

Annunciating the Word in Image: Visual Exegesis of the Annunciation to Mary (Lk 1:26-38) in Counter-Reformation Italian Altarpieces.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the visual exegesis of the Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) in Counter-Reformation Italian altarpieces. Based on the significant role the reception of the Bible had in the fracturing of the Church in the sixteenth century, the investigation centres on how the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church used visual exegesis in the pictorial representations of altarpieces as a means to communicate their methods of biblical interpretation. The Annunciation to Mary formed the subject of a considerable number of Italian altarpieces, as it stood as the foundational canonical text concerning the Virgin Mary. After the minimization of this figure in the Protestant Reformation, Annunciation altarpieces provided opportune moments for the reinstatement of Catholic Mariology. This saw a flourishing of treatments of the subject that constituted enormous breadth in their visual biblical exegesis, yet by and large these objects have neither been treated as significant by art-historical or biblical-reception standards. In order to adequately analyse Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces and dissuade attempts to overlook these objects or treat them under a false characterization, this research constructs a series of case studies to evaluate the multiplicity of the biblical text's reception within the period. It uses three prevalent issues relating to the objects – pictorial narrative and temporality, the use of the book as propaganda, and the motif of heavenised imagery – as a structure to analyse the Annunciations by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Federico Zuccaro, Guido Reni, Federico Barocci, Ludovico Carracci, Durante Alberti, Giorgio Vasari, Tiziano Vecelli, and Il Passignano. These analyses will be used as examples of how the visual reception of the Bible was informed by the multifaceted nature of the Counter-Reformation context, and how the exceptional exegetical range identifiable in Annunciations echoed the degree of inconsistency in the Catholic reform objectives as they migrated across ecclesiastical environments.

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1. Chapter 1. Introduction: Research Context, Methodology, Outline

The reception of the Bible in textual, visual and material cultures lay at the heart of the division of the Western Church in the sixteenth century. The discord that characterises the Reformation period was intimately bound to differing perspectives on the appropriate use and interpretation of the Bible and its texts. As one of these texts, the Annunciation to Mary (Lk 1:26-38) had a multifaceted reception during the Reformation period. The minimization of the figure of the Virgin Mary in the Protestant context contrasted sharply with her illustrious characterisation in Counter-Reformation Catholicism, which heralded a new and active phase in her veneration. The Annunciation, the biblical text that pronounces the birth of Jesus Christ through the Virgin Mary, had long stood as a key narrative in Catholicism's visual culture. It is the foundational canonical text concerning the Virgin Mary, and the source from which a rich body of non-canonical traditions have developed.¹ In the wake of Protestant challenge, Catholicism's reception of this text posed an opportunity to restore and even intensify devotion to the Virgin Mary. This veneration was explicit in the form of painting, a method of representation commended by the Catholic Church as possessing the ability to both teach and to inspire devotion.² Of particular importance to this cause were painted altarpieces, which provided a visual rhetoric for the teachings of the newly-reformed Catholic Church, in much the same way as verbal sermons.³ They were, by definition, located "above a church altar, in close visual, physical and spiritual conjunction with the locus of liturgical worship."⁴ Counter-Reformation altarpieces have even been described as "barometers," implying that they were reflective of their specific religious climate.⁵ Their high and prominent positions meant they were highly accessible to the specific demographic of viewers who entered the individual ecclesiastical spaces.⁶ This thesis extends the argument that altarpieces

¹ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

² Council of Trent, Session 25, "On invocation, veneration and relics of the saints, and on sacred images, 3-4 December, 1563," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 774-798.

³ Carole Valone, "The Art of Hearing: Sermons and Images in the Chapel of Lucrezia della Rovere," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 3 (2000): 753-777.

⁴ Peter Humfrey, "Altarpieces and altar dedications in Counter-Reformation Venice and the Veneto," *Renaissance Studies* 10, no. 3 (1996): 371-387.

⁵ Marcia B. Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation: Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Sta Maria Novella and Sta Croce 1565-1577* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 1.

⁶ Pamela Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni* (London: Routledge, 2017), 5: "I maintain that these individuals brought their experiences of Catholicism in its manifold dimensions to bear when looking at art. Sometimes individual persons beheld altarpieces when alone. At other times they viewed altarpieces as members of corporate entities, such

functioned as essential communicators of Counter-Reformation ideologies, and identifies that they were particularly valuable for providing opportune moments for the reinstatement of Catholic Mariology through the visual interpretation of the Annunciation narrative.

Despite the prominence of this specific type of painting, and the centrality of the issue of biblical reception to the Counter-Reformation context, Annunciation altarpieces of this period are vastly understudied. This lacuna may have been caused by a number of factors, not least that of the Counter-Reformation being a relatively new field of academic enquiry. There is evidence that some scholarship still functions under the archaic understanding that Catholicism of this age was simply reacting against the threats of Protestantism.⁷ The introduction of different terms - such as the Catholic Reformation or post-Tridentine Catholicism - have attempted to neutralise the reactionary “Counter-Reformation” language, but ideologies that undermine the regeneration of Catholic identity in this period remain prominent.⁸ While it is possible to utilise these different terms, for the most part this thesis reclaims the language of “Counter-Reformation” as not only a valid period designation, but as a vessel through which it can summate a range of the different conflicts and tensions relating to this period, as Mary Laven has written:

The reforms and renewals experienced by the Catholic peoples of the world were propelled by conflict and opposition; their faith was dynamic, responsive and ever-

as confraternities and religious orders, or as loosely bound groups, such as pilgrims or unreformed prostitutes. Sometimes viewers looked at altarpieces through the lens of artistic practice, sometimes through the lens of art critics. Many viewers looked beyond the altarpieces and into themselves when praying. Others looked at altarpieces when processing through a church on a pilgrimage, or when listening to a sermon, or when defiantly not listening to a sermon. These viewing experiences were not necessarily mutually exclusive nor were they the only kinds that took place, although for practical reasons I necessarily present only a selective range.”

⁷ John O'Malley, “A Historiographical Frame for the Paintings: the Recent Interpretations of Early Modern Catholicism,” in *Saints and Sinners; Caravaggio and the Baroque*, ed. Franco Mormando (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999), 19-27.

⁸ Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism* (Chicago: Loyola University, 1999), 5; Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, “The Counter-Reformation and welfare provision in Southern Europe,” in *Health Care and Poor Relief in Counter-Reformation Europe*, eds. Jon Arrizabalaga, Andrew Cunningham, Ole Peter Grell (London: Routledge, 2005), 1-16; Hubert Jedin, “Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation?” in *The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings*, ed. David Luebke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19-45; John O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), 5.

changing. The value of the term 'Counter-Reformation' is in encouraging us to put encounters at the centre of religious change.⁹

The language of "Counter-Reformation" emphasises the idea of religious, political and cultural encounter in sixteenth-century Catholicism, a microcosm of which is found in the process of visual exegesis in Annunciation altarpieces and the responses they inspired. The lack of scholarship relating to this topic may have been fuelled by the aforementioned failure to acknowledge this period as one of dynamic encounter within Catholicism itself. I also postulate that the absence of prior investigation into Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces is due to their transdisciplinary location in scholarly investigation. The objective to track an individual biblical text in images from a specific historical moment - and doing so not just as an iconographic motif, but as a biblical narrative with its own theological resonances - should not be limited to the task of art historians who specialise in visual data, but should be an incentive of biblical reception historians. Like the Annunciation altarpieces themselves, biblical reception historians function in a transdisciplinary space, examining the history of the Bible's interpretation in textual, visual and material cultures. This project embodies this reality, and gathers research to enrich the ever-increasing catalogue of biblical reception history. Although formerly uninterrogated, Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces indicate an extraordinary breadth of visual exegeses, even within the close context of Italy from the closing of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) to the first decade of the seventeenth century. It is the objective of this thesis to interrogate these images using unique, interdisciplinary methodologies, in order (1) to understand how visual biblical reception was informed by the multifaceted nature of the Counter-Reformation context; (2) to ascertain what degree of variance there was in the methods of visual biblical reception in post-Tridentine Italy, and (3) to understand how the Annunciation itself participated in the visual biblical interpretations in Italian churches.

⁹ Mary Laven, "Introduction," in *The Ashgate Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, eds. Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven (London: Ashgate, 2013), 1-12. See, among others, Jetze Touber, *Law, Medicine and Engineering in the Cult of the Saints in Counter-Reformation Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 14.

This research identifies that the reception history of the Bible in the Counter-Reformation is an area that has received minimal scholarly consideration (see 1.1.3). The period is one that has frequently been viewed by biblical scholars as subordinate to the Protestant Reformation, a tendency that reflects the demographic of the discipline and its resolute desire to retain the call of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) as its pedagogical model.¹⁰ Historical criticism has long dominated the field, as it centres its investigation on the words written by the biblical authors and their intended meanings. Despite the reception-historical progress, “logocentrism” (*word*-centricity, both in terms of a preference for written text and canonical scripture), shadows biblical studies and investment in the Protestant Reformation has allowed the scripture-alone model to perpetuate.¹¹ Here the thesis locates additional rationale for the chosen terminology of “Counter-Reformation,” deeming it an important phrase that channels the combative angle this interdisciplinary research takes against any logocentric bias that may still affect modern biblical studies. Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation age troubles this scripture-centricity, as it relied on traditions – in textual, visual and material form – as well as biblical texts to inform its belief system and practices. To engage with the Counter-Reformation is therefore to engage with the principle that biblical texts were bound to tradition, and so to the use, interpretation and appropriation of these texts in history. This thesis provides a unique contribution to scholarship, forming the only study of substantial length hitherto that hones in on this historical moment and defines it as an ideal location for the practice of reception-historical methodologies.

¹⁰ Lynn R. Huber and Dan W. Clanton Jr, “Teaching the Bible with Art,” SBL, accessed October 17, 2020, https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TBv2i9_HuberClantonTeachingwithArt.pdf. See Robert Evans, *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 153. Despite using the language of ‘tradition’ with ‘reception history,’ Evans makes scant reference to the Counter-Reformation in contrast to the Protestant Reformation. See Michael Lieb, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The handbook makes fleeting reference to the Counter-Reformation, and even this is only in relation to Luther’s biblical reception. See, among others, Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’Umbomír Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Timothy Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

¹¹ On the language of “logocentrism” or “textocentrism,” see, among others, Alison M. Jack, *Text Reading Texts, Sacred and Secular* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 33; Louise Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17.

Within the theology of the Counter-Reformation Church, the biblical text of the Annunciation to Mary was viewed in conjunction with centuries of accumulated Catholic traditions. The amorphousness of these traditions meant that the way in which the Annunciation was visually represented fluctuated significantly. It is the contention of this thesis that in order to understand visual biblical reception of this period and specifically that of the Annunciation, it is necessary to adopt a case-by-case approach. As has been increasingly identified in scholarship, the Counter-Reformation movement was felt across Italy with varying degrees of intensity and with differing central objectives.¹² Even within cities, individual churches possessed their own agendas that in turn affected their visual interpretation of biblical texts. Current art-historical scholarship has begun to define this visual exegetical range and has found a “seething creativity” in Counter-Reformation image production that echoed the wider reimagining of Catholicism.¹³ To deduce the specific character of the ‘Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpiece’ is therefore unfeasible, due to the quantity that were produced during this period and the spectrum of interpretations. Yet it is possible to define a set of themes that were significant to the methods of visual exegesis. This thesis uses three such themes, identified through direct engagement with a database of Italian Annunciation altarpieces ranging from the years 1560 and 1610 (Appendix 1).¹⁴ These three themes form the focus for Parts 1 to 3, with the recognition that more themes could - and should - be deduced through further investigation.

The three central themes are positioned as different lenses for the case-study analyses found in the main chapters, and are related to issues both in the local churches and the wider Counter-Reformation context. The first is the issue of pictorial

¹² Laven, “Introduction,” 1-15; Jesse M. Locker, “Introduction,” in *Art and Reform in the Late Renaissance: After Trent*, ed. Jesse M. Locker (London: Routledge, 2018), 1-18; O’Malley, *Trent and All That*, 1-46.

¹³ William V. Hudon, “Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy – Old Questions, New Insights,” *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (1996): 783-804; Nathan D. Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary: Marian Devotion and the Reinvention of Catholicism* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 49-50.

¹⁴ The rationale for selecting 1560-1610 is based on this period being an appropriate range for the Counter-Reformation period. It roughly correlates with the closing of the Council of Trent, and therefore anticipates changes – whether in practice or in theory – in the Catholic Church. The fifty years encompasses a temporal range that is focused enough to evaluate connections between the objects and the immediate Counter-Reformation moment. Yet it is broad enough to evaluate the theological and art-historical shifts into the Baroque period, which the Counter-Reformation period shaped significantly. See, among others, Luis Garcia-Ballester, “The Inquisition and minority medical practitioners in Counter-Reformation Spain, 1560-1610,” in *Medicine and the Reformation*, eds. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (London: Routledge, 1993), 156-191; Marvin R. O’Connell, *The Counter-Reformation 1560-1610* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974).

narrative and temporality. Based on the premise that the biblical text of the Annunciation is formed primarily of a verbal dialogue, the pictorial narrative of Counter-Reformation altarpieces disrupted the chronological temporality of the Annunciation story described in the Gospel of Luke. The exegetical methods that translated the subject from textual to visual form therefore requires significant investigation. The second lens the thesis uses is the use of the book in Annunciation paintings. This was an exceptionally prevalent iconographic choice in Annunciations since the fourteenth century, but it maintained a propagandistic function in the Counter-Reformation that fluctuated based on the polemics of individual church environments. The final issue this thesis uses to interrogate the altarpieces is the motif of heavenised imagery. The incorporation of imagery associated with heaven – such as unexplainable sources of light, angels (in addition to Gabriel), cherubim, dense cloud formations, and representations of God the Father – in Counter-Reformation Annunciations has previously been identified in scholarship, but this assertion has thus far lacked any substantial interrogation into its contextual purpose.¹⁵ This thesis will provide a rationale for the artistic trend, drawing on biblical reception-historical and art-historical findings.

For each of these three lenses, the thesis uses three paintings to investigate how altarpieces dealt with the issue. The selected case studies are Annunciation altarpieces by Michaelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), Federico Zuccaro (1539-1609), Guido Reni (1575-1642), Federico Barocci (1533-1612), Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619), Durante Alberti (1556-1623), Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), Tiziano Vecellio (1488-1576), and Il Passignano (1559-1638). For each, I identified a need for further investigation, specifically into the context of their creation and how their visual exegesis was mediated by Catholic methods of biblical interpretation. Some of the images were created by artists who are well known by art-historical measures and some less so, but each provided significant contributions to Italian visual culture during this turbulent historical moment. The artists spread across the

¹⁵ Jeannine Baticle, *Zurbarán: The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Met, 1988), 181; James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (London: Routledge, 2018), 20; Gary Waller, *A Cultural Study of Mary and the Annunciation: From Luke to the Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2015), 116; Richard Viladesau, "The Annunciation: VI. Visual Arts," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 70-76; Rosemary Muir Wright, *Sacred Distance: Representing the Virgin in Italian Altarpieces* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 72.

geographical landscape of the country, working in Rome, Venice, Florence, Bologna, and beyond into rural locations and abroad. The intentionally broad remit of the paintings' locations, patrons, intended functions, and audiences, serves to elicit the three main thesis objectives: (1) how visual exegesis was marked by the complexity of the Counter-Reformation period, (2) the degree of variance in the methods used, and (3) how this translated into the pictorial representation of the Annunciation. By exploring the paintings as case studies centred around the three aforementioned lenses, the thesis provides nuanced interdisciplinary perspectives on some of the complex issues relating to the visual biblical interpretation of the Annunciation during the Counter-Reformation. It distinguishes paintings of this narrative, and within this period, as possessing a particularly meaningful set of exegetical challenges and necessitates the use of interdisciplinary methodologies to analyse them.

1.1. Research context

The thesis combines several areas of cross-disciplinary research, many of which have had little extended dialogue before this point. The following section identifies three of the most significant areas of research, which throughout the thesis will develop, interrelate and destabilise disciplinary boundaries. The first area of scholarship I will evaluate is that of biblical reception history, with specific emphasis on its use and analysis of paintings. The following section will examine the scholarly treatment of Annunciation paintings, predominately in the field of art history but also in biblical reception studies and theology. The final section focusses on literature related to the Bible in the Counter-Reformation, with a specific focus on those studies that propose this period as a key historic moment for the study of biblical reception. By delineating some of this central scholarship, this section will identify the key ideas and concepts underpinning the thesis, as well as locate the significant gaps in current academia that this research supplements.

1.1.1. Biblical reception history and paintings

For the last two centuries, historical criticism has dominated the field of biblical studies with its concerted efforts to extricate the intended meanings of a set of ancient writings.¹⁶ The focus has remained on the words written by the authors; on why they wrote them, to whom, in what historical context. It has long been established that the logocentrism of the discipline accurately reflects its object of enquiry. Lynn Huber observes that the form in which the Bible is most commonly studied (as a set of words) dictates the progression in the field, as research and education has remained fully fixed on text.¹⁷ In recent decades, however, the very definition of what constitutes biblical material has changed dramatically, in turn shifting the parameters of the discipline's main focus. It is now not so straightforwardly defined as the body of books as its name 'Bible' presumes. This shift is, in part, an effect of the growing area in biblical studies known as reception history, which has as its main objective the exploration of the Bible's reception throughout history. John Lyons has defined reception history as "the virtually infinite series of "events" generated by the historical journeys of the biblical (or closely related) texts and/or such texts echoed in some other medium or product down through the centuries."¹⁸ Reception history therefore expands the discipline's focus from the 'original' meanings of biblical texts to the broader spectrum of the history of the Bible's interpretation.¹⁹ Indeed, the entire concept of 'original' as it is attached to biblical texts has been undermined due to the inseparability of original text and reception; as Brennan Breed argues, "the concept of the original text ignores the various source and redaction layers that one may analyse as part of the history of a text's composition."²⁰ The process of reception and interpretation does not take place from a specific moment at which a text has been deemed authoritative. Rather, the formation of the biblical sources is entirely engaged in the processes of reception and re-interpretation too.

¹⁶ George Aichele, Peter Miscall and Richard Walsh, "An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 2 (2009): 383-404.

¹⁷ Huber and Clanton, "Teaching the Bible with Art," 1.

¹⁸ John Lyons, "Some Thoughts on Defining Reception History and the Future of Biblical Studies," *Bible and Interpretation* 8 (2015): 1-11.

¹⁹ On the relationship between original and reception, see Brennan Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014).

²⁰ Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 15.

[T]he very notion of the original text of a biblical book is a paradox that obfuscates the processual dimension of all texts, especially those related to the traditions of a community – or, more precisely, many communities. The processual nature of biblical texts requires us to think in terms of time, and thus we must understand change – or difference – to be a fundamental part of the identity of biblical texts.²¹

The creation of biblical texts consisted of a series of actions and decisions. Boundaries between the ‘original’ text and the reception of said text are impossible to ascertain.²² The edifying process of translation into the vernacular, from which the Bible is primarily read, is itself a reception of the original, thus as Lyons argues, “what we are all working on [in biblical studies] is reception history in some form.”²³ The significance of the reception-historical approach has seen it gain considerable traction in modern scholarship. The focus of this present overview is to identify the contributions made by scholars in the field who use paintings as instances of biblical reception.

The incorporation of visual objects into modern academic biblical studies was most explicitly developed first through Ulrich Luz’s scholarship/commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew. His commentaries combined multiple methodological frameworks including historical-criticism and Hans George Gadamer’s *Wirkungsgeschichte* (history of interpretation).²⁴ Luz interlaced his observations on the original author’s historical context with examinations of responses to the biblical texts from history, including that found in visual images. He situates these images as objects of the Bible’s diverse reception in history, postulating that “biblical texts do not simply have a fixed, closed meaning; they are full of possibilities.”²⁵ Luz’s incorporation of different types of media into his commentaries initiated a stream of reception-historical scholarship in the field, which continues to see new growth. The *Blackwell Bible Commentaries* (2003-ongoing) are the longest running set of works that analyse individual books of the Bible based on their reception history. The commentaries focus both on the “effects of the biblical materials of culture” and the “uses to which people

²¹ Ibid, 204.

²² Brennan Breed, ““Nomadology of the Bible:” A Processual Approach to Biblical Reception History,” *Biblical Reception* 1 (2012): 299-320.

²³ Lyons, “Some Thoughts on Defining Reception History,” 6.

²⁴ Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, trans. Rosemary Selle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* vols. 1-3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989-2005); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

²⁵ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 64.

have put the Bible through the centuries.”²⁶ The process of engagement is longitudinal, focusing on specific moments from the texts’ reception history and considering the significance of these interpretations. This type of study has become an exceptionally popular method in reception-historical scholarship, inspiring the publication of numerous monographs that trace a specific biblical tradition through the centuries, which often include the reception of the texts in the visual arts.²⁷

A scholar who has fuelled conversation between biblical studies and visual images is Cheryl Exum, whose work is dedicated predominantly to the reception history of biblical texts in visual art forms. In an essay entitled “Toward a Genuine Dialogue between the Bible and Art” (2010) Exum draws on the important idea that artists make interpretative decisions when depicting a biblical text. Their visual exegetical strategies can therefore destabilise and challenge our understandings of biblical narratives:

[A]rt can enhance our understanding and appreciation of the biblical text, but it can also bring a critical dimension; it can point to problematic aspects of the text and help us ‘see’ things about the text we might have overlooked, or enable us to see things differently.²⁸

This is a theme that resonates in some of Exum’s other works, including the introduction to her co-edited collection with Ela Nutu, *The Bible and the Canvas in Dialogue* (2007) and her monograph *Plotted, Shot, and Painted* (1996); each establish the value of studying visual interpretations for our critical analysis of biblical texts. In *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, Exum is transparent in the way in which she approaches biblical paintings; the images are reflected on in order to shed light on the reception of

²⁶ Jin Han, “Reception History,” Blackwell Bible Commentaries, accessed October 15, 2020. http://bbibcomm.info/?page_id=183

²⁷ See, among others, Cheryl Exum, “Toward a Genuine Dialogue between the Bible and Art,” in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Marri Nissinen (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1996); John Lyons, *Joseph of Arimathea: A Study in Reception History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Rachel Nicholls, *Walking on the water: reading Mt. 14:22-33 in the light of its Wirkungsgeschichte* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Natasha O’Hear, *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art: A Case Study in Visual Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Natasha O’Hear and Anthony O’Hear, *Picturing the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Arts Over Two Millenia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: the survival of Jonah in western culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁸ Exum, “Toward a Genuine Dialogue,” 473-4. When clarifying the title of her essay, Exum writes, “By a ‘genuine dialogue’ between the Bible and art, I have in mind a dialogue in which the biblical text and biblical art play an equal and critical role in the process of interpreting each other.”

female biblical characters. Exum's approach to the images is purely semiotical, bearing more of an emphasis on what the interpretations say about the biblical women and their reception tradition than considering the historical context behind the images themselves.

Far more intent on building an interdisciplinary rapport between biblical studies and art history is a work like *Visuality and Biblical Text* (2004), written by Jane Boyd, an art historian, and Philip F. Esler, a biblical specialist. Their study is an exposé of how a biblical text and a visual image can unite under one project, using Velázquez's *Christ with Martha and Mary* (1618) as a case study. By focusing on one image in considerable detail, Boyd and Esler provide a comprehensive study on the multi-layered process of Velázquez's visual biblical interpretation. Writing in the early millennium, they hoped that the impact of their study would be the "possibility [...] of a two-way traffic,"²⁹ where there can be a mutual giving and receiving between their disciplines. Current contributions that see this "two-way traffic" into fruition include the projects of German publishing house De Gruyter, which are dedicated to the interdisciplinary conversations of biblical reception history.³⁰ *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, for example, is "the first-ever and only comprehensive reference work on the Bible and its reception."³¹ It sits at the forefront of reception-historical research and continually crosses disciplinary boundaries in ground-breaking ways. Its entries vary enormously, with articles on biblical characters, geographical locations, world religions, and historical events, to name a few. The authors of these entries come from a range of disciplines, thus making the content exceptionally well informed and unparalleled in its disciplinary fluidity. Yet perhaps its most notable impact is that its articles continue to challenge the logocentrism that dictates biblical scholarship. The visual arts are identified as significant components of biblical material's reception history and are seen as visual manifestations of a culture's appropriation/re-appropriation of the material.³²

²⁹ Jane Boyd and Philip Esler, *Visuality and Biblical Text* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2004), 9.

³⁰ See, for example, *Handbooks of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014-2020); *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014-2020); *Studies of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014-2020).

³¹ "Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception," De Gruyter, accessed November 16, 2020, <https://0-https://www.degruyter.com/view/db/ebr>.

³² Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Bible in Art," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 818-852.

Continuing to identify the projects that dovetail the research of art history and biblical scholarship, but this time from a more explicitly art-historical disciplinary location, Paolo Berdini's contribution to the concept of biblical exegesis in paintings is hugely significant and provides an influence for the methodological framework of this thesis (see 1.2.2).³³ Berdini focusses on sixteenth-century Venetian artist Jacopo Bassano (1510-1592) and examines how his representations of religious subjects function as objects of biblical exegesis. Berdini explicitly marries together religious images with the process of biblical interpretation in the sixteenth century.³⁴ Berdini forms the concept of visual exegesis under the following hypothesis: "Painting visualises a reading and not a text, for the relationship between a text and its visualization has to take into account the circumstances under which that text is read".³⁵ In Berdini's view, Bassano's religious images are not just illustrations of a biblical text but are dynamic, contextualised interpretations of the subject that often stray significantly from the original source. An artist's visualization of a biblical subject involves an exegetical process that leads to an expanded version of the text; "When the reader moves beyond the literality of the text and begins to adjust the text to himself and himself to the text, he expands the text. Such expansion may be favoured, or required by indeterminacies contained in the text."³⁶ The process of visual exegesis results in textual expansion, where the biblical text is contextualised into the artist's environment so that a developed and expanded version is visualised.

Berdini's idea of visual exegesis and the resultant effect of textual expansion has been developed in recent scholarship.³⁷ For example, Natasha O'Hear uses this language

³³ Paolo Berdini, *Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I., 1994), 5.

³⁴ Also see Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35. Bal views the idea of visual hermeneutics in a similar way to Berdini, writing "images are readings [...] they are not a retelling of the text [...] but ultimately, a new text."

³⁵ Berdini, *Jacopo Bassano*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁷ For analysis on the relationship between Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* and visual exegesis, see, among others, Ian Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); John Harvey, *The Bible as Visual Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013); Martin O'Kane, "Wirkungsgeschichte and Visual Exegesis: The Contribution of Hans-Georg Gadamer," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 2 (2010): 147-159; Vernon K. Robbins, Walter Melion, and Roy R. Jeal (eds.), *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017).

to contribute to the visual reception history of the book of Revelation, focusing on the subjectivity of visual objects on account of their specific context. She writes,

[An] intimate understanding of a work of art and its immediate context in terms of sources and artistic and exegetical inspiration, as well as its intended function and reception, are all necessary for a full understanding of both the hermeneutical strategies at work within the image, as well as how it functions as a piece of visual exegesis.³⁸

Biblical images are conceptualised through an exegetical process influenced by all manner of stimuli associated with the artist. O’Hear situates artists as decision makers who possess the freedom to interpret a biblical narrative or theme, not just represent it in its pictorial form. Effective analysis of biblical images therefore requires art-historical apparatus to nuance visual interpretation with the specific cultural climate. Although this sort of research formerly took place far outside the remit of biblical scholarship, the increasing desire to use images necessitates the use of alternative methodologies and lines of enquiry to provide adequate analysis. In a similar vein to O’Hear, the fifth issue of *Biblical Reception* is dedicated to interdisciplinary conversation surrounding the afterlives of women in the Bible in art. The project unites “art history, biblical studies, Christian theology, cultural history, feminist studies, comparative literature and music history.”³⁹ The emphasis is on weakening research boundaries and acknowledging that the analysis of images relating to biblical sources combines the interests of numerous areas of study. As Jonathan Roberts writes, “no individual, school, or group does or can own biblical reception.”⁴⁰ It is in the interest of a spectrum of disciplines, not just biblical studies, to pursue the examination of the Bible’s influence in culture. The increase in studies gives rise to the transformational identity of biblical studies as enabled by the pursuit of reception history.

The variety of sources mentioned here indicates the breadth of approaches used by biblical scholars in their engagement with images. They fluctuate from more of a one-way conversation relating to what the image can tell us about the biblical text, to a

³⁸ O’Hear, *Contrasting Images*, 8.

³⁹ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, “Introduction,” *Biblical Reception* 5 (2018):1-2.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Roberts, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, eds. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-10.

dialogue that engages with biblical interpretation and its contextual significance. Some studies are longitudinal, selecting a text or a theme and tracking its progress. Others use the single case study approach to hone in on one object. Still others use a referential or cataloguing system, which highlights moments from biblical reception history. The model used in this thesis to engage with Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces differs from all of these methods. It engages with the biblical narrative in a specific historic moment, allowing heightened levels of specificity in contextual analysis. Yet it also has sufficient breadth to facilitate dialogue between a body of Annunciations created during a similar time period. While retaining the ever-increasing desire for interdisciplinarity, the project contributes to diversifying the current landscape of reception-historical scholarship.

1.1.2. Paintings of the Annunciation

The Annunciation to Mary (Lk 1:26-38) is one of the most painted narratives in the history of Christianity.⁴¹ Its iconography typically captures the moment in which the angel Gabriel visits the Virgin Mary and brings her the news that she is to become the mother of Christ. In his entry on the Annunciation in the visual arts for the *EBR*, Richard Viladesau writes, “The primary visual symbol of the Annunciation is a portrayed dialogue: a gesture of speech by the angel and a gesture of response by Mary.”⁴² It is by this method, expanded and interpreted in ways specific to the artist and their context, that the biblical text has been pictorially narrated. The first type of scholarship to mention leading on from the biblical-reception material is that which argues the theological significance of paintings of the Annunciation to Mary. This will be a recurring theme in the thesis and therefore requires consideration at this point.

Within some literature there is an understanding that the Lukan account of the Annunciation is the narrative expression of the mystery of the Incarnation, that being

⁴¹ See, for example, Tom Devonshire Jones, Linda Murray, and Peter Murrar, *Dictionary of Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22; Heidi Hornik and Mikeal Carl Parsons, *Illuminating Luke: The Infancy Narrative in Italian Renaissance Painting* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 18; Laura Saetveit Miles, “The origins and development of the Virgin Mary’s book at the Annunciation,” *Speculum* 89, no. 3 (2014): 632-699.

⁴² Viladesau. “The Annunciation,” 70-76. See also, Tord Fornberg, “The Annunciation: A Study in Reception History,” in *The New Testament as Reception*, eds. Mogens M. Ller and Henrik Tronier (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2002), 157-180.

the Christian doctrine that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ.⁴³ The most extensive account of the Incarnation doctrine interpreted from biblical texts is John 1:1-14; a portion of which reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [...] And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son” (v. 1 and 14).⁴⁴ The Virgin Mary is not mentioned in John 1, nor is any allusion to the delivery of the Annunciation message to her by the angel Gabriel. Yet the first chapters of the gospels of Luke and John have been commonly understood as accounts about the same event, as Jaroslav Pelikan writes,

What the Gospel of John stated in the language of theology and of Hellenistic philosophy when it said “The Word [Logos] was made flesh,” the Gospel of Luke described in the language of drama and dialogue, in the form of an exchange between Mary as the chosen one of God and the angel Gabriel as the emissary of God.”⁴⁵

By reading these two texts as different receptions of the same episode, designed and written for two different purposes, we conceive of the Annunciation within the Incarnational framework laid out in John's gospel. By reading it “in light” of John 1, the Lukan narrative is transformed into the moment the Word of God is made flesh.⁴⁶

The Incarnation has been received throughout Christian history as one of the most persuasive arguments that supports the use of sacred images. In scholarship, this argument is most commonly associated with the Byzantine monk John of Damascus (675-749), who defended the use of icons (two-dimensional representations) in the Eastern Church.⁴⁷ John of Damascus is known famously for writing, “I boldly draw an

⁴³ See, among others, Hanneke Grootenboer, “Reading the Annunciation,” *Art History* 30, no. 3 (2007): 349-363; Klaus Krüger, “Mute Mysteries of the Divine Logos: On the Pictorial Poetics of the Incarnation,” in *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image*, eds. Walter Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 76-108; Walter Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel, “Introduction,” in *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image*, eds. Walter Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-14; Mario Valenti, “Light and shadow: Painting the incarnation mystery (Notes on Orazio Gentileschi's Annunciation),” *Semiotica* 2001, no. 136 (2006): 419-450.

⁴⁴ All Bible translations are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless stated otherwise.

⁴⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1996), 82.

⁴⁶ Krüger, “Mute Mysteries,” 80; Jacqueline Olson Padgett, “Ekphrasis, Lorenzo Lotto's Annunciation and the hermeneutics of Suspicion,” *Religion and the Arts* 10, no. 2 (2006): 191-216.

⁴⁷ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 71.

image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood.”⁴⁸ Walter Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel use this very statement in the introduction to their edited collection *Image and Incarnation*, which examines images in the early modern period.⁴⁹ John of Damascus’ statement is used in Melion and Wandel’s book as a theology for all sacred images, but it could be argued that the statement holds particular significance to Annunciation paintings due to their theological connection to the Incarnation. Paintings of the Annunciation represent the doctrine of the Incarnation through the language of a pictorial narrative. The exegetical process of word translating into image as the biblical text is manipulated into visual form, echoes the Incarnational concept of the “Word becoming flesh.” The suitability of the mode of painting for representing this subject has been identified by scholars, for example Bret Rothstein, who writes concerning Rogier van der Weyden’s (1400-1464) *Bladelin Triptych*, “As the Word becomes flesh, visibility renders it accessible.”⁵⁰ The tension between the story’s invisible mystery with painting’s visible qualities has marked the Annunciation as a “‘theoretical object’ triggering numerous art-historical debates.”⁵¹ French theorist Louis Marin states,

Only painting, in showing the Angel, the Virgin and their meeting, will bring it to life, not only on a panel or on a wall, as space, but in language because panel or wall will have to make it understood as the figuration of a dialogue read in the pages of the holy book, as the figurability of its "realization" which relates the reality of its event and its story. [...] No long is the question, as it was just a while ago, how is one to figure the interval and the "inter-diction" that puts history's narrative into story? But how is one to recount the monstration of infinite distance and immediate proximity, of transcendental remoteness and the most intimate penetration, accomplished by paintings that at their surface represent the Annunciation?⁵²

⁴⁸ John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. D. Anderson (New York: Crestwood, 1980), 16. See also Gyula Homoki, “The role of incarnation in defence of icons in John of Damscus’s *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*,” accessed May 14, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/36341752/The_role_of_incarnation_in_defence_of_icons_in_John_of_Damascus_Three_Treatises_on_the_Divine_Images

⁴⁹ Melion and Wandel, “Introduction,” 3.

⁵⁰ Bret L. Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

⁵¹ Grootenboer, “Reading the Annunciation,” 350.

⁵² Louis Marin, “Stating a Mysterious Figure,” in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: Mimesis, semiosis, and power*, ed. Ronald Bogue (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), 45-64.

Marin heralds the medium of painting as the method through which the fundamental mystery of the Incarnation is effectively communicated. Through images, the narrative of the Annunciation reflects the Incarnation in understandable, figurable terms. Paintings provide the “figurability of the mystery (of the Incarnation) by the enunciability of the secret (of the Annunciation); thus the mystery of figurability in painting comes to tell the secret of painting.”⁵³ The Annunciation narrative is the means by which the Incarnation can be pictorially represented and subsequently received by the beholder.

The intimate relationship between the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Annunciation narrative is one that is found in the Counter-Reformation context, for example in the Tridentine Catechism published the year after Trent. An exegesis on the Virgin Annunciate reads,

But what surpasses the order of nature and human comprehension is, that as soon as the Blessed Virgin assented to the announcement of the Angel in these words, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word, the most sacred body of Christ was immediately formed.⁵⁴

From the moment of dialogue described in Luke 1:26-38, the Incarnation was in effect. In much the same way as Rothstein and Marin, art theorist Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), who was archbishop of Bologna through some of the most formative years of the Counter-Reformation, heralded images as a key way for the Incarnation/Annunciation subject to be represented: “images encompass the broadest and gravest concepts in a confined space, with no hunting through volumes or page turning, as we see in the mystery of the annunciation of the glorious Virgin.”⁵⁵ Painting provided visibility for mysteries of the Catholic faith, the “gravest” of which was the Incarnation.⁵⁶ This perspective shared in both Counter-Reformation and modern

⁵³ Marin, “Stating a Mysterious Figure,” 56.

⁵⁴ Tridentine Catechism of the Catholic Church. “Who was Conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary,” 1923, trans. John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan, accessed November 16, 2020. <http://www.angelfire.com/art/cactusong/TridentineCatechism.htm>

⁵⁵ Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, trans. William McCuiag (London: Getty, 2012), 115.

⁵⁶ Bette Talvacchia, “Word Became Flesh: Spiritual Subjects and Carnal Depictions,” in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church* eds. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49-73.

scholarship will be a central theme in the examination of the case studies and imbues the objects with additional depths of theological significance.

Perhaps due to such importance in art-historical and theological parameters, the historiography of the Annunciation in pictorial art has been considerable and scholars have adopted different methods to engage with the topic, as the rest of this section will indicate. This varies from identifying specific iconographic trends in different cultures, to focussing on a specific pictorial interpretation of the narrative in detail. Others still use a longitudinal method akin to the reception-historical studies mentioned in 1.1.1 that traces the development of the narrative in its visual representations. Scholars, including Richard Viladesau for the *EBR*, have attempted to define the characteristics of Annunciations by highlighting specific moments from its history of visual interpretation.⁵⁷ Although this identifies different tropes in the history of Annunciation representations, this method tends to generalise and group paintings together, as if to attain a linear reading of how the Annunciation has visually progressed throughout history. The lack of nuance found in such studies fails to communicate the considerable variance in visual exegesis that occurs even within a specific historic period. In contrast to this approach, this thesis draws out three specific trends that were popular and meaningful to Counter-Reformation Annunciations, creating conversations around the themes and addressing those paintings that both contribute and destabilise the trends.

An important piece of scholarship to mention in relation to pictorial art of the Annunciation is by Michael Baxandall.⁵⁸ In his monograph on fifteenth-century Italian paintings and theory, Baxandall quotes the popular preacher Fra Roberto Caraccioli (1425-1495), who interpreted five discrete stages of the Annunciation narrative. These stages, Baxandall claims, were then replicated by painters of the time. The five stages of Caraccioli's exegesis are:

⁵⁷ Viladesau, "The Annunciation," 70-76. See also Albert C. Labriola, "The Bible in Iconography," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 175-199. Also, Gary Waller's *A Cultural Study of Mary and the Annunciation* (2015), which is an insightful examination of specific moments of Annunciation interpretation, yet the temporal breadth of 1700 years of reception is overly ambitious in its objective to characterise the progression.

⁵⁸ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 48-51.

- (1) *Conturbatio* (Disquiet) “Hail, thou art highly favoured.” She was troubled.
- (2) *Cogitatio*: she cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.
Angel then said fear not Mary.
- (3) *Interrogatio*: How shall this be since I know no man?
- (4) *Humiliatio*: What tongue could ever describe. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.
- (5) *Meritatio*: Angel departed. And the bodily sensations of the Child being present in her womb rose again with indescribable sweetness. Probably, in her profound humility, she raised her eyes to heaven and then lowered them towards her womb with many tears.⁵⁹

Baxandall puts forward the case that it is these five stages in the Annunciation that circumscribe the manner in which fifteenth-century paintings represented the biblical narrative. He claims that in the fifteenth century, “sermons were a very important part of the painter’s circumstances: preacher and picture were both part of the apparatus of the church, and each took notice of each other.”⁶⁰ This is a reasonable assessment, based on the formative role that both the exegesis of the preacher and the artist contributed to the church environment; we certainly anticipate this relationship in the Counter-Reformation, when altarpieces took on a rhetorical role akin to that of a “silent preacher/theologian,” to use the language of Gabriele Paleotti.⁶¹ Yet, from the perspective of a biblical reception-historian, this argument is complicated by the fact that the Annunciation text in Luke 1:26-38 can, and indeed has, been interpreted into various stages.⁶² It is through the subjective nature of reading that these stages are

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 48-51.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 48.

⁶¹ Christopher F. Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 204.

⁶² See Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 297. Brown uses various set stages to evaluate the parallels between the annunciation to Mary and that to Zacharias (Lk 1:5-24): (1) angel appearing to the protagonist; (2) a startled response; (3) a comfort in the form of “do not be afraid”; (4) you will name the child; (5) a question from the protagonist; (6) the angel’s response; (7) divine sign. See, François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50* (London: Fortress Press, 2002). Bovon likens the structure of the annunciation to Mary with the promise of children to barren women in the Hebrew Bible (Sarah, Genesis 18; Rebekah, Genesis 25; Zorah’s wife, Judges 13). See, Michael D. Goulder *Luke: A Paradigm Shift* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989). Goulder has likened Luke 1:26-38 with the structure of visions in the later narratives of the New Testament, such as Cornelius’ and Peter’s heavenly apparitions (Acts 10). See also, Simon Altmann and Gloria Martinez Leiva, “Gabriel and the Virgin II,” *European Review* 27, no. 2 (2019): 159-170. Altmann and Leiva attribute Venetian monk Giovanni Marinoni (1490-1562) with the authority of defining the Annunciation moments as (1) Angelic salutation: ‘Ave gratia plena...’ (v. 28);

deciphered; objective guidance is not found in the biblical text itself. Without evidence of individual examples in which Caraccioli's system is intentionally used by the artist - of which Baxandall provides none - it cannot be claimed that artists meticulously followed the biblical text and, in unanimity, discerned five stages for pictorial representation. For this reason, Baxandall's methodology will not be used in this study, by and large due to the absence of any reasonable indication that Annunciations in the Counter-Reformation were categorised in such a uniform manner.⁶³

More specific and sustained analyses of Annunciation paintings can be found in literature that focusses on a specific period, trend or form of Annunciation iconography.⁶⁴ A particularly relevant piece of scholarship is by Heidi Hornik and Mikeal Carl Parsons, who examine the infancy narratives of Luke's gospel specifically in Italian Renaissance painting.⁶⁵ They create a methodological platform for their analyses by focussing on two steps in reception relating to these objects: firstly the reception of the text by the artist into an image, and secondly how the visual exegesis enriched the understanding of the text by contemporary audiences and the modern day viewer.⁶⁶ In addition to the focus on a specific period and set of texts, other scholarship has used an iconographic detail as its starting point for image analysis, such as Laura Saetveit Miles' analysis of the motif of a book in Annunciation paintings, which will be particularly relevant to the case studies in Part 2.⁶⁷ Although her essay does not utilise a particularly extensive body of visual material to supplement her

(2) Virgin perturbed thinks: 'what manner of salutation this should be' (v. 29, Conturbatio); (3) Angel speaks: 'Fear not, Mart' (v. 30); (4) Angel speaks: 'thou shall conceive in thy womb' (v. 31); (5) Virgin speaks: 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man.' (v. 34, Cogitatio.), (6) Angel speaks: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee' (v. 35), (8) Virgin speaks; 'Ecce ancilla Domini' (38, Umiliatio.) (The seventh scene is the Annunciation to Elizabeth). The few responses cited here indicate the subjectivity of defining Annunciation stages.

⁶³ For the use of Baxandall's interpretation, see, among others, Siri Hustvedt, *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), 21; James Schamus, *Carl Theodor Dreyer's Gertrud: The Moving Word* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2008), 77-78.

⁶⁴ See, among others, Simon Altmann, "Right and Left in Art: The Annunciation," *Empirical Studies of the Arts* 31, no. 2 (2013): 223-238; Maria Evangelatou, "The purple thread of the flesh: The theological connotations of a narrative iconographic element in Byzantine images of the Annunciation," in *Icon and Word: the power of images in Byzantium. Studies presented to Robin Cormack*, eds. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (London: Ashgate, 2003), 269-85; David M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *The Art Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (2015): 480-526; Ann van Dijk, "The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (1999): 420-436.

⁶⁵ Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 5-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Miles, "The origins and development," 634.

findings, Miles brings out the significant cultural factors that informed the increased use of the book iconography in Annunciations, such as the growth in female readership in the Middle Ages.⁶⁸ Another source that reflects a sensitivity to a specific trope, and indeed hones in even more specifically on a specific century and city, is John R. Spencer's examination of spatial imagery in Florentine Annunciations of the fifteenth century.⁶⁹ Spencer identifies specific trends in Annunciation spaces and considers how artists working within the context manipulated the architecture of Mary's house, which was the prevalent setting for the narrative in the text's visual tradition. On this, Spencer argues, "Text and tradition restricted the action of the Annunciation to the interior of a house and the number of actors to two. Tradition dictated the colours of the garments, the gestures and poses which could be employed."⁷⁰ Tradition played an integral role in Annunciation iconography in the fifteenth century, argued both by Spencer and also by Miles in reference to the iconography of the book. The use of tradition remained integral to the interpretation of the narrative in the Counter-Reformation, which was also a context that put significant emphasis on using the history of biblical interpretation as a method of representation.

In addition to the studies that interrelated different Annunciation paintings under the same theme and context, there are studies that focus specifically on individual paintings.⁷¹ It is within these types of studies that we find the most rigorous examples of visual analysis. Take, for example, Daniele Bohde's analysis on the altar project in the San Salvador in Venice which contains a content analysis of Titian's *Annunciation* (1564).⁷² Bohde's analysis synthesises Titian's painting with the other two altars

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ John R. Spencer, "Spatial Imagery of the Annunciation in Fifteenth Century Florence," *The Art Bulletin* 37, no.4 (1955): 273-280.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 277. While Spencer's argument is entirely correct regarding the impact of tradition, it should be stated that the Annunciation has been represented in alternative interior spaces besides a house, and images often contained other protagonists besides the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, such as angels, patrons, and saints.

⁷¹ See, among others, Samuel Y Edgerton, "'How Shall This Be?' Reflections on Filippo Lippi's 'Annunciation,'" in London, Part II," *Artibus Et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987): 45-53; Carla Gottlieb, "The Brussels Version of the Merode *Annunciation*," *The Art Bulletin* 39 (1957): 53-59; Padgett, "Ekphrasis," 191-218; Erwin Panofsky, "Van Eyck's Washington *Annunciation*: Narrative Time and Metaphoric Tradition," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 1 (1999): 117-125; Erwin Panofsky, "The Friedsam Annunciation and the Problem of the Ghent Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 17, no. 4 (1935): 432-473; Leo Steinberg, "'How Shall This Be?' Reflections on Filippo Lippi's 'Annunciation,'" in London, Part I," *Artibus Et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987): 25-44.

⁷² Daniela Bohde, "Titian's Three-altar Project in the Venetian Church of San Salvador: Strategies of Self-representation by Members of the 'Scuola Grande Di San Rocco,'" *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 4 (2001): 450-472.

contained in the church and provides important contextual information relating to the commission. The specific detail found in studies like Bohde's means that they have the most explicit influence on the individual case studies of the thesis. Where available, object-specific essays will be used to distinguish the main features of the focal images, as well as the immediate situation of the church environment. Often lacking in that type of study, however, is the placement of these objects in the wider historical setting so as to link the micro-analysis to the macro-landscape. Additionally these studies have been provoked primarily by art-historical concerns as opposed to the issues relating to biblical reception.

The literature I have mentioned in this section shows a wide and varied interest in pictorial art of the Annunciation. Studies vary enormously, from honing in on the art-historical and theological significance of the objects, to attempting to construct the journey of the Annunciation as it moved across historic contexts, to using an isolated image as the source of investigation. The body of Counter-Reformation paintings that this thesis uses for its case studies will be impacted by each of these types of studies. In return, the lines of enquiry achieved by the case studies will inform existing literature by supplying interdisciplinary perspectives relating to these lesser-known images.

1.1.3. The Bible and the Counter-Reformation

As previously mentioned, the reception of the Bible occupied one of the most contentious debates of the Reformation period. Jaroslav Pelikan writes,

For the Reformation of the sixteenth century – whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Radical – is unthinkable apart from the Bible; and the Bible – at any rate as we know it in the realms of Western literature, culture, and faith – is almost equally unthinkable apart from the Reformation.⁷³

The Bible was at the centre of the contests, received on one side as the only reliable revelation of the will of God, and on the other as an authority shared with the history of Church tradition. Naturally these deviations inspired different methods for biblical

⁷³ Jaroslav Pelikan, Valeria R. Hotchkiss and David Price, *The Reformation of the Bible: The Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 1.

interpretation and led to the breadth of receptions found in textual, visual, and material culture of this period. Analysis of the reception of the Bible in this momentous historical moment has deviated significantly across contexts. Biblical reception in the Counter-Reformation is, for example, curiously lacking investigation despite its importance in the landscape of the Reformation and the history of the Catholic Church. The use and interpretation of the Bible in the Catholic context has been repeatedly overlooked due to the perceived intimate relationship between the Bible and the Protestant Reformation, in which the object became the sole instrument of religious authority. This contrasted with the Catholic view of the union of scripture and tradition as sources of truth. The reading and interpretation of scripture in Catholicism was executed in conjunction with the co-equal authority of “Popes, Councils, Church Fathers or ancient philosophers,” as well as the rituals, rites, and devotional practices of both clergy and laymen.⁷⁴ The Bible was mediated by the voices of its history of interpretation in Catholic tradition. In this respect, as Euan Cameron has argued, “it would be hard to sustain the argument that scripture played the sort of decisive, foreground role in Catholicism that it did in Lutherism.”⁷⁵ While this is true, there remains a need for scholars to analyse the Bible in Catholicism and enquire how tradition mediated its transmittance within the context. This objective does appear in a small collection of articles and subsections of larger volumes, albeit to a far lesser extent than studies on the Bible and its Protestant reception.

First to mention is Luke Murray’s article concerning the history of Jesuit exegesis scholarship.⁷⁶ Given that the emergence of the Order of the Jesuits correlated with the Catholic Reform context, Murray’s paper provides a comprehensive overview of the historical context of biblical exegesis. He identifies the significant contributions - including the Council of Trent - and highlights the key scholarship relating to Jesuit exegesis since the Counter-Reformation to the present day. Within this, Murray

⁷⁴ Liam Jerrold Fraser, *Atheism, Fundamentalism and the Protestant Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 19.

⁷⁵ Euan Cameron, “The Counter-Reformation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 85-103.

⁷⁶ Also see Luke Murray, “The Catholic Church & the Canon of Scripture at the Reformation,” accessed November 16, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/40092789/The_Catholic_Church_and_the_Canon_of_Scripture_at_the_Reformation

acknowledges the aforementioned lack of reflection on Counter-Reformation biblical interpretation, and writes,

With the coming of Vatican II, the interest in Jesuit exegesis waned as even Catholic scholars began to distance themselves from the (supposedly) reactionary stance taken by Tridentine exegetes. This distance is still evident today as a brief look through a textbook on hermeneutics reveals a jump from Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–64), and the other Reformers, straight to the pioneers of the historical critical method. Due to the previously mentioned factors (Trent's limited decree, Galileo affair, Vatican II, etc.), Catholic figures after Trent, including Jesuits, were not considered to be serious scholars of scripture.⁷⁷

This seeming unwillingness to interrogate the use and interpretation of the Bible in the Counter-Reformation is but a microcosm of the wider tendency in biblical and theological historiography to bypass Catholicism of the early modern period altogether. This was due to a long-held misconception that the Counter-Reformation merely intended to reinstate the traditions of the medieval church and as such its only significance was in providing context for the progress of the Protestant Reformation.⁷⁸ Through more dedicated study, this position has shifted, with the period now being considered fertile ground in the history of religion, art, gender, material culture and more. Murray's essay is a valuable resource that brings biblical exegesis into the discussion and indicates the need for more scholars to take up an interest in this period.

For introductions to the reception of the Bible in the Counter-Reformation, Guy Bedouelle and Euan Cameron's essays are particularly instructive.⁷⁹ Both outline some of the "historiographical puzzles and disputes" that surround the relationship between the Bible and the Counter-Reformation and trace its origins from pre-Trent through to the post-Tridentine period. Bedouelle uses the two different terms, Catholic

⁷⁷ Luke Murray, "A History of Historiography on Jesuit Exegesis," *Jesuit Historiography*, accessed November 20, 2020, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/jesuit-historiography-online/a-history-of-historiography-on-jesuit-exegesis-COM_193804

⁷⁸ Marcia B. Hall, "Introduction," in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, eds. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-19.

⁷⁹ Guy Bedouelle, "Biblical Interpretation in the Catholic Reformation," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, eds. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 440-461; Cameron, "The Counter-Reformation," 85-103.

Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and relates the reception of the Bible to each individually. The Counter-Reformation was “grafted” onto much older Catholic reformation movements that were forming from the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁸⁰ At the Council of Trent, these ideologies were codified in a reaction to Protestant challenge, bringing with it warnings to yield to Catholic authority in the Bible and its interpretation. In the fourth session of Trent the Church formed its position on the use of the Latin Vulgate as the Catholic Bible, which absorbed the apocrypha into its canon.⁸¹ Whilst, as Cameron identifies, there were disagreements over the Vulgate’s use even within Catholic circles, its antiquity and use in the Church for such a duration saw it continue to act as a scriptural source.⁸² The use of the Latin Vulgate over other sources is a decision in itself that warrants the acknowledgement that the Counter-Reformation clearly retained its own “reformation of the Bible.”⁸³ The ever-increasing desire for the Bible to be printed in the vernacular and so make it accessible to the lay person was problematic for Roman Catholicism as it put the interpretative authority on the reader as opposed to the Church. Cameron articulates that the concern of the Catholic Church lay in the increased autonomy that was being given to the laity in Protestant ideology, which may sway the Catholic faithful into heretical biblical interpretation (heretical being anything contrary to Church authority).⁸⁴ This implies that the Counter-Reformation Church recognised the subjectivity of texts and how their meaning was established through a process of reading, and not objectively in the text itself. The understanding of the subjectivity of the biblical reader and the challenge this created for the Catholic Church is described by Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, who write that, “[T]he availability of both texts and translations posed a threat to the Roman Catholic Church’s authority, and to orthodoxy itself. The translation of any manuscript, including the Bible, requires interpretation, because an understanding of the source text is integral to the process.”⁸⁵ It was exactly the issue of biblical reception that troubled the Council of Trent into heralding the Vulgate as the source of biblical authority.

⁸⁰ Bedouelle, “Biblical Interpretation,” 440.

⁸¹ Cameron, “The Counter-Reformation,” 95.

⁸² *Ibid*, 95-96.

⁸³ Black, *Church, Religion and Society*, 204.

⁸⁴ Cameron, “The Counter-Reformation,” 97.

⁸⁵ Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, “Introduction and Overview,” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, eds. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 13-97.

Also clarified at the Council of Trent was the continued use of Church tradition as a divine authority. The fourth session stated,

The council clearly perceives that this truth and rule are contained in written books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or else have come down to us, handed on as it were from the apostles themselves at the inspiration of the holy Spirit.”⁸⁶

The combined use of “written books” and “unwritten traditions” formed a central characteristic of the Counter-Reformation’s reception of the Bible. This contrasted with Protestantism, which heralded the Bible as the only source of revelation. The difference between these two positions was exceptionally important to the division of the Church in the sixteenth century, as Sylvester O’Brien writes, “How does man come to a knowledge of what God has revealed? That was the really fundamental question that sundered the unity of the seamless robe of Christ’s Church at the time of the Reformation.”⁸⁷ The division of the Church maintained an intimate connection to the opposing understandings of the Bible.

In addition to the aforementioned scholarly introductions on the Bible and the Counter-Reformation, there are a number of contributions that relate with more specificity the relationship between scripture and tradition within this period. O’Brien and Frank McNamara’s essays, for example, explore the paradigm of scripture and tradition at Trent in light of how it was perceived throughout Catholic history.⁸⁸ Jeffrey W. Barbeau also puts forward an interesting argument concerning the method in which scholars should understand Trent’s concept of scripture and tradition, ascribing the “conciliar hermeneutic” to the document, which involves the analysis of the text, context and text in context, to deduce the appropriate meaning and reception.⁸⁹ Donald S. Prudlo’s

⁸⁶ Council of Trent, Session 4, “First decree: acceptance of the sacred books and apostolic traditions, 8 April, 1546,” in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 663-665.

⁸⁷ Sylvester O’Brien, “Scripture and Tradition: A Problem of the Council,” *The Furrow* 14, no. 5 (1963): 303-309.

⁸⁸ O’Brien, “Scripture and Tradition,” 303-309. See also Frank McNamara, “Faith and Tradition,” *The Furrow* 32, no. 2 (1981): 67-78.

⁸⁹ Jeffrey W. Barbeau, “Scripture and Tradition at the Council of Trent: Reapplying the “Conciliar Hermeneutic,”” *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* 33, no. 1 (2001): 127-146.

contribution to a volume on Christian ideologies identifies that it was the concept of tradition that formed the “key interpretive principle” for understanding scripture in the Counter-Reformation.⁹⁰ In his chapter he summarises the role of tradition and how it opposed Protestantism’s *sola scriptura*:

One must bear this principle in mind in understanding the Catholic response to the Protestants. For Catholics, *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) was a puzzling doctrine. The Church had gathered, tested, and confirmed the scriptural canon; by its authority the Bible had been compiled. Indeed, for many years before the sacred books were written, there was only the oral tradition. Thus, for Protestants to say that scripture was sufficient by itself missed significant ecclesiological and historical questions. Many Catholic thinkers were equally confused by the Lutheran principle that scripture interprets itself. Catholics thought that many biblical passages were strange and obscure, and that one had to have recourse to a tradition of authoritative interpretation to aid in understanding it. [...] For them, the most reliable guides came from tradition, particularly the testimony and study of those who were closest to the apostles: the fathers of the Church. In other words, Catholics maintained principles of interpretation that they considered to have come from the apostles themselves.⁹¹

Prudlo succinctly summarises the two opposing ideas of Protestant and Catholic biblical reception. While the former identified scripture alone as the single source of revelation, Catholicism identified that the Bible was contained by Church tradition. Building on this essential difference in reception, Prudlo goes on to consider the repercussions this had in the post-Tridentine period and identifies that as well as a reaction against Protestantism, the relationship between scripture and tradition allowed for the contextual appropriation and innovation of biblical interpretation.⁹² The nature of Catholic theology liberated biblical texts from scriptural boundaries by allowing them to be interpreted in conjunction with the much broader remit of the history of tradition. This had a profound influence on the interpretation of the Bible that we see in textual, visual and material culture from the Counter-Reformation. The ability of tradition to expand the biblical text in contextually meaningful ways is a central

⁹⁰ Donald S. Prudlo, “Scripture and Theology in Early Modern Catholicism,” in *Christian Theologies of Scripture*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York: New York University, 2006), 134-153.

⁹¹ Prudlo, “Scripture and Theology,” 139.

⁹² *Ibid*, 144-146.

hypothesis in this thesis as I interrogate how the Annunciation to Mary was received and visually interpreted. It is also an accurate reflection of the concept of “nomadology” – the idea that biblical texts do not originate from a specific point but shift constantly through their long histories - which underpins Brennan Breed’s understanding of reception history, mentioned in 1.1.1.⁹³ The Counter-Reformation Church did not privilege biblical texts’ original history, but the accumulation and blending of the texts’ history of reception. This is no more effectively demonstrated than in the character of the Virgin Mary, when “the equal validity of the Scriptures as well as the unwritten traditions of the Church as sources of religious truth were asserted, thus giving, though not explicitly, canonical authority to traditional beliefs such as the tales and miracles that had informed the figure of Mary.”⁹⁴ Counter-Reformers did not appeal to the Mary conceptualised by the gospel writers, but to the Mary who had been repeatedly re-conceptualised by culture in the last sixteen-hundred years. To use the language of Breed, we could define the figure of the Virgin Mary as nomadic:

Nomads do not come from any fixed point, and neither are they headed toward a fixed point. Instead of yearning to return to one sedentary location like the exile or shifting between two sedentary locations like the migrant, the nomad is always moving between and beyond fixed points. For the nomad, there is no origin and no endpoint.⁹⁵

The history of Mary’s reception was not linear; it ebbed and flowed with currents of culture, in conjunction with the multitude of interpretations. In a Counter-Reformation context, she was not conceived from a point of origin, but from the ongoing dialogues that surrounded her and that were passed on and preserved in various cultural forms. Mary and her Annunciation are to be best understood through the unity of canonical and non-canonical sources, as an embodiment of centuries of interpretation.

To close this section, I appeal to the most concise explanation for the association between the Counter-Reformation and biblical reception history that this research has obtained. Harrison states that within Catholicism, “the text of scripture lay embedded in its own hermeneutical web in such a way that the words of the biblical authors were

⁹³ Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 203.

⁹⁴ Susan Haskins, “Volume Editor’s Introduction,” in *Who is Mary?: Three Early Modern Women on the Idea of the Virgin Mary*, ed. Susan Haskins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1-42.

⁹⁵ Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 203.

in practice not distinguished from the history of their interpretation.”⁹⁶ Harrison appeals to the language of Hans George Gadamer’s *Wirkungsgeschichte*, described in 1.1.1 as the root of the reception-historical methodology. This clear connection between reception history and Catholic ideology is represented in the focus of both to use the history of interpretation as a means to engage with biblical texts and their meaning. The Counter-Reformation occupied a moment in which this method was challenged in light of Protestant theology. Objects of biblical reception from this period therefore hinged their interpretation on perpetuating the voices of its history of interpretation.⁹⁷ Engagement with these objects provides reception-historical scholars with an opportunity to examine a period that itself projected the history of interpretation as the lens through which the Bible should be transmitted, learned and experienced. 1.1.3 has indicated that while this has been identified by a limited number of scholars, the attachment of the explicit language of reception history has been broadly avoided and more considerable research is required to fill this lacuna.

1.2. Methodology

As the overview of these diverse research contexts has shown, this thesis draws on scholarship from across disciplines and unites their primary interests. The main research questions of this thesis – (1) how was visual exegesis in altarpieces informed by the Counter-Reformation context? (2) what degree of variance is there in visual exegesis within these fifty years in Italy? And (3) how, specifically, was the Annunciation represented? – demand a similar interdisciplinarity in the methodology. This section will explain the rationale and structure of the method used in this thesis, with specific reference to the manner in which it will engage with the nine visual case studies. Given that the analysis of visual images still remains outside ‘traditional’ biblical studies pedagogy, attention is given to acquiring the appropriate interdisciplinary tools to effectively analyse the objects.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 93.

⁹⁷ See, among others, Roman Fischer and Jourden Travis Moger, “Johannes Dietenberger and his Counter-Reformation German Bible,” *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 3, no. 2 (2017): 279-302.

⁹⁸ Lyons, “Some Thoughts on Defining Reception History,” 10. See also Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 15.

1.2.1. Preliminary research

During the initial stages of research, before the case studies had been selected and I was dealing with an amorphous body of Annunciation images created during the fifty years after the Council of Trent, I used visual grounded theory to define specific recurrent patterns in the objects.⁹⁹ Firstly, I collated a range of Italian Annunciation paintings dating from c. 1560 to 1610 into a database (Appendix 1). This database was inspired by the work of Simon Altmann who, over several decades, collected the data of over 1300 Annunciation paintings from 300AD-1700 from across the globe.¹⁰⁰ The database I curated was far more specific in temporal and geographical range, but it retained Altmann's hypothesis that these objects were united by their biblical subject matter. I collected the data for the paintings from scholarly literature, internet sources, and churches, museums, and galleries that I visited during a research trip to Rome. While the database was never intended to be an exhaustive list of all Counter-Reformation Annunciations (as this period was particularly industrious in its production of sacred images), the database was effective in organising a large number of Annunciations in one format, that were then accessible for examination and analysis. The benefit of using a grounded theory approach was that the themes – or 'lenses' – that will be discussed in this thesis developed organically from the empirical data itself, thus generating accurate theories about the images and their connections to each other.¹⁰¹

In their definition of visual grounded theory methodology, Günter Mey and Marc Dietrich argue that "comprehensive interpretation is done during the process of coding and segmentation. Through the subsequent condensation of codes, categories should be constructed that reflect the basic concepts of the images."¹⁰² Building on this

⁹⁹ Günter Mey and Marc Dietrich, "From Text to Image – Shaping a Visual Grounded Theory Methodology," *Historical Social Research* 42, no. 4 (2017): 280-300. For an overview of grounded theory and its growing inclusion of visual images, see, among others, Barney Glaser, "All is data," *Grounded Theory Review* 2, no. 6 (2007), accessed October 26, 2020, <http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2007/03/30/1194/>; Krzysztof T. Konecki, "Visual Images and Grounded Theory," in *The SAGE Handbook of Current Developments in Grounded Theory*, eds. Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (London: SAGE, 2019), 352-373; Krzysztof T. Konecki, "Visual grounded theory: A methodological outline and examples from empirical work," *Revija Za Sociologiju* 41, no. 2 (2011): 131-160.

¹⁰⁰ See Simon Altmann, "Gabriel and the Virgin: The Secret of the Annunciation," *European Review* 24, no. 1 (2016): 149-158; Altmann and Leiva, "Gabriel and the Virgin II," 159-170; Altmann, "Right and Left in Art," 223-238.

¹⁰¹ Konecki, "Visual grounded theory," 132.

¹⁰² Mey and Dietrich, "From Text to Image," 295.

principal, I began to categorise the images in the database in various ways: by artist, location, date, intended function, and, importantly, by methods of visual exegesis, and by that I mean the way they interpret the biblical narrative. I was eager to go beyond a survey of Counter-Reformation Annunciation iconographic characteristics, and instead decipher those areas in the artists' exegesis of the biblical text that maintained connections to the specific religious, political and cultural climate of post-Tridentine Italy. It was from this grounded theory approach that I deduced specific issues relating to Counter-Reformation Annunciations. Three of these then developed into the lenses of interpretation found in the three-part structure of the thesis.

The first of the three main themes is the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality. In my "coding" and "segmentation" of the visual data, I observed that in attempting to pictorially narrate the Annunciation, the temporality of the biblical story was distinctly affected. This manifested in different ways depending on the artist and/or patron's preference, but the concept of a disrupted chronological story was a dominant characteristic in the visual expression of this narrative during the period. The second issue I identified related to the employment of the book as propaganda of Counter-Reformation objectives. The use of the book was a dominant iconographic feature of the Annunciations I engaged with, but it became increasingly clear that its presence went far beyond the remit of an aesthetic decision. It had a varying use and appearance in the paintings, indicating a level of exegetical choice made on behalf of the artist and their company of influence. I identified that the book shifted and changed in representation based on specific locations and intended audiences.

The identification of these first two issues – pictorial narrative and temporality and the use of the book as propaganda - is unique in that they have received little to no traction in the field of Annunciation scholarship, either in art history or biblical reception history. This is the first time these issues have been defined as meaningful to the Counter-Reformation context and to the cultivation of Annunciation visual exegesis in this historical moment. The final theme - or lens - deviates slightly from this form in that it has already been identified in scholarship as a typical mode of Counter-Reformation Annunciation representation. This, however, has been assumed with minimal theological or historical substantiation. I define this final theme as the inclusion of heavenised imagery in Annunciation paintings. This trope has commonly been

attached to the development of Baroque-inspired spiritual imagery that dominated Catholic visual culture, but through my analyses I distinguished that the use of heavenised symbols such as angels, cherubim, clouds, light sources and images of a God in heaven, was meaningful to the independent ecclesiastical situations in which the Annunciations were employed. For this third lens, the grounded theory was advantageous for adjudicating the independent uses and purposes of this trope, and countering a misguided perception that has blanketed this imagery as typical of Counter-Reformation Annunciations.

More will be stated on these three themes in the outline of the thesis (see 1.3), but for now it should be articulated that these three themes are not posited as the only methods of visual exegesis that I distinguished in the body of Counter-Reformation Annunciations I collated. Far from it, as this thesis argues that Annunciation paintings created in this period possessed a complex set of exegetical experiments. Nor are the specific case studies used because they are the only meaningful objects relating to the issues. A characteristic of this thesis is the inclusion of an exceptionally high number of paintings that are used to support arguments and indicate ideas requiring further investigation. Some of the primary case studies are chosen because they were created by artists who have been noted in scholarship as major contributors to Italian art of the sixteenth century and who can be identified as the key movers in the artistic climate. This can be found in the example of Caravaggio, who provides the first case study of the thesis. His fame and reputation in the last fifty years has outshone all other artists of this period due to his provocative and important presence in Italian art historiography. Others were not chosen due to popularity in historiography, but because their Annunciations reflected a particular connection to modes of Catholic biblical exegesis, as in the case of Durante Alberti, whose *Annunciation* (1588) was inspired by Counter-Reformation ideologies around the use of images as tools for religious conversion. Others still were chosen due to their fascinating function, for example in the case of Guido Reni's *Annunciation* (1610), which decorated the pope's private chapel, thus visualising a mode of Annunciation exegesis that was sanctioned by the highest authority in the Counter-Reformation Church. The different rationale that accompanies each part and case study - as continued in 1.4 - makes it possible for this thesis to hypothesise the breadth of interpretations found in the visual exegesis of the biblical text in this period.

1.2.2. Methodological approaches

The method by which these images will be analysed comprises of three main steps, and it is worth considering the specific influences of this three-step method before describing them further. A significant influence has been Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), who himself devised three levels of interpretation for image-based analysis, formulated in *Studies in Iconology* (1937), which was one of the “most famous and influential approaches taken in twentieth-century art history.”¹⁰³ This method remains a standard model in modern art history, despite certain criticism that will be discussed below.¹⁰⁴ The three-fold process begins with the first level, “primary or natural subject matter,” which involves identifying the basic forms and shapes represented in an image, and second level, “secondary or conventional subject matter,”¹⁰⁵ which makes the sequence and placement of objects compatible with an identified subject matter. In the context of Annunciation images, this second level would involve identifying the winged male figure and the young woman as the Angel Gabriel and Virgin Mary, thus circumscribing the biblical subject matter. The third level, “intrinsic meaning or content,” involves looking deeper at the context in which the painting was created and the influences that impacted the artist in their interpretation of the subject matter. The third level is achieved “by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work.”¹⁰⁶ Influences can include, but are by no means limited to, historical period, geographical space, requirements of commissioner, and religious or denominational persuasion. This level is the ultimate stage of Panofsky’s analytical system and is the step that allows for a deeper understanding and awareness of the contextual conditions in which an image was created.

Panofsky’s system is advantageous to the investigation of this thesis, specifically the idea of reconstructing a historical context to define the purpose of an image. The three-step system of the analyses in this thesis, however, should not be considered a direct

¹⁰³ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 96.

¹⁰⁴ Dieter Wuttke, “Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968),” in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, ed. Colum Hourihane (London: Routledge, 2017), 105-122.

¹⁰⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

replica of Panofsky's. It also draws on the work of art historian Paolo Berdini, who in fact criticises part of the Panofskian methodology. In a review of Berdini's work, Peter Humphrey writes,

Berdini's main theme is that traditional, Panofskian iconographical analysis demands too close a concordance between the image and a pre-existing text; and he argues instead that sixteenth-century painters in general, and Bassano in particular, invariably amplify any written source by a process that the author calls "visual exegesis." In other words, in visualizing his text, the painter suggests meaning by drawing on his own more general reading and experience.¹⁰⁷

Berdini renders the idea put forward by Panofsky's version of art history as limiting in that it creates too stable a relationship between text and image.¹⁰⁸ Yet within the framework of visual exegesis, an image is no longer the same as the source that informed it but is a new version of the subject, expanded and developed by an artist.

The paradigm of textual expansion in visual exegesis as described by Berdini also provides a means to synthesise the method of analysis with the historical context. Berdini does this by theorising the different forms of visual exegesis used in the Lutheran and Counter Reformations respectively. Berdini writes in relation to the movement of Martin Luther (1483-1546) that, "Like the word, the image had to be secured in its literality, precluded in its expansion, and politicized in its use."¹⁰⁹ In contrast, Berdini puts forward the following statement regarding sixteenth-century Italy: "Contrary to the case for Reformation Germany, visual culture in Italy was

¹⁰⁷ Peter Humphrey, "Jacopo Bassano and His Public: Moralizing Pictures in an Age of Reform, ca. 1535-1600; the Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis by Paolo Berdini," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (1998): 1348-1350.

¹⁰⁸ Other criticisms on Panofsky's work relate to how it focusses on images as a product of their cultural milieu. See Keith Moxey, "Panofsky's Concept of "Iconology" and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art," *New Literary History* 17, no. 2 (1986): 265-274. He writes that Panofsky "ignores the life of the work of art after it has entered a social context. By concentrating on the way in which the work of art "reflects" the life of its times, the preoccupation with "intention" fails to recognise the function of the work of art as an actor in the development of cultural attitudes and therefore as an agent of social change." For the purpose of this thesis, the analysis of case studies also intends to draw on their reception in the Counter-Reformation where this is possible. This thesis posits that the images were not just objects that reflected the times, but that informed them, as these visual objects projected representations sanctioned by the Counter-Reformation Church. They are articles that themselves shaped the values and belief system of its beholders and thus require the consideration of their contemporary reception.

¹⁰⁹ Berdini, *Jacopo Bassano*, 18.

intended to play an important role in the expansion of the [biblical] text.”¹¹⁰ While Berdini stops at this point and uses these assessments solely within a discussion of different types of image, it can be argued that these different modes reflect opposing perspectives on the interpretation of the Bible.¹¹¹ The Lutheran prerogative of *sola scriptura*, a consistent feature of Protestant Reformation theology, drove the desire for “literality” of biblical texts and “preclusion” of their expansion in images.¹¹² In contrast, at the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church emphasised the unity of scripture and tradition, as identified in 1.1.3.¹¹³ In the reformation of Catholicism’s sacred images, the unity of scripture and tradition encouraged the expansion of biblical texts to incorporate elements of Church tradition. The history of the Bible’s interpretation was used as an authority on the visualisation of sacred subjects. Berdini’s textual expansion is therefore effective in allowing Counter-Reformation biblical interpretation to come to the fore throughout image analysis. Berdini’s method, however, suffers its own criticism in that, unlike Panofsky, it does not provide a systematic process for image analysis. Indeed, another reviewer, John Marciari writes, “Berdini’s own method is less entirely new than it is a valuable modification and expansion of scholarship in recent years.”¹¹⁴ Marciari identifies that Berdini’s contribution is largely based on reframing earlier approaches and certainly in practice his analyses of Bassano’s paintings are not distinctive. For this reason, the method employed in the case studies of this thesis is unique, in that it synthesises Panofsky’s clear, interrogative process of analysis and Berdini’s more nuanced hypothesis of visual exegesis in order to create substantial assessments on the aforementioned Counter-Reformation Annunciations.

1.2.3. Three-step methodology for image analysis

The first step in the analysis of the nine case studies focusses on providing the contextual information that relates to the painting: its location, intended function (“devotional, ceremonial, liturgical, private and/or polemical”¹¹⁵), the conditions of its

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ See Chloe Church, “Modes of visual biblical interpretation in the Lutheran and Counter Reformations,” (MA diss., University of Birmingham, 2017).

¹¹² Dianne Bergant, “Catholic Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Stephen L. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 86; Herbert D. Rix, *Martin Luther: The Man and the Image* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1983), 58.

¹¹³ Council of Trent, “First decree,” 663.

¹¹⁴ John Marciari, “*The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis*. Paolo Berdini,” *Speculum* 75, no. 2 (2000): 440-41.

¹¹⁵ O’Hear, *Contrasting Images*, 8.

commission, and a brief introduction to the artist and their involvement, if known, to the Counter-Reformation context. It also reiterates the rationale for the chosen paintings. This first step is supplemented most significantly by the art-historical literature concerning the artist and the painting. This step provides the reader with the foundational knowledge necessary to move forward with iconographic and interpretative analysis of the image. The second step in the analysis uses the concept of “textual expansion” as defined by Paolo Berdini to identify the characteristics of the painting’s content. This is the place in which divergences from the biblical text are identified. This step seeks to qualify the level at which the traditions of the Annunciation narrative have mediated the translation of text to image. It does not insinuate that the artist directly read the biblical text, chose an aspect of it and represented it. It instead examines the outcome of the image and how it, advertently or not, expanded the biblical text. This step relies less heavily on secondary literature, but does incorporate other pictorial representations that mirror a similar iconographic trend. In this step, the variance in visual exegesis across the nine case studies - and beyond - will be most explicit. It will also highlight the important areas in the case study that will be interrogated in the third step of the analysis.

The final step in the analysis is by far the most extensive section in the analysis and is where the visual exegesis that has just been described is interrogated against contextual factors. It focusses on a cross-section of literature – historical, art-historical, and theological – to determine how the visual exegesis was informed by Counter-Reformation ideology. It considers both the wider Catholic context and the more localised intentions of individual church environments, in the knowledge that Counter-Reformation strategies were not blanket-enforced but instead fluctuated across times and spaces. It considers how the biblical image was created and the contributing factors that led to its composition, such as guidance from theologians, the patron, written texts and pre-existing traditions. It also considers how such an interpretation was received within the same context. On these occasions, primary material is prioritised that may elicit a first-hand reception of the work, but where this is unavailable there are opportunities to construct the experiences of the beholder by building knowledge bases of the specific church, audience type and practice of

viewing.¹¹⁶ The analysis will be directed towards understanding how the issue of the part - whether that be pictorial narrative and temporality, the book as propaganda, or the motif of heavenised imagery - is represented in the artist's response. It will examine what meaning the theme has to the specific context and how it contributes, or complicates, the identification of the trends.

1.2.4. Use of sources

The process of this analysis is "immersive" in that it seeks to use any and all resources pertaining to the image, the artist and historical context.¹¹⁷ It unites word-based sources and image-based sources, recognising both types as valuable in reconstructing the Counter-Reformation context. It does this in order to better prepare the research, and its reader, with as broad a knowledge as possible around the central subjects in order to make accurate assessments regarding the visual exegesis. That being said, the method of this thesis, which to a certain extent is driven by a Panofskian-level of interrogation, does involve some risks around the idea of anachronism: the viewing of history from the perspective of the present. The challenge lies in engaging with a moment in history that is fundamentally unlike our own. Interpretation of a historic context can naturally lead to personal, contemporary bias that impacts our understanding of it.¹¹⁸ However, as John Shearman suggests, this is an inevitable issue that resonates across all historical disciplines and should not hinder a Panofskian-type investigation:

...such inevitable imperfection ought not to be allowed to discourage the exercise of the historical imagination. In the same way it goes without saying that we will not reconstruct entirely correctly, but it is a sign of an unreflective lack of realism to suppose that because we will not get it entirely right we had better give up and do something else not subject to error.¹¹⁹

Although we cannot disentangle ourselves from our time, nor "avoid, as it were, all contamination by contemporary ideologies and intervening histories," there is

¹¹⁶ Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers*, 2-3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1-11.

¹¹⁸ Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 5.

¹¹⁹ John Shearman, *Only Connect--: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 4-5.

significant value in our attempts at contextual reconstruction.¹²⁰ It is through the process that it is possible to ascertain the environment of the visual objects and identify the cultural phenomena that informed their exegesis. This research therefore aims to reconstruct the temporal moment, identifying and nuancing the potential influences that might have impacted the artist, patron, commission details, ecclesiastic environment, or reform strategies, and so triggered the specific interpretation of the Annunciation as found in the individual altarpieces.

To achieve the deepest level of insight, the three-step analysis used in the case studies draws on a body of information from primary and secondary sources, of textual, visual and material culture. The range of textual primary material includes, but is not confined to: biblical commentaries, textual exegeses and sermons on Luke 1:26-38, the official decrees and catechism of the Council of Trent; post-Tridentine art treatises (Giovanni Andrea Gilio's *Dialogue on the Errors and Abuses of Painters* (1563/4), Johannes Molanus' *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum* (1570), Gabriele Paleotti's *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582), Charles Borromeo's *Instructions on Ecclesiastical Building* (1577), and Federico Borromeo's *Sacred Painting* (1624), autobiographies, biographies, letters, and more. This is supported and supplemented by the textual secondary sources, some of which have been described above and some that will be artist and image specific. Moving now to the visual and material primary sources, these will include paintings, engravings, prints, sculptures, architecture, dramas, relics and other traditions. As with the textual primary sources, some of these objects pre-date the Counter-Reformation, or, conversely, date much later. Their inclusion is important in stating how, where and why specific iconographic tropes developed, and also their continuing prominence in post-Tridentine Italy. When considering the stimuli of artists' education and knowledge formation, it has been acknowledged that visual objects themselves were particularly formative in shaping visual interpretations of subjects.¹²¹ They will therefore be used extensively, in the knowledge that visual language was often replicated and passed on from one artist to another. Some of these more tangible primary sources were

¹²⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹²¹ Elsje Van Kessel, "Artists and Knowledge in Sixteenth-century Venice," in *The Artist as Reader: On Education and Non-Education of Early Modern Artists*, eds. Heiko Damm, Michael Thimann and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 221-240.

received through my own access to churches and chapels in Rome, where the altarpieces remain in situ. Where these visits were possible, the analysis will incorporate first-hand observations of the physical space and immediate surroundings, whilst remaining sensitive to renovations that took place in later years.

1.3. Outline of Parts and Chapters

Chapter 1 has located the lacuna in scholarship surrounding visual exegesis in the Counter-Reformation and identified Annunciation altarpieces as objects that posed specific exegetical challenges. It deciphered the central research questions – (1) How was visual exegesis in altarpieces informed by the Counter-Reformation context? (2) what degree of variance is there in visual exegesis within these fifty years in Italy? and (3) how, specifically, was the Annunciation represented? - and introduced a means to answer them, namely by using case studies relating to different themes identifiable in Counter-Reformation Annunciations. It has also provided an overview of the research context based on three substantial lines of scholarly enquiry: biblical reception history and painting, pictorial art of the Annunciation, and the Bible and the Counter-Reformation. Following this, Chapter 1 delineated some methodological thoughts focussing on Panofsky and Berdini, and designed a unique, three-step methodology that uses evidence from both textual and visual sources.

Chapter 2 follows on by executing some of the reconstruction work mentioned in section 1.2.4, and focusses on the key statements relating to sacred images in the Counter-Reformation. The chapter is the only one of the thesis that focusses solely on primary literature in its analysis. It focusses on the precursors before Trent who made the initial responses to Protestantism, before moving onto the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent, which is where we find the decree relating to the essential use and purpose of sacred images in Catholicism. Section 2.4 focusses on art treatises, which were exceptionally prominent in this period based on the need to apply the vague Tridentine decrees into tangible guidance for artists, patrons and beholders. Finally, Chapter 2 acknowledges the image-reform influences in Rome, where there were considerably fewer art treatises written in the wake of Trent. It provides a reason behind this lack and recognises alternative influences such as the new painters' guild, the Accademia di San Luca. This specific enquiry into Rome's context is due to it being

the geographical heart of the Counter-Reformation movement, as well as the location of four out of the nine case studies. Chapter 2 serves as a sounding board for the thesis, which is then available for the reader to revisit or refer to.

The structure of the rest of the thesis centres around the three trends that I identified as significant in the visual exegesis of the Annunciation to Mary in Counter-Reformation altarpieces. The three trends emerged during the preliminary research stages, when I applied the method of visual grounded theory to deduce specific recurrent patterns in the Annunciation's visual exegesis (see 1.2.1). The three lenses I selected – the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality, the use of the book as propaganda, and the inclusion of heavenised imagery - establish the three main parts of the thesis. Within each part are three case studies, which serve to elicit how the specific theme/lens is represented in practice by the artists' visual biblical interpretation. The order in which the case studies are treated is chronological, apart from in Part 1 where Caravaggio's *Annunciation* (1608) forms the first visual analysis. This decision was driven by the acknowledgement that Caravaggio scholarship has dominated Counter-Reformation art historiography. By positioning Caravaggio at the forefront of my case studies, his evocative character and style introduces some of the major themes and challenges that confronted sacred image-makers in his contemporary climate. On the geographical location of these case studies, to reiterate an earlier point, the chapters move between cities and regions. It does this not to generalise a specific location based on the visual exegesis of one object, but to reflect the variance across Italian Annunciations. The Counter-Reformation was felt with varying degrees of force across the country, affecting the religious and political landscape of each place, including the visual interpretation of biblical narratives. Thus the geographical disparity serves not to hinder the investigation, but to substantiate the claims that Annunciations of this period were responding to their own web of exegetical challenges impacted by the specifics of their theological and historical milieu.

The title of each Part – “Narrating the Word in Image,” “Reading the Word in Image,” and “Heavenising the Word in Image,” - centres on the language of word and image, echoing the interplay between these two modes in the practical, theological and methodological principles of the thesis. First and foremost, the language of word and

image relates to the translation of a biblical text into a visual altarpiece. Secondly, word and image relates to the subject of the Incarnation - the Word of God becoming flesh - in which the Annunciation plays a narrative role. Finally, the methodology of this thesis appeals to the use of word-based and image-based sources in its analysis. It considers how the words written by both ancient (biblical and Church fathers) and contemporary sources (Church decrees, art treatises etc) were represented in the visual mode, and how in turn the visual impacted that which was written.

Part 1 is entitled “Narrating the Word in Image: the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces.” Part 1 first focusses on describing the selected trend and its contextual significance, before using said trend as a lens to analyse the paintings. “Narrating the Word in Image” focusses on the mechanics of pictorially interpreting the Annunciation in visual form during the Counter-Reformation. This part was chosen as the first of the three main sections as it introduces some of the issues surrounding the representation of a narrative in two-dimensional visual form that recurs later in the thesis. It would have already been established in Chapter 2 that *istoria* (painted narratives) were encouraged by the Council of Trent and treatise writers as a means to instruct and inspire the lay beholder. Images were sanctioned as valuable communicators of “the stories of the mysteries of our redemption”¹²², but the question lay in how the *istoria* translated the verbal, sequential language of a story into a visual, static image such as an altarpiece. Pictorial narratives of the Annunciation during this period therefore reflected a disrupted temporality, in which visual interpreters grappled with different methods to make the verblity of the narrative function in transitory visual space.

Chapter 3 contains the first case study of the thesis, by the most studied painter of the Counter-Reformation period: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. Caravaggio’s *Annunciation* (1608) for the Duke of Lorraine, Henry II (1563-1624), is one of his least studied paintings due to considerable damage to its canvas. The analysis begins with contextual information relating to the artist, context and commission details, before working systematically through the painting, highlighting the various points of textual expansion to the biblical narrative and attaching details relating to the cultural

¹²² Council of Trent, “On invocation,” 665-667.

phenomena that informed such decisions. The analysis then argues how the painting's visual exegesis was informed by its context, and in particular how the dramatic naturalism of Caravaggio's style impacted the temporality of his *istoria*.

Chapter 4 continues investigating pictorial narrative in its analysis of Federico Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets* (1565), which was the first artistic commission by the Order of the Jesuits in the now-destroyed Church of the Annunciation, Rome. The fact that the Jesuits dedicated their central ecclesiastical space to the Annunciation illustrates the narrative's significance to the community and thus makes it an important fresco for the investigation of its visual exegesis. In a similar way to Caravaggio's *Annunciation*, Zuccaro's altarpiece is vastly understudied, likely due to its destruction in 1650, but its engraved copy by Cornelis Cort represents the complex interpretation relating to its structure of pictorial narrative. The engraving shows the Annunciation dialogue between the Angel Gabriel and Virgin Mary situated as part of a much larger composition that includes heavenly imagery and six Old Testament prophets. These details disrupt the narrative temporality of the *Annunciation* through its unity of various temporal states.

Chapter 5 forms the final case study of Part 1, in its analysis of Guido Reni's *Annunciation* (1610) for the private chapel of Pope Paul V (1550-1621) in the Vatican. This image is part of a cycle of images designed by Reni that decorate the chapel and was used for the Pope's personal devotion. The cycle narrates the Life of the Virgin Mary, and the *Annunciation* forms the final painting in the sequence. The analysis synthesises the cycle with the context of the chapel in order to examine the influences informing the visual exegesis. The pictorial narrative of the cycle united sources from scripture and tradition. The temporality of the story thus relates not only to unfolding of the life of Mary up to the point of the Annunciation, but also to the perpetuation of traditions relating to her character. The pictorial narrative is disrupted by the interjection of contemporary and even polemical perspectives.

Part 2 is entitled "Reading the Word and Image: the use of the book as propaganda in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces." The opening section of Part 2 traces how the object of a book became particularly popular in late medieval pictorial and literary receptions of the Annunciation, often found in the context of Mary reading. The

motif remained influential in the late sixteenth-century Reformation context, when it became bound to different contemporary issues arising across Italian churches. Part 2 uses the case studies to consider three specific ways in which the book functioned as Counter-Reformation propaganda: (1) in the issue of female readership, (2) in the Church's jurisdiction over reading practices, and (3) in the polemic of religious conversion.

Chapter 6 analyses Federico Barocci's *Annunciation* (1582-4) as the first case study of Part 2. This painting was created for the Duke of Urbino's private chapel in the Basilica di Santa Casa, Loreto. Barocci produced an Annunciation in which Mary holds a book in her left hand, as if in the practice of reading when the Angel Gabriel brought his message. Not only this, but Barocci has expanded the tradition of the book to include an inkwell, an object that intensifies the textuality of the image, as well as the autonomy given to Mary as a female reader and writer. The analysis then considers how these details reflected and fed into the context of female literacy during the Counter-Reformation.

Chapter 7 evaluates the second case study in Part 2, Ludovico Carracci's *Annunciation* (1584) for a confraternity in Bologna. The rationale for this painting's inclusion in the thesis is that it has been interpreted in modern scholarship within the context of Gabriele Paleotti's writings on propriety in art, which were published in the wake of the closing of Trent. Chapter 6 assesses this claim and uses Paleotti's call for didactic art to argue for the compatibility of Carracci's clear and methodical visual exegesis with the views of the treatise writer, who at the time was serving as Archbishop of Bologna. The analysis then argues that the prescriptive reading action of Mary and her book in the painting reflects the authoritative jurisdiction of the Counter-Reformation Church over reading practices and education.

Durante Alberti's *Annunciation* (1588) forms the primary source for Chapter 8 and the final analysis in Part 2. It evaluates the use of the book in the polemical context of Santa Maria ai Monti, a church in Rome that oversaw the conversion of members of the Jewish faith to Roman Catholicism. Alberti's painting was commissioned for the burial chapel of preacher Andrea del Monte, who preached vehemently against Judaism in the city. Del Monte used the typological method of biblical interpretation, in

which New Testament events were interpreted as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Chapter 8 argues that this method of biblical exegesis is found in Alberti's *Annunciation* in its use of the book that shows the text of Isaiah 7:14 in Hebrew. This biblical text was interpreted within the context as a prophecy of the Virgin Mary, and shows a specific use of the book as propaganda of its church's objectives. The chapter includes reference to other paintings in Rome that used biblical texts in this way, such as Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (1602).

Part 3 is entitled "Transcending Word and Image: the motif of heavenised imagery in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces." It innovates the term "heavenised imagery," and uses it to define motifs that include - but are not confined to - unexplainable sources of light, angels, cherubim, clouds, and representations of God the Father. These types of motifs have been identified by scholars as having a dominant presence in Counter-Reformation Annunciations. Many have used generic statements to articulate that this method of interpretation was a stereotypical response for the period. Part 3 goes further than previous research by first constructing a theological and historical backdrop in which to determine the contextual significance of the heavenised theme. Secondly, the section provides extended analyses of three case studies. For each, attention is given to localising the interpretation to its specific context and its particular adherence - or avoidance - of a heavenised interpretation. Part 3 therefore aims to individualise the generalising hypothesis that there is a categorical response to the Annunciation narrative in the period.

Chapter 9 focusses on the *Annunciation* by Giorgio Vasari, created between 1563-4 for a nunnery in Arezzo, Tuscany. The use of the image in this thesis allows my research to widen its geographical parameters to consider the context of sixteenth-century Florence from which Vasari completed the majority of his work. Florence maintained a completely different relationship to the Counter-Reformation than that of Rome and thus its visual culture was driven by a different set of objectives. This chapter will examine how this affected the interpretation of the Annunciation narrative in Vasari's painting, particularly in reference to the neglect of heavenised imagery. The avoidance of such a detail is curious considering Vasari's integration of such imagery in the stage design for Annunciation plays in Florence. Chapter 9 attempts to qualify Vasari's exegetical decisions, as well as use the painting as an argument against the

claim from scholars that heavenised imagery always accompanied the Annunciation in the Counter-Reformation.

Titian's *Annunciation* (1564) for San Salvatore in Venice is the case study for Chapter 10, and was a clear choice given its occupance as one of the earliest pictorial representations of the heavenised trend in Annunciation representations. Unlike Vasari's painting, which was created within the same year, Titian's painting absorbs unnatural light, clouds, and hordes of angels to create an interpretation centred on the Incarnational aspect of the Annunciation. Chapter 10 addresses how this cataclysmic exegesis was informed in part through correspondence with Titian's contemporaries, specifically Pietro Aretino, who devised a similarly dramatic interpretation of the narrative in textual form. The Annunciation narrative was particularly revered in Titian's Venice due to the city's long association with the Virgin Mary since its founding on the 25th March 421AD, which is the annual date of the feast of the Annunciation. Titian's *Annunciation* is the most popularly studied painting found in this thesis, and this chapter extends its assessment to consider how the painting related to the *istoria* of the Annunciation in late sixteenth-century Venice.

Chapter 11 brings the research back to Rome and into the setting of Santa Maria in Vallicella. Il Passignano created the altarpiece of the Chapel of the Annunciation in 1590-1, after he had spent time in Venice. Compositionally, the *Annunciation* adopts many of the details found in Titian's *Annunciation* and may indicate a first-hand encounter with the earlier image. Chapter 11 contextualises the heavenised imagery found in Passignano's painting to the Santa Maria in Vallicella's altarpiece cycle, which was designed under the devotional strata of the rosary pattern by Philip Neri (1515-1595). Neri was the founder of the Oratorian order and prioritised spiritual exercises, often using visual images as a source of such devotion. Passignano's altarpiece thus serves as an example of how the heavenised method of visual exegesis encouraged devotional responses to the Virgin Mary and particularly to her role as the Virgin Annunciate.

The thesis concludes in Chapter 12 by drawing together the observations gained throughout the three main parts and the case studies within them. It will unite the micro-analyses of the case studies to the broader landscape of Counter-Reformation

Annunciations, and evaluate how they can inform and shape our understanding of this biblical text within the period. It will also identify the specific characteristics of late sixteenth-century visual exegesis and evaluate the complexity of the hermeneutical web that surrounded biblical texts through tradition, location, commission, and localised circumstances. The chapter will situate the findings in the main areas of research earlier identified in the research context - biblical reception history and painting, pictorial art of the Annunciation, and the Bible and the Counter-Reformation – in order to demonstrate the progress made by this thesis within each of the strands, and also to identify the areas requiring more intensive scholarly consideration that the author intends to pursue.

2. Chapter 2. Identifying and Addressing the Key Statements on Sacred Images in the Counter-Reformation.

2.1. Introduction

The historic period this thesis is concerned with was one of momentous discord, occupied by irreparable ruptures in the Church and considerable depths of religious and political conflict. These struggles existed not just between the two main camps of Protestantism and Catholicism, but also within internal and local structures. A microcosm of the dissonance is reflected in the issue of sacred images, and this chapter will identify and address some of the key statements on religious art that date from the turbulent late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The purpose of this chapter is to situate the idea of visual biblical exegesis within the historical moment. It will provide contextual information on the ideologies and policies relating to biblical images and construct a historic lens through which I will engage with the paintings in Parts 1-3. I will be appealing to a body of primary evidence: the decrees of the Council of Trent, the art treatises published in the following decades, and the texts surrounding the inauguration of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome. This chapter is therefore rooted in literary analysis, as I piece together textual evidence relating to image-based representation. From the texts, I will construct an overview of the prominent theories on the visual arts, specifically focussing on painting, which was given significantly greater precedence than other forms of visual representation.

Before venturing further, it would be beneficial to mention the historiography relating to paintings of this period. Firstly, it should be stated that there is an ever-increasing number of mono- and polygraphs that provide contextual introductions for the art-historical context of the Counter-Reformation.¹²³ Within these texts, in a similar way to the shifting perceptions on the history of the Counter-Reformation mentioned in Chapter 1, the specific issue of the Catholic image-reform has borne various

¹²³ See, for example, Marcia B. Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art* (London: Yale University Press, 2011); Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper (eds.), *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Pamela Jones, Ivor Jones and Thomas Worcester (eds.), *Rome and Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, Ca. 1550-1650* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Elizabeth Lev, *How Catholic Art Saved the Faith: The Triumph of Beauty and Truth in Counter-Reformation Art* (Bedford: Sophia Institute Press, 2018); Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *Sensuous Worship: Jesuits and the Art of the Early Catholic Reformation in Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

receptions. In the century and a half of “bewilderingly complex historiography,” scholars from different historic moments have fluctuated dramatically from perceiving this period after the closing of Trent as one of artistic crisis, to one of creative flourishing.¹²⁴ Similarly, some have identified an art that reflects a “repressive, iron-fisted, autocratic” interpretation of the Counter-Reformation, while others have procured that the *disciplinamento* of the image reform as declared by the Council of Trent and Church authorities on methods of visual exegesis, afforded some level of flexibility and agency.¹²⁵ It is this latter perspective that has gained more considerable traction in recent years, as it accounts for the multifaceted nature of the term ‘Counter-Reformation’ across geographical, historical, cultural, political and religious parameters, in addition to the sheer artistic eclecticism evidenced in the visual arts themselves during the fifty years after the Council of Trent. This diversity is forcefully communicated in this thesis based on the simultaneity of the altarpieces’ subject matter, which makes it increasingly clear how even an isolated biblical text was received with multiplicity within a brief context. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is not to diminish the historiographical complexities of post-Tridentine art, nor create a false idealization of unity in the image reformation. Rather, it uses the space to engage with the primary texts relating to the issue of painting during the period.

2.2. Catholic image theory before Trent

The position of the Western Church on the use of images prior to the Reformation period was influenced by the statements of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604AD) in his letter to Serenus of Marseilles.¹²⁶ The pope challenged Serenus’ destruction of images from churches in his diocese on the following grounds, “For what writing presents to readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read. Hence, and chiefly to the nations, a picture is instead of reading.”¹²⁷ Gregory is the first Christian writer to state that images and words were interchangeable in the context of

¹²⁴ Locker, “Introduction,” 5.

¹²⁵ Hudon, “Religion and Society,” 783-804; Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 49-50.

¹²⁶ François Quiviger, “Renaissance Art Theories,” in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 50.

¹²⁷ Pope Gregory the Great, “Book XI, Letter 13,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, vol. 13, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. James Barmby (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1898), accessed November 16, 2020, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/360211013.htm>

education.¹²⁸ His position has been both widely praised by Christian groups, including the Counter-Reformers, and heavily criticised.¹²⁹ During the Protestant Reformation, the Gregorian view on images was challenged by German theologian Andreas Karlstadt (1486-1541), who declared the primacy of the written Word of God and situated Gregory's stance in direct opposition to it. He claimed the Church was guilty of idol worship and bolstered his argument with references to the biblical communities who worshipped graven images (Ex. 20:3; Hos. 9:10; Ps. 43; Mt. 21:13; Jn 10; 1 Cor 5:11, 8:4, 10:14).¹³⁰ Karlstadt writes, "Moses says: You shall teach your children the Word of God from their youth. But Gregory says: The laity shall use images for books. Tell me, dear Gregory, or have someone else tell me, what good things could the laity indeed learn from images?"¹³¹ Karlstadt argued that the Bible emphasised the Word of God as the sole medium for divine revelation. It was through words that God communicated with his people and it is therefore only through words that one could be biblically educated. Protestantism's perspective on images ranged from Karlstadt's ferocious attitude, which ultimately provoked the first violent outbreaks of image destruction in Wittenberg, to the more lenient outlook of Martin Luther (1483-1546). Despite the logocentrism of the Lutheran movement's battle cry - *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) - Luther does not oppose images as long as they were used exclusively for educational purposes. He developed a specific type of image called *Merckbilder*: a picture "meant to remind the beholder of the Word and to teach the fundamentals of Lutheran thought."¹³² In the majority of cases, these *Merckbilder* images were anchored in inscriptions of scriptural references or direct text. This reinforced the view that although images were a helpful form of education, they were subordinate to the written/spoken word.¹³³ The full spectrum of Protestant views on sacred images was widespread and multifaceted, consisting of many different voices

¹²⁸ Celia M. Chazelle, "Pictures, books, and the illiterate: Pope Gregory I's letters to Serenus of Marseilles," *Word and Image* 6, no. 2 (1990): 138-153.

¹²⁹ Lawrence G. Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?", in *Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication*, eds. Marielle Hageman and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 63-108.

¹³⁰ Quiviger, "Renaissance Art Theories," 50.

¹³¹ Andreas Karlstadt, "On the Removal of Images," in *A Reformation Debate: Karlstadt, Emser, and Eck on Sacred Images*, eds. and trans. Brian D. Mangrum and Giuseppe Scavizzi (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1998), 21-44.

¹³² Bonnie Noble, *Lucas Cranach the Elder: Art and Devotion of the German Reformation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 33.

¹³³ Church, "Modes of visual biblical interpretation," 43-44; Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 381-2.

from all across Europe. Their uniting belief was that the Church's traditional use of images had become corrupt and had drifted into the realm of idolatry.

2.3. Council of Trent on sacred images

From early on in Catholicism's defence, representatives of the established faith released publications to counter these various Protestant positions.¹³⁴ Catholic writers confirmed that it would continue along the Gregorian trajectory: that images reaped benefit and should remain in churches. While the image defense strategy had already been forcast it was not until the last session of the Council of Trent that it reached the apex of Catholic hierarchy. The twenty-fifth session took place on the 4th December 1563 and finally saw attention turn to the "invocation, veneration, and relics, of saints, and on sacred images." As an official declaration of the Counter-Reformation Church, the decree stands as a foundational text for understanding the purpose of images in this period. The decree states:

[I]mages of Christ, the Virgin Mother of God and the other saints should be set up and kept, particularly in churches, and that due honour and reverence is owed to them, not because some divinity or power is believed to lie in them [...] but because the honour showed to them is referred to the original which they represent: thus, through the images which we kiss and before which we uncover our heads and go down on our knees, we give adoration to Christ and veneration to the saints, whose likeness they bear. [...]

Bishops should teach with care that the faithful are instructed and strengthened by commemorating and frequently recalling the articles of our faith through the expression in pictures or other likenesses of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption; and that great benefits flow from all sacred images, not only because people are reminded of the gifts and blessings conferred on us by Christ, but because the miracles of God through the saints and their salutary example is put before the eyes of the faithful, who

¹³⁴ Note, for example, Hieronymus Emser, *That One Should Not Remove Images of the Saints from the Churches* (1522), and Johannes Eck, *On Not Removing Images of Christ and the Saints* (1522). For translations and commentaries on these texts, see Bryan Mangrum and Giuseppe Scavizzi (eds.), *A Reformation Debate: Karlstadt, Emser, and Eck on Sacred Images* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1998).

can thank God for them, shape their own lives and conduct in imitation of the saints, and be aroused to adore and love God and to practise devotion. [...]

The holy council earnestly desires to root out utterly any abuses that may have crept into these holy and saving practices, so that no representations of false doctrine should be set up which give occasion of dangerous error to the unlettered. So if accounts and stories from holy scripture are sometimes etched and pictured, which is a help to uneducated people, they must be taught that the Godhead is not pictured because it can be seen with human eyes or expressed in figures and colours.¹³⁵

The Counter-Reformers argued that images were valuable for two main reasons: firstly, they had the capacity to incite honour and veneration for the holy figures and stories that they represented. In the above translation, edited by Norman Tanner, beholders of sacred images should be “aroused to adore and love God and to practise devotion”; a slightly earlier English translation by James Waterworth uses the phrase “may be *excited* to adore and love God and to cultivate piety”.¹³⁶ To “arouse” or “excite” the observer into religious living was a beneficial property of sacred images. They had the ability to rouse worshipful responses, thus acting as channels through which the faithful could adore Christ. This was a particularly important function for altarpieces, positioned above an altar, either in side chapels or the main nave space of a Church. Altarpieces occupied a crucial role in devotional practice, especially in the events of “private mass,” which saw the role of the laity demoted to spectating the liturgy as opposed to participating in it.¹³⁷ Private masses were widely commended by the Council of Trent, which decreed that they “should be considered truly communal [...], partly because the people communicate spiritually in them, and partly because they are celebrated by an official minister of the church, not for his own good alone but for all the faithful who belong to the body of Christ.”¹³⁸ Hence the most common Counter-Reformation church architecture was a long nave with side chapels, so as to provide

¹³⁵ Council of Trent, “On invocation,” 775-6.

¹³⁶ Council of Trent, Session 25, “On the invocation, veneration, and relics, of saints, and on sacred images,” in *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. James Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 232-289.

¹³⁷ Joseph F. Chorpenning, “Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion,” *Artibus Et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987): 149-58.

¹³⁸ Council of Trent, Session 22, “Teaching and canons on the most holy sacrifice of the mass, 17 September, 1562,” in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 732-741. See, among others, Robert C. Croken, *Luther’s First Front: The Eucharist as Sacrifice* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), 121.

uninterrupted space to hear and see the mass being conducted; this structure is found in many of the churches described in this thesis, particularly the Gesù and Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome (see Chapters 5 and 11).¹³⁹ Altarpieces were the visual backdrop for these devotional practices, and provided a source for meditation. As such, it was integral that these sacred images were stirring people towards adoration and reverence for Christ and his Church. In the twenty-fifth session, cited above, the Council was clearly aware that this use for images could be manipulated by their opposition to imply idolism, and so it establishes some very clear boundaries between appropriate devotion - that being done in the knowledge that images are simply representations of the divine - and idol worship. As a result, the decree directly tackled Protestantism's accusations.

The second reason given in the decree that rendered images intrinsically valuable conformed to the millennia-old Gregorian tradition that images had the ability to educate.¹⁴⁰ Although Gregory is not explicitly mentioned in the decree, the Council maintained a similar understanding that the faithful could be instructed through "the expression in pictures or other likenesses of the stories (*historias, s. historia*) of the mysteries of our redemption." In classical Latin terms, the word *historias* has been used to broadly refer to events (*res gestae*) and narrative accounts of them (*narrations*): "both to stories in general and to formal historical narratives."¹⁴¹ *Historias* have largely been tied to rhetoric, oral or written accounts, but it has also been translated as a relevant term for paintings in the word *istoria*: translated by Lorenzo Pericolo as pictorial narrative.¹⁴² The ideologies of the Counter-Reformists on *istoria* were significantly influenced by the work of fifteenth-century author and philosopher Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), who first popularised the use of the term in *De Pictura* (1435).¹⁴³ *Istorie* - pictorial narratives – were particularly important during the early modern period as they occupied "the most earnestly reflected-upon pictorial

¹³⁹ R. Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161.

¹⁴⁰ Quiviger, "Renaissance Art Theories," 51.

¹⁴¹ Anthony Grafton, "Historia and istoria: Alberti's Terminology in Context," in *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad*, ed. John Jeffries Martin (London: Routledge, 2003), 207.

¹⁴² Lorenzo Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative* (London: Harvey Miller Studies, 2011), 3.

¹⁴³ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting - A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. and trans. Rocco Sinigalli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 187-192; Van Kessel, "Artists and Knowledge," 223.

institution,” over other forms of images such as portraits and landscapes.¹⁴⁴ It appears with considerable frequency in art theory, including many of the post-Tridentine treatises that will be discussed momentarily. It was these images that were explicitly promoted by the Council, as they served the faithful with scriptural education that did not depend on their ability to read texts. The criteria that a painting should be an *istoria* is helpful in discerning the type of image, yet what actually constitutes the “stories of the mysteries of our redemption” remains ambiguous. To hypothesise the potential meaning of these histories, let us return to a statement from the fourth session of Council in 1546, which addressed the issue of canonical scripture. As mentioned in section 1.1.3, this decree included the matter of Church tradition, which had suffered considerable repudiation from Protestant Reformers on account of it sanctioning abuses. The decree states:

The council clearly perceives that this truth and rule are contained in written books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or else have come down to us, handed on as it were from the apostles themselves at the inspiration of the holy Spirit.¹⁴⁵

The Council argues it is the unity of scripture and tradition that informs the faith; tradition was “the process by which this Gospel is handed on in the Church through the ages.”¹⁴⁶ It is plausible, then, that the histories to be depicted in “paintings and other representations” were not confined to scripture, but to an indefinite spectrum of “written books and unwritten traditions.” This begs the question of what the subject limits were for Counter-Reformation paintings. The decree mentions Christ, the Virgin Mary, an ambiguous set of “other saints,” and “accounts and stories from Holy Scripture.” The Annunciation to Mary falls within this category as a narrative in the canonical Gospel of Luke and as the central biblical text of the Virgin Mary. Yet, in knowledge of Catholicism’s belief in scripture *and* tradition, images of biblical *istoria*, such as the Annunciation, were to be interpreted through the lens of tradition. As anticipated earlier, there is nothing to suggest what the ‘traditions’ were, presumably too multifaceted and numerous to conceive of in a written decree. A component of my

¹⁴⁴ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Council of Trent, “First decree,” 663-665.

¹⁴⁶ McNamara, “Faith and Tradition,” 70.

analyses of paintings in Parts 1-3 will be the identification of those perpetuating Catholic traditions that artists of this period appealed to in their visual interpretation of the Annunciation *istoria*.

Trent thus established the two central purposes for images: they could facilitate devotion and education as objects of Catholic *istoria*, presumably from both scripture and tradition. With regards to establishing guidelines for paintings, the Council writes that “nothing occurs that is disorderly or arranged in an exaggerated or riotous manner.”¹⁴⁷ This suggests that paintings were to be depicted with clarity and simplicity, so their pictorial narrative would function effectively for the lay observer. Furthermore, Trent addresses decorum in painting: “all superstition must be removed [...], all aiming at base profit must be eliminated; all sensual appeal must be avoided, so that images are not painted or adorned with seductive charm.”¹⁴⁸ Both of these concerns - for lucidity and propriety – were reactive to the state of contemporary Italian Catholic art, and particularly to a movement known as *Maniera*. This trend had derived in Florence as a style of court painting, but became popular across Italy. It focused on artificiality, exaggerated ornamentation and bewildering narrative composition.¹⁴⁹ The influence of the trend meant that sacred images were increasingly found to contain confounding obscurities and the eroticisation of religious figures and events. A continuation of these trends in a post-Tridentine society would have inevitably led to even greater criticism from Catholicism’s opponents. The Catholic Church therefore sought to eradicate those abuses in the new generation of sacred image-makers. It was the question of *how* these restrictions were to be regulated that produced the most concrete guideline found in the decree. Trent placed the responsibility of judging the appropriateness of images on bishops: “bishops should give very great care and attention [...] the holy synod lays down that no one may erect or see to the erection of any unusual image in any church or site, however exempt, unless it has been approved by the bishop.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Council of Trent, “On invocation,” 776.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 775-6.

¹⁴⁹ Sydney Joseph Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1993), 605; Mina Gregori, *The Age of Caravaggio* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985), 164; Hall, “Introduction,” 7; H. W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson, *History of Art: The Western Tradition* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003), 488; Hessel Miedema, “On Mannerism and Maniera,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 10, no. 1 (1978), 19-45; Cathy Ann Thomas, “Domenico Cresti, Il Passignano (1559-1638) and the Roman Rinascita: Studies in his Religious Paintings for Rome between 1589 and 1616,” (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1995), 19.

¹⁵⁰ Council of Trent, “On invocation,” 776.

The bishops were to regulate the paintings in their jurisdiction, presumably based on the effectiveness of their pictorial narrative and its propriety. The artist is never mentioned by the Council and the bishop is situated as the governing authority over religious images.

The Tridentine text provides a vague framework for the image reform strategy, one that is formed of a small and subjective body of expectations. Modern art historians Robert Klein and Henry Zerner write that the Council's decree, "tended toward an art rather traditional in its forms, without individual initiative, clear as to its subject, respecting classical decorum as well as modern decency but aiming, however, at a dramatic or pathetic effect."¹⁵¹ Although images were encouraged to possess the ability to arouse/excite the emotions of the observer, it was the bishops' duty to harbour the artistic freedom that could lead to misrepresentation or indecency. It aimed to take artistic license away from the artist, instead placing freedom on the bishops who then had to construct their own regulations and exegetical limits in lieu of there being no such restrictions from the Council. The decree seems to have played a far more decisive role in Spain than elsewhere in Europe, particularly in the metropolis of Seville where an inspector regularly attended churches to assess religious images.¹⁵² No such process is known to have existed in Rome or the rest of Italy. This begs the question of its practical function in the career of the artists of the post-Tridentine period. In reference to this exact query, Jesse M. Locker writes:

Did the Council smother artistic creation and lead to a decline in art, stifling expression and effectively halting the Renaissance? Or did it lead to a more "spiritual" art, expressed through abstraction and dematerialization? Or were its ideals only truly realised generations later in the earthy naturalism and ecstatic emotionality of the Baroque?¹⁵³

The reception of the Council of Trent decrees participate in the discrepant historiography of post-Tridentine art. Opinion differs on what - if any - elements of the Tridentine decree affected paintings and at what rate that affect occurred. Guided by the decree itself, which put the onus on bishops and their localised regions, this

¹⁵¹ Robert Klein and Henry Zerner, *Italian Art 1500-1600: Sources and Documents* (London: Prentice-Hall International), 120.

¹⁵² Quiviger, "Renaissance Art Theories," 50.

¹⁵³ Locker, "Introduction," 1.

chapter will now examine a number of the treatises that were published across Europe that aimed to delineate Trent's requirements by providing more substantive guidance for both artists and their patrons.

2.4. Art treatises

Trent's decree on images explicated its position on the role and purpose of religious art, in response to Protestant challengers. The text did not, however, provide much in the way of direction for what these artworks must look like, what they should include and what they should not include. It was from this place of ambiguity that Counter-Reformatory art treatises began to be published. Ruth S. Noyes writes, "Attesting to the anxiety and consequence that religious and artistic constituencies attached to image-related issues left unresolved by Trent is a veritable explosion of treatises on art theory and reform published during the years that followed the council."¹⁵⁴ Some of these texts included reflections on the importance of painting and focused on elevating the medium to new ranks of nobility. They provided a continuation of the Tridentine principle that images were to manifest as *istorie*, arguing for the supremacy of the painting in contrast to an audible sermon or the written word. But art treatises of this time were also published as a means to "fill some of the blanks," providing more tangible methods of appropriate visual biblical interpretation and striking the balance between a painting of historical accuracy and an image that would be too confusing for the lay-viewer to understand.¹⁵⁵

In both of these cases - whether it was to argue for the case of the nobility of painting or to provide parameters for biblical interpretation in art - it should be remembered that the authors of these treatises were individuals. Each was responding to specific issues within their own regions and would have occupied their own unique position in the religious and political fallouts of the sixteenth century.¹⁵⁶ Subsequently, it is necessary to remain dubious of the actual impact of such texts during this time. Noyes writes that

¹⁵⁴ Ruth S. Noyes, "Post-Tridentine Image Reform and the Myth of Gabriele Paleotti," *Catholic Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (2013): 239-261.

¹⁵⁵ Andrea Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, eds. Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 375-394.

¹⁵⁶ On the individual issue of Paleotti's image reform in Bologna, see Chapter 7. See also Paolo Prodi, "The Application of the Tridentine Decrees," in *The Late Italian Renaissance, 1525-1630*, ed. Eric W. Cochrane (New York: MacMillan, 1970), 226-243.

although “treatises reflected an awareness of contemporary concerns and trends regarding the production, consumption, and cult of images,” these texts “may not have greatly affected the production of sacred images per se.”¹⁵⁷ It cannot be claimed without reasonable evidence that these texts were widely read in the context or held much weight in impact. It falls on the examination of individual artists and patrons to ascertain what the reform influences were. It is, however, a useful exercise to use these treatises in the manner Noyes indicates, as primary cultural texts that at the very least provide valuable insight into what was happening in the context.

2.4.1. *Istoria*: the function and importance of painted histories

Post-Tridentine image reformists were particularly interested in the term *istoria* (pictorial narrative) and its status as the most noble genre of painting.¹⁵⁸ This view conformed to the traditional Catholic belief first established by Pope Gregory in the seventh century, which prevailed – though oft-challenged - throughout the centuries into the Counter-Reformation. Among the many publications from this period that discuss paintings’ capacity to portray histories are Giovanni Andrea Gilio’s *Dialogue on the Errors and Abuses of Painters* (1563/4), Johannes Molanus’ *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum* (1570), Gregorio Comanini’s *The Figino, or On the Purpose of Painting* (1591) and Gabriele Paleotti’s *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582). These texts, alongside the work of Carlo Borromeo and his cousin Federigo Borromeo, are believed to have been the most influential discourses on art in the decades immediately following Trent, and they each dedicate considerable attention to establishing the connection between writing and painting. The first of these, Gilio’s *Dialogue*, was the first treatise to be published after Trent’s decree on sacred images, although it does not mention the decree explicitly. As the title would suggest, Gilio’s treatise is formed of a dialogue between six people discussing contemporary painting practice.¹⁵⁹ He writes under the name of Pulidoro, one of the dialogue’s six characters, “let us discuss the historical painter...history needs more attention than poetry because, while the latter is loose and broad, the

¹⁵⁷ Noyes, “Post-Tridentine Image Reform,” 242.

¹⁵⁸ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Bury, Lucinda Byatt, and Carol M. Richardson, “Introduction,” in Giovanni Andrea Gilio’s *Dialogue on the Errors and Abuses of Painters*, eds. Michael Bury, Lucinda Byatt and Carol M. Richardson, trans. Michael Bury and Lucy Byatt (LA: Getty Publications, 2018), 1-4.

former is fixed within limits that nobody is entitled to overstep.”¹⁶⁰ On the basis that they are recorders of history, Gilio suggests that painters should be confined to limits; he states that they have no entitlement to subvert historic narratives.¹⁶¹ Gilio himself was a cleric who was strongly influenced by a humanistic trajectory to anchor art in authentic historic sources.¹⁶² He argues that painters need to ensure historical accuracy and therefore insists on limiting artistic freedom. He continues under the character Silvio,

It is because of this, Gentleman, that modern painters, whether they are painting histories, fables, or mixed subjects, commit an infinite number of mistakes, and very few paintings are to be found that have the proper correspondence with their subjects. For histories, few are faithful and straightforward expositors of the truth of the subject matter; and it ought to be different, for the writer and the painter – I am speaking of historical writers and painters – are weighed on the same pair of scales. We will make the same judgement about each of them: the painter with his brush is no less obliged to portray the plain and simple truth than is the historian with his pen.¹⁶³

For Gilio, painters have the same responsibility as writers of history. Both are entrusted with the duty of conveying historic truths and are therefore to be judged by the same standard. This was echoed in Molanus’ *De Picturis*, published a few years after *Dialogue*. Building on Trent’s position on the educational benefits of images, Molanus too parallels the obligation of religious artists with that of writers.¹⁶⁴ Despite being different modes of representation, both books and paintings were viewed as vessels through which historic events were recorded, and as such, what was accepted and prohibited in one should also be in the other. Molanus quotes directly from Quintus

¹⁶⁰ Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogue on the Errors and Abuses of Painters*, eds. Michael Bury, Lucinda Byatt and Carol M. Richardson, trans. Michael Bury and Lucinda Byatt (LA: Getty Institute, 2018), 85-240.

¹⁶¹ On the limits of invention and amplification in Counter-Reformation sacred narratives, see Steven F. H. Stowell, *Spiritual Language of Art: Medieval Christian Themes in Writings on Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 250-313.

¹⁶² Robert Gaston, “How Words Control Images: The Rhetoric of Decorum in Counter-Reformation Italy,” in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, eds. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 74-90.

¹⁶³ Gilio, *Dialogue*, 116.

¹⁶⁴ David Freedberg, “Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings. De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum Et Picturarum, Book II, Chapter 42,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971): 229-45; Cordelia Warr, “Visualizing Stigmata: Stigmatic Saints and Crises of Representation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy,” *Studies in Church History* 47 (2011): 228-248.

Horatius Flaccus (65 BC – 8 BC) and fosters the Horatian ideology that “a poem is like a painting” and “a picture is a poem without words,” as well as mentioning the image/word theory of Pope Gregory the Great. Molanus even goes one step further to argue that prohibitions in paintings should be *stricter* than in books, as their effects are more powerful and instantaneous.¹⁶⁵ Poet and historian Gregorio Comanini (1550-1608) occupied a similar position in *The Figino, or On the Purpose of Painting* (1591):

[A]lthough people are not always preaching and reading in the temples, paintings teach us constantly; for in the morning and at noon and at night and at all times they can be seen and are visible, living scripture. They surpass the written word, which strikes the eyes only of learned men, as they concentrate on their lesson. Painting, on the other hand, strikes the eyes of the learned and of the humble and the ignorant, whether or not they are paying attention.¹⁶⁶

Comanini argues the constant ‘being-there’ of paintings in buildings has a more dominant effect on the church attendee than transitory sermons and scriptural readings. In the single clause, “they [paintings] surpass the written word,” the Protestant trajectory of the precedence of the Word is countered. Members of the Catholic renewal not only reconfirmed that images could be used in conjunction with other forms of biblical education, but they elevated the practice to new levels of status.¹⁶⁷ Comanini emphasises the immense importance of the visual arts in the Counter-Reformation movement and, as such, displays close connections with the work of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti. Paleotti articulates that the didactic authority of art impacts a much broader audience than that of word/text-based instruction. Paleotti reiterates the dominant sixteenth-century Catholic viewpoint that paintings exercised an unparalleled role in the education of Catholic believers:

It is astonishing that, to be able to understand some book, so many difficult things are necessary, like knowledge of the language, a teacher, capacious intelligence and

¹⁶⁵ Freedberg, “Johannes Molanus,” 229-45.

¹⁶⁶ Gregorio Comanini, “The Figino, or On the Purpose of Painting: Art Theory in the Late Renaissance,” trans. Ann Doyle-Anderson and Giancarlo Maiorino (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 51.

¹⁶⁷ See, Gian Paolo Lomazzo, *Idea del Tempio della Pittura* (Milano: per Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1590), whose writings also focused on the equivalence of painting with poetry. See, among others, Martin Kemp, “‘Equal excellences’: Lomazzo and the explanation of individual style in the visual arts,” *Renaissance Studies* 1, no. 1 (1987): 1-26; Rensselaer W. Lee, “Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting,” *Art Bulletin* 22, no. 4 (1940): 196-269.

leisure for learning, to the point that acquaintance with books is restricted to a small circle of persons who are known as the learned and the intelligent. Pictures on the other hand serve as a book open to the capacities of everyone because they are composed in a language common to persons of every sort, men, women, humble folk, great folk, the learned, the ignorant, and so may be understood, provided the painter does not choose to distort them, by all nations and all intellectual levels without any teacher or interpreter. We may add that they convey their message to persons quickly, in a moment or rather at a glance [...] What often happens with books, moreover, is that what you have learned with much difficulty you may forget with great ease, whereas images sculpt what they teach into the panels of memory so firmly that it remains stamped there for many years.¹⁶⁸

Paleotti highlights the innate power of images to educate.¹⁶⁹ They functioned as a means to translate religious truths,¹⁷⁰ but more than this, images had the ability to incite mnemonic responses. Images could be recalled in the minds of the faithful with significantly greater ease than that of, for example, a book. Paleotti makes direct reference to the Annunciation in this capacity when he writes, “images encompass the broadest and gravest concepts in a confined space, with no hunting through volumes or page turning, as we see in the mystery of the annunciation of the glorious Virgin.”¹⁷¹ The didactic ability of images even beyond books is the very reason why they had to remain anchored in historic accuracy, as divergence from narrative in a painting could trigger harmful ignorance of the truth. The powerful, edifying ability of images leads Paleotti to stress the importance of first and foremost teaching patrons of the visual arts how to appropriately conceive of Christian histories. It was the responsibility of those in positions of authority - cardinals and bishops - to exercise theological specialism and enable artists to create works that embodied correct Catholic teaching. In this instance, Paleotti is clearly inspired by the Council, which placed the responsibility of discerning the appropriateness of painting on the bishops, not the painters. This contrasts strongly with the independent style of *Maniera* that influenced Italian art in this period. Artists working during this new phase in Catholicism’s reform

¹⁶⁸ Paleotti, *Discourse*, 115.

¹⁶⁹ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 136.

¹⁷⁰ Brenda Deen Schildgen, “Cardinal Paleotti and the *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*,” in *Sacred Possessions: Collecting Italian Religious Art, 1500-1900*, eds. Gail Feigenbaum and Sybille Ebert-Schifferer (LA: Getty, 2011), 8-16.

¹⁷¹ Paleotti, *Discourse*, 115.

may previously have enjoyed the luxury of freer expression, as Marcia Hall writes, “Paleotti’s position [...] brings into focus the challenge faced by painters who wanted to demonstrate their independence and their skill in making sacred images yet at the same time satisfy the expectations of the Church, and even exceed them.”¹⁷² This exact issue of finding compromise was widely recognised among art treatise writers, who provided individual assessments on how far artistic license was permitted in the painting of a *historia*. Artists of sacred subjects were theoretically tied to their patrons expectations, but it is now a case of defining the exegetical limits that were put in place, and establishing whether there was a regulated Counter-Reformatory standard, or if it was, again, an highly individualised process.

2.4.2. Defining limits: Politics of textual expansion

In the Council decrees, there is an expectation that painters should represent *istoria* of the combined sources of scripture and tradition. In a number of prolific art treatises, we found that painters were said to be expositors of history and should anchor their paintings in historical truth, as their duty is as important - if not more important - than writers. Charles Borromeo, archbishop of Milan between 1564-84, vocalises this in his *Instructions on Ecclesiastical Building* (1577): “care must be taken that the representation corresponds to historical truth, to church practice, to the criteria prescribed by the Fathers.”¹⁷³ As well as agreeing with historic truth, the interpretations contained in *istoria* must not stray from church practice or the authorities of the Church Fathers. Borromeo goes further to discuss what should be avoided in sacred images:

First of all no sacred image containing a false dogma or that offers the uneducated an occasion for dangerous error, or that is at variance with the Sacred Scriptures or Church tradition, is to be depicted in the church or elsewhere. Conversely, the image must conform to the truths of the Scriptures, the traditions, ecclesiastical histories, customs and usages of the Mother Church.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 135.

¹⁷³ Charles Borromeo, *Instructiones fabricate et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae, 1577: A Translation with Commentary and Analysis.*, ed. Evelyn Carol Voelker (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1977), 60.

¹⁷⁴ Borromeo, *Instructiones*, 59.

The interpretation of *istoria* must correspond to the idiom of scripture and tradition, exactly the same criteria as that established by the Council of Trent. This was to ensure that the uneducated would not fall into dangerous errors as they engaged with sacred images. Failure to comply with such regulations would result in a “heavy punishment” for painters and a similar “sanction” for those “ecclesiastical rectors who allow an unusual image to be depicted or placed in their church, contrary to the rules prescribed by the Tridentine decree.”¹⁷⁵ We saw in the Trent decree that it was bishops who were given the responsibility of ensuring suitable images were being created; Borromeo extends it to the painters themselves. They were accountable for the images they were creating and therefore should ensure that they corresponded to the teachings of the Tridentine reform. Yet the non-specificity of what constitutes tradition remained an area of ambiguity and allowed a degree of freedom. The authority given to tradition opens up the subject matter of sacred images significantly, as well as expanding the lens of exegesis to view biblical texts in light of the centuries of accumulated Church history and biblical interpretation (see sections 1.1.3 and 1.2.2). This permitted at least some degree of textual expansion on behalf of the Counter-Reformation artists, and so long as the representations did not stand in opposition to history, tradition, and ecclesiastic truth, this liberty could be exercised. There is an argument for this in Gilio’s writing:

Troilo: You should not judge a history to be untruthful if variations are introduced in the nonessential things that are apt to occur.

Pulidoro: But there are nonessential things that do not alter the sense of a history, as for example if one made the number of Pharisees who seized Christ greater or smaller than there actually were; the lights that they carried, the kinds of arms, the houses of Pilate, of Caiaphas, of Anna, of Herod more beautiful and more ornate than they actually were; the hill of Calvary higher or lower, Jerusalem bigger or smaller, and other such things.

Silvio – Rather these additions will be an ornament to the painting. The task of a good painter to know how to distinguish between the nonessential things that need to be

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

avoided and those that should be used, those that may dishonour the subject and those that may enhance it.¹⁷⁶

A duty of painters was to deduce what was an appropriate expansion for their *istoria* and what was unsuitable. As an example, Gilio provided a loose model for the interpretation of Jesus' trial and the areas where autonomy was acceptable. Although his discussion is directed towards this one biblical text, it related to the wider issue of ambiguous details in biblical narratives that in the visual exegetical process had to be supplemented. Whether the parameters were decided by the patron or the artist themselves, the freedom was available to express individualised interpretations of the text.

Federico Borromeo, like Gilio, offered various frameworks for representations of biblical texts and themes and he specifically supported the expansion of the biblical text to include symbols, so long as these were audibly explained to the lay observer by the bishop to avoid misinterpretation.¹⁷⁷ These symbols, though missing in texts, were considered helpful extensions for visual representation and provided a space for Catholic theologies and doctrines. This is particularly relevant to the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation, as the text's visual history is rich with symbolism. Federico Borromeo, Charles Borromeo's cousin, wrote in Book II of *Sacred Painting*; "Signs and symbolic attributes that are used to identify the Most Blessed Virgin should be preserved, and her person should be painted with the greatest possible majesty."¹⁷⁸ The symbols incorporated into images through textual expansion, enabled Mary to be distinguishable from other biblical characters; a number of these symbols will be addressed in the analyses of case studies, which generally reflect Borromeo's call for the use of Marian symbolism.

A painting of this period that provides evidence of textual expansion and represents the potential danger it incurs is Paolo Veronese's *The Feast in the House of Levi*

¹⁷⁶ Gilio, *Dialogue*, 117.

¹⁷⁷ Anna Marotta, "Visual History of the Sacred Mounts System on Alps. Representations, Iconologies, Symbols," in *Graphical Heritage*, vol. 1, eds. Louis Agustin-Hernandez, Aurelio Vallespin Muniesa, and Angelica Fernandez-Morales (Cham: Springer, 2020), 347-366.

¹⁷⁸ Federico Borromeo, *Sacred Painting & Museum*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 91.



Figure 1. Paolo Veronese, *The Feast in the House of Levi*, 1573, oil on canvas, 555x1280cm. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

(1573) (Fig. 1). The painting was brought to the attention of the Inquisition of the Holy Office while under its original title, *The Last Supper*, on the basis of Veronese's objectionable textual expansion of the sacred scene.¹⁷⁹ The enormous painting, commissioned for the Dominican refectory of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, was crammed with naked saints, dwarves, drunkards, and even a sub-narrative of a servant with a nose-bleed. The biblical accounts of the event had provided no justification for any of these details, and when asked by the Holy Office why he had included, for example, "armed men dressed as Germans," the artist had answered, "We painters take the same license the poets and the jesters take" and "if in a picture there is some space to spare I enrich it with figures according to the stories."¹⁸⁰ Veronese was evidently accustomed to exercising liberty in his biblical exegesis. He openly admits that it was his decision to expand the text to this extent ("I received the commission to decorate the picture as I saw fit") and was not the responsibility of his patron.¹⁸¹ Despite providing no further rationale for his bizarre embellishments of the scene, the Inquisition settled to giving him three months to make suitable amendments.¹⁸² In this time, Veronese simply 'reformed' the image by painting 'LVCA.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Grasman, "On Closer Inspection – The Interrogation of Paolo Veronese," *Artibus et Historiae* 30, no. 59 (2009): 125-134.

¹⁸⁰ Paolo Veronese Before the Holy Tribunal, "The Council of Trent on Religious Art and Paolo Veronese Before the Inquisition Tribunal," 1573, accessed November 16, 2020. <http://homepages.neiu.edu/~wbsieger/Art312/312Read/312Trent.pdf>

¹⁸¹ Paolo Veronese, "The Council of Trent on Religious Art," 5-6.

¹⁸² Paolo Veronese, "The Council of Trent on Religious Art," 6; John Paoletti and Gary Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005), 515.

CAP. V.' (Luke, Chapter 5) as an inscription on a column center-right, thus insinuating a change in the painting's subject from the Last Supper to the feast in the house of Levi. The authorities were satisfied with the change and Veronese received no further interrogation.

Despite the evident concern of the Inquisition regarding his visual biblical interpretation, Veronese's painting should be considered as an isolated case.¹⁸³ There is no evidence of any other artist of this period being questioned on account of the appropriateness of their exegesis of a biblical scene. Monitoring textual expansion cannot therefore be claimed to be a trope in Catholicism's image reform process. What Veronese's example does show, however, is that artists of this period believed they had liberty and exercised it by expanding biblical narratives. A feature of art treatises was to establish guidelines for doing this to an appropriate level that would satisfy the Church. This in itself differed from person to person, based on the subjective nature of their plight. Treatise writers harboured their own perspectives, defining limits and restrictions by what they considered theologically sound.

2.5. Image-Reform in Rome and the Accademia di San Luca

The Catholic art treatises of this period were predominately published throughout Italy and the Northern European countries of France, Belgium and Germany (Fig. 2). Across these regions, image issues varied and each writer established a culturally conscious response. Interestingly, however, Rome was only responsible for 8% of the treatise publications.¹⁸⁴ As the geographical heart of the Counter-Reformation by the means of the Vatican, it is surely significant that art treatises were not regularly being published from this central location. Noyes provides a plausible explanation to why this was the case:

The fact that surprisingly few of these texts were printed in Rome, in comparison to the amount published outside the papal city and Italy, may indicate the difficulties in publishing too close to the Curia – such publications would have an implied critique

¹⁸³ Paleotti and Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, 515.

¹⁸⁴ Evidence is gathered from approximately 40 reform treatises; see Appendix A in Noyes, "Post-Tridentine Image Reform," 257-261.

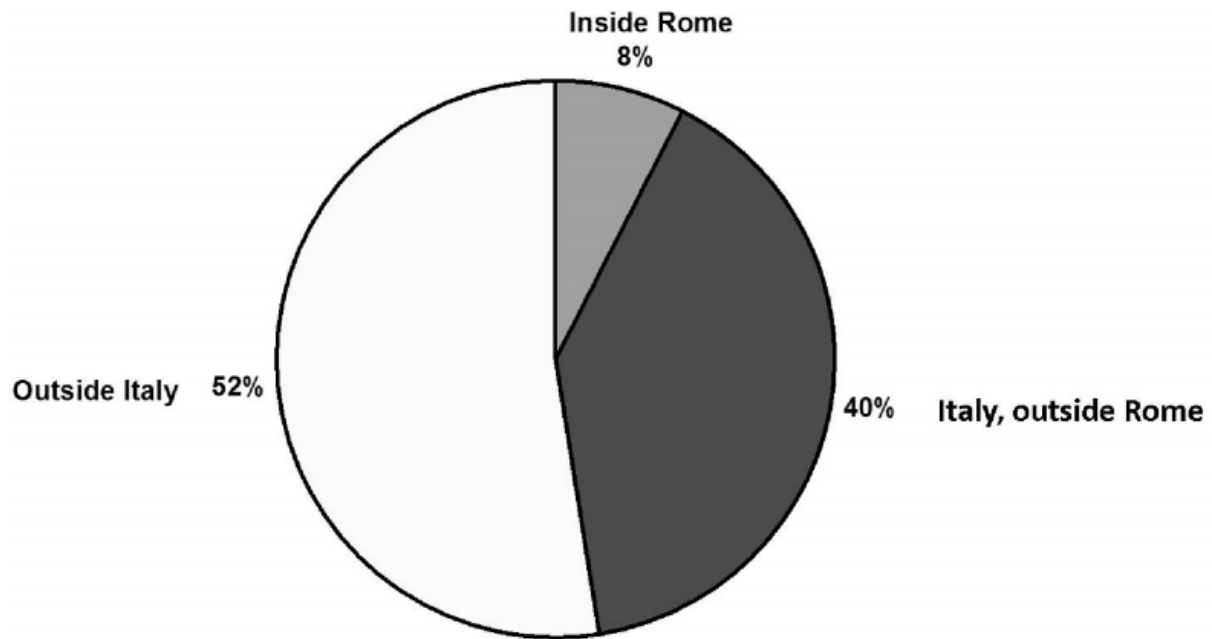


Figure 2. "Location of Treatise Publications." Figure by Noyes, "Post-Tridentine Image Reform," 242.

that reform remained to be seen (a failure of the curia) and that reform was not exclusive to papal jurisdiction (an undermining of the curial prerogative). It is possible that, under the oversight of the papacy, the Vatican would not grant permission necessary for the printing in Rome of treatises voicing contrary opinions on image reform.¹⁸⁵

It is possible that the publication data in Figure 2 reflects the Catholic Church's desire to maintain militant control over all aspects of their reform strategy, including the issue of images. Due to it being a hugely controversial matter with a varying spectrum of ideologies, treatises could easily undermine or trouble the Church's teaching, which sought a "top-down" implementation of the Council's decrees."¹⁸⁶ If this was the case, and art treatises were not being published in Rome due to the Church's desire for control, it is important to examine the other influences that were impacting the city's

¹⁸⁵ Noyes, "Post-Tridentine Image Reform," 242.

¹⁸⁶ Locker, "Introduction," 12.

artists and patrons. This is particularly important given that four of the nine case studies examined in this thesis were originally designed for churches in Rome.

Firstly, it needs to be stated that even within this single location, the variety of styles and influences were exceptionally diverse, and, as such, so was the outcome of artists' visual exegeses.¹⁸⁷ Yet at least in theory, sacred images in Rome were to come under the jurisdiction of the newly-formed Tridentine decree. The drapery campaigns to cover the nude figures on Michelangelo's fresco of the *Last Judgement* (1537-41) (Fig. 3) in the Sistine Chapel that happened in the aftermath of the Council - with the first modifications occurring between 1564-1565 - are an example of the self-consciousness of the Church regarding the images that it was promoting.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore at the end of the sixteenth century, the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Girolamo Rusticucci (1537-1603), ordered an edict to ensure Rome was not producing, and therefore endorsing, indecency in its visual culture.¹⁸⁹ In the same year, Clement VIII began visits to censor any images already *in situ* that needed rectification or removal.¹⁹⁰ On a practical level, however, it is widely understood that the theories of reform remained theoretical, and the autonomy of orders – like the Jesuits and Oratorians - established in Rome allowed for artistic freedom within their local ecclesiastical structures.¹⁹¹ Thus, despite being given a “high profile” in the image debate, the situation in Italy's capital was not dissimilar to the fluctuating, adaptive strategies found elsewhere. This is not to say that post-Tridentine artists in Rome were not subject to systemic influences that originated out of the cultural moment. One such influence was the Accademia di San Luca, “one of the earliest, most influential and longest living [artistic] institutions.”¹⁹² Evidence surrounding the formation of the academy is “scant and confused” and spans across two unsettled decades at the end

¹⁸⁷ Clare Robertson, “On the “Reform” of Painting: Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio,” in *Art and Reform in the Late Renaissance: After Trent*, ed. Jesse M. Locker (London: Routledge, 2018), 19-32.

¹⁸⁸ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 97-115; Peter M. Lukehart, “Painting Virtuously: The Counter-Reform and the Reform of Artist's Education in Rome Between Guild and Academy,” in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, eds. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 197-223; John O'Malley, “Art, Trent, and Michelangelo's “Last Judgement,” *Religions* 3, no. 2 (2012): 344-356.

¹⁸⁹ Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers*, 20.

¹⁹⁰ John L. Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 119.

¹⁹¹ Robertson, “On the “Reform” of Painting,” 20.

¹⁹² Peter Lukehart, “Introduction,” in *Accademia di San Luca in Rome: 1590-1635*, ed. Peter Lukehart (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 197-223.



Figure 3. Michelangelo, *Last Judgment*, 1536-41, fresco, 1370x1220cm. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

of the sixteenth century.¹⁹³ Its official origin, however, is consistently situated by scholars to 1577, when Pope Gregory XIII (1502-1585) wrote a breve to Cardinal Giacomo Savelli to propose the establishment of an academy for the purpose of educating artists in Catholic doctrine and piety.¹⁹⁴ Gregory expressed concern for the decadence in Rome's visual arts and sought to found an institute of education specifically for those entrusted with the responsibility of representing religious truths in art.¹⁹⁵ The premise of the academy may have appeared to have been for the benefit of the artist, but in reality the intention was to use the academy to enforce the reforms desired by the Council of Trent.¹⁹⁶ Gregory's breve specifically mentions the canons of the Council, and a confraternity under the patron's name was also established that

¹⁹³ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (New York: DA Capo Press, 1973), 56; Christopher Witcombe, "Gregory XIII And The Accademia Di San Luca In Rome." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 54 (2009): 107-18.

¹⁹⁴ Witcombe, "Gregory XIII And The Accademia Di San Luca," 107.

¹⁹⁵ Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 56.

¹⁹⁶ Witcombe, "Gregory XIII And The Accademia Di San Luca," 107.

upheld the Tridentine decrees.¹⁹⁷ In the place of several potentially contradictory treatises and separate painters' guilds, the Accademia di San Luca in Rome aimed to unite artists under one authority, officiated by the papacy itself to disseminate image reform strategies directly to the artists.

The primary evidence available to modern scholars on the early history of the Accademia are the writings of Romano Alberti; namely his *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura* (1585) and *Origine et progresso dell'Accademia del Disegno, de pittori, scultori & architetti di Roma* (1604). Alberti was a painter and poet, the nephew of the academy's first elected president Federico Zuccaro.¹⁹⁸ He was invited by the confraternity to write the *Trattato*, which occupied the "single purpose [...] to elevate the status of painting from that of a vile and mechanical profession to that of a noble and liberal art."¹⁹⁹ Echoing the parallels between writing and painting identified by his contemporary writers, which even fed into a preference for the latter, Alberti recognised that paintings have the ability to inspire conversion: "the painter – its maker – shared in nothing less than the act of salvation."²⁰⁰ Articulating the importance of the profession was a key component in the life of the academy, evidenced in the commissioning of such a work as the *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura*. It was an ideology that was fostered in the academicians during their theory lessons and was ultimately inspired by the official Tridentine teaching that the visual arts could both educate and inspire the lay people. In terms of the practicalities of the academy, Alberti's *Origine e progresso* constructs "the most concrete visual description of how students were instructed in the art of painting."²⁰¹ Alongside lectures on theory, there was a focus on the rudiments – the ABCs – of painting, the classes centering on instruction in drawing techniques such as anatomy, perspective and foreshortening.²⁰² Pietro Francesco Alberti provides a visual glimpse of the practicality of the Academy's drawing classes in his print (Fig. 4). The image shows several groups of young

¹⁹⁷ Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 58.

¹⁹⁸ Liana De Girolamo Cheney, "Imagination/Creativity," in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, ed. Helene E. Roberts (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), 427-434.

¹⁹⁹ Lukehart, "Painting Virtuously," 161.

²⁰⁰ Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 57

²⁰¹ Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 62.

²⁰² Peter Lukehart, "The Practice of Pedagogy of Drawing in the Accademia di San Luca," in *LERNT ZEICHNEN! Techniken zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft 1525 – 1925*, eds. Maria Heilmann et al (Strich: LMU, 2015), 45-58.



Figure 4. Pietro Francesco, *A Painter's Academy in Rome*, 1625, engraving. The Metropolitan Museum, New York. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

students crowded around different stations, some drawing or painting, and some observing the work of the older artist who engaged with life-casts of body parts and a dissected dead body.²⁰³ Aside from classes, it is understood that students would attend mass every day to grow accustomed to the official teachings of the Counter-Reformation Church.²⁰⁴ This, after all, was the ultimate reason provided by Pope Gregory XIII for instituting an academy in Rome, for the visual arts could be used for the propagation of Catholic Christianity.²⁰⁵ The Accademia placed the education of artists within the context of reform, but the way the institute actively played out in the lives of the academicians should not be generalised, rather being placed within the context of individual artists.

²⁰³ Peter Lukehart, "Accademia di San Luca between Educational and Religious Reform," in *The Italian Academies 1525-1700: Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*, eds. Jane E. Everson, Denis V. Reidy and Lisa Sampson (London: Routledge, 2016), 170-185.

²⁰⁴ Cheney, "Imagination/Creativity," 430

²⁰⁵ Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 154.



Figure 5. Unknown, *Madonna and Child (Salus populi romani)*, n.d., tempera on panel, 117x79cm. Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

An important factor for this thesis in the establishment of the Academy is its chosen patron: Saint Luke, the author of the biblical account of the Annunciation to Mary. The patronage of the academy feeds into the legend that Luke was an artist, which has been a prominent tradition since early Christianity. The idea has primarily centered around the belief that Luke painted the Virgin Mary from life, the repercussions of this being the emergence of many paintings supposedly by Luke's very hand - most famously the Annunciation in the Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (Fig. 5). In the fourth century, Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus (320-404AD) recorded a vivid description of Mary's appearance based on an unknown source within the tradition's history. The Mary that Epiphanius constructs has a "complexion of the colour of ripe wheat, and her hair was auburn (or reddish). Her eyes were bright and keen, and light brown in colour, and the pupils thereof were of an olive-green tint."²⁰⁶ It was this exact description that Federico Borromeo believed should be the basis for sacred images of

²⁰⁶ Epiphanius' description recorded by Nicephorus Callixtus, *Ecclesiasticae historiae*, vol.2 (Paris: apud Ioannem Ruellium, 1566), 815-816, cited in Borromeo, *Sacred Painting*, 93.

the Virgin Mary in the seventeenth century. He embraced the tradition and wrote, “the Most Blessed Virgin was directly copied, during her lifetime, from her own divine countenance.”²⁰⁷ Borromeo’s affection for this belief evidences the authority given to Church tradition within this period, despite a lack of canonical and historic evidence. Marina Warner writes concerning the legend:

The prolific Luke is still credited with hundreds of statues and paintings all over the Catholic world; and there are still many *achieropoietoi* images in the Catholic churches. It seems pathetically childish to believe such tales, but they perform a crucial function that should not really be mocked. For the all-important lifeline, the direct chain of descent from God to man, is not broken if the images appeared miraculously or were painted by Luke in the presence of the Virgin. The time continuum is not interrupted, for the believer finds himself contemplating the face of the Virgin as she really was, living in an eternal present in which she still abides.²⁰⁸

We have read consistently among the Council’s decrees and art treatises that history has limits that painters should respect, yet an even weightier influence on artists was the teachings of Church tradition. Warner identifies this in the case of the Lukan legend and argues that the Church saw their identity through the direct and perpetuating line of written and oral histories that accumulated over time, “relating fragmentary experiences across temporal boundaries.”²⁰⁹ Their composite histories transcended chronological and spatial limits to generate their specific Catholic heritage. Luke as a painter was one of these such traditions that was so firmly embedded in ecclesiastical history and thought that it was exempt from historical enquiry. Whereas there is a substantial lack of reliable evidence that Luke was an artist, the tradition holds deeper meaning that almost certainly evokes an awareness of the biblical sense. Hornik and Parsons highlight the tradition’s underlying theological implication:

While many modern commentators have intuited the connection between Luke’s artistry with words and the legend of Luke the painter, we suggest [...] using the language of the rhetorical tradition to describe Luke’s writing as “elegant,” “learned,” and especially “clear,” early interpreters were acknowledging Luke’s rhetorical skills as

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 298.

²⁰⁹ Boyd and Esler, *Visuality and Biblical Text*, 74.

a writer. Because these skills were often compared to the skills necessary to produce visual art (painting, sculpture) and since “clarity” was so often linked to “vividness” (i.e. appealing to the eye and not the ear), it was a simple move to characterise Luke the rhetorical artist as the painting evangelist.²¹⁰

The writing style of Luke’s gospel differs considerably from the other gospels – Bovon highlights its departure from the “rough language” of Mark²¹¹ - to such an extent that his writing has been considered elegant and learned. This accurately reflects the context into which Luke was writing, his audience being educated Gentiles.²¹² Hornik and Parsons discuss the links between the rhetoric of Luke as a writer and the easy transition this makes to the expectations of a painter. They are referring generally to the characteristic of Luke’s writing, but it could be argued that this has significant pertinence with his account of Mary, the only “scriptural source for all the great mysteries of the Virgin.”²¹³ No traditions have emerged that associate the other gospel writers with the Virgin, her character being mentioned sparingly and in no significant detail in the other three books. Luke, however, offers the primary source through which the figure of Mary has been received, interpreted and expanded over the past two millennia. It is from this source that representations of her have originated. Luke, therefore, from the position of a “rhetorical artist” – an artist with words – became the “painting evangelist.”²¹⁴ Again, this nurtures the writing/painting equivalence so integral to the writers of the Counter-Reformation period. It was a significant trope in Romano Alberti’s writings where he compared painters to theologians and orators, and it was on this very tradition of the writing/painting gospel Saint that the Accademia was inaugurated. Rome, although then not the most prolific region for treatise publication, united with the Counter-Reformation ideology on the nobility of painting and the artist as the visual preacher.

²¹⁰ Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 23.

²¹¹ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 4.

²¹² PHEME PERKINS, *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), 215.

²¹³ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 7.

²¹⁴ Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 23.

2.6. Conclusion

The Council of Trent's twenty-fifth decree and the art treatises that followed it reacted to a spectrum of image issues that had emerged during a historically and theologically turbulent time. The documents examined in this chapter clarified Catholicism's position on the purpose and function of images, as well as style and decorum. Some even went into detail on the appropriate way to visualise specific biblical subjects by providing limitations in the field of exegesis. In Rome, where the publication of treatises was somewhat stunted, alternative structures were put into place. An example of this was the Accademia di San Luca, which regulated the Tridentine decrees in artistic education through instruction and theory. The combination of each of these individual elements constructs a backdrop of the Counter-Reformation that is multifaceted, with an absence of one discreet arrangement for image reform; Christopher Black writes, "Bishops, artists and art commentators accepted the challenge to produce effective religious art, and allied visual effects, but no standardised post-Tridentine art emerged, because the purposes were many and varied."²¹⁵ The perspectives highlighted in this chapter each identify a need to clarify the function of the visual arts in this pivotal time for the Church. They recognise the necessity of determining the status of artists and the role they have to play at this key historic moment. But other than reflecting these concerns, reform processes remain inconsistent from region to region. Furthermore, "decisions to commission works of sacred art, might come from a variety of sources, including religious orders and confraternities. The degree to which there was cultivated discourse about the theory and practice of art in local circles was another significant variable."²¹⁶ As the Council had given authority to the entire field of bishops, the commission of artworks differed considerably. The individuality of their perspectives, the specifics of their geography and the types of religious space fluctuated from image to image.

This chapter has provided a contextual foundation for Catholic image reform in the turbulent sixteenth century. From the evidence collected in this chapter, it is clear that traditional Catholic values were reinstated with particular emphasis on narrative lucidity and devotional engagement, albeit in a way that oscillated across contexts.

²¹⁵ Black, *Church, Religion and Society*, 204.

²¹⁶ Prodi, "Introduction," 13.

The rest of the thesis is dedicated to seeing this diversity play out in the representation of the Annunciation. Using the unique methodological framework defined in section 1.2, the following chapters will evaluate the visual biblical exegesis of the Annunciation in nine Counter-Reformation altarpieces created between 1560 and 1610, paying particular attention to whether they are consistent or contradictory to the ideologies presented in this chapter.

PART 1: “Narrating the Word in Image”: the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces.

a. Introduction

Part 1 contains the first of three main bodies of research, and focusses on the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces. As articulated in Chapter 2, narrative paintings (*istorie*) were promoted by the Church in both the Council of Trent decrees and post-Tridentine treatises. Perpetuating earlier Church tradition, paintings were considered to hold a pivotal role in communicating the narratives of the Catholic faith. The Annunciation paintings this research engages with fall under the category of *istoria* paintings, in as much as they each interpret the story found in Luke 1:26-38. The Annunciation as an artistic theme thus conforms to the type of painting promoted by the Church in this period. In the introduction to Part 1, I will first present some principals on pictorial narrative, and the idea of ‘reading’ painting. I will then focus on the biblical account of the Annunciation and establish how it functioned as a narrative story, identifying and challenging the various attempts that have been made to distinguish distinctive stages from the text. Following this, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will focus on analyzing three Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces – Caravaggio’s *Annunciation* (1608), Zuccaro’s *Annunciation* (1565) and Reni’s *Annunciation* (1610) – and will evaluate how they communicated the pictorial narrative to their specific contemporary audiences. Through these analyses, I will demonstrate that pictorial narrative was intimately associated to the issue of temporality in painting and the process of creating a chronological, ‘readable’ story through this medium.

b. Approaching the issue of pictorial narrative

Chapter 2 focused on views surrounding the use and expectation for paintings in the Counter-Reformation. This included introducing the idea of *istoria* and its definition as a narrative painting of a history, which were promoted for both didactic and devotional purposes. Here I will re-focus on the idea of pictorial narrative in more detail and determine challenges associated with the construction of a visual history. To begin, Lorenzo Pericolo, whose work on pictorial narrative in the age of Caravaggio occupies a significant influence in this chapter, identifies a gap in scholarship surrounding *istoria* paintings in the early modern period. He renders this absence curious on the following grounds:

[P]ainting is paradigmatically assimilated to narration by artists and art theorists from the fifteenth century onward: it is no overstatement to posit that the *istoria* is both the most earnestly reflected-upon pictorial institution of the early modern period, and the theoretical core that configures the notion and finality of art during the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. That many early modern paintings are designed to narrate is either taken for granted or deemed irrelevant by scholars for one single reason: the structures and mechanisms of pictorial narrative do not appear to offer enough ground for analysis and interpretation.²¹⁷

The lack of modern scholarly investment in the theory of pictorial narrative in the early modern period is discordant to the quantity of painted histories being produced at this time. This type of painting was the principal mode of representation in western Christian art. Within its visual parameters it narrated stories from the Bible and a corpus of Church tradition, and was a method justified at the Council of Trent. From Chapter 2 we identify that art criticism of this period viewed painting in light of its equivalence to poetry, and assimilated both modes' effectiveness to narrate story. It persisted with the Gregorian tradition from the sixth century and justified the continued use for images for didactic and devotional purposes. Yet, as Pericolo has recognised, there has not been an intentional focus on how narrative functions in the paintings created up to and including the time of the Counter-Reformation. The following are some enquiries that have been left open on the issue: "How [...] can a spatial art unfold in time? Is there a narrator in painting and sculpture? What relationship does pictorial narrative have to literature?" and "By what means did paintings express action and temporality? And what is time in the *istoria*?"²¹⁸

A central problem that surrounds the notion of pictorial narrative is, as Pericolo has identified, that of temporality. Essentially, how does a painting render a narrative, which is, by its very nature, a progressive duration of time? Due to the lack of theory surrounding early modern paintings, it is necessary to look at scholars who have dealt with temporality in other periods of art. The influential eighteenth-century *Laocoön: On*

²¹⁷ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 3.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 10; Herbert Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson, "Introduction," in *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (1985): 7-9. A chapter published after Pericolo that has gone some way to negotiate some of the challenges around the "actions and operations of sacred narrative" is "Invention and Amplification: Imagining Sacred Histories," in Stowell, *The Spiritual Language of Art*, 250-313.

the Limits of Painting and Poetry (1766) by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), for example, focused on neoclassical art. Lessing argued that the question of figuring narrative in art is redundant based on the understanding that painting is an art only preoccupied with *space*.²¹⁹ He contrasts this with poetry, which has as its central issue, *time*. To summarise Lessing's stance, he identifies poems as "temporal and successive," and painting as "spatial and simultaneous."²²⁰ The painter should therefore not "be concerned with temporal succession," as this was the prerogative of a writer.²²¹ Based on this understanding, painting represents only bodies, while poetry represents the action.²²² Lessing therefore argues that painting can only ever posit one single moment in a narrative. He provides an example by describing two parts from the Fourth Book of the Iliad: one, the preparation and shooting of Pandarus' arrow from his bow, and two, the assembled council of the carousing gods. Lessing writes:

Though both, in so far as they are visible subjects, are equally adapted for painting, yet there is this essential difference between them, that the one is a progressive action, the several parts of which develop themselves one by one in the course of time, while the other, on the contrary, is a fixed subject, the various parts of which are exhibited closely connected in space. If then the signs which painters employ as their means of imitation can only be combined in space, and are totally inapplicable to time, it follows that progressive actions, as such, cannot be included among the subjects proper for the pencil, which must be confined to actions which are simultaneous, or to mere figures which indicate an action by their positions.²²³

While Lessing makes it clear that painting can *suggest* an action, it is incapable of reflecting the continuity of time, and requires a literary art to accomplish the temporality. French philosopher Mikel Dufrenne (1910-1995) similarly wrote, "It is obvious that painting is an art of space. The painter draws and places his colours on the surface of the canvas for the sake of a perception which will take in the aesthetic

²¹⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön; On the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (London: J. Ridgeway & Sons, 1836), 146.

²²⁰ Jeoraldean McClain, "Time in the Visual Arts: Lessing and Modern Criticism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44, no. 1 (1985): 41-58.

²²¹ Lew Andrews, *Story and Space in Renaissance Art: The Rebirth of Continuous Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20.

²²² H. B. Nisbet, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: His Life, Works, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 316.

²²³ Lessing, *Laocoön*, 148-9.

object in a single look instead of following it in the flow of a duration.”²²⁴ Painting is considered static in its representation, embodying an illustration of a specific moment, rather than an active interpretation of a story, thus it has been argued that the pictorial mode is restrained by temporal limitations.

This theory of polarizing painting and poetry, first devised in *Laocoön*, has received significant attention by critics across the humanities.²²⁵ While Lessing’s claims have convinced some, others have challenged his trajectory, arguing from both literary and pictorial perspectives that the arts are mutually capable of fusing spatiality and temporality. Both bodies and actions - which unfold together in space *and* time - are required to form a narrative in paintings and poetry.²²⁶ Although Lessing claims to distinguish the inherent qualities of both art forms and purely highlight their differences, what he constructs is a perceptible hierarchal pyramid, “placing poetry at its top, and dramatic poetry at its very apex, while the visual arts, occupied with mere visual appearances and encumbered with manual practices, compose its base.”²²⁷ Lessing’s perspective is challenging in the confines of this thesis for two central reasons. The first being that his project focusses on a specific *type* of image. Being part of the eighteenth-century school of thought, Lessing drew on principles from classical philosophy and ancient image traditions.²²⁸ His view was focused on a type of image that singled out moments from a narrative that, while they could not give narration themselves, could suggest a type of action. Furthermore, adhering to an intensely *theoretical* methodology, he does not identify specific painterly examples “against which the theory might be verified.”²²⁹ This annuls the opportunity to substantiate his claims, and explore those paintings that do, with intention, contain different stages of

²²⁴ Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 275.

²²⁵ Daniel Fulda, “Temporalization?” in *Rethinking Lessing’s Laocoön: Antiquity, Enlightenment, and the ‘Limits’ of Painting and Poetry*, eds. Avi Lefschitz and Michael Squire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 221-242.

²²⁶ George M. A. Hanfmann, “Narration in Greek Art,” *America Journal of Archaeology* 61, no. 1 (1957): 71-78.

²²⁷ Frederick Beiser, “Mendelssohn’s Critique of Lessing’s *Laocoön*,” in *Rethinking Lessing’s Laocoön: Antiquity, Enlightenment, and the ‘Limits’ of Painting and Poetry*, eds. Avi Lefschitz and Michael Squire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 176-196.

²²⁸ Avi Lefschitz, “Introduction,” in *Rethinking Lessing’s Laocoön: Antiquity, Enlightenment, and the ‘Limits’ of Painting and Poetry*, eds. Avi Lefschitz and Michael Squire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-58.

²²⁹ Gyöngyvér Horváth, “From Sequence to Scenario. The Historiography and Theory of Visual Narration,” (PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 2010), 24.

a narrative. These types of paintings are known as continuous and polyscenic compositions, and are one of the three types of narrative painting acknowledged by Franz Wickhoff (1853-1909). Wickhoff was a founder of the Vienna School, in 1895 publishing a book focused on the visual language of early Christian painting.²³⁰ He innovated a new technique in art theory, which analyzed and categorised paintings based not on their historical context and thematic content, but on the way they *narrate*: how they construct a pictorial narrative. Wickhoff identifies three distinct methods employed in images that aim to depict narrative:

1. *Complementary method (polyscenic)*. This type of image focusses on simultaneous occurrences from a narrative. The purpose of this technique is, “to bring out the totality of the event in question [thus] we are shown its preparatory stages as if by a retrogression from the main point.”²³¹
2. *Isolating method (monoscenic)*. In a similar way to Lessing’s view on a ‘single moment’ image, this method was used to distinguish specific set stages of a narrative; it “gives striking scenes either separately or else side by side, but divided by framework.”²³² This was still used for a narrative technique, but was conceived for a narrative sequence of paintings, such as those that I will be analyzing in Chapter 5 in the fresco cycles of the Virgin Mary’s life.
3. *Continuous method (polyscenic)*. This narrative technique was particularly popular in the early Christian images Wickhoff was working with. Significant parts of the narrative were shown simultaneously, but deviating from the complementary method, the protagonist figure would appear repeatedly, engaging in the different parts of the story. Instead of “pictures of striking, epoch-making moments... as the text flows on, the heroes of the narrative accompany it in a continuous series of related circumstances passing, smoothly and unbroken, one into another.”²³³

²³⁰ Horváth, “From Sequence to Scenario,” 14.

²³¹ Franz Wickhoff, *Roman Art: Some of Its Principles and Their Application to Early Christian Painting* (Portsmouth: W. Heinemann, 1990), 14.

²³² Wickhoff, *Roman Art*, 8.

²³³ *Ibid.*

Wickhoff's distinction between these three types of images have been designated as the dominant narrative modes in modern studies on *istoria* paintings. Wickhoff broadens the spectrum of potentiality for *istoria* images and identifies the solutions of artists to deal with the simultaneousness of the pictorial mode.

c. Understanding temporality in paintings

The second reason that Lessing's work on painting and poetry is discordant to the method of this thesis is that his theory sits in direct opposition to the idea of *ut pictura poesis*. This is a fundamental issue as the Laocoön reflects arguments that are inconsistent with the Counter-Reformation perspective. In the late sixteenth century, the prevalent view was the equivalency, not the opposition, of painting and poetry. This was the dominant ideology that perpetuated Church tradition since the writings of Pope Gregory the Great: "For what writing presents to readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read."²³⁴ The idea of *reading* a painting, as Gregory suggests, is pivotal to my exploration of narrative in pictorial Counter-Reformation Annunciations. The designated chronology of a piece of literature, fashioned to be read in the structured sequence (for example left to right, top to bottom) constructs a temporality, with the narrative unfolding as it is being read/spoken. It can be argued, however, that this is the same process in a painting. In his work on French artist, Nicholas Poussin (1594-1665), Louis Marin (1931-1992) constructed a valuable method of viewing narrative in seventeenth-century Christian *istoria*. He writes, "in front of the painting, the viewer tells a story to himself, he reads the painting, he understands the narrative messages. This means that he converts the iconic representational model into language, and more precisely into a story."²³⁵ Marin argues, with specific relation to Poussin's work, that paintings effectively use their space to create "an enunciative representation"²³⁶; that being an image that *announces* the narrative. Poussin does this by embracing a model that is akin to the polyscenic framework of Wolkhoff's complementary method; that being the incorporation of "a relatively large number of

²³⁴ Pope Gregory the Great, "Book XI, Letter 13," 13.

²³⁵ Louis Marin, "Toward a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's *The Arcadian Shepherds*," in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, eds. Susan R. Suleimann and Inge Crossman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 292-324.

²³⁶ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 5.

figures, each of them encompassing a diverse temporal aspect of the story.”²³⁷ A painting of this type was capable of creating an inherent narrative through its various set scenes. While the narrative components of the painting are simultaneously exposed, the observer engages with the narrative through observing, reading the temporal progression of the actions take place. Wickhoff emphasises that the chronology embedded in polyscenic narrative paintings is intimately associated, and even activated, by the observers’ perception; “the concept of process links the method of continuous narration with the notion of the painterly, and with the nature of aesthetic experience.”²³⁸ In a similar way to a reader engaging with literature, the narrative in a *istoria* painting unfolds in unity with the reader’s interpretation of the object. It is in understanding these elements - the images and symbols in paintings - that allows for the progressive temporality of a narrative to take place:

[T]he addition of other narratives or symbols in the background or elsewhere within the frame may expand the intrinsic timeline by associating the chronological “present” of the principal subject to a symbol representing a related event from the “past.” The image is a text, but like any text, the role of the reader/spectator is paramount, since it is through the reading of the text that its significance can be interpreted and understood.²³⁹

It is in the *reading* of painting that the temporal aspect of narrative is revealed. This is a key trajectory in this thesis as I engage with visual objects through a ‘reading’ that is then formulated into an analysis. This method is entirely aligned to the objective of Counter-Reformation paintings, which were to be read as narratives in the place of written text. Mieke Bal writes, “Reading is predicated on the passage of time: the time it takes to walk through the text or image, to process its signs, to produce the meaning. To pave the way for making a programmatic case for taking the time to read, I wish to insist on the notion that images can – indeed must – be read, regardless of how much “language” is in them.”²⁴⁰ All the images I am analyzing were created for ecclesiastical settings, and predominately as the decoration for altarpieces. Audiences were

²³⁷ Ibid, 88.

²³⁸ Horváth, “From Sequence to Scenario,” 45.

²³⁹ Melissa Nicole Demos, “Time and the Experience of Narrative in Italian Renaissance Art,” (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2016), 30.

²⁴⁰ Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 89-90.

educated by reading these paintings, and through this process constructing a story that, in the words of the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent, “instructs,” “commemorates” and “frequently recalled the articles of our faith.”²⁴¹

d. Pictorial narrative and temporality in the Annunciation story

The pictorial narrative this thesis is interested in is the Annunciation to Mary in Luke 1:26-38. In Chapter 1, I introduced the idea that paintings of this story have their own unique set of problems in terms of their pictorial narrative. The Annunciation event that is recorded in Luke’s gospel constructs a spoken dialogue between two individuals; the very word that defines the event is equivalent to *announcement*, an action associated with verbal speech. Paintings of the Annunciation therefore have to reflect this verbliness within visual parameters. This thesis has already argued that based on the equivalence between literary and pictorial forms maintained by Counter-Reformation ideology, the narration of a story was not only seen as possible but efficacious through painting. This is relevant particularly to the Annunciation. To repeat an important quote from Marin,

Only painting, in showing the Angel, the Virgin and their meeting, will bring it to life, not only on a panel or on a wall, as space, but in language because panel or wall will have to make it understood as the figuration of a dialogue read in the pages of the holy book, as the figurability of its "realization" which relates the reality of its event and its story.²⁴²

Marin argues that it requires painting to present the Annunciation as a “real,” “figurable” story. The compatibility of the Annunciation with the pictorial mode had been earlier identified by Gabriele Paleotti in the Counter-Reformation, who said, “images encompass the broadest and gravest concepts in a confined space, with no hunting through volumes or page turning, as we see in the mystery of the annunciation of the glorious Virgin.”²⁴³ Despite the dominating verbliness of the Annunciation story, it has been identified that painting allows for the narrative to be communicated successfully and in its fulfillment. The preference for this mode of representation underscores the theological relationship that exists between the Annunciation

²⁴¹ Council of Trent, “On invocation,” 775.

²⁴² Marin, “Stating a Mysterious Figure,” 48.

²⁴³ Paleotti, *Discourse*, 115.

narrative and the doctrine of Incarnation. The Incarnational mystery of God becoming man - the invisible becoming visible, the Word becoming flesh - is reflected in the transition from verbal language to visual image in Annunciation paintings. Yet, the issue remains of *how* the Annunciation as a story of verbal dialogue is retold by painters through their medium. Having described Wickhoff's three methods for portraying pictorial narrative, there is a question of whether the Annunciation narrative was handled by painters to (a) unite the important parts in the narrative in one image, (b) represent a specific set stage in the sequential narrative, or (c) communicate the narrative through the repeated appearance of its characters in various phases. Firstly, let us consider Luke 1:26-38:

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Throughout the reception history of this text, there is evidence that individuals have broken down the narrative to formulate definitive scenes. It is a common approach adopted by biblical scholars that allows an evaluation of the parallels between the Annunciation to Mary and other Annunciation 'type-scenes' in the Bible.²⁴⁴ This is language used by Robert Alter, who writes,

²⁴⁴ Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Prooftexts* 3, no. 2 (1983): 115-30.

What some commentators have dismissed as mechanical repetition proves to be an indispensable framework for making sense of the story when one recognises that all the variations in a given sequence of motifs – the way the motifs are fleshed out, which motifs are given prominence, what “free” motifs are attached to the required ones, where a rare shift in the order of motifs is introduced – serve as directional markers for meaning and the understanding of character in the story at hand.²⁴⁵

Identifying that Annunciations follow a specific formula has allowed scholars to qualify set stages in the narrative. Most commonly the parallels have been distinguished between the Annunciation to Mary and that to Zechariah (Lk 1:5-24). Raymond Brown identified the structure of these texts as: (1) appearance of an angel to the protagonist; (2) a startled response; (3) a comfort in the form of “do not be afraid”; (4) you will name the child; (5) a question from the protagonist; (6) the angel’s response; (7) divine sign.²⁴⁶ Luke used a similar framework for both of his Annunciation stories, and it has been debated in what direction the imitation took place; did the Annunciation to Mary inform the Annunciation to Zechariah or vice versa.²⁴⁷ It is understood that, like the Annunciation dream to Joseph in Matthew 1, both were informed by the Annunciation type-scenes in the Hebrew Bible: Sarah (Gen 18); Rebekah (Gen 25); Manoah’s wife (Jdg 13); Hannah (1 Sam 1), and Elisha’s Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4).²⁴⁸ The reason for such an adherence to earlier Annunciations may have been to exploit the “step-by-step realization of the Old Testament form in both passages so as to establish the climactic effect of Jesus’ wondrous birth in relation to all those, including John’s, which had been announced in the same way.”²⁴⁹ Unlike Brown’s seven steps, Richard Dillon uses a five-step Annunciation script in order to make the texts compatible to a type-scene: “(1) God’s messenger makes an unexpected appearance. (2) The numinous personage offers reassurance. (3) An unexpected birth is foretold. (4) The meaningful name of the child is given. (5) The future mission or destiny of the hero is

²⁴⁵ Alter, “How Convention Helps Us Read,” 118.

²⁴⁶ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 297. Although this basic structure is consistent in both stories, Brown also accounted for certain narrative differences. For example, the exhortation to Mary in the greeting “favoured one” (v. 28) and the climactic statement from Mary of “Here am I, a servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (v. 38).

²⁴⁷ Richard Dillon, “Annunciation: II New Testament,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 56-58.

²⁴⁸ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 43.

²⁴⁹ Dillon, “Annunciation: II New Testament,” 58.

stated.”²⁵⁰ These five steps are noticeably less specific than Brown’s but still highlight a number of set stages to which all Annunciations fall into conformity. Dillon understands that in using this type of narrative pre-established in the Hebrew Bible, Mary’s Annunciation indicates a continuation, not a cessation, of miraculous births.

While most have perpetuated the idea of an Annunciation type-scene, which draws upon a range of biblical Annunciations and categorises them based on their similar narrative patterns, it could be argued that the Annunciation to Mary does not fit into this configuration. The most obvious alteration is that Mary was a virgin, whilst each other woman mentioned in Annunciation type-scenes are defined as initially barren. In light of this, the two Annunciations in Luke – that to Zechariah and to Mary - have a clear dissimilarity: Elizabeth’s barrenness situates her within the Annunciation type-scene whilst Mary’s virginity does not. Luke places the “conventional” Annunciation first, perhaps in order to highlight the uniqueness of the Annunciation to Mary based on her virginity.²⁵¹ Mary’s Annunciation boasts literary and, simultaneously, theological uniqueness. The narrative deviates as the child to be born is named “the Son of the Most High” (Lk 1.35); only in this Annunciation is there the anticipation of the Incarnation. Whilst this Annunciation does not therefore conform to the Annunciation type-scene, Madhavi Nevader has argued that it does show a reflection of the Theophany type-scene. Those steps include:

(1) scene setting wherein the protagonist is separated (intentionally or unintentionally) so as to experience the theophany; (2) the appearance of speech of Yahweh; (3) human response to the presence of the divine; (4) expression of doubt; (5) externalization, wherein the protagonist re-enters the external realm and is integrated into society.²⁵²

This reflects some similarities to the Annunciation type-scene, but omits the necessary barrenness of the female protagonist. However, the Theophany stages fail to dictate the nature of the visit – it being an announcement of pregnancy – and in doing so does

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 56.

²⁵¹ S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (London: A&C Black, 1997), 92.

²⁵² Madhavi Nevader, “When Gods Talk to Men: Reading Mary with the Annunciations of the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,” in *Annunciations: Sacred Music for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. George Corbett (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019), 45-55.

not account for any specific details relating to that prophecy. Nor does Luke's story extend to when Mary is re-integrated into society as accounted in the Theophany type-scene, only that the angel departs from her. It is evident that whilst the Annunciation to Mary does not fit without deviation into the Annunciation type-scene, neither can it be made wholly compatible to a Theophany type scene.

e. Categorising the Annunciation narrative in the early modern period

The above discussion offers insight into a small number of ways scholars have subcategorised the Lukan narrative of the Annunciation to Mary. The discordant attempts that have been made by scholars to break down the story and make it congruent to specific type-scenes underscores the reception-historical approach of this thesis. Clear and unanimous scholarly decisions on the narrative logic of this biblical text cannot be made, as each individual approaches and reads the story uniquely, identifying their own moments and stages as they read the story. Responses deviate considerably, with some assigning a seven-step system, others a five. In turning to consider the interpretations of the Annunciation narrative in early modern Catholicism, there is evidence of similar digression. Simon Altmann uses the Annunciation sequence described by Venetian monk Giovanni Marinoni (1490-1562) to assign narrative stages to the paintings contained in his extensive database of Annunciations dating from the fourth to eighteenth century.²⁵³ Marinoni identified eight stages in the Annunciation, expanding the narrative to also include the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Lk 1:39-45) and Mary's song (Lk 1:46-55). While Altmann concludes that it is Marinoni's numbers that are to be used to prescribe set stages of the Annunciation, there is exceptionally little evidence of Marinoni's exegesis, and even less evidence that artists throughout history have posited their visualizations of the narrative on these set stages. A similar case is Fra Roberto Caraccioli (1425-1495) a Franciscan friar, who identified five stages of the Annunciation. His exegesis has received far greater documentation and reception, and was drawn upon most famously by Michael Baxandall (see section 1.1.2.). In Table 1, we can identify a number of parallels.

²⁵³ Altmann and Leiva, "Gabriel and the Virgin II," 160.

Giovanni Marinoni (1490-1562)	Fra Roberto Caraccioli (1425-1495)
<p>(1). Angelic salutation: ‘Ave gratia plena...’ (28)</p> <p>(2). Virgin perturbed thinks: ‘what manner of salutation this should be’ (29, Conturbatio)</p> <p>(3). Angel speaks: ‘Fear not, Mart’ (30)</p> <p>(4). Angel speaks: ‘thou shall conceive in thy womb’ (31)</p> <p>(5). Virgin speaks: ‘How shall this be, seeing I knownot a man.’ (34, Cogitatio.)</p> <p>(6). Angel speaks: ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee’ (35)</p> <p>(8). Virgin speaks; ‘Ecce ancilla Domini’ (38, Umiliatio.)</p> <p>(The seventh scene is the Annunciation to Elizabeth.)²⁵⁴</p>	<p>(1) Conturbatio (Disquiet) “Hail, thou art highly favoured.” She was troubled.</p> <p>(2) Cogitatio: she cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. Angel then said fear not Mary.</p> <p>(3) Interrogatio: How shall this be since I know no man?</p> <p>(4) Humiliatio: What tongue could ever describe. Hebold the handmaid of the Lord.</p> <p>(5) Meritatio: Angel departed. And he bodily sensations of the Child being present in her womb rose again with indescribable sweetness Probably, in her profound humility, she raised her eyes to heaven and then lowered them towards her womb with many tears.²⁵⁵</p>

Table 1. Comparison of the division of Luke’s gospel by Giovanni Marinoni (1490-1562) and Fra Roberto Caraccioli (1425-1495). By author.

Marinoni and Caraccioli use similar designations of “conturbatio, cogitatio, humiliatio” to describe Mary’s disposition at various points in the narrative. Yet there are also significant differences. Most notably, there is a different number of scenes; an entire absence of a salutation in Caraccioli’s; a non-canonical expansion of the text in Caraccioli’s exegesis after the angel departs; and an amalgamation of the Annunciation, Visitation and Magnificat in Marinoni’s. While Marinoni’s stages have, with the exception of Simon Altmann, been overlooked in scholarship, Caraccioli’s exegesis, or more appropriately Baxandall’s adoption of Caraccioli’s exegesis, has had a significant influence in art history.²⁵⁶ Despite this traction, however, I consider it an inaccurate method for engaging with narrative paintings. Firstly, the application of

²⁵⁴ Altmann and Leiva, “Gabriel and the Virgin II,” 160.

²⁵⁵ Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 48-51.

²⁵⁶ See Grootenboer, “Reading the Annunciation,” 351, where the Annunciation is described as an “allegory of art-historical interpretation.”

Baxandall's stages have been used for Annunciations that predate or outdate Caraccioli's interpretation. It is unclear whether painters of various stages of history and cultures were aware of this specific method of exegesis or whether they were instructed by an entirely different interpretation, constructed independently or by their patron or donor's personal ideologies. Similarly, there is an expectation that the observer/reader of the painting would be equipped with the knowledge to distinguish set scenes. Such expectation cannot be applied to the integrated audience of Annunciation viewers, who would have differed considerably across times and locations. In addition, the aims of such methods to confine each Annunciation painting to a set stage of the narrative, is perpetuating the theory of Lessing that paintings can only construct one moment. They render paintings as monoscenic, not polyscenic as they are conceived in the complementary and continuous methods described by Franz Wickhoff. While structuring the Annunciation narrative may appear to attribute interpretive authority to the painter, it actually limits their ability to construct a temporally successive narrative. It disallows their freedom to curate an image that amalgamates various moments of the Annunciation narrative that might provide the observer with a representation of the narrative components for them to read. When analyzing Annunciations in the Counter-Reformation period, these arguments remain pertinent. Scarce evidence of contemporary exegesis of the Lukan narrative means there are few examples on which to attach Annunciation paintings. The importance of tradition in this period also begs the question of how important the narrative in Luke 1 was to their interpretation. As argued in Chapter 1, the influences of written and oral non-biblical traditions associated with the Annunciation were prevalent and mediated between the biblical text and the Counter-Reformation audience.

For these various reasons, it is suggested here that the attachment of Annunciation paintings to set stages of the biblical narrative - most commonly the five stages upheld by Baxandall - should be replaced by far more interrogative analyses of these paintings as individual objects, that each dealt with the Annunciation narrative in coordination with their specific cultural conditions. Part 1 builds upon this very premise and uses its chapters to focus on a small number of Annunciations dating between 1560 and 1610 in order to analyse their specific narrational abilities. Firstly, in Chapter 3, I will be continuing to challenge the idea of set stages in the Annunciation by analyzing Caravaggio's *Annunciation* (1608). In exchange for the stages described by

Baxandall and Altmann, I propose the idea of disrupting pictorial narrative, a method by which Caravaggio dislocated the temporality of the Annunciation and designed a scene that communicated the narrative in an atemporal state. Chapter 4 then examines Federico Zuccaro's *Annunciation Broadcast By Prophets* (1565) and assesses how the painting presents the Annunciation as the fulfilment of narratives from the Old Testament. The combination of the New Testament narrative with Old Testament prophecies has a particularly interesting impact on chronological temporality and is more suitably understood through a circular reading of the pictorial narrative. The final chapter of Part 1 situates Guido Reni's *Annunciation* (1610) within the framework of a cycle of the life of the Virgin. As ecclesiastical objects designed to educate and inspire devotion, some Annunciations were not to be looked at in isolation, but instead as a part in a wider, overarching narrative of the life of the Virgin Mary. Using each of these three paintings as carefully-selected case studies, the following chapters address the nuances and challenges attached to the mechanisms of pictorial narrative and the issue of temporality within the genre of Counter-Reformation Annunciations.

3. Chapter 3. Annunciation as disrupted pictorial narrative: Michaelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's Annunciation (1608)

3.1. Introduction

The introduction to Part 1 outlined some methodological arguments challenging the concept that Annunciation paintings conform to set stages in the Lukan text. To substantiate this claim with a practical example, I have selected for my first case Caravaggio's *Annunciation* (1608) (Fig. 6). This painting has been chosen not only because it is the work of the most studied painter of the Counter-Reformation period, but because it reflects a fascinating engagement with this issue of pictorial narrative and temporality.²⁵⁷ The relationship between Caravaggio and the Baroque style originating in Italy in the late sixteenth century has been of scholarly interest since the 1950s, and the reception of his biography and work has grown exponentially in the last two decades with a "Caravaggiomania" spanning both academic and popular culture.²⁵⁸ The complexity of his historiography is marked by the nuances of scholarly and popularist writings, as both experts and fanatics have honed in on specific characteristics of the individual's reputation. For the objectives of this study – that being to interrogate the visual exegesis of Caravaggio's pictorial narrative – Chapter 3 will focus on the material that examines Caravaggio's paintings within the religious and political climate of the Counter-Reformation period. Debates circulate around Caravaggio's commissions fit within Counter-Reformation visual culture; his excessive naturalism sitting in opposition to the mediated realism of other major sixteenth- and early seventeenth- century artists such as the Carracci family, Guido Reni (1575-1642), and Francesco Albani (1578-1660); each of whom will be discussed in this thesis.²⁵⁹ Whereas other artists commissioned by the Catholic Church treated their subjects as historical narratives, Caravaggio painted his subjects as if they were a performance of a history, staged in the framework of the present.²⁶⁰ As a result, Caravaggio proposed a different form of pictorial narrative to his contemporaries. There is an instantaneity in Caravaggio's work, an immediacy sprung upon the viewer

²⁵⁷ Richard Spear, "Caravaggiomania," *Art in America*, 2010, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/caravaggiomania/>

²⁵⁸ Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," 383; Spear, "Caravaggiomania."

²⁵⁹ Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," 381.

²⁶⁰ Genevieve Warwick, "Introduction: Caravaggio in History," in *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, ed. Genevieve Warwick (Newark: University of Delaware Press), 13-22.



Figure 6. Michaelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Annunciation*, 1608, oil on canvas, 285x205cm, Museum of Fine Arts of Nancy, Nancy. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

that engages attention in a different way to reading a detached history.²⁶¹ This chapter will demonstrate how Caravaggio's unique form of *istoria* disrupts the temporality in his *Annunciation*.

The *Annunciation* was created at the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century, at a late stage in Caravaggio's career. The exact date of its creation is debated among scholars, and there is discrepancy over whether it was painted in Malta in 1608 or during Caravaggio's final stay in Naples in 1609-10.²⁶² The painting belonged to Henry II, the newly appointed Duke of Lorraine, and was gifted to the primatial church in Nancy as an altarpiece sometime between 1608 and 1610. This church had previously been dedicated to the Annunciation to Mary, and the altarpiece by Caravaggio was to add a taste of a new modern style originating from Italy that was likely alien to the community in Nancy.²⁶³ The painting has received minimal consideration by art historians due to the severe damage that covers approximately half of the canvas, which has left many scholars reluctant to pose any significant discussion around it.²⁶⁴ Yet in disregarding the painting due to poor current condition, scholars risk missing a key Caravaggio altarpiece, which was the "most distant commission from origin to destination undertaken by the artist."²⁶⁵ From a commission perspective, the painting was a hugely important project that saw Caravaggio's painting brought into France, thus underscoring the artist's international influence even within his short career. A more measured recommendation for the treatment of the *Annunciation* comes from Howard Hibbard, who states "any attribution of this striking and appealing image is to be made with caution."²⁶⁶ Certainly Howard's comment is something to bear in mind when discussing the painting, but it by no means suggests conversation around it should be stopped. In terms of the damaged appearance of the painting, we should note that the image was created in Caravaggio's later style, which

²⁶¹ Warwick, "Introduction," 19.

²⁶² Clara Gelly, *Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts: peintures italiennes et espagnoles, XIVe-XIXe siècle* (Saint-Étienne: IAC Éditions, 2006), 58.

²⁶³ Keith Sciberras, "The Context for Caravaggio's *Annunciation* for the Duke of Lorraine," *At Home in Art* (2016): 115-125, accessed November 24, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/38139329/_The_Context_for_Caravaggio_s_Annunciation_for_the_Duke_of_Lorraine_

²⁶⁴ Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 338; Sybille Ebert-Schiffer, *Caravaggio: The Artist and His Work* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2012), 221.

²⁶⁵ Sciberras, "The Context for Caravaggio's *Annunciation*," 115.

²⁶⁶ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 338.

consisted of “using the priming as a half-tone and bringing out figures and objects mostly in flat relief through flimsy layers of colour.”²⁶⁷ It has thus been suggested that the image was never a “perfectly accomplished work,” even prior to the damage it suffered.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, given that my primary interest is the painting’s pictorial narrative, I will be focussing on the overall composition of the biblical characters and their actions, both of which remain consistent with Caravaggio’s original design.

Caravaggio’s *Annunciation* is the only case study in the thesis commissioned for a church outside of Italy. Despite this anomaly, it qualifies for this investigation as Caravaggio’s career was centred in Italy, and his style developed entirely within the Italian schools. The *Annunciation* was created either in Malta or Naples, and it demonstrates similarities in style and design to his other late Italian commissions, such as *Raising of Lazarus* (1609) (Fig. 7) and *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1609) (Fig. 8). The innovation of Caravaggio’s paintings amongst his contemporaries situates him as an essential figure to discuss when representing the spectrum of artistic trends that developed during the outworking of the Counter-Reformation. Caravaggio’s interpretation of biblical narratives was highly unusual for the context and differed considerably from his contemporaries’ versions of the same subjects. This is highlighted in the *Annunciation* in part by the absence of additional angelic figures and transcendentalised stylisations; trends that have been determined as the stereotypical response to the Annunciation narrative within the fifty-year time frame acknowledged in this research (see Part 3).²⁶⁹ While it has been widely accepted that his conceptualizations challenged common interpretations of Christian themes, this has not been discussed in relation to his *Annunciation*.²⁷⁰ This is an issue that even transitions into the field of biblical reception history. Reception historians have constructed analyses on several of Caravaggio’s biblical paintings.²⁷¹ The dramatic

²⁶⁷ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 82.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Viladesau, “The Annunciation,” 76.

²⁷⁰ Howard, *Caravaggio*, 85.

²⁷¹ See, among others, Chorpensing, “Another Look at Caravaggio,” 149-58; Joe Garland, Cindy Garland, and Jim Eichenberger, *God’s Word on Canvas* (Colorado Springs: Standard Publishing, 2010); Irving Lavin, “Divine Inspiration in Caravaggio’s Two St. Matthews,” *The Art Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (1974): 59-81; Luis Menendez-Antuna, “Is Caravaggio a queer theologian? Paul’s conversion on the way to Damascus,” *Critical Research on Religion* 6, no. 2 (2018): 132-150; Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009); Ela Nutu, “Reading Salome: Caravaggio and the Gospel Narratives,” in *From the Margins 2: Women of the New Testament and Their Afterlives*, eds. Christine Joynes and Christopher C. Rowland (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2009), 210-225;



Figure 7. Caravaggio, *The Raising of Lazarus*, 1609, oil on canvas, 380x275cm. Museo Regionale, Messina. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 8. Caravaggio, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1609, oil on canvas, 314x211cm. Museo Regionale, Messina. Wikimedia Commons.. License: Public Domain.

realism of the artist's work set a new trend in the genre of religious paintings and biblical scholars have used this unmediated reality to analyse how the biblical is portrayed in the visual mode. While some analyses of Caravaggio's paintings are superficial - a common problem in the field that I described in section 1.1.1 - others have anchored Caravaggio's paintings to their historical context to provide more substantial and corroborative claims on the artist's exegetical decisions. This, again, has yet to be accomplished for Caravaggio's *Annunciation*. As potentially the most dominating iconography in western Christianity, created by one of the most significant influencers in religious art, substantial investigation needs to be given to this image. Prescribing to the method of analysis described in Chapter 1, the study begins with an

Charles Scribner, "In Alia Effigie: Caravaggio's London Supper at Emmaus," *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 3 (1977): 375-82; Susanne J. Warma, "Christ, First Fruits, and the Resurrection: Observations on the Fruit Basket in Caravaggio's London "Supper at Emmaus,"" *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 53, no. 4 (1990): 583-86.

examination of the painting's content, followed by an exploration of the context and, in this case, the painting's relevance to the issue of pictorial narrative.

3.2. Iconographic analysis

In Caravaggio's altarpiece, the Annunciation narrative takes place in a dark, unlit room; a choice consistent with the majority of his religious paintings. The room in the *Annunciation* is identifiable as a bedchamber, with an unmade bed with white and red sheets in the back right-hand corner of the room. The decision to set the scene in this space is not influenced by biblical stimuli, for in Luke we find no mention of geographical context apart from "a town in Galilee called Nazareth" (Lk 1:26). A possible apocryphal source could be the *Protoevangelium of James* 11:1-3, "she went away, trembling, to her house," although again this is lacking substantive indication that the scene took place in a bedroom.²⁷² Despite the indeterminacy of the exact location in the traditional Annunciation texts, the bedroom is a dominant feature in many paintings of the narrative. Above the bed, there is a dark green drape that hangs over the bed, emphasizing that it is a private and intimate space. In front of the bed, and stationed directly behind the female figure, is a wooden chair. Moving to the foreground, and we find a basket, an object that may allude to an iconographic tradition common in Annunciations since the tenth century.²⁷³ The tradition saw sewing baskets appear in Annunciations as a theological image of Christ being created in Mary's womb, or additionally as a response to the cultural emphasis of domesticated women in the Middle Ages.²⁷⁴ As with the choice of the bedroom, it appears the exegesis subscribes to earlier visual traditions for its interpretation. Yet, when examining the basket in Caravaggio's painting, it does not appear to contain any sewing materials. Rather, the basket looks empty, only a white plaited sheet lies on top of the handle. This is not the first time Caravaggio used a basket in a religious context. In his earlier version of *Supper at Emmaus* (1602-3) (Fig. 9), Caravaggio represents a basket full of fruit, which modern scholars have taken to associate with "Christ, the resurrection, and first fruits".²⁷⁵ If we apply this reading of the basket in *Supper* to the *Annunciation*,

²⁷² "Protoevangelium of James," New Advent, accessed November 25, 2020, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0847.htm>

²⁷³ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 82.

²⁷⁴ Mindy Nancarrow, "The Significance of the Basket in El Greco's "Annunciation" for the Retable of the Madrid Seminary of Doña María De Aragón," *Notes in the History of Art* 23, no. 2 (2004): 9-16.

²⁷⁵ Warma, "Christ, First Fruits," 583-586.



Figure 9. Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1602-3, oil on canvas, 141x196.2cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

it would be reasonable to suggest that the empty basket is symbolic of the imminent coming of Christ. Whether there is continuity between the baskets - and by that I mean the same basket that was empty in the *Annunciation* is then filled in *Supper* after Christ's resurrection - has not been explored by scholars, although there could be a plausible link. Furthermore, the white drape along the basket may be the holy girdle, the belt of the Virgin Mary that she wore when she bore Christ. This is a rare iconographic addition to an *Annunciation*, and would situate Caravaggio's basket as more of a "visual prolepsis" of Christ's birth than a cultural object.²⁷⁶

Transitioning to the central figures of the *Annunciation* and we find the angel on the left-hand side of the canvas and the Virgin Mary on the right, which is the most popular positioning in *Annunciation* paintings in the western culture.²⁷⁷ Mary kneels on the right, facing towards the angel and displaying the viewer a side profile. Her body is

²⁷⁶ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 83.

²⁷⁷ Altmann and Leiva, "Gabriel and the Virgin II," 159. In a survey of 1090 European *Annunciation* paintings dating from the fourth century to 1750, only 225 (21%) show Gabriel on the right.

covered by a blue garment, her lowered head is covered with a paler fabric, and there is a slither of crimson behind her left hand. Mary's eyes are closed and her hands are crossed in front of her chest. In order to understand the semiotics of this gesture within the context, I referred to *L'Arte de' Cenni*, a comprehensive discourse on gesture written by Giovanni Bonifacio in 1616. Bonifacio suggests that in contemporary visual culture, the gesture of crossed arms in front of the chest embodies humility.²⁷⁸ This provides justification for its popular use in representations of the Virgin Annunciate, who responded in humility to the message of the Angel Gabriel (Lk 1.3, ““Here am I, the servant of the Lord””). The Virgin Mary maintains this pose whilst kneeling on a much lower level than Gabriel, who is elevated on a solid-looking cloud. Like the Virgin Mary, Gabriel is dressed in what appears to be a large piece of material – “nothing more than a bedspread”²⁷⁹ – which is tied at the waist by a slightly darker piece of material. On the highest point of his back is a set of wings, which are dark and blend unobtrusively with the dark shades in the background. Gabriel's body leans over the Virgin Mary and he stretches his right arm down with a flexed wrist, and points his index finger towards the right side of the canvas. His clothes and right arm are lit by a startlingly bright light that comes from an unknown source on the left-hand side of the canvas.

In Gabriel's left hand he holds a stem of lilies, an exceptionally common symbolic element of Annunciation visualizations during the Renaissance and Baroque periods and one borne of an entirely non-canonical tradition. The lily, as a cultural representation of “purity, chastity, and innocence,” has come to be considered as the flower of the Virgin and its frequent use in Annunciation artworks has also meant that it has been intimately connected with the Angel Gabriel.²⁸⁰ Although the image seems to be perpetuating another artistic tradition - this time in the form of the lily as a symbolic gesture of Mary's purity - Gabriel's forbearing right arm obscures the flowers. The visual exegesis thus subverts the use of these flowers from being a key iconography to one easily dominated by the artist's own unique interpretation.

²⁷⁸ Giovanni Bonifacio, *L'Arte de' Cenni* (Vincenza: Appresso Francesco Grossi, 1616), 284.

²⁷⁹ Peter Robb, *M: The Man Who Became Caravaggio* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 82.

²⁸⁰ Farrin Chwalkowski, *Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 257.

Gabriel's right arm also obscures the majority of the angel's face.²⁸¹ This is an interesting exegetical decision as it annuls the opportunity to use the angel's facial expression to support or help dictate the narrative. Are the angel's lips parted as if speaking the dialogue to the Virgin Mary as described in Luke, or are we meant to believe that the message was communicated in a different way? The altarpiece leaves its audience with the opportunity to construct their own understanding of the interaction, in doing so intensifying the mystery of the interaction.

3.3. Context and the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality

The interpretative decisions made in this visual exegesis, particularly those around the gesture of Gabriel, have had a significant effect on the painting's pictorial narrative. Firstly, the uniqueness and enigmatism of Gabriel's gesture makes it difficult to even attempt harnessing it to a specific moment in the Lukan text. Pericolo suggests that Caravaggio's *Annunciation* is demonstrative of Mary's humility, described in Luke 1:38 (stage 8 in Marinoni, and stage 5 in Caraccioli). After her initial query in v. 34 ("How can this be, since I am a virgin?") where she questioned how this divine mystery might occur, in v. 38 she graciously accepts the message Gabriel has delivered with the words "let it be." Pericolo's view is corroborated by Mary's gesture of humility, which is a theme that is commonly attached to this stage of the narrative. While this is a plausible explanation for the type of interaction represented in the *Annunciation*, this cannot be verified without additional evidence.

Let us, therefore, interrogate Gabriel's posture in greater detail. The angel leans over the Virgin Mary, with an outstretched right arm and pointed finger, a gesture that has been considered "in and of itself an iconographic quagmire."²⁸² Gabriel is often portrayed pointing in Annunciations, either to the sky or to the Virgin Mary, but in Caravaggio's *Annunciation*, Gabriel's hand hovers directly above her head as he points unconvincingly towards the right side of the canvas. Caravaggio commonly used the gesture of pointing in his later paintings, most famously in *The Calling of St. Matthew* (1600) (Fig. 10) but also in *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1602) (Fig. 11)

²⁸¹ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 83. Pericolo has been able to identify a couple of possible engravings that may have influenced Caravaggio's exceptionally unusual back-turned Gabriel: Albrecht Altdorfer's *Annunciation* (1513) and *Annunciation to Joachim*, and Jan Saenredam's *Adam and Eve Mourning the Slain Abel* (1604).

²⁸² Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 83.



Figure 10. Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1599-1600, oil on canvas, 340x322cm. Church of San Luigi dei Francesi. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

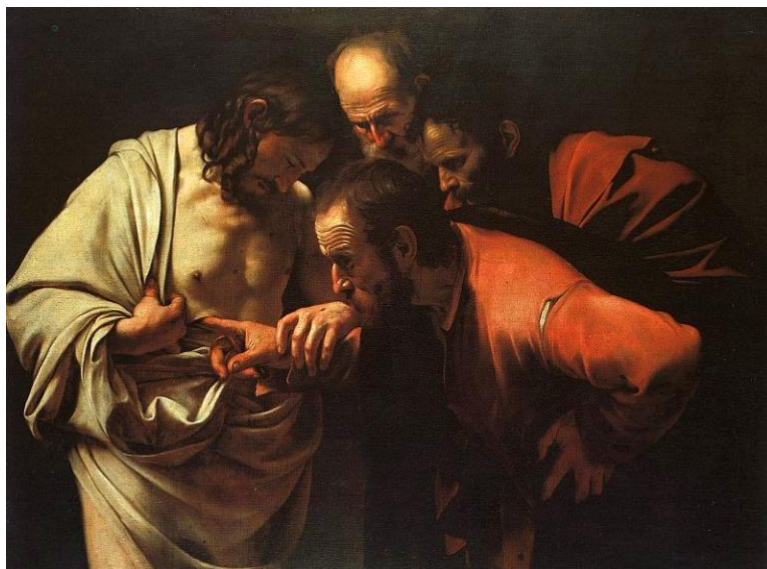


Figure 11. Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601-2, oil on canvas, 106.9x146cm. Sanssouci Picture Gallery. License: Public Domain.



Figure 12. Caravaggio, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1603, oil on canvas, 104x135cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

and *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (1603) (Fig. 12). The pointed fingers in these Caravaggio images are commonly understood to be strategically placed as ambivalent gestures that identified a spiritual appeal or revelation.²⁸³ Within the context of the *Annunciation*, however, it is by no means clear what object is being pointed to. It may allude to Gabriel *calling* Mary, in a similar way to Jesus' gesture to Matthew in *The Calling of St Matthew*. The only Annunciation from the period I could obtain with similar iconographic detail is one by Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli (1505-1570) (Fig. 13), but even within this painting there are major compositional differences including the shape of Gabriel's hand and the location of the lilies. Due to the uniqueness of Caravaggio's image, a viewer of the painting is faced with significant exegetical challenges when attempting to find narrative purpose in Gabriel's interaction with Mary.

In addition to these issues of interpretation, there is no historical evidence that Caravaggio, his patron, or any advisors who may have participated in this exegesis, had any awareness of set stages of the Annunciation, like those proposed by Caraccioli and Marinoni. It cannot even be claimed that Caravaggio desired to create

²⁸³ Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 45; Wendy A. Stein. *How to Read Medieval Art* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 24; Jonathan Unglaub, "Caravaggio and the 'truth of pointing'," in *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions*, ed. Lorenzo Pericolo (London: Ashgate, 2014), 149-175.



Figure 13. Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli, *Annunciation*, 1555, oil on wood, 84.8x58.7cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437250>

a monoscenic image that attached itself to one single moment in the staged Annunciation narrative. But neither can it be claimed that Caravaggio wanted to create a polyscenic image, and by that I mean a scene depicting various parts of the narrative. This was a method used in the work of Nicholas Poussin, who often used the complementary method of pictorial narration to portray an advancing story in his paintings (see section b in Part 1). He did this by using space to distinguish different parts of the narrative, situating some figures closer to the picture plane and others far away to show temporal progression. Poussin focused on “creating illusionistic fields in which visual narrative could unfold and peopling them with figures whose references to the canon of past art were, like every other detail of his paintings, harnessed to a clear didactic exposition of the story.”²⁸⁴ In creating pockets of space where different parts of the narrative were unfolding simultaneously, Poussin created the type of image that unfolded the story, in unity with the process of the observer’s reading. While

²⁸⁴ Warwick, “Introduction,” 19.

this is possible in paintings that utilise large spatial fields and portray the full human form in order to inform the narrative, Caravaggio's religious paintings often make this impossible. Caravaggio's use of confined, dark spaces, paired with his half-figures, have from their creation been understood by critics to disqualify the potential for narrative temporality seen in polyscenic paintings.²⁸⁵ Davide Panagia writes, "Indeed, it's precisely the emphasis on the superficial space of the canvas that makes the hermeneutic depth of narrative unavailable."²⁸⁶ Thus the complementary mode of narrative telling is incompatible with the nature of Caravaggio's work as neither space, nor the entirety of the human form is given precedence. One of Caravaggio's contemporary critics, Francesco Albani (1578-1660), writes, "Come on! Since half-figures have no thighs, no legs, no draperies to reveal the painter's quality, how much he knows of perspective, who executed it, they are very disconnected."²⁸⁷ By avoiding the use of full figures, Albani considers there to be a disconnection between figure and action in Caravaggio's paintings. It is interesting to compare Caravaggio's *Annunciation* to Albani's own interpretation of the subject created for the altarpiece at the Saint Bartholomew in Bologna in 1635 (Fig. 14). Although Albani worked closely with the acclaimed Carracci family in their school and became one of their most distinguished representatives, his *Annunciation* received contemporary criticism based on the very nature of his pictorial narrative.²⁸⁸ He aimed to create a complementary image, absorbing several different moments from the Annunciation text. He writes about this image in his private writings and says:

To acknowledge his great mistress the angel ought to humiliate himself [bending] down to earth; I didn't make this angel at random, for his is an act of entering, and greeting, and of a profound reverence, so I showed him lingering on his wings, since he was sent supernaturally by God the Father as his ambassador.

²⁸⁵ See, for example, Caravaggio's *David with the Head of Goliath* (1610), *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* (1607), *Martha and Mary Magdalene* (1598), *The Taking of Christ* (1602), *The Denial of St Peter* (1610).

²⁸⁶ Davide Panagia, "The Effects of Viewing: Caravaggio, Bacon, and The Ring," *Theory & Event* 10, no. 4 (2007), accessed November 17, 2020, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/230146>.

²⁸⁷ Evelina Borea, "Bellori 1645: Una lettera a Francesco Albani e la biografia di Caravaggio," *Prespettiva* 100 (2000): 57-69, cited in Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 16.

²⁸⁸ Marta Cacho Casal, "Bologna alla stanza o in casa mia: Mobility and Shared Space in the Circle of Francesco Albani," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 19, no. 1 (2016): 41-62.



Figure 14. Francesco Albani, *Annunciation*, 1632, oil on canvas, 365x295cm. Santi Bartolomeo e Gaetano, Bologna. Source: http://baroqueart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=objekt;BAR;it;Mus12_D;6;en.

[Mary], who must have been reading Isaiah at that moment of the unfolding Incarnation [appears to be reading, and turning] upon seeing an angel aloft in human form entering the room, is upset, and sets out to protect the virginal purity she has determined to preserve forever.²⁸⁹

Albani reflects a desire to have the observer 'read' the narrative through his painting, isolating different moments in the image to create a chronological sequence. His biographer, Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616-1693), commends his visual construction of

²⁸⁹ Borea, "Bellori 1645," 57, cited in Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 31.

time, writing, “Is it not possible that Mary, upon the celestial messenger’s unexpected arrival in her secluded room, stood up swiftly, especially since she is depicted standing, holding the open book with one hand, while she uplifts the other with admiration, listening to the angel’s words.”²⁹⁰ Here Malvasia consolidates at least three stages of the Lukan text: entrance, conturbation, and humility, thus reinforcing the painting as a complementary image. While commended by Malvasia, and by Albani himself, it is debated whether the *Annunciation* is successful in its pictorial narrative, the image demanding excessive interpretative skills from its observers to narrate the story effectively.²⁹¹ What is evident, however, is that Albani appeals to the full length of his figures, set in a larger and brighter space, to catch the Virgin Mary and Angel Gabriel in a flurry of movement. It is the two components – bodies and action – that were considered the essential components for narrative telling in *istoria* paintings. Albani’s negative opinion of Caravaggio is preserved in his private writings, and when comparing his type of pictorial narrative to Caravaggio’s, it is clear to see why.

Criticism of Caravaggio’s *istoria* perpetuated into the recent centuries, with Louis Marin writing, “when it comes to the highest position in the hierarchy of genres of paintings – historical paintings – Caravaggio is a failure.”²⁹² Caravaggio’s paintings have been deemed ineffective because of their narrational inability, leading some to describe Caravaggio’s religious paintings as more still life than *istoria*.²⁹³ This is due to the method of his creations, which were focused entirely on copying from the stationary life models in his studio. The essence of Caravaggio’s style is his unmediated adherence to nature. This causes a dilemma in a subject like the Annunciation, which calls for the presence of an angel, a non-earthly being. Stephen Ostrow posits the question: “How can we reconcile [Caravaggio’s] devotion to painting only the *vero*, only what he could see, with his role as a painter of *istorie*, which called for the inclusion of angels?”²⁹⁴ Caravaggio sought little distinction between humans and angels. His angels appear as corporeal and *human* as any of his other subjects. In the

²⁹⁰ Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice: Vite de’ pittore bolognesi* (Bologna: Erededi D. Barbieri, 1678), 263, cited in Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 31.

²⁹¹ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 32.

²⁹² Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 150.

²⁹³ Jonathan Unlaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12.

²⁹⁴ Steven F. Ostrow. “Caravaggio’s Angels,” in *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions*, eds. Lorenzo Pericolo and David M. Stone (London: Routledge, 2014), 123-149.

Annunciation, apart from his wings, lilies, and position on the cloud, there is nothing angelic about Gabriel's form. He is dense and unspiritual. Caravaggio's naturalism thence seems so exaggerated that even heavenly subjects are minimised in their divinity to look like dress-up characters. This has led Roger Hinks to argue that for Caravaggio, "heaven did not exist: there was only the earth below."²⁹⁵ Caravaggio's only master was nature.²⁹⁶ His painting method involved the direct copying of motionless study models, the static type of which left no room for narrative progression in his *istoria*. Sixteenth-century painter and art historian Giovanni Baglione (1566-1643) wrote of this new phenomena,

According to some, Caravaggio is considered to have destroyed painting. Many young artists followed his example and painted heads from life, without studying the fundamentals of design ... satisfied merely with colours, consequently they do not know how to put two figures together, nor weave together a narrative.²⁹⁷

The failure to establish action between figures and to emphasise the difference between forms such as human and angelic, meant Caravaggio's construction of narrative was flawed. Pericolo writes, "all his detractors note that by no means can these aberrant, impaired and truncated bodies adapt to an *istoria*, the noblest and paramount genre of painting or, more properly, the quintessence of painting itself."²⁹⁸

If, based on these observations, Caravaggio's paintings cannot be interpreted as a narrative to be read, how do his paintings function for his viewer? When considering the *Annunciation*, it could be argued that the painting both contributes to and opposes the above criticisms. Unlike many of his religious paintings, Caravaggio's *Annunciation* does contain full length figures. Furthermore, the space, while still dark and restricted, is comparatively larger than that of his other works. Yet equipped with the knowledge of the wider body of Caravaggio's religious paintings and the contemporary criticism they received, the absence of temporal progression is still relevant to his *Annunciation*. The idea of religious subjects as still life objects in Caravaggio's *istoria* is identifiable

²⁹⁵ Roger Hinks, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 13.

²⁹⁶ Ostrow, "Caravaggio's Angels," 127.

²⁹⁷ Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti* (Rome: Fei, 1642), 138, trans. and cited in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 255.

²⁹⁸ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 4.

in his *Annunciation* by the essential motionless nature of this scene. Both Mary and Gabriel adopt gestures partially swathed by large quantities of fabric, so that any allusion to motion is impossible to ascertain.²⁹⁹ There is no way to determine if they have just adopted their positions, recently changed from a previous movement, or if they have been in this position for a considerable length of time – for example, the length of time required for Caravaggio to copy his life models. The absorbed state that Mary is in also makes connection between the painting and observer challenging. Michael Fried has written extensively about the impact of painted figures who are portrayed in an absorbed state, that being: “the depiction of figures so deeply engrossed in what they are doing, feeling, and thinking that they strike the viewer as wholly unaware of anything else, including the presence of the viewer before the painting.”³⁰⁰ Fried goes on to determine that *istoria* first formulated by Leon Battista Alberti was encouraged to have a “commentator” role; a person held in the painting who functioned as the bridge from the *istoria* to the observer:

Then, I like there to be someone in the ‘historia’ [a narrative or historical painting] who tells the spectators what is going on, and either beckons them with his hand to look, or with ferocious expression and forbidding glance challenges them not to come near, as if he wished their business to be secret, or points to some danger or remarkable thing in the picture, or by his gestures invites you to laugh or weep with them. Everything the people in the painting do among themselves, or perform in relation to the spectators, must fit together to represent and explain the ‘historia’.³⁰¹

This figure encouraged the observer to conduct appropriate reading and therefore ascertain suitable meaning from the history represented. In Annunciations, this figure may be either Mary or Gabriel, a donor, or even one or all of the angelic hosts that surround the interaction, like in many of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Annunciations. Yet in Caravaggio’s *Annunciation*, there is no indication of the process of reading recommended by figures in the painting. The covering of Gabriel’s face by his right arm means it is unusable as a form of narrative suggestion. Paired with the absorbed disposition of the “masklike” Mary, who is so internally transfixed

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 84.

³⁰⁰ Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 71.

³⁰¹ Alberti, *On Painting*, 77-8.

that she appears oblivious to her surroundings, and we find a composition that is pragmatically unreadable.³⁰² The immobility of the painting, paired with the ambiguous gesture executed by the angel, means the object can neither be described as monoscenic or polyscenic in its construction of a narrative.

Rather than making any further attempts to render temporal significance in Caravaggio's *istoria*, it would be more appropriate to see in his paintings the instantaneity of a new type of *istoria*. In other words, Caravaggio constructed images that were held in the perpetual present: "Caravaggio's painting collapses temporality by reducing it to the petrifying instant of the ineffable representation: the tremendous yet wonderful unveiling of fiction fictiveness as it dawns upon the viewer's astonished mind."³⁰³ Caravaggio's *istoria* did not convey a *narrative* as much as the frozen time and action of an iconic moment.³⁰⁴ The stories did not progress, they remained in the instantaneous moment in which the still life objects were painted. His paintings retained the "palpable presence of the model, or, in some cases, the artist himself [in self-portraits] as if reflections on a mirror."³⁰⁵ To reiterate an early point, Caravaggio's paintings are not of a narrative history, but a static moment in the *performance* of a history. A modern interpretation of this idea is found in the 'Living Paintings' portion of the *Beyond Caravaggio* exhibition at the National Gallery, London, in 2016, which had actors reenact some of Caravaggio's paintings including *The Taking of Christ* (1602) (Fig. 15 and 16). The decision of the exhibition co-ordinators to have these actors stand motionless as opposed to acting out the narrative acts as a sophisticated reversal of the paintings' creation process, as if the actors themselves were the still life models of Caravaggio's time.³⁰⁶

Caravaggio's religious paintings created staged interpretations of their *istoria*, the effect of which was largely considered unsuccessful by his contemporaries. The artist subverted temporality by avoiding the perpetuation of a chronological narrative and instead emphasised a static stillness from his figures. His *Annunciation*, as an example

³⁰² Robb, *M: The Man Who Became Caravaggio*, 426; Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 76.

³⁰³ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 6.

³⁰⁴ Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 106.

³⁰⁵ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 6; Warwick, "Introduction," 18.

³⁰⁶ "Living Paintings | Beyond Caravaggio | National Gallery," The National Gallery, accessed November 17, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkZjrGR2p_E



Figure 15. "Living Painting," Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ*, The National Gallery, 2016. Source: <https://www.radioactivepr.com/national-gallery-radioactive-pr-agency/>.<https://www.radioactivepr.com/national-gallery-radioactive-pr-agency/>



Figure 16. Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, 1602, oil on canvas, 133.5x169.5cm. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

of this method, demonstrates an atemporal moment, catching his observer in the perpetual present in which it was created. This could certainly be considered ineffective if we were to try to read the painting as a representation of a specific moment in the biblical narrative (monoscenic), or even a combination of several moments from the text (polyscenic). Yet I argue that the Annunciation could be determined as the most suitable religious theme for Caravaggio's type of *istoria*. The essential timelessness of the Annunciation moment, brought forth by the coming of one of God's emissaries, had the temporal world intersected by the atemporal. Georges Didi-Huberman writes,

More than a moment in history [...] the Annunciation bears within it the virtual present of the mystery that gives it meaning: the instant of Incarnation produces a temporality that is utterly without verisimilitude, utterly inconceivable. It is the temporality of an *ineffabilis assumptio*, a body that is formed but outside any order of succession – a challenge, therefore, to any “natural” or physical notion of generation, of movements, of continuity, and of duration. [...] It is produced invisibly in Mary's womb, indivisibly, outside any historical law; we thus understand how a “linear” notion of the present moment is radically overturned and superceded.³⁰⁷

The Annunciation challenges progressive, earthly temporality and points to a different type of time. In some ways, Caravaggio's *Annunciation* highlights some of the inconfigurability of the Annunciation temporality. Marin writes the following regarding paintings of the Annunciation: “But how is one to recount the monstration of infinite distance and immediate proximity, of transcendental remoteness and the most intimate penetration, accomplished by paintings that at their surface represent the Annunciation?”³⁰⁸ Ironically this is the same scholar who writes that Caravaggio is a failure based on his inability to tell a story.³⁰⁹ I would argue that Caravaggio's painting, by the very nature of the artist's ‘failure’ to create a *istoria*, contributes a convincing idealization of Annunciation temporality. It functions as both infinitely distant in its lack of commentator between subject and observer, and immediately close in being the tangible reflection of the model it represents. Although Marin does not connect

³⁰⁷ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 124.

³⁰⁸ Marin, “Stating a Mysterious Figure,” 48

³⁰⁹ Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, 150.

Caravaggio's painting to his observations on the subverted temporality of the Annunciation, I would argue that connection can be drawn. When interpreted through the contextual lens of Counter-Reformation ideology, the Annunciation was far more than a *istoria*: it was the narrative site of the founding mystery of the faith: the Incarnation. Pericolo writes of Mary's gesture, she is, "grasping her body as though in that moment she were truly feeling the inexpressible pleasure of the ongoing mystery."³¹⁰ This "ongoing mystery" points to the Incarnation, an event that carved a new form of temporality into the life of Mary and thus into the earthly sphere. The new type of *istoria* introduced by Caravaggio was, therefore, an entirely suitable form of representation for the Annunciation text, which is simultaneously a historical narrative and an eternal mystery.

3.4. Conclusion

Modern scholarship may well have dismissed Caravaggio's *Annunciation* from both the study of Annunciation iconography and the study of the artist, but this image contains valuable evidence contributable to both areas. The style of the *Annunciation* - distinctly un-heavenised and overtly naturalistic - is a stark contrast to other paintings of the same subject from the same period. In addition, the *Annunciation* creates important discussion around Caravaggio's atemporal pictorial narrative. *Istoria* was the essential mode for the representation of religious narratives in the Counter-Reformation context and Caravaggio's seeming failure to create such compositions led some early modern, and contemporary, critics to dismiss him as a painter of histories. His *Annunciation* justifies the views of those critics who argued that his use of confined space and unmediated copying of life models meant narrative sequence was unattainable, but I argue that the *Annunciation* emphasises the effectiveness of such a structure when paired with the right sacred theme. Caravaggio's painting has drawn out the essential immutability of the Annunciation, in other words the innate disrupted temporality that exists within the narrative itself. This chapter has indicated that the method of visual exegesis employed by Caravaggio intimates something of the subject's mystery. The lack of sequential temporality makes Caravaggio's *Annunciation* narrative impenetrable, but what it retains is an explication of the fundamental mystery of the Incarnation doctrine.

³¹⁰ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 85.

4. Chapter 4. Annunciation as fulfilment of narrative: Federico Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets (1565)*

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 examined how the Annunciation narrative was translated into an image by Caravaggio and the effect that this translation had on the pictorial narrative and temporality. The following sections continue to address this issue by focussing on two other Annunciation altarpieces created during the period of Counter-Reform. This chapter analyses Federico Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets (1565)* (Fig. 17), which was the high altarpiece for the now-destroyed Church of the Annunciation in Rome. Alongside the central motif of the interaction between the Virgin Mary and Angel Gabriel, Zuccaro's fresco includes prophets from the Old Testament. In doing so, it promotes a typological framing of the Annunciation; typology being the concept that prophecies in the Hebrew Bible anticipated New Testament events. Due to this combination of narrative and prophecy, the fresco frames the Annunciation through a temporally complex lens that sees it as the fulfilment of the biblical texts it references. While bringing to mind the atemporality of the Annunciation as in Caravaggio's image, this fresco maintains its own distinctive representation of the story's pictorial narrative.

Similar to the first case study, I identify Zuccaro's *Annunciation* as being vastly understudied in scholarship, despite its exceptionally important role in the original setting. I anticipate that this lacuna is largely due to the painting's destruction in 1650, which has meant only the fragment of Mary Annunciate's head remains. In its original state, Zuccaro's *Annunciation* held the exceptional title as being the first recorded Jesuit painting commission in Rome.³¹¹ The image was commissioned as the central altarpiece for the Church of the Annunciation, the first permanent church built by and for the Jesuit order. Formally established in 1540 under the leadership of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the Order of the Jesuits has been heralded the "finest expression" of Counter-Reformation initiatives.³¹² A primary example of this is in their prioritization

³¹¹ Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome 1565-1610* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 115.

³¹² Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of the Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), unpaginated, accessed November 24, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Turning_Points/7rJvhpg0S9sC?hl=en&gbpv=0



Figure 17. Cornelis Cort after Federico Zuccaro, *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets*, 1571, engraving, 48.1 x 68.0cm. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

of the utility of the visual arts in the didactic and spiritual formation of the Church and its overseas mission; a position codified in the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent.³¹³ The Jesuits' patronage of the visual arts is found throughout Rome's churches and institutions, but the most influential of the early Jesuit art in the city was that which decorated the Jesuit collegiate institutions.³¹⁴ Zuccaro's painting was one such image, contained in the Church of the Annunciation, which itself was contained in the *Collegio Romano*. In 1580, Roman publisher Girolamo Francini wrote of the Church,

[T]he main [altar] has a vaulted tribune where there are painted the Annunciation, some prophets, Choirs of Angels, God the Father above, with great variety and artifice, made according to the design and work of Federico Zuccaro, excellent painter; the other

³¹³ Gauvin Alexander Bailey, "Le style jésuit n'existe pas": Jesuit Corporate Culture and Visual Arts," in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540-1773*, eds. John O'Malley et al (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 38-89.

³¹⁴ Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*, 107.

[altars] have their paintings made by different masters, namely the Crucifixion, the Madonna, St Sebastian, and St Francis.”³¹⁵

Zuccaro’s *Annunciation* stood as the central altarpiece between motifs of Christ and the saints, and lasted in this church until it was destroyed and replaced in the seventeenth century by the vast church dedicated to St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), which is still in place today.

Information concerning both the painting and its original setting is minimal due to these circumstances. An additional challenge with this analysis, in contrast to that on Caravaggio’s *Annunciation*, is the lack of scholarship concerning the artist themselves. In the previous example, there was no shortage of literature surrounding the artist, the attraction of Caravaggio’s “bad-boy” personal biography allowing unique dialogues between his personal life and his paintings.³¹⁶ The “Caravaggiomania” that characterises so much of the art-historical reflection of this age means a painter like Zuccaro is often overshadowed.³¹⁷ This is remarkable given the role he had during the late sixteenth century; recall that we were first introduced to this figure in Chapter 2 as the founder and first director of the Accademia di San Luca, Rome, in 1593. Zuccaro therefore occupied a major role in Rome’s evolving art scene. On the painter’s fame among his contemporaries, Julian Brooks writes, “For the last quarter of the sixteenth century, Federico was probably the most famous artist in Europe, traveling widely and working for Queen Elizabeth I in England, King Philip II in Spain, and almost every significant court and city in Italy.”³¹⁸ His contemporary reputation is ill-reflected by the minor role his historiography plays in the modern study of Counter-Reformation art. What is known of Federico Zuccaro is that he was born in Vado in 1541, in the Marche region of Italy, and was the younger brother of Taddeo Zuccaro (1529-1566). Both men were artists who worked in Rome for some of their careers, with Federico beginning his career as his brother’s assistant. By the 1560s Federico was receiving his own commissions across Italy, including scenes from the Life of Moses in the

³¹⁵ Girolamo Francini, *Le cose maravigliose dell’alma citta di Rome* (Rome: Fei, 1580), 71, trans. and cited in Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*, 116.

³¹⁶ Spear, “Caravaggiomania.”

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Julian Brooks, *Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro: Artist-brothers in Renaissance Rome* (London: Getty, 2007), x.

Vatican and frescoes in the Grimani Chapel in S. Francesco della Vigna, Venice.³¹⁹ The *Annunciation* for the new Jesuit church in Rome was another major commission for the artist in this decade. The scale and purpose of the work would have been hugely significant in this early stage in Zuccaro's career, although little has been written about the commission or its importance.

With regards to the specific context of the painting, it is therefore necessary to consider the significance of its physical environment. The *Collegio Romano* that housed the Church of the Annunciation was opened in 1552 for the teaching of theology and philosophy, and soon after its opening received university status.³²⁰ The Church of the Annunciation, built for the use of the college's students, was "hopelessly undersized," and featured an apse which held *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets* and four shallow side chapels on each side, in total filling a space of 74.25ft by 41.5ft.³²¹ The replacement, the Church of Saint Ignatius, by comparison measured 300ft by 160ft. The destruction of the Church of the Annunciation and the inevitable loss of Zuccaro's altarpiece have disguised the importance of the *Annunciation* for its context. Zuccaro's fresco presided in central position in the Jesuit's first ecclesiastic home in Rome, and demonstrates how integral the narrative of the Annunciation was to Counter-Reformation visual culture. Through a sophisticated exegesis of the theme, the young Zuccaro created an image that contained major elements of the reformed Catholic belief system. One of these central features is the theme of typology, and the idealization of the Annunciation as a fulfilment of Christian pretexts. As I will demonstrate, the use of this type of visual biblical interpretation has a significant impact on the image's pictorial narrative and, subsequently, its temporal logic.

4.2. Iconographic analysis

The primary interest of this chapter is the fresco created by Federico Zuccaro for the Church of the Annunciation in Rome in the sixteenth century. In order to analyse this object, however, we must engage with a different visual object that possesses its own

³¹⁹ James Mundy, "Additions to and Observations on Federico Zuccaro's Drawings from the Critical 1560s," *Master Drawings* 43, no. 2 (2005): 160-85.

³²⁰ John W. O'Malley, "How the First Jesuits Became Involved in Education," in *The Jesuit Ration Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 56-74; Aldo Scaglione, *The Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1986), 81.

³²¹ Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*, 116.

specific exegetical issues and relationship to cultural context. As the opportunity for direct analysis is annulled, I use for this analysis a copy of the painting, an engraving by Cornelis Cort (1533-1578) dating to 1571. Cort was a Dutch engraver and etcher who moved to Italy in the late stages of his career and became highly influential in Rome, where he founded an engraving school.³²² The use of the printing press during the Counter-Reformation, which allowed engravings to be produced en masse, has, until recently, been overshadowed by the examination of its use in the Protestant Reformation. Yet its use in Catholic propaganda demonstrates a persuasion for the medium that is every bit as great as Protestantism.³²³ By the end of the sixteenth century, Rome had become the centre for printmaking in Italy, and Cort fronted the production of a huge number of engraved copies of Italy's great paintings that could be disseminated at a low cost across Italy and beyond.³²⁴ The medium was a way to broaden the spectrum of viewers who could witness images - like altarpieces - that were ordinarily situated in their confined ritual context.³²⁵ Though there is insufficient evidence to identify the specific audience who received and viewed Cort's engraving of the *Annunciation Broadcast By Prophets*, as a Jesuit image it may have been used as a polemical device in overseas missionary activities.³²⁶ The combination of text and image that Zuccaro's altarpiece contained provided a visual and textual rhetoric for Cort's engraving that absorbed the didactic abilities of both modes, as found in the propagandistic material produced by both sides of the European Reformations.³²⁷

³²² Ruth S. Noyes, "'One of those Lutherans we used to burn in Campo de' Fiori': Engraving Sublimated Suffering in Counter-Reformation Rome," in *Visualizing Sensuous Suffering and Affective Pain in Early Modern Europe and the Spanish Americas*, eds. Heather Graham and Lauren G. Kilroy-Ewbank (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 116-167.

³²³ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Andrew Pettegree, "Catholic Pamphleteering," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, eds. Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven (London: Ashgate, 2013), 109-126; Miriam Usher Chrisman, "From Polemic to Propaganda: The Development of Mass Persuasion in the Late Sixteenth Century," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 73 (1982): 175-196.

³²⁴ Andrew R. Casper, "Display and Devotion: Exhibiting Icons and Their Copies in Counter-Reformation Italy," in *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler (Leiden: Brill 2012), 43-62; Gert Jan van der Sman, "Dutch and Flemish Printmakers in Rome 1565-1600," *Print Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2005): 251-264.

³²⁵ David Freedberg, "Painting and the Counter-Reformation in the Age of Rubens," in *The Age of Rubens*, ed. Peter C. Sutton (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1993), 131-145.

³²⁶ Kirstin Noreen, "Ecclesiae Militantis Triumph: Jesuit Iconography and the Counter-Reformation," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 3 (1998): 689-715.

³²⁷ Walter Melion, "Religious Plurality in Karel van Mander's *The Nativity Broadcast by Prophets of the Incarnation of 1588*," in *Illustrated Religious Texts in the North of Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Feike Dietz, Adam Morton, and Lien Roggen (London: Routledge, 2016), 77-112. Van Mander's *Nativity* uses Cornelis Cort's print as a prototype.



Figure 18. Titian, *Annunciation*, 1564, oil on canvas, 410x240cm. San Salvatore, Venice. Wikimedia Commons.. Source: Public Domain.



Figure 19. Cornelis Cort after Titian, *Annunciation*, 1566, engraving, 41.1x27.8cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

During his time in Italy, Cort maintained particularly close connections to Zuccaro, and to Titian in Venice, for whom he created a series of engravings, including an image of Titian's *Annunciation* for the San Salvatore Church (Fig. 18 and Fig. 19).³²⁸ The comparison between the painting and Cort's engraving indicates the different aesthetic principles of the two modes of representation. The painting is characteristic of Titian's late Venetian manner, with its flurried, imprecise brushstrokes emphasising colour and tonality over exact form.³²⁹ Contrastingly, Cort's engraving of Titian's *Annunciation* follows a "precise linear ductus and a more legible pictorial structure."³³⁰ When approaching Cort's engraving of Zuccaro's *Annunciation*, the same differences are

³²⁸ Richard G. Parker, "Academy of Fine Arts: Print from a copper engraving. 1578, by Cornelius Cort after a drawing by Jan Van Der Straet, 1573," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 38, no. 1 (1983): 76-77.

³²⁹ Stephen J. Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 265; Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 162.

³³⁰ Campbell, *The Endless Periphery*, 265.

anticipated and worth considering. Etched mark-making produces distinct and definite lines that are successful in defining the overall composition of the original, but simultaneously limited in their inability to convey the subtlety of painted movements. For this analysis, the inherent limitations of engraved reproductions of paintings is not insurmountable, as the engraved copy retains the exegetical decisions relating to the biblical texts and their visual reception that are the primary stimuli for this analysis.³³¹ Additionally, Cort's engraving is corroborated by the textual description of the original image by Girolama Francini (see section 4.1), and painter, architect and writer, Giorgio Vasari: "[Zuccaro] made a choir of many angels and various splendours, with God the Father who sends the Holy Spirit above the Madonna, while she is given the annunciation by the Angel Gabriel, and placed in the middle of six prophets, larger than life and very beautiful."³³² Although but a brief description, Vasari constructs the same type of composition, thus validating Zuccaro's image engraved by Cort.

Beginning in the same place as Vasari, in what would have been the dome of the tribune vault, we see through Cort's engraving that Zuccaro painted a hoard of angels and heavenly beings (Fig. 20). The group seems to have gravitated towards the centre of the upper semi-circle, where God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit reside. A dense group of angels kneeling on clouds create a clear divide between the domed area and the rest of the image, marking the heavenly and earthly spheres. Vasari's description of the angelic host is accurate, it is "a choir of many angels and various splendours." The angels in this scene are not all directing their attention to one place, nor are they doing the same thing: some - such as the central angel to the left of the dove - seem to look down on the narrative unfolding below, others - angel on the right side playing a stringed instrument - look towards God the Father in worship. They are varied and independent, each initiating an individual response to the events they are witnessing. God the Father is stationed at the top and centre of the dome. He holds an orb in his left hand, and lifts his right hand up towards the sky. The gesture he executes could be interpreted in various ways; the hand may be inviting the observer

³³¹ It is, however, worth considering that there may be details added to the composition in Cort's engraving, particularly the textual references situated on the periphery of the central image. See Walter Melion, "Introduction: Scriptural Authority in Word and Image," in *The Authority in Word and Image*, eds. Celeste Brusati Karl A. E. Emenkel and Walter Melion (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1-46.

³³² Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori* (Florence: Sansoni, 1881), 102, cited in Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*, 116.



Figure 20. Cort after Zuccaro, *The Annunciation Broadcast By Prophets*, 1571. Detail of God the Father with angels, adapted from Figure 17.

to participate in the witness of the angels who surround him. Alternatively, his gesture may signal to the sending out of the Holy Spirit, which is visualised directly below him as a dove.

At the centre of the lower tier of figures is the Virgin Mary, seated on the left, and the Angel Gabriel, seated on the right (Fig. 21). The light from the heavenly sphere is funnelled into the lower area of the image and illuminates the interaction; an interaction that Viladesau describes as “the primary visual symbol of the Annunciation [...]: a gesture of speech by the angel and a gesture of response by Mary.”³³³ When focusing solely on this area of *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets*, the Annunciation narrative is clearly shown in this way. The angel kneels towards Mary, gesturing upwards to the source of the heavenly light, and holds in his left hand an exceptionally large stem of lilies. He looks directly at Mary, who in response, looks down at her lectern, hand on her chest in a display of humility. The interpretation of the interaction is comparable to a number of contemporary Annunciations, including that by Giorgio Vasari (1564) (Fig. 22), Agostino Carracci (1580) (Fig. 23) and Ludovico Carracci (1584) (Fig. 24), where Gabriel is also depicted in a kneeling position as a gesture of

³³³ Viladesau, “The Annunciation,” 76.



Figure 21. Cort after Zuccaro, *The Annunciation Broadcast By Prophets*, 1571. Detail of Virgin Mary and Angel Gabriel, adapted from Figure 17.

humility. The action of Gabriel kneeling intensifies his subservience to Mary, leading the viewer by his movement to contemplate the superiority of the Virgin Mary, which was a key objective for Counter-Reformation visual culture.³³⁴ It is undeniable, however, that the Annunciation moment captured at the centre of Zuccaro's *Annunciation* was swamped by the surrounding events. An early modern reception of Cort's engraving of Zuccaro's image is found in the writings of English artist Jonathan Richardson (1667-1745). He writes in 1725 that "the Angel, and Virgin have nothing particularly remarkable; but Above is God the Father, and the Holy Dove with a Vast Heaven where are Innumerable Angels Adoring, Rejoycing."³³⁵ He identifies the heavenly apparition visualised by Zuccaro and engraved by Cort as an example of the "sublime," with its revelation of "eternity and infinitude."³³⁶ Richardson articulates the view that the one-on-one dialogue in the biblical Annunciation is therefore lost in the midst of this distracting splendour.

³³⁴ Donna Pierce, Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, and Clara Bargellini, *Painting a New World: Mexican Art and Life, 1521-1821*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 135.

³³⁵ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London: A & C Black, 1725), 255.

³³⁶ Lydia Hamlett, "The Longinian Sublime, Effect and Affect in 'Baroque' British Visual Culture," in *Translations of the Sublime*, ed. Caroline van Eck (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 187-220.



Figure 22. Giorgio Vasari, *Annunciation*, 1563, oil on panel, 216x166cm. Louvre Museum, Paris. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 23. Agostino Carracci, *Annunciation*, 1590, oil on canvas, 48x35cm. Louvre Gallery, Paris. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 24. Ludovico Carracci, *Annunciation*, 1583, oil on canvas. Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, Bologna. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 25. Cort after Zuccaro, *The Annunciation Broadcast By Prophets*, 1571. Detail of Moses, Isaiah and David, adapted from Figure 14.



Figure 26. Cort after Zuccaro, *The Annunciation Broadcast By Prophets*, 1571. Detail of Solomon, Jeremiah and Haggai, adapted from Figure 14.

The other figures on this lower tier are organised into two groups, one to the left of the Virgin Mary and one to the right of the Angel Gabriel (Fig. 25 and 26). The groups consist of three men who each hold a large plaque with inscribed text. The six figures are different prophets from the Hebrew Bible, who each hold a text associated with their prophecies. From the left these figures and their accompanying texts are: (1) Moses, Deut. 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren”; (2) Isaiah, Isa. 7:14, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son”; (3) David, Ps. 132:11, “of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon they throne”; (4) Solomon, Song 5:1, “Let my beloved come into his garden”; (5) Jeremiah, Jer. 31:22, “For the Lord has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encompasses a man,” and finally on the far right, (6) Haggai, Hag. 2.7-8, “Yet one little while [...] and the desired of all nations shall come forth.”³³⁷ Zuccaro expands his Annunciation from the narrative in Luke to incorporate a number of prophets and texts believed to foretell the event. Unlike the angels who look intently towards either God the Father or the Annunciation event itself, all bar two of the prophets gaze towards the beholder and most indicate either towards themselves or their texts. Through their gestures, the

³³⁷ Specific translations of these texts are taken from Melion, “Introduction,” 19, to ensure accuracy.

figures function as commentators to the narrative, inviting the beholder to read and interpret the pictorial narrative through their direction.³³⁸ The second step in the analysis will use these six prophets - or commentators - to explore the purpose of Zuccaro's visual exegesis and his method of biblical interpretation.

4.3. Context and the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality

The decision of a main sect of Counter-Reformation initiative to dedicate their first ecclesiastic space to the Annunciation to Mary contributes to part of the rationale of this thesis, which identifies the dominant and varied use of Annunciations in churches built or redecorated in the late sixteenth century. It cannot be denied that the growth in the cult of the Virgin Mary saw a correlating increase in Catholic-specific doctrinal themes, such as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Virgin.³³⁹ These ideas lifted the Virgin Mary to a new level of superiority and quasi-divinity, which was a central aim in the Counter-Reformation movement due to her minimization in Protestant theology and visual culture. Yet, as this thesis argues, the Annunciation narrative remained prevalent and its visual exegesis became aligned to Counter-Reformation objectives. Zuccaro's *Annunciation* is not an exception, as it feeds into the Counter-Reformation stereotype of presenting a heavenised interpretation of the biblical text (see Part 3).³⁴⁰ Zuccaro's image amalgamates the two spaces of heaven and earth, and draws on heavenised imagery of angels, prophets, and God the father. His visual exegesis of the Annunciation was also united to Counter-Reformation ideology in its appeal to typology, that being a method in biblical interpretation that focusses on "the connections between persons, events, or objects in the Old Testament, and persons, events, or objects in the New Testament."³⁴¹ Typological exegesis was not an innovation of the Counter-Reformation, but it certainly experienced a revival in this period.³⁴² There is endorsement for it in the fourth session of the Council of Trent, in reference to the issue of biblical canon and interpretation:

³³⁸ This commentator role was missing in Caravaggio's *Annunciation* in Chapter 3, section 3.3. See Alberti, *On Painting*, 63.

³³⁹ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 121.

³⁴⁰ Viladesau, "The Annunciation," 76; Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 122.

³⁴¹ Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 86.

³⁴² Anna C. Knaap, "Meditation, Ministry, and Visual Rhetoric in Peter Paul Rubens' Program for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp," in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley et al (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 157-181.

The holy ecumenical and general council of Trent, lawfully assembled in the holy Spirit, with the same three legates of the apostolic see presiding, keeps ever before its eyes this purpose: that the purity of the gospel, purged of all errors, may be preserved in the church. Our lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first proclaimed with his own lips this gospel, which had in the past been promised by the prophets in the sacred scriptures; then he bade it be preached to every creature through his apostles as the source of the whole truth of salvation and rule of conduct.³⁴³

The key phrase that underscores the Church's use of typological biblical exegesis is, "[the] (Gospel), before promised through the prophets in the holy Scriptures." Later on in the text it states that the Church, "accepts and venerates with a like feeling of piety and reverence all the books of both the old and the new Testament, since the one God is the author of both."³⁴⁴ There is the understanding of unity and continuation from the Old Testament into the New Testament. Both bodies of text are rededicated as equally important, but it is clear that the Council believed the prophecies of the Old Testament looked forward to the New Testament for their fulfilment. This view set the standard for the method of Counter-Reformation biblical interpretation, and permeated the treatment of biblical texts in the visual arts.³⁴⁵ The Jesuits clung to this method with particular intensity, using the idea of 'type' and 'antitype' to formulate the way the Old Testament and New Testament interacted.³⁴⁶ This is evidenced in Zuccaro's fresco in the Jesuit motherhouse in Rome, where the use of Hebrew prophecies point to where their text is fulfilled in the New Testament. This a particularly sophisticated use of the polyscenic method of representation, with each figure and text alluding to the Annunciation or the Incarnation respectively. The coalescing of these two terms earlier identified in this thesis is essential for understanding the painting accurately. Some of the prophecies seem to foretell the Annunciation as a story, as the event that a Virgin became pregnant with a son, while others associate on a deeper theological level to the Incarnation, where God, through royal human lineage, became man through Christ. In continuation of earlier Catholic ideology, the Counter-Reformers understood

³⁴³ Council of Trent, "First decree," 663.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Knaap, "Meditation, Ministry, and Visual Rhetoric," 161.

³⁴⁶ Anna C. Knaap, "Seeing in sequence: Peter Paul Rubens' ceiling cycle at the Jesuit church in Antwerp," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 55 (2004): 155-195.

that these two concepts - Annunciation and Incarnation - were interlocked (see 1.2.2.). The Annunciation was the narrative expression of the Incarnation doctrine.³⁴⁷

Some of the Old Testament prophecies cited in Zuccaro's image are thus viewing the Annunciation through this Incarnational framework. The decision to cite these specific prophecies is believed to have been inspired by the *Glossa Ordinaria*, a full Latin Bible with accompanying "'ordinary gloss', i.e., an accepted gloss – marginal and interlinear – on the Latin text."³⁴⁸ This text was a compilation of the biblical exegesis of Church Fathers and early medieval theologians, and had been in production for several centuries before it was published at the end of the fifteenth century.³⁴⁹ A central characteristic of the *Glossa* was typology, which in practice looked like the cross-referencing of New Testament texts to Old Testament texts to create a sense of fulfilment and succession in Christian narratives. Walter Melion writes concerning Zuccaro's painting, "The *Glossa* alone [...] is the exegetical source for the inventive linking of these prophecies to each other and to the Annunciation."³⁵⁰ This is plausible given that the *Glossa* had a significant afterlife in the Counter-Reformation particularly among the Jesuits, who had it reprinted and put to use as an intentionally polemical object.³⁵¹ The text had long been the most formative typological text in Catholicism and was used in issues of interpretation, as a way of ascertaining the established exegetical opinion of the Church.³⁵² In Zuccaro's image, which Melion argues was based on the *Glossa*, the observer enters into the Annunciation narrative through the lens of the prophecies of the earlier biblical figures.

Working through the prophets in the order of left to right as seen in Cort's engraving, Moses' prophecy – "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren" - is a reference to both himself and Christ. His self-referential indication, by that I mean his hand gesture to his breast, whilst positioning

³⁴⁷ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 82.

³⁴⁸ David A. Solomon, *An Introduction to the 'Glossa Ordinaria' as Medieval Hypertext* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 1.

³⁴⁹ Knaap, "Seeing in sequence," 155.

³⁵⁰ Melion, "Introduction," 13.

³⁵¹ Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 4; Lesley Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 238.

³⁵² Frederick J. McGinness, *Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 46.

the plaque towards the Virgin Mary who was to bear Christ, demonstrates a continuation in Moses' ministry into that of Christ.³⁵³ The typological relationship between Moses and Christ had been a prominent theme in Rome, evidenced in the decorations of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican, from the late fifteenth century (Fig. 27 and 28). In the chapel, the visual theological scheme is the mirroring of Moses' life to Christ's on the opposing north and south walls.³⁵⁴ These paintings forecast the exegetical lens through which the Old and New Testaments would be interpreted in the turbulent sixteenth century, like we see in Zuccaro's now-destroyed painting.³⁵⁵ Moving to the right of the image and we find the Isaiah 7:14 text, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." This is perhaps the most common typological interpretation of the Annunciation since the time of the early Church fathers, and features in textual and visual objects of the Counter-Reformation period; Chapter 4 will focus on this specific reference more closely in the analysis on Durante Alberti's *Annunciation* (1588) at the Santa Maria ai Monti in Rome, which had a specific aim for the use of typology for its contemporary audience of Jewish converts. In front and to the right of Isaiah is David and his text, "of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon thy throne." In a similar way to the Moses reference, this text alludes to the outcome of the Annunciation, that being the birth of God incarnate. The full verse of Psalm 132:11 is, "The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne." The promise of God to David is read typologically to refer to Christ. This interpretation is stipulated by the text in Luke 1:27 that reads, "a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary." The inclusion of this text in the *Glossa*, and subsequently in Zuccaro and Cort's images, highlights the lineage of Christ through the Davidic line, which included Joseph whom Mary was betrothed to.

³⁵³ Melion, "Introduction," 14.

³⁵⁴ See, for example, Giovanni Careri, "Typology at its Limits: Visual Exegesis and Eschatology in the Sistine Chapel," in *Imago Exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments, 1400-1700*, ed. Walter Melion, James Clifton and Michel Weemans (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 73-87.

³⁵⁵ David Lyle Jeffrey, "The Hebrew Bible in art and literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, eds. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 426-446.



Figure 27. Cosimo Rosselli and workshop, *Descent from Mount Sinai*, 1481-2, fresco, 350x572cm. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 28. Cosimo Roselli and workshop, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 1481-2, fresco, 349x570cm. Sistine Chapel, Vatican. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

To the right-hand side of the Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel are the second group of prophets. The closest to Gabriel is Solomon. The text he holds is “Let my beloved come into his garden,” a reference from Song of Songs. Trent Pomplun refers to this book as “a particularly fertile field for Marian cultivation”; a particularly apt statement in relation to the imagery around the Annunciation.³⁵⁶ A popular iconographic trend developed in fourteenth-century art and literature that portrayed the Annunciation

³⁵⁶ Trent Pomplun, “Mary,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, eds. James J. Buckley, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt and Trent Pomplun (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 312-325.

taking place in a *hortus conclusus* (an enclosed garden).³⁵⁷ This term itself derives from the hermeneutic of Song of Song 4:12, “A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed.” This is meaningful to the virginal state of Mary at the time of the Annunciation event. Song of Songs 4:16 goes on to state, “Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits.” This is an invitation for God through Christ to enter the garden, a typological term for the womb of Mary.

To the right of Solomon sits Jeremiah, in the same position as Isaiah in the left group. His text reads, “for the Lord has created a new thing on earth: a woman encompasses a man.” This text functions as an image both for the Annunciation narrative and the Incarnation mystery. The matter of a woman encompassing a man tells the narration of Mary bearing a son, (Lk 1:31, “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son”), and the “new thing on earth” refers to the nature of this son, a son not born through sexual encounter, but by the Holy Spirit through a virgin. The final prophet, Haggai, sits in front and to the right of Jeremiah. The conversation that is being had between Jeremiah and Haggai is understandable given the similarity of their respective prophecies: “the two prophets are seen to converse because both their prophecies have to do with the founding of the universal Church made possible by the longed-for advent of Christ.”³⁵⁸ Like Jeremiah, Haggai anticipates the newness of the event being inaugurated at the centre of the image. The full version of Haggai 2:6-8 reads, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendour.”” The advent of a new occasion on earth is foreseen in this text. Corresponding with the writings of the *Glossa* and including it in proximity to the Annunciation narrative, the Haggai text demonstrates that this event projected in Hebrew scriptures is that of God entering the world through Christ. The union of the heavenly and earthly spheres that is displayed in the image reflects this last text. The Annunciation event is posited as one of cosmic significance in that it surpasses being a narrative history to it being an event that ushered the non-earthly – the presence of God through Christ – into an earthly site.

³⁵⁷ Stephen E. Miller, *The Word made Visible in the Painter Image: Perspective, Proportion, Witness and Threshold in Italian Renaissance Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 47.

³⁵⁸ Melion, “Introduction,” 14.

The typological expansion of Zuccaro's pictorial narrative to include these prophets has a significant effect on the temporality of the Annunciation story. While Caravaggio's *Annunciation* was essentially atemporal as it held an immediacy with its observer due to its dramatic use of naturalism, Zuccaro constructed an image that consciously amalgamated various types of temporality. The artist did this by expanding the subject of the image from the Lukan narrative concerning Mary and Gabriel to a cosmic event foretold and anticipated in various temporal states. The prophets who sit on either side of Mary and Gabriel occupy a much earlier date in biblical history. These men, as their respective texts demonstrate, foretold the Incarnation. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible "compressed great events into a brief space of time, brought momentous movements close together in a temporal sense, and took them in at a single glance."³⁵⁹ The prophets visualised in Zuccaro's image do just this, as they witness in a single glimpse the "momentous movements" of their prophecies. The temporal shift that is activated in Zuccaro's image by the inclusion of the prophets is meaningful from a biblical perspective. The image has amalgamated a narrative with prophecy; these are identified as two of the different literary genres found in the Bible. Mi-Rang Kang writes:

- (1) Prophecy. In prophecy, revelation is conceived as the messages which the prophet announces on behalf of God. These revelations concern history, especially the end of time.
- (2) Narrative. The narrative differs from prophecy. The revelational character of a narrative is not so much the person of the prophet or the narrator but the plot of the story. What prophecy and narrative have in common is their interest in history, but in a biblical narrative several events are interpreted as revelational events: events which transcend ordinary history. The revelation of a narrative arises from a temporality that unites the stream of events into a meaningful history of salvation.³⁶⁰

While both types of biblical genre contained in the image concern history, they are inherently different modes and associate with different types of temporality. A narrative is a plot, an event taking place in the sequence of history. The Annunciation in its most

³⁵⁹ Randall E. Otto, "The Prophets and Their Perspectives," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2001): 219-240.

³⁶⁰ Mi-Rang Kang, *Interpretative Identity and Hermeneutical Community* (Munster: LIT Verlag Munster, 2011), 49.

common representation as a one-on-one dialogue between two figures is exactly this: a story of the *past*. A prophecy is a message announced on God's behalf that is not an event in itself but an anticipation of one. This exegesis of the Annunciation story, as shown in Zuccaro's image, has a specific effect on the painting's narrative temporality, as in one way the Annunciation appears as if it is happening in the current time. One of the reasons Caravaggio was criticised was because his paintings did not recall biblical narratives as history, but as if they were happening in the present moment. Zuccaro's image of Mary and Gabriel is also brought into the present, not through his choice of style like Caravaggio, but through his choice of content. By incorporating these earlier prophets traditionally associated with the Annunciation, the image brings the moment between Mary and Gabriel directly into the present. As the prophets represent the past, the Annunciation represents the current time. The culmination of events into the present is intensified through the witness of the heavenly realm to the event. To have observed this painting would have been to do so in conjunction with the other witnesses contained in the image itself. Alessandra Buccheri writes that this idea of joint spectatorship between angelic hosts, prophets, and the contemporary observer may have been stimulated by Zuccaro's involvement with a play called *La Cofanaria* (1566). The stage for this play was divided horizontally with architecture in the lower section and a "heaven full of clouds" in the upper.³⁶¹ The idea of theatrical performance and the presence of an audience is present in Zuccaro's image and given the scale and position of the original work, would have certainly demanded devotional and educational involvement of the observer. The Annunciation at the centre of the fresco acted as the climax of the broader biblical story.

An alternative suggestion to reading the Annunciation in the present moment is to understand it as a future event. Paul Ricoeur writes "Prophecy, consists [...] of speaking about the future in terms appropriate to the past."³⁶² Prophecy is bound to its present state whilst projecting an event in the future, an event that has not yet happened. By positioning the two genres of prophecy and narrative in the image, Zuccaro creates a sense of "the exegetical relation between prophecy and

³⁶¹ Alessandra Buccheri, *The Spectacle of Clouds 1439-1650: Italian Art and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2017), 105.

³⁶² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 143.

*revelation.*³⁶³ The event at the centre of the image, the Annunciation, is a revelation of the prophecies that frame the interaction. This troubles and adjusts the paintings' temporality again, shifting the Annunciation away from being a *istoria* or even a moment in the present, to being one projected in the future. In order to deal with this complex of temporal meaning, it can be argued that Zuccaro's image possesses a type of circular temporality, one that maintains a fluidity across its various parts. Melion observes the following:

[In] the *Annunciation*, therefore, the interaction between word and image, reading and viewing, proves to be circular: the biblical texts that prognosticate Christ are invoked, not abrogated, at the moment of his coming, and the mystery of the Incarnation is seen to fulfil, and by fulfilling to advocate, the covenantal promises recorded in the Old Testament.³⁶⁴

The temporality of the painting is distorted by the typological dialogue between the prophecies and the revelation. As the text and images seen on the outer portions of the print herald the Annunciation at the centre, so the Annunciation harks back as a prophecy in and of itself. To rearrange a quote from Gary Waller, "The Annunciation story of his [Christ's] conception can be read as both a specific call or commissioning to a young Jewish girl chosen by God for a special task, [or a] birth prophecy, revealing God's purposes to a chosen group of the faithful."³⁶⁵ In other words, the Annunciation in Luke can be read as a narrative of events of a girl's life, or as the prophetic expectation of her purpose.

The Annunciation as a biblical text is one that testifies to prophecy through the genre of narrative. Prophecy is an essential criterion of the Annunciation type-scene throughout the accounts in the Hebrew Bible, but also in the New Testament in the Annunciation to Zechariah and to Mary.³⁶⁶ Luke 1:26-38 anticipates the Incarnation; v. 31 reads in the Greek καὶ ἰδοὺ ("and now"), which is "the signal of an event that is about to begin, here an event prophetically forecasted."³⁶⁷ In Zuccaro's image, the

³⁶³ Melion, "Introduction," 6.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 12.

³⁶⁵ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 41

³⁶⁶ Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (London: Fortress Press, 2000), 133.

³⁶⁷ Bovon, *Luke 1*, 50.

prophets respond to the prophecy situated at the Annunciation by indicating to the Incarnation through the texts they hold to the observer. Melion identifies that the prophets are actually larger in scale than Mary and Gabriel, as if they are the mediators between the viewer and the Annunciation.³⁶⁸ Their size has them appear to sit right on the front picture plane, facilitating the observers' awareness of the Incarnational framework through which we should be reading the Annunciation. We observe the image with the guidance of the words and direction of these figures. As such, Mary and Gabriel, and the prophets on either side of them, confer and justify each other in a continual cycle of prophecy and revelation. Kevin J. Vanhoozer writes of the effect of prophecy as a genre in biblical texts and states, "prophetic writings represent a powerful temporal dislocation and disorientation."³⁶⁹ The installation of prophets in Zuccaro's image does just this, disrupting a linear reading of the Annunciation *istoria*. Not only do these prophets provide a typological exegesis of a New Testament text, but they raise and challenge the question of how temporality has an impact on the relationship between prophecy and fulfilment.

4.4. Conclusion

Due to the demolition of the original home of Jesuit education and worship in Rome, the theological and historical significance of the Church of the Annunciation's visual schemes has been repeatedly overlooked in scholarship. This has consequently impacted research surrounding Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets*. Fortunately, Zuccaro's image has been preserved in an engraving by Cornelis Cort, making analysis of this complex fresco possible. Through the lens of the engraving, we see that Zuccaro's *Annunciation* was polyscenic, and contained a highly sophisticated use of the typology hermeneutic, which was prominent not just in Counter-Reformation ideology but in that of the Jesuits specifically. In using the combined framework of narrative and prophecy, the image invites a circular reading of the *Annunciation*: prophecy through revelation, revelation through prophecy; image through text, and text through image. It situates the Annunciation narrative as an event foretold by earlier biblical figures, thus extending the temporal distance of the painting, yet, due to the nature of prophetic genre, it also brings the characters into the present

³⁶⁸ Melion, "Introduction," 9.

³⁶⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 202.

moment through the Annunciation figures. The image pushed against the edges of the chronological temporality associated with the Annunciation story in the Lukan text, expanding it to unite various temporal states through its use of other biblical sources. The Annunciation event is seen as the fulfilment - the climax - of these prophecies, and creates an entirely different interpretation of the Annunciation to that of it being a containable and isolated *istoria*.

5. Chapter 5: Annunciation as a division of narrative: Guido Reni's Annunciation (1610)

5.1. Introduction

Chapters 3 and 4 focused on the Annunciation firstly as its own isolated narrative, and secondly as a narrative that fulfilled earlier biblical narratives. In Chapter 4, I argued that by incorporating these other biblical sources, Zuccaro's painting broadened the temporal remit of his fresco. In a similar way, this chapter focusses on extending the Annunciation sequence to form a wider narrative context, specifically the story of the life of the Virgin Mary. Since the time Christianity became a state religion in the early fourth century, painted narrative cycles had been used as a method of visual representation for purposes of education and instruction. By narrative cycle I mean individual paintings on a consistent theme, positioned intentionally – most commonly within a church or inner chapel - for the purpose of narrating a story. In Counter-Reformation Rome, this method was used regularly in the redesigning of both public and private ecclesiastical spaces.³⁷⁰ This chapter focusses on one example of this method in a private context, a chapel that emphasised the importance of the Annunciation within a narrative cycle of the Life of the Virgin Mary: the Chapel of the Annunciation at the Quirinal Palace, which has as its central altarpiece the *Annunciation* (1610) by Guido Reni (Fig. 29).

Unlike other examples in the thesis that rely on a more abstract concept of a Counter-Reformation audience, the primary individual who engaged with the decoration of this Chapel was Pope Paul V, who commissioned the space for private use at his summer residence.³⁷¹ The space contains five narrative paintings, each focused on a different part of Mary's life, and two paintings of heavenly scenes in the vaults above the altar and nave. Only the *Annunciation* appears as a narrative in canonical scripture, with the other images originating from apocryphal sources. The five narratives unite to retell the story of the life of the Virgin Mary, beginning at the *Annunciation to Joachim*

³⁷⁰ The decision to focus on the Chapel of the Annunciation, and the other examples incorporated into this chapter, was motivated by findings during a research trip to Rome in September 2019. Through engaging with these images directly, as opposed to through a range of digital sources, it was possible to experience their location and position within their ecclesiastic context.

³⁷¹ Judith W. Mann, "The Annunciation Chapel in the Quirinal Palace, Rome: Paul V, Guido Reni, and the Virgin Mary," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 1 (1993): 113-134.



Figure 29. Guido Reni, *Annunciation*, 1610, oil on panel. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: <https://www.topofart.com/artists/Guido-Reni/art-reproduction/3242/The-Annunciation.php>

(Mary's father) and ending with the altarpiece of the *Annunciation*. Although the overall theme of the chapel and its altarpiece are dedicated to the Annunciation, the pictorial narrative contained in the space is concerned with a much broader timeframe. As well as narrating Mary's life up to this significant point, the chapel heralds a connection to the doctrinal issue of the Immaculate Conception, which is unattached to chronological temporality. The chapter argues that as opposed to viewing the paintings contained in the chapel as disconnected static images, they should be viewed as a carefully curated series of moments that unite Marian narrative and doctrine. The following research draws upon other narrative cycles dating to the Counter-Reformation, specifically in Rome, to further explore the purpose and effect of these types of cyclical representations in their given contexts.

The artist who designed the Chapel of the Annunciation, Guido Reni, was recognised as the most "illustrious" pupil of the Carracci academy in the city of Bologna where he was born.³⁷² His style was consistent with the mediated naturalism of his teachers at the academy. The majority of his work can, therefore, be compared to artists such as the Carracci family, Francesco Albani, and Federico Zuccaro, and contrasted to that of Caravaggio. It is understood that when Reni moved to Rome at the beginning of the seventeenth century, he was put up against Caravaggio for certain commissions. This was much to the disappointment of his former teachers, who sought Reni's complete avoidance of this artist who was viewed as a destroyer of painted histories.³⁷³ By and large, Reni's style remained unaffected by Caravaggio's influence in Rome, except in rare examples such as his interpretation of *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (1604) (Fig. 30). This image has compositional similarities to Caravaggio's version of the same subject in the Cesari chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, but dulls some of the overt naturalism such as the garish positioning of Caravaggio's three soldiers (1601) (Fig. 31).³⁷⁴ Ultimately, however, Reni maintained much of his "ideal classicism" learned at the Carracci academy, ensuring the idealization of the human figure in his paintings

³⁷² Richard E. Spear, "Di Sua Mano," in *The Ancient Art of Emulation*, ed. Elaine K. Gazda (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 79-98.

³⁷³ Moses Foster Sweester, *Artist Biographies: Titian: Guido Reni, Claude Lorraine* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1877), 23.

³⁷⁴ Gregori, *The Age of Caravaggio*, 174.



Figure 30. Guido Reni, *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, 1604, oil on canvas, 305x175cm. Vatican Pinacoteca, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons License: Public Domain.

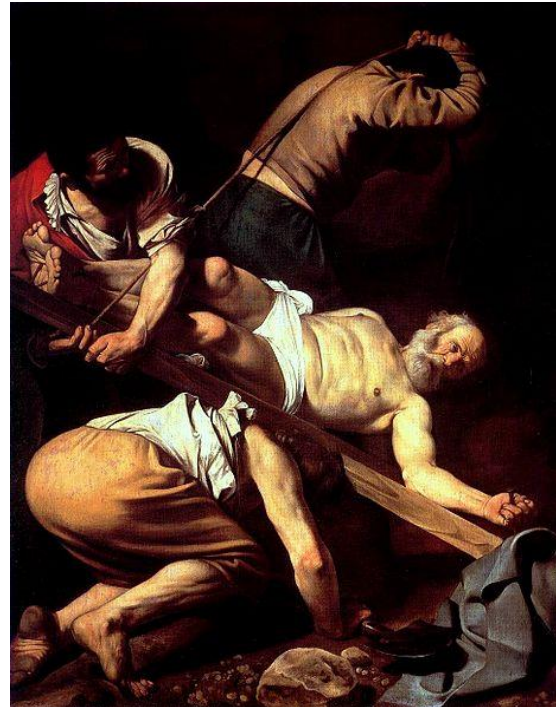


Figure 31. Caravaggio, *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, 1601, oil on canvas, 230x151cm. Santa Maria del Popolo. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

as opposed to its direct copying.³⁷⁵ Reni experienced great success in Rome, particularly in his involvement with patrons from the Roman curia, including Cardinal Sfondrati (1560-1618) for whom Reni created a portrait of Saint Cecilia for the Santa Cecilia in Trastevere (Fig. 32).³⁷⁶ These commissions saw him become the favourite artist of Pope Paul V, formerly known as Camillo Borghese. Paul V first commissioned Reni to execute the frescoes for the Sala delle Dame and Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini at the Vatican Palace between 1607-8.³⁷⁷ Based on the evidence of Reni's account book that describes his commissions and financial affairs, it is evident that he then entered the Pope's household in November 1609 until approximately May 1612, during which time he completed the decoration for the Chapel in the Quirinal

³⁷⁵ Richard E. Spear, *The "Divine" Guido: Religion, Sex, Money, and Art in the World of Guido Reni* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 2.

³⁷⁶ Martin Olin, "A Portrait Drawing of Pope Paul V Attributed to Guido Reni," *Bulletin of National Museum Stockholm* 23 (2016): 107-110.

³⁷⁷ Lilian H. Zirpolo, *Historical Dictionary of Baroque Art and Architecture* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 476.



Figure 32. Guido Reni, *Saint Cecilia*, 1606, oil on canvas, 95.9x74.9cm. Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Palace and the Pauline Chapel in the Santa Maria Maggiore.³⁷⁸ The end of his contract with the Pope saw Reni return to Bologna, visiting Rome sporadically for the rest of his career.

Guido Reni's design for Paul V's private chapel in the Quirinal Palace was a major project for two central reasons. Firstly, the commission united the artist and patron in their devotion to the Virgin Mary. Reni's involvement with projects that emphasised Marian devotion had him devise a particular interpretation of the Virgin Mary, as will become evident in the iconographic analysis. Pope Paul V himself maintained his own personal relationship with the Virgin Mary and specifically with the doctrine of the

³⁷⁸ D. Stephen Pepper, "Guido Reni's Roman Account Book-I: The Account Book," *The Burlington Magazine* 113, no. 819 (1971): 309-317.

Immaculate Conception, which he promulgated in a bull in 1616.³⁷⁹ Secondly, the project maintained its own contextual significance in artistic patronage:

Reni's Annunciation Chapel is the first work of the new century in which the unifying style of a single artist prevails through-out a complex of decorations in which mature artists served as assistants, and it must be considered a milestone in the emergence of a new style of artistic decoration."³⁸⁰

Stephen Pepper understands that the Chapel was united by the strategy of a single artist. The paintings, he believes, share a cohesive identity, with the central deviations between the images relating only to narrative content, as opposed to varying styles. Due to the fact that the Chapel was to be used daily by the Pope whilst he was in residence at the Palace, the project was requested to be completed swiftly, and thus Francesco Albani, Antonio Carracci, Domenichino Lanfranco, Alessandro Albini, Giacomo Cavedone and Tommaso Campai are all said to have joined Reni in the project.³⁸¹ The identification of the different artists' respective work in the chapel is challenging, but it has generally been accepted based on Carlo Cesare Malvasia's biography of Reni's life that Albani completed various painted *putti* around the space and Carracci painted the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (1610).³⁸² Lanfranco, however, has a more ambiguous role in the process, perhaps painting some of the figures on the pilasters in the Chapel. On this, Malvasia records an interaction between Reni and his patron Pope Paul V, in which Reni describes the involvement of Lanfranco and the other assistants in his Chapel:

Beatissimo Padre [...] the drawing, sketching, and background painting are not the things that make up the work. They are just like a simple contract that, before you place your hand on it and sign it, is worthless. In addition to the ideas and designs that are mine, I go over, finish and redo everything, in a way that, if a work given to me does

³⁷⁹ Nicholas J. Santoro, *Mary In Our Life* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 32.

³⁸⁰ D. Stephen Pepper, "Guido Reni's Roman Account Book-II: The Commissions," *The Burlington Magazine* 113, no. 820 (1971): 372-386.

³⁸¹ Spear, *The Divine Guido*, 227.

³⁸² Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *The Life of Guido Reni*, trans. C and R Enggass (London: University Park, 1980), 55.

not turn out to be by my hand, I will be content to incur your indignation, which would bring me as much grief, so to speak, as the loss of a thousand lives.³⁸³

Despite having to recruit the skills of other artists to complete the Chapel scheme, Reni is adamant that the entire project was still of his own hand.³⁸⁴ He says to Pope Paul V that each painting bore his own defining mark, even on those to which he played an edifying role. Yet, his claim of “*il mio mano*” (by my hand), should not be taken without at least some level of wariness. From what is known of the commission, Reni was “not enamored” by the company of the other artists.³⁸⁵ The artists involved in the commission, and particularly Francesco Albani, argued so severely with Reni due to his domineering attitude towards the project that none of the artists worked with him in the following decades.³⁸⁶ Reni’s claims are therefore set against a turbulent commission, and the narrative cycle should not be claimed to have been executed through the linear perspective of one artist’s lens. Exegetical decisions on the representation of the narratives of Mary’s life could well have been made by the artists involved, or, knowing the presence of Pope Paul V at times during the project, may have also been made by the patron himself or his theological advisors. As with each of the case studies contained in the thesis, paintings were designed via a complex system of influence that involved a fluid group of artist, patron, church leaders, advisors, other artist colleagues and more. When engaging with this narrative cycle, this chapter refrains from anchoring specific exegetical decisions in the images to Reni per se, and instead retains the necessary nuance required to evaluate this complex scheme.

5.2. Iconographic analysis

This investigation will first consist of a description of the layout of the Chapel and the other paintings that make up the narrative cycle, finishing with the *Annunciation*, which out of all the images is the most reliably attributed to Reni’s own hand. The Chapel of the Annunciation has a spacious entrance that leads into a small room consisting of

³⁸³ Malvasia, *The Life of Guido Reni*, 55.

³⁸⁴ Spear, “Di Sua Mano,” 73.

³⁸⁵ Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Alice Sedgwick Wohl and Tomaso Montanari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 353.

³⁸⁶ Spear, *The Divine Guido*, 227.

two main sections, much like the design of a church (Fig. 33).³⁸⁷ The central area is shaped like an octagon with a domed ceiling, and the altar space directly opposite the entrance is rectangular and creates the chapel's transept arms. The short narrative cycle of Mary's life takes up the painted decoration in the upper register of the Chapel walls. When reading the narrative paintings in chronological order, the first image is the *Annunciation to Joachim*, designed, although perhaps not painted, by Reni (no. 1 in Fig. 33; Fig. 34). This painting is positioned on the right-hand wall of the chapel in a lunette-shaped panel, and shows the visitation of an angel to Joachim, the soon-to-be father of Mary. This narrative does not originate from a biblical source, but from the *Nativity of Mary*, "a condensed, adaptive retelling of the first thirteen chapters of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which is, in turn, an expansive adaptation of the *Protoevangelium of James*."³⁸⁸ The *Nativity of Mary* was an exceptionally popular text in early modern Catholicism and recounts the life of Mary up to the birth of Christ. The text opens by introducing Joachim and Anne, Mary's parents. Chapters 1-3 describes Joachim being driven away from his home by shame on account of his inability to have children with his wife Anne. Whilst hiding in the company of shepherds, Joachim is encountered by an angel of the Lord, who says that his wife "has conceived a daughter from thy seed [...] she herself shall be blessed, and shall be made the mother of eternal blessing."³⁸⁹ This story marks the start of Mary's earthly life, thus forming the subject for the first painting in the narrative cycle.

To the right of this painting, above the entrance door to the chapel is the second narrative painting: the *Nativity of the Virgin* (no. 2 in Fig. 33; Fig. 35). This section of the narrative constitutes a very minor part in the aforementioned textual version: "Anna conceived and gave birth to a daughter and, according to the angel's command, the parents called her name Mary."³⁹⁰ The painting in the Chapel shows the nativity in the midst of a large group of figures in a domestic setting. A group of women crowd around Anne, who sits with her baby daughter in her lap. Joachim is present at the back of

³⁸⁷ Pepper, "Guido Reni's Roman Account Book-II," 379.

³⁸⁸ Brandon W. Hawk, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Nativity of Mary* (London: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 111.

³⁸⁹ "Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew," 3, ed. and trans. Brandon W. Hawk, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Nativity of Mary* (London: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 46-82.

³⁹⁰ "Nativity of Mary," 5, ed. and trans. Brandon W. Hawk, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Nativity of Mary* (London: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 111-142.

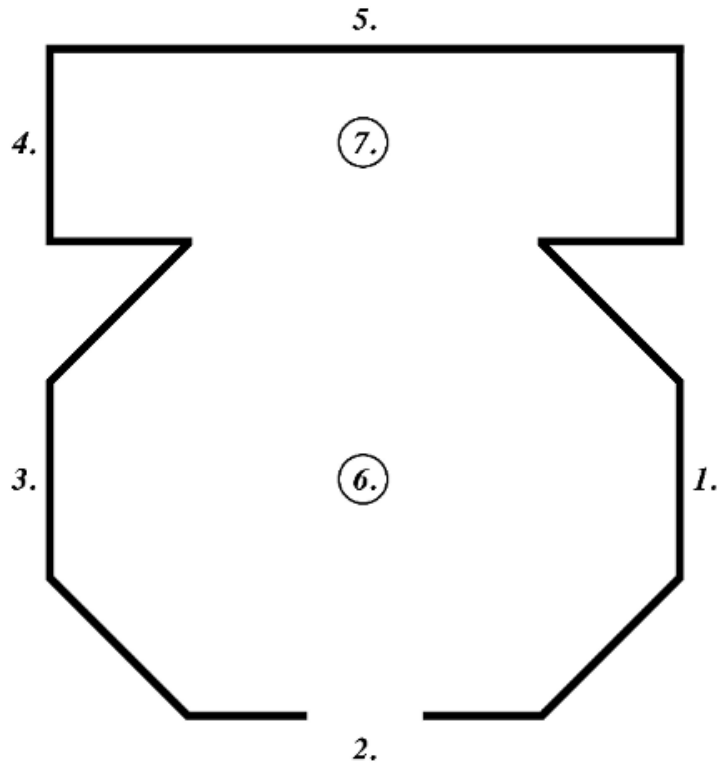


Figure 33. Narrative Cycle of the Chapel of the Annunciation, Quirinal Palace, Rome. By author.



Figure 34. Unknown, *Annunciation to Joachim*, 1609-11, fresco. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/reni/3/4cappell.html

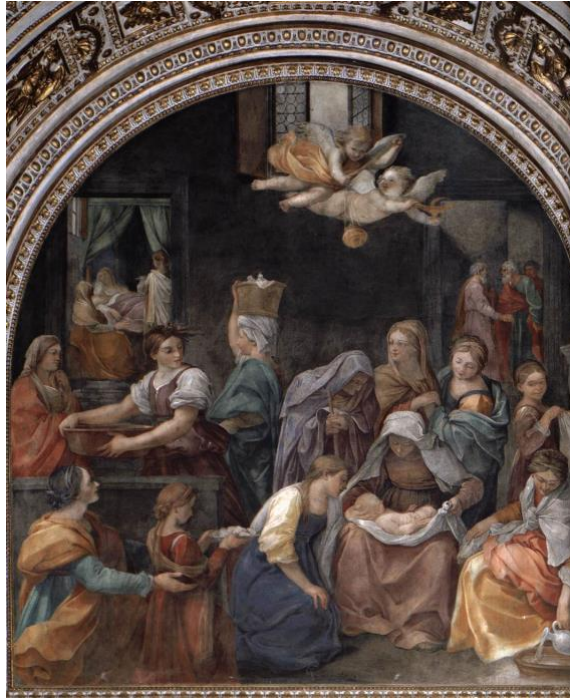


Figure 35. Guido Reni, *Nativity of the Virgin*, 1610, fresco. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/reni/3/7cappell.html

the space tending to two men. Continuing in clockwise direction around the chapel, the next painting is the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (no. 3 in Fig. 33; Fig. 36), painted by Antonio Carracci. The image is positioned opposite the *Annunciation to Joachim*, and is contained within a similar lunette-shaped panel. This painting also relates to the story in *Nativity to Mary*, “Indeed, when she had nursed her for three years, Joachim and his wife Anna went together to the temple of the Lord.”³⁹¹ It shows Mary accompanied by a woman, presumably her mother Anne, entering the temple where she devoted herself to education with “the company of virgins who continued in the praises of God night and day.”³⁹²

A representation of her time in the temple can be seen in the penultimate narrative painting in the sequence: the *Virgin Sewing in the Temple* (no. 4 in Fig. 33; Fig. 37). Differing from the position of the other paintings in the sequence, the *Virgin Sewing* is hidden from view, situated at the end of the left transept. This simple composition

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.



Figure 36. Guido Reni, *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, 1610, fresco. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/reni/3/3cappell.html



Figure 37. Guido Reni, *The Virgin Mary Sewing*, 1610, fresco. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

shows Mary facing the observer, working a needle over a white piece of cloth. Notice how the position of Mary in this image closely mirrors that of her mother in Reni's *Nativity*, as if in anticipation of the birth of the Christ child. She is joined by two angels, one on either side of her, who appear involved with her task, either practically or in interest. A textual source for the subject of the painting is the eighth-century apocryphal book *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which inspired the later compilation of stories in *Nativity of Mary*. The relevant text states that whilst in residence at the temple, the Virgin Mary structured her day in the following manner, "From the morning to the third hour she remained in prayer; from the third to the ninth she was occupied with her weaving; and from the ninth she again applied herself to prayer."³⁹³ The text continues and identifies Mary as the Virgin who was selected to sew the temple veil, the veil that is torn at the death of Jesus (Mt. 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45): "the purple for the veil of the temple of the Lord fell to the lot of Mary."³⁹⁴ This could be the fabric depicted in Reni's painting, and would certainly indicate Mary's tangible involvement with the narrative of the Incarnation.³⁹⁵ Another feature of Reni's painting commonly associated with an Annunciation subtext is the biblical citation of Isaiah 7:14 in the banner held above Mary's head by cherubim: "VIRGO CONCIPIET PARIET FILIUM" ("a virgin will conceive and will bear a son"). The inclusion of this text and the use of typical Annunciation iconography, however, should not lead beholders into misinterpreting the *Virgin Sewing* as an Annunciation, as has happened in the past.³⁹⁶ This is indicated not only by the fact that the scene takes place in a temple setting, but by Mary's unawareness of the message held above her head.³⁹⁷ Furthermore, it is in no way consistent with the dichotomic pattern of the Annunciation that sees the Virgin Mary receive information from a singular angelic figure.

While the painting does not represent an Annunciation, it does maintain a key function as a narrative device, which unites several key themes in the Chapel. Firstly, in appealing to the prophet Isaiah, the *Virgin Sewing* speaks to the four main prophets that are painted in the upper corners of the chapel: Moses, David, Solomon, and

³⁹³ "Pseudo-Matthew," 6, trans. and cited in Hawk, *The Gospel*, 55.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 62.

³⁹⁵ Margaret Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 153.

³⁹⁶ Pepper, "Guido Reni's Roman Account Book-II," 379.

³⁹⁷ Mann, "The Annunciation Chapel," 119.

Isaiah. Chapter 4 argued how each of these prophets foretold the Annunciation and/or Incarnation. Secondly, the painting emphasises the virtue of the Virgin Mary through imagining her as the ideal domesticated women. Her virtue is made manifest in the ten pilaster figures that are positioned below the paintings of the narrative cycle that each represent a virtuous characteristic. Finally, the *Virgin Sewing* appeals to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception through the other banner held by the cherubim: VOCAVIT IS QUI VOCAT EAM A PRINCIPIO (“He who calls has called her from the beginning”). This text demonstrates the selection of the Virgin Mary in eternity, and her creation by God that left her unstained through natural conception. This is a key theme in the Chapel - as it was to its patron - and is pictorially represented in the *Conception of the Virgin Immaculate by God the Father*, which can be seen above the main chapel space in the domed ceiling (no. 6 in Fig. 33; Fig. 38). Despite being slightly hidden and an iconographically rare interpretation of the sewing abilities of the Virgin Mary, the *Virgin Sewing* holds an integral role in wedding together the visual themes of the Chapel.

In the cupola of the altar space is a painting of *God the Father in Glory* (no. 7 in Fig. 33; Fig. 39). God is positioned in the centre, draped in a stark white robe surrounded by angels and cherubim. The painting’s position above the altar of Reni’s *Annunciation* (no. 5 in Fig. 33; see Fig. 29 in 5.1.) has a similar effect to that of Federico Zuccaro’s *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets*. Viewing Reni’s *God the Father in Glory* and *Annunciation* in unity, the scheme reflects a transcendentalised interpretation of the Annunciation narrative in which the heaven and earthly spheres converge. This is intensified by the presence of the five cherubim at the top of the *Annunciation* that have appeared to have dropped down into the frame from the celestial scene above. Giovan Pietro Bellori wrote about these characters, “five little cupids who hold hands and interweave, frolicking in jubilation for Mary, chosen to be the mother of the Lord.”³⁹⁸ These figures move across the upper space of the canvas, as if pulling each other into frame to witness the interaction below. In the lower setting, the Angel Gabriel, dressed in yellow and blue with a large set of feathered wings, approaches the Virgin Mary and kneels on his right leg. He holds a stem of lilies in his left hand and points with his right to the heavenly scenes flourishing above. As argued in

³⁹⁸ Bellori, *The Lives*, 354.



Figure 38. Detail of Guido Reni, *Conception of the Virgin Immaculate by God the Father*, 1610, fresco. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: https://www.wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html



Figure 39. Detail of Guido Reni, *God the Father in Glory*, 1610, fresco. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: https://www.wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html



Figure 40. Guido Reni, *Annunciation*, 1621, oil on canvas. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 41. Guido Reni, *Annunciation*, 1629, oil on canvas, 319x221cm. Louvre Museum, Paris. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Chapter 4, the kneeling Gabriel was a common feature in Counter-Reformation Annunciations, and it appears as a consistent theme in Reni's later paintings of the scene (Fig. 40 and 41). So too does his kneeling Virgin Mary, who acts in gestures of humility as the "quintessence of sweetness and docility."³⁹⁹ In many of Reni's paintings of this character, the Virgin Mary is represented kneeling at her *prie-dieu*, a location of private prayer and devotional reading. In the version at the Quirinal Palace, an open book rests behind her, as if she had been caught in the act of reading. She is dressed in what seems to be a red dress, with a large blue garment covering most of her frame. She looks downwards, perhaps has even closed her eyes, and her right hand is held across her chest, both gestures consistently associated with humility and submission in the cultural context. Around Mary's head is a glowing luminosity, a stylistic device signifying that although she is the epitome of the modest female ideal, she is also an ethereal figure to whom even angels bow. The event of the Annunciation, more specifically the figure of Mary Immaculate in this narrative context, absorbs the

³⁹⁹ Spear, *The "Divine" Guido*, 152.

attention of the heavenly realm both contained in the frame and portrayed in the ceiling of the Chapel.

5.3. Context and the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality

The Chapel of the Annunciation contains a range of visual devices, including images of four key prophets of the Incarnation in the Chapel's upper corners, ten pilasters dedicated to Mary's virtuous character and the paintings of heavenly visions on the ceiling. The narrative structure of the Chapel is guided by the carefully constructed series of five painted *istoria* that tell the story of the birth and early life of the Virgin Mary. The story is told through the main area in the Chapel in the *Annunciation to Joachim*, *Nativity of Mary*, and *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, before building to a climax in the altar space, where the *Virgin Sewing* and the *Annunciation* are in situ. The narrative is overseen by the frescos of the *Conception of the Virgin Immaculate by God the Father* and *God the Father in Glory*, which emphasise the supernatural implications of the events of Mary's life. The pictorial narrative this chapter deals with differs from the previous two examples in terms of its categorisation as one of the following: (1) complementary (*polyscenic*); (2) isolated (*monoscenic*), and (3) continuous (*polyscenic*) (see Part 1b-c). Chapter 3 argued that Caravaggio's *Annunciation* was conceivable neither as a monoscenic or polyscenic image: it avoided temporality and became atemporal as it did not satisfy the requirements of *istoria*. Conversely, in Chapter 4, Zuccaro's altarpiece was easily identifiable as a polyscenic representation, specifically subscribing to the complementary method, in which "narrative complexity is achieved through the presence of other episodes, actions, or signs that happen before or after the central action. The beholder is expected to read the artwork as a puzzle by relating all the details to the main action."⁴⁰⁰ The fresco used the additional motifs of the Incarnation prophets and the heavenly realm to supplement and apply meaning to the interaction between Gabriel and Mary at the centre of the image. In contrast, in Guido Reni's Chapel of the Annunciation, the pictorial narrative is comprised of *monoscenic* images. This designation is based on the understanding that the narrative being engaged with has changed from being the Annunciation narrative in and of itself, to the broader story of Mary's early life. This shift from reading an object as polyscenic or monoscenic is

⁴⁰⁰ Horváth, "From Sequence to Scenario," 42.

based on whether it is viewed as an isolated image that possesses its own narrative independence or if it is dependent on its wider narrative setting. For example, when considering the *Annunciation* by Guido Reni as its own independent object, it could be considered polyscenic and complementary. It has amalgamated several areas in the Annunciation narrative: Gabriel's entrance, his salutation, Mary's humble response to Gabriel's request, and so on. When we consider the *Annunciation* in its setting, it is a monoscenic image that depicts just one moment in Mary's life; a snapshot in her story. As this chapter is examining the narrative effect of the overall Chapel scheme, the more appropriate option is to consider the five narrative paintings as monoscenic.

[E]ach [*image*] captures a scene using only single, isolated moments, but the scenes are distinguished from each other. This isolation [...] was not simply a compositional differentiation to isolate scenes by frames, but rather it was interpreted in a narratological sense, as involving gaps or jumps in the depicted storyline. Here the scenes can be viewed as multiple snapshots.⁴⁰¹

This is a suitable definition for the narrative paintings contained in the Chapel of the Annunciation. The images are separate and involve narrative leaps consisting of several years, for example in the transition from Mary's birth to her appearance in the temple aged three. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, who has worked extensively on the mechanics of pictorial narrative cycles, uses a similar hypothesis when distinguishing individual paintings in a cycle on the Infancy of Christ, which "consists of three monoscenic compositions on large lunette-shaped walls chronologically disposed from left to right in a chapel that is almost square. The episodes represented are the Annunciation, the Nativity, and Christ Disputing with the Doctors."⁴⁰² Although these are narratives in themselves, when situated within a cycle of Christ's infancy, they are categorizable as monoscenic representations. In a similar way, within the narrative cycle of the Virgin Mary's life - like that in the Chapel of the Annunciation - the designs are monoscenic.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431-1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 226.

Having qualified the type of images, it is worth defining the term already used frequently in this Chapter that describes the Chapel's overall project: a narrative cycle. As previously mentioned, this method was commonly used in Counter-Reformation visual culture in support of the Church's objective to revive the painting mode for representations of the histories of the faith. Furthermore, the use of narrative cycles was a way in which the Counter-Reformers could reinstate millennia-old traditions of the early Church. It was a tried and tested tool that allowed for an enhanced experience of the stories of religious figures, most popularly the life of Christ and life of the Virgin Mary. An early example of this is found in the fifth-century mosaics in the Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, which use a typological framework to illustrate the fulfilment of Old Testament texts in the life of Christ. The mosaics construct a long series of Old Testament narratives, forty two in total, on both sides of the nave with the scenes of Christ's life shown on the triumphal arch at the front of the church.⁴⁰³ The stories are chronologically ordered, starting from the triumphal arch end on both the left and right sides, as if the stories flow out from the Christological framework of the altar decorations (no. 1 and 2 in Fig. 42). This narrative cycle in the Santa Maria Maggiore was reassessed in the Counter-Reformation, perhaps due to its typological framework, which was a popular method in biblical interpretation. Cardinal Domenico Pinelli (1541-1611) was the archpriest of Santa Maria Maggiore in the late sixteenth century, and had the fifth-century mosaics in the nave restored, as well as a new fresco cycle dedicated to the life of the Virgin Mary designed to sit above the existing cycle (no. 3 in Fig. 42).⁴⁰⁴ The position of the paintings on the upper layer of the nave's decorations meant visibility from ground-level was poor. The narrative cycle was therefore designed to be iconographically simplistic, each painting containing a small number of figures placed close to the picture plane so that the audience may identify and learn from each image despite considerable distance.⁴⁰⁵ It deals sensitively with the surrounding space and ensures the scheme will be an effective addition to both the architecture and the religious theme.

⁴⁰³ Margaret R. Miles, "Santa Maria Maggiore's Fifth-Century Mosaics: Triumphal Christianity and the Jews." *The Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 2 (1993): 155-75.

⁴⁰⁴ Marcia B. Hall, *Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 304.

⁴⁰⁵ Clare Robertson, *Rome 1600* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2015), 109.

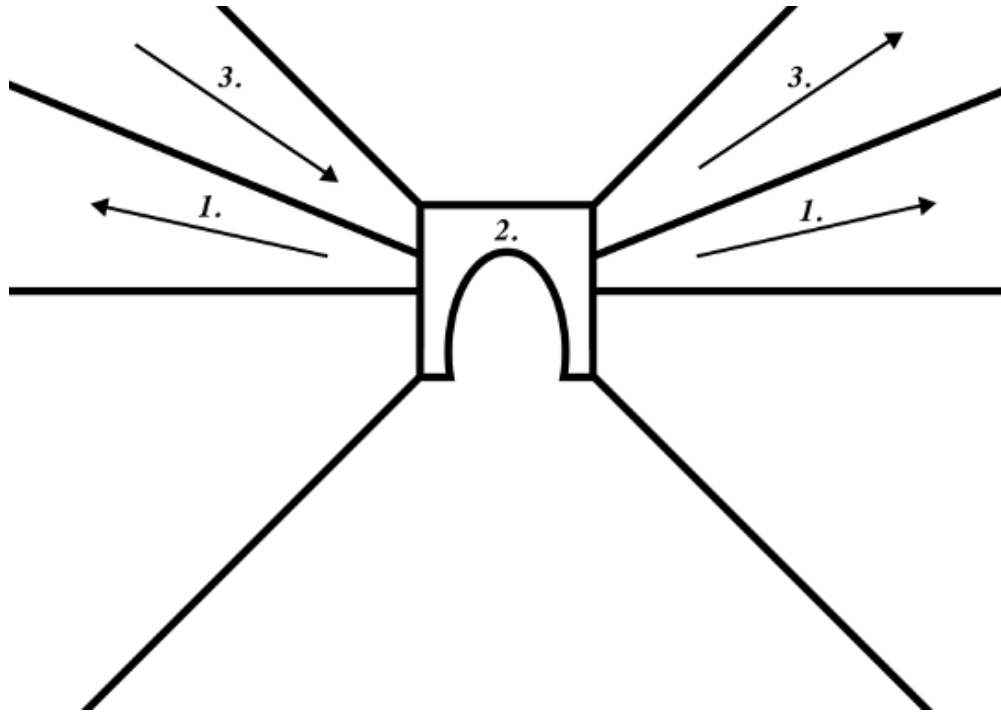


Figure 42. Narrative Cycle in the Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. By author.

There were exceptionally important assessments for designers of narrative cycles, especially those who were working towards the redesign of churches and chapels. Lavin writes:

Termed cycles because of their multiple components circumscribing a central theme, mural narratives have a place in history that depends [...] on their physical location in the supporting architectural framework but also, and perhaps more so, on the ideas, social mandates, and spiritual aspirations they are meant to express.⁴⁰⁶

The monoscenic images contained in narrative cycles are each embedded into the scheme of the physical space and its hypothetical objective. In the life of the Virgin Mary cycle in the nave of the Santa Maria Maggiore, the careful design deals with (1) the physical distance between image and observer, and the space left between the upper windows and pre-existing mosaics, and (2) the thematic scheme of the Church, which at the time was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The exegetical decisions

⁴⁰⁶ Lavin, *The Place of Narrative*, 1.

surrounding the cycle would have been influenced by this criteria, to ensure the creation of a visual scheme that optimised the setting.

Before interrogating how the narrative cycle in the Chapel of the Annunciation was shaped both by its space and subject matter, two other examples from Counter-Reformation Rome are worth mentioning. The visual scheme in the Santa Maria in Vallicella, the home of the new order of the Oratorians, was begun in 1575 and prescribed to a formula designed by Philip Neri. The main decorative scheme of the Church is formed of a narrative cycle of the mysteries of the Life of Christ and of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 43).⁴⁰⁷ The cycle begins in the left transept with the *Presentation of the Virgin to the Temple* (no. 1 in Fig. 43), continuing in the left hand chapels with the *Annunciation* (no. 2), the *Visitation* (no. 3), the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (no. 4), the *Adoration of the Magi* (no. 5) and the *Purification of the Virgin* (no. 6). On the other side of the nave, the cycle continues with the *Crucifixion* (no. 7), the *Deposition* (no. 8), the *Ascension* (no. 9), the *Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the Virgin* (no. 10), the *Assumption of the Virgin* (no. 11), finishing in the right transept with the *Coronation of the Virgin* (no. 12). The selection and order of these subjects is inspired by the Mysteries of the Rosary, a series of meditations that were exceptionally significant to Neri in his personal devotion.⁴⁰⁸ His careful selection of paintings to construct the amalgamated life of Christ and the Virgin Mary may not be identical to the order of the rosary devotions, which contains fifteen mysteries not twelve, but it undoubtedly reflects the desire to correspond the visual layout of the Chiesa to the specific structure of rosary prayer.⁴⁰⁹

Created at the same time as the Santa Maria in Vallicella is the narrative cycle in the Cappella della Madonna della Strada in the Gesù (Fig. 44). This small chapel situated to the left of the main altar differed from the overall theme of the Church established by the Jesuits, which focused on the life of Christ and the male-dominated narratives of his followers from both biblical and apocryphal traditions.⁴¹⁰ The Cappella della

⁴⁰⁷ Constanza Barbieri, "“To Be in Heaven”: St. Philip Neri between Aesthetic Emotion and Mystical Ecstasy," in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, eds. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 206-229.

⁴⁰⁸ Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 35.

⁴⁰⁹ Mary Ann Graeve, "The Stone of Unction in Caravaggio's Painting for the Santa Maria in Vallicella." *The Art Bulletin* 40, no. 3 (1958): 223-38.

⁴¹⁰ Hall, *Rome*, 290.

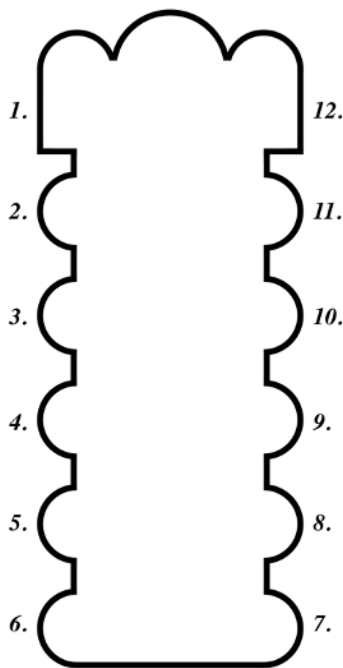


Figure 43. Narrative Cycle in the Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome.

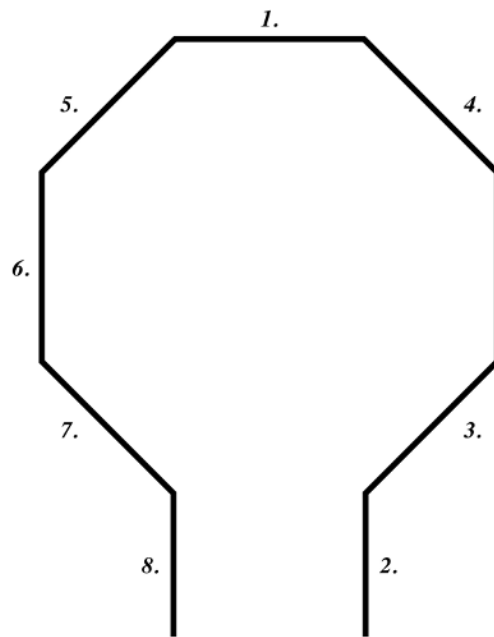


Figure 44. Narrative Cycle in the Cappella della Madonna della Strada, Il Gesù, Rome.

Madonna della Strada, however, has foundations that predate the Counter-Reformation period. In a similar way to the demolition of the Church of the Annunciation discussed in Chapter 4, the Santa Maria della Strada was a fifth-century Church replaced in the late sixteenth century by the mother church of the Jesuits, the Gesù. Frederic Conrod writes that this is “the most patent instance of his [Ignatius of Loyola’s] recycling of older church buildings,” which had become a common trope in the Jesuit’s architectural patronage.⁴¹¹ Santa Maria della Strada had held an important fifteenth-century fragment of an icon of the same name of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child (no. 1 in Fig. 44). This was incorporated into the Gesù through the newly designed Cappella della Madonna della Strada, where it was used as the altar image. The object is somewhat separate to the narrative cycle decorating the Chapel’s other walls by Giuseppe Valeriano (1542-1596) and aided by Scipione Pulzone (1544-1598).⁴¹² The cycle begins on the right entrance wall to the chapel with the *Immaculate Conception* (no. 2), followed on the adjacent right wall by the *Nativity of Mary* (no. 3),

⁴¹¹ Frederic Conrod, *Loyola’s Greater Narrative* (Pieterlen and Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 74,

⁴¹² Charles Hope, “Religious Narratives in Renaissance Art,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 134, no. 5364 (1986): 804-818.

then *Mary in the Temple* (no. 4), the *Betrothal of Mary and Joseph* (no. 5), the *Annunciation* (no. 6), the *Visitation* (no. 7), and the *Assumption* (no. 8). The Chapel created a new environment in which to approach the earlier Marian iconography of the Santa Maria della Strada. It incorporated the genre of narrative through a sequence of paintings, thus promoting *istoria* as a key form of representation in the Jesuit program.

In the examples of Santa Maria Maggiore and the Gesù, the narrative cycles are intimately bound to the physical setting and its programmatic intention. The shape, length, and focus of the cycles was conditional on the specific environment. The previous examples form a type of public art that was to be viewed by either a broad Catholic audience or a group of a specific order. Jules Lubbock writes,

[N]arrative cycles [...] constituted a public art treating major religious, ethical and even legal issues through the depiction of biblical stories. Such art was integral to the fabric of public places, churches, which the local population and pilgrims visited for worship, instruction and political meetings, just as it was integrated into the church service, Gospel readings, preaching and liturgical drama.⁴¹³

Narrative cycles retained the same function as all sacred images. As prescribed the Council of Trent and in the art treatises that followed it, the medium was to inspire devotion and instruction in the beholder. This purpose needs to be nuanced when treating Reni's narrative cycle in the Chapel of the Annunciation, which had its own specific function within a private setting. While the audience of other narrative cycles was comparatively larger, this chapel was designed for the personal use of Pope Paul V, and as such we can think more specifically about its intended function.

Firstly, the cycle is designed to cohere to the architectural space. The Chapel is small and its cycle focusses on only five narrative moments from the life of the Virgin Mary. The length of the narrative cycle is demonstrative of the nature of the setting; the Chapel was not for education, but for meditation and devotion. A narrative cycle for the purposes of education would likely be longer and would see the narrative go further than the Annunciation, which ultimately starts the narrative of Christ and his Mother in

⁴¹³ Jules Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2006), 39.

the biblical sources.⁴¹⁴ Naturally, the Chapel's only regular audience member - the Pope - did not require an education from his narrative cycle, but he did require a space for daily mass and the other holy offices.⁴¹⁵ In light of this, the manner in which the narratives are arranged in the space and synthesised within the surrounding visual images is worth investigating. The pictorial narrative of a cycle is conditioned by the process of joining the isolated mono-scenes together, in order for it to be read by an audience. This order of reading typically follows the chronological flow of a narrative, guided by the placement of the images in certain places i.e. in close proximity to the *istoria* showing the next chronological step in the story. It is the process of moving from one image to the next in a continuous flow that allows the monoscenic images to unite and become scenes from the same story.⁴¹⁶ Charles Hope writes, "Most [...] cycles, of course, raise no particular iconographic problems. They just consist of familiar stories arranged in chronological sequence, even though the structure of the chapel might make this sequence difficult to unravel."⁴¹⁷ While this is true and the familiarity of narratives allows a seamless transition from one image to the next, the direction in which narrative cycles move varies, thus demanding different systems of movement by the specific audience. In her study on narrative cycles in Italian churches from the fifth to seventeenth century, Lavin has identified a variety of methods employed in churches and chapels to structure pictorial narrative and the ways in which the specific audiences were expected to read it. In the Counter-Reformation, the format was usually either a wraparound - the most popular form of cyclical structure in Christian art - or the increasingly prominent counterclockwise wraparound.⁴¹⁸ The first of these sees the movement of narrative start on the right wall closest to the apse and wrap around the walls of the church in a clockwise direction; this is what we find in the life of the Virgin Mary cycle in Santa Maria Maggiore. The counterclockwise wraparound is the opposite form, starting on the left wall closest to the apse and working in an anticlockwise direction. Lavin writes,

⁴¹⁴ Devonshire Jones et al, *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art*, 359.

⁴¹⁵ Bellori, *The Lives*, 353.

⁴¹⁶ Gyöngyvér Horváth, "A Passion for Order: Classifications for Narrative Imagery in Art History and Beyond," *Visual Past* (2016): 247-278.

⁴¹⁷ Charles Hope, "Religious Narrative in Renaissance Art," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 134, no. 5364 (1986): 804-818.

⁴¹⁸ Lavin, *The Place of Narrative*, 7.

It is not easy to divine why [...] the counterclockwise movement was employed. I feel sure that the disposition reflects in some way paths prescribed for the monks in moving about the cloister while meditating, reading breviary, or performing other devotional acts not generally known to the public. [...] Whatever its genesis in the monastic setting, the counter-clockwise disposition became a major element in later sixteenth-century counterreformatory ecclesiastic decoration.⁴¹⁹

In the example of the Santa Maria in Vallicella, as well as the transept in San Giovanni in Laterano designed by Pope Clement XIII (1536-1605) and the naves in San Cesareo and Santa Prassede, there is evidence of the counterclockwise wraparound method. In each of these late sixteenth-century Roman programs, the direction of the narrative cycle is from right to left. This is the same direction in the Cappella della Madonna della Strada in the Gesù, although the beginning position of the narrative is different. The chapel environment would have been used for specific devotional purposes within the Jesuit order, thus the meditative emphasis Lavin associates with this design is entirely appropriate.

Pope Paul V's Chapel of the Annunciation, however, is a traditional wraparound form, working clockwise from the right hand wall round to the altar. If the narrative cycle is to be read in chronological order, the direction of reading is left to right. However, Judith Mann argues that the space was not intended as a "simple whole" but a "divided interior with subgroups of imagery that facilitate private contemplation."⁴²⁰ Under this hypothesis, the space was not regimented by narrative logic that would have the paintings read as a discrete chronological cycle. Rather, the emphasis was on the relationship of the Chapel's different parts to each other. This happens, Pepper writes, in a sequence carefully controlled by Reni himself.⁴²¹ On first entering the Chapel, the viewer is drawn to the central axis, that being the *Annunciation*, up to *God the Father in Glory*, and on to the *Conception of Virgin Immaculate*. The three narratives that fit in the main Chapel space then supply a short history of the virtuous life of the Virgin Mary, supported by the pilasters dedicated to her many virtues. Finally, and most significantly, is the *Virgin Sewing*, which is set apart and hidden from view from the

⁴¹⁹ Lavin, *The Place of Narrative*, 241.

⁴²⁰ Mann, "The Annunciation Chapel," 113.

⁴²¹ Pepper, "Guido Reni's Roman Account Book-II," 380.

Chapel entrance. This image is a key tool in uniting the overall spatial composition: it anticipates the altarpiece of the *Annunciation* as the event in which Mary becomes the Virgin Mother by citing the Isaiah text in the banner held by cherubim. It also speaks of the Immaculate Conception by its text “He who calls her has called her from the beginning.” This painting was the image that the Pope would most habitually sit in front of and enjoy, as Bellori writes that this area by the altar held the “the *prie-dieu* at which the pontiff customarily hears mass and remains at his prayers.”⁴²² This space immediately surrounding the *Annunciation* was the most important space in the Chapel. It was the location in which the heavenly world entered that of the earthly, shown in the angels in the *Virgin Sewing* and the cherubim in the *Annunciation*. The space sits separate from the other images of the narrative cycle, as images absorbed in a transcendental moment of communion with God the Father, placed in the ceiling of the altar space.

The various components of the narrative cycle both respond to and impact the functionality of the Chapel space. Under Lavin’s judgement that a cycle is influenced by both physical space and “spiritual aspirations,” the second way in which this cycle is uniquely formed is by the purpose of its programmatic intention.⁴²³ The subject matter of the life of the Virgin Mary, and one particularly focused towards the *Annunciation* and the Immaculate Mary contained in its narrative, was exceptionally important for the patron. With the exception of the *Annunciation*, the stories used in the cycle are each formed by apocryphal traditions. The only other biblical references in the Chapel are found in the four prophets in the corners of the cupola. The Chapel thus interweaves biblical and non-biblical references in one visual scheme. The Chapel presents a microcosm of the cultural view on the relationship between scripture and tradition, which identified both entities as authoritative voices in the Catholic belief system. This is tangible also in larger narrative schemes, such as that in the Santa Maria Maggiore, which seamlessly works its way through a plethora of canonical and non-canonical sources to construct a lengthy chronological depiction of the life of the Virgin Mary. The intimate relationship between scripture and tradition is particularly noticeable in visual representations of the life of the Virgin Mary due to the fact that

⁴²² Bellori, *The Lives*, 354.

⁴²³ Lavin, *The Place of Narrative*, 1.

she features significantly less heavily in the New Testament narratives. Biblical data on the life of Christ is abundant, lending itself to a broad range of potential visual themes. This cannot be said of the Virgin Mary, whose character development is limited to the conception and nativity of her son.⁴²⁴ Luigi Gambero writes, “the silence of the New Testament writings and the Apostolic Fathers concerning her [Mary’s] person left a knowledge gap that Christians have been trying to fill since the first centuries.”⁴²⁵ The use of traditions was imperative for forming the character of the Virgin Mary and substantiating the narratives concerning her life.

For Pope Paul V’s private chapel, the narratives from church tradition were imperative to its visual scheme, as it gave rise to the concept of Mary Immaculate, a premise entirely absent in canonical scripture. Since the ninth century, church authorities have debated whether the Virgin Mary was “immaculately” conceived without original sin, or, conversely, whether she was sanctified by God whilst in the womb.⁴²⁶ Debates on this issue have persisted throughout a large portion of church history, displaying the dogma’s turbulent history that has centred on cultural and philosophical developments.⁴²⁷ The issue was greatly contested in the Counter-Reformation period even within Catholic circles, and eventually led to Pope Paul V and Pope Gregory XV (1554-1623), both issuing decrees in 1617 and 1622 respectively that banned the matter from public speculation.⁴²⁸ The controversy surrounding the matter may have impacted Pope Paul V’s desire for its visual representation within his chapel setting. Judith Mann writes,

It is likely, therefore, that political sensitivity required Paul V to relegate this imagery to his private chapel rather than to display it in the more public space such as the Pauline Chapel in S. Maria Maggiore or even the Pauline Chapel in the Quirinal Palace, the public ceremonial chapel.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 7.

⁴²⁵ Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019), 33

⁴²⁶ Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 117.

⁴²⁷ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 242.

⁴²⁸ Andrew Weaver, *Sacred Music as Public Image for Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 225.

⁴²⁹ Mann, “The Annunciation Chapel,” 118.

From what is known through Bellori's text regarding the Pope's devotional responses to the images in the chapel, specifically the *Virgin Sewing* which had a prominent textual polemic concerning the Immaculate Conception, the theme contained in the chapel was of primary importance. In the knowledge that the Pope would later defend the Immaculate Conception as an infallible Catholic doctrine, the Chapel's narrative scheme can be interpreted as an important outward expression of the Pope's personal faith, providing evidence of a narrative cycle operating within a specific cultural objective.

5.4. Conclusion

In contrast to polyscenic representations of *istoria* that amalgamate different aspects of narrative and temporality within a single image, a narrative cycle sees pictorial narrative function in a different way. The cycles discussed in this chapter consist of monoscenic images that portray one moment in the overarching story to which the program is dedicated. The images are narratively dependent on the others in the cycle. While many of the narrative cycles created in Counter-Reformation Rome were purposed for religious education, the Chapel of the Annunciation was intended to facilitate the meditative practices of its patron, Pope Paul V. While it is possible to read the narratives in a clockwise direction starting from the *Annunciation to Joachim* to the *Annunciation* in the altar space, this detracts from the multifaceted dialogue in effect between the visual decorations in the Chapel. There are subtle details either within the compositions or in their placement that unites different aspects of the story or draw a connection between story and doctrine. The Chapel of the Annunciation sees its narrative paintings intentionally situated in a way that uses the space to project a profound adoration to the Virgin Mary, more specifically the Immaculate nature that saw her chosen as God's handmaiden at the event of the Annunciation.

f. Conclusion of Part 1

Part 1 has drawn on three diverse interpretations of the Annunciation created within a period of three decades. Each example has responded to the narrative in a different way, in a manner reflective of their personal environments and their commission's context. The paintings demonstrate the diversity of Counter-Reformation visual exegesis when applied to the pictorially-challenging Annunciation narrative. The verbleness of the Annunciation story presents a visual interpreter with the challenge of reconciling words into an image. The task is to pictorially narrate the dialogue between the Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel, and to somehow emulate the idea of chronologically reading a textual account. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing understood that paintings lacked the ability to create a temporally effective image that focused on more than one moment in a story in the painting mode. This view was consistent with the work of Michael Baxandall who prescribed set stages to the Annunciation and considered it only possible to portray one moment from the Lukan text. This chapter has aimed to counter this argument by arguing that Annunciation paintings were not confined to discrete stages. More than this, I argue that Annunciation images had the ability to dislocate and expand narrative temporality.

Beginning with the understudied *Annunciation* by Caravaggio, Chapter 3 identified the disruption of narrative temporality through the use of intense naturalism. Caravaggio's painting cannot be claimed to represent one single moment as the ambiguous iconography makes little narrative sense when comparing it to the Annunciation text in Luke. Neither can the image emulate a polyscenic representation that shows various moments in the story. Instead, Chapter 3 argued that Caravaggio presents a dislocated *istoria*, entirely unbound to temporal logic and narrative progression. Rather than dismiss the *Annunciation* as a failure of the *istoria*, however, I concluded that the atemporal state of the image goes some way to embody the fundamentally challenging temporal structure of the Annunciation story. The narrative is one that unites the "monstration of infinite distance" with "immediate proximity."⁴³⁰ The wholeness of God becoming man, which is the subtext to the Annunciation, is shown innovatively through Caravaggio's interpretation of the mystery.

⁴³⁰ Marin, "Stating a Mysterious Figure," 48.

Chapter 4 focused on Federico Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets*, a significant painting for its context but one lost in history due to its destruction in the seventeenth century. Through an engraved copy of this image by Cornelius Cort, the fresco appears as a complex interpretation of the Annunciation that draws on a range of biblical traditions. This polyscenic image demonstrated the typological form of biblical interpretation in which New Testament narratives are situated as the fulfilment of Old Testament stories and prophecies. This was a hermeneutic used in the theology of the Jesuits, who commissioned the work for their first ecclesiastic home. The pictorial narrative of the Annunciation has been increased via the installation of prophets from the Hebrew Bible who herald the event. In doing so, Zuccaro created a cycle of meaning that read the Annunciation narrative through the prophetic texts, and the prophetic texts through the Annunciation. Although the chronology of the story is both played and reversed in this *Annunciation*, the scene is far more concerned with picturing a temporally progressive narrative than Caravaggio's.

The same can be said of the final case study of Part 1, Guido Reni's Chapel of the Annunciation. In this scheme, the Annunciation plays just one monoscenic component in the wider story of the life of the Virgin Mary. Regardless of their length, cycles of the Virgin Mary's life dating from the Counter-Reformation consistently incorporated the Annunciation as a key narrative component. The biblical importance of the story, it being the most extensive Mariological text obtainable from canonical scripture, has it stand in central place in Reni's Chapel. The life of the Virgin Mary is retold clockwise around the small chapel, but even within this seemingly simple chronology of paintings, there is an element of divided temporality. The narrative cycle plays an important role in pointing the observer to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception represented in various ways around the space. While the narrative can be read as a linear story, given its devotional intention it can also be read in different ways to highlight the overall unity and points of connection between the images, including those of *istoria* and doctrine.

Part 1 introduces the exegetical complexity of Counter-Reformation Annunciations that has been overlooked in both art history and biblical reception history. It has ascertained some of the major challenges associated with pictorial narrative and temporal logic in painted Annunciations, and has indicated even within a small number

of examples the various Counter-Reformation responses to such challenge. Part 2 and 3 continue along this trajectory by examining other tropes contained in Annunciations altarpieces of the period that were used to aid the pictorial narration of the scene.

PART 2. 'Reading the Word in Image': the use of the book as propaganda in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces.

a. Introduction

Part 2 investigates the use of the book as propaganda in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces. It evaluates how the book, both as an entity and an object of reading, was variably interpreted in paintings to persuade the viewer of Counter-Reformation ideologies. The objective of Part 2 is not only to consider three distinct ways the book was used – in relation to (1) the issue of female readership, (2) the Church’s jurisdiction over reading practices, and (3) the polemic of religious conversion – but also to fill a gap in scholarship relating to Counter-Reformation visual propaganda.⁴³¹ This is yet another area that has been neglected due to Protestant partiality in scholarship, and Part 2 serves to correct this lacuna. It also poses the broader hypothesis that details of textual expansion in Counter-Reformation visual biblical exegesis should not be interrogated as merely stylistic or iconographic decisions, but as ones that directly reflected the intention to persuade beholders of Catholic prerogatives.

Part 2 begins by defining the origins of the use of the book in Annunciations and its significant developments in church tradition. It then offers an explanation of the theological significance of the book at the Annunciation and outlines the methodological idea I adopt in my analyses of the three specific altarpieces. Part 2 then proceeds by examining three significant visual interpretations of the trope as it was received and projected in the Counter-Reformation context: Federico Barocci’s *Annunciation* (1582-4), Ludovico Carracci’s *Annunciation* (1584) and Durante Alberti’s *Annunciation* (1588). Each image appeals to a different form of visual exegesis in representing the book, and in each instance the object is transformed by the specific conditions of their makers and their environment.

⁴³¹ Jennifer Spinks, “Monstrous Births and Counter-Reformation Visual Polemics: Johann Nas and the 1569 *Ecclesia Militans*,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 40, no. 2 (2009): 335-363; Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 261; Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 248.

b. The role of tradition in Counter-Reformation Annunciations

To introduce Part 2, I begin by stating that the inclusion of the book in Annunciation paintings bears no biblical precedent. As has been already identified, the Annunciation in its Lukan context is formed almost entirely by a dialogue between two characters, the first of these being introduced as the angel Gabriel, “sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth” (v.26), to visit “a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (v.27). From this transitory introduction comes a verbalised conversation of eleven verses. The author provides the reader with no further stage directions to elaborate on the drama: no mention of specific setting besides “a town in Galilee,” no details on either of the characters’ appearances, and no description of gestural communication between the individuals. When stripped of its centuries of interpretation, the Lukan Annunciation is a short and uncomplicated narrative, merely presenting a conversational interaction. It is therefore unachievable to attach the book as an object to the biblical source. Yet as Chapter 2’s findings indicated, within a sixteenth-century Catholic context, the Annunciation was not an eleven-verse, canonical text written by a biblical author. It instead embodied a story that, during its centuries of reception, had snowballed into an object of accumulated traditions. At the point of the Catholic reform in the sixteenth century, the biblical narrative had developed so significantly and in such intimacy with traditions that what was ‘biblical’ and what was ‘non-biblical’ could not be differentiated. The Annunciation was a polylogue of re-interpretations, preserved in oral, written, and visual discourses. This trajectory is not exclusive to the Annunciation, but to the body of canonical texts. In attaining co-equal divine authority, canonical and non-canonical sources were intentionally blurred, so that what was left were collaborations of voices that centred around different religious themes. The use of the book as propaganda in the Counter-Reformation must therefore be situated as a perpetuation of Catholic tradition, that whilst not enforced by the authority of the Bible was inspired by the history of its interpretation.

The Counter-Reformation perspective of scripture and tradition reflects an overarching methodological idea of this thesis. Current discussions in biblical reception theory highlight the inability to distinguish original text from reception tradition, in a similar way to the blurred boundaries between canonical and non-canonical sources

maintained by the Counter-Reformists. The idea of 'original' source commonly used in biblical studies singles out canonical writings and deems them to be the stimulus from which reception occurs. However, as previously stated in the thesis, the construct of an original source dismisses the layers of interpretation involved in the "source and redaction layers."⁴³² The formation and creation of the biblical sources was entirely engaged in a process of reception. The creation of biblical texts in themselves involves a series of actions and decisions. The dynamic between a biblical text and its reception is therefore completely interlinked. Relating this back to the Counter-Reformation, we find a similar idea, in which borders between what is 'scripture' and what is 'tradition' are subverted; the borders between 'canonical' and 'uncanonical' accumulate and blend to create the multifaceted, multi-voiced experience of Catholicism. For the Virgin Mary, this meant a characterisation built by biblical sources and the sixteen hundred years of regenerating conceptualization. In section 1.1.3., I used Brennan Breed's language of nomadology to describe the Virgin Mary as nomadic: "always moving between and beyond fixed points [...] there is no origin and no endpoint."⁴³³ Mary's reception history is a story of cultural reflections of her character, that shifted in conjunction with the multitude of her interpretations. This chapter is concerned with a specific element of this reception history, and one that dominated the Western projection of the Annunciation during the Counter-Reformation: that is her ownership and readership of a book.

c. Origins of the book in Annunciation representations

The tradition of the book at the Annunciation has a rich and enduring legacy in Catholic thought. It is a single tradition that provides impetus for Maria Warner's claim that, "It requires a herculean effort of will to read Luke's infancy Gospel and blot from the imagination all the paintings and sculptures, carols and hymns and stories that add to Luke's spare meditation."⁴³⁴ The appearance of a book - whether it be held in Mary's hand, on her lectern, or fallen on the floor - has come to function as a hallmark in pictorial versions of the narrative. It is not the intention of this introduction to Part 2 to catalogue the growth of the cult of the Annunciation book in visual and textual culture throughout history, but to pinpoint some of the significant developments in the history

⁴³² Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 15.

⁴³³ *Ibid*, 203.

⁴³⁴ Warner, *Alone Of All Her Sex*, 13-14.

of the tradition in order to provide a backdrop for how the motif transitioned into sixteenth-century Italy.

The earliest categorical references to the appearance of a book at the Annunciation can be found in the writings of Ambrose of Milan (339-97CE), who trained in Rome in rhetoric and law, before becoming bishop of Milan in 374. Ambrose has been identified as the “champion” of Mary’s cult, and “the father of Western Mariology.”⁴³⁵ His marked fascination for Mary largely developed from his admiration of her virginal living. He understood Mary as the epitome of purity and perfection, who should not just be celebrated for her physical purity, but for her inner, spotless morality.⁴³⁶ In a collection of sermons written on the request of his sister Marcellina (327-397CE), Ambrose writes, “She was a virgin not only in body but also in mind, who stained the sincerity of its disposition by no guile, who was humble in heart, grave in speech, prudent in mind, sparing of words, studious in reading.”⁴³⁷ Her corporeal nature as virgin was mirrored internally by her chaste disposition. Ambrose’s invention of Mary’s perfect character contains reference to her being “studious in reading,” thus implying her ownership of reading material, for example, a book. Ambrose continues along this track in his exegesis of the Annunciation, the narrative that he viewed as the single, momentous event that constituted the hidden mystery of Mary’s vocation: “She, when the angel entered, was found at home in privacy, without a companion, that no one might interrupt her attention or disturb her...For how should she be alone, who had with her so many books, so many archangels, so many prophets?”⁴³⁸ Other Ambrosian literature provides more detail of this characterization, and describes Mary specifically as a reader of the psalter and the writings of the prophet Isaiah.⁴³⁹

A later text that interprets and expands the infancy narratives in Luke is the eighth-century apocryphal book *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (see section 5.2). This compilation of stories and traditions, largely inspired by the second/third century *Protoevangelium of James*, has supplemented some of the key features familiar in

⁴³⁵ Haskins, *Who is Mary?*, 16; Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 88.

⁴³⁶ Graef, *Mary*, 81.

⁴³⁷ Ambrose, “Concerning Virgins,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, vol. 10, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 361-390.

⁴³⁸ Ambrose, “Concerning Virgins,” 375.

⁴³⁹ Miles, “The Origins and Development,” 639.

Annunciation iconography: the inclusion of a fountain/well (“while Mary stood in front of the fountain to fill up her pitcher, an angel appeared to her”) and the act of weaving wool (“on the third day, while she worked the purple with her fingers, a young man of indescribable beauty came to her”).⁴⁴⁰ The second of these details provided a stimulus for pictorial representations of the Annunciation from the fifth century. Mary was popularly seen with a loom or in the process of knitting. This motif resonated with the domesticated ideals of women throughout the Middle Ages, and presented a worked example of correct feminine practice. The tradition of the reading Virgin, anticipated in the writings of Ambrose from the fourth century, also has roots in the verses of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*:

[S]he was found first at vigils, more learned in the wisdom of the law of God, more modest in humility, more elegant in the songs of David, more gracious in charity, more pure in purity, more perfect in all virtue. For she was constant, immovable, and in this manner more and more she advanced daily.⁴⁴¹

In a similar way to Ambrose and within the context of Mary’s internal purity, *Pseudo-Matthew* presents the Virgin as “learned in the wisdom of the law of God.” She is exhibited as a person of perfection and piety, interpreted along the Ambrosian tract as a reader of the psalms of David and of the writings of Old Testament prophets. *Pseudo-Matthew* presents evidence that Mary as a reader had been a developing notion from early Christianity, and was so central to Annunciation tradition that it was to be interpreted within the authority of the apocrypha. Laura Saetveit Miles argues, however, that the first explicit visual and textual indications only developed in the ninth and tenth centuries, and it is not until much later that we find the tradition fully come into its dominant use.⁴⁴² Dates vary among art historians, but until approximately the thirteenth or fourteenth century, Mary as a cultivated weaver had been the prominent domestic feature in Annunciations. From this moment, however, there was a discernible waning of the textile tradition and in its place an increase in images of her reading: “the Virgin of the Annunciation came to be transformed in the course of

⁴⁴⁰ “Pseudo-Matthew,” 9, trans. and cited in Hawk, *The Gospel*, 62-63.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid*, 55.

⁴⁴² Miles, “The Origins and Development,” 634.

medieval art from an industrious spinster to an inspired theologian.”⁴⁴³ This development reflects the contemporary cultural shift in female readership in the west. It was at this time that Mary is depicted reading a Book of Hours, a devotional text read by contemporary, literate women and that had gradually replaced the psalter as the standard devotional text.⁴⁴⁴ The parallel of Mary’s actions found in visual culture in the later Middle Ages with those of the female readers of this time created a relationship that transcended temporal and cultural boundaries and thus increased devotional practice to the figure of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁴⁵ Susan Groag Bell writes,

Artists’ insistence on portraying the most significant medieval female ideal, the Virgin Mary, as a constant reader was surely based on the reality of their patrons’ lives. It suggests women were not only acquiring books but spending much of their time perusing them. The developing association of Virgin with books in fact coincides with rise in numbers of women book owners during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁴⁶

Mary’s occupation with her book spoke into the cultural phenomenon of female readership: the Mother of God herself was conceptualised as a woman who possessed and engaged with books. A particular extension of this tradition was the growth of images that portrayed Mary’s ability to read from a young age. Coinciding with the growth of iconography in Annunciations with Mary with a book are images that depict her mother, Saint Anne, teaching her to read; the first of these images appears in England in the early fourteenth century.⁴⁴⁷ Anne does not appear in the biblical sources but was a figure that featured in non-canonical texts, specifically the *Protoevangelium of James*. Anne as a teacher directly situated the role of educator in the relationship between mother and child. In unity with the increasingly common understanding of Mary as a reader, which informed and promoted respectability to laywomen who also read, Anne embodied an ideal role model for women to nurture

⁴⁴³ Gail McMurray Gibson, “The Thread of Life in the Hand of the Virgin,” in *Equally in God’s Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, eds. Constance S. Wright, Joan Bechtold, and Julia Bolton Holloway (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 46-54.

⁴⁴⁴ Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 85.

⁴⁴⁵ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 81.

⁴⁴⁶ Susan Groag Bell, “Medieval Women Book-Owners, Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture,” in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, eds. Mary Erler and Maryanna Kowaleski (London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 149-187.

⁴⁴⁷ Pamela Sheingorn, ““The Wise Mother”: The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary,” *Gesta* 32, no. 1 (1993): 69-80.

their children's education. She was rarely portrayed without her daughter and a book, supporting the case that the cult around this religious woman was inspired by the single trope of her as a teacher.

The tradition that Mary owned books has been both a product and effect of cultural perceptions on the Virgin Mary. The reality of Mary as a reader had developed fitfully since the fourth century and had not entered its dominant use until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in accordance to shifting ideals in women as readers. This chapter will be engaging with how the book spoke into the specific context of the Counter-Reformation, exploring the histories of the specific commissions of the images and ascertaining exactly how and why this particular trope was meaningful.

d. Meaning-making and the book of the Annunciation

In tracing the tradition from its origins, I have predominately focused on the actual *act* of Mary's reading as opposed to the image of the book itself. Before engaging with the tradition as it appears in the sixteenth-century Annunciation altarpieces, it is necessary to engage directly with the book, in order to grasp the cultural and potentially *theological* nature of the object in its narrative context. To consider this, I will refer to the work of Erwin Panofsky, who had a significant influence on the methodology for image analysis found in this thesis (see section 1.2.2.). Panofsky formulates a dilemma around 'meaning' in miscellaneous objects in paintings, aware of the tendency - or lack thereof - of observers to distinguish underlying significance within such items. In his article on Jan Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*, Panofsky writes,

The very fact that these significant attributes are not emphasised as what they actually are, but are disguised, so to speak, as ordinary pieces of furniture impresses the beholder with a kind of mystery and makes him inclined to suspect a hidden significance in all and every object, even when they are not immediately connected with the sacramental performance.⁴⁴⁸

Household objects like the ones Panofsky refers to in his article can either have attached meaning or be nothing more than domestic items that decorate the space;

⁴⁴⁸ Erwin Panofsky, "Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 64, no. 372 (1934): 117-27.

fundamentally the question is, “are realistically portrayed objects that enhance the realism of a scene disguised symbols or are they still-life features devoid of meaning?”⁴⁴⁹ This is precisely the dilemma that surrounds the Virgin’s book. It may simply have featured to emphasise the domestic nature of the Annunciation site as envisioned by its medieval interpreters. The potential is that the book is an inanimate object that serves a non-existent - or at most - marginal role in visual narrations of the Annunciation *istoria*.

However, this chapter is stimulated by the hypothesis that decisions made in the process of visual exegesis are intentional, therefore giving incentive to the endeavour of deciphering potential meaning. Nowhere is this more necessary than in paintings of the Annunciation. The crux of the Annunciation message is the making visible of what is invisible: the unborn Jesus conceived in Mary being “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1.15). This very idea is reflected in the production of a painted Annunciation: “this emanation [is] analogous to that other mystery: the possibility of expressing the divine artistically – tracing it in line and colour in the world of time and space.”⁴⁵⁰ Pictorial representations of the Annunciation are responsible for providing a visual framework for what is supernaturally hidden; ultimately, “they aim to give visual form to the divine word.”⁴⁵¹ As this is the core dilemma of Annunciation paintings, the narrative retelling relies on utilising methods compatible with the pictorial mode to convey the divine words. The visible-visual exchange requires the use of disguised symbolism by the artist, and the excavation of meaning by the observer, to unlock the Annunciation message. Visual symbols in Annunciations allow the verbal text to narrate the fundamental characteristics of the story. This was particularly necessary for understanding the person of the Virgin Mary in Annunciations. As Grootenboer writes, “The Annunciation is an excellent site for (re-)addressing the production of meaning because it poses a particular challenge to interpretation. To signify innocence and purity, a great variety of Marian symbols were developed”.⁴⁵² The central event of the

⁴⁴⁹ Grootenboer, “Reading the Annunciation,” 352. See, among others, Jon Baptist Bedaux, “The Reality of Symbols: the Question of Disguised Symbolism in Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini Portrait,” *Simiolus* 16, no. 1 (1986): 5-26; L. Benjamic, “Disguised Symbolism Exposed and the History of Early Netherlandish Painting,” *Studies in Iconography* 2 (1976): 11-24.

⁴⁵⁰ Barbara Baert, “The Annunciation and the senses: late medieval devotion and the pictorial gaze,” in *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe*, eds Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan and Laura Katrine Skinnebach (Dublin: Four Courts, 2015), 123-145.

⁴⁵¹ Krüger, “Mute Mysteries,” 82.

⁴⁵² Grootenboer, “Reading the Annunciation,” 350.

Annunciation is the conception of a child. The biblical text describes this conception with veiled mystery, as it says “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35). This verbal language is challenging when translated into visual imagery. The nature of these events are imperceptible, attaining not to physical manifestations but to a type of interior spiritual experience. For this reason, I argue that Annunciation paintings rely on the functions of disguised symbolism to signal to the story’s underlying meaning, by using visible forms to communicate invisible ideas. Among those objects is the book, and in the narrative context, its use could maintain theological significance. It is possible that the book at the Annunciation testifies to concepts in Christian theology, specifically the doctrine of the Incarnation, the idea that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. The presence of the book, embodies a visual aid for the “word”-centricity of the Incarnation ideology. Lesley Smith argues that the locality of the book to Mary in Annunciations, whether it is in the state of being read or simply appearing at her lectern, illuminates the eternal quality of the Word as defined in John 1:2, “[the Word] was in the beginning with God.”⁴⁵³ The book as already present in Mary’s room foreshadows the message Gabriel is given by God to deliver.

Going further to relate the book to the narrative of conception in the Annunciation, the book has even been understood as a kind of “semen” for the event of the Incarnation.⁴⁵⁴ Since the early Christian apologists, attempts have been made by the Church to explain how the event of conception happened. Gary Waller writes, “the most popular [...] explanation that in the ‘overshadowing’, the organ of impregnation was Mary’s ear: conception per aurem, the Word entering the ear.”⁴⁵⁵ Artists portraying the Annunciation somehow have to deal with a text that is fundamentally verbal, in that it describes a spoken dialogue. The idea of an aural conception is supported by the method through which Gabriel communicated the Annunciation message; the angel *speaks* to Mary. It was also anatomically unproblematic as it left Mary’s virginity intact

⁴⁵³ Lesley Smith, “Scriba, Femina: Medieval Depictions of Women Writing,” in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, eds. Lesley Smith and Jane Taylor (London: The British Library, 1997), 21-44.

⁴⁵⁴ Grootenboer, “Reading the Annunciation,” 353.

⁴⁵⁵ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 57.



Figure 45. Detail of Simon Martini and Lippo Memmi, *The Annunciation and Two Saints*, 1333, tempera on wood, 265x305cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

and averted the difficult issue of sexual congress. A trend in medieval paintings was to include inscriptions of the exact words spoken between the two characters.⁴⁵⁶ These visual inscriptions often were positioned leaving Gabriel's mouth and landing in close proximity to Mary's ear, reiterating the interpretation of an auditory conception (Fig. 45). Thus it is entirely plausible to argue that visual interpreters translated the Annunciation's verbleness into image by creating a set of symbols compatible with the pictorial mode. The book provided an ideal location for such an interpretation, and maintained a clear connection to the theological Word through the method of disguised symbolism.

e. The book as the 'navel'

By understanding the book as a disguised symbol that holds meaning as the Word of God, we can describe it as the 'navel' of the paintings. This language is based on the work of Mieke Bal in *Reading Rembrandt* (1991), in which she begins her analysis of Rembrandt's paintings from a navel that she identifies in each image. She uses these navels to "unravel the visual knot, taking the potential disconnection between pictorial

⁴⁵⁶ Krüger, "Mute Mysteries," 81.

sign, or between her reading and more conventional iconographic interpretation, as a point of departure for analyses.”⁴⁵⁷ The navel is a point in an image from which the observer can propose new interpretations. In Bal’s own words, the navel is “the little detail that hooks us and imposes the text alluded to, that lets the text spread out and take over,” and “a metaphor for an element, often a tiny detail, that hits the viewer, is processed by him or her, and textualises the image on its own terms.”⁴⁵⁸ When Bal talks about “text” she refers to the pre-text, that being the biblical text that is the subject of the paintings. She understands that the navel allows a way for the pre-text to infiltrate the image. In this way, I too will engage with the book at the Annunciation in order to intuit the theological pre-text of the Annunciation, the site of the Incarnation. The book allows me to unravel the image to understand the Incarnational meaning of the Annunciation event. The navel being a book – a typically textual object - heightens the idea of pre-text further. Bal finds a similar case in the navel of Rembrandt’s *Bathsheba At Her Bath* (1654) (Fig. 46), which is a letter held in Bathsheba’s hand; “an icon [that] is thoroughly verbal, but in its verballity, thoroughly visual.”⁴⁵⁹ Knowing the story of Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) and the narrative implications that the letter has on the story makes it possible for a viewer with knowledge of this pre-text to see the text take over. Although the book is not found in the Lukan Annunciation as the letter is in the case of 1 Samuel 11, the book functions as the navel as its theological implications spread out and settle into the painting. It is only by being acquainted by the pre-text of the biblical source and the pre-text of the reading Mary tradition that we can ascertain the potential of the book as a navel.

In labelling the book as the navel, I do not suggest that it is the only element of the painting that can be viewed in such a way. This research is testament to the subjective nature of the reception of an object. Based on this understanding, the categorisation of the book as a navel allows me to view this single object as a departure point for investigation. It is an element in Annunciation paintings that is often ignored or rendered nothing more than an insignificant detail. The commonality of the book tradition has left the object - to put it metaphorically - unopened and unread. The continuation of uncanonical Catholic tradition, of which the book at the Annunciation

⁴⁵⁷ Grootenboer, “Reading the Annunciation,” 350.

⁴⁵⁸ Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*, 22.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 238.

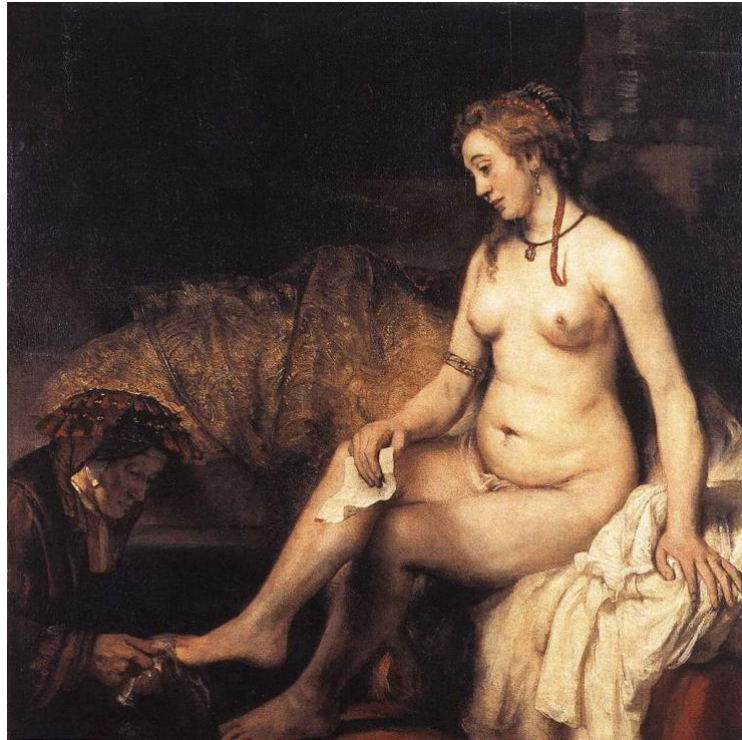


Figure 46. Rembrandt, *Bathsheba At Her Bath*, 1654, oil on canvas, 142x142cm. Louvre Museum, Paris. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

is an indicative model, was one of the central justifications for the preservation of the iconography in Counter-Reformation paintings. The inclusion of a book had become so intermingled with conceptions of the Annunciation that patrons and artists saw it either as a critical component of the event or had become so accustomed to its presence in this context that it was less of a decision and more of an inevitability. This chapter does not diminish this reason as being one of the primary incentives for the inclusion of a book in Annunciations. Yet this does not mean that the tradition lacked meaning and relevance to the context. Based on the prerequisites of Catholicism's image reform, images were to serve as didactic objects and their observers were to actively engage and learn from the interpretations being produced by artists. From my position of retrospect where I can collate evidence simultaneously using textual and visual data, I have identified evidence in a number of cases dating to the Counter-Reformation that the book of the Virgin functioned as propaganda. *How* artists did this is the question that dominates the following chapters. As a period typically defined as contra to the logocentricity (*word*-centricity, both in terms of a preference for written text and canonical scripture) of Protestantism, the book poses an interesting trajectory. The Catholic Church sought to mediate control on the dissemination of biblical texts,

hence the re-institution of visual and material culture as devotional instruments. Energy was poured into the reform and re-institution of sacred spaces, devotional objects, holy bodies, relics, shrines and sacred images.⁴⁶⁰ In addition, Catholicism sought to facilitate devotion to the Virgin Mary by portraying her in the heavenly ranks; as an ethereal, spiritual figure (see Part 3).⁴⁶¹ To situate Mary, who was for the Counter-Reformists the immaculate *Theotokos* (Mother of God), as an owner of books, and so imply her as an active and pious *reader*, was to juxtapose what have become some of the notable characteristics of the post-Tridentine Church. Based on this understanding, this chapter seeks to ‘read’ the book in three case studies: Barocci’s *Annunciation*, Carracci’s *Annunciation*, and Alberti’s *Annunciation*. Each of these objects occupied different intended locations and functions and as such their visual exegeses differ considerably. But in each, the book as an object of text enables deeper analysis into their reception of the Annunciation narrative and their characterization of the Virgin Annunciate within it. Unlike Part 1, which focused predominately on art originating in Rome, the following chapters traverse between Urbino, Bologna and Rome, magnifying the geographical breadth of the tradition and defining the propagandistic functions that each interpretation maintained to its specific location.

⁴⁶⁰ Silvia Evangelisti, “Material Culture,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven (London: Routledge, 2016), 395-418.

⁴⁶¹ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 118.

6. Chapter 6. The use of the book and female readership: Federico Barocci's Annunciation (1582-4)

6.1. Introduction

The first case study that is used to evaluate the use of the book as Counter-Reformation propaganda is the *Annunciation* by Federico Barocci in the Basilica di Santa Casa, Loreto (Fig. 47). The chapter is somewhat unique in Part 2, as it evaluates the use of both the book and another literary object: an inkwell. Its use in conjunction with the book in Annunciation representations is highly unusual and finds few iconographic similarities in other Counter-Reformation Annunciations, nor in paintings created before or after this period. Its inclusion in the “compelling and influential” religious imagery of Federico Barocci, “one of the first original iconographers of the Catholic Reformation,” warrants far more extensive interrogation than has previously been achieved.⁴⁶² Barocci was a prominent artist in late sixteenth-century Italy, and worked primarily in Urbino and the surrounding Marche region.⁴⁶³ It is widely understood that Barocci, who worked almost exclusively on sacred subjects in his pictorial representations, was himself a devout man who was affected by the reform movements arising from Italy's unstable religious landscape; his connections with the orders of the Franciscans and the Capuchins in the Marches is accounted for in scholarship.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, engagement with Barocci's unique and affective work on biblical subjects is illuminating not only for Counter-Reformation art history, but for the reception historian, as this chapter will demonstrate.

His *Annunciation* is a homage to the figure of the Virgin Annunciate, who occupied central invocation in Catholic religious reforms. As Judith Mann has written, “it seems safe to say that when Barocci approached a narrative concerning the Virgin Mary, he devoted a great deal of thought to Mary's role and contemporary ideas about her.”⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² Babette Bohn and Judith W. Mann, “Introduction,” in *Federico Barocci: Inspiration and Innovation in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Judith W. Mann (London: Routledge, 2018), 1-18.

⁴⁶³ Peter Gillgren, *Siting Federico Barocci and the Renaissance Aesthetic* (London: Routledge, 2011), xvii.

⁴⁶⁴ Keith Christiansen, “Barocci, the Franciscans and a Possible Funerary Gift,” *The Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1232 (2005): 722-728.

⁴⁶⁵ Judith W. Mann, “Drawing the Virgin,” in *Federico Barocci: Inspiration and Innovation in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Judith W. Mann (London: Routledge, 2018), 112-137.



Figure 47. Federico Barrocci, *Annunciation*, 1582-4, oil on canvas, 248x170cm. Vatican Pinacoteca, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Thus, I approach this image, particularly in address to its use of the book and inkwell, with the understanding that Barocci's visual exegesis echoed perceptions on the cultural reception of the Virgin Mary in Catholic thought. From an art-historical perspective, Barocci has received increased interest of late, that has gone some way to reclaim the fame and attribution of the artist during his own lifetime. He has often been treated as an isolated individual, partially because he "fits so uncomfortably into standard art historical periodization. Is he "proto-Baroque" or even as has been remarked more than once, proto-Rococo, or does he remain "Renaissance," even "Mannerist"?"⁴⁶⁶ Barocci's work has been understood as representative of many artistic movements and has thus stunted appropriate analysis of his career. The increase in scholarly investment in Counter-Reformation art (see section 2.1), however, has allowed this figure to be synthesised more effectively with this period of artistic eclecticism. Barocci is particularly important because he is an artist that grew up within the atmosphere of the Counter-Reformation; hence Marcia B. Hall's selection of Barocci as one of the five artists most heavily implicated by the religious climate (others being Tintoretto, Titian, El Greco, and Caravaggio).⁴⁶⁷ In particular, she identifies the emotional impact of his sacred images:

We are attracted by the loveliness of his *colorito*, his composition, and his figures and we are swept up in the sensuous experience of it. We could get lost, lose track of time, lapse first into reverie, thence into meditation, and from there perhaps even move to the highest form of vision, ecstasy.⁴⁶⁸

Barocci is marked by his sensitivity to the devotional expectations that were attached to sacred images in the post-Tridentine context.⁴⁶⁹ The most famous example of the reception of this emotionality is found in the reaction of Saint Philip Neri, his patron at the Santa Maria in Vallicella, who entered a "most sweet ecstasy" during a meditation

⁴⁶⁶ Stuart Lingo, "Federico Barocci, History, and the Body of Art," in *Art and Reform in the Late Renaissance: After Trent*, ed. Jesse Locker (London: Routledge, 2019), 154-175.

⁴⁶⁷ See Hall, *The Sacred Image* (2011).

⁴⁶⁸ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 215.

⁴⁶⁹ Alessandra Giannotti, "The legacy of the artistic tradition of his homeland," in *Federico Barocci: Inspiration and Innovation in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Judith W. Mann (London: Routledge, 2018), 46-62.



Figure 48. Federico Barocci, *The Visitation*, 1583-6, oil on canvas. Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Source: <https://culturespectator.com/2013/04/30/federico-barocci-at-the-national-gallery-london-until-the-19th-may/>

of Barocci's *Visitation* (1583-1586) (Fig. 48).⁴⁷⁰ Another contemporary appraisal of Barocci's sacred paintings comes from painter and art historian Giovanni Baglione, who wrote that Barocci's work "led the [beholders'] hearts back to devotion."⁴⁷¹ While this quality in Barocci's paintings was identified almost immediately among a contemporary audience, the comparative lack of scholarly investigation up until recently may be due to many of his commissions being at a distance to the artistic centres of the sixteenth century.⁴⁷² It was, however, within Rome that Barocci forged much of his legacy between 1560 and 1563.⁴⁷³ During this time, Barocci developed a

⁴⁷⁰ Pier Giacomo Bacci, *The Life of Saint Philip Neri*, trans. Frederick William Faber (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1847), 357.

⁴⁷¹ Arnold Witte, "'Maniera sfumata, dolce, e vaga': the recent canonization of Federico Barocci," *Perspective: Actualite en histoire de l'art* 1 (2015): 161-168.

⁴⁷² Gillgren, *Siting Federico Barocci*, xvii.

⁴⁷³ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 199.

reputation among reforming Catholic movements, most significantly the Oratorians, and worked on major projects, including the frescoing of two vaults in the Vatican. On returning to Urbino, Barocci continued to work both locally and for his patrons in Rome.⁴⁷⁴ He developed a particularly intimate relationship with the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria II della Rovere (1549-1631) during his career. Barocci painted several portraits of members of the Duke's court as well as religious images, including the *Annunciation* for the Basilica della Santa Casa, which adorned the Duke's private chapel.⁴⁷⁵ Barocci was joined by Federico Zuccaro (see Chapter 4), who decorated the wall paintings of the chapel dedicated to the life of the Virgin Mary, including those *istorie* used in the cycles seen in Chapter 5, such as the Visitation and the Coronation of the Virgin.⁴⁷⁶

In one of the earliest sources that we have on Barocci's life, Giovan Pietro Bellori *Lives* (1672), Bellori describes Duke Francesco Maria II as a "devotee of the Virgin Annunciate" who delighted at the final composition: "The duke rewarded [Barocci's] skilful art most generously because of the great satisfaction he gained from it."⁴⁷⁷ The satisfaction of Barocci's patron with the composition reflects his endorsement of the artist's interpretation and the iconography it purports, naturally including that of the book and the inkwell. The decision to focus on the Annunciation narrative specifically as the subject for the altarpiece, out of all of the Catholic Marian traditions, was mediated not only by Francesco Maria II's admiration of the Virgin Annunciate, but also by its physical location. The Basilica di Santa Casa has an intimate connection to the Annunciation narrative that far outdates the installation of Barocci's altarpiece. As the name of the basilica suggests, within the space lies the Santa Casa, "the holy house," "the house in Nazareth in which the mystery of the Redemption was announced to Mary," which was "miraculously translated to Ancona, Italy, by Angels in the year 1291."⁴⁷⁸ The Basilica enshrines the Santa Casa, and since the fifteenth century has stood as one of the most famous Christian shrines in Italy and abroad

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 201.

⁴⁷⁵ Gillgren, *Siting Federico Barocci*, 177. See Stuart Lingo, "Francesco Maria II della Rovere and Federico Barocci: Some Notes on Distinctive Strategies in Patronage and the Position of the Artist at Court," in *The Della Rovere: The Creation and Maintenance of a Noble Identity*, ed. Ian Verstegen (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2007), 179-199.

⁴⁷⁶ Raffaella Morselli, "In the Service of Francesco Maria," in *The Court Artist in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, eds. Elena Fumagalli and Raffaella Morselli (Rome: Viella, 2014), 49-87.

⁴⁷⁷ Bellori, *The Lives*, 163.

⁴⁷⁸ Santoro, *Mary in Our Life*, 455.



Figure 49. Photography of the marble screen around Santuario della Santa Casa, Basilica della Santa Casa, Loreto. Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

(Fig. 49). The site has been held responsible for a number of miraculous healings resulting from devotion to the Santa Casa shrine. Within the Counter-Reformation period, the tradition that the Virgin Mary's house was moved from Nazareth to Italy received increased veneration as a "major symbol of resurgent Catholicism [...] central to the Counter-Reformation's affirmation of the Marian presence and her role in the Church's defiance of Protestant protests against superstition and idolatry."⁴⁷⁹ The tradition of the Santa Casa, while disputed by Protestant Reformers, was one of many relics used by the Counter-Reformation Church to evoke the laity's "emotional dependency" on Catholic devotional practices.⁴⁸⁰ It encouraged spiritual experiences by appealing to the tangible presence of a space that the Virgin Mary herself allegedly occupied. The status of this shrine as a place of pilgrimage during the Counter-Reformation is famously represented by Caravaggio in the Church of Sant'Agostino, Rome (Fig. 50). In characteristic fashion, Caravaggio did not conform to the traditional iconography of the subject that had mainly centred on the Santa Casa in flight from its

⁴⁷⁹ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 106-7.

⁴⁸⁰ Hall, "Introduction," 1-21.



Figure 50. Caravaggio, *Madonna di Loreto*, 1605, oil on canvas, 260x150cm. Basilica of Saint Augustine in Campo Marzio, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

original location to Italy, and instead painted an image of pilgrims worshipping the Virgin Mary and the Christ child that she holds.⁴⁸¹ Caravaggio's painting emulates the Marian devotion paid to the Madonna di Loreto, which exegetically goes hand-in-hand with devotion to Mary Annunciate. Returning to the actual location of the Santa Casa in the Basilica in Ancona as it stood in the Counter-Reformation, we see this devotion to the Annunciation translated into the marble screen that surrounds the Santa Casa, and pictorial representations, such as Barocci's *Annunciation* in the Duke of Urbino's private chapel.

⁴⁸¹ William Gavin, "Caravaggio's "Madonna of Loreto" Reconsidered," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 6, no. 1 (1986): 20-23.

The attachment of the Basilica di Santa Casa to the tradition of the Madonna di Loreto sets the context for Barocci's visual exegesis of the Annunciation narrative. Although the painting has resided in the Vatican collections since 1820, it is through engaging with the intended location that it becomes possible to examine the directions of Barocci's contextualised interpretation. Through the analysis, it will be demonstrated that the decisions made in the painting further localised the biblical event to the Marche region of Italy. The use of the book – and the inkwell - function as cultural propaganda that supports Catholic tradition, and specifically echoes the reception of the narrative within the Basilica's Counter-Reformation context.

6.2. Iconographic analysis

Barocci's painting represents the Annunciation narrative taking place in an interior space, the most dominant location for pictorial representations of the event and one that echoes the tradition of the Santa Casa. The most dominant feature of the setting itself is the large, open window that faces onto the Castle of Urbino, a homage to Barocci's hometown that situates the biblical narrative in a time and place consistent with his own. The opening of the window is partially covered by a red curtain that drapes across the left hand corner. On the upper edge of the canvas, Barocci has made a subtle allusion to the divine sphere by painting the bottom of clouds with light streaming into the space. This mere suggestion of heavenised imagery is expanded dramatically in his later *Annunciation* at Santa Maria degli Angeli, Perugia, which emulates an almost identical composition but with the addition to God the Father and two cherubim in the upper dome (Fig. 51). Although significantly less dramatic, Barocci has used the light in the Loreto version to illuminate the rest of the scene. This is clear from the vertical falling of shadows, particularly noticeable in the position of the shadow of Gabriel's left arm. Gabriel kneels towards the Virgin Mary. He is dressed in gowns of white, yellow and orange, and holds a stem of lilies in one hand and presents his other in an open gesture. His head tilts to one side in an enquiring manner, as if inviting a response. This position leads the beholder to the Virgin Mary, who reacts to this action with perceptible uncertainty. Dressed in a red gown and traditional blue covering, she appears to lean back on her *prie-dieu*, and positions her right hand between herself and the angel. In her left hand, she sets down an open book; evidently she has been disturbed in her reading. There is an obvious similarity between this

arrangement of the protagonists in the *Annunciation* and in Barocci's *Calling of St. Peter and St. Andrew* (1580-3) (Fig. 52). Both create a falling diagonal from left to right, with the divine figure - Mary or Jesus - situated at a higher level whilst a figure bows before them.⁴⁸² The sense of worshipful adoration maintained by Gabriel and the fisherman makes a clear indication towards the figures of the Holy Family as the object of devotion, both in the view of the figures within the painting and the audience who behold the composition.

Two other objects in the painting need to be identified in preparation for the next stage in the analysis, and both benefit from the use of a later drawing by Barocci of the Loreto composition. Created within two years of the *Annunciation*, Barocci's engraving is considered his most popular, and it journeyed with him to be used at his personal discretion. It emulates the composition at Loreto yet it also enhances some of the more subtle details found in the edges of the painting. Firstly, on the left-hand corner of the engraving's pictorial plane is a sleeping cat, which is partially obscured in the painted version due to damage. The placement of a cat in the *Annunciation* could well be in reference to the folk tradition that a litter of kittens were born at the moment of Christ's birth.⁴⁸³ Alternatively, it could merely indicate that Barocci was exceptionally fond - and perhaps was an owner - of cats; Barocci's *Madonna della Gatta* is affectionately named after the cat in the front left corner who plays with John the Baptist (Fig. 53).⁴⁸⁴ Alternatively, it could indicate the perpetuation of a fairly uncommon iconographic tradition from Renaissance influences, such as Jan de Beer's *Annunciations* or, importantly, the *Annunciation* by Lorenzo Lotto (Fig. 54).⁴⁸⁵ Lotto's *Annunciation* for the Santa Maria sopra Mercanti in Recanati is one of the most famous paintings of the *Annunciation* narrative, and is "uncanny, uncomfortable and strangely at odds with

⁴⁸² Gillgren, *Siting Federico Barocci*, 131.

⁴⁸³ For analysis on the use of the cat in *Annunciations* and reference to Paleotti's *Discourse*, see Patricia Rocco, *The Devout Hand: Women, Virtue, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 55-57.

⁴⁸⁴ Carol Plazzotta, "From altar to hearth: Barocci and the Brancaleoni of Piobbico," in *Federico Barocci: Inspiration and Innovation in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Judith W. Mann (London: Routledge, 2018), 19-32.

⁴⁸⁵ See, among others, Ilaria Bianchi, *La politica delle immagini nell'eta della Controriforma. Paleotti teorico e committente* (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2008), 68; Simona Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Subha Mukherji, "Invasion from Outer Space": The Threshold of *Annunciations*," in *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Space*, ed. Subha Mukherji (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 43-70; Rocco, *The Devout Hand*, 55-57.



Figure 51. Federico Barocci, *Annunciation*, 1594-6, oil on canvas. Santa Maria degli Angeli, Perugia. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 52. Federico Barocci, *The Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew*, 1590, oil on canvas, 133x99cm. Palace Museum, Wilanow. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 53. Federico Barocci, *Madonna with the Cat*, 1574-77, oil on canvas, 112.7x92.7cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 54. Lorenzo Lotto, *Annunciation*, 1534-5, oil on canvas, 166x114cm. Villa Colloredo Mels Museum, Recanati. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

typical representations of this seminal subject.”⁴⁸⁶ It is a highly individualised interpretation of the biblical event that focusses on Mary’s agitation in response to Gabriel’s intrusion.⁴⁸⁷ A key visual device for formulating the disturbance of the scene is the cat, who flees from the angel towards Mary. The unusual movement of the cat, which drives the drama of Lotto’s painting, is exceptionally different to that found in Barocci’s *Annunciation*, although there is reason to suggest that Lotto’s interpretation had a direct impact on the Loreto image given that there is less than ten kilometres between the town of Recanati and Loreto.⁴⁸⁸ Furthermore, it is possible that Lotto was well known in the Loreto context, as he spent his final years in devotion to the Madonna di Loreto in the residence of the Basilica di Santa Casa.⁴⁸⁹ The use of the cat is not

⁴⁸⁶ Irene Cioffi Whitfield, “Apocalypse Now: A Psychology of Conception in Lorenzo Lotto’s *Annunciation* of 1535” *ARAS Connections* 3 (2018): 1-28.

⁴⁸⁷ Padgett, “Ekphrasis,” 191-218.

⁴⁸⁸ Mann, “Drawing the Virgin,” 128.

⁴⁸⁹ Peter Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto* (New York: Yale University Press, 1997), 27.

the only similarity between the two Annunciations. In addition, the positioning of the protagonists - the Virgin Mary on the left and the Angel Gabriel on the right - is far less common than the dominant formula of Mary on the right.⁴⁹⁰ In addition, both images contain the literary objects not only of the book, but also of an inkwell. In Lotto's image, the back wall of the interior space contains a shelf with several domestic objects, including several books, a candle and the inkwell. Recanati was the home of an international book fair, attracting a widely literate and educated audience; the inkwell in Lotto's image may, therefore, have served to function as a familiar domestic object and little else.⁴⁹¹ While spatially distanced from Mary in Lotto's image, in Barocci's the inkwell is in much closer proximity. On the furthest left of Barocci's images, both his painting but more clearly in his sketch, the inkwell and quill rest on a table at the height of Mary's elbow.

Barocci, and Lotto before him, demonstrate a typical response to the book iconography, but the presence of the inkwell is comparatively rare in an Annunciation context. In addition to these two images, Judith Mann writes that the only other painting that includes this iconography is Giovanni Battista Cungi's *Annunciation* (1547) (Fig. 55).⁴⁹² This image reflects a typically *Maniera* interpretation of the Annunciation; by that I mean that it conforms to a trend in Italian art that prioritised artistic flair opposed to narrative lucidity (see sections 2.2.3. and 9.3.). Cungi evidently sought to demonstrate his artistic brilliance, but his *Annunciation* falls short of being a success: "Cungi's enthusiastic attempt to catch the studied wit and elegance of the *Maniera* style is thwarted by his heavy-handed stylisations and inept treatment of the figures."⁴⁹³ Focussing on the right-hand portion of the painting, Mary is shown leaning against a column, beside a reading desk with open book and inkwell. This inkwell is being lifted by a small, male, nude statue. There has not been any substantial analysis given to this object, and its sheer bizarreness makes it challenging to determine whether there is an iconographic trope being developed or it is simply a benign

⁴⁹⁰ Lealani Mae Y. Acosta, John B. Williamson and Kenneth M. Heilman, "Agency and the Annunciation," *Journal of Religion and Health* 53 (2014): 1616-1621; Altmann, "Right and Left in Art," 223-238.

⁴⁹¹ Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto*, 27.

⁴⁹² Mann, "Drawing the Virgin," 127.

⁴⁹³ Christopher Witcombe, "An 'Annunciation' by Giovanni Battista Cungi," *The Burlington Magazine* 131, no. 1041 (1989): 849-51.



Figure 55. Battista Cungi, *Annunciation*, 1547, oil on panel, 262x176cm. Museo Civico, Borgo Sansepolcro. Source: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/884216.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A0eff43d235c9cc98ecd45fa2702bcd8f>

compositional decision.⁴⁹⁴ The same could be argued in the case of Barocci; is the inkwell of exegetical significance that furthers the idea of Mary's literacy, or does it merely appear to aid the domesticity of the image? Yet based on the fact that Barocci's *Annunciazione* is relatively restrained in its incorporation of popular Annunciation iconographic objects – only incorporating to a cat, lily, book and inkwell – its use is worth investigation.⁴⁹⁵

6.3. Context and the use of the book

It has been argued that Barocci held a particular affinity to the genre of *istorie* paintings, of which his *Annunciazione* is an example. When invited in 1574 to represent the “mystery of the *Misericordia* (mercy) or another mystery and *historia* of the blessed

⁴⁹⁴ Mann “Drawing the Virgin,” 127.

⁴⁹⁵ Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 639.

Virgin,” for the fraternity in Urbino, Barocci warned against the more abstract concept of the *Misericordia* in favour of an image of pictorial narrative.⁴⁹⁶ He wrote,

The desire to represent the mystery of the misericordia does not seem to me to [provide] a subject that is very appropriate for making a beautiful painting. If your excellencies do not mind, one could do another mystery, for there are other istorie of the glorious Virgin which are more appropriate and with more beautiful inventions, such as the Annunciation, the Assumption, the Visitation, and other istorie which will please your excellencies more.⁴⁹⁷

In this way, Barocci articulates a post-Tridentine hypothesis: that it was by the “stories of the histories of our redemption” that the laity were instructed in faith and inspired to devotion.⁴⁹⁸ Stuart Lingo writes that Barocci “seems to have been unsure how a modern painter would successfully represent something that was principally a mystery, a symbolic image, rather than an image that expressed the mysteries of the sacred through the mechanisms of dramatic narrative, which were most accessible.”⁴⁹⁹ The Annunciation story was compatible with the representation of a *istoria*. As a biblical narrative, it was not static or abstract, but tangible and representable. It was specified by Barocci as “more appropriate and with more beautiful inventions.” When, in 1582-4, Barocci eventually painted his *Annunciation*, the image accomplished both the propriety and the beauty he intended. The image was praised not only by his patron, but by biographer Bellori, who wrote, “[the Virgin] emanates utter modesty and virginal humility, with her eyes lowered and her hair gathered simply above her brow, not to mention that her decorum is increased by the blue mantle that spreads from her arm over the kneeler on the ground.”⁵⁰⁰ Bellori pays the highest commendation to Barocci’s Virgin on account of the artist’s ability to represent the central characteristics that Mary was praised for during the Counter-Reformation period. Barocci’s accomplishment of a modest and humble Virgin Mary is achieved by an increase in what Freedberg has described as his “feminine accent,” in which “he has begun to probe more insistently

⁴⁹⁶ Stuart Lingo, *Federico Barocci: allure and devotion in late Renaissance painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 39.

⁴⁹⁷ Federico Barocci, “Letter 61,” in *Nuova raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura* vol. 1, ed. Michelangelo Gualandi (Bologna: A spese dell’editore ed annotatore, 1844), 137-8, trans. and cited in Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 39.

⁴⁹⁸ Council of Trent, “On invocation,” 775.

⁴⁹⁹ Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 39; Lingo, “Federico Barocci, History, and the Body of Art,” 155-157.

⁵⁰⁰ Bellori, *The Lives*, 165.

into those too-soft, yielding regions of emotion [...] touching on sentimentality or falling quite into it.”⁵⁰¹ The meticulous planning that went into the Virgin Annunciate - and particularly her face that professes a heightened emotionality and sweetness - is reflected in the twenty-eight known preparatory drawings relating to this commission.⁵⁰² Barocci’s carefully-considered interpretation of the Virgin Mary for the *Annunciation* indicates an attentiveness to her characterization, which would have been aided not only by her gesture but in the possessions that surround her. This includes the two literary features of the book and the inkwell, both of which are in close proximity to the Virgin Mary at the moment of Gabriel’s visit.

In the introduction to Part 2, it was discussed that the book maintains a theological connection to the Incarnation - and therefore to the Annunciation - through its manifestation of a textual object. The book has been interpreted as a disguised symbol of the narrative of the Word of God becoming physical flesh, and has thus made the object a theological image as well as one attached to cultural theories around female readers. The inkwell has been understood to cultivate further theological meaning within the Annunciation narrative, in addition to heightening the historical issue of female literacy. This section therefore temporarily broadens the navel of our investigation to focus on both the book and the inkwell as represented in Barocci’s image. In addition to the Incarnational pre-text of the book in Annunciations, the inkwell also occupies symbolic reference to the event of God becoming man. It functions in this way by symbolising “the most powerful Biblical example of collaboration [...] Mary and the Lord worked together to produce an extraordinary ‘text,’ namely, the incarnate Christ.”⁵⁰³ When considered as an extension of the theological significance of the book, the inkwell goes further to illicit the participation of Mary in the creation of Christ and provides her with more agency in her role as His Mother. Although she is not actively writing in Barocci’s image, the closeness of the object and its presence amongst a sparse selection of objects may be interpreted as this type of theological metaphor, which elevates Mary’s maternal partaking in the Incarnation and reflects the

⁵⁰¹ Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 639.

⁵⁰² Babbette Bohn, ““Though this be madness, yet there is method in it”: Barocci’s design process,” in *Federico Barocci: Inspiration and Innovation in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Judith W. Mann (London: Routledge, 2018), 89-112.

⁵⁰³ Kimberley Benedict, *Empowering Collaborations: Writing Partnerships Between Religious Women and Scribes in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2004), 9.

desired elevation of the figure in the Counter-Reformation context. Conversely, or additionally, the image may also be a nod to female literacy and to the specific historical context in which Barocci was working.

The image of an inkwell and the implication that Mary was a writer is uncommon in Annunciations. It is worth considering that Barocci actually omitted the detail from his later *Annunciation* for the Santa Maria degli Angeli in Perugia and as such the inkwell cannot even be reliably considered part of his conventional imagery for this religious narrative.⁵⁰⁴ Aside from an Annunciation context, the most famous commemoration of the writing Mary is found in Sandro Botticelli's (1445-1510) *Madonna del Magnificat* (1480) (Fig. 56). In this painting, Mary is shown surrounded by young boys, typically identified as wingless angels, with the young Christ sitting on her lap. Two of the boys present to Mary an open book with legible text of the Magnificat (Lk 1:46) and an inkwell. With her son's guiding hand hovering above her wrist, Mary dips her quill into the ink to continue writing.⁵⁰⁵ Susan Schibanoff has argued that the painting reflected of the issue of women writers in the fifteenth-century context, and specifically the impossibility of such a notion:

Its central conception and its most significant gesture -the Christ child's "handling" of the Virgin-overstate its case for the miraculousness of female talent. To depict his sole female writer, the Madonna of the Magnificat [...] Botticelli uses an entirely different set of gestures and pictorial *topoi*, which reinforce her extraordinary nature as well as her dependence on masculine agency. In contrast to Botticelli's solitary male writers, his female author is surrounded by six enabling figures, all masculine, most notably the Christ child, who guides the Madonna's writing.⁵⁰⁶

In the biblical account, Christ is unborn at the moment of the Magnificat. Botticelli thus disrupted temporality to have Mary writing under the guidance of a masculine figure.⁵⁰⁷ The risk that Mary's ability to write would portray too much creative independence is

⁵⁰⁴ Bohn and Mann, "Introduction," 1.

⁵⁰⁵ Benedict, *Empowering Collaborations*, 9.

⁵⁰⁶ Susan Schibanoff, "Botticelli's Madonna Del Magnificat: Constructing the Woman Writer in Early Humanist Italy," *PMLA* 109, no. 2 (1994): 190-206.

⁵⁰⁷ Benedict, *Empowering Collaborations*, 9.



Figure 56. Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna of the Magnificat*, 1483, tempera on wood, 118x118cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

thus moored by the overwhelming presence of masculine authority. I use Botticelli's example not to draw contextual parallels to Barocci's inkwell, as there is a century difference in the dates of their creation, but to illustrate how Mary as a female writer had been controlled by a masculine dominance. The presence of male angels and the dominance of Christ over Mary's writing hand in Botticelli's *Madonna* continued to be reflected in the phenomenon of female education into the sixteenth century. The Reformation context was one in which debates around the education of women was debated. Dissonances rose between the external groups of Protestantism and Catholicism, and internally within them. Merry E. Weisner, who has written extensively on women's learning in the early modern period, lays out a series of questions that debates around women's education had to deal with:

Why should women learn Latin, when they were forbidden to attend universities and none of the professions that required it were open to women? Why did women need

to read the Bible themselves, when they could listen to their fathers, brothers, or husbands read from it? Why couldn't women be content with education that was primarily training in the type of domestic skills they would use as married women, whether milking cows or hiring servants? Wouldn't a woman's reading or writing distract her from caring for her children and household?⁵⁰⁸

These questions are modelled on assumptions that access to women's education could have dangerous effects. It pertained to an anxiety that a rise in women's education would have dramatic consequence to their role in society. Within Protestantism, vernacular schools were opened for biblical education; although these were primarily aimed at boys, there were also elementary schools opened for girls who could not learn to read at home.⁵⁰⁹ Martin Luther had heralded a new age in biblical readership, which sprung forth from his understanding of divine authority found singularly in scripture. Access and engagement with vernacular bibles was therefore a fundamental objective of his reform. In such a way, Protestantism seemed to recognise a need to nurture the biblical education of young females and saw the schooling of girls as a more necessary project than had been distinguished before.⁵¹⁰ However, it is important to also contrast these positions with the fact that Protestantism sought the closing of convents, which were the most operational modes for scriptural education among women.⁵¹¹ What education there was for girls at these schools was limited to a short space of time. Similarly, there still existed a significant gender gap in children's education and differentiation between the classes. Ideals on female education shifted between geographical locations across Europe, as well as simply between urban and rural areas, thus the Protestant Reformation brought both an expansion and diminishing of women's education.

The landscape of women's education in Counter-Reformation Italy was also varied, but it "lagged behind even the meagre offerings of Protestant areas."⁵¹² The context of learning was heavily impacted by the hierarchy in society. Reading and writing were

⁵⁰⁸ Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145.

⁵⁰⁹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 121.

⁵¹⁰ Lowell Green, "The Education of Women in the Reformation," *History of Education Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1979): 93-116.

⁵¹¹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 148.

⁵¹² *Ibid*, 149.

the privilege of those women who enjoyed living in higher ranks, whilst those of lower standing were almost unanimously excluded from this privilege. A minority of women would have had access to devotional literature, commonly a book of hours, and infrequently summaries of the Bible in the vernacular.⁵¹³ In *Dell'educatione christiana dei figliuoli* (1584), Cardinal Silvio Antoniano (1540-1603) warned parents against educating their daughters to the same level as their sons as it might inspire intellectual vanity in women. If not contained, this may have troubled the "Pauline dictum against women teaching or having authority over men."⁵¹⁴ The central anxiety was that educated women would pose a challenge to male authority. Predominantly, their education was confined to the acquisition of religious morals that would encourage a devotion to chastity until marriage.⁵¹⁵ The convent, a model that was shunned by Protestants, continued to function as a place of education for young girls, but in an "increasingly repressive" way.⁵¹⁶ The increased involvement of bishops in the religious institutions under their jurisdiction in the post-Tridentine era meant significantly less autonomy for the educators in the convents. The influence of these Church leaders confined the autonomy of women in these convents so that education was directed solely towards the nurturing of women's moral character, based on the ideal cultural prescriptions of women at the time. Although not prohibited, therefore, female readers in a Counter-Reformation context were subject to significant limitations in the material they engaged with. As with the case of female education in Protestant circles, attitudes in Catholicism fluctuated significantly across different locations and, most importantly, social class.

Within the question of female education is the specific issue of writing. The period's re-emphasis on feminine ideals, those namely being "chastity, modesty, silence and obedience," did not warrant an overwhelming flourishing of feminine creativity.⁵¹⁷ Limitations were still fixed to female authors based on the widely masculine-centred

⁵¹³ Haskins, "Volume Editor's Introduction," 32-33

⁵¹⁴ Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2011), 21.

⁵¹⁵ Paolo Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte: Women and Life in Sixteenth-century Venice* (London: Associated University Press, 2003), 44.

⁵¹⁶ Jane Stevenson, "Conventual Life in Renaissance Italy: The Latin Poetry of Suor Laurentia Strozzi (1514-1591)," in *Women Writing Latin*, ed. Laurie Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey (London: Routledge, 2002), 109-133.

⁵¹⁷ Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 132.

literary scene, although by the end two decades of the sixteenth century saw higher class women occupy more presence in the literary scene as well as in painting, music and acting. Unsurprisingly, a common theme in the writings of these women was devotion to the Virgin Mary, who was the epitome of the female ideal as dictated by the tradition of the Catholic Church. Yet even where opportunities for female writing on Mary was possible, the type of text that could be produced was regulated:

As women, the writers were not to deal with theology – the preserve of male ecclesiastics – but as laywomen, with a stress on devotion and appealing to the imagination and emotions. In doing so, they expressed their understanding of Mary as virgin, mother, miracle maker, and model for themselves and their readers.⁵¹⁸

The personification of the Virgin Mary as a writer is therefore exceptionally difficult to trace across Counter-Reformation textual culture, even in that written by women. Susan Haskins notes that the one of the most popular female writings from the period, Lucrezia Marinella's *Life of Mary Virgin, Empress of the Universe* (1602), emphasised themes of matrimony and family, consistent with the renewed emphasis attached to this sacrament by the post-Tridentine Church.⁵¹⁹ Mary is commended and elevated to the status of "Empress of the Universe" based on, and due to, her humility and decorous behaviour in a familial setting, which did not lend itself to the creative agency of writing. The same understanding is found in male writings of the period relating to Mariology, which in addition to emphasising Mary's doctrinal significance in the Incarnation, focused on positioning Mary's humility as the central invocation for female believers. Mary was to remain the feminine ideal, not only in the elite classes, but also for the laity en masse. The premise of writing was therefore wholly unattainable to the remit of an entire gender, and makes the incorporation of the inkwell in Barocci's painting even more curious and necessitates our examination of his Urbino context and specific audience at the Basilica di Loreto.

With regards to the use of the book in Barocci's painting, the passivity of reading meant it was less problematic to the cultural perceptions around women, as it sanctioned

⁵¹⁸ Haskins, "Volume Editor's Introduction," 2.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, 3.

“female submission to male textual authority.”⁵²⁰ The book that Mary has her hand on is small, and may indicate that it is a prayer book or a book of hours; both of these constituting devotional literature propagated by Catholic authorities for a female audience. A similarly sized book is found in Barocci’s later portrait of his Urbino patroness Quintilia Fischieri, which is an image wholly dedicated to the concept of a female reader (Fig. 57). More than just reading, however, it is likely that throughout his long career centred in Urbino, Barocci would have grown accustomed to the “phenomenon of the female writer,” as the city raised such writers as Laura Battiferra and Vittoria Galli.⁵²¹ His close personal relationship to his patron, the Duke of Urbino, allowed Barocci an audience with elite society, which would have therefore made him more acquainted with writing women and perhaps supportive of their literacy. Barocci had a unique relationship with Francesco Maria II, far surpassing the “courtier-sovereign” relationship, and resulted in the Duke’s provision of an apartment in his palace.⁵²² The province of Urbino was a “small but intellectually brilliant court in central Italy.”⁵²³ Women occupied a dominant presence in the society and thus exercised more liberation in typically masculine roles.⁵²⁴ In one of Barocci’s later paintings, a portrait of Monsignore Giuliano della Rovere, an inkwell sits on the desk behind the figure, surrounded by other books that contribute to the image of male literary education (Fig. 58).⁵²⁵ Its pair in the earlier *Annunciation* indicates the proactivity of writing by a female – specifically the Virgin Mary – as if indicating her as a scholar or a “doctoressa.”⁵²⁶ The lack of acknowledgement in Counter-Reformation scholarship that this was the way in which Mary should be interpreted indicates that this characterization was reflective of a type of elite woman found in Urbino society, as opposed to a broader cultural idealization of Mary as a writer. Commissioned by the Duke of Urbino himself, the *Annunciation* pays tribute to those female members of society who afforded the privilege of writing.

⁵²⁰ Elena Lombardi, *Imagining the Woman Reader in the Age of Dante* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 23.

⁵²¹ Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 25.

⁵²² Morselli, “In the Service of Francesco Maria,” 56.

⁵²³ Fiora A. Bassanese, “Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547),” in *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. Rinaldina Russell (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 85-94.

⁵²⁴ June Osborne, *Urbino: The Story of a Renaissance City* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003), 17.

⁵²⁵ Mann, “Drawing the Virgin,” 129.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, 130.



Figure 57. Federico Barocci, *Quintilia Fischieri*, 1600, oil on canvas, 123.8x95.3cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 58. Federico Barocci, *Monsignore Guilliano della Rovere*, 1600, oil on canvas. Source: <https://www.oceansbridge.com/shop/museums/kunsthistorisches-museum/monsignore-giuliano-della-rovere-1559-1621>

Furthermore, in correlation with the elevation of polemical significance, the type of audience who attended the pilgrimage of the Basilica di Santa Casa included members of the papacy and other high rank officials; an audience that would have been far more used to the writing female than those of the lower classes.⁵²⁷ This specific form of Annunciation visual exegesis was, however, avoided in Barocci's later *Annunciation* for female patron Laura Pontani Coli, and implies the choice of the inkwell was intimately bound to cultural perceptions within Francesco Maria II's Urbino court. Barocci's careful contextualisation of the sacred narrative to the province of Urbino was explicit in the visibility of the castle that can be seen through the large open window. In an often missed detail, the same can be said about the inkwell, which propagated the practice of female reading and writing that was not a universal Counter-Reformation contingent, but a localised cultural phenomenon.

⁵²⁷ Ian Verstegen, *Patronage and Dynasty: The Rise of the Della Rovere in Renaissance Italy* (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2007), 189.

6.4. Conclusion

Barocci's *Annunciation* for the Basilica di Santa Casa was the first altarpiece commissioned by Francesco Maria II and saw the start of a blossoming relationship of artistic patronage and friendship. The Annunciation narrative was one Barocci was pleased to represent. As an object of *istorie*, Barocci used the Annunciation to communicate a sacred history that both taught and inspired devotion through the characterization of a humble and modest Mary – the ideal figure of Counter-Reformation femininity. Amidst the carefully constructed visual exegesis are not one but two objects pertaining to a literary context that were perhaps inspired by the unique *Annunciation* of Lorenzo Lotto. The first is the book, which conforms to a hugely popular iconographic tradition that Mary was a reader. By extension, her reading elevated her piety as well as her submissiveness to male text. Barocci took Mary's education further into the context of writing, which was far less common as an iconographic detail in Annunciations both in his contemporary visual culture and that which preceded him. Mary's ability to write can be singled out in a small number of paintings, such as Botticelli's *Magnificat*, which sparks curiosity into both the historical and theological significance of such an interpretation. Furthermore, the inkwell could be interpreted as a disguised symbol of Mary's creative participation of "writing" the Incarnation and actualising the Word into flesh. Historically, the writing Mary constructs a curious interpretation when set against the context of Counter-Reformation female education. Writing was still the prerogative of men, and female education fluctuated significantly across contexts. Yet in Urbino, within a high and privileged court, the writing Mary was not so unexpected. Less than a perpetuating tradition relating to Mariological symbolism, Mary here supported a particular status of female that was specific to its patron's elite society.

7. Chapter 7. The use of the book and the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church: Ludovico Carracci's *Annunciation* (1584)

7.1. Introduction

To continue the investigation of the use of the book in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces, Chapter 7 analyses the *Annunciation* by Ludovico Carracci (1584), created within two years of Barocci's image of the same subject (Fig. 59). The image was designed for San Giorgio in Poggiale, Bologna, and is now housed in the Vatican Pinacoteca. Carracci's image extends what is merely inferred by Barocci and represents the Virgin Mary in the act of reading, initiating no response to the Angel Gabriel who closely observes the practice. This occupies the focal point in the pictorial narrative, and this chapter will investigate how Mary's reading of the book intimates a connection to the prescriptiveness of reading under Catholic jurisdiction during the Counter-Reformation period. The analysis also gives space to the arguments of contemporary scholarship that identify an affiliation between Carracci's image and the post-Tridentine artistic theory of archbishop of Bologna, Gabriele Paleotti. Having dealt almost exclusively in Chapter 2 with bodies of text that theorised the nature of the image-reform strategies, the relevance of examining Carracci's *Annunciation* is based on it being an image that actualises those textual ideas. As Gail Feigenbaum has written, "Here, in a singular experiment, the theory and practice of artistic and Catholic reform seem to converge."⁵²⁸ The impact of this image is even more significant given the influence of the Carracci family (Ludovico, Annibale and Agostino) in this period's reformation of visual culture. To challenge the excesses that they identified in the *Maniera* art of sixteenth-century Italy, the Carracci became pioneers of an "updated classical Renaissance artistic vocabulary."⁵²⁹ Before venturing further into the significant impact of the Carracci's style, it should be stated that in comparison to the historiography relating to his cousins - Annibale and Agostino – Ludovico Carracci's fame and reputation has often been treated as inferior or subsidiary.⁵³⁰ This is despite

⁵²⁸ Gail Feigenbaum, "The Early History of Lodovico Carracci's 'Annunciation' Altar-Piece" *The Burlington Magazine* 132, no. 1050 (1990): 616-622.

⁵²⁹ Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," 376.

⁵³⁰ Daniel M. Unger, *Redefining Eclecticism in Early Modern Bolognese Painting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 109.



Figure 59. Ludovico Carracci, *Annunciation*, 1583, oil on canvas. Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, Bologna. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

his longer working career and contemporary praise from biographers like Carlo Casare Malvasia, who will be referred to momentarily. With the initial help of his cousins, who later on in life moved to Rome to pursue their careers and so form a more visible legacy in Counter-Reformation art, Ludovico Carracci formed a school in Bologna – the Accademia dei Desideri, later the Accademia degli Incamminati - which itself had a substantial impact on a rising generation of artists that included notable individuals Guido Reni and Domenichino.⁵³¹ Ann Sutherland Harris writes that pupils of the Accademia were “either trained by him or deeply affected by his art.”⁵³² His *Annunciation* is a tangible example of how Trent’s requirements for didactic and devotionally impactful sacred images were satisfied by this new innovation, in addition

⁵³¹ Ann Sutherland Harris, *Seventeenth-century Art and Architecture* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005), 21.

⁵³² Harris, *Seventeenth-century Art*, 21.

to how it responded specifically to the expectations of Gabriele Paleotti. The idealization of the reading Mary found within Carracci's *Annunciation* should therefore be examined not merely as a stylistic choice, but as a theme that was considered to be an appropriate, cultural characterization of the Virgin Mary, and perhaps even as a nod to the prescriptiveness of Carracci's visual exegesis to post-Tridentine ideals.

The *Annunciation* was created for the Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento (Company of the Holy Sacrament) at San Giorgio in Poggiale, Bologna, and is believed to be Carracci's first large-scale painting of a religious subject.⁵³³ It was positioned above a predella, designed by artist Camillo Procaccini (1556-1629), but was lost during the Second World War.⁵³⁴ Based on Francesco Cavazzoni's description in his guide to art from 1603, the *Annunciation* was created for "la residenza del Corpo di Cristo."⁵³⁵ "Residenza (residence)" as opposed to "cappella (chapel)" infers the work was designed specifically for the rooms adjacent to the church, which the confraternity was given the right to construct in a concession from 1583.⁵³⁶ Carracci's altarpiece was commissioned for the residence by one of the confraternity's most active members, Giulio Cesare Guerini. Guerini intended the altarpiece to remain in the hands of the confraternity for them to use as they seemed fit even after his death. The painting remained in its original location for fifty years, "in a comparatively secluded location exclusively devoted to the Society's use," before being transferred to the Church of San Giorgio, and then, much later on, to the Vatican collections.⁵³⁷ As will be argued more extensively in section 7.3, within this painting is a clear departure from the *Maniera* that was popular in Bologna during the Carracci family's childhood.⁵³⁸ While it is his younger cousins, Annibale and Agostino, who have been received more art-historical attention, Ludovico Carracci's *Annunciation* should bring him to the forefront of Counter-Reformation art history. His contemporary biographer, Malvasia, praised his work for its attentiveness to the artistic and religious milieu of Bologna, in which art theorist Gabriele Paleotti had very recently been made archbishop. He

⁵³³ Robert Neuman, *Baroque and Rococo Art and Architecture* (London: Pearson, 2013), 31.

⁵³⁴ Nancy Ward Neilson, "Camillo Procaccini: Toward a Reconstruction of the Emilian Years," *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 3 (1977): 362-74.

⁵³⁵ Feigenbaum, "The Early History," 617.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁸ Harris, *Seventeenth-century Art*, 7.

argues that the attributions formerly made by Giorgio Vasari about Michelangelo could be more appropriately paid to Carracci, and writes,

If [Giorgio] Vasari did not seem so very poetic to me in the otherwise ingenious introduction he devised for his *Life of Michelangelo*, where, following the model of epic poetry, he wrote that “the benign ruler of heaven mercifully turned his gaze to the earth, and seeing a vast wasteland of artistic effort, the fruitlessness of men’s intense studies, their presumptuous preconceptions more removed from the truth than darkness from light, took it upon himself to save us from these errors by sending a spirit into the world who would be able to show what was true perfection in the art of design by his use of line, contours, light and shadow in order to achieve the effect of relief,” how much better might these words be applied to our Ludovico, it being clear from the evidence and the consistent opinion held of him that he was the first of the Carracci to bring true succor to painting when it was faltering and to save it from imminent harm and ruin. It was he who courageously set himself in opposition to that self-deluding generation.⁵³⁹

Malvasia identifies that the Carracci family initiated a great stylistic change away from the flamboyance of *Maniera*, and that by this variation he saved the genre of art from sharp decline. Ludovico Carracci indeed “spearheaded” the reform of images in Bologna and paved the way for a new genre of sacred painting.⁵⁴⁰ Although this reform that fundamentally centred around narrative legibility and clarity can be viewed in many of the Carracci family’s paintings from the early 1580s, Ludovico Carracci’s *Annunciation* is perhaps the most overt in its removal of artistic ornamentation. In continuation of the premise that an artist’s visual exegesis is directed by the intended location and function of an image, this chapter recognises that the location of a confraternity - a place of learning and participation in Catholic ideologies - was a significant factor in the creation of Carracci’s image, and, as such, to his adherence to the iconography of the book. The chapter will now structure analysis of Carracci’s image, paying particular attention to how the biblical narrative has been expanded to incorporate a particularly conclusive portrayal of Virgin Mary as a pious reader, before

⁵³⁹ Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 1.

⁵⁴⁰ Anne Summerscale, “Context,” in Carlo Cesare Malvasia’s *Life of the Carracci*, trans. Anne Summerscale (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 1-79.

interrogating the larger effects of this trope in Carracci's adherence to Counter-Reformation image debates.

7.2. Iconographic analysis

Carracci has set the biblical narrative in an interior space, in keeping with the dominant form of Annunciation representation found in Counter-Reformation visual culture, and has structured the space using a linear perspective accentuated by a dominating checked floor. The room of the pictorial narrative has been variably received, one scholar refers to it as “ample,” while another of an “archaic poverty.”⁵⁴¹ Yet both contribute to identifying key characteristics of the space. The space is, as Giovanni Folesani identifies, “ample” in that the perspective makes the scene appear to open towards the beholder. Furthermore, Folesani writes, “the action [pictorial narrative] takes place in an ample room at the second floor of a fairly prosperous mansion endowed with hallways, columns, fine furniture.”⁵⁴² While this is partial conjecture, there is considerable space behind the protagonists, with an open door on the left implying further space beyond this single room. The prospect from the window at the back of the space may indicate it is on a second floor, and, in a similar way to Barocci, portrays a scene of Italian buildings, in this case Bologna, identifiable by its leaning tower.⁵⁴³ The space that Carracci creates by no means emulates a space akin to the historical setting of the Annunciation in ancient Palestine, and does not replicate the holy space housed in Loreto, which itself is a small, bricked single-roomed cottage.⁵⁴⁴ On this point, it is perhaps important to note that from the Renaissance period, Bologna was well-established as a place of pilgrimage that substituted the Holy Land, as one of its basilicas - the Church of Saint Stephen - was a replica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.⁵⁴⁵ Situating the Annunciation in a city like Bologna indicated both a contextualisation of the biblical narrative to contemporary society and a sensitivity to the phenomenon of Italian cities as sites of religious pilgrimage.

⁵⁴¹ Giovanni Perini Folesani, “Landscapes, Townscapes and Maps in the Oeuvre of the Carracci,” *Ritsumeikan Language and Culture Research* 26, no. 1 (2014): 71-90.

⁵⁴² Folesani, “Landscapes, Townscapes and Maps,” 79.

⁵⁴³ Feigenbaum, “The Early History,” 618.

⁵⁴⁴ Folesani, “Landscapes, Townscapes and Maps,” 79.

⁵⁴⁵ Kathryn Blair Moore, *The Architecture of the Christian Holy Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 103.

In contrast to the idea of the Annunciation room being “ample,” it has alternatively been described as possessing an “archaic poverty.” This too has some understandable resonances to Carracci’s construction of space, if we understand the term to refer to the “poor, nearly severe palette” and to the deficiency of objects.⁵⁴⁶ The tones used in the image indicate a clear restraint in the use of rich colours that may determine any type of opulence on the part of Mary and her domestic setting. The same can be said of the scarcity of objects, which contrasts with the size of the space. But despite Carracci’s avoidance of any extravagant ornamentation in the background, the domestic objects that have been used indicate that the Annunciation has been staged in a bedroom. On the right of the room is a bed with white sheets canopied by dark drapes, and Mary’s *prie-dieu* in the foreground suggests a place of intimate devotion. On the *prie-dieu* are two books, and rosary beads are hung on the side facing the beholder. The use of rosary beads in Catholic devotion saw a reformation of its own during this period in conjunction with the increased emphasis on visual and material culture to stimulate devotional experiences.⁵⁴⁷ In the context of Christian imagery, the beads are used to increase the piety of the characters represented, in this case, the Virgin Mary.⁵⁴⁸ A similar effect is had by the sewing basket to the left of the *prie-dieu*. Within a Bolognese context, under the authority of then-archbishop Gabriele Paleotti, women were given more agency in the reform context, and were encouraged to engage with virtuous forms of work such as sewing and embroidery.⁵⁴⁹ Patricia Rocco writes,

The silk industry of Bologna, in turn, employed large numbers of these young *putte* to create embroidered objects of beauty and devotion, often with a didactic purpose. In turn, these virgins and their meditative work had a powerful impact on the sanctity of the city, since women’s honour was also inherently tied to the virtue of their city.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁶ Carla Bernardini, “Annunciation,” in Discover Baroque Art,” Museum With No Frontiers, accessed October 26, 2020, http://www.discoverbaroqueart.org/database_item.php?id=object;BAR;it;Mus12_A;1;en

⁵⁴⁷ Evangelisti, “Material Culture,” 412.

⁵⁴⁸ See Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary* (2012). See also, Margaret A. Morse, “Domestic Portraiture in Early Modern Venice: Devotion to Family and Faith,” in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Maya Corry (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 117-138.

⁵⁴⁹ Patricia Rocco, “Maniera Devota, Mano Donnesca: Women’s Work and Stitching for Virtue in the Visual Culture of the Conservatori in Early Modern Bologna,” *Italian Studies* 70, no. 1 (2015): 76-91.

⁵⁵⁰ Rocco, “Maniera Devota, Mano Donnesca,” 76.

The object next to the *prie-dieu* in Carracci's *Annunciation* makes further indication to the piety of the Virgin Mary, by using an iconography that possessed significance to its contemporary location.

Before having analysed the central figures in the *Annunciation*, the physical setting has already characterised the main features of Carracci's textual expansion. The space is relatively sparse but has been meticulously organised for the benefit of the beholder, as if "every element is conscientiously described, and its role defined."⁵⁵¹ A useful transition between background setting to foreground protagonists is neatly provided by the dove of the Holy Spirit and its stream of light, which parallels the linear perspective produced by the flooring and creates the sense of spatial depth. The beam guides the beholder to its end point – the head of the Virgin Mary who is positioned directly opposite the Angel Gabriel on the picture plane. Beginning with the latter of these figures, Gabriel kneels on his left leg whilst presenting Mary with a tri-stem of lilies, and points upwards with his right hand. He is barefoot and is dressed in white robes, with a precise and detailed set of wings that reflect Carracci's sensitivity to naturalism. Gabriel's clothing is adorned with red sashes crossed over his chest, perhaps depicting a stole or similar garment worn by church authorities as implied by the crosses that are woven into the bottom of the fabric. From the wider research I have conducted on this specific detail, I would suggest that, while this vestment is exceptionally uncommon in Annunciation iconography, it influenced an *Annunciation* by Carracci's most successful student Guido Reni in 1629 (Fig. 60). Reni's image bears certain compositional similarities to Carracci's, namely the white gown and red stole, the open window revealing a landscape of a city, and the use of diagonal flooring. Reni has, however, heightened the emotional intensity of the scene by removing the superfluous space surrounding the figures and incorporating a throng of angels in the upper portion.

The final aspect to analyse in relation to the content of Carracci's image is the Virgin Mary, who kneels at her *prie-dieu*, facing Gabriel. Her hair is swept away from her face so as to reveal a rounded, plump face that accentuates her youth. She is dressed in a red gown with a sash around her waist – perhaps a girdle - on which hangs another

⁵⁵¹ Feigenbaum, "The Early History," 618.



Figure 60. Guido Reni, *Annunciation*, 1629, oil on canvas, 319x221cm. Louvre Museum, Paris. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

set of rosary beads. In a similar way to the angel's uniform, Mary's garment looks institutional as opposed to domestic. The more ostentatious appearance of Gabriel implies a subordinate role on the part of Mary, as in a relationship of teacher and student, or active speaker and passive listener. Mary's submission to this divine, religious presence is magnified by her physical gesture. Her arms are crossed by her chest in a gesture of humility, and her eyes do not break away from the intense act of reading. The book is relatively small and may indicate a type of devotional prayer book, like the book of hours identified in Barocci's which is similar in size. In Carracci's interpretation, Mary's eyes remain respectfully lowered as she is watched or presided over by Gabriel. In this instance, the use of the book is not a subsidiary add-on to the biblical narrative, but the chosen activity for the Virgin Mary before, and during, the Annunciation event. Carracci has enlarged the motif to the point that it stands as the defining characteristic of the pictorial narrative and marks this image as a pivotal

moment in its iconographic tradition. The prescriptiveness of Mary's reading style is drawn out further by the similarly repressed setting, and it is this quality of Carracci's visual exegesis that will form the basis for the rest of the analysis. To analyse the use of the book iconography in Carracci's *Annunciation*, 7.3 will first address how the tradition reflected the specific location and intended function of the San Giorgio in Poggiale, before evaluating its compatibility with the prescriptions on sacred images promoted in the post-Tridentine period, and more specifically in the vision of Gabriele Paleotti.

7.3. Context and the use of the book

On the use of the book in Carracci's *Annunciation*, it should firstly be argued that a desire to preserve tradition should not be underestimated in this circumstance. Like other major artists of this period, Carracci sought to satisfy the religious requirements of his day, which had authorised tradition as co-equal in its authority to canonical scripture. I argued in the introduction to Part 2 that out of the most common iconographies associated with the Annunciation during this period, the use of the book was the most important and most polemicised. Like so many of his contemporaries, Carracci's conformity to such a tradition marks the submissiveness of his methods of visual exegesis to the perpetuating influence of Church tradition. To take this investigation further, however, and synthesise Carracci's visual exegesis with the specific context, it is important to first gauge the *type* of appeal the artist makes to the tradition. David Linton writes,

Mary's reading is sometimes treated as a marginal activity, one which is played down in both visual and narrative elements. Hence, the book is repeatedly positioned with only half of it visible at the edge of the painting, partially obscured by architectural or other features, seen only partially or merely implied. Second, Mary is sometimes seen as readily relinquishing her book or even closing it in favour of her higher calling of motherhood. [...] Yet frequently accompanying these strategies are subtle elements which suggest that books are given up with reluctance or that perhaps Mary will try to accomplish what so many of our own contemporaries strive to do: juggle both the

responsibilities of motherhood and a life of reading or even scholarship, satisfying the socio-religious demands and the personal desires as well.⁵⁵²

Carracci's *Annunciation* does not depict the book on the periphery; it is not tossed to the side, nor is it forgotten even by the entrance of the Angel Gabriel, as is implied by Barocci's interpretation. Neither is it disguised or overshadowed by other elements in the painting. Carracci's use of the tradition is not marginal or secondary, but forms the focal point of the entire composition. The Virgin is intentional in reading, fully dedicated and unwavering in her studies, very much conforming to her fourth-century Ambrosian characterization (see Part 2c). She does not exert any kind of emotional response to the angel and refuses to tear her eyes away from the book. Not only is the activity spotlighted by the dove emanating a beam of light and the nimbus around Mary's head, but it is also illuminated by the studious observation of the Angel Gabriel. Guided by his attention to Mary, and Mary's attention to reading, the book manifests as the navel of the painting. In light of the nature of Carracci's use of the tradition, an enquiry can now be made on the purpose of this appeal.

The original location and intended audience of Carracci's *Annunciation* is particularly useful in elucidating the purposes behind the iconography being used so histrionically. The Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament within the San Giorgio in Poggiale was envisioned principally as a space for education. The rooms attached to the church were intended not only for "discussion, consultation and reflection on matters concerning the faith, the Church, and the Society itself" but "for instructing and educating boys of the aforesaid parish in Christian doctrine."⁵⁵³ Based on the early descriptions of the altarpiece mentioned in section 7.1, we know that it was within one of these rooms that the *Annunciation* was originally located. These rooms were places of instruction for members of the confraternity to gather and deliberate on current issues in the newly-reformed Catholic Church, and also for the doctrinal education of the next generation. Across Counter-Reformation Italy, confraternities, like that of the Holy Sacrament, were flourishing and with them came an extension of papal authority

⁵⁵² David Linton, "Reading the Virgin Reader," in *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (London: Routledge, 2012), 253-276.

⁵⁵³ Feigenbaum, "The Early History," 618.

to control the lay and parish communities.⁵⁵⁴ For Paleotti's Bologna, this transpired into establishing a Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament in every parish, which was to be subject to a standard set of guidelines, as opposed to the local model the city had previously implemented.⁵⁵⁵ As institutions dedicated to the Eucharistic, which itself was a significant point of contention in a sixteenth-century religious context, the confraternities of the Holy Sacrament ensured the celebration of the "real body and blood of Christ in the sacramental bread and wine" across lay communities, including the observation of this practice among the sick and dying.⁵⁵⁶ The confraternities provided yet another means to increase the communities' reliance and observation of explicitly Catholic activities, and thus minimise opportunities for corrupt ideologies that may challenge church hierarchy.

From what is known of the Italian confraternities dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, the education of children was a primary initiative. Translating that to the context of the San Giorgio in Poggiale, and Carracci's *Annunciation* appears entirely compatible with the objectives of the original location:

[T]hrough Ludovico's altar-piece young children receiving instruction in the Society's residence would understand the concept of the Incarnation in the simplest terms. Those who were able – presumably the members of the Compagnia who met for discussion, consultation, and reflection on matters of doctrine – could advance to a more subtle understanding of the theological concepts entailed. Although much of Ludovico's early work suggests a general sympathy with the major ideas of Paleotti's *Discorso* the pointedly didactic character of the *Annunciation* stands out as exceptional.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ For a nuanced assessment on confraternities in Italy during this period, which prioritises individual instances as opposed to vast and inaccurate generalizations, see, John Patrick Donnelly and Michael W. Maher (eds.), *Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France, and Spain* (Kirkville: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999). See also Anna Beth Rousakis, "From Image of Devotion to Devotional Image: The Changing Role of Art in the Chapel of the Arciconfraternita della Madonna della Consolazione, detta della Cintura," in *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas*, eds. Christopher F. Black and Pamela Gravestock (London: Ashgate, 2006), 112-128; Nicholas Terpstra, "Confraternities and Civil Society," in *A Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Bologna*, ed. Sarah Rubin Blanshei (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 386-410.

⁵⁵⁵ Nicholas Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 224-5.

⁵⁵⁶ Danilo Zardin, "'A Single Body': Eucharistic Piety and Confraternities of the Body of Christ in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Texts, Images and Devotion," in *A Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Bologna*, ed. Sarah Rubin Blanshei (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 109-132.

⁵⁵⁷ Feigenbaum, "The Early History," 621.

Given the nature of the building in which it was originally situated, Carracci's painting makes the Incarnation mystery tangible through a painted narrative. The image was to be observed not only by the Company's members or the educated in the society, but by children. The religious education of young boys of the parish is understood to have taken place in view of this painting. The motif of Mary reading therefore embodied an entirely appropriate iconography and would have served as a primary example to those children. She pours over her book with intentionality, indicating not only how important devotional study is, but also perhaps how her observers should be subscribing to the revised order of the Catholic Church. Although Mary is portrayed as a humble young person, dedicated to nurturing her education and obedient to religious authority, within the Counter-Reformation she also embodied a revered and deified figure in Catholicism. This supplemented the following idea: if it was a pursuit of the Mother of God, it should also be a pursuit of the lay believer.

Yet beyond its ostensible suitability, tension exists between Carracci's *Annunciation* and its original setting. The painting, an explicit exhortation to *female* readership, resides in an institution that aimed for the education of men, which begs the question of what Carracci was propagating through his visual exegesis. The roles of women in confraternities is often obscure and fluctuated significantly across contexts.⁵⁵⁸ There is no historical evidence to suggest the Company of the Holy Sacrament was a site of female education, and women most likely held the role of tending to the physical church spaces and furnishings.⁵⁵⁹ The image of Mary reading in this location could be interpreted as ironic if we consider the issue of gender. The painting represents the prescriptive type of reading that was rendered suitable for women in this age.⁵⁶⁰ The book Mary holds is small, which may indicate that it is one of the types of books mentioned in Barocci's analysis - a prayer book, a book of hours - which were acceptable devotional objects suitable for the eyes of the responsible, upper class female. Carracci's Mary is restrained and modest, and is instructed by her book and observed by a masculine presence acting as God's agent. When read in this way, the

⁵⁵⁸ Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 37.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 224-5.

⁵⁶⁰ Andrea Emiliani, *The Carracci: Early masterpieces by Ludovico, Agostino and Annibale from Mannerism to Baroque* (Collana: NFC Edizioni, 2015), 46.

image may well be hinting at the cultural expectations for female readers and even furthering this idealization for its confraternity at the audience. Alternatively, to reiterate the earlier point, the image may merely be equipping its young audience with a biblical character to aspire to. Little is made of Mary's femininity in Carracci's *Annunciation*; she is modestly built and her hair is swept back from her face with no head covering or ornamentation. She is dressed in a religious uniform, also distracting the viewer from her embodiment of femininity and instead making an appeal to her primary audience of young pupils of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. While it may be that Carracci's Mary reflects the desire for female readers, it is far more convincingly argued as an endorsement of the dedicated style of reading and education desired by the confraternity's young students. Specifically, the book could be a visualization of a catechetical instruction book, which were increasingly common objects in the Counter-Reformation period as the educative prerogative was given over to "the several new religious congregations of brothers and sisters, formed especially with the religious instruction of children in mind."⁵⁶¹ Mary's act of reading, in which she pores over her book with intentionality, is perhaps propagating how a rising generation of educated individuals should be abiding by the Church's instruction.

As previously mentioned, Carracci's *Annunciation* has been used in scholarship to represent the new age heralded by Gabriele Paleotti of a "devotional art meant to impart discipline."⁵⁶² The image has been deemed a "manifesto" of the renewal of religious art; a key visual tool for understanding this moment in art history.⁵⁶³ If this is, as it seems, a tried and tested assumption, it begs the question of what precisely is the motive behind this categorisation. In a moment of artistic eclecticism with a broad spectrum of interpretations even of this one subject, what is the significance of this particular object? Naturally, Paleotti and Carracci were contemporaries in Bologna. The Carracci family, and particularly Ludovico, were exceptionally well-known in their

⁵⁶¹ Robert J. Hurley, *Hermeneutics and Catechesis: Biblical Interpretation in the Come to the Father Catechetical Series* (Oxford: University Press of America, 1997), 19. Also see, among others, Jean Pierre Dedieu, "Christianization in New Castile: Catechism, Communion, Mass, and Confirmation in the Toledo Archbishopric, 1540-1650," in *Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain*, eds. Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 1-24.

⁵⁶² Prodi, "Introduction," 8.

⁵⁶³ Giuseppe Nifosi, *Arte in opera vol. 4 Dal naturalismo seicentesco all'Impressionismo* (Rome: Gius Laterza & Figli Spa, 2016), unpaginated, accessed November 24, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Arte_in_opera_vol_4_Dal_naturalismo_seic/mx61DAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Arte+in+opera&printsec=frontcover

native city and so too was the Academy they founded. Paleotti's treatise was published two years prior to Ludovico Carracci's painting, and the Carracci family may have been acquainted with the text itself or the nature of its contents. Perhaps the favour Paleotti had for confraternities of the holy sacrament influenced or directed Carracci's particular form of visual exegesis.⁵⁶⁴ While there is no evidence to suggest that Paleotti himself sanctioned the painting created by Carracci, the argument remains that at a point simultaneous to the publication of Paleotti's *Discourse*, there emerged from the Carracci academy a method of visual exegesis that provided a formula for the same reform of image-based didacticism. Alessandro Brogi describes this as a "neutral and codified pictorial language."⁵⁶⁵ Narrative comprehensibility is a fundamental principle in Paleotti's *Discourse*, for example in his statement that, "A painting must [...] have the greatest possible clarity by itself; it should be so well organised as to make immediately recognizable what it wants to portray."⁵⁶⁶ Compare this statement to Carracci's visual exegesis of the Annunciation and the *istoria* he creates is methodically and consciously organised in a manner that facilitates an uninterrupted exposé of the biblical narrative. The explicit linear perspective allows the space to function as a pictorial stage for the figures in the foreground to narrate the story. The beholder experiences a legible narrative, grounded in a likeness to nature that is not shrouded by distracting objects or obscure, unreadable gestures.

It is clear then from this first point that the legibility of Carracci's composition satisfies Paleotti's desire for "well-organised" compositions with a clear pictorial narrative. But, further to this, it is the very style in which the *Annunciation* is represented that so clearly corresponds to the educational expectations for images. This form of naturalism epitomises the wider method used in the Carracci's artistic practice that saw them become one of the central schools of art in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁶⁷ The Accademia dei Desideri, later the Accademia degli'Incamminati, was "the crucible in which the Carracci forged the reform of painting, charting the future course of the Italian baroque."⁵⁶⁸ To achieve this new-

⁵⁶⁴ Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 75.

⁵⁶⁵ Alessandro Brogi, *Ludovico Carracci: Addenda* (Bologna: Fondazione Federico Zeri, 2016), 14-5.

⁵⁶⁶ Paleotti, *Discourse*, 313.

⁵⁶⁷ Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," 381.

⁵⁶⁸ Gail Feigenbaum, "Practice in the Carracci Academy," in *The Artist's Workshop*, ed. Peter Lukehart (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1993), 59-76.

found desire for representations of nature rather than the incongruity of *Maniera*, the Carracci school enforced the use of life models, a method that became a popular only in this post-Tridentine era.⁵⁶⁹ An observance of nature was so desired under the principle that observers would learn and be shaped more effectively in religious living if the characters in paintings were comparable to their human reality.⁵⁷⁰ This entered an extreme phase in the unmediated realities of Caravaggio's religious paintings, but is found in the images of the Carracci family in a more stylised manner. Evidence of the observance to nature is found not only in the central characters in Ludovico Carracci's *Annunciation*, but also in the still life objects. The basket of sewing tools and *prie-dieu* with reading books all echoed the human dimension of the sacred narratives.⁵⁷¹ They were domestic objects testifying to domestic activities. Although we do not have evidence to suggest the specific reception of this image by the members of the confraternity or whoever beheld the image, it is reasonable to suggest that books and learning were highly desirable and actively practiced methods within the historical context. In the *Annunciation*, with the scene of Bologna coming through the window, the image of confraternal education, the objects of domestic life, and perhaps even the culturally appropriate representation of female readers, the beholder is inspired to receive religious instruction.

The visual exegesis of Carracci's *Annunciation* is in keeping with the didactic ideals of its original setting. Yet the nature of this comprehensible, unobstructed pictorial narrative extends beyond contextual appropriability and into the wider expectations for images in the Counter-Reformation context. In light of this point, it becomes all too easy to decipher the prescriptivity of the Virgin Mary's reading in her artist's adherence to the requirements of the post-Tridentine Church. Carracci's *Annunciation* is considered by scholars as an "orthodox" interpretation of the Annunciation narrative, and one that is emblematic of Gabriele Paleotti's desire for didactic clarity in visual images.⁵⁷² The orthodox nature of the image - by that we mean the controlled and orderly compositional arrangement - is precisely the characteristic that singles this painting out among contemporaneous images of the same subject and aligns it so

⁵⁶⁹ Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," 381.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Emiliani, *The Carracci*, 46.

⁵⁷² Feigenbaum, "The Early History," 618; Nifosi, *Arte in opera*, unpaginated; Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 75.



Figure 61. Fontana Prospero, *Annunciation*, 1575, oil on canvas, 225x137cm. Milanovia Brera, Lombardy. Source: https://www.beniculturali.eu/opere_d_arte/scheda/annunciazione-annunciazione-fontana-prospero-1512-1597-03-00180226/251137

specifically to Paleotti's call for "greatest possible clarity" in religious images. Indeed, the image possesses its own inimitability among the case studies already examined in this thesis. It is an explicit example of the method of visual exegesis innovated by the Carracci family, and spearheaded by Ludovico, that focused on using naturalism and visible realities as a means to evoke the invisible doctrines of Catholicism.⁵⁷³ Sydney Joseph Freedberg uses Ludovico Carracci's *Annunciation* and compares it to a work by Carracci's teacher, Prospero Fontana (1512-1597) (Fig. 61), to articulate just how significantly Carracci challenged current artistic styles:

The Ludovico stands against this representative work of the late Maniera as an index of a new attitude toward the nature and the uses of art, and indeed toward nature itself.

⁵⁷³ Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 50.

In the Maniera work ornamental value takes primacy over the desire for descriptive truth, and a code of highly stylised, fancy behaviour almost excludes the sense of any narrative sincerity. Ludovico's picture seems, by comparison, to be deliberately in a prose style while the Maniera *Annunciation* pretends to a fanciful and elaborated poetry.⁵⁷⁴

Freedberg uses rhetorical language to describe Carracci's painting. He defines it as a "prose" image. The image *tells* the narrative of the Annunciation in unequivocal terms. This was a contrast to that which is "fanciful and elaborated" in Fontana's *Maniera* interpretation, where the narrative of the biblical story is by no means as explicit. Carracci has omitted any artistic devices that might distract the observer from the humble telling of a conversation between two figures. This was a fundamental characteristic for Counter-Reformation paintings, as they were called upon by Trent and treatise writers like Paleotti to function as *istorie*, which when conceptualised properly were to be as - if not more - effective than a verbal object. It was Paleotti who described paintings as "silent preachers," and Carracci's *Annunciation* fits neatly within this definition.⁵⁷⁵ The painting preached not only of the Incarnation mystery in legible terms, nor only of the importance of dedicated reading in a confraternal setting, but also of the didactic ability of a new age of sacred images that manifested the textual expectations of image reform forged by Counter-Reformation authorities.

7.4. Conclusion

Carracci's *Annunciation* was the first religious altarpiece designed by the artist, and its reception in modern scholarship has certainly rendered it an extraordinary achievement by its sensitivity to the cultural milieu. The process and direction of the artist's visual biblical exegesis is clearly shaped by the intended function of an artwork as an object that decorated a confraternal space. The image of Mary reading a book was entirely compatible to the educational context. In a manner consistent with an increasing tendency to use nature as a primary source in pictorial representations, Carracci's *Annunciation* is a comprehensible composition, and thus obtainable for the

⁵⁷⁴ S. J. Freedberg, *Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 83.

⁵⁷⁵ Black, *Church, Religion and Society*, 204; Paolo Prodi "Introduction," in *Gabriele Paleotti. Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, ed. Paolo Prodi, trans. William McCuiag (London: Getty, 2012), 1-44.

beholder to replicate in their life. In addition, when examining the broader context of post-Tridentine image reform, the act of reading in Carracci's painting - persistent and unwavering - mirrors the interpretation's conformity to the reformed ideals for sacred images. The nature of Mary's reading imitates the artist's obedience to the post-Tridentine Church, and propagates a challenge to its beholder to display equal subservience to Christ's Church in an age of uncertainty.

8. Chapter 8. The use of the book and religious conversion: Durante Alberti's *Annunciation* (1588).

8.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters of Part 2 have focused primarily on the book in relation to the act of Mary's ownership or readership, and how this characterisation may have been created to reflect and/or reinforce cultural perceptions of women in the Counter-Reformation. In the instance of Carracci's *Annunciation*, it also examined how the motif mirrored the prescriptive nature of image reform in Bologna. The objective of Chapter 8 is to examine an altarpiece whose relationship to the book relies less heavily on the issue of female readership or the Church's authority over reading practices, and more on the use of the book as a polemical object of biblical interpretation. In this case study, the book embodies a physical text and thus constructs an interplay between the two modes of writing and painting, as anticipated in Chapter 2. This is one in a small number of pictorial Annunciations in which the book functions in such a way that its text becomes legible to the viewer. In such paintings like the one we will examine in this chapter, there exists a heightened level of textuality, allowing the navel of the book - but more specifically the *text* - to unravel and verbalise the pictorial narrative.

Chapter 8 sees the return of our investigation to the geographical heart of the Counter-Reformation, Rome, and analyses the *Annunciation* by Durante Alberti in the Santa Maria ai Monti (Fig. 62). Like the figures of Federico Zuccaro and Ludovico Carracci whom we have already discussed in this thesis, Durante Alberti has been relatively understudied in modern scholarship. He remains an "obscure" figure in the landscape of sixteenth-century painters.⁵⁷⁶ Working almost entirely for patrons in Rome, Alberti was commissioned for altarpieces and decorations in churches and chapels associated with the emerging religious orders, including the Jesuits, the Oratorians and the Capuchins.⁵⁷⁷ Later in his career, Alberti was elected *principe* of the Accademia di San Luca from 1598-9. It is clear, therefore, that Alberti was highly involved both with the practical and theoretical sides of the reimagining of the visual

⁵⁷⁶ Carol M. Richardson, "Durante Alberti, the Martyrs' Picture and the Venerable English College, Rome," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 73 (2005): 223-262.

⁵⁷⁷ Richardson, "Durante Alberti," 230.



Figure 62. Durante Alberti, *Annunciation*, 1588. Santa Maria ai Monti, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

culture of the city; he occupied positions of both artist and teacher. Carol Richardson writes, "Despite not so well-known today, Alberti was clearly not just a Jesuit regular, which is to say that [he was] available at low pay [...] but a leading member of the artistic establishment in Rome in the last decades of the sixteenth century."⁵⁷⁸ Like the artist himself, his paintings, including the *Annunciation* in the Santa Maria ai Monti, have not been significantly studied in modern scholarship. This lacuna presents an opportunity for art historians - and biblical reception historians - to investigate Alberti's major contributions to Catholic visual culture. His *Annunciation* in particular contains a fascinating visual exegesis of the biblical narrative of the Annunciation, and constructs a unique interpretation of Mary and her book.

The image in the Santa Maria ai Monti was commissioned by a nephew of Andrea del Monte, Ugo Boncompagni, in 1588. Del Monte was a Jewish convert, formerly named Josef Zarfati, and was an exceptionally important sixteenth-century preacher and writer. He was designated Rome's "preacher to the Jews" in 1576, using as the primary form of his biblical exegesis 'typology', in order to claim the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament.⁵⁷⁹ He was responsible for "purifying" and censoring the Hebrew literature belonging to Jews living in the city and also served as the Hebrew specialist at the Vatican Library.⁵⁸⁰ His newfound zeal and involvement with the post-Tridentine Church saw him preach and write vehemently against Judaism, his unpopularity among his former community being so extreme that Rome's Jewish population threatened to leave the city.⁵⁸¹ Due to the "virulence" of his sermons and the alienating effect his message was having on a community he was meant to be attracting to the Catholic faith, Del Monte was asked to stop preaching in 1582.⁵⁸² In 1588, following the preacher's death, Boncompagni commissioned a painting for the Santa Maria ai Monti in commemoration of his uncle. For this painting, he commissioned Durante Alberti, an artist who had by this point created several

⁵⁷⁸ Carol Richardson, "The English College Church in the 1580s: Durante Alberti's Altarpiece and Niccolo Circignani's frescoes," in *The Church of the English College in Rome: Its history, its restoration*, ed. Andrew Headon (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2016), 24-52.

⁵⁷⁹ Martine Boiteux, "Preaching to the Jews in Early Modern Rome: Words and Images," in *The Jewish-Christian Encounter in Medieval Preaching*, eds. Jonathan Adams and Jussi Hanska (London: Routledge, 2015), 296-322.

⁵⁸⁰ Boiteux, "Preaching to the Jews," 302.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Carolyn H. Wood and Peter Iver Kaufman. "'Tacito Predicatore': The Annunciation Chapel at the Madonna Dei Monti in Rome," *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (2004): 634-49.

paintings for churches across the city. It is the specific context of Alberti's image that animates his use of the book, which has the object fall on the floor of the pictorial plane, fronting the beholder and exposing in it a text from the Old Testament. Therefore, in addition to the book testing the instability between text and image in the visual space, the book also maintains a distinct connection to the preacher to whom the chapel is dedicated as it makes a direct link to the typological unity of Old and New Testament texts. The following analysis focusses on how the method of biblical exegesis found in the sermons of this famous preacher were mirrored in the visual exegesis of Durante Alberti. It will delineate exactly how this was achieved via the use of the book, and also consider the relationship that was maintained between Counter-Reformation sermons and images in Rome.

8.2. Iconographic analysis

Alberti's *Annunciation* is set in an dark, interior space, and contains many of the traditional objects associated with the narrative within this period. There is a bed with white sheets and dark drapes above it forming a canopy. Next to the bed, on top of a low step with an engraving of the artist's name, is a sewing basket full of fabric, thread and tools that indicate the Virgin Mary's proficiency as a seamstress or embroiderer, responding perhaps to the cultural emphasis of domesticated women since the Middle Ages (see Part 2c).⁵⁸³ In the foreground to the right of the Mary is a *prie-dieu* and beside it is the aforementioned book, perhaps dropped from her hands during the Annunciation event and landing in the space directly in front of the beholder. The enlarged book is open to a page of Hebraic text that is legible to the observer (Fig. 63). The text cites a passage from Isaiah 7:14, "Behold a virgin shall give birth to a son and she shall name him Emmanuel" and 7:15, "Butter and honey shall he eat."⁵⁸⁴ This should be a familiar text to us given the investigation on Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets* in Rome's Church of the Annunciation discussed in Chapter 4. But before discussing Alberti's specific use of the book and its biblical text, let us examine the other features of his image and the characterisations of the Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel.

⁵⁸³ Nancarrow, "The Significance of the Basket," 9-16.

⁵⁸⁴ Specific translation of this text are taken from Wood and Kaufman, "'Tacito Predicatore,'" 641, to ensure accuracy.



Figure 63. Durante Alberti, *Annunciation*, 1588. Detail of the book, adapted from Figure 62.

The latter is represented on the left, caught mid-stride as he moves towards Mary. He wears elaborate gowns of yellow, white and blue, with flowers on his lower skirt. He clutches a long stem of lilies, which, as we have seen throughout the thesis, were an exceptionally common symbolic element of Annunciation paintings during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and one borne of an entirely non-canonical tradition. Gabriel crosses his arms around these flowers and lowers his eyes. From contemporary writings on the semiotics of gesture, it is reasonable to understand Gabriel's movement as an embodiment of humility, both to Mary and God the Father who looms down above the scene.⁵⁸⁵

Opposite Gabriel, on the same level, kneels the Virgin Mary. She turns away from her *prie-dieu* on the right-hand side of the panel and inclines towards the angel. Mary's hands are held lightly towards her chest as she gazes up into what appears to be a heavenly apparition. Her wide eyes and partly open mouth may imply that she is actively bearing witness to the heavenly scene above; her indication to herself a visualization of her place within this union between heaven and earth. The image she

⁵⁸⁵ Bonifacio, *L'Arte de' Cenni*, 284.

observes in unison with her beholder pervades the otherwise dark bedchamber, and contains a throng of angelic beings and winged cherubim who flank both sides of the upper canvas. The division allows for the dove of the Holy Spirit to descend into the space. Above the dove and the heavenly figures is an image of God the Father. The significance of this detail is easily overlooked based on the commonality of representations of God the Father in religious images since the tenth century.⁵⁸⁶ Yet in the early sixteenth century, Protestantism had charged the Catholic Church with anthropomorphism: ascribing human qualities to God when he is fundamentally immaterial and indescribable.⁵⁸⁷ The continued visual interpretations of God the Father in Counter-Reformation paintings became even more theologically loaded, and underscored Catholicism's understanding that while images did not possess their own divinity, they could be used to inspire devotion to what they represented. In this image, the detail of God the Father not only re-emphasises this ideology, but also increases the reverence of the scene by augmenting God's authority in sending the Angel Gabriel and instigating the event of the Annunciation. While it is this inclusion of heavenised imagery that forms the most obvious expansion to the biblical text, Alberti's *Annunciation* contains a considerable level of textual expansion in its iconographic detail. I argue the most contextually significant expansion found in the image is the interpretation of the book as a readable object. It is this feature that will dominate the rest of the analysis, particularly in the way it reflects the exegetical method of the Chapel's benefactor.

8.3. Context and the use of the book

The chapel in which the *Annunciation* resides is dedicated to Andrea Del Monte, a notorious preacher who spoke passionately against Jewish theology. His primary mission was to encourage the Jews of Rome to yield to the tenets of the Catholic faith. His preoccupation with such a task was consistent with that of the wider Counter-Reformation Church. The turbulence and challenge of the Reformation period had sparked Catholic leaders to reconsider their relationship with Jews; after all, "had not the Jews always been the arch-symbol of impurity and division in the Catholic

⁵⁸⁶ Hilarie Cornwell and James Cornwell, *Saints, Signs, and Symbols* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 2.

⁵⁸⁷ Karl F. Morrison, "Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti's Call for Reform of Christian Art," in *Knowledge and Profanation: Transgressing the Boundaries of Religion in Postmodern Scholarship*, eds. Martin Mulson and Asaph Ben-Tov (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 95-132.

world?"⁵⁸⁸ Catholicism's dealing with the Jewish community would have allowed the Church to regain some type of mediation and control on groups who posed a challenge to the established structure. Within the early sixteenth century, after the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Sicily, Rome saw an influx in Jewish refugees; in a 1527 census, there was recorded 1776 Jews living in the city, 3.6% of the population.⁵⁸⁹ Particularly in the late sixteenth-century papacy, various strategies were proposed and executed to deal with members of the Jewish faith. An example of one such action was the public burning of the Talmud, a primary book in Jewish law and theology, in 1553, after which point all printing of Hebrew text was ceased until the nineteenth century.⁵⁹⁰ Another conversionary tactic was initiated by Pope Gregory XIII in a bull, *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* (1584), in which he demanded Jews to attend Catholic sermon events every Saturday afternoon.⁵⁹¹ Despite the model of conversionary preaching being present in the Catholic Church since the mendicants in the thirteenth century, these weekly meetings in Rome were the first time such regimented structure had been endorsed.⁵⁹² A writer who visited Rome during the second half of Gregory's reign was English cleric Gregory Martin, who provides a first-hand account of the Jewish community in Rome at the time and the procedure of Gregory's initiative:

This people therefore thus hitherto preserved in the world as they are not forced, so by alcharitable meanes they are invited and persuaded to forsake obstinate Judiasme and to become Christians, as every yere they doe. [...] They live altogether in that which is called, the Jewes striate, and of late bycause of the number there is another corner added where they have their Synagog and in it reading of the old Testament in the Hebrew tong, where no Christian may enter in at service time under payne of excommunication.

Upon every Satterday which is their Sabbath day and wherein they worke not, bycause they shal have no excuse of other businesse, they are bound under a penaltie to be

⁵⁸⁸ Kenneth R. Stow, "The Papacy and the Jews: Catholic Reformation and Beyond," *Jewish History* 6, nos. 1-2 (1992): 257-79.

⁵⁸⁹ Massimo Leone, *Saints and Signs: A Semiotic Reading of Conversion in Early Modern Catholicism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 252.

⁵⁹⁰ Stow, "The Papacy and the Jews," 9

⁵⁹¹ Katherine Aron-Beller, "Ghettoization: The Papal Enclosure and its Jews," in *A Companion to Early Modern Rome*, eds. Pamela Jones, Barbara Wisch, and Simon Ditchfield (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 232-246.

⁵⁹² Emily Michelson, "How to Write a Conversionary Sermon," in *Religious Orders and Religious Identity Formation, ca. 1420-1620*, eds. Bert Roest and Johanneke Uphoff (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 235-252.

present in the church of the Company of the B. Trinitie. There to heare what may be sayd for Christianitie against their Iudaisme.⁵⁹³

Martin's text highlights the expectance of unanimous Jewish attendance at these oratories, the penalty he mentions for those who refuse to attend being the prohibition to "stipulate any contract whatsoever with Christians."⁵⁹⁴ Failure to attend conversionary sermons would result in exclusions that would impact their livelihood. Sermons for the conversion of the Jews would take place on the Saturday afternoon, during the Jewish Sabbath in which Christian authorities could guarantee there would be nothing to hinder their attendance at church. The sermon Martin lists above took place in the Confraternity della Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini, a brotherhood established by Philip Neri, who himself had shown particular interest in the conversion of Jews.⁵⁹⁵ The oratory of this Confraternity was the most popular location for these sermons to take place, it being one of the most attractive oratories in Rome and thus compatible for facilitating a type of multisensory Christian-ization. Among the preachers who would have sermonised there was Andrea Del Monte. An account of his practice is also found in Gregory Martin's writings:

The audience being thus assembled every Satterday about two a clocke after dinner, there come up into the pulpit two excellent men, one after an other, for the space of two hours. The one and the first, a Jesuite, or some other of greate skil and good spirit, to move: the other, a great Rabbine sometime of their owne, but now these manie years a zelous and learned Christian, named maister Andreas. This M. Andreas, whose Zeale for his brethren the Hebrewes (for so they are and would be called) not unlike to S. Paules in the like case, his maner of utterance to teache and convince and confound, his knowledge and readiness in the Hebrew Bible and al the Hebrew commentaries and Chaldee Paraphrases and the Syriake and Arabike tong. This man is chosen of purpose to confute them out of the owne books and doctors, and to confound them by their owne books and doctors, and to confound them by their owne peevish opinions and absurd Imaginations and folish practises [...] he knoweth as well as the best of their Rabbins, and can disclose al theyr ridiculous mysteries, him self

⁵⁹³ Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta*, ed. George Bruner Parks (Rome: Edizioni di Stiora e Letteratura, 1969), 79.

⁵⁹⁴ Leone, *Saints and Signs*, 258.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

having been sometime one of them, and knowing the greatest poyntes that then blinded him self, and marveyling now that he could be so sotted and bewitched.⁵⁹⁶

Martin describes a sermon consisting of two distinct sections. Firstly, there is the technique of moving the listener. The use of emotions is a familiar Counter-Reformation trope that has already been made apparent to us in Trent's decree on sacred images, in which images were viewed "to arouse/excite" the observer.⁵⁹⁷ Within the art of preaching, this was also a desired effect. Affective sermons would engage the listener into the central message. In the realm of conversion, an appeal to the emotions was imperative, as Federick McGinness has written,

They [church leaders] knew that a clear presentation of the truth alone did not win converts, because everything had already been clearly revealed by Christ. Before Jews could receive Catholic teaching, they needed first to be moved. To this end, the captive audience listened to a Jesuit, a holy man trained in the devices of the language and acting as the instrument of divine grace.⁵⁹⁸

Moving rhetoric was the first discourse to be employed in this type of conversionary sermon. Only after this does the teacher begin. In Gregory Martin's description of the service he attended, he refers to "Maister Andreas" as the "great Rabbine." He describes him as a persuasive and fervent preacher, who possessed the ability to forcefully interpret Jewish scripture in light of its fulfilment in Christianity. Martin's Andrea is zealous, akin to that of the most famous Jewish convert, the apostle Paul. It is because of his past involvement with the Jewish faith that he can so provocatively argue the case that the Jewish faith had been blinded by ignorance of narratives in the New Testament. Thus his task to convert fundamentally rested on convincing his Jewish audience to use a particular typological frame of exegesis to read narratives of Christology in Hebrew scriptures. In the above quote, Martin demonstrates his appreciation for the work of Del Monte. He appraises the technique used in Del Monte's preaching as it uses sophisticated, learned arguments that his listeners would find challenging to contradict. A final comment should be made on Martin's account. I

⁵⁹⁶ Martin, *Roma Sancta*, 79.

⁵⁹⁷ Council of Trent, "On invocation," 775-6.

⁵⁹⁸ McGinness, *Right Thinking*, 57.

would suggest that his account needs to be treated with at least some degree of dubiety. As a Catholic, Martin would have known that the reinforcement of Counter-Reformation strategies had to be felt with significant force in Rome, in order to present the newly reformed Church as a threat to Protestantism. McGinness, a scholar who has written extensively on the Roman oratory, identifies in Martin's writings a "near-perfect realization of the Tridentine ideal."⁵⁹⁹ His accounts of Rome, especially the efficacy of the conversionary treatment of Jews, does therefore need to be treated with caution. Nevertheless, Martin provides a rich description of the Jews in Rome and the program of the Catholic Church to use sermons with an aim of conversion.

Much more can be said on the landscape of conversionary preaching in Rome in this period, but it is now the task of honing in on the specific chapel that houses Alberti's *Annunciation*. To reiterate an earlier point, the Confraternity della Santissima Trinità was the central location of conversionary preaching as it was envisaged by Pope Gregory XIII. There was, however, a network that surrounded the endeavour to facilitate conversion and maturation of Jews in the Catholic faith. As Emily Michelson writes, "teaching the Jewish catechumens and neophytes fell to a group of allied organizations and religious orders."⁶⁰⁰ It was a united initiative of the city to promulgate religious conversion. The Santa Maria ai Monti enters into this discussion as it was a hub of the Confraternity of Saint Joseph of the Catechumens and Neophytes. This confraternity had been founded by Ignatius of Loyola and approved by Pope Paul in 1543. The scheme of this confraternity was dedicated, although not exclusively, to the conversion of Jews to the Catholic faith and the nurturing of their beliefs up to and including baptism. After this initiation had been completed, the confraternity supervised their education at devotional and didactic levels to ensure the individuals would not be tempted to return to their former beliefs.⁶⁰¹ Ignatius envisaged a long-term strategy for the confraternity, which led neophytes through each stage of their conversion into Catholicism. The origins of the Santa Maria ai Monti as a physical building dates to the 1580s, when a fifteenth-century image was rediscovered on the

⁵⁹⁹ Frederick J. McGinness, "Preaching Ideals and Practice in Counter-Reformation Rome," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 11, no. 2 (1980): 109-27.

⁶⁰⁰ Michelson, "How to Write," 234.

⁶⁰¹ Lance Lazar, "The first Jesuit confraternities and marginal groups in sixteenth-century Rome," in *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132-149.

ruins of a convent site. This image was believed to be responsible for numerous unexplainable miracles and thus the Pope ordered a church to be built for its fame. Pope Gregory XIII transferred the chapel of the Confraternity of Catechumens and Neophytes into this church, but it was not until 1634, that the enormous formal structure of the College of the Neophytes was built and was fully unified with the Santa Maria ai Monti.⁶⁰²

Since 1543, Santa Maria ai Monti had been dedicated to the education and continuing care of new members of the Catholic faith by its affiliation with Ignatius' confraternity. It is understood that Del Monte had himself gone through the confraternity's process of conversion and baptism, after which his beliefs came full circle. After his death in 1587 he left the contents of his extensive library and money to the College of the Neophytes and Santa Maria ai Monti.⁶⁰³ It should be said that although Ugo Boncompagni saw the commission for the Annunciation chapel into fruition in 1588, the chapel decoration was financed using 150 *scudi* from Del Monte's money as instructed in his will. It was primarily the intention of the preacher himself to have the altarpiece of the *Annunciation* created.

Alongside the practical, monetary impact of Del Monte in this commission, he also had exceptional theological impact, and by that I am referring to the undoubtable influence of his sermons on Alberti's painting. The element of the image that holds particular significance is, as identified earlier, the single object sitting on the pictorial plane: the open and legible book. The Jewish community in Rome would have become familiar with Isaiah 7:14 ("Behold a virgin shall give birth to a son and she shall name him Emmanuel") as "a standard polemical fare. When cited in connection with the Incarnation, it accused them of denying the truth of their prophet."⁶⁰⁴ Del Monte's conversionary preaching had included forceful manipulation of existing beliefs in the Hebrew Bible. By visualising the Isaiah text within an Annunciation scene, the image created "a sort of visual sermon that seeks to help the faithful to understand the exaltation of the prophetic message."⁶⁰⁵ It perpetuated an exegetical framework that

⁶⁰² Marina Caffiero, *Forced Baptisms: Histories of Jews, Christians, and Converts in Papal Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 207.

⁶⁰³ Wood and Kaufman, "Tacito Predicatore," 644.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, 640.

⁶⁰⁵ Boiteux, "Preaching to the Jews," 305.

Del Monte had appealed to in his sermons as he worked centrally in the Church's initiative to convert Jews of the city. Furthermore, it is expected that the first observers of Alberti's *Annunciation* would have been individuals acquainted with Del Monte's legacy. Converts to the Catholic faith who, being members of the Confraternity of Catechumens and Neophytes, would have first been introduced to the Catholic dogma in the conversionary sermons preached at the Santissima Trinità.

Fascinatingly, this technique exercised by Del Monte in his sermons and mirrored in Alberti's painting has roots in the interpretation method used by the gospel writer Matthew, who, in a similar way, constructed parallels between Jewish writings and Christian narratives. According to Jerome (374-429 AD), Matthew's gospel served to support the faith of those who, like the author, had grown up in the Jewish law and were entering into a new religious movement, hence his unique construction of the genealogy that traces along the Davidic lineage from Abraham to Jesus (Mt 1:1-17). He attempted to "explain that Jesus is truly of the House of David," persuading his reader that the Jewish texts that prophesied the coming of the Messiah in David's lineage are consistent with the messianic claims of Jesus.⁶⁰⁶ More than this, however, Matthew chooses to bolster his argument by citing the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy in his gospel. Matthew 1 mentions Joseph in the genealogy as a Davidic descendent, "the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born," and goes on to recount the narrative of the Annunciation to Joseph. The Annunciation message that Joseph receives in a dream corresponds to that spoken to Mary in Luke 1, with the angel saying to him:

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." (Mt. 1:20-23).

It is highly plausible, according to Raymond Brown, that Matthew becomes the first, if not only, New Testament Christian to identify the applicability of the Isaiah prophecy

⁶⁰⁶ Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 153.

in the context of the annunciate message of the coming of the Messiah through the Virgin Mary.⁶⁰⁷ What this means for Alberti's *Annunciation* is that its direct union of the Annunciation *istoria* based on the Gospel of Luke and the textual reference to Isaiah's prophecy was facilitated knowingly or not by a Matthean form of exegesis. By delineating the interpretive decisions made in the painting, it is evident that the painting did not just draw on a single biblical source, but potentially three.

It is not just in the context of his specific form of exegesis that the biblical author Matthew is relevant to the discussion of the book in Alberti's *Annunciation*. Matthew is the subject of a triptych of paintings created by Caravaggio for the Contarelli Chapel at San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. Alongside *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1599-1600) (Fig. 64) and *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (1599-1600) (Fig. 65), Caravaggio created *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew* (1602) (Fig. 66). This iconography depicts Matthew recording his gospel with the aid of an angelic messenger. It is the first version of the *Inspiration* - sometimes called *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (Fig. 67) for differentiation - that is relevant to this discussion. This image was rejected by the church based on the artist's irreverent interpretation of Matthew with his bare feet and obscure facial expression. After this decision, the painting was given to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, where it is believed to have been destroyed by fire at the end of World War 2. Existing copies of the image show the gospel writer sitting cross-legged on a chair, writing with a quill into an open book. His hand is being guided by an angel who stands by his side and leans towards him as if narrating the words verbally as well as physically. Like Alberti's *Annunciation*, the book is open, the words distinctly legible and in Hebrew script, only the text reads the opening of Matthew's gospel, "The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat..."⁶⁰⁸ Irving Lavin writes on the implication of this specific text in the painting: "The lineage of salvation has been announced, the founding father has been named and his seed is being sown. The light of a new age has dawned."⁶⁰⁹ By citing the first verse of the Gospel and beginning the lineage, Caravaggio allows the observer to determine a central premise of Matthew's first chapter. It being in Hebrew

⁶⁰⁷ Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 153.

⁶⁰⁸ Lavin, "Divine Inspiration," 64.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 64. Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1599-1600, oil on canvas, 340x322cm. Church of San Luigi dei Francesi. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 65. Caravaggio, *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew*, 1599-1600, oil on canvas, 323x543cm. San Luigi dei Francesi Church, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 66. Caravaggio, *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*, 1602, oil on canvas, 295x189cm. Church of San Luigi dei Francesi. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 67. Caravaggio, *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, 1602, oil on canvas, 232x183cm. Destroyed. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Script - the language Christian tradition maintained Matthew's gospel was first written in - the text ascertains this Davidic lineage that yielded the Messiah.

Alberti's *Annunciation* and Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* both contain open books transcribed with Hebrew text. The use of the Hebrew language directly responded to a Counter-Reformation initiative, in which Pope Gregory XIII had requested it be used in rhetoric as a tool to encourage the conversion of Jews to Christianity. Just as the Hebrew language was to be *spoken*, so these artists also intended them to be *read* by positioning them in such a way that the observer can easily render each letter. Because of this detail, it is possible to *read* the painting from the book's vantage point, much in the same way as Bal identifies in the capacity of the navel. Although the paintings construct two different iconographies, the presence of the books emphasises the Incarnational message that steeps both. The theological significance of the book in Annunciations has been argued persuasively in this thesis, based on its explicit symbolic reference to the coming of Jesus as the Word becoming flesh. Yet it is entirely valid to apply the same Incarnational lens to visualizations of Matthew writing his gospel. His account of Jesus is one that bridges the gap from what once was projected under Jewish tradition to the accomplishment of that projection; "connecting Old to New, promise to fulfilment."⁶¹⁰ At the time in which Caravaggio was working, Matthew's gospel would have been identified through its Incarnational message in an intensified way. It was believed by Catholicism at the time to be the earliest gospel report of the life of Christ. Lavin writes:

[T]he gospel of St. Matthew was the first divinely inspired Christian text. As far as the written word of God is concerned, Matthew was the spearhead, the herald of the new Church, which replaced both the Church of the Jews and the Church of the Gentiles. The second factor that determined the primacy of Matthew among the gospels lay in its content – notably that of the first chapter, which begins with the famous recitation of the fourteen generations from Abraham to Jesus, and ends with the nativity. Matthew is thus, par excellence, the gospel of the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh, the manhood of God. Hence Matthew not only wrote down the sacred message for the

⁶¹⁰ James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 44.

first time, but in doing so stressed the First Coming of the Lord, the intervention of the Divine Word on earth and its continuity with the past.⁶¹¹

Matthew's gospel can be deemed inherently Incarnational; Caravaggio's impression of this being an appeal to the first verse of Matthew that immediately situates Christ in Old Testament figures. The biblical interpretation in both Alberti's *Annunciation* and Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* can therefore be characterised as a typological form of visual exegesis. It is the intention behind this visual exegesis for their first audience that leads into the final point of connection between the two paintings and their uses of the book. The observers of the *Annunciation* would have included members of the Confraternity of Catechumens and Neophytes, individuals who were some way down the conversionary journey. A similar endeavour can be seen in San Luigi dei Francesi, in which, at the time of Caravaggio's first interpretation of *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, the parish priest Father Pierre Pichot was actively engaged in teaching local Jews. Adrienne Von Lates understands there to be evidence that "Caravaggio was asked by the newly-arrived Father Pichot to include the Hebrew text in his painting as a direct appeal to the Jews coming to the church seeking conversion."⁶¹² For members of the Jewish faith who converted in the San Luigi, Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, had it been used, would have exhibited a direct challenge to this specific community. Just as in the case of the biblical author whose account of Jesus' life was grounded in explicating the fulfilment of Judaism in Christ, the use of text in Caravaggio's painting would have definitively warned the viewer that their denial of the validity of Jesus' messianism was a blasphemy against their prophets."⁶¹³ This is a visual polemic consistent with what has been seen in Alberti's *Annunciation*.

These two paintings raise an important question regarding the relationship between preaching and painting. It was these two mediums - the verbal words of sermons and the pictorial mode of church altarpieces and paintings - that were considered the most effective means of didactic communication. The educational capacity of sacred images

⁶¹¹ Lavin, "Divine Inspiration," 64.

⁶¹² Adrienne Von Lates, "Caravaggio, Montaigne, and the Conversion of the Jews at San Luigi dei Francesi," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 124 (1994): 107-115.

⁶¹³ Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 153.

has been emphasised extensively in this thesis. The decrees of the Council of Trent and the art treatises that followed supported the Church's continued utility of images by justifying them within the spheres of education and devotion. The pictorial mode was emphasised as an immensely effective tool for representing biblical and traditional *istoria*. The same can be said about verbal sermons. Robert Bireley writes, "Scholars are starting to realise that in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the pulpit served as the principal medium of mass communication."⁶¹⁴ Verbal sermons were of exceptionally high importance to the Counter-Reformation Church. This type of oration allowed church leaders to explicitly communicate the vision of the post-Tridentine Church to a large group and on a regular basis. In Chapter 2, I commented that the Council of Trent's response to sacred images was brief in length and, given that it was decided at the closing of the Council, evidently bore comparatively minimal significance to Trent's attendees. This is an altogether different case from that of preaching, which scholars have understood as an exceptionally important topic for the Council to address; McGinness claims that the "Council of Trent understood the reform of preaching to be most urgent."⁶¹⁵ The Council's concern is understandable considering the challenge of Protestantism, which saw sermons constitute a huge component of their campaign. The success of the Protestant sermon is likely to have impacted the renewed disposition of the Counter-Reformers to focus on perfecting the art of preaching.

The subject was discussed twice at the Council, in sessions with a twenty-year interval.⁶¹⁶ In the fifth session of the Council in 1546, preaching was addressed immediately after the decree on the reception of biblical canon; Michelson argues, "the session seems to have viewed preaching as an extension of biblical exegesis".⁶¹⁷ It seems appropriate that the two issues, of biblical exegesis and preaching Scripture,

⁶¹⁴ Robert Bireley, "Preaching from Trent to the Enlightenment," in *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching*, ed. Edward Foley (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 74-83.

⁶¹⁵ McGinness, "Preaching Ideals and Practice," 110.

⁶¹⁶ Giorgio Caravale, *Preaching and Inquisition in Renaissance Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 16; Michael Monshau, "A Catholic Conversation about Preaching," in *Preaching at the Double Feasts*, eds. Michael Monshau and Linda Clader (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 1-46.

⁶¹⁷ Emily Michelson, "Preaching Scripture Under Pressure in Tridentine Italy," in *The Formation of Clerical and Confessional Identities in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Wim Janse and Barbara Pitkin (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 257-268; Jared Wicks, "Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras," in *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 617-648.

were discussed in proximity as the two are so closely associated. Sermons were instrumental to the laity's familiarity with biblical narratives and themes. It was the preacher's interpretation of Scripture, according to proper Counter-Reformation exegesis, that was impressed on the listeners during sermons, just as it was the artist/patron's scriptural interpretations that were visualised in paintings of the period. Shifting our focus twenty years later and we find the second case where Trent mentioned preaching. In the twenty-fourth session in 1563, preaching is primarily presented as a duty of the bishop in his resolve to care for his parishioners' souls.⁶¹⁸ Biblical exegesis is not mentioned at all and preaching is seen as a compulsory act of the Counter-Reformation bishop. It was viewed as an opportunity to articulate Catholic dogma and "to reinstate instruments of mediation between the sacred text and the faithful."⁶¹⁹ It is evident from Trent's earlier decree on preaching that the ultimate intention of Counter-Reformation sermons was "to preach the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ."⁶²⁰ Yet this was done by using the discipline as a mediating tool between the scriptures and the listeners. In this way, bishops as the Church's preaching delegates could interpret and manipulate biblical texts for their specific audience in accordance with the traditions and vision of new Catholicism.

Within the city of Rome, where Del Monte had been preaching, the reform of the discipline was imperative. Rome, which had suffered vicious criticism in Protestantism's polemic, was to be the microcosm of the Counter-Reformation world, and so immediate attention went into ensuring the city embodied the post-Tridentine spirit. Renewal had to be felt with significant force in Rome and from literature of the period, it appears Counter-Reformation Rome came to serve its intended purpose. By the end of the sixteenth century, Rome was idealised in sermons as the "light to the nations"; "everywhere throughout Rome one could hear the voices of holy preachers: in the major churches, in the hospitals and convents, in the piazzas, and in the regular weekly meetings for the conversion of Jews."⁶²¹ Preaching was used in varying

⁶¹⁸ Caravale, *Preaching and Inquisition*, 16. See for reference, Council of Trent, Session 24, "Decree on reform, 11 November, 1563," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II.*, vol. 2, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 759-744.

⁶¹⁹ Caravale, *Preaching and Inquisition*, 16.

⁶²⁰ Council of Trent, Session 5, "Decree on original sin, 17 June, 1546," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 665-670.

⁶²¹ McGinness, "Preaching Ideals and Practice," 110; Thomas Worcester, "Catholic Sermons," in *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, ed. Larissa Taylor (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3-34.

contexts, and the appropriation of the Bible and delivery of Catholic dogma was shaped by the specific audiences. Yet there was a “glorifying tone” set by Counter-Reformation preachers, which began with the highest authority in the papal court, with Latin sermons visioning the prosperous future of the Catholic Church.⁶²² These sermons descended through the hierarchy to the laity, where the same intentions and Catholic dreams were orchestrated through the vernacular.⁶²³ Michelson states, “The Catholic Church was competing for the first time with multiple religious truth claims in Europe and its tactic was to enter the race by declaring itself the triumphant and glorious winner.”⁶²⁴ Specific quarrels with Protestant circles were avoided and the primary focus was on situating Church authority in its rightful position between the Bible and the people, the sacred and the profane. In this way, audible words spoken by Counter-Reformation preachers were another means for the Church to exercise control and distinguish itself as the infallible facilitator of the Christian faith.

Direct connections can be drawn between the attitude towards preaching and the vision for sacred images. Both, in theory, were envisaged to mediate and control the transmittance of Catholic doctrine, including that both were biblically and traditionally inspired. Benjamin Saviani writes, “Catholic doctrine was understood as a set of discourses, which should be expressed efficiently as to persuade the audience; hence, different art genres were systematically included in catholic projects.”⁶²⁵ Saviani situates artistic genres as expositors of Catholic discourses within the realm of rhetoric. Images of *istoria* were attached to rhetoric principles as their function was to teach and persuade. This is the reason for which boundaries in visual histories had to comply to that of written histories. So too “the oral sermon is a rhetoric discourse as much as a written text (prose or verse), a painting, an engraving, a sculpture, an architectonic building, a musical or a scenic play.”⁶²⁶ This relationship between discourses had been bound by the language of rhetoric since Horace fostered the principle “as is painting, so is poetry.”⁶²⁷ From this moment there was understanding

⁶²² Emily Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 171.

⁶²³ Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press*, 171

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Benjamin Saviani, “Language Mechanisms in Art Production During the Counter-Reformation,” *Pos* 22, no. 38 (2015): 192-207.

⁶²⁶ Saviani, “Language Mechanisms,” 198.

⁶²⁷ Freedberg. “Johannes Molanus,” 229-45.

of the “homology” between artistic discourses.⁶²⁸ A scholar who has taken this connection between preaching and painting beyond its theoretical bounds is Carolyn Valone, by interlinking the production of images and sermons in a specific chapel within Rome. Valone constructs an argument that in the Chapel of Lucrezia della Rovere, Trinità dei Monti, there existed an intimate connection between the objects of sight and those of hearing.⁶²⁹ The patron, Lucrezia della Rovere (1485-1552) was drawn to the space as it belonged to the Minim order, great promoters of the Catholic reformation and especially devoted to the Virgin Mary.⁶³⁰ There are no known copies of Minim sermons that were used in the chapel, but with knowledge of the Minim order and its founder, Francesco di Paola (1416-1507), devotion to Mary was a central theme. This idea is strengthened by examining the interior walls of the chapel, which are decorated with scenes from the life of the Virgin, including the *Assumption of the Virgin* and the *Presentation of the Virgin* (Fig. 68 and 69).⁶³¹ Furthermore, Valone argues women had become an important audience in the sixteenth century for sacred oratory, with individuals including Gabriele Paleotti and Agostino Valier authoring manuals that propose shaping sermons for a female audience.⁶³² The female patronage of the chapel, the Marian focus of the Minims and the interior decoration would have created a setting for women to engage with relevant biblical narratives and figures of spiritual inspiration:

If we attempt to “hear” the images in her chapel rather than read them as a narrative of Mary’s life, we can recover a discourse about women which was meaningful to patron and viewer alike. Without challenging the Church’s traditional patriarchal views about women, Lucrezia was able to speak to all her sex about their shared sorrows and joys, and their hope for consolation and honour, based on the lives of well-known female exemplars.⁶³³

⁶²⁸ Saviani, “Language Mechanisms,” 198.

⁶²⁹ Carole Valone, “The Art of Hearing: Sermons and Images in the Chapel of Lucrezia della Rovere,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 3 (2000): 753-777.

⁶³⁰ Valone, “The Art of Hearing,” 759.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Ibid.



Figure 68. Daniele da Volterra, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1555, fresco. Santissima Trinità dei Monti, Rome. Source: <https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/d/daniele/trinita.html>



Figure 69. Daniele da Volterra, *Presentation of the Virgin*, 1555, fresco. Santissima Trinità dei Monti, Rome. Source: <https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/d/daniele/trinita.html>

Sermons, like images, were created using an exegesis that was directed towards their intended audience. Part 2 has already testified to the application of the Virgin Mary as an example among women. Within a Minim chapel that specifically nurtured devotion to Mary, and by her veneration also to women such as her mother Saint Anne and cousin Saint Elizabeth, images and sermons worked in partnership to create a multisensory experience based around the specific theme of womanhood. The combined rhetoric experienced verbally and visually would have functioned as a valuable tool in the art of persuasion. The very nature of Lucrezia as a participant in architectural matronage would also have encouraged a female audience to revere these godly women in sight and in sound.

Valone has identified the association between words and images contained in the Chapel of Lucrezia in a similar way to what has been discovered about the Santa Maria ai Monti and San Luigi dei Francesi. These have performed as persuasive examples of the way in which paintings and sermons might have maintained intimate connections. I identify two specific areas in which more research needs to be executed to solidify these claims: firstly, evidence on the sermons themselves is currently

marginal. In order to create convincing arguments of the connection between biblical interpretation in sermons and paintings, more needs to be discovered about what was actually *said* in these sacred spaces. Secondly, we need to find evidence on how preachers used the art in their surroundings; did they direct their listeners to them or was there no such instruction? Although significant questions persist and leave gaps in our current understanding, it can be confidently argued that in theory and in practice through the examples contained in Chapter 8, the Counter-Reformation understood words and images as parallel forms of rhetoric. By analysing Alberti's *Annunciation* and drawing on comparisons with other contemporary artistic projects, it is evident that his visual exegesis supported identical forms of typology found in preaching ideals of the time.⁶³⁴ Boiteaux writes,

In the case of Alberti's painting, the references in Hebrew appear to have been intended as actual instruments of persuasion in the conversion process: the writing, and hence, the sacred Word, within the image was meant to have a visual impact. Intellectual and rational understanding is secondary: the use of images in preaching is a substitute for and predecessor of preaching with words.⁶³⁵

The installation of this image meant Del Monte's preaching continued to exercise an influence. The way in which this was achievable was through an interpretation of a book. It was adapted to expose the hidden text, which allowed the pre-text of the biblical story to reinterpret the scene typologically, just as Del Monte had himself advocated. Uniting this example with the others mentioned above, it is apparent that preaching was embedded into the fabrics of Rome; not only were sermons heard but they were seen in the images that decorated chapel interiors.

8.4. Conclusion

Alberti's *Annunciation* is an exceptional example of the strategies of the Counter-Reformation Church impacting the visual exegesis of biblical narratives, and specifically impacting the use of the book iconography in Annunciation altarpieces. Through the lens of Del Monte's typological preaching methods, the Annunciation story presented an opportunity for expansion and relocation as a fulfilment of Jewish

⁶³⁴ Wood and Kaufman, "Tacito Predicatore," 640.

⁶³⁵ Boiteux, "Preaching to the Jews," 302.

prophecy. This pictorial narrative was achieved by the combined use of image and text. The position of the book so close to the picture plane meant the beholder could not escape the forceful explication of a sacred prophecy, propagating a Catholicised interpretation of the scene. While the example of Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* indicates that the use of Hebrew text in paintings was a known concept, the polemic is particularly potent in Alberti's *Annunciation* based on the magnitude of the painting's claim that Isaiah 7:14 was a central Incarnational prophecy. Alberti's visual biblical reception synthesised this key principal of Counter-Reformation ideology and through the book iconography achieved an image that declared that the Word had become flesh.

f. Conclusion of Part 2

By treating the book as a navel and marking it as a departure point for my analyses of Annunciation paintings, this chapter has constructed a series of conversations relating to Counter-Reformation objectives. In critically analysing the way in which artists use the book as propaganda of local or general Counter-Reformation ideologies, it has been possible to investigate a number of central cultural concerns that impacted the Annunciation's visual exegesis. Barocci's *Annunciation* saw the use of not only a book, but an inkwell, to construct an image that may have been a reaction to the small community of female writers in Italy. Its absence in any subsequent Annunciations both by this artist and his contemporaries demonstrates that this interpretation was either redundant in a wider context or an unfavoured textual expansion relating to the Virgin Mary. The theme of the inkwell, however, does add another layer to the word/image interplay and further supplements Mary's position as a collaborator with God in the Incarnation mystery. Ludovico Carracci's use of the book demonstrates the level of orthodoxy set out in Paleotti's expectations for Counter-Reformation paintings. In this context, Mary's reading functioned as a vessel that encouraged resolute adherence to Counter-Reformation incentives, as well as confined the action of female readership to the jurisdiction of Church leaders. In Durante Alberti's *Annunciation*, the iconography is transformed again and makes the text that the Virgin Mary read, or was reading, a tangible experience for the beholder. It allowed the Isaiah text to impact the observers' understanding of the Annunciation scene, a particularly essential initiative based on the context of its commission. In synthesising the visual exegesis of this image with the preaching of Andrea Del Monte, who was the benefactor of the painting, I constructed a link not only between the image and its *visual* text, but to its audible voice. By using other evidence from chapels in Rome, it became evident that these spaces stimulated sensory experience through the combination of words and images.

Part 2 has demonstrated that although a perpetuating tradition since early Church writings, the use of the book functioned as propaganda, in that it remained relevant and contributable to the objectives of the Counter-Reformation Church in its various parochial and national settings. Although it has only been possible to showcase three of the Annunciations dating from the period, the research has challenged the common understanding that the book of the Annunciation was nothing more than an

iconographic tradition. In reality, by using and expanding the book and Mary's engagement with it, artists could speak directly to the issues and cultural shifts of the Counter-Reformation Church.

PART 3. Heavenising Word in Image: the representation of heaven in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces.

a. Introduction

Part Three examines the theme of the heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation narrative within three Counter-Reformation paintings. In the context of Part 3, 'heavenised' is used to define the expansion of the Annunciation narrative to include heavenly motifs unmentioned in Luke 1:26-38. Among those objects definable as heavenly within the Counter-Reformation context include, but are not confined to, unexplainable sources of light, multiple angels, cherubim, dense cloud formations, and representations of God the Father. These types of motifs have been identified by scholars as having a dominant presence in Counter-Reformation Annunciations altarpieces. In this way, Part 3 differs from Parts 1 and 2, as it focusses on a theme that has already been identified in both art-historical scholarship and the reception history of the biblical narrative. Such contributions made to these fields, as we shall see below, have created the impression that the heavenised interpretation is a stereotypical response to the narrative in the Counter-Reformation period. Part 3 goes further than previous research by first constructing a theological and historical backdrop in which to determine the contextual significance of the heavenised theme. Secondly, the section provides extended analyses of three case studies: Giorgio Vasari's *Annunciation* (1563), Titian's *Annunciation* (1564), and Passignano's *Annunciation* (1590). For each, attention is given to localising the interpretation to its specific context and its particular adherence, or avoidance, of heavenised imagery. In doing so, the research individualises the generalising hypothesis assumed in scholarship, which threatens to negate the individual and interpretative processes of Counter-Reformation Annunciations. Part 3 follows the method of the previous chapters by viewing each painting as a discrete object that possesses its own complex exegetical response to the biblical narrative.

b. The heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation as a Counter-Reformation topos in modern scholarship

Part 1 and 2 have focused on two prominent themes found in Counter-Reformation Annunciations: the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality, and the use of a book as propaganda. The identification of these motifs developed organically in my research from the objects themselves (see section 1.2.1). The explorations of Part 1 and 2 presented innovative ways of viewing the selected paintings and marked distinctive

themes that had largely been unexamined in scholarship. Part 3 differs from this pattern in that it engages with an approach that has already been deciphered by scholars. In many cases, the heavenised trope is identified as the distinguishing exegetical decision made by Counter-Reformation artists and/or patrons in their interpretations. Richard Viladesau's entry in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (*EBR*) contains the following description concerning pictorial representations of the narrative:

In medieval scenes [the Angel Gabriel] is generally alone, but in Renaissance painting he is sometimes joined by one or even two angels, and in Counter-Reformation art he appears on a heavenly cloud, accompanied by a great choir of heavenly beings who come to glorify the Incarnation.⁶³⁶

This entry is a generalisation of Annunciation paintings as they developed from the medieval to Counter-Reformation period. The motifs mentioned in this description do indeed resonate with specific popular trends of those periods, but Viladesau's claims restrict the degree of variation and expansion the biblical narrative received in pictorial representations. The *EBR* offers a description of a very specific type of image in relation to the Counter-Reformation Annunciation, which is not wholly satisfied by any of the examples mentioned in the thesis so far. A similar description is written by James Hall, who writes of the Annunciation, "Italian painting from the first half of the sixteenth century shows the angel on a bed of cloud, suggesting that [he] comes from heaven. This was seldom omitted in the later painting of the Counter-Reformation."⁶³⁷ Again, Muir Wright states, "A post-Tridentine variant elevated the archangel Gabriel to a bank of clouds so that he trod air rather than rested upon solid ground," while Jeannine Baticle writes, "The angelic salutation was no longer conceived without the presence of many angels; all heaven came to accompany the Archangel Gabriel in his mission."⁶³⁸ These descriptions give the impression that representations of heavenly imagery, and clouds in particular, are a topos in post-Tridentine Annunciation

⁶³⁶ Viladesau. "The Annunciation," 71. Given the previous work of Richard Viladesau (*The Triumph of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation*, 2008), it is plausible that this description has been directly inspired by the Annunciations of El Greco, an artist Viladesau cites extensively in his work on the visual representations of the Passion of Christ in the Counter-Reformation (249-256).

⁶³⁷ Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects*, 20

⁶³⁸ Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 72; Baticle, *Zurbarán*, 181.

paintings. It is this impression that Part 3 interrogates and challenges, due to its failure to provide a nuanced panorama of images created at this time. Ludovico Carracci's *Annunciation* from Chapter 7 - which was considered paradigmatic of Counter-Reformation visual initiatives - bypasses the overt use of heavenised imagery, as do the Annunciations by Caravaggio, Barocci, and Giorgio Vasari, which will be analysed in Chapter 9. The idea of a heavenised topos is therefore worth readdressing in scholarship due to these evident nuances.

The type of scholarship to which Viladesau and Hall are contributing centres on cataloguing major topics and themes across vast historical periods and cultures. The categorising method that is used to construct these definitive borders and groupings leads to a distinctive lack of nuance and sensitivity to the breadth of cultural difference. In the scholarship described above, the Counter-Reformation is just one of the timeframes used as a fleeting reference to a moment in the reception history of the Annunciation; no explanation is given to why, for what purpose or to what extent this Counter-Reformation stereotype was put into effect. The more successful sources are those that provide a tangible contextual backdrop for the period in which we can situate the method of visual exegesis. Gary Waller writes, "'Baroque' Mariology is characterised by a simultaneity of heightened spirituality and intensified materiality, the 'presence of divinity within the very fibres of the material creation.' [...] Along with such intense materialization Mary is simultaneously more intensely spiritualised."⁶³⁹ In this example, Waller provides a reasonable assessment given the developing trends associated with Baroque visual culture that the figure of Mary was increasingly supernaturalised. Her person had to be restored to its prior eminence after minimization in Protestant theology. The Annunciation as the key biblical Marian text provided an opportunity in Counter-Reformation visual culture, in which it could be expanded and augmented to cultivate devotion to a heavenised Mary. Waller's description therefore creates a much more verifiable portrait of the aesthetics of Mariology in the period, and the implications this might have on the manner in which the Annunciation is portrayed. Having said this, the breadth of Waller's investigation, a study of Mary and the Annunciation from the gospels to the period of enlightenment, is a vast project that, again, cannot assess each context thoroughly. The examples

⁶³⁹ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 116.

used to track the reception of the narrative in the Counter-Reformation are therefore relatively limited. For example, he uses only one painting, Titian's *San Salvatore Annunciation* (1564) (see Chapter 10), which possesses an almost fanatic heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation, to demonstrate a Counter-Reformation initiative. This bypasses the opportunity for dissonance and comparative analysis in the visual culture of the narrative. It is for this reason that, while using Titian's *Annunciation* as a case study in Part 3, I have sought to also include images in the thesis that challenge that type of interpretation, in order to map out the spectrum of visual exegetical responses.

The topos of heavenised imagery in Counter-Reformation Annunciations is, at best, useful in that it identifies a key iconographic trope that mirrored the flourishing of Baroque visual culture, as will be argued in Part 3d. The fundamental issue remains, however, that the assessments have largely overlooked the variety of responses from Counter-Reformation artists and patrons. In the *EBR* entry particularly, the Annunciations are all plumped into one rigid category that is not representative of the demographic. A key intention of the thesis is to reevaluate this period of Church history as one that was multifaceted, and subsequently that the objectives and strategies of the Catholic Church's visual culture differed within timeframes, locations, and architectural settings. Gauvin Bailey writes, "devotional art of this period is so eclectic that it verges on stylistic anarchy, with no single movement leading the way."⁶⁴⁰ It seems, therefore, meaningless to attempt to reduce the wealth of pictorial interpretations to form a single category of Annunciation representation. Instead, the case study approach that this thesis constructs focusses on honing in on specific instances and providing substantive evaluations of prevalent themes and topics relevant to the visual exegesis of Annunciations in this period. In scholarship relating to the heavenised interpretation in Counter-Reformation Annunciations, there has been no attempt to use the case study approach to individualise the objects. This has meant that the specific purposes and effects of its interpretation as it was used – or avoided – in representations has not been duly considered. Neither has the rationale for the heavenised interpretation been synthesised to the Counter-Reformation's

⁶⁴⁰ Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*, 4.

theological and historical context. The objective of the rest of Part 3's introduction is to pull together the rationale for this form of exegesis, beginning by examining the level at which biblical sources were informing such an interpretation.

c. Evaluating biblical justification for the heavenised Interpretation

The Annunciation text in Luke 1:26-38 is the primary canonical source that has inspired the reception history of the narrative, including its pictorial representations. Paintings that portray this narrative largely conform to the pattern of two individual characters – the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary - interacting.⁶⁴¹ Based on the investigations of this thesis, we know that artists, patrons, and advisors have expanded this simple motif in various directions. This is due to Luke's gospel offering a description of the words exchanged between the two characters - the verbal aspects of the narrative - as opposed to providing a description of the setting and appearances, which are necessary to inform the visual aspects of the story. In a similar way to Part 2 where it was argued that the presence of a book was an iconographic response lacking in canonical scripture, the presence of objects that construct the heavenised interpretation are also absent. There is nothing explicit in the text to indicate that within the setting of the Annunciation were unknown sources of light, multiple angels, cherubim, clouds, or the figure of God the Father. Yet, like the book, the heavenised motifs that scholars have argued characterise Counter-Reformation Annunciations do contain theological connotations that are inspired by the interpretation of biblical sources.

It would be reasonable to take the Lukan text in isolation and state that the heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation is not inspired by the Bible. Luke does not, however, offer the only canonical account of the Annunciation. The Incarnation text of John 1 has been cited repeatedly in this thesis as it bears considerable importance not only to the Counter-Reformation ideology I am dealing with, but also to the objective of all pictorial representations of the Annunciation, which is to see the "Word become flesh" (Jn 1:14), the text become image. In the case of how John 1 implicates the findings of Part 3, a basic justification for the heavenised interpretation is its intention to represent supernatural, heavenly visions in the transient space of the natural world, so as to

⁶⁴¹ With exceptions of icons of Mary Annunciate. See, for example, Krüger, "Mute Mysteries," 75-108.

emulate the fullness of the Word coming to “live among us” (Jn 1.14). In images that include the aforementioned motifs that expand the Lukan text, there is an allusion to the heavenly entering the earthly; “the attention given to the divine presence, as form or as radiance, reaffirms the underlying doctrinal Word.”⁶⁴² The specifics of what “form” the divine manifests in the paintings – as angels or cherubim or the image of God the Father – will differ from image to image. The “radiance” that Wright refers to in the above quote, however, is prominent across heavenised interpretations. Accompanying the supernatural motifs is the allusion to radiant light that filters into the natural space. This luminosity is also bound to the theology of John 1: “in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (Jn 1.4-5). This explanation appears to oppose the language of Luke 1:35, when Gabriel explains how the Virgin Mary shall conceive: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow (ἐπισκιάσει) you.” The word “overshadow” seems to complicate the light described in John and subsequently the inclusion of such dramatic divine light in heavenised images of the Annunciation. While “overshadow” is a phrase that implies darkness or shade, the necessity of light in order to cast a shadow implies an intrinsic link to John’s language. Meredith J. Gill writes persuasively on this hypothesis,

Shadow in Scripture and in scriptural commentary can be yet more profoundly ambiguous for its meaning devolves, further to clouds and even to light itself. One form, “to throw a shadow upon,” is used in the New Testament to record three miraculous events: the Transfiguration of Christ, when a “bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud [spoke]; second, the Annunciation, when the “power of the Highest shall overshadow” the Virgin; and third, for Peter, the laying out of the sick so that at least the shadow [ombra] of [him] Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.” The overshadowing cloud is, in all cases, paradoxically a source of brightness [...] The paradox of shadow can be read into the paradox of light too. When Renaissance artists portrayed the Transfiguration and the Annunciation, they typically depicted the presence of God as light, even though the Bible refers to “shadows” and

⁶⁴² Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 72.

“clouds.” [...] the Holy Spirit of the Annunciation that overshadows the Virgin is accompanied by slivers of light that convey her impregnation.⁶⁴³

Reconciling the language of “overshadow” in Luke with the Incarnation light in John, has been a task of theologians since Gregory the Great in the sixth century, who argued that as shadow is formed by light and body, “the incorporeal Light assumed a body in [Mary’s] womb.”⁶⁴⁴ Different interpretations continued to develop in such a way that reflected the fundamental struggle to quantify the mystery of the Incarnation. This summates in the work of Flemish Jesuit scholar Cornelius a Lapide (1567-1637), who devised eight ways in which the overshadowing metaphor could be summarised.⁶⁴⁵ Evidently, given the date of Lapide’s writings, the implications of “overshadowing” in the Annunciation context was still being questioned in the seventeenth century. An interpretation from this period in Italy comes from writer Luigi Novarini (1594-1650):

Therefore just as the mind is suffused with light in the formation of a word, and illuminated by it, so the Word was conceived by the Virgin. She conceived the Son of God just as the mind conceives a word, and then understands it, and is flooded by a light from above. That is why Christ is called “Oriens,” the rising sun, by the prophet. Thus indeed in Zechariah 6.12 it is written, “[Here is a man] whose name is ‘Oriens’.”⁶⁴⁶

The language of overshadowing was thus united with the idea of light as a metaphor for the conception of the Word. The description posed by Novarini paints a picture of a heavenised form of Annunciation through an unattainable, flooding radiance. The inclusion of radiant light in Annunciations, accompanied by other figures that mark a divine presence, could therefore be understood as a metaphor for the Incarnation. In those interpretations, the paradoxical formation of Catholicism’s founding mystery is expressed. Verena Lobsien writes, “The incarnation is not only the greatest mystery

⁶⁴³ Meredith Gill, “Reformations: The Painted Interiors of Augustine and Jerome,” in *Augustine beyond the Book: Intermediality, Transmediality and Reception*, eds. Karla Pollmann and Meredith Gill (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 59-96.

⁶⁴⁴ Pope Gregory the Great, “Book XXXIII,” in *Collected Works of Gregory I* (East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2019), unpaginated, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Delphi_Collected_Works_of_Gregory_I_Illu/EoupDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0

⁶⁴⁵ Paul Bishop, *On the Blissful Islands with Nietzsche and Jung* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 42.

⁶⁴⁶ Luigi Novarini, *Umbra Virginea* (Verona: Typis Rubeanis, 1653), 30; Eileen Reeves, *Painting the Heavens: Art and Science in the Age of Galileo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 145.

in that it folds into one the divine and the human, it is also the greatest paralepsis and the greatest paradox in that it combines the utterly incompatible, reconciling the material and the spiritual.”⁶⁴⁷ In the same way, through the heavenly interpretation it can be communicated through the “ambivalence of the shadow, in its otherness from light and yet its sameness.”⁶⁴⁸ By interpreting the Lukan Annunciation in conjunction with John 1, a method that reflects that of the Counter-Reformation context, we reveal how the heavenised interpretation, with its radiance and allusion to divinity, resonated with a particular biblical reception.

d. The heavenised interpretation in Catholic tradition

In addition to observing the biblical reasoning behind the heavenly interpretation of the Annunciation, we should also explore the contextual support for the exegesis. An important extension from the previous discussion is that the Counter-Reformation Church framed the use of the Bible within the parameters of scripture and tradition. The Bible was not the singular informer for the faith, neither is it the singular inspiration for Counter-Reformation Annunciation iconography. Instead, the unity of scripture and tradition formed Catholicism’s source of authority, and saw precedence given not only to the biblical canon but to the accumulation of a millennium-and-a-half of Catholic practices, institutions, and methods (see sections 1.1.3. and 2.4.2.). This philosophy sharply contrasted Protestant’s belief in *sola scriptura*, which emphasised the unique authority of the Bible. Protestantism sought to remove the excess traditions from the Catholic faith and recalibrate the church to the central tenets set out in scripture. The desire to remove distractions is seen most dramatically in the removal of images and whitewashing of churches across Northern Europe. Marcia B. Hall writes:

[T]he intent [was] that worshippers would have nothing to distract them from receiving the Word of God and pondering it with their mental faculties. Appeal to the senses was to be avoided because it created an emotional dependency on the Church, which Protestants regarded as an illegitimate hold over the faithful.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁷ Verena Olejniczak Lobsien, *Transparency and Dissimulation: Configurations of Neoplatonism in Early Modern English Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 138.

⁶⁴⁸ Meredith J. Gill, ““Until Shadows Disperse”: Augustine’s Twilight,” in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, eds. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 252-272.

⁶⁴⁹ Hall, “Introduction,” 1-2.

One of the central distinctions between Protestant and Catholic theology is the opposing views on the role of the senses. Protestantism largely promoted a Platonic understanding of the body, in that the body as flesh was essentially corrupt, and thus the anatomical senses could not be used or trusted within a religious context. This reiterates the claims of Martin Luther that participation of the physical body in sacramental practices was redundant. It was through intellectual contemplation of the Bible that one could engage with the divine, not through the affective or sensory vessels promoted in Catholicism that demanded emotional responses as opposed to rational reasoning. Faced with the challenge of Protestantism, the Catholic Church responded with a perspective on the role of the senses that conformed closely to the theories of Scholasticism:

Where there was Catholicism after Trent, there was almost certainly Scholasticism. Where there was Scholasticism there was at least a theoretical acceptance of a close and positive body-soul relationship and a recognition of the integral role that the senses play in one of the most spiritual, noncorporeal realities of which we have direct experience, abstract thought or concepts.⁶⁵⁰

Counter-Reformation Catholicism saw the senses as an indispensable tool through which it could engage with the divine. Sensuous practices previously supported by the Catholic Church continued to be utilised after Trent, including “images [...] relics, liturgy, processions, music, and theatre.”⁶⁵¹ These practices formed gateways through which spiritual reality could be experienced. The *Spiritual Exercises* (1548) by Ignatius of Loyola is a typical Catholic response to this idea, and sees the direct application of the five senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch) to stimulate internal spirituality. A notable example from this text is the “Fifth Exercise” that contemplates the experience of hell: “see in imagination the vast fires [...], hear the wailing, the howling, cries [...] with the sense of smell to perceive the smoke, the sulphur, the filth and corruption [...] to taste the bitterness of tears, sadness, and remorse of conscience [...] with the sense

⁶⁵⁰ John O'Malley, “Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholics’ Senses of the Sensuous,” in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, eds. Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28-48.

⁶⁵¹ In using the word *sensuous*, I mean practices evoking the senses, as opposed to *sensual*, which has sexual connotations; Hall, “Introduction,” 2.

of touch to feel the flames which envelop and burn the souls.”⁶⁵² The anatomical senses form the backbone of Ignatius’ practice, and demonstrate the use of the physical anatomy to facilitate spiritual experience. Specific subject matters were chosen with the intent of habituating the multisensory experiences of biblical figures and saints in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Catholic observers. The physicality of the story of Saint Thomas, who said he would doubt Christ’s resurrection until he had touched His wounds (Jn 20:24-29), led the figure to gain exceptional popularity in the late sixteenth century; Caravaggio’s *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* is particularly illustrative of the sensoriality of this narrative (Fig. 70).⁶⁵³

In a similar way, martyrs of the early church formed a source of inspiration for Counter-Reformation instruction. Churches used dramatic depictions of their deaths to encourage emotive responses based on the tangibility of the verbal or visual representation. Through the interior contemplation of these themes, there develops a Counter-Reformation personal piety that “drew heavily on the fluidity between external and internal sensing where imagination collated sensory experiences and spiritual themes.”⁶⁵⁴ This view on the relationship between materiality and spirituality corresponds to the levels of affectiveness and emotionality that characterises Counter-Reformation visual culture and the Baroque style that developed from and through it.⁶⁵⁵ At the Council of Trent, it was stated that images should not just have the capacity to teach, but also to inspire devotion. The Church supported the use of images and their ability to rouse emotions, to offer sensory experiences with the aim of cultivating internal spirituality. This intensification of sensory experience and emotions is identifiable within Counter-Reformation visual culture - a complex moment in which artistic choices shift from the so-called ‘Renaissance’ traditions of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century painting to those of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

⁶⁵² Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1951), 32.

⁶⁵³ Kelley Magill, “Reviving Martyrdom: Interpretations of the Catacombs in Cesare Baronio’s Patronage,” in *Death, Torture, and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300-1650*, eds. John R. Decker and Mitzi Kirkland-Ives (London: Ashgate, 2015), 87-117.

⁶⁵⁴ Matthew Milner, “The Senses in Religion: Towards the Reformation of the Senses,” in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance*, ed. Herman Roodenburg (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 87-106.

⁶⁵⁵ Erin E. Benay and Lisa M. Rafanelli, *Faith, Gender, and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art* (London: Ashgate, 2015), 177-8.

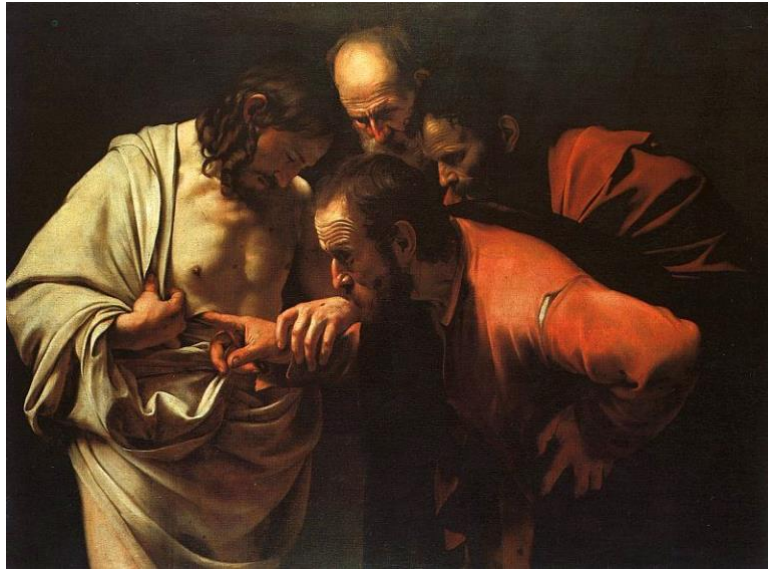


Figure 70. Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601-2, oil on canvas, 106.9x146cm. Sanssouci Picture Gallery. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

frequently summarised as 'Baroque'.⁶⁵⁶ This is found in those representations that emphasise the physical suffering of Christ and the saints, and it is also present in the images of the spiritual realm, such as those that represent Mary's Assumption, or her Immaculate Conception (Fig. 71 and 72). They maintain the same objective of exercising a devotional response from the observer through the use of the material cult. Images that visualise the glories of heaven, like the heavenised form of the Annunciation, use splendour and beauty, as opposed to gore and violence, to captivate the viewer. Constanza Barbieri writes that through this type of image it is possible "to ascend to the spiritual via visual pleasure. In this process, the senses lead the viewer from mundane beauty to divine glory, passing through various stages of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment."⁶⁵⁷ This transition is explicated in the images that explicitly unite heaven and earth. They represent the fluidity of the two permeable spaces of material and immaterial, matter and spirit, body and soul.⁶⁵⁸ This idea of blending two seemingly disparate spheres culminates in the seventeenth-century

⁶⁵⁶ Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*, 4-37; Rupert Martin, *Baroque* (London: Routledge, 2018); Alois Riegl and Alina Alexandra Payne, *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome* (London: Getty Publications, 2010); François Quiviger, "Art and the Senses: Representation and Reception of Renaissance Sensations," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance*, ed. Herman Roodenburg (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 169-202.

⁶⁵⁷ Barbieri, "'To Be In Heaven,'" 207.

⁶⁵⁸ Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler, "Introduction: The Sacred and the Senses in an Age of Reform," in *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1-13.



Figure 71. Annibale Carracci, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1600-2, oil on wood panel, 245x155cm. Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 72. Guido Reni, *The Immaculate Conception*, 1627, oil on canvas, 268x185.4cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 73. Andrea Pozzo, *Triumph of St Ignatius of Loyola*, 1685, fresco. Sant'Ignazio Church, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

decorations of the major churches in Rome, where “the Baroque intersected with the geographical heart of Catholic reform.”⁶⁵⁹ The ceiling of the Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola, as an example, displays the glory of heaven in an illusionistic space (Fig. 73). The effect of the imagery is of the interior church space dissolving into heaven, where angels seem to climb out of the ceiling and onto the walls of the church interior. Saint Ignatius resides at the centre of the frescoed ceiling, surrounded by angels and clouds. It is as if “heaven and the church space of the devout were one and the same place.”⁶⁶⁰ Exaggerating the effect of the Counter-Reformation paintings that had begun to blur the boundaries between heaven and earth, this decoration rids the distinctions altogether. The entire church space becomes a portal through which one can experience the divine. Through simply gazing at the ceiling one is assured of communication with heaven itself.⁶⁶¹ While the example of the Church of Saint Ignatius is from a much later date than the case studies of this thesis, the theme of instability between material and immaterial borders was directly impacted by the ideologies of the Catholic Church the century before. Against this backdrop, the relevance of a heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation is clear. While the theme of angels, clouds and heavenised imagery was most commonly associated with images of Mary in her doctrinal role, the Annunciation presented a narrative opportunity for the heavenly world to interact with the earthly. The heavenised interpretation celebrates the cataclysmic impact of Mary’s participation in the Incarnation, elevating Mary to a much closer and more united position with Jesus than that distinguished by Protestant Reformers.⁶⁶² While spiritualised Marian devotion was not an invention of Counter-Reformation Catholicism, a “defiant flourishing of Marian devotion, literature, and images” is clearly identifiable in the discourse of this moment, and, as Part 3 will reveal, directly impacted the visual reception of the Annunciation.

The following chapters engage with three case studies that each maintain a connection to the heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation. As in Part 1 and Part 2, the selection of these case studies is not based on them being the only objects

⁶⁵⁹ Lepage, “Art and the Counter-Reformation,” 376.

⁶⁶⁰ Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 46.

⁶⁶¹ John D. Lyons, “Introduction: The Crisis of the Baroque,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1-24.

⁶⁶² Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 116.

relating to the heavenised topos within this period. Indeed, the recurrence of this motif as identified in scholarship indicates that there are many representations that need specific assessment regarding their use of heavenly iconography. Rather, the three case studies used here were selected as key individual instances in which the heavenised interpretation has a particularly significant role in relation to the theological and historical context of the visual exegesis. The first is Giorgio Vasari's *Annunciation* in Florence, which, interestingly, does not deploy heavenised imagery. It is an image that was created under the Florentine *Maniera* influences and therefore constructs an alternative set of objectives to what is found elsewhere in Italy where reform strategies were more keenly felt. The painting's relevance to Part 3, however, is found in that Vasari did use the heavenised interpretation in other art forms, indicating that he was aware of the trope but did not use it in his pictorial representation of the Annunciation. By beginning with this object, Part 3 therefore acknowledges the presence of alternative methods of interpretation in Counter-Reformation Annunciations aside from the heavenly *topos*, and identifies that the characteristics of competing styles - namely *Maniera* - informed the direction of visual exegesis in different locations across Italy.

Chapter 10 presents a sharp contrast by analysing the painting frequently used as an informant of the typical heavenised Counter-Reformation Annunciation: Titian's *San Salvatore Annunciation* in Venice. This image is considered one of the first altarpieces to contain all the motifs commonly attached to the heavenly method: clouds, angels, cherubim, and most significantly, supernatural light. The choice for this painting is guided by evidence that suggests that Titian's method was informed by the textual exegesis of his friend Pietro Aretino (1492-1556). The unity found between these Venetian textual and visual exegeses point to the development of a trend within the city that absorbed the sensuous nature of its art. The final case study of Part 3 is Il Passignano's *Annunciation* at the Santa Maria in Vallicella. In the analysis I examine why the heavenised interpretation used by Passignano - which includes similar themes to Titian as well as an image of God the Father - was contextually significant to the patron of the Church, Saint Philip Neri who was leader of the Order of the Oratorians. As part of the visual scheme designed by Neri himself, the altarpieces of the side chapels each represented a moment in the life of the Virgin Mary and specifically the narratives associated with the ritual of the rosary. Passignano's *Annunciation* functioned in this context and was one component in a much larger narrative cycle.

Yet not only did it satisfy the didactic requirements of the space, but it also represented Neri's desire for affective and emotional participation in the visual arts by creating a transient space between heaven and earth. It is in this discussion that I will continue exploring the aforementioned sensuousness of images within this period, and how they had the capacity of provoking physical and spiritual faculties. Through each of these chapters, I will localise each case study to their original ecclesiastical setting, in order to better understand the nature of heavenised imagery as a topos of Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces.

9. Chapter 9. Subverting the heavenised interpretation: Giorgio Vasari's *Annunciation* (1563-4)

9.1. Introduction

Giorgio Vasari was an Italian painter, architect, and writer, best known for his collection of artists' biographies in *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550). The influence of this work marks Vasari as the central figure in early modern art theory, having "invented" Renaissance art through his analysis of its three hundred years of artistic contributions.⁶⁶³ Through his *Lives*, Vasari establishes an art-historical model that synchronises the lives of artists with their achievements, so constructing links between an individual's character and the work they produce.⁶⁶⁴ The successes of Vasari as an art historian should not, however, detract from his own working practice. David Franklin writes, "All artists perhaps refashion the work of their precursors in their own image, but Vasari is the first painter for whom this process of assimilation can be so explicitly monitored."⁶⁶⁵ Vasari's *Lives* indicates the extensive attention the artist paid to his predecessors, while his paintings reveal the extent to which he accepted or challenged their creations. This will be a central hypothesis as I identify the specific qualities of Vasari's visual biblical interpretation in his *Annunciation* (1563-4) for the Santa Maria Novella in Arezzo, Tuscany (Fig. 74). As articulated in the introduction to Part 3, the following three chapters assess the heavenised Annunciation trend in post-Tridentine painting. For this reason Vasari's *Annunciation* may appear to be an anomaly. While sections of the altarpiece created by other artists do contain reflections of the heavenised interpretation, the central panel by Vasari does not prioritise heightened spiritual imagery, but instead focusses on the figures of the Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel solely within the parameters of an earthly space. Yet this is one of the central reasons that this painting was chosen, as the low level of absorption with the heavenised trend allows Vasari's *Annunciation* to lay the ground for disrupting and individuating the topos of heavenised Annunciation paintings in the post-Tridentine period that has formerly been identified in scholarship. Additionally, Vasari's *Annunciation* provides an opportunity to interrogate his exegesis of the

⁶⁶³ Patricia Lee Rubin and Maurice Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.

⁶⁶⁴ Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," 385.

⁶⁶⁵ David Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence 1500-1550* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2001), 229.



Figure 74. Giorgio Vasari, *Annunciation*, 1563-4, oil on panel, 216x166cm. Louvre Museum, Paris. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Annunciation in pictorial form against other forms of representation. The lack of heavenised imagery in Vasari's *Annunciation* altarpiece is paradoxical to the exegesis of the Annunciation narrative found in Vasari's stage design from 1564, which contains a high number of heavenly motifs, including angels, clouds and spectacular light. This disparity across the methods of his exegesis is deserving of interrogation, of which there is currently none in scholarship, and this chapter gathers evidence to evaluate the differences.

The *Annunciation* by Vasari was commissioned in 1563 for the commune of nuns at the Santa Maria Novella in Arezzo. Vasari refers to the commission twice in his writings, first in his autobiography and then in his *Ricordanze*, and lists it under the paintings completed in 1564:

In those days or shortly before, I sent to the nuns of Santa Maria Novella in Arezzo a panel containing the Annunciation of the Virgin by the Angel, with two saints at each side of the panel.⁶⁶⁶

I remember how this year a panel was made for the nuns of Santa Maria Novella in Arezzo, to satisfy Monna Cosina, my wife. The panel was never fully paid for. I had the ornament made in wood, completely at my own expense. In that ornament, beside the panel, there were two saints on the sides; specifically, Saint Donatus, bishop of Arezzo, and Saint Dominic the Confessor, from whom the nuns had adopted their habit and his regulations. Several times Madonna Cosina and I received thirty scudi; that is 30.⁶⁶⁷

The second of these entries from Vasari's studio log suggests that his wife Monna Cosina requested the three paintings – the *Annunciation*, *Bishop Donatus* (Fig. 75) and *St Dominic* (Fig. 76) - to be made for the church and that the wooden ornament surrounding it was paid for by Vasari himself. The following statement from the State Archives in Florence indicates a different set of conditions regarding the commission, from the perspective of the church's *Libro di Ricordi*:

⁶⁶⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *Le Ricordanze*, eds. Paolo Barocchi and M. Fileti Mazza, Fondazione Memofonte, 2006, accessed on November 23, 2020, http://www.memofonte.it/home/files/pdf/vasari_ricordanze.pdf, cited in Serena Nocentini, "Architectural Painting: Giorgio Vasari's Altarpiece for the Monastery of Santa Maria Novella in Arezzo," *Explorations In Renaissance Culture* 39, no.1 (2013): 49-58.

⁶⁶⁷ Vasari, *Le Ricordanze*, 37-8, cited in Nocentini, "Architectural Painting," 49.



Figure 75. Giorgio Vasari, *Bishop Donatus*, 1564. Source: https://brill.com/view/journals/erc/39/1/article-p49_6.xml?lang=en



Figure 76. Giorgio Vasari, *Saint Dominic*, 1564. Source: https://brill.com/view/journals/erc/39/1/article-p49_6.xml?lang=en

In 1563, Sister Mattea Tozetti had the panel of the Annunciation of the glorious Virgin made by the Magnificent M. Giorgio Vasari. The painting and ornament in wood cost fifty scudi; that is to say, three hundred fifty *Lire*.⁶⁶⁸

While the texts of Vasari and the *Libro di Ricordi* describe two different accounts of the same commission, they can be understood as corroborative when read in context. The *Libro di Ricordi* may have been informed by a contract or verbal agreement between the Santa Maria Novella and Vasari.⁶⁶⁹ This makes the dates - 1564 by Vasari and 1563 by the *Libro di Ricordi* - more reliable, as while the image was commissioned in

⁶⁶⁸ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Convento 22, filza 5, *Libro di Ricordi*, 1503-1641, cited in Nocentini, "Architectural Painting," 49.

⁶⁶⁹ Edmund Pillsbury, "Three Unpublished Paintings by Giorgio Vasari," *The Burlington Magazine* 112, no. 803 (1970): 94-101.

the earlier year, only in 1564 was the image completed. With regards to the financial transaction, it could be said that the amount decided in 1563 simply had to be reduced, meaning that Vasari paid for part of the project himself.⁶⁷⁰ Finally, the matter of the different commissioners described in the accounts, Vasari's wife Monna Cosina and the nun Sister Mattea Tozetti, is explained by Monna Cosina's role as an intermediary between the artist and the convent; this was common practice between convents and artists in the sixteenth century.⁶⁷¹ Cosina could occupy this role as she was a permanent resident in Arezzo and naturally had close relations with the artist.⁶⁷²

The commission organised by Cosina on behalf of the nuns at Santa Maria Novella included an elaborate wooden altarpiece, the *Annunciation* as the central panel, with *Bishop Donatus* on the left wing and *St Dominic* on the right wing. Each of these components were created by Vasari himself. Later sections, however, were added by Alessandro Forzori, "Vasari's Aretine collaborator," and included the paintings *Archangel Saint Michael* and *Mary Magdalene the Penitent* either below or above the wings, and *God the Father* above the *Annunciation*; each of these sections are now lost.⁶⁷³ It is the latter of these that is particularly significant in the context of Part 3, which seeks to assess the heavenised interpretation of Annunciations within the Counter-Reformation. Although Vasari's *Annunciation* is now viewed in its isolated form in the Louvre, Paris, it is the original and intended location that is of significance for the present thesis. The positioning of Forzori's *God the Father* above the *Annunciation* increases the heavenised detail attached to the biblical narrative. We have seen this technique before in Guido Reni's Chapel of the Annunciation in the Vatican (see Chapter 5) (Fig. 77 and 78), where the *Annunciation* is placed below *God the Father* in different panels. When both parts of the altarpiece were considered in unity the biblical narrative of the Annunciation heralded an intimate connection to the unearthly sphere. However, several compositional differences can be identified in the

⁶⁷⁰ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Libro di Ricordi*, cited in Nocentini, "Architectural Painting," 49.

⁶⁷¹ Ann Robert, *Dominican Women and Renaissance Art: The Convent of San Domenico of Pisa* (London: Routledge, 2016), unpaginated, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Dominican_Women_and_Renaissance_Art/100oDQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Dominican+Women+and+Renaissance+Art&printsec=frontcover

⁶⁷² Pillsbury, "Three Unpublished Paintings," 94.

⁶⁷³ Nocentini, "Architectural Painting," 50.



Figure 77. (Top) Detail of Guido Reni, *God the Father in Glory*, 1610, fresco. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: https://www.wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html



Figure 78. Guido Guido Reni, *Annunciation*, 1610, oil on panel. Quirinal Palace, Rome. Source: <https://www.topofart.com/artists/Guido-Reni/art-reproduction/3242/The-Annunciation.php>

comparison of Reni's altarpiece and Vasari's. Reni absorbs some of the heavenised interpretation in his *Annunciation* by having the line of cherubim appear to drop down from the scene above. The cherubim are therefore included in the same canvas as the Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel. Vasari, however, has ensured that no such explicit motif be found in his painting.

Furthermore, the paintings by Forzori were created at a later date and Vasari's practical involvement with said paintings is unknown. For this reason, Vasari's *Annunciation* occupies a fascinating instance in which the heavenly significance of the Annunciation narrative is retained in surrounding iconographies, while there is a perceptible restraint from using excessive heavenised imagery in the artist's own visual biblical exegesis. The analysis in 9.3 will postulate some reasons for this interpretation by drawing on a range of material, primarily evidence from the biblical interpretation in Vasari's stage design for an Annunciation play of 1564 and his painting of *St Luke Painting the Virgin Mary* from 1565. The Annunciation play presents a dramatically heavenised interpretation, while the painting avoids such expression and draws on a restrained interpretation that recalls that of his Arezzo *Annunciation*. This difference in the modes of visual biblical interpretation may reflect a desire to differentiate the exegesis of the biblical narrative based on the mode of representation, i.e. theatre or painting.

In addition, the chapter will examine the specific location in and for which Vasari was working in Florence, and how the influences of *Maniera* - a style that prioritised such tropes as artificiality and unnatural construction of pictorial narrative - sat against the didactic and devotional expectations for images projected by the Counter-Reformation Church. This will contribute to verifying a hypothesis of this thesis that the reduction of post-Tridentine art to a single style is inaccurate. During a context that saw varying degrees of artistic reform and response, boundaries between artistic trends were blurred, and Counter-Reformation objectives were selectively chosen and/or conditioned by local politics and cultural norms.⁶⁷⁴ As visual "barometers" of their localised religious climate, the altarpieces that were produced in the decades after Trent were eclectic and dealt with visual biblical interpretation in different, and often seemingly contradictory, ways.⁶⁷⁵ Vasari's *Annunciation* occupies such an instance, particularly when compared to the other two case studies analysed in Part 3, and promises to provide an illustration of the breadth of visual exegetical responses to a biblical narrative in close temporal proximity.

⁶⁷⁴ Locker, "Introduction," 1.

⁶⁷⁵ Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation*, 1.

9.2. Iconographic analysis

Vasari's *Arezzo Annunciation* represents the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary in an interior space distinguishable as a bedroom. On the left of the back wall there is a green canopy with a bed with white sheets extending beneath it. A potential influence for this canopy in size, shape and colour is Girolamo Siciolante da Semoneta's *Annunciation*, dating from 1549 (Fig. 79).⁶⁷⁶ Siciolante's canopy is significantly more stark than the one found in Vasari's composition. The lack of shade on the left edge of the canopy facing the viewer creates an odd and artificial light in Siciolante's painting. The dove of the Holy Spirit that hovers next to the canopy has no impact in casting shadows across the canopy. In contrast, Vasari shows an attentiveness to the natural sequence of light by darkening the left side of the canopy, and in doing so highlights the dove as the primary source of light for the image. Although it is arguable that Vasari's *Annunciation* is more sophisticated in its representation of light and shade, the artist wrote positively of Siciolante in his *Lives* – "there is now living in Rome one who is certainly very excellent in his profession" - and may have drawn upon his painting for inspiration; the detail is repeated in Vasari's other known *Annunciation* for the Chapel of Saint Michael in the Vatican Palace (Fig. 80).⁶⁷⁷ To the right of the canopy in the *Arezzo Annunciation*, behind the dove, is a door surrounded by a decorative stone frame. In a preparatory study for the *Annunciation*, Vasari sketched an unbroken pediment over the door.⁶⁷⁸ This detail is amended in the painting through the presence of the jug in the centre of the decorative frame, perhaps as a slight increase to the grandeur of the interpretation.

The Virgin Mary sits at the end of the bed, or perhaps on a slightly shorter stool, which is covered by her dress. Vasari has represented her with crossed ankles and her left hand resting near her chest. Her right arm rests against her side and she holds a book; her index finger marking a specific page that she may have just been reading. In light of the earlier investigation of Part 2, this book could be a book of hours or indeed a

⁶⁷⁶ Carmen Morte Garcia, "Que se haga al modo u manera de [...]: Copy and Interpretation in the Visual Arts in Aragon during the 16th Century," in *Making Copies in European Art 1400-1600*, ed. Maddalena Bellavitis (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 387-427.

⁶⁷⁷ Vasari, *Le vite*, 571. For contextual details on Vasari's 1570-1 *Annunciation*, see Louis A. Waldman, "Giorgio Vasari: Annunciation (1570-1) from the Chapel of St. Michael, Torre Pia, Vatican Palace," in *Giorgio Vasari 1511-1574: The Painter of the Szeged Annunciation*, eds. Istvan Zombori and Tamas Szabo (Szeged: Szeged-Csanád Grosics Akadémia, 2011), 54-67.

⁶⁷⁸ Pillsbury, "Three Unpublished Paintings," 98.



Figure 79. Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta, *Annunciation*, 1549. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 80. Giorgio Vasari, *Annunciation*, 1570-1, oil on poplar panel. Mora Ferenc Museum, Szeged. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Bible marked to one of the Hebrew texts relating to Mary's character. Her face inclines to the floor and she has lowered her gaze away from her visitor. She is dressed in a magenta gown that gathers about her lower half to create deep folds of richer colour, and she clings to a light blue stole. Her light auburn hair is swept away from her face and is adorned with a lace band with a translucent veil that falls around her face to her neck and shoulders. From examining some of Vasari's other paintings that include representations of the Virgin Mary, it is clear that the *Annunciation* represents the artist's typical response to this character. Vasari's *Annunciation* (1570-1) (Fig. 80), *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception* (1540) (Fig. 81) and *Assumption of the Virgin* (1567) (Fig. 82) show Mary in similarly coloured dress, with inclined face and light hair complete with transparent headdress. In the *Arezzo Annunciation*, the Angel Gabriel kneels opposite the Virgin Mary and rests on a white cloud. This is, perhaps, the only iconographic detail found in the painting that feeds into the heavenised form of interpretation identified in scholarship relating to Counter-Reformation Annunciations.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁹ Viladesau, "The Annunciation," 71; Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects*, 20.



Figure 81. Giorgio Vasari, *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*, 1541, tempera on wood, 58x39cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 82. Giorgio Vasari, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1567. Wikiart. License: Public Domain.

Gabriel is dressed in white with a yellow tunic and large wings that lean over his body. Gabriel kneels on his right knee and leans over his left towards Mary in a bowing position. His arms are crossed and he holds a stem of lilies in his left hand. Based on the semiotics of gesture previously acknowledged in this thesis, we know that this position is related to humility and submission. Gabriel's head is inclined lower than Mary's, his neck and face almost at a ninety degree angle. It is a possibility that the position of Gabriel was inspired by Andrea del Sarto's monochromatic painting, *The Baptism of the Multitudes* in the Scalzo, Florence (Fig. 83).⁶⁸⁰ The kneeling figure being baptised shows remarkable resemblance to Vasari's Gabriel, even to the placement of the arms, which remains the same whilst incorporating the stem of lilies. In his biography of Del Sarto, Vasari commended the artist by ranking him among Michelangelo, Leonardo and Raphael, whom it is well-known Vasari had particular predilections for.⁶⁸¹ Given Vasari's praise of Del Sarto's style and the fact that Vasari

⁶⁸⁰ Pillsbury, "Three Unpublished Paintings," 99.

⁶⁸¹ Julian Brooks, *Andrea del Sarto: The Renaissance Workshop in Action* (London: Getty, 2015), 145.

centred his career in the finest aristocratic locations of Florence, the influence of the *Baptism* on Vasari's own *Annunciation* is plausible. Another detail to note regarding Vasari's Gabriel is the figure's blonde hair and head band with leaves. This band could be a laurel or olive wreath, that being the symbol of "eternity, victory, and triumph, as well as peace and truce, because it is an evergreen."⁶⁸² Its use in Vasari's painting indicates a fusion of Christian iconography with pagan mythology.⁶⁸³ In a Greco-Roman context, the laurel or olive wreath indicated the sovereignty of rulers and were worn on occasions of victory and restoration of peace. It was used in Florentine visual culture relating to the Medici at the time Vasari was working to communicate the family's military and political power.⁶⁸⁴ While this symbol was being used by Vasari himself - *Portrait of Alessandro de' Medici* (Fig. 84) and *Portrait of Six Tuscan Poets* (Fig. 85) - its use in the *Annunciation* reflects a Christianised iconographic significance. The laurel or olive wreath was absorbed by a Christian context at the time of Constantine (272-337 AD), and was understood to communicate the victory of Christ over death and thus the establishment of peace with God.⁶⁸⁵ When placed on Gabriel's head, the wreath can be understood as an allusion to this coming peace in which Mary played a key role. In addition, the wreath may also symbolise the virtue of virginity and chastity in its unchanging nature of being an evergreen.⁶⁸⁶ An example of this is seen elsewhere in Vasari's work in *The Temptation of St Jerome* (Fig. 86), where a laurel wreath wraps itself around the tree as an image of Jerome's preservation of virginity under sexual temptation. Under this hypothesis, the laurel wreath worn by Gabriel is a meaningful extension of the *Annunciation* narrative that relates to the character of its central protagonist.

Vasari's *Annunciation* represents a simple pictorial narrative through a combination of still, carefully positioned gestures and the iconographic elements that are inextricably linked to the biblical story and its characters. The arrangement is characteristic of

⁶⁸² Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Honor/Honoring," in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, ed. Helene E. Roberts (London: Routledge, 2013), 401-410.

⁶⁸³ Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Peace," in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, ed. Helene E. Roberts (London: Routledge, 2013), 703-706.

⁶⁸⁴ Liana De Girolami Cheney, *Giorgio Vasari's Teachers: Sacred and Profane* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 164.

⁶⁸⁵ Dragana Rogic, Jelena Andelkovic Grasar and Emilija Nikolic, "Wreath – its use and meaning in ancient visual culture," *Religion and Tolerance* 18 (2012): 341-356.

⁶⁸⁶ Cheney, *Giorgio Vasari's Teachers*, 164.



Figure 83. Andrea del Sarto, *Baptism of the People*, 1515-7, fresco. Chiostrò dello Sclazzo, Florence.
Source:
https://www.wga.hu/html_m/a/andrea/sarto/1/baptism.html



Figure 84. Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Alessandro de' Medici*, 1567, oil on canvas. Galleria Palatina, Florence.
Source:
https://www.wga.hu/html_m/v/vasari/1/02medici.html



Figure 85. Giorgio Vasari, *Six Tuscan Poets*, 1544, oil on panel, 132.8x131.1cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 86. Giorgio Vasari, *Temptations of St Jerome*, 1541, oil on panel, 169x123cm. Pitti Palace, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Vasari's exegetical engagement with the subjects of his religious altarpieces; Marcia B. Hall writes,

When he [Vasari] came to paint an altar-piece, he sought a classical prototype to emulate [...]. Where there was none, he designed his composition according to a formula deduced from his study of classical paintings. The primary actor or group must be placed in the centre and the other figures disposed symmetrically, the picture plane must be established by a figure or figures flattened against it and must never be violated; emotion must be restrained and must be expressed by appropriate pose and gesture, but such poses and gestures must have grace and beauty; contact with the viewer should not be sought. It is unfortunately true that Vasari tended to begin with the formula and seek a compositional solution that would conform with it, rather than beginning with his subject and developing an artistic representation of it.⁶⁸⁷

Vasari's *Annunciation* bears remarkable resemblance to Hall's description. In Vasari's *Annunciation*, the two figures inhabit their own halves of the canvas, forging a sense of symmetry and order via their elegant gestures. The image lacks depth based on the characters position on "a thin foreground plane."⁶⁸⁸ The restrained emotion of Mary and Gabriel is accented by their side profiles and lowered gaze, minimising the beholders' engagement with the characters' reaction. Drawing on Hall's language from the above description, the *Annunciation* fits into a formula that does not offer the beholder a sense of Vasari's creative agency in the representation of the biblical narrative. Instead, it reflects a desire to return to the earlier artistic prototypes found in the High Renaissance. Vasari's work was intimately affected by the "classical" tropes identifiable in the work of artists such as Michelangelo (1475-1564), Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519), and Raphael (1483-1520), including "clearness, elegance, symmetry, and repose produced by attention to traditional forms."⁶⁸⁹ It was these very tropes that Vasari praises in his artist biographies and emulates in his working practice. For Vasari, the full embodiment of these characteristics was found in *Maniera*, which he describes as the following:

⁶⁸⁷ Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation*, 37.

⁶⁸⁸ Pillsbury, "Three Unpublished Paintings," 99.

⁶⁸⁹ Brian A. Curran, "Teaching (and Thinking About) the High Renaissance: With Some Observations on its Relationship to Classical Antiquity," in *Rethinking the High Renaissance: The Culture of the Visual Arts in Early Modern Rome*, ed. Jill Burke (London: Routledge, 2012), 27-56.

Maniera is more than an element of art, it is a technique [a method or style] by which a perfect form is created; the total configuration of a beautiful figure or perfect form is the result of combining and copying parts from other beautiful or perfect figures; when this method is used for all the figures in an art work it is called *bella Maniera* (a beautiful style).⁶⁹⁰

In Florence, where Vasari was working, the cultivation of *Maniera* was a driving force behind visual culture. 9.3 progresses by determining how the artistic climate of this city sat within the sixteenth-century context, before evaluating how Vasari's *Annunciation* presents a visual exegesis of the biblical narrative inspired by the motivations of *Maniera*.

9.3. Context and issue of heavenised interpretation

Vasari's *Annunciation* presents a different form of biblical interpretation than the other case studies included in Part 3. Titian and Passignano's Annunciations present the narrative in what has been qualified in scholarship as the typical Counter-Reformation response; Titian's *Annunciation* in particular makes a significant contribution to forming the assessment on widespread heavenised interpretations. Vasari's *Annunciation*, however, cannot be received in the same way. By situating Vasari's *Annunciation* alongside Titian and Passignano's Annunciations, the landscape of post-Tridentine images is broadened to expose the breadth of artistic responses to this biblical text within a short stretch of time. The dissimilarity between the images venerated by the post-Tridentine Church and those driven by a *Maniera* objective is stark. Trent required images to present understandable pictorial narratives and to evoke the emotions of the beholder. *Maniera*, on the other hand, prioritised the *manner* in which the narrative was presented. This division is fundamentally related to the differing contexts of the geographical locations during the sixteenth century. The connections between Florence and the papal city of Rome had been relatively strong at the beginning of the sixteenth century, yet during the later years of Paul III's (1468-1549) pontificate the Catholic Church entered a more radical stage in their reformation process by initiating Trent in 1545, which led to weaker links between Florence and Rome.⁶⁹¹ The affluent Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574) confirmed the absolutist state of Florence for the first

⁶⁹⁰ Vasari, *Le vite*, 277–78, trans. and cited in Cheney, *Giorgio Vasari's Teachers*, 85.

⁶⁹¹ Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy*, 86.

time and absorbed a significant amount of control.⁶⁹² The artists who painted Cosimo and his government used a style that mirrored their patron's aristocracy, providing visual propaganda for the Medici's wealth and affluence.⁶⁹³ *Maniera* was a suitable artistic response to this aim, as it exaggerated elaborate artistic technique.⁶⁹⁴ First intended for this small audience of aristocratic patrons in Florence, the style became increasingly popular and saw the promotion of artificial tropes, such as unusual gestures, bizarre detailing, exaggerated refinement and elegance, and the unnatural construction of pictorial narrative.⁶⁹⁵ In sum, the "preciosity, ornamentalism, involution of Maniera ratiocination was out of keeping with [Counter-Reformation] spirit."⁶⁹⁶ This begs the question of how Vasari the *Maniera* artist should be understood within the Counter-Reformation context, especially in relation to the visual exegesis in his religious art.

On the one hand, Vasari's monumental literary work, *Lives*, was entirely in keeping with a culture that was becoming increasingly suspicious of sacred images. A considerable measure of Vasari's biographies were dedicated to critiquing artists and their works, and warning of artistic irresponsibility.⁶⁹⁷ These assessments carried over into the contemporary ecclesiastical setting, where bishops were given more control over the images that were occupying the churches. On the other hand, Vasari's objective in identifying art's great achievements and mis-endeavours was for aesthetic rather than political or liturgical reasons.⁶⁹⁸ The conclusions Vasari drew were therefore out of sync with post-Tridentine ideals. Noah Charney and Ingrid Rowland write "ironically for someone who wrote so acutely on evaluating works of art, Vasari seems to have fallen victim to changing definitions of good, bad, and beautiful."⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹² Gene A. Brucker, *Florence, the Golden Age, 1138-1737* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 257.

⁶⁹³ Henk Th. Van Veen, "Republicanism in the Visual Propaganda of Cosimo I De' Medici," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 200-209.

⁶⁹⁴ Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 605; Gregori, *The Age of Caravaggio*, 164; Hall, "Introduction," 7.

⁶⁹⁵ Janson and Janson, *History of Art*, 488; Miedema, "On Mannerism and Maniera," 19-45; Thomas, "Domenico Cresti," 19.

⁶⁹⁶ Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation*, 52.

⁶⁹⁷ Karen Hope Goodchild, "Bizarre Painters and Bohemian Poets; Poetic Imitation and Artistic Rivalry in Vasari's Biography of Piero di Cosimo," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*, ed. David J. Cast (London: Routledge, 2014), 129-144.

⁶⁹⁸ Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation*, 37.

⁶⁹⁹ Noah Charney and Ingrid Rowland, *The Collector of Lives: Giorgio Vasari and the Invention of Art* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), unpaginated, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Collector_of_Lives_Giorgio_Vasari_an/YJFYDgAAQBAJ

Vasari's career spanned across an unstable landscape and Catholicism's reformed view of suitable artistic representations was codified at a late point his life. The reception of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel is perhaps the best "barometer" we have regarding the diverging standards (Fig. 87).⁷⁰⁰ The image was commissioned by Pope Paul III in the mid-1530s and received enthusiastic praise at its debut from its patron, who prostrated himself in front of it the first time he saw it, and art critics, including Vasari, who highly commended the artist's skilful creation of four hundred semi-naked idealised figures.⁷⁰¹ By the end of the 1540s, several of the cardinals involved in the commission had passed away and there rose a generation of Counter-Reformation Church authorities who adopted a more militant attitude towards the treatment of Protestant heretics. The fresco was not ferocious enough to intimidate the Protestants, which was all the more disappointing as by method of the printing press the fresco had expanded its intended reception from the *cognoscenti* who entered the Sistine Chapel to the general masses.⁷⁰² The image was now accessible to the general public and was vulnerable to misinterpretation regarding the nudity and the theology of the resurrection. Michelangelo's supporters became apologists who attempted to reconcile the fresco with the changed context and protect the artist from discredit; Vasari comments "Christ is seated, and turns with a terrible expression towards the damned, to curse them, while the Virgin in great fear shrinks into her mantle and hears and sees the ruin".⁷⁰³ This was rightly challenged, as the Christ in Michelangelo's painting appears young and beardless with a face of forbearance as opposed to wrath. This is a clear indication of the difference between Vasari's perspective and that of the increasingly reformatory church authorities from the mid-sixteenth century.

By his paintings and through his *Lives*, it is evident that Vasari's central desire was to re-captivate the arts to a prior, glorious standard set by the High Renaissance, and in

?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=The+Collector+of+Lives:+Giorgio+Vasari+and+the+Invention+of+Art&printsec=frontcover

⁷⁰⁰ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 97.

⁷⁰¹ John W. O'Malley, "The Council of Trent (1545-63) and Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 156, no. 4 (2012): 388-397.

⁷⁰² James A. Connor, *The Last Judgment: Michelangelo and the Death of the Renaissance* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), unpaginated, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Last_Judgment/8gZFOW2JGdsC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=The+Last+Judgment:+Michelangelo+and+the+Death+of+the+Renaissance&printsec=frontcover.

⁷⁰³ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 104.



Figure 87. Michelangelo, *Last Judgment*, 1536-41, fresco, 1370x1220cm. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

particular Michelangelo, and that standard related to aesthetics over the comprehensibility of religious narratives. The differing ideals for appropriate pictorial methods in terms of narrative clarity and emotional stimulation do not, however, diminish the fact that Vasari was the artistic lead in Florence and the surrounding Tuscan region at the start of the post-Tridentine period.⁷⁰⁴ His paintings, considered and interpreted in light of his specific context and extensive writings, contribute to nuancing the context of post-Tridentine Italian painting. They broaden the remit of visual objects and challenge assumptions relating to Counter-Reformation pictorial types, including that of the visual interpretations of the Annunciation. From the iconographic analysis of Vasari's *Annunciation*, we ascertain that emotional stimulation of the biblical narrative was not a priority. Yet neither, I would argue, is the *Maniera* tendency to drastically expand the narrative beyond what is described in the text. The very nature of *Maniera* lends itself to the prioritisation of artificiality, including

⁷⁰⁴ Locker, "Introduction," 1.



Figure 88. Agnolo Bronzino, *The Crossing of the Red Sea*, 1540-5, fresco, 300x475cm. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

elaborate, superfluous details that trouble the narrative integrity of a pictorial representation.⁷⁰⁵ When understanding *Maniera* as a method for visual biblical exegesis, the characteristics of its interpretation mean a subversion of biblical narratives to amplify its visual effects. To take an example from sixteenth-century Florence, Agnolo di Cosimo, or Bronzino, demonstrates an attentiveness to the complexities of the physical form and gestural movements in his painting *The Crossing of the Red Sea* (1542) (Fig. 88). The biblical narrative is shrouded in artifice. The figures are occupied in inactive sculptural poses, some bearing elaborate costume while others recline nude to expose idealised physiques. Janet Cox-Rearick writes that the image “continued a dialogue between an illusionistic classicism and an emerging style of greater artificiality and abstraction.” Within the affluent context of the Medici rule, in which Vasari was also working, this artificiality promoted the flamboyancy and eliteness of Florentine society. Bronzino’s image bears witness to the confounding effects of combining elaborate court painting with biblical narratives and its exegetical outcomes. Ornament was seen as a substitution for meaning and content.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁵ Hall, “Introduction,” 7.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

The textual expansion in Vasari's *Annunciation* is, for a *Maniera* painting, surprisingly restrained. The image contains elements of Marian iconography that had long been associated with the narrative: the lily, the dove of the Holy Spirit, the bedroom, classic gestures of submission and humility. Aside from these common tropes, there is limited extraneous detail in the *Annunciation* panel. It is the addition of *Bishop Donatus* and *St Dominic* on the wings of the panel and the later paintings by Forzoni that may indicate a politic of Vasari's textual expansion, but even they do little to interfere with the interpretation of the *Annunciation* itself. The content of the wing panels, as an example, disclose no allusion to the Bishop or Saint's physical attendance at the site of the Annunciation and it is more accurate to view these figures as useful mediators to inspire the sixteenth-century observer into devotion of the narrative. Vasari's preparatory sketches for the altarpiece also isolated the *Annunciation* to its central panel, avoiding the detail of the overall altarpiece project.⁷⁰⁷ In this light, it seems increasingly unlikely that any additional iconography, such of the image of *God the Father* by Forzoni, was an intended aspect of Vasari's visual exegesis. His avoidance of overtly heavenised imagery, save the subtle cloud around Gabriel's feet and the luminosity of the dove, shows a conscious separation of nature from anything supernatural. From a compositional perspective, the *Annunciation* communicates a closed and intimate interpretation of the event that restricts participative engagement with the emotions of the scene. Mary and Gabriel are facing each other, the lack of movement in their gestures marking the stillness of their dispositions. They seem unaware, or at least unphased, by the proximity of other pictorial representations, including that of a heavenly ether. Therefore, while it is true that the surrounding pictorial pieces offer a broader lens for understanding the reception of the Annunciation in this commission, the details of which do little to inform Vasari's exegetical decisions relating to his *Annunciation* and importantly its relationship to a heavenised form of Annunciation interpretation.

The absence of such heavenly imagery in Vasari's *Annunciation* becomes increasingly identifiable as a conscious exegetical decision given his awareness of the heavenised form of interpretation in other art forms, specifically in theatre. In 1565/6, a couple of

⁷⁰⁷ Pillsbury, "Three Unpublished Paintings," 98.

years after he had completed his *Annunciation*, Vasari designed the stage machinery for an Annunciation play in Santa Spirito, Florence, to celebrate the marriage of Francesco and Joanna of Austria.⁷⁰⁸ Domenico Mellini (1540-1610), a contemporary of Vasari, records the performance:

The stage for the presentation was erected under the cupola on the choir loft of the brotherhood. The windows were closed and shaded from the light. On the stage, the room of the Virgin was erected with the bed and all the other necessary properties. Upon this stage the various Prophets and Sybils appeared, one by one, to recite their prophecies. Then the sky, which was arranged in the cupola of the church, opened and the Paradiso appeared which filled the audience with amazement. God the Father was seen in the Heavens, surrounded by Angels and Cherubin. He ordered the Angel Gabriel to descend to the Virgin Mary to announce the incarnation of His Son. The Angel Gabriel then descended slowly to the ground in a beautiful mandorla filled with lamps. Above him a chorus of Angels descended together and stopped in mid-air as Gabriel slowly descended to the earth in the mandorla. When Gabriel arrived on the ground, the mandorla opened and the angel emerged from the mandorla as it unexpectedly lighted up in brilliant splendor. With beautiful grace, Gabriel conducted himself to the Virgin and with an almost divine voice, he delivered the message of God.⁷⁰⁹

The Annunciation play that Mellini describes boasted an exceptionally high level of heavenly motifs: God the Father, angels, cherubim, the *paradiso*. The stage design by Vasari helped to enforce such an interpretation. Within Vasari's *Lives*, we find an exceptionally similar description of an Annunciation play found in the life of Filippo Brunelleschi (1337-1446). Although designed in the previous century, the types of plays designed by Brunelleschi continued to be performed in churches in Florence in the sixteenth century and it is likely that Vasari saw such plays being performed and perhaps based his design on these earlier prototypes.⁷¹⁰ There is, after all, a distinct similarity between Mellini's description of Vasari's play of 1565/6 and the *paradiso* of

⁷⁰⁸ Alison C. Fleming, "Presenting the Spectators as the Show: The Piazza degli Uffizi as Theatre and Stage," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 37, no. 3 (2006): 701-20.

⁷⁰⁹ Domenico Mellini, *Descrizione dell' Entrata Della sereniss. Reina Giovanna d'Austria e dell'Apparato* (Florence: aspresso I Giunti, 1566), cited in Orville K. Larson, "Vasari's Descriptions of Stage Machinery," in *Education Theatre Journal* 9, no. 4 (1957): 287-299.

⁷¹⁰ Fleming, "Presenting the Spectators," 710.

Brunelleschi's Annunciation play, which Vasari describes as "a truly marvelous thing, displaying the ability and industry of the inventor, for it presented the spectacle of Heaven full of living figures that moved about amid an infinite quantity of lights which appeared and disappeared like lightning."⁷¹¹ Vasari continues with a complex description of the various parts of Brunelleschi's stage design from the previous century. Yet the similarities between such descriptions have caused trepidation around whether such accounts are plausible. Alessandra Bucchieri, for example, suggests that the design that Vasari describes in *Lives* is not of Brunelleschi's design but Vasari's own. The reason Vasari insinuated a continuation from earlier tradition could be that his Medici patrons sought the preservation of all things relating to the Florentine republican tradition, including the glorious design of Brunelleschi's machinery.⁷¹² While Brunelleschi's stage design may have exercised some influence on the *paradiso* of Vasari's Annunciation design, it is more plausible that the fullness of the 1565/6 performance was the invention of Vasari himself. The play that was performed, *La Rappresentazione dell'Annunziazione della Gloriosa Vergine*, matched the textual expansion of the biblical narrative in the stage design. The play consisted of 318 lines: two thirds consisted of reciting the prophecies of fifteen prophets from the Hebrew Bible, prayers by Mary, songs sung by angels (two boys perhaps acting as cherubim) as Gabriel descended, the spoken salutation and Annunciation, and the return of Gabriel to heaven singing Psalm 97.⁷¹³ The thirteen-verse Annunciation account found in Luke 1:26-38 constitutes a minor part in this production. While it is the climax of the theatre event, the moment is shrouded by extravagance. The retelling of the biblical story, both in script and in stage design, indulged the audience of the Medici wedding in all the wealth and beauty of the Florentine response to the visual arts.

Vasari's interpretation of the Annunciation narrative as a climactic heavenly event in his stage design makes his painting at Arezzo seem increasingly restrained and formulated. One of the reasons for this deviation in Vasari's biblical reception are the objects' specific contexts, which would have guided Vasari's visual exegesis in two different directions. The 1564 painting was designed for a group of nuns in Arezzo.

⁷¹¹ Giorgio Vasari, *Le Opere di Giorgio Vasari, con nuove annotazioni e commenti di G. Milanese*, ed. Gartano Milanese (Florence: Sansoni, 1878), cited in Larson, "Vasari's Descriptions," 293.

⁷¹² Bucchieri, *The Spectacle of Clouds*, 29.

⁷¹³ Nerida Newbigin, "Greasing the Wheels of Heaven: Recycling, Innovation and the Question of "Brunelleschi's" Stage Machinery," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 11 (2007): 201-241.

The use of extravagancies and dramatic flair would have been ill-fitting in the modest setting and audience of the Dominican convent at the Santa Maria Novella. The abstinent life of St Dominic, whose representation is located just to the right of the *Annunciation* panel, made the setting unsuited to the grandiose aspects of the *Maniera*. Conversely, the stage design for the Medici wedding was designed to accommodate a different set of agendas. Knowing the context of the Medici in Florence, the production can be perceived more as an exposé of wealth and affluence rather than religiosity. An additional reason for the opposing interpretations could be the differing standards between theatre and painting; by this I mean that what is appropriate in one may not be appropriate in the other. To explore this possibility, let us engage with another of Vasari's paintings, that of *St Luke Painting the Virgin Mary* (1565) (Fig. 89) in the Chapel of Saint Luke in the Santa Annunziata, Florence. This chapel was overseen by the city's art academy, the Accademia del Disegno.⁷¹⁴ Vasari's image represents Saint Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke, in the position of painter, sitting behind a canvas with paintbrush and palette in hand and looking towards his subject. As was customary in earlier representations of this subject, the figure of Saint Luke is a self-portrait of Vasari himself.⁷¹⁵ To his right are two male figures and an ox, the animal that has characterised the theme of sacrifice in Luke's gospel since the fifth-century.⁷¹⁶ The two figures beside it are understood to be the sixteenth-century painter Montorsoli and his pupil Martino, who are now buried in the chapel.⁷¹⁷ The men look towards the Virgin Mary and the Christ child, who are elevated on clouds and surrounded by at least five cherubim who cling on to Mary's garments. Her gestural indication to Saint Luke through her pointed finger is instructive, as if she is "directing or correcting his impression of her."⁷¹⁸ She appears to have an edifying role in Luke's visual exegesis and the artist responds positively by lifting his brush and palette towards her in submission. By analysing the canvas within the painting - what

⁷¹⁴ Hornik and Parsons, *Illuminating Luke*, 18.

⁷¹⁵ Hiroko Takahasi, "Giorgio Vasari's *St Luke Painting the Virgin*: a reconsideration of its possible sources," GLIM Institution Repository, accessed April 1, 2020, <http://glim-re.glim.gakushuin.ac.jp/handle/10959/1296>

⁷¹⁶ John Beckwith, Richard Krautheimer, and Slobodan Ćurčić, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1986), 35.

⁷¹⁷ Matthijs Jonker, "The Cappella di San Luca: A Crossing Point of Religious and Professional Activities of Artists in Pre-Modern Florence," in *Presence and Visibility of Artists, Guilds, Brotherhoods in the Premodern Era*, eds. A. Tacke, B. U. Münch, & W. Augustyn (Petersburg: Michael Imhof Verlage, 2017), 280-299.

⁷¹⁸ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 72.



Figure 89. Giorgio Vasari, *St Luke Painting the Virgin*, 1565, fresco. Basilica of the Annunciation of Mary, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

I will be referring to as the “internal portrait” - it is clear that while Luke copies his subject from nature, his painting contains exegetical deviations.⁷¹⁹ For while the heavenly image of the Virgin Mary with Christ echoes a heavenised interpretation, the painting Luke is working on contains no indication of such visions (Fig. 90). The cherubim and clouds are omitted in the virtual portrait and only Mary with the Christ-child remain. The decision to omit the heavenly details communicates a central principle in Vasari’s theory of art in two ways.⁷²⁰ It communicates the “medial nature of the artist’s imaginative, or noncorporeal, vision.”⁷²¹ Within the context of a chapel overseen by the Accademia del Disegno, the painting indicated the interpretative nature of an artist’s response to a subject of any sort, but particularly of a religious

⁷¹⁹ Ian Verstegen, “Between Presence and Perspective: The Portrait-in-a-Picture in Early Modern Painting,” *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 71, no. 4 (2008): 513-26.

⁷²⁰ Cheney, “Imagination/Creativity,” 426-434.

⁷²¹ Marsha Libina, “Divine Visions: Image-Making and Imagination in Pictures of Saint Luke Painting the Virgin,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz (Max-Planck-Institut)* 61, no. 2, (2019): 235-263.



Figure 90. Detail of Giorgio Vasari, *St Luke Painting the Virgin*, 1565, fresco. Basilica of the Annunciation of Mary, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

subject. It demonstrated that even in incorporeal subjects, the artist was at liberty to edify and form a mediatorial role in the transmission of divine subjects to the beholder of their work. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, is the role of a divine figure within this process. The Virgin Mary participates in the visual interpretation of the internal portrait. This recalls the theology that underpins Vasari's *Lives*; Marsha Libina writes, "Akin to his account of Michelangelo's newly created Adam, Vasari's fresco re-establishes the religious image's connection to its creationary moment."⁷²² Saint Luke, and so Vasari by substitute of his self-portrait, is guided by Mary's action towards the virtual portrait, thus the artist is able to sanction his work as sealed with the approval of the subject Herself.

Created one year after his *Annunciation* in Arezzo, Vasari's *St Luke Painting the Virgin Mary* contains an internal portrait that edifies a vision of the Virgin Mary and Christ-child by removing heavenised imagery. The fact that Vasari has painted Luke's subject in her ethereal nature on the left of the canvas, yet ignores this detail in the internal portrait, implies that this was the correct - nay *biblical* - exegetical process of reception. In the knowledge that Luke was the biblical author of the Annunciation narrative, it seems entirely appropriate that Vasari used what he considered Luke's pictorial representation of Mary as the most suitable interpretation for the mode of painting in other paintings of the figure, such as his *Arezzo Annunciation* of 1564 and his *Vatican Annunciation* of 1570-1. However, this is profoundly different from Vasari's interpretation of the biblical narrative within a theatrical setting, where excessiveness of the narrative is plainly promoted. In the knowledge that Vasari was aware of both methods of Marian interpretation within this contemporary moment - the heavenly and the earthly - there is a clear choice that had to be made as he approached the Annunciation narrative. Vasari's pictorial interpretation of the narrative conforms to a "classical prototype" borrowed from the High Renaissance, avoiding evocative, heavenised visions but retaining all the grace and beauty of the art he praised so highly both in literature and in imitation.⁷²³

⁷²² Libina, "Divine Visions," 263.

⁷²³ Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation*, 38.

9.4. Conclusion

The *Annunciation* by Giorgio Vasari was created between 1563-4, simultaneous to the closing of the Council of Trent and its decree on sacred images. Yet the differing historical contexts of Florence and Rome saw the cities' visual culture subscribe to different objectives. While the sacred images imagined by the Council of Trent desired narrative comprehensibility and the ability to inspire, in Florence the aim was to capitalise artistic ability. It is true that in the later stages of Vasari's career he was involved in a number of Counter-Reformation projects under the jurisdiction of Cosimo I de' Medici, who sought to retain the favour of the Roman curia or forsake his chance of receiving a granducal crown.⁷²⁴ It is also true that, like Trent, Vasari attained a deep desire for re-establishing excellence in art. Yet for the most part, the motivations of Trent and Vasari were not aligned.⁷²⁵ This was clearly evidenced in the different reception of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*. As a key advocate of the *Maniera* form of representation, Vasari's own work suffered from the "anesthetizing of emotion."⁷²⁶ His *Annunciation* is as an example of this, being an unflappable image of seemingly passive engagement, which conjured little sensory participation in the emotions of the biblical characters. It was thus entirely inconsistent with the ideals set out by Trent. This pictorial interpretation of the Annunciation is, however, vastly different to the heavenly splendour of the stage design for the Annunciation play of 1565, which elicits Vasari's awareness of a highly supernatural reception of the narrative. Through the engagement with another painting, *St Luke Painting the Virgin Mary*, it is clear that the absence of such flourishing imagery was imperative to the mode of painting.

For this reason, while not promoting the typical Counter-Reformation response argued by modern scholars, Vasari's painting is an excellent starting point for considering some of the questions relating to heavenised Annunciations in this period, particularly those around it being an exegetical decision. In the light of his work, the next case study of Part 3 becomes all the more remarkable. For at the same point in which Vasari was completing his restrained *Annunciation* in Arezzo, Titian was also finishing his version of the biblical subject in Venice. However, in this instance, Titian introduced a

⁷²⁴ Henk Th. Van Veen, *Cosimo I De' Medici and his self-representation in Florentine art and culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 118.

⁷²⁵ Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation*, 8.

⁷²⁶ Hall, "Introduction," 16.

version of the Annunciation that was overtly heavenised in its inclusion of angels, cherubim, supernatural light and fiery pyrotechnics, the likes of which had never been seen before in Annunciation iconography.

10. Chapter 10. Incarnating the heavenised interpretation: Tiziano Vecellio (1488-1576) *Annunciation* (1564)

10.1. Introduction

The second case study of Part 3 is Tiziano Vecellio's *Annunciation* (1564) for the San Salvatore Church in Venice (Fig. 91). The interpretation marks the last of Titian's Annunciation paintings, a body of work that in itself contains exceptional levels of variety and thematic development. During this chapter, I will be referencing five Annunciations by Titian. To avoid confusion, when referring to each of these paintings I will attach the ecclesiastical location and date of the paintings, as follows in chronological order:

Malchiostro *Annunciation* (1520)

Murano *Annunciation* (1536)

San Rocco *Annunciation* (1530)

Capidimonte *Annunciation* (1557)

San Salvatore *Annunciation* (1564)

This chapter will address changes in Titian's visual exegeses, as well as analyse how the heavenised imagery of the San Salvatore *Annunciation* metaphorises the Incarnation doctrine through its use of supernatural light and imagery. Titian's innovative use of "colour, light, and sensuous realism," which reaches an apex in this case study, has established him among scholars as "the most extraordinary and prolific of the great Venetian painters."⁷²⁷ Indeed, Titian is recognised as the greatest colourist in the history of painting, a testament to the quality of materials his home city offered as the intersection between Western and Eastern trade, as well as the city's appreciation for sensuousness in the arts.⁷²⁸ Evelyn March Phillipps writes of Venice, "Hers is the kingdom of feeling rather than of thought, of emotion as opposed to intellect. Her whole story tells of a profoundly emotional and sensuous apprehension

⁷²⁷ Peter Humphrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1995), 3; Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective*, vol. 2 (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2009), 485.

⁷²⁸ Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau, "Introduction," in *Colour: Art and Science*, eds. Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-5; Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 15.



Figure 91. Titian, *Annunciation*, 1564, oil on canvas, 410x240cm. San Salvatore, Venice. Wikimedia Commons. Source: Public Domain.

of the nature of things.”⁷²⁹ Having spent the last chapter examining the austerity of visual culture in Florence, this description of Venice posits a startling dissimilarity between the two Italian cities in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁷³⁰ While, like Florence, the Venetian state preserved its own “ecclesiastical, political and cultural” autonomy that resisted the increasing papal control from Rome, the sensuousness and emotionality of Venetian art was well-equipped to satisfy the devotional expectations for religious images articulated at the Council of Trent.⁷³¹ The sensitivity to light, colour and atmosphere, a result of a city surrounded by the sheen and vitality of water, was a faculty that artists used to create images of emotion and vivacity and came to characterise the Venetian school of painting. In his *San Salvatore Annunciation*, Titian embodies a response to the religious subject that stimulates the senses through the use of supernatural light and figures. The heavenised method thus serves to capture the cataclysmic and emotional intensity of the event and absorb the viewer into understanding the Incarnational purpose of the Annunciation narrative.

The *Annunciation* was commissioned as an altarpiece for the altar on the south wall of the church of San Salvatore, Venice, by Antonio Cornovi della Vecchia. Cornovi was a textile merchant from Bergamo, and may have sought the altar for self-representation as a non-native Venetian resident.⁷³² The link between Cornovi and Titian could well be their membership at the lay confraternity, Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Interestingly, another altarpiece, the *Crucifixion*, by Titian was meant to sit opposite the *Annunciation*, and was commissioned by the D’Anna family who were also members of the Scuola Grande.⁷³³ The *Crucifixion* was not completed due to financial circumstances. There is potential that the commission of these two altarpieces may have been co-ordinated, an argument made more convincing given that the two subjects represented (the Annunciation and the Crucifixion) held

⁷²⁹ Evelyn March Phillipps, *The Venetian School of Painting* (Alexandria: Library of Alexandria, 1972), unpaginated, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Venetian_School_of_Painting/20AsCLGFyHEC?hl=en&bpv=1&dq=The+Venetian+School+of+Painting&printsec=frontcover.

⁷³⁰ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 145: “One needs only to compare a Venetian palace like the Ca d’Oro, once ornamented with gold whose glitter was multiplied by reflection in the water, with the stony austerity of the Palazzo Medici in Florence to sense the difference in temperament and preferences.”

⁷³¹ William James Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty* (California: California University Press, 1968), 294; Peter Humfrey, “Altarpieces and Altar Dedications in Counter-Reformation Venice and the Veneto,” *Renaissance Studies* 10, no. 3 (1996): 371-87.

⁷³² Bohde, “Titian’s three-altar project,” 469.

⁷³³ *Ibid*, 450.

substantial significance to both Venice and the church of San Salvatore specifically.⁷³⁴ The city of Venice has long been associated with the Virgin Mary based on the legend that its foundations were built on the Rialto in 421AD on the 25th March, a date celebrated in Catholicism as the Feast of the Annunciation. From the fourth century this date was also attached to the date of Christ's crucifixion, a theory stemming from the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) who wrote:

For He [Christ] is believed to have been conceived on the 25th of March, upon which day also he suffered; so the womb of the Virgin, in which He was conceived, where no one of mortals was begotten, corresponds to the new grave in which He was buried, wherein was never man laid, neither before or since.⁷³⁵

The two themes designed for the nave of San Salvatore were intimately linked not only to each other, but also to the legend of Venice's origin. The relevance of the church of San Salvatore to the theme of the Annunciation is verified in the diary of writer and historian Marino Sanudo (1466-1536), who wrote that on the date of the Feast of the Annunciation in 1507, "the first stone was laid for the new construction of the church of San Salvador on this ground."⁷³⁶ Although the church had been dedicated to Christ the Saviour since its consecration in the twelfth century, from the early sixteenth century it also had a connection to the Annunciation and the dates relating to it. Manfredo Tafuri writes,

The foundation of San Salvador was thus inserted into a divine and universal temporal rhythm: the same enigmatic time, both solemn and eternal, scanned by the birth of the world, by the Annunciation and the Crucifixion, beat again with the "divine" birth of Venice. There is sufficient evidence for one to read in the symbolic act completed with the laying of the first stone of the church a rite of refoundation that was immersed in the absolute time sanctifying the lagoon city.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁴ Ibid. See also Peter Humfrey, "Co-ordinated altarpieces in Renaissance Venice: the progress of an ideal," in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 190-211.

⁷³⁵ Augustine of Hippo, "Chapter 4," in *The Doctrinal Treatises*, trans. Arthur West Haddan, James Johnston Shaw, and W. G. T. Shedd (Berlin: Jazzybee Verlag, 2017), 71.

⁷³⁶ Marino Sanudo, *I Diarii*, vol. 53 (Venice: F. Visentini, 1899), 72, trans. and cited in Manfredo Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 22.

⁷³⁷ Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, 22.

The church was returning to the origins of the city and so to the links with the celebration of the Annunciation. Through his commissions later in the century, Titian contributed to re-embedding the specific temporal date of the 25th March within the fabric of this central Venetian church. In doing so, Titian also introduced a different mode of Annunciation exegesis than that of his predecessors.⁷³⁸ As will be argued in this chapter, the “reassuringly static linear perspective and stable space” of High Renaissance Annunciations, such as those by Filippo Lippi (1406-1469) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), is disrupted in the San Salvatore painting and the primary imagery focusses on the heavenised form of Annunciation representation (Fig. 92 and 93).⁷³⁹ Similarly, the “graceful compliance” of Mary that are commonplace in Renaissance Annunciations are confounded by Titian’s San Salvatore *Annunciation*.⁷⁴⁰ At this late point in Titian’s career, the artist had forged an artistic expression that differed from the traditional culture of Venetian art.⁷⁴¹ His style became increasingly personalised, using visible, imprecise brush strokes, or as Giorgio Vasari negatively described his style, as “painting with splotches.”⁷⁴² What this technique did was emphasise “tonal and colour values” over that of form, the very qualities that Titian came to be celebrated for and that are brought increasingly to the fore in his Annunciations.⁷⁴³

During the course of Titian’s life, the religious and political atmosphere of Venice changed dramatically, from a period of democracy and autonomy from the papacy, to one of division and autocratic subdual.⁷⁴⁴ Titian’s increasingly progressive style that came out of such a climate had a considerable impact on the genre of sacred images

⁷³⁸ Una Roman D’Elia, *The Poetics of Titian’s Religious Paintings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 119.

⁷³⁹ Waller, *The Cultural Study*, 127.

⁷⁴⁰ Robin Kirkpatrick, *The European Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 2014), 208.

⁷⁴¹ Bruce Cole, “Titian: An Introduction,” in *Carlo Ridolfi: The Life of Titian*, eds. Julia Conaway Bondanella, Bruce Cole and Jody Robin Shiffman (City of State College: Penn State Press, 2010), 1-10; Tom Nichols, *Titian: And the End of the Venetian Renaissance* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 153.

⁷⁴² Giorgio Vasari, “Life of Titian,” in *Lives of Titian*, ed. Carlo Corsato, trans. Frank Dabell (London: Getty Publications, 2019), 88, cited in Van de Wetering, *Rembrandt*, 162. See Vasari, “Life of Titian,” 82-83, “By these latter works, although there is something of the good to be seen in them, are not much esteemed by him, and have not the perfection that his other pictures have. And since the works of Titian are without number, and particularly the portraits, it is impossible to make mention of them all; wherefore I shall speak only of the most remarkable, but without order of time, it being of little import to know which was first and which later.”

⁷⁴³ Van de Wetering, *Rembrandt*, 162.

⁷⁴⁴ D’Elia, *The Poetics of Titian’s Religious Paintings*, 2-3.



Figure 92. Filippo Lippi, *Annunciation*, 1450-3, tempera on panel. 68x152.8cm. National Gallery, London. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 93. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Annunciation*, 1472, oil on panel, 98x217cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

in the Counter-Reformation age.⁷⁴⁵ Marcia B. Hall has marked his work from the mid-century onwards as having “opened up a whole new way of painting and of engaging the beholder in the post-Tridentine era.”⁷⁴⁶ His increasingly expressive treatment of religious subjects marked not only a fresh mode of visual biblical interpretation, but it also encouraged a new way to view sacred themes. The sensuousness and emotionality of Titian’s later paintings - in that they evoked lively movement and drama - was in keeping with the initiative of sacred images described at the Council of Trent. These images were “well calculated to appeal to the very different religious climate of the age of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; and in fact, they were to provide

⁷⁴⁵ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 15. Also see, among others, Craig S. Harbison, “Counter-Reformation Iconography in Titian’s Gloria,” *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 3 (1967): 244-6.

⁷⁴⁶ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 15.

compositional models that were to remain valid in the European Baroque of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁴⁷ Titian's theatrical altarpieces, such as the *San Salvatore Annunciation*, are emblematic of the religious climate, and as Chapter 11 will explore in more detail, held particular influence in Baroque Rome. The *Annunciation* is a key example of Titian's histrionic altarpiece, and provides a fascinating example of a heavenised interpretation that set a new perspective for the sacred space of the narrative.⁷⁴⁸ Furthermore, the image demonstrates the ability of this type of Annunciation to speak of the mystery of the Incarnation through the medium of visual representation.

10.2. Iconographic analysis

Titian's *Annunciation* was the last known painting of this subject by the artist, and its composition bears both similarities and differences to his previous treatments of the same subject. The architectural setting in which he stages his Annunciation is comparable to his *Annunciation* (1520) (Fig. 94) for the Malchiostro Chapel in the Cathedral of Treviso, and the lost *Annunciation* (1536) (Fig. 95) for Santa Maria degli Angeli in Murano. Columns line the left-hand side of the canvas and, paired with the tiled flooring, create the sense of linear perspective that leads to an outside space behind the structure. Judging by the position of the columns and open space behind the two protagonists, it appears the interaction is taking place outside on a type of veranda. Mary is positioned kneeling on her *prie-dieu* and holding a book in her left hand. Her finger is positioned within the book, as if holding the section she was just reading; perhaps Isaiah 7:14 or a book of hours (see Part 2c). Mary has twisted from her *prie-dieu* to look towards her visitor. Mary leans away from him, elbow resting on her desk for support, and she lifts her hand to a veil that covers her head. Paul Hills argues that this movement may have been inspired by a Greek relief of Ares and Aphrodite in Museo Archaeologico, Venice (Fig. 96), a plausible argument given Titian's fusing of Christian and Classical form and content.⁷⁴⁹ Mary's gesture is a new addition to Titian's Annunciation iconography, with all other representations showing

⁷⁴⁷ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 301.

⁷⁴⁸ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 126.

⁷⁴⁹ Paul Hills, "Titian's Veils," *Art History* 29, no. 5 (2007): 770-795.



Figure 94. Titian, Malchiostro *Annunciation*, 1520, oil on canvas, 179x207cm. Wikimedia Commons. Malchiostro Chapel, Treviso Cathedral, Venice. License: Public Domain.



Figure 95. Jacopo Caraglio after Titian, Murano *Annunciation*, 1536, engraving, 45.2x34.4cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Mary with her arms folded across her chest in a display of humility and subservience. In the San Salvatore *Annunciation*, Mary is taken aback, physically leaning away from the angel who steps towards her. Gabriel's movement is strident and his relative position closer to the picture plane gives the illusion of him looming over Mary. His body leans forward so that it runs parallel to Mary's torso.⁷⁵⁰ Some have argued for a sexual energy in the image and have perceived in the agitation of Mary a similarity to that in Titian's *Rape of Europa* (1560) or rape of Lucretia in *Tarquin and Lucretia* (1571) the following decade, again a case of Titian's characteristic blending of Christian and Classical genres (Fig. 97 and 98).⁷⁵¹ While the diagonal inclination is the same, Gabriel's arms are folded over his chest as if, despite his positive movement towards her, he is humbling himself to this woman who is to become the mother of Christ. Interestingly, x-rays of the painting have identified that Titian had originally painted his angel with an outstretched arm, more akin to those of his other Annunciations.⁷⁵² The decision to offset Gabriel's intrusion with a passive arm gesture constructs a more non-threatening representation of the narrative than that which he originally designed.

The space that is left between Gabriel and Mary has been dramatically reduced from Titian's previous Annunciations. Taking the Murano *Annunciation* (1536) and Capodimonte *Annunciation* (1557) as examples, we see a clear divide between the figure of Gabriel on the left and Mary on the right. The space is open and the meeting between the two figures is less confrontational and more temperate. In the San Salvatore *Annunciation*, the tall, narrow canvas presents a more intimate point of connection between the two characters. The compactness of the space, intensified by the large size of the angel, has drawn the figures much closer together, and in doing so has drawn the spheres that they represent closer together too. The unity of heaven and earth is not merely represented in two halves – the upper portion of the canvas

⁷⁵⁰ Kirkpatrick, *The European Renaissance*, 208.

⁷⁵¹ Tom Nichols, "Defining Genres: The Survival of Mythological Painting in Counter-Reformation Venice," in *Forms of Faith in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, eds. Abigail Brundin and Matthew Treherne (London: Ashgate, 2009), 119-148; Gary Waller, "The Annunciation from Luke to the Enlightenment: A Cultural History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 387-408.

⁷⁵² Bruce Cole, *Titian and Venetian Painting, 1450-1590* (London: Routledge, 2018), unpaginated, accessed November 24, 2020, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Titian_And_Venetian_Painting_1450_1590/dVJPDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Titian+and+Venetian+Painting&printsec=frontcover.



Figure 96. Votive Relief of Ares and Aphrodite, 5th century. National Archaeological Museum, Venice. Source: <http://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=7684>



Figure 97. Titian, *Rape of Europa*, 1560, oil on canvas, 178x205cm. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 98. Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, 1571, oil on canvas, 189x145cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

as heaven and the lower as earth – but by the closeness of the two central protagonists:

Here, in a striking gesture, the Annunciate Virgin lifts a veil from her face, while another veil, loosely knotted over her chest, billows to brush Gabriel's wing. Thinly scumbled, both veils are meshed with the turbulent velature of the clouds to give substance to a gauze or scrim of light that is mysteriously alive, dancing in the air and like a breath of wind touching the actors in the sacred drama.⁷⁵³

Titian has painted a point of contact between the angel's wing and the veil that comes off of Mary's cloak. Above and through this locus flourishes a mirage of the glories of heaven. Mary's veil joins with the clouds that trail down from the dramatic combination of angels, cherubim, wings, fabric, and vivid light, which fills the middle and upper spaces. The figures are orientated towards the dove representing the Holy Spirit that descends into the space through the dramatic stream of light. On the left side are a disordered group of cherubim who each theatrically respond to the event they are beholding, swirling and tumbling as the heavenly world they represent enters Mary's home. To the right of the dove is a group of feminine angels with large wings, who look towards Mary in awe. They exercise the same position as Gabriel, again affirming the subservience of heaven to the Mother of Christ. As the viewer looks closer towards the source of light in the centre of the upper canvas, faces of other angels and cherubim appear and give a sense of the crowds of heaven peering down upon this cataclysmic event. In all this divine tumult, Mary appears vulnerable as she experiences the heavenly presence. From previous chapters, it has been made clear that Annunciation images are notoriously difficult to equate to specific moments in the biblical text of Luke 1:26-38, but Titian seems to have put an emphasis on "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" (v. 35). Wright describes Titian's *San Salvatore Annunciation* in the following terms, "In an explosion of light and action the dove of the Spirit forces apart the materiality of the earthly atmosphere to create a fissure of energy directed at the virgin."⁷⁵⁴ The divine energy represented by Titian's imagery is channelled by the dove, which travels towards Mary as if to "overshadow" (v. 35) her humanity. The Venetian painter Tintoretto (1518-1594), thirty years Titian's junior,

⁷⁵³ Hills, "Titian's Veils," 783.

⁷⁵⁴ Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 73.



Figure 99. Tintoretto, *Annunciation*, 1583-7, oil on canvas, 422x545cm. Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice. Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/t/tintoret/3b/3ground/1annunc.html

displays a similarly charged representation of the heavenly realm approaching Mary in his *Annunciation* from 1583-7 (Fig. 99). Mary drops her book, startled, as “a whole squadron of angels peels off like fighter bombers to strafe the rather ramshackle building.”⁷⁵⁵ This overwhelming onslaught of supernatural motifs in both Titian’s and Tintoretto’s Annunciations is paired with an apprehensive Mary. In doing so, the images give the Annunciation’s pictorial narrative a histrionic dynamism entirely missing from the biblical form of the story.

10.3. Context and the issue of heavenised interpretation

Titian’s San Salvatore *Annunciation* is an exceptional example of the motif of heavenised imagery, due to the significant quantity and complexity of the vision above Mary and Gabriel’s interaction. Before exploring the significance of this form of interpretation for its context, it is worth mapping Titian’s previous paintings of the narrative to see the development of exegesis. The first known Annunciation by Titian is his painting for the Malchiostro Chapel (see Fig. 94). The *Annunciation* is structured untraditionally, with Mary positioned in the left foreground as opposed to the right-hand

⁷⁵⁵ Garry Wills, *Venice: Lion City: The Religion of Empire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 215.

side as was most common in Annunciation iconography.⁷⁵⁶ Peter Humfrey has suggested that this abnormal positioning and proportioning was not considered successful by Titian, who reverts to the traditional placement in his later interpretations.⁷⁵⁷ The strange inclusion of the painting's donor, Broccardo Malchiostro, in a central position between Mary and the angel was also unconventional. It is known from contemporary writings that the inclusion of Malchiostro was not to the favour of an ecclesiastical tribunal in 1526:

When I go to say mass in the chapel of Mr Broccardo, I feel ashamed because I am doing reverence to him, and not to the image of the Madonna. When he (Bishop Rossie) was last here [...] he ought to have had the figure of Broccardo removed, so that he no longer appeared in the middle of the altarpiece.⁷⁵⁸

The donor kneels in the centre, passively observing the biblical narrative as it unfolds. His conspicuous presence was significantly problematic for the contemporary attendees in their worship, as its abnormality drew their attention away from the holy event of Gabriel's announcement to Mary. Titian had "plac[ed] an ordinary mortal frontally, and in the traditional place of honour on the central vertical axis."⁷⁵⁹ Interestingly, Thomas Puttfarcken identifies that this "meddling" in the composition, both in the variant Mary and Malchiostro's presence, would have been challenged in the period after the Council of Trent, when the Church made steps to stop such altering of altarpieces' functional structures.⁷⁶⁰ In the writings of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), for example, he discusses at length the importance of proportion (*sproporzionate*).⁷⁶¹ Paleotti writes,

Some also classify it as disproportion among a number of things together when they are not distributed into their correct places; as if a potter were to put the bottom of a vase where the mouth was supposed to be. This is the case when the painter does not put the things depicted where their condition and dignity would require and places to the sides things that belong at the centre; or when he bypasses the main point of the story

⁷⁵⁶ Altmann, "Right and Left in Art," 223-238.

⁷⁵⁷ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 313.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 314.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

⁷⁶⁰ Puttfarcken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, 171.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid*, 172.

and applies greater diligence to things of less importance, making them more visually striking.⁷⁶²

Paleotti warns painters of the negative effect of disproportion and actively discourages the placing of objects in incorrect spaces that may trouble the pictorial narrative of the painting. From the account of the tribunal in the years that immediately followed the painting's unveiling, it is clear that Titian's first Annunciation was criticised on the grounds of decorum. Half a century later when Paleotti wrote his discourse, this same anxiety perpetuated, and he articulates the importance of paying diligence to the important elements of the story. From the four known Annunciations that were created after this one, it is clear that Titian did not intend to repeat the unusual composition. At this early stage in Titian's career, the Annunciation narrative was unattached to the physical forms of heavenised imagery and was, through the addition of the donor, firmly fixed in a sixteenth-century worldly interpretation.

Titian's second known *Annunciation* (1530) (Fig. 100), for the Scuola di San Rocco, Venice, models a different form of visual exegesis, and has the Angel Gabriel enter from the left side. Mary is less animated than in the Malchiostro *Annunciation*, and presents a gesture of humility to her visitor, whilst still either praying or reading from the *prie-dieu*. This image also avoided uncanonical supernatural imagery, however Gabriel has been represented in a more extravagant manner and is elevated by misty, dark clouds about his left foot. The ray of light that casts down towards Mary from an opening in the sky seems to suggest a more visible intention to display supernatural light than in the Malchiostro, which could easily be mistaken for the sun. The San Rocco *Annunciation* appeals to the traditional "Renaissance landscape and loggia background," demonstrating at this point Titian was still convinced of the classical interpretation of the Annunciation that emphasised structured space and controlled emotion.⁷⁶³ Remarkably, however, we find significant change in the pictorial narrative he created only a few years after the San Rocco, where we find an increased interest in the heavenised form of representation. The *Annunciation* for the Church of Santa

⁷⁶² Paleotti. *Discourse*, 231.

⁷⁶³ Waller, *A Cultural Study*, 126.



Figure 100. Titian, *San Rocco Annunciation*, 1530, oil on canvas, 166x266cm. Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

Maria degli Angeli in Murano was created by Titian in 1536, and was lost roughly at the end of the Spanish Peninsular War. Here we are introduced to heavenised imagery through the flourishing of motifs in the upper portion of the canvas. Basing the analysis on Jacopo Caraglio's (1500-1565) engraved copy, Titian had constructed an encounter between Mary and Gabriel that has been expanded to incorporate other characters.⁷⁶⁴ Titian again pictures a humble Mary with an advancing angel Gabriel, but above them angels and cherubs peel and hold back the dark clouds to allow the dove to descend into the earthly realm. The painted copy emphasises the divine light shining through the fissure in the clouds that replicates some of the visual effect Titian's Murano *Annunciation* originally obtained.

The *San Rocco Annunciation* and the *Murano Annunciation* present two exceptionally different narratives; the former is inline with a classical, formalised interpretation while the latter presents a heavenised, dynamic version that actively incorporated the two spheres of heaven and earth. The reason for the marked change in Titian's visual exegesis of the narrative is worth investigating, particularly in relation to the other

⁷⁶⁴ Aidan Weston-Lewis, "Titian's Lost Annunciation Altarpiece for Murano: An Early Copy," *Artibus et historiae* 34, no. 68 (2013): 55-59.

forms of Annunciation reception developing in early sixteenth-century Venice. The essential question concerns the influence of other interpretations on Titian's exegesis. Within this context, Elske van Kessel has identified the importance of communication and collaboration in artists' education and formation of style.⁷⁶⁵ From what is known of Titian from historiography and the large corpus of Titian's letters, it is understood that he maintained many relationships with influential religious and secular writers of the period, and even considered some close friends.⁷⁶⁶ A primary example of this type of communication is found in Titian's relationship with writer and poet Pietro Aretino. The two developed a personal and professional friendship, to the point that the writer described Titian's brush as the equivalent to his own pen ("il pennello di Messer Tiziano e la penna mia").⁷⁶⁷ Titian's work greatly influenced Aretino's writings, who saw in the structure and process of Titian's use of the brush and application of paint a method that could shape his own work.⁷⁶⁸ It is possible that this exchange also went the other way, with Titian being influenced by Aretino. With Titian's Murano *Annunciation* in mind, here is an extract of Aretino's exegesis on Luke 1:26-38 in *Quattro Libri de la Humanità di Christo* (1535), written the year before Titian's painting was completed:

But the earth heard the murmurs from that part, where the sky was to be unlocked; and the murmur was mixed with some lightning and some horrors that did not cause any fear. And it flashed so soon and so often that it appeared that in every moment boomed thunder, which in breaking clouds created the lightning. And while the eyes of the whole world were intent on such a marvel, a knot of flaming seraphim spread out through the air and, beating their wings, lifted the veils that lay across the path that the angel had to follow. And a good space of pure blue was revealed. Behold! Paradise opens! The Messenger of the Father of the Gods appeared as a small point of light, which hurt the eyes [with its brightness] when he left the empyrean realm. [He appeared small] because of the great distance and was already beginning to grow larger to those watching. And because he burned with that light with which the blessed spirits burn, even though the people squinted to look at him, they could not penetrate his clear light. Nevertheless, just as in the bright flame one distinguishes a lit coal, so

⁷⁶⁵ Van Kessel, "Artists and Knowledge," 224.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, 223.

⁷⁶⁷ David Rosand, "Titian and the Critical Tradition," in *Titian: His World and His Legacy*, ed. David Rosand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-39.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid, 21.

in him they could make out a luminous body, which surpassed everything in its splendour. And just as one sees an iron taken from the fire give off sparks, and from each one of its infinite sparks it shines forth in every part, so from the rays which girded him came forth a great number of sparks.⁷⁶⁹

This small part of Aretino's exegesis plunges the reader into a heavenised version of the event, which describes paradise opening and the angel Gabriel entering Mary's immediate presence with a company of the heavenly host. The breaking of clouds; the opening of paradise; the luminous body of Gabriel; these are all expansions of the Lukan dialogue that emphasise the tangible presence of the unearthly. Despite it not being possible to decipher which interpretation - Titian or Aretino's - was constructed first, it is evident that in both forms of art and literature an analogous exegesis of the Annunciation surfaced within the context. This was hugely significant to the method of interpretation surrounding this biblical narrative. Up until this moment in history, the Annunciation had widely been represented in visual and textual exegeses as a private, binary encounter between Mary and the angel, in a way that more purposefully corresponded to the dialogue in Lk 1:26-38.⁷⁷⁰ Both Aretino and Titian intensify the event by combining heavenly visions to the conversation, and in doing so pave a new form of Annunciation interpretation. From further exchange with the artist and writer, Aretino praises Titian's biblical interpretation in the Murano *Annunciation*, and writes an ekphrastic response:⁷⁷¹

One is dazzled by the splendid light shed by the rays of Paradise, from which angels come, poised in various attitudes on the white, vibrant and shimmering clouds. The Holy Spirit surrounded by the light of his glory makes us hear the beating of wings, so similar is He to the [real] dove, whose form He has taken. The rainbow crossing the air of the landscape, revealed by the light of dawn, is more real than that which appears after rain toward evening. But what shall I say of Gabriel, the divine messenger? He, filling everything with light and shining in the inn with a marvellous new radiance, bows so sweetly with a gesture of reverence that we are forced to believe that he presented

⁷⁶⁹ Pietro Aretino, *I Quattro libri de la humanità di Christo* (Venice: Francesco Marcolini, 1539), 6v-7r, trans. and cited in D'Elia, *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*, 107-8.

⁷⁷⁰ D'Elia, *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*, 107; Caroline Van Eck, "Rhetoric and the Visual Arts," in *The Oxford Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Michael J. MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2017), 461-476.

⁷⁷¹ Norman E. Land, "Ekphrasis and Imagination: Some Observations on Pietro Aretino's Art Criticism," *Art Bulletin* 68, no. 2 (1986), 207-217.

himself before Mary in this way. [...] I am silent about the Virgin, first adored, then consoled by the messenger of God, because you have painted her in such a manner and so marvellously that others' eyes, dazzled by the splendour of her gaze of peace and holiness, cannot themselves gaze upon her.⁷⁷²

By his characteristic use of excessive flattery towards Titian, whom he considered a dear likeminded friend, Aretino describes his satisfaction with the painting, most likely because it bears such significant similarities with his own interpretation. During the course of his letter, Aretino provides textual narration to the painted scene and creates this critical analysis of Titian's visual exegesis.⁷⁷³ After passing comment on the technical elements of the work, Aretino spends the most extensive portion of his letter describing the manner in which the Annunciation narrative has been dramatised in Titian's painting, and commending the levels of expansion. Ekphrastic analysis of Titian's work is found not only in the work of Aretino, but also in that of Bartolomeo Maranta (1500-1571). Maranta writes an entire discourse on Titian's Capodimonte *Annunciation* (1557) (Fig. 101), an image that although completed two decades after Titian's Murano *Annunciation*, retains much of the heavenised form of interpretation. Murano's analysis of this painting was "the first known text of considerable length whose subject is a painting by a then-living artist."⁷⁷⁴ Maranta's description of the painting is extensive and uses the image to draw out particular theoretical issues, such as the relationship between poetry and paint. In a way that echoes the position of Aretino on the equivalence of Titian's painting to his own writing, Maranta writes, "it is already perfectly clear to everyone that poetry and painting, despite the speaking nature of the one and the mute exterior of the other, are one and the same thing, and that what is said of the one may be applied to the other."⁷⁷⁵ Chapter 2 of this thesis focused on the cultural ideology that painting and writing were innately similar as modes of expression. This is evidently the case with the work of Titian specifically, whose work, even within its contemporary setting, was associated with the

⁷⁷² Pietro Aretino, *Lettere sull'arte*, eds. Ettore Camesasca and Fidenzio Pertile (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1957), 78-9, trans. and cited in Land, "Ekphrasis and Imagination," 208.

⁷⁷³ Land, "Ekphrasis and Imagination," 208.

⁷⁷⁴ Luba Freedman, "Bartolomeo Maranta's Discourse on Titian's Annunciation in Naples: Introduction" *Journal of Historiography* 13 (2015): 1-48

⁷⁷⁵ Bartolomeo Maranta, "Discourse," trans. Viviana Tonon and Luba Freedman, *Journal of Art Historiography* 13 (2015): 43-81.



Figure 101. Titian, Capodimonte *Annunciation*, 1557, oil on canvas, 280x194cm. National Museum of Capodimonte, Naples. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

painting/poetry idiom. Maranta's essay demonstrates the ability to translate the vividness and expression of Titian's *Annunciation* into verbal language:

But she [the Virgin], upon hearing the noise, quit her prayers and turned to the place from where the angel was coming. Facing her now and staying in the same position as he had then happened to stop, he greeted her, and after expecting and hearing her answer, which was *Quomodo fiet istud* ["How can this be?"] and the rest [of the sentence], he is now saying *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te* ["the Holy Spirit will come upon you"] and the rest [of the sentence]. Even as the angel enunciated these words, the Virgin took on that attitude of humility suited to her saying *Ecce ancilla Domini* ["Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord"] and the rest [of the sentence], and in this way, her arms in the form of a cross, bowing as much as she could considering

that she had been caught [off guard] so suddenly, and almost in a rush, she waits for the angel to finish. Accordingly, in this picture Mary does not speak and therefore her mouth is shut. The angel has his mouth open and, as I have already expounded, from the gesture of his hand and from Mary's posture as well as from their faces' appearances it is easy to understand that he is saying: *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te*, etc.⁷⁷⁶

Maranta has constructed a narrative that cuts across various phases of the Annunciation. Maranta understands Gabriel has simultaneously displayed "obedience/ humility/ zeal/ confidence/ meditation/ majesty/ and even a subconscious fear of botching his mission."⁷⁷⁷ When verbally narrated by Maranta, the pictorial story of the Capodimonte *Annunciation* is revived into a chronological sequence of events. The cultural sensitivity to sensory perception is manifest in Maranta's description of the sounds, sights, and movements of the narrative Titian creates. With regards to how he intensifies the heavenised aspects of Titian's image, Maranta describes Titian's angels as "similar to the most beautiful things that have ever been seen in the world [who] climb ever up the path of celestial life towards that high and sublime seat where the Creator of all things dwells."⁷⁷⁸ The angels in the Capodimonte *Annunciation* represent a form of celestial life that manifests itself within Mary's earthly parameters. While it is arguable that the heavenised aspect of the narrative is slightly muted in Titian's Capodimonte *Annunciation* in contrast to his Murano *Annunciation*, the cherubim remain active and participative in the event, reacting to the light that bursts forth from the clouds. Yet more than merely recognising the use of light, Maranta comments on the concept of fire, which he argues permeates through the image via the Angel Gabriel's blush:

[T]his blush represents nothing other than the fire that theologians figuratively attribute to angels. The thrones and the seraphim are rather often said to be of fire, and to them are assigned the same properties that fire has, and they in this way want to let us know that the visage of a celestial spirit is illuminated in the guise of fire by the refulgence of the face of God. In fact (as the Areopagite teaches us), in order to make the humans' minds capable of understanding, those who have spoken about God in the holiest way

⁷⁷⁶ Maranta, "Discourse," 68-9.

⁷⁷⁷ Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 77.

⁷⁷⁸ Maranta, "Discourse," 68-9.

have used the various guises of fire to portray His eternal and immaterial substance, which has no form or figure, because fire contains in itself many likenesses and images of God's properties, if we are allowed to speak in this way. As, for example, fire is extremely luminous, simple and unmixable, and what it touches is transformed into its nature. It always rises upwards very swiftly, it embraces all and cannot be embraced, it can give its substance to all without diminishing itself, and it possesses an infinity of other properties similar to the divine actions.⁷⁷⁹

This description perceives that the blush of the Angel Gabriel is a metaphor for divine fire. As an early reception of Titian's work, attuned to the contextual milieu and informed of its theologies, Maranta emphasises the nature of fire in relation to divine presence and uses the Capodimonte *Annunciation* as an example for its appropriate use in imagery. This discourse was written specifically for the Capodimonte *Annunciation*, but Maranta picks up on a key theme that enters a new stage of dramatization in Titian's San Salvatore *Annunciation* painted seven years after.

I will explore the overall effect of the San Salvatore image in due course, but firstly, let us focus on the vase of flowers that are positioned in front of the *prie-dieu* on its picture plane (Fig. 102). On close inspection, the petals of the flowers appear to have caught on fire, whilst their overall form remains unchanged. Directly below the vase, in the allusion of an engraving on the step, a quote reads, "ignis ardens non comburens" – "fire that burns but does not consume."⁷⁸⁰ This ambiguous statement and the pictorial equivalent above it does not find inspiration in the Lukan account of the Annunciation and its implication within the given context may not be immediately obvious to observers as it is not common iconography. It does, however, bear fascinating theological significance. The quote and blazing petals appeals to a narrative from the Hebrew Bible in which God appears to Moses in a burning bush: "There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed" (Ex. 3:2). The justification for its inclusion in Titian's altarpiece could be determined as two-fold, with the first reason being the obvious parallel between the immediate presence of God in the burning bush of the Exodus narrative and the similarly direct presence of God at the event of the Incarnation. The

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid, 61.

⁷⁸⁰ Wills, *Lion City*, 222.

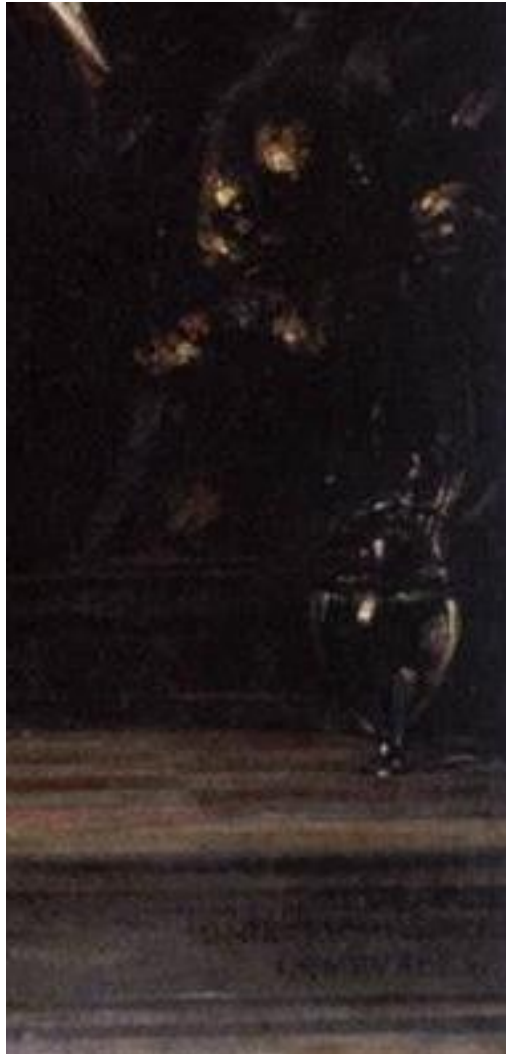


Figure 102. Detail of Titian, *San Salvatore Annunciation*, 1564, oil on canvas, 410x240cm. San Salvatore, Venice.
Source:
https://www.wga.hu/html_m/t/tiziano/06_1560s/03salvad.html

idea of “holy ground” is therefore a common denominator of the narratives. As Moses is called towards the burning bush that contained God’s localised presence, so is Mary advised of the closeness of God’s company by Gabriel when he says, “the Lord is with you” (Lk. 1:28). Exodus 3:2 is also relevant to the Annunciation as the text bears considerable association with the paradoxical nature of the Virgin Mary: by describing Mary as a paradox I am referring specifically to the conflict between her virginity and motherhood. It is a Christian mystery that theologians have grappled with for centuries and one of the ways they have attempted to understand it is by constructing parallels between Mary and earlier portions of the Hebrew Bible. Origen (184-253CE) and his

school in Alexandria, for example, searched for scriptures that could be rendered prophetic of the Virgin, in order to “unveil the hidden, typological meaning beneath the written word of the Bible and the superficial narrative.”⁷⁸¹ Origen understood the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible continued into their fulfilment in the New Testament, and associated this explicitly to the character of the Virgin Mary. He was not alone in doing so and this form of exegesis continued in the Church and finds explicit reference in the period Titian was working. In the Tridentine Catechism, a book published in the wake of the closing of Trent and that enforced the reworking of Counter-Reformation Catholicism for members of the clergy, there is a paragraph dedicated specifically to the prophecies of the Virgin Mary. The section, “Types and Prophecies of the Conception and Nativity” reads,

The mysteries of this admirable Conception and Nativity being, therefore, so great and so numerous, it accorded with the plan of divine Providence to signify them by many types and prophecies. Hence the holy Fathers understood many things which we meet in the Sacred Scriptures to refer to these mysteries, particularly that gate of the sanctuary which Ezekiel saw closed [Ez 44:2]; the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which became a great mountain and filled the universe, of which we read in Daniel [Dn 2:34-35]; the rod of Aaron, which alone budded of all the rods of the princes of Israel [Num 17:8]; and the bush which Moses saw burn without being consumed [Ex 3:2].⁷⁸²

The Catechism promoted this specific exegesis of the Virgin Mary, which had been circulating from the second or third century. Each of the biblical texts testify to Mary’s conception of Christ through their construction of oxymoronic statements. With regards to the mention of the bush of Moses, Leon Partridge writes, “Ordinarily a mortal would not be able to survive so complete a possession by the fire of divine love, but like the bush the Virgin burns with its ardour and is not consumed.”⁷⁸³ By this he means that although Mary conceived a child, her virginity was not compromised. Titian used the image-and-text pair relating to the burning bush as a microcosm of which the San Salvatore *Annunciation* was a macro. The image has intensified the heavenised interpretations of the Murano and Capodimonte Annunciations, and created an

⁷⁸¹ Warner, *Alone Of All Her Sex*, 62.

⁷⁸² Tridentine Catechism, “Who Was Conceived By The Holy Ghost,” unpaginated.

⁷⁸³ Hills, “Titian’s Fire,” 199.

overwhelming sense of divine radiance.⁷⁸⁴ Not only do the flowers burn without being harmed, but Titian designs the entire painting as “an all pervasive metaphorical effect” of blazing power.⁷⁸⁵

Under its definition by Maranta, fire portrays God’s “eternal and immaterial substance,” speaking of Him in the “holiest way.”⁷⁸⁶ Although the features of light, fire, and energy are not corroborated in the Lukan text, their significance in this image relates to the commission context. On requesting this image for his burial chapel, Antonio Cornovici della Vecchi states in his commission document that he wants an “altarpiece of the Incarnation of Our Lord.”⁷⁸⁷ The way in which the Incarnation is represented in the *Annunciation* is understood by recalling the light described in John 1:5: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” The blazing, pyrotechnic energy that Titian has created pierces through the materiality of the earthly world and sees the entire canvas caught up in the inferno.⁷⁸⁸ Again to allude to Maranta, “fire embraces all [...], it can give its substance to all without diminishing itself.”⁷⁸⁹ The fire burns into the earthly atmosphere, and rather than diminishing, forms a contagious energy that manifests into a new sacred space, where both heaven and earth unite in mystery. Paul Hills writes, “Just as fire converts matter into spirit, so here, in an atmosphere of explosive friction, the mystery of the Incarnation or begetting of the Son of Man, is conceived as a spark that will trigger the golds, reds and browns to smoulder into flame.”⁷⁹⁰ Through the blaze of light, fire and energy associated with the Incarnation, the Annunciation narrative is transformed from a dialogical exchange to the cataclysmic moment of divine intervention. The undertone of the painting is simply described as *light* becoming *flesh*. This is most clearly seen by the faint, unformed heads of cherubim that emulate from the brightest point of light and slowly become solid, corporeal beings.⁷⁹¹ The angelic beings help to establish this transition that underpins the Incarnation doctrine, in which the spiritual became physical. While the

⁷⁸⁴ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 159.

⁷⁸⁵ Hills, “Titian’s Fire,” 201.

⁷⁸⁶ Maranta, *Discourse*, 61.

⁷⁸⁷ Cole, *Titian and Venetian Painting*, 196.

⁷⁸⁸ Wright, *Sacred Distance*, 73.

⁷⁸⁹ Maranta, *Discourse*, 61.

⁷⁹⁰ Hills, “Titian’s Fire,” 199.

⁷⁹¹ Daniela Bohde, “Corporeality and Materiality: Light, Colour and the Body in Titian’s San Salvatore Annunciation and Naples Danae,” in *Titian: Materiality, Likeness, Istorica*, ed. Joanna Woods-Marsden (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007), 19-28.

relationship between John's Incarnation text and Luke's Annunciation story has been widely probed in religious literature for centuries, Daniele Bohde astutely observes that "only a painter is able to show how the divine light becomes flesh."⁷⁹² Marked during his own time for his exquisite use of colour and expressive application of paint, Titian was the perfect artist to unravel this particular doctrinal mystery.

10.4. Conclusion

Titian enjoyed a long career in Venice that spanned the breadth of many religious and political changes. His Annunciations offer an insight into some of those cultural deviations. From the Annunciations at the Malchiostro Chapel and the Scuola di San Rocco, Titian sought to expand his visual exegesis of the narrative and appeal to non-earthly forms and light to create a new arrangement of Annunciation iconography. At the same time in which his friend Aretino was reworking his perception of the biblical story, so was Titian, and his reinterpretation in the Murano *Annunciation* was an early example of the emotive and heavenised method of Annunciation exegesis. In a similar way, Titian's Capodimonte *Annunciation* led Maranta to distinguish within the painting an illusion to fiery imagery that translated further than earthly elements. In locating Titian's allusion to fire, Maranta identified a key trope of the artist's final Annunciation in San Salvatore. This extraordinary image, used countless times in modern scholarship to construct a sense of the Counter-Reformation Annunciation stereotype, was intimately connected to Titian's personal relationship to the theme. Although it was created at a pivotal moment relating to the closing of the Council of Trent, the image must be dealt with sensitively within its specific commission context. Given that this heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation was new to both forms of art and literature in the sixteenth century, Titian's San Salvatore *Annunciation* represents the most dramatic encounter between the Virgin and Gabriel we have up until this point in history.⁷⁹³ The influence this interpretation had on Counter-Reformation visual culture is therefore worth investigating, and the most appropriate place to start is at the geographical heart of the reformed Catholic Church: Rome.

⁷⁹² Bohde, "Corporeality and Materiality," 25.

⁷⁹³ Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 159.

11. Chapter 11. Contemplating the heavenised interpretation: Il Passignano's Annunciation (1590-1)

11.1. Introduction

Titian's San Salvatore *Annunciation* has been identified by scholars as a key moment in the development of the heavenised interpretation of the biblical narrative. The stark advancements of the artist's visual exegesis discloses a sensitivity to the intensifying sensuousness and domineering emotionality in Catholic paintings during the Counter-Reformation. The final case study of Part 3 - Domenico Cresti's (Il Passignano) *Annunciation* (Fig. 103) - demonstrates some of the same iconographic developments as Titian's *Annunciation* and may indicate a direct influence of the earlier work.⁷⁹⁴ Unlike Titian's painting, however, the painting has received little scholarly attention and this chapter aims to correct this oversight by analysing the image in its theological and historical context. Passignano created his *Annunciation* for the newly rebuilt Santa Maria in Vallicella, also known as Chiesa Nuova, in Rome. The plans to rebuild this church was first put forward by the leader of the Oratorians, Philip Neri. The building had been given to Neri by Pope Gregory XIII as the centre for the Order's worship in 1575, and Neri soon made plans for its reinvention. With the financial help of wealthy benefactor Cardinal Pier Donato Cesi (1521-1586), the Santa Maria in Vallicella was built by the end of the sixteenth century.⁷⁹⁵ The church was largely based on the motherhouse of the Jesuits, the Gesù, in its structure of a single wide nave and rows of side chapels; a design that came to characterise Counter-Reformation architecture.⁷⁹⁶ In 1606 when Peter Paul Rubens took up his commission for the high altar of the church, he describes it as the "finest and most splendid opportunity in all Rome," and that the church was "without doubt the most celebrated and frequented church in Rome today, situated right in the centre of the city, and which was to be adorned by the combined efforts of all the most able painters in Italy."⁷⁹⁷ The church was marked in contemporary society by its popularity and the affection the city had for

⁷⁹⁴ Thomas, "Domenico Cresti," 19.

⁷⁹⁵ Stephen Ostrow, "The Counter-Reformation and the End of the Century," in *Rome*, ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 246-320.

⁷⁹⁶ Loren Partridge, *The Renaissance and Rome* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2005), 56.

⁷⁹⁷ Peter Paul Rubens, "Letter no. 14" in Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 119, trans. and cited in Anne-Marie Logan, *Peter Paul Rubens: The Drawings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 104.



Figure 103. Passignano, *Annunciation*, 1592. Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Source: http://imagineidei.blogspot.com/2017/03/the-joyful-mysteries-annunciation-part_25.html

Philip Neri's desire for beautiful forms of sensuous worship. Passignano's *Annunciation* is one of the altarpieces that contributes to the church's interior of beatific sacred images. It is found in one of the side chapels, the Ruspoli Chapel or Chapel of the Annunciation, and was placed there in 1592, immediately prior to the chapel's consecration. The image that Passignano creates conforms to the heavenised interpretation of the Annunciation in that it includes supernatural light, large numbers of angels and cherubim, clouds, and, even on this instance, an image of God the Father. This chapter will focus on how such an interpretation was significant to its original setting, particularly in its participation with the ritual scheme of the church's decorations.

As with the contextual significance of Titian's painting, in that it was a response to the commission requirement of representing the "Incarnation of Our Lord," Passignano's visual exegesis was also intimately connected to its church setting. The Santa Maria in Vallicella has already been mentioned in this thesis in Chapter 5 in reference to the concept of narrative cycles, which were prominent in Roman visual culture. The cycle presents itself through the altarpieces of the side chapels, which pictorially narrate the life of Christ and Mary in a counter-clockwise direction starting from the top left-hand transept (Fig. 104). As I will be arguing in section 11.3, this cycle was not merely a selection of significant narrative moments from the life of these biblical figures, but a carefully constructed sequence based on the devotional practices of the Oratorian Order. The visual scheme of the narrative cycle conforms to the mysteries of the rosary, a Catholic method of meditation on the life of the Virgin that experienced a revitalisation during the period of reform.⁷⁹⁸ A primary motivation behind the rosary within this context was the participation of the senses to facilitate devotional experience.⁷⁹⁹ As previously argued, sensuous worship was claimed and used by the Counter-Reformation Church to create an emotional attachment to their theologies. Philip Neri was an advocate for this type of worship, and the construction of the Oratorians' mother church to this design informs the level of engagement he submitted to meditative, spiritual exercises. As one of the paintings contributing to the cycle, Passignano's *Annunciation* played an integral role in the narrational flow of the church,

⁷⁹⁸ Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 35.

⁷⁹⁹ Evangelisti, "Material Culture," 412.

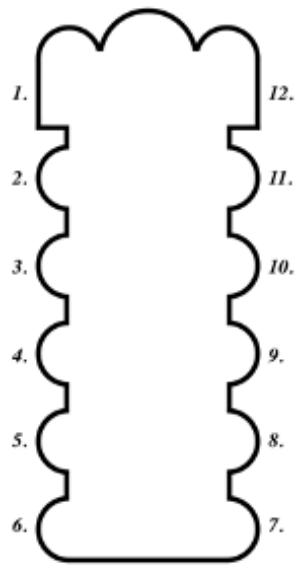


Figure 104. Narrative Cycle in Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. By author.



Figure 105. Federico Barocci, *Presentation of the Virgin*, 1599, oil on canvas, 383x247cm. Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Source: <http://arthistoryreference.com/cgi-bin/hd.exe?art2=a53913>



Figure 106. Federico Barocci, *The Visitation*, 1583-6, oil on canvas. Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Source: <https://culturespectator.com/2013/04/30/federico-barocci-at-the-national-gallery-london-until-the-19th-may/>

creating the link between Federico Barocci's *Presentation of the Virgin* (Fig. 105) and *Visitation* (Fig. 106). It transitions the viewer from the apocryphal story of the young Mary in the *Presentation*, to her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, who celebrates Mary and declares her "Blessed among women" (Lk 1:42).

In the context of the Santa Maria in Vallicella, the partnering of the Annunciation theme with the specific artist is worth considering. This painting marks the first of Passignano's Roman commissions, positioning him as a new player in the image-reform of the geographical heart of the Counter-Reformation.⁸⁰⁰ To be requested to play a fundamental part in this major church's visual renovation indicates Passignano's popularity in other cities and particularly among his commissioners for this project, the Ruspoli family. Brothers Allesandro and Orazio Ruspoli requested Passignano to complete the altarpiece for their family chapel - the Ruspoli Chapel or Chapel of the Annunciation - in which their mother and brother were buried.⁸⁰¹ I would suggest that the decision to have Passignano paint the altarpiece may have been motivated by the shared Florentine origins of the patron and artist, and that the Ruspoli used their chapel as an opportunity to integrate a new artist into the Florentine colony in Rome.⁸⁰² The central decoration for the Ruspoli Chapel opened up opportunities for the artist to work with the most important patrons and projects of the city. Born in the Tuscan village of Passignano, Domenico Cresti was sent to Florence at a young age to nurture his artistic talent, and worked under his brother Jocopo Cresti.⁸⁰³ Passignano spent considerable time in Florence and then Venice - perhaps during which time he saw Titian's *San Salvatore Annunciation* - and worked as Federico Zuccaro's assistant (the same Zuccaro who created *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets* in Chapter 4). Passignano is most famously known for his involvement in "counter-Maniera," a movement that sought to relax the "tightness and the complication of high Maniera."⁸⁰⁴ Mentioned in Chapter 2 and Chapter 9, *Maniera* was the artistic style originating from Florence that exaggerated artistic technique over narrative ability.⁸⁰⁵ First intended for

⁸⁰⁰ Lepage, "Art and the Counter-Reformation," 385; Thomas, "Domenico Cresti," 16.

⁸⁰¹ Joan Lee Nissman, "Domenico Cresti (Il Passignano), 1559-1638: A Tuscan Painter in Florence and Rome," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1979), 84.

⁸⁰² Bruce Davis, *Master Drawings in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1997), 38.

⁸⁰³ Nissman, "Domenico Cresti," 22.

⁸⁰⁴ Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 605.

⁸⁰⁵ Gregori, *The Age of Caravaggio*, 164; Hall, "Introduction," 7.

a small audience of aristocratic patrons, the style spread across Italy and promoted artificial tropes.⁸⁰⁶ These excesses tended to create unusual paintings that prioritised artistic talent over understandable visual stories.⁸⁰⁷ Given the religious context of Italy during the mid-sixteenth century, the *Maniera* style became an increasing threat to the Catholic Church. Religious images were instructed to be didactic and emotionally understandable, used for the purposes of instructing faith. They were not meant for obscuring subjects, as was the *Maniera* trend. Amidst this challenge, counter-*Maniera* emerged that aimed to support the Church in its age of reform.⁸⁰⁸ Domenico Cresti was one of the major Florentine proponents of the counter-*Maniera* style, gaining from his time in Venice the sensuous naturalism and *colorito* that epitomised the city's visual arts.⁸⁰⁹ Federico Berti writes,

It was in Venice [...] that Domenico developed a personal style, a perfect and original synthesis between the Florentine discipline of drawing, the naturalistic lessons of Zuccari, the amber tonalism and the luminism of the painters active in the lagoon, and functional to that “natural” call strongly invoked by the Tridentine instances.⁸¹⁰

The years of experience in these two major Italian cities, both with their own specific artistic climate, forged the individual style that can be seen in Passignano's religious paintings in Rome. The *Annunciation* at the Santa Maria in Vallicella marks the first in this body of works. Passignano's reputation in Rome grew, and the artist was recommended to paint one of then six altarpieces for St Peter's Basilica.⁸¹¹ Passignano became one of the most widely used Florentine painters in Rome and his *Annunciation* made a significant contribution to his success. The painting is the first known interpretation of the biblical narrative by the artist and has been considered one of the finest masterpieces of Passignano's early career.⁸¹² The image is a fascinating example of an image that had to maintain its private devotional function (within the

⁸⁰⁶ Janson and Janson, *History of Art*, 488; Miedema, “On Mannerism and Maniera,” 19-45; Thomas, “Domenico Cresti,” 19.

⁸⁰⁷ Hall, “Introduction,” 7.

⁸⁰⁸ Janson and Janson, *History of Art*, 488.

⁸⁰⁹ Thomas, “Domenico Cresti,” 9; Gregori, *The Age of Caravaggio*, 164.

⁸¹⁰ Federico Berti, *Domenico Cresti, il passignano: “fra la nazione fiorentina e venezia”: viatico per il period giovanile con una inedita Sacra famiglia* (Firenze: Franscione arte, 2013), 11.

⁸¹¹ Nissman, “Domenico Cresti,” 111. Unfortunately these images were removed in the nineteenth century and now exist in a depository in fragmentary form.

⁸¹² Berti, *Domenico Cresti*, 39.

Ruspoli burial chapel) as well as operate in an overall visual church scheme. Chapter 11 will therefore focus on the suitability of Passignano's use of heavenised imagery in the Annunciation to the church's program, and specifically to the aim of contemplating the mysteries of the Virgin Mary.

11.2. Iconographic Analysis

Passignano's *Annunciation* has recently been restored, allowing the modern viewer to experience the image as it might have been enjoyed by its contemporary audience. The richness of colour is due to the technique Passignano adopted from his time in Venice, which saw the artist apply a thin layer of dark paint to the canvas, as opposed to the use of a white base, more common in Florence.⁸¹³ The effect of this dark under-paint is the subtle deepening of the paints to create a soft and warm blending of colours and shapes.⁸¹⁴ In Passignano's *Annunciation*, this technique gives the impression of the biblical narrative taking place in a closed and intimate space. From what can be seen of the room, it appears to contain a rich brown wooden wall or cabinet, a short stool with a sewing basket on top, a bed and a *prie-dieu* supporting a clear vase and a book. Mary kneels on the left-hand side of the canvas, the more uncommon positioning in Annunciation iconography.⁸¹⁵ Her gesture suggests humility and subservience, as she brings her arms towards her chest and looks diagonally down towards the cherubim who surround Gabriel's legs. She gathers her red, green, and blue garments towards herself and her head is covered by a veil.

While the main line of argument in this analysis will be considering the influence of Titian's *San Salvatore Annunciation* on Passignano's visual interpretation, Cathy Thomas has identified a potential link to Titian's *Malchiostro Annunciation* (see 10.2), in the way that Mary "tilts her head away from the picture plane into the fictive space. Her veil is placed far back on her hair, skimming the crown of her head to expose her ear. This important detail evidences the *conception per aurem* as the Word was made flesh effecting the Incarnation."⁸¹⁶ In Titian's *Malchiostro Annunciation*, Mary's movement exaggerates her visible ear. As Thomas suggests, this may be an appeal

⁸¹³ Nissman, "Domenico Cresti," 85.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁵ Altmann, "Right and Left in Art," 223-238.

⁸¹⁶ Thomas, "Domenico Cresti," 31.

to the tradition in which the Word of God, in other words the Incarnated Christ, is literally received through the ear (see Part 2d). This theory developed from the fourth century onwards and became increasingly useful in visualizing how Mary conceived Christ.⁸¹⁷ This may be an idea that Passignano has appealed to, particularly given the context of the Santa Maria in Vallicella. Philip Neri promoted sensory experience and the suggestion of the *conception per aurem* made an explicit appeal to the sense of hearing. I would also add to Thomas' suggestion that Frederico Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets* may also have been an influence on Passignano's representation of Mary's veil and tilting head (see sections 4.1 and 4.2.). Given that Passignano was Zuccaro's assistant for years, it is possible that he drew on some of his visual Marian interpretation.

Continuing with the analysis, Passignano represents Gabriel approaching on a significantly higher level than Mary. He kneels on an elevated cloud with the two figures appearing next to him. He is dressed elaborately in a red gown with orange waist band and purple garter, with a green fabric sash that circles around his body. Gabriel's red and pink wings can be seen behind this green sash. His left hand holds a long rod that rests against his shoulder and he uses his right arm to point upwards to the images of heaven in the upper portion of the canvas. In Chapter 3's analysis of Caravaggio's *Annunciation*, I addressed the theories of Leon Battista Alberti, who in his formation of the *istoria* stated that there should exist in a painting a commentator that could "inform the spectators of the things that unfold; or invites with the hand to show; or threatens with sever face and turbid eyes not to approach."⁸¹⁸ In Caravaggio's painting, the use of ambiguous gestures and intense *chiascuro* meant that the commentator role was absent. Passignano, however, has positioned Gabriel in such a way that he plays an effective invitational role in the pictorial narrative. His hand guides Mary - and so the observer - to engage with the visions of heaven that dominate the top half of the image.

Using a similar method to Titian, Passignano appeals to a vivid depiction of heavenly forms and light. He does so, however, in a much more precise way to Titian's

⁸¹⁷ Baert, "The Annunciation," 121-145; Steinberg, "'How Shall This Be?,'" 25-44.

⁸¹⁸ Alberti, *On Painting*, 63.

expressive, loose brushstrokes.⁸¹⁹ The heavenly vision Passignano constructs contains adult-looking angels who gaze upon the scene in awe and what appears to be trepidation. The young cherubim look down with a more tangible sense of glee. Their blushing faces and jubilant display of red flowers - perhaps roses - emphasise their childish nature and celebration at the event. There are also cherubim who manifest only in the form of faces and wings with no physical body; these characters are also found in Passignano's *Santa Andrea della Valle* and *Santa Maria della Pace Annunciations* (Fig. 107 and 108), both in Rome, and his *Compagnia della SS. Annunziata Annunciation* in Florence (Fig. 109). In each of these Annunciations created after the *Santa Maria in Vallicella* version, the adult angels are omitted, creating a more open space in the heavenly sphere and emphasising the single angelic figure of Gabriel in his authoritative role as God's chosen messenger. Another detail that is removed in Passignano's later Annunciations is the image of God the Father. In *Santa Maria in Vallicella*, God the Father appears from within the luminous orange opening between the clouds. The representation of this figure has appeared in two of the previous case studies in this thesis: Zuccaro's *The Annunciation Broadcast by Prophets* and Durante Alberti's *Annunciation* (see Chapters 4 and 8). We saw in the instance of Alberti's painting in particular just how polemical the iconography of God the Father could become, as it was used in a setting in which Jews were being indoctrinated into the Catholic faith. The Jewish community would have been even more sensitive to the visual imagery of God, as under Hebrew law it constituted idol worship. Within the context of *Santa Maria in Vallicella*, Passignano's image of God the Father emphasised the physical manifestation of the divine, and contributed to the dramatization of the visual space.

The heavenised imagery of Passignano's *Annunciation* presents angelic figures in various stages of corporeality: angels as physical as men, as well as cherubim who do not materialise into physical beings. The painting captures heaven beginning to impose itself on earth, transitioning from spiritual state to physical form, or vice versa. While the heavenised method of interpretation remained a characteristic in his *Santa*

⁸¹⁹ Nissman, "Domenico Cresti (Il Passignano)," 86.



Figure 107. Passignano, *Annunciation*, 1604-1612, fresco. Santa Andrea della Valle, Rome. Source: <http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/scheda/opera/54596/Cresti%20Domenico%2C%20Annunciazione>



Figure 108. Passignano, *Annunciation*, 1612, oil on canvas. Santa Maria della Pace, Rome. Source: <https://cbccoop.it/app/uploads/2017/06/Barnaba-Bertorello-abstract-testo-e-foto-2.pdf>



Figure 109. Passignano, *Annunciation*, 1615, oil on canvas, 170x210cm. Compagnia della SS. Annunziata, Florence. Source: https://issuu.com/piccoligrandimusei/docs/9033_museo_san_martino_a_gangalandi

Andrea delle Valle, Santa Maria della Pace, and Compagnia della SS. Annunziata Annunciations, his first *Annunciation* in Santa Maria in Vallicella creates a more theatrical impression of earth being raptured with heaven. The scene is more crowded, thus constructing intimate proximity between the two spheres.

As previously noted, the *Annunciation* by Passignano shares similarities with Titian's San Salvatore *Annunciation*. In this case, however, Passignano has gone further than Titian and included this image of God the Father to further emphasise his participation in the narrative event. Whereas Titian's image visualised a sophisticated metaphoric device that alluded to the presence of God through divine light and imagery, Passignano removes symbolism and represents God the Father in physical human form. This imagery maintained significance in its individual ecclesiastical context, in which it emphasised the physical presence of God at the site of the Annunciation and also in the view of the observer who was meditating in the space.

11.3. Context and Issue of heavenised Interpretation

In order to understand the contextual significance of Passignano's heavenised *Annunciation*, it is necessary to consider the belief system of the Oratorians who occupied the Santa Maria in Vallicella, and particularly those of their leader Philip Neri who initiated the church's redesign. The Oratorian order was formed organically by Neri, who at the time was a priest in the church of San Girolamo, Rome. From 1553, he would gather with friends in the church's loft - or oratory - to pray and engage in religious discussion.⁸²⁰ Indebted to a Dominican order in San Marco, Florence, for his spiritual training, Neri idealised the communal form of worship that saw the sharing of ideas and practices.⁸²¹ The emphasis of the early order was on congregating with one another to mutually support and pray for each other's faiths. Although ultimately recognised as their spiritual father, Neri sought high levels of contribution from the members during the sessions. A central priority for Neri was using music to facilitate their spiritual exercises.⁸²² As the congregation became larger and sessions more formalised, the use of music allowed for structure in liturgy whilst maintaining the

⁸²⁰ John Donnelly, "The Congregation of the Oratory," in *Religious Orders in the Catholic Reformation*, ed. Richard DeMolen (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 189-215.

⁸²¹ Graeve, "The Stone of Unction," 223-38.

⁸²² Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio: The Oratorio in the Baroque Era* (North Carolina: UNC Press, 2012), 57.

widespread participation among the community. This practice fostered the concept of *laude*, which were “simple expressions of popular religion sung in meetings of confraternities, or religious brotherhoods of laymen.”⁸²³ The use of *laude* was popularised during the Counter-Reformation by the Oratorians, who published nine books of music between 1563 and 1598.⁸²⁴ Not only did music retain a practical function for Neri and the Order, but it also resonated on a philosophical level to his understanding on the use of the material cult in spiritual formation. In a similar way to Ignatius of Loyola, whom he met in Rome in 1548, Neri saw the importance of inspiring the senses in religious practices. As argued in Part 3d, the Catholic Church held a profound interest in sensory experience.

Given the physicality of its rites and devotions [...] the body of Christ became visible during the elevation of the host and was tasted in communion; the last rites involved anointing the sense organs; holiness was evidenced in the smell of saintly bodies, which also offered themselves up to touch and viewing; sacred music was to mimic the sounds of the heavenly spheres.⁸²⁵

In the sixteenth century, when Protestantism aimed to promote reason and rational understanding of the Bible over and above these rituals, Catholicism, through its many factions, made a discernible effort to promote sensuous forms of worship. The aim was to re-establish the attractiveness of the Catholic faith through the use of inspiring, evocative art forms. Participation in the Oratorian *laude*, for example, retained the attention of the congregants so they too could engage with worship. As the Oratorian Order grew and was formally established by Pope Gregory in 1575 in the Santa Maria in Vallicella, this sensory form of worship remained imperative. Recent research has identified that talented musicians who were attracted to the Oratorians’ love for music, entered the Order and led sung liturgy for mass and vespers.⁸²⁶ The growth in the church’s music library correlated with its renovation and the increasingly large

⁸²³ Ibid, 22.

⁸²⁴ Anne Piejus, “Artistic Revival and Conquest of the Soul in Early Modern Rome,” in *Listening to Early Modern Catholicism: Perspectives from Musicology*, eds. Daniele Filippi and Michael F. Noone (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 149-172.

⁸²⁵ Wietse de Boer, “The Counter-Reformation of the Senses,” in *The Ashgate Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, eds. Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven (London: Ashgate, 2013), 243-260.

⁸²⁶ Rosemarie Darby, “The Liturgical Music of the Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome (1575-1644),” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2018), 105.

numbers who were attracted to the Oratorian methods of worship. Yet the church became renowned not only for its soundscape, but for its visual design that mirrored Neri's passion for sublimity in sensuous worship. This is nowhere more accurately demonstrated than in the Santa Maria in Vallicella's altarpiece cycle, in which we find the *Annunciation* by Passignano.

The narrative cycle in the Santa Maria in Vallicella is formed of twelve individual altarpieces. Within the sixteenth century, the genre of the altarpiece provided a key point of communication between the church and the lay beholder. Its position above the altar, either in side chapels or the main space, signified its importance and naturally drew the eye to behold it. I described in section 2.2. that altarpieces were particularly important during "private mass," events promoted by the Council of Trent that saw the laity spectate the administration of the mass as opposed to actively participating in it.⁸²⁷ Hence the commonality of the specific form of Counter-Reformation church architecture found in the Gesù or Santa Maria in Vallicella, which centred around a long nave with side chapels. This allowed for an uninterrupted view of not only the mass, but also the visual stimuli of the chapel altarpieces that circled the nave space.⁸²⁸ In these instances, altarpieces functioned as devices that would inspire the faithful from their seats. To initiate further inspiration, the laity were often encouraged to meditate on prayers, which would help to channel their mental faculties to devotional experience, despite a lack of practical participation in the gatherings. Given the context of the Santa Maria in Vallicella in which the Oratorian's desired lay engagement, the prayerful observation of altarpieces was even more imperative. Concerning the church's altarpiece cycle, an early biographer of Neri, Pier Giacomo Bacci, wrote that Neri himself had designed the program to correspond to a specific form of meditation: the rosary.⁸²⁹ Appearing in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the rosary consisted of a "ritually repeated sequence of prayers accompanied by meditations on episodes in the lives of Christ and Mary."⁸³⁰ The narrative episodes are based on both biblical and apocryphal traditions and are categorised into three main sections: the joyful mysteries, the sorrowful mysteries and the glorious mysteries. The rosary is most

⁸²⁷ Chorpenning, "Another Look at Caravaggio," 154; Council of Trent, "Teaching," 734; Croken, *Luther's First Front*, 121.

⁸²⁸ Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 161.

⁸²⁹ Bacci, *The Life of Saint Philip Neri*, 177-194; Graeve, "The Stone of Unction," 234.

⁸³⁰ Susuan Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2012), 116.

commonly represented by round beads strung on cord or wire.⁸³¹ It became an increasingly important practice in the sixteenth century as it was a method for reinstating Marian piety.⁸³² While it largely disappeared in Northern Europe in the Reformation, it was increasingly used in the South under the guidance of the Counter-Reformation Church.⁸³³ Its attraction to the Oratorians was the way in which anyone could engage with it: “Anyone can practice it, for the observer is assisted by beads with which to count off his devotions to the mysteries by reciting ten Ave marias and one Pater Noster for each.”⁸³⁴ The beads formed an understandable sequence of prayer that could be meditated upon independently or corporately. A particularly significant source of rosary meditation, and one found in the library of Philip Neri, was Alberto da Castello’s *Rosario de la Gloriosa Vergine Maria* (1522). This exceptionally popular devotional manual saw thirty-four editions between 1522 and 1600 and was designed to encourage lay men and women to contemplate mysteries of the rosary continually in their hearts: at home, to their children, in the street, or going to sleep.⁸³⁵ The rosary was used both privately and publicly, and therefore formed a familiar devotional model on which Neri could structure his altarpiece cycle. Table 2 lists the narrative episodes of the rosary and the Santa Maria in Vallicella altarpiece sequence, and identifies their differences.

The main differences in the transition from the *Rosario* to the Santa Maria in Vallicella cycle is the exclusion of the Passion narratives (‘Agony in the Garden’, ‘Scourging’, ‘Crowning with Thorns’, and ‘Carrying of the Cross’), and the addition of the ‘Adoration of the Shepherds.’ The elimination of four moments from the Passion mysteries may be due to Neri’s desire that Marian devotion be the central theme of the cycle. Bacci writes “when they were erecting the altars in the church, he [Neri] ordered that a mystery of our Saviour should be painted on each of them, and that the Madonna was to appear in the mystery.”⁸³⁶ Mary was to be the common denominator of the altarpieces in the cycle. Her role in the Passion scenes may have been too passive and subsidiary, whereas the addition of another form of Nativity, the Adoration of the

⁸³¹ Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 1.

⁸³² Laven, “Introduction,” 1.

⁸³³ Quiviger, “Art and the Senses,” 184.

⁸³⁴ Graeve, “The Stone of Unction,” 234.

⁸³⁵ Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard and Mary Laven, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 258.

⁸³⁶ Bacci, *The Life of Saint Philip Neri*, 153.

Alberto da Castello, <i>Rosario de la Gloriosa Vergine Maria</i> (1522)	Altarpieces in the Santa Maria in Vallicella (Fig. 19)
<p>The Joyful Mysteries</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annunciation 2. Visitation 3. Nativity 4. <u>Presentation of Jesus in the Temple</u> 5. <u>Christ among the doctors</u> <p>The Sorrowful Mysteries</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. <u>Agony in the Garden</u> 7. <u>Scourging</u> 8. <u>Crowning with Thorns</u> 9. <u>Carrying of the Cross</u> 10. Crucifixion <p>The Glorious Mysteries</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. <u>Resurrection</u> 12. Ascension 13. Pentecost 14. Assumption 15. Coronation of the Virgin.⁸³⁷ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presentation at the temple (no. 1) 2. Annunciation (no. 2) 3. Visitation (no. 3) 4. Nativity (no. 4) 5. Adoration of shepherds (no. 5) 6. Purification of the Virgin (no. 6) 7. Crucifixion (no. 7) 8. Pietà (no. 8) 9. Ascension (no. 9) 10. Pentecost (no. 10) 11. Assumption (no. 11) 12. Coronation of the Virgin (no. 21)

Bold – added to the Santa Maria in Vallicella sequence

Underlined – removed in the Santa Maria in Vallicella sequence

Table 2. Comparison of Alberti da Castello, *Rosario de la Gloriosa Vergine Maria* (1522) and the altarpiece cycle in Santa Maria in Vallicella. By author.

Shepherds, naturally engaged Mary as a primary figure in the pictorial narrative. Two other, albeit more subtle, changes can be found in the cycle. The *Rosario's* 'Presentation of Jesus in the Temple' is distinguished by scholars as the 'Purification of the Virgin' in the Santa Maria in Vallicella.⁸³⁸ These two events are reported simultaneously in Luke 2:22, "When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to

⁸³⁷ Brundin et al, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy*, 258.

⁸³⁸ Barbieri, "'To Be In Heaven,'" 220.

the Lord”).” There may have been an intended Mariological emphasis in this alteration given the context of the church, but the iconographic simultaneity of the story means this is difficult to assess.⁸³⁹ Perhaps of more significant interest is the transition from the ‘Crucifixion’ to the next narrative episode. The Santa Maria in Vallicella cycle substitutes the ‘Resurrection’ for the ‘*Pietà*.’ The altarpiece for the Chapel of the *Pietà* was created by Caravaggio, whose image, now in the Vatican, has frequently been referred to as the *Entombment* or *Deposition* (Fig. 110). Mary Ann Graeve has argued that in reality this image has a more intimate connection with the theme of the chapel – the *Pietà* - as the characters are not in the process of entombing or removing Christ from the cross; “Once it is realised that the bearers do not follow the motivations of an Entombment, it is easier to detect other subjective elements. The Virgin, somber and mantled, is very much the key to a mood of requiem.”⁸⁴⁰ Despite the inclusion of other characters who support Christ’s body, the image recalls Christ’s gesture from Michelangelo’s *Pietà* (1498) (Fig. 111).⁸⁴¹ This sculpture corresponded to the iconography that developed in the early fourteenth century where Mary held Christ’s body on her lap as an evocative representation of her mourning. The fact that the Santa Maria in Vallicella’s scheme idealised an image that recalled the *Pietà* motif over and above the Resurrection demonstrates the level at which Marian devotion was mediating the Church’s visual scheme.

Based on these observations, there is a moderate level of deviation from the *Rosario* to the Santa Maria in Vallicella altarpiece cycle. While it is likely that there were additional influences used to structure the sequence, the similarities between the two remain considerable. The construction of single narrative moments as defined by the manual is aligned to the church’s program, where chapels are dedicated to discrete moments in the life of Christ and Mary in order to inspire contemplation on and for the specific events. In her work on narrative cycles, Marilyn Aronberg Lavin has argued

⁸³⁹ Dorothy C. Shorr, “Iconographic Development of the Presentation in the Temple,” *The Art Bulletin* 28, no. 1 (1946): 17-32.

⁸⁴⁰ Graeve, “The Stone of Unction,” 234.

⁸⁴¹ Varriano, *Caravaggio*, 107.



Figure 110. Caravaggio, *Pietà*, 1603, oil on canvas, 300x203cm. Vatican Pinacoteca, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 111. Michelangelo, *Pietà*, 1498, sculpture in marble, 174x195cm. St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

that the sequence in the Santa Maria in Vallicella was designed for worshippers to move around the space, passing from altarpiece to altarpiece in a meditative practice.⁸⁴² Without primary evidence, this observation can only be conjecture, but the counter-clockwise direction in which the narratives unravelled does mirror the way in which the rosary beads would have been fed through the hand as the worshippers counted off their prayers. This sense of counter-clockwise movement that takes place on a microscale in the rosary ritual is echoed on a much greater scale in the altarpiece cycle. Observing Passignano's *Annunciation* through this constructed lens of rosary devotion means it is possible to identify the specific decisions of the artist's visual exegesis that supported Neri's spiritual objectives. Firstly, the presence of roses in the image may indicate an intention to integrate the painting into the church's "processional schema."⁸⁴³ The *Annunciation* contains several rose motifs, one within the clear vase on the *prie-dieu* and the others in the form of garlands in the hands of the cherubim. The rose in the vase recalls the motif employed by Titian of the burning flowers, although Passignano has omitted any connection to fire. He may instead be suggesting Mary as the *rosa sine spina*, the rose with no thorns, echoing an early

⁸⁴² Lavin, *The Place of Narrative*, 256.

⁸⁴³ Thomas, "Domenico Cresti," 41.

liturgical interpretation of Mary existing without original sin.⁸⁴⁴ It is the garlands held by the cherubim, however, that have a more intimate connection with the church's scheme. The origin of the word rosary comes from *rosarium* (rose garden). In the same way as a garden, the *rosarium* is made up of a series of "roses" - devotions - that are paid to Mary.⁸⁴⁵ This idea was not just conceptual, it was actively incorporated into Marian iconography often through the representation of crowns.⁸⁴⁶ This was a standard convention in paintings from the sixteenth century.⁸⁴⁷ The garlands being held by the cherubim in Passignano's *Annunciation* indicate the process of attributing rosary prayers to the Virgin within the context of a specific narrative. The accumulative method of rosary prayers sees the believer construct rose by rose, prayer by prayer, a crown of devotion that is then given to Mary. Passignano has manifested this tradition within his interpretation. Yet he has gone further with the religious significance of the roses by painting them red, a typically funereal colour. Thomas has argued that in Christian iconography, the red rose symbolises martyrdom and death.⁸⁴⁸ Under this hypothesis, Passignano's image pre-empts the two sorrowful mysteries ('Crucifixion' and '*Pietà*') that are to come in the middle stages of the rosary procession of the church.

The expansion of the biblical narrative in Passignano's *Annunciation* to incorporate roses situates the image in the wider visual program of the Santa Maria in Vallicella, which itself was formed by Neri's personal spirituality. When considering Passignano's use of the heavenised form of Annunciation interpretation - by that I mean the use of imagery including angels, cherubim, wings, clouds, and a portrait of God the Father - I argue that this is also aligned to Neri's spiritual formation. It is well documented that Philip Neri had a particular predilection for the arts, including music and visual images. He maintained an acute appreciation for their ability to inspire and instruct, to the point that in contemplation of these objects he would enter a state of ecstasy. The concept of ecstasy was an integral spiritual motive in the Counter-Reformation. The desire for

⁸⁴⁴ Debra N. Mancoff and Lindsey J. Bosch, *Icons of Beauty: Art, Culture and the Image of Women* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), 338.

⁸⁴⁵ Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 5.

⁸⁴⁶ Erminia Ardissino, "Literary and Visual Forms of a Domestic Devotion: The Rosary in Renaissance Italy," in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, eds. Maya Corry, Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 342-372.

⁸⁴⁷ Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 27.

⁸⁴⁸ Thomas, "Domenico Cresti," 35.

ecstatic religious encounter is demonstrated in the group of sixteenth-century religious figures who were canonised in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, which, as well as Neri, included Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). It has already been argued that Ignatius used visual images to support meditative experiences, but this is also true of Saint Teresa, who was a Spanish mystic. Her spiritual encounters, autobiographically recorded, gained significant traction in Counter-Reformation Catholicism. She emerges as a key figure for understanding ecstasy within the period, both in defining the term and cultivating an understanding of the physical response that accompanies such religious experience. She writes in her *Libro de la vida*:

I would like, with the help of God, to be able to describe the difference between union (*union*) and rapture (*arrobamiento*), or elevation (*elevamiento*), or what they call flight of the spirit (*vuelo de spiritu*), or transport (*arreatamiento*) – which are all one. I say that these are all different names for the same thing, which is also called ecstasy (*estasi*).⁸⁴⁹

Teresa has drawn these terms from her experience of devotional texts and monastic culture, and she demonstrates that these religious experiences ultimately fall under the name ecstasy.⁸⁵⁰ This word is a helpful tool to use for defining spiritual responses, which are innately impossible to describe. Mystics' writings contain experiences that are "personal, momentary and incapable of being shared contemporaneously with another person."⁸⁵¹ They trouble the boundaries between natural and supernatural experience, familiar and transcendent.⁸⁵² The most famous of Teresa's ecstatic experiences is known as the transverberation, which describes an encounter with an angel who pierces her heart with "a long dart of gold," which led to a pain "so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it, and the soul is satisfied now with nothing less

⁸⁴⁹ Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. David Lewis (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2011), 135.

⁸⁵⁰ Carlos Eire, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 20.

⁸⁵¹ Kevin Smullin Brown, "A Proposal of Saint Teresa de Avila's rhetorical strategy in the twentieth chapter of *Libro de la vida*," *Journal of Romance Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009): 19-29.

⁸⁵² Donald MacKinnon, "Some epistemological reflections of mystical experience," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, Studies in Philosophy and Religion* 5, ed. Steven Katz (London: Shledon, 1978), 132-40.

than God.”⁸⁵³ The experience that Teresa describes was hugely significant in the religious climate. Protestantism had rejected mystical ecstasy as “blasphemous or demonically-inspired claims,” yet in response Catholicism supported spiritual experiences that implied union with God.⁸⁵⁴ The transverberation that Teresa describes was received with notable appreciation from the Catholic Church, and after her canonization was celebrated widely in visual culture. The most lauded of these representations is Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s (1598-1680) *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1650) (Fig. 112), typically deemed the “embodiment of Counter-Reformation art.”⁸⁵⁵ A central reason for this description is its involvement of the physical senses with spiritual experience. The experience Teresa recounts involves the heightened use of the senses: she describes the visual image of the angel with the dart, the pain that made her verbally moan and the touch of sweet, excessive pain. Bernini has evoked this sensuousness in his sculpture. It is an object that has been studied extensively, particularly in regards to the claims that Bernini has conflated spiritual ecstasy with sexual ecstasy.⁸⁵⁶ Franco Mormando writes, “The reason for the popularity of Bernini’s *Teresa* is not merely artistic or religious, it also, let us be honest, has a lot to do with sex. The statue titillates our senses as it provokes our wonder, if not our shock, about this blatant melding of the spiritual and sexual.”⁸⁵⁷ The sculpture represents Teresa’s physical response to spiritual experience to the point of evoking the onlooker’s sensory faculties. By depicting the transverberation in such a corporeal way, the object encourages devotion of a similar type for its onlooker. This was the fundamental principle behind the Counter-Reformation’s push towards the cult of ecstasy in art.⁸⁵⁸ The sexual connotations that intermingled with representations of ecstatic devotion is demonstrated in images of Mary Magdalen in ecstasy that became exceptionally popular at this historic moment, particularly with artists in Rome (Fig. 113 and 114). Within this context, Mary Magdalen was associated with “penitence,

⁸⁵³ Teresa of Avila, *The Life*, 226.

⁸⁵⁴ Carlos Eire, “Ecstasy as Polemic: Mysticism and the Catholic Reformation,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2018): 3-23.

⁸⁵⁵ Lepage, “Art and the Counter-Reformation,” 373.

⁸⁵⁶ John Weretka, “The Ecstasy (?) of Saint Teresa,” in *Emotion and the Seduction of the Senses, Baroque to Neo-Baroque*, eds. Lisa Beaven and Angela Ndalianis (ISD LLC, 2018), 217-234.

⁸⁵⁷ Franco Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 161.

⁸⁵⁸ Murray Roston, *Changing Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts, 1650-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 60.

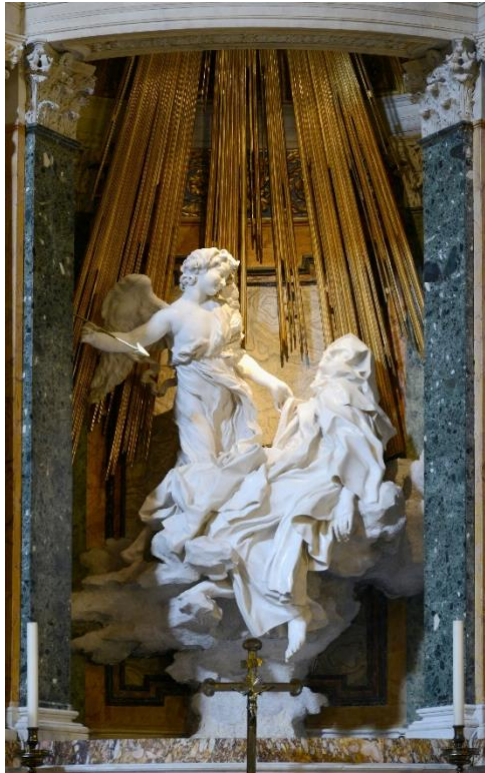


Figure 112. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1647-52, sculpture in marble, 350cm. Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

salvation and mystical love.”⁸⁵⁹ The requirements of her penitent submission to God for her sinful prostitution had her visualised in a passive gesture of compliant ecstasy, in a similar gesture to Saint Teresa in Bernini’s sculpture. In these images, Mary Magdalen tilts her head back, parts her lips, and exposes a large portion of her chest and shoulder. These representations, although confounding the boundary between spiritual and sexual experience, satisfied the cultural requirements of sacred images to intensify worshipful contemplation. Much of the contextual theory on the effects of ecstasy in art stem from Loyola’s thoughts on images in devotional practice. Murray Roston writes of the Loyolan hypothesis:

They [images] were designed to assist the isolated Christian worshipper to attain to personal communion with the divine, to achieve ideally a climactic experience wherein

⁸⁵⁹ Heidi J. Hornik, “The Invention and Development of the “Secular” Mary Magdalene in Late Renaissance Florentine Painting,” in *Mary Magdalene in Medieval Culture*, eds. Peter Loewen and Robin Waugh (London: Routledge, 2014), 75-94.



Figure 113. Caravaggio, *Mary Magdalen in Ecstasy*, 1606, oil on canvas, 106.5x91cm. Private collection, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

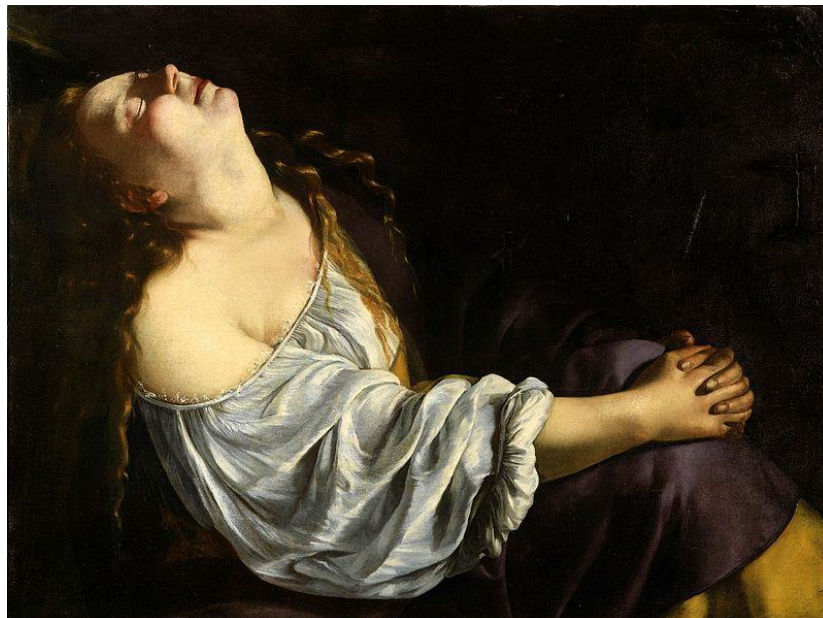


Figure 114. Artemesia Gentileschi, *Mary Magdalen in Ecstasy*, 1620, oil on canvas, 81x105cm. Private collection. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

the soul, in the literal meaning of the term ecstasy, would momentarily move outside the body and undergo imaginatively the same agony of martyrdom or the same bliss of salvation as the saint whose scene he was conjuring up in his mind's eye.⁸⁶⁰

The purpose of these images was to inspire ecstatic responses. Through their appeal to the bodily senses, images were deemed capable of evoking the spiritual. Philip Neri is not only demonstrative of this practice, but can be considered the key proponent of the binding together of the visual arts with mystical ecstasy. Of particular significance is his time spent contemplating the *Visitation* by Barocci, in the chapel along from Passignano's *Annunciation*. After listing several of Neri's ecstatic experiences, Bacci writes, "Another time [Neri] was in the chapel of the Visitation, one of his favourite haunts, because he was particularly fond of Barocci's picture which is there; and sitting down, according to his custom, upon a little seat, he passed unawares into a most sweet ecstasy."⁸⁶¹ In other instances, Neri is recorded having been moved to tears at an image, at times so excessive that it was deemed miraculous that he did not go blind.⁸⁶² These responses demonstrate the level at which the senses were interlinked with spiritual devotion. In her analysis of Neri's ecstasy, Constanza Barbierini uses the phrases "exterior" and "interior" cult; Neri demonstrates the value of using the exterior cult to minister to the interior, in such a way that the very "boundaries between interior experience and exterior representation become more frail."⁸⁶³ Images had the capacity to transport Neri to a different space, one that, though facilitated by material culture, was wholly immaterial. They enabled him to transition into a different reality, thus illustrating the aptitude of the visual image to evoke mystical ecstasy.

In the knowledge of Neri's emotional experiences when beholding images in the Santa Maria in Vallicella, Passignano's adherence to heavenised imagery in his *Annunciation* seems all the more appropriate. The painting highlights the vulnerable boundary between earth and heaven at the event of the Annunciation. The two realms press into one another to the point that they appear to blend; the various stages of corporeality

⁸⁶⁰ Roston, *Changing Perspectives*, 60.

⁸⁶¹ Bacci, *The Life of Saint Philip Neri*, 357.

⁸⁶² Joseph Imorde, "Tasting God: The Sweetness of Crying in the Counter-Reformation," in *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Wiestse de Boer and Christine Göttler (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 257-269.

⁸⁶³ Barbieri, "'To Be In Heaven,'" 225.

among the angels and cherubim illustrate the instability between the spheres. The literal representation of heaven in the Annunciation may have aided the viewer's - perhaps even Neri's - mental elevation to spiritual ecstasy. Bacci writes, "this glorious saint, whose mind and heart were continually in heaven, was favoured by God with heavenly visits and unearthly consolations."⁸⁶⁴ His biographer imagines Neri as continually directing his mind towards visions of heaven. In this way, Passignano's image is wholly compatible with Neri's spirituality. It provided the visual stimulus of heaven itself, thus explicitly revealing supernatural images for absorption through sensory vision. Under the cultural theory on sacred images, this in turn commanded mental contemplation on the vision's reality. In turning once again to the overall visual scheme of the Santa Maria in Vallicella, visions of heaven like that in Passignano's *Annunciation*, feature heavily. The ceiling of the church represents Pietro da Cortona's *St Philip's Vision of the Virgin* (Fig. 115) and the chapel dedicated to Neri at the left hand-side of the altar holds one of the most illustrious images of Neri, the *Ecstasy of Philip Neri* by Guido Reni (Fig. 116). While these demonstrate the cult of Neri-inspired images that flourished in the seventeenth century, it is important to remember these were added several decades after Neri's death. Largely, Neri had desired simplicity in the Santa Maria in Vallicella's decorative scheme. The altarpieces were to form isolated spaces for devotion, allowing uninterrupted meditation on the rosary cycle. Of the twelve images originally found within the cycle, four of them depicted heavenly imagery (*Annunciation*, *Shepherds*, *Assumption*, and *Coronation*), and just two of them represented earth and heaven together, the other being Durante Alberti's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1590) (Fig. 117). That image, however, does little to blend the two spaces together. As well as occupying one of the first visual appeals to heaven in the ecclesiastic space, I argue that Passignano provides the only figurative display of Neri's integration of the exterior and interior cult. By idealising the Annunciation through the lens of heavenised imagery, the altarpiece testifies to a key contingent in Neri's spirituality, that the borders between heaven and earth are fundamentally permeable.

⁸⁶⁴ Bacci, *The Life of Saint Philip Neri*, 364.



Figure 115. Pietro da Cortona, *The Virgin Appearing to St Philip Neri*, 1664, fresco. Ceiling of Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Source: <https://civitavecchia.portmobility.it/en/santa-maria-vallicella-or-chiesa-nuova>



Figure 116. Guido Reni, *St Filippo Neri in Ecstasy*, 1614, oil on canvas, 180x110cm. Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.



Figure 117. Durante Alberti, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1590, oil on canvas. Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Wikimedia Commons. License: Public Domain.

11.4. Conclusion

Passignano's *Annunciation* contains a high level of heavenised imagery in its pictorial narrative, and draws on some of the imagery of Titian's influential San Salvatore *Annunciation*. The painting was one of Passignano's first images in Rome, and helped pave the way for the artist's involvement with significant projects of the Counter-Reformation Church, including the altar decorations of St Peter's Basilica. Passignano created his *Annunciation* for the renovated Santa Maria in Vallicella, the new mother church of the Oratorian order led by Philip Neri. The *Annunciation* was created as part of a narrative altarpiece cycle, defined by Peter Paul Rubens as a project involving only the most able of Italy's painters.⁸⁶⁵ The cycle was inspired, at least in part, by the mysteries of the rosary, which was a devotional practice that distinguished set narratives of Christ and Mary's lives based on biblical and apocryphal sources. Passignano's image demonstrates a sensitivity to this cycle through the use of roses within the image, which echo that used in the meditative practice of the rosary. The altarpiece also responds to the more specific detail of Neri's personal devotion to the Virgin Mary. Recorded in contemporary biographical sources, Neri was known to have ecstatic responses in front of sacred images. Within the Counter-Reformation context, these experiences testified to the ability of exterior, sensuous forms of worship to mediate interior spirituality. The *Annunciation's* attention to heavenly, immaterial imagery reflects this very ideology, satisfying the ritualistic spirituality of the Santa Maria in Vallicella and its leader.

⁸⁶⁵ Rubens, "Letter no. 14," 119, trans. and cited in Logan, *Peter Paul Rubens*, 104.

e. Conclusion of Part 3

Part 3 investigated the dominant ideology in modern scholarship that argues for the use of heavenised imagery in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces. It began by going further than previous studies by defining the historical and theological parameters within which this mode of visual exegesis sits. It ascertained that, in addition to satisfying Counter-Reformation's use of sensuous imagery to establish emotional attachment to the Church, heavenised imagery also constructed a particular form of biblical reception relating to the Incarnational light of John 1. The introductory sections to Part 3 also set up the following chapters to challenge the generalising hypothesis that summates all Annunciations from this period within a restrictive thematic type. Therefore, rather than beginning with an example that fed into the dominant heavenised *topos*, this thesis used Giorgio Vasari's *Annunciation* for Santa Maria Novella in Arezzo to destabilise the unified reading of Counter-Reformation Annunciations and pose an alternative artistic response to the biblical narrative within the context. Vasari's visual exegesis did not rely on heavenised imagery, but on an elegant, aristocratic method influenced by *Maniera*. This is made all the more significant given that he used heavenised imagery in other settings - namely a theatre set. Vasari's painting functioned as an ideal starting point for individualising instances of the Annunciation's biblical reception and troubling the notion of a cohesive exegetical landscape.

In contrast to Chapter 9, Chapter 10 appealed to an Annunciation that is frequently cited in scholarship and idealised as paradigmatic of the Counter-Reformation type. Titian's San Salvatore *Annunciation* was the first of its kind to represent an intense, heavenised interpretation of the narrative. The chapter looked back across Titian's previous Annunciations and synthesised the progression in his imagery to the shifting cultural expectations on images. It examined the theological and contextual ideologies that informed his final *Annunciation*, but also aimed to ensure that the object was localised to a specific instance that cannot be used as the only image relating to the methods of Counter-Reformation's visual exegesis. The final case study was Passingnano's *Annunciation*, which although likely to be influenced by Titian, maintained its own unique connection to the heavenised interpretation. It functioned as an image in a twelve-piece altar cycle of the Life of the Virgin in the Santa Maria in

Vallicella. The Church followed the design of Saint Philip Neri and his spirituality. This is found in Passignano's *Annunciation* by the use of rosary imagery and adherence to emotional, sensuous images of heaven. While the two final Chapters focused on images that fell into the category of heavenised interpretations, both examples were treated as independent instances of biblical visual exegesis. Both had their own design and function within their ecclesiastical contexts and both were created by artists who had their own personal experiences, histories, and influences. Part 3 has indicated that the premise of biblical reception history, or any historical investigation for that matter, should first be responsible for conducting individual, micro-analyses, before any generalised assumption about a large body of images can be made.

12. Chapter 12. Conclusion

This project, which has focused on the visual exegesis of the Annunciation to Mary (Lk 1:26-38) in Counter-Reformation altarpieces, has made a range of significant conclusions within each part and each chapter. The final aim of this thesis is to marry together the findings of this research, and provide an overview of how the scholarly landscape has been changed by this project. First and foremost, this thesis has provided the most extensive analysis of the reception history of the Annunciation in the Counter-Reformation to date. Through the high level of interrogation of visual, textual and material sources, this thesis has identified tropes and ideologies that had formerly been left unexamined in scholarship. The three main lenses – the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality, use of the book as propaganda, and the motif of heavenised imagery – were used to reconstruct something of the characterization of Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces, not just as aesthetic representations but as objects of visual rhetoric.

The three main parts – “Narrating the Word in Image,” “Reading the Word in Image,” and “Heavenising the Word in Image,” - centred their language around the idiom of word and image. By using this language, the thesis projected the interplay between these modes as they have functioned during each stage of the research. The thesis has seen the dynamic of word and image represented (1) in practice, as the interpretation of a biblical text into a visual object, (2) in a theological context, as an expression of the central Catholic mystery - the Incarnation, the Word of God becoming flesh - in which the Annunciation plays a narrative role, and (3) from a methodological perspective, as it related to the word-based and image-based sources in its analysis. The latter of these points was particularly pertinent to the manner in which I approached the case studies in the three parts, and allowed for heightened levels of interdisciplinary engagement that marks the uniqueness of this study’s scholarly contribution.

Part 1 examined the vastly understudied but hugely important matter of pictorial narrative and temporality in sixteenth-century sacred images, and defined it as a primary issue in Counter-Reformation Annunciation altarpieces. Part 1 identified how the Annunciation itself was a temporally complex event, particularly in its Incarnational

framework, and how artists - specifically Caravaggio, Federico Zuccaro, and Guido Reni - necessitated different forms of narrative dislocation to define it for its beholders. It discovered that Caravaggio's *istoria* was constructed by disrupted temporality through his use of dramatic realism, with an immediacy that defied narrative chronology. Zuccaro's fresco was identified as a polyscenic image that contained a circular temporality that incorporated the modes of narrative and prophecy to create a sense of fulfilment at the site of the Annunciation. Finally, Part 1 defined Reni's *Annunciation* as representative of a transitory division in a much larger pictorial narrative that related to the Life of the Virgin Mary. Through these three examples, Part 1 established that the pictorial narrative of the Annunciation in this period was bound to exegetical challenges, which in turn disrupted, fulfilled and divided temporal logic.

Part 2 focussed on the use of the book as propaganda, and used this as its lens of interpretation. While the use of the book in Annunciation images has been analysed in relation to medieval imagery, there has been little to no assessment of the specific use of Mary's book in a Counter-Reformation context. This research identified that the book could be interpreted as a theologically-significant object representing the Word becoming flesh, but it went further to construct a series of arguments that linked the trope to the characterization of the Virgin Mary in Counter-Reformation ideology. Part 2's first case study, Barocci's *Annunciation*, exemplified this point, as it indicated to a cultural phenomenon relating to female readers or writers in the political backdrop of the artist's hometown of Urbino. The second case study was Caracci's *Annunciation*, which interpreted the book as it was used to propagate the authority of the Church over reading practices. This image has often been considered paradigmatic of Counter-Reformation image reform, and Caracci's representation of Mary's reading under Gabriel's watchful eye enforced a vision of prescriptive adherence to Church authority. Another use of the book was found in Alberti's *Annunciation*, in which the object was represented containing a prophecy that sought to challenge Jewish theology. These alternative uses for the book as propaganda of the Counter-Reformation's local and national objectives reflected vast and contentious issues that related to the individual conditions of the spaces they inhabited. This specific line of enquiry has, until now, been unidentified as a location for analysis.

In addition to highlighting specific pertinent themes, this thesis has challenged some of the stereotypes associated with pictorial representations of the Annunciation in the Counter-Reformation, particularly through the findings of Part 3. The motif of heavenised imagery, which was a popular Annunciation *topos* in this period, has been used in scholarship to summate a body of complex, individual, and varied images. We saw in Chapter 9 that Vasari's *Annunciation* challenged this perception, as an object created simultaneously to the decrees of Trent, but that used a completely different set of objectives to that promoted in post-Tridentine Catholicism. His image contained no heavenised imagery, despite his foreknowledge of the method in alternative art forms. Contrastingly, in the two chapters that followed, Titian and Passignano's Annunciations were analysed to gather evidence as to why heavenised imagery was used so frequently in the period, with the objective of uncovering specific validations for the approach. Titian's painting reacted to a commission for an "Incarnation of Our Lord," and drew on the theologically complex exposition of light in the heavenised imagery, and Passignano was creatively inspired by the church leader to present an interpretation of spiritual and sensory devotion. By localising each interpretation to the specific contexts and avoiding grandiose claims about this vast and multifaceted group of objects, Part 3 provided a nuanced - and hence more accurate - illustration of the breadth of interpretations surrounding the Annunciation narrative within a comparatively short temporal and geographical space.

Throughout these three main parts, this thesis has treated paintings first and foremost as sources of information intrinsically linked to the specific Counter-Reformation environment they inhabited. It proposed a unique combination of methodological principles drawn from different disciplines in order to deal appropriately with these innately transdisciplinary objects. The methodologies comprised of an innovative amalgamation of biblical reception-historical and art-historical perspectives, to allow heightened levels of excavated meaning in each individual image as they related to the theological and artistic tensions of this historical moment. The primary methodological principle has been the concept of visual exegesis proposed by Paolo Berdini, and by extension how images of this period represented textual expansion: the expansion of the narrative beyond the biblical text. My research protracted this hypothesis further. Never before have the terms 'visual exegesis' and 'textual expansion' been so closely used in relation to the biblical methodologies of Counter-

Reformation Catholicism, and more specifically, to the dogma of scripture and tradition. The methodology I used absorbed the terms of visual exegesis and textual expansion and designed them to function within three stages of analysis. As outlined in the introduction and demonstrated by the nine in-depth case studies, the method followed three distinct processes: (1) identification of location, intended function, conditions of commission, introduction to artist and their Counter-Reformation involvement, (2) analysis of textual expansion in the image, including iconographic analysis, and (3) synthesising visual exegesis with historical, art-historical and theological context and selected lens of interpretation. This method has created the most thorough and intentionally cross-disciplinary analyses on these nine paintings currently found in scholarship. The original methodological design made for an intimate investigation of the images, drawing on visual, textual and material sources, and retained the freedom to explore interdisciplinary conversations relating to each of the three lenses. The method was specifically tailored to early modern art theories surrounding the equivalence of painting with writing, word and image, verbal stories with visual *istorie*, thence forming the ideal location for the interjection of visual art-historical reflections into a text-dominated biblical studies.

By applying this methodology to the selected visual objects, the thesis has responded to the central research objectives outlined in Chapter 1 and has made significant scholarly advances. The first of the main objectives was to understand how visual biblical reception was informed by the multifaceted nature of the Counter-Reformation context. This research has achieved this throughout the case studies, by highlighting the individuality of each altarpiece's context and relating it to local and national tenets in Counter-Reformation biblical interpretation. In doing so, the thesis has substantiated research into the reception history of the Bible in the Counter-Reformation. This project started with the reception of one single biblical text within one context, and the findings it has yielded have spoken to art-historical, theological and biblical reception-historical issues, on both a micro and macro level. The reason for this is that this period, though vastly understudied from a biblical studies perspective, is the ideal location for practising the reception-historical methodology. It is an important, fertile ground for considering different forms of biblical reception within close proximity, due to the diversity of its reformed methods and approaches. It was a period in which the reception of the Bible had, through Protestant challenge and Catholic defense, divided

the Church with violent repercussions. From the Catholic viewpoint, the Bible was not to be interpreted in isolation as the *sola scriptura* paradigm implied, but via the lens of its centuries of interpretative history. This echoes the methodological choices made in reception history, which traces the meaning of biblical texts throughout history. The Counter-Reformation allows the space to consider the central issues relating to biblical reception, such as who owns biblical interpretation and meaning, and how do objects of reception use and politicise biblical texts and so construct invented meanings relating to a specific context. Furthermore, the Counter-Reformation poses a welcome change from the logocentric priorities of biblical studies, which reflects a Protestant bias, and instead requires active engagement with a huge range of visual and material sources that were produced as part of Catholicism's political agenda.

The second central objective was to ascertain what degree of variance there was in the methods of visual biblical reception in post-Tridentine Italy. This thesis saw the first direct appeal to the cross-section between biblical reception and sacred image making in this historical context; a correlation that was reflected in the word-and-image parallelism of the age. It is the first to identify that within this period, the issue of sacred images and biblical reception were intimately linked and bound to a complex web of exegetical decision-making on the part of artist, patron, commissioner, adviser, and, importantly, the viewer. This thesis has argued that images created within this period were bound not only to ecclesiastical expectations but to that of secular, cultural ideologies around images and their function. This research is unique in combining early modern art theories with Counter-Reformation theology, in such a way that reconstructs the complexity of the cultural milieu. It has uncovered methods of Counter-Reformation biblical interpretation predominantly related to textual exegesis – such as scripture and tradition, typology, polemical re-interpretation and narrative ornamentation – and demonstrated how they were made visual through images.

The third central objective of this thesis was to understand how the Annunciation itself participated in the visual biblical interpretations in Italian churches. The micro-analyses have demonstrated that the visual exegesis of the Annunciation during this period was multidimensional, due to the range and potential of its interpretative modality. The direction of each visual exegesis was driven by intended location, function and audience. This hypothesis as it relates to the Counter-Reformation Annunciation had

not been previously identified, and this thesis has used the analysis of nine case studies to indicate something of the exegetical spectrum. This thesis has also created lenses through which we can better establish thematic connections between these individual objects. It has used three concepts – the issue of pictorial narrative and temporality, use of the book as propaganda, and the motif of heavenised imagery – to examine the cultural issues that impacted these objects. The three lenses were not mutually exclusive and paintings may have participated in two or more of them, but the key has been to define some parameters within which we can appropriately conceive of the visual reception of the Annunciation narrative in this historical moment.

The aforementioned contributions this thesis has made to current scholarship have implications for future research. This thesis indicates that the Counter-Reformation requires much more substantive research into how the Bible was received in the context and why. This thesis has used the pictorial mode of altarpieces to interrogate this question and has set up a methodology specific to the word-and-image dynamic of Annunciation images, yet research in this area does not end with pictorial objects. Afterall, the Catholic Church appealed to all manner of devices to cultivate its specific interpretation of the Bible and engage the laity, such as relics, liturgy, processions, music, theatre, printing, and preaching.⁸⁶⁶ For this future research, I propose that the principles behind the methodological steps used in this thesis - (1) of defining the history of an object, (2) evaluating the boundaries of its textual expansion, and (3) synthesising its biblical exegesis to its context - would be advantageous to collating excellent, insightful assessments on these highly complex cultural objects.

The final implication I want to address is how, while this research does promote the central objectives of biblical reception history - to examine the influence of the Bible in different contexts and constructs - it takes issue with the selectivity of the disciplinary area, particularly in the way that it has so blatantly generalised themes and receptions across historical periods that are frequently misunderstood due to their inherent complexity. It is in this precise location that we find the Counter-Reformation and the reception history of the Annunciation. The Counter-Reformation remains a period that is received with disparity and false assumptions. Its scholarship, particularly when we

⁸⁶⁶ List collated from Hall, "Introduction," 4, and Laven, "Introduction," 4.

consider its place in biblical studies, is tainted by issues of definition and its place in the period that usually is dominated by Protestant investigations. Scholarship's need for quantifiable, understandable parameters around historic moments has tainted the exegetical labyrinth that makes the biblical-reception objects of the Counter-Reformation so fascinatingly complex. In this thesis, the Annunciation has functioned to illustrate this point, and defy claims that its interpretations can be unified into a single aesthetic ideal. As it made its Incarnational journey from textual word to visual image, the Annunciation was changed, expanded, and manipulated to respond to the cultural climate of each individual altarpiece setting. This has been successfully translated throughout the research project and will contribute to a line of required research that invites interdisciplinary collaboration, in order to discover the treasures of the Counter-Reformation's biblical reception story.

Appendix 1

ARTIST	TITLE	DATE	LOCATION
			(* indicates still in original location)
Alberti, Durante (1556-1623)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1588	*Santa Maria ai Monti, Rome.
Allori, Alessandro (1535-1607)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1579	Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.
Allori, Alessandro (1535-1607)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1591	Banca Popolare Commercio e Industria Collection, UBI, Naples.
Allori, Alessandro (1535-1607)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1603	Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.
Barocci, Fedrico (1535-1612)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1582	Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City.
Barocci, Fedrico (1535-1612)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1592	*Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi, Perugia.
Bassani (after)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1580- 1600	Royal Collection Trust, London.

Bedoli, Girolamo Mazzola (1500-1569)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1555- 1560	Museo di Capodimonte, Naples.
Cardi, Lodovocio (1559-1613)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1600	*Parrocchia Cappuccini Montughi, Florence.
Carracci, Agostino (1557-1602)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1590	Louvre, Paris.
Carracci, Annibale (1560-1609)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1585	Unknown.
Carracci, Ludovico (1555-1619)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1584	Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.
Carracci, Ludovico (1555-1619)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1603	*Comune di Genova, Genoa.
Caravaggio, Michelangelo (1571-1610)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1608	Cathédrale de Nancy, Nancy.
Cesari, Giuseppe (1568-1640)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1595	*Santa Maria in Via, Rome.
Crespi, Daniele	<i>Annunciation</i>	1597	*Provenance Amadeo dal Pozzo, Milan.

Cresti, Domenico (Passignano) (1559-1638)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1594	*Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome.
Cresti, Domenico (Passignano) (1559-1638)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1604	Chiesa di Santa Andrea della Valle, Rome.
Gentileschi, Orazio (1563- 1639)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1605	Unknown, Rome.
Lanfranco, Giovanni (1582-1647)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1610	Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.
Marchetti, Marco (1528- 1588)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1565- 1575	*Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Cesena, Cesena.
Nappi, Francesco (1565-1630s)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1604- 1617	*Santa Maria in Aquira, Rome.
Nucci, Avanzino (1552-1629)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1580	*Santa Maria dei Raccomandati, Gubbio, Perugia.
Peterzano, Simone (1535-1599)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1578	Venegono Inferiore, Lombardy.

Pocetti, Bernardino (1548-1612)	<i>Annunciation</i>	c.1590	*Sant'Agnese, Florence.
Pulzone, Scipione (1544-1598)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1584	*Il Gesù, Rome.
Pulzone, Scipione (1544-1598)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1587	*Chiesa dei Domenicani a Gaeta, Naples.
Reni, Guido (1575-1642)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1610	Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome.
Rubens, Peter Paul (1577-1640)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1609	Jezuïetencollege, Antwerp.
Sabatini, Lorenzo (1530-1576)	<i>Annunciation</i>	Unknown.	Unknown.
Salimbeni, Ventura (1568-1613)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1605	Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest.
Salviati, Francesco (1510-1562)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1562	*San Francesco a Ripa, Rome.
Santi di Tito (1536-1603)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1580	Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.
Santi di Tito (1536-1603)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1603	*Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

Scarsella, Ippolito (Scarsella) (1550-1620)	<i>Annunciation</i>		*Santa Maria Nuova, Ferrara.
Siciolante, Girolamo (1521-1580)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1565	*Cappella di San Tommaso ai Cenci, Rome.
Tintoretto (1518-1594)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1578-90	Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin.
Tintoretto (1518-1594)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1583	*Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice
Vasari, Giorgio (1511-1574)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1564	Louvre, Paris.
Vasari, Giorgio (1511-1574)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1570	*Torre Pia, Palazzo Vaticano, Vatican City.
Vecelli, Tiziano (Titian) (1506-1576)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1564	*San Salvatore, Venice.
Ventura, Salimbeni (1568-1613)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1590	*Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.
Veronese, Paolo (1528- 1588)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1580	Museu National d'Art de Catalunya

Veronese, Paolo (1528- 1588)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1578	*Scuola dei Mercanti, Venice.
Veronese, Paolo (after)	<i>Annunciation</i>	1560- 1600	Royal Collection Trust, Edinburgh.

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