THE POETICS OF TITIAN’S RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS

In this book, Una Roman D’Elia examines Titian’s religious paintings in relation to the changing religious climate of sixteenth-century Venice. Like his literary friends, Titian struggled with the decorum appropriate for religious subjects at a time when this critical issue was current and topical. As D’Elia notes, the artist did not distinguish between the sacred and secular. Rather, he used a variety of styles depending on the size and subjects of his works. High subjects required grandiloquent rhetoric; pastoral scenes, humility; tragic martyrdoms, violence; and the passion of Mary Magdalene, eroticism. His decorous paintings served as important models for the Baroque and, thereby, suggest new ways to interpret the art of the Counter-Reformation.

Una Roman D’Elia is a scholar of Renaissance art and a recipient of fellowships from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She is an assistant professor of art history at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.
For Granny and Rufus,
with love and admiration
CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS  XI

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS  XIV

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS  XV

INTRODUCTION  1
Word and Image  2
The Counter-Reformation in Venice  2
Titian's Decorum  3
Titian and Writers  5
The Decorum of Genre  8

I: Christian Pastoral  9
Renaissance Pastoral Poetry  9
Titian's Secular Pastoral Paintings  10
Titian's Christian Pastoral Paintings  12
Christian Pastoral Literature  15
Titian and the Decorum of Pastoral  18
The Low or Humble Style  22
Pastoral Self-Consciousness  25

II: A Christian Laocoön  27
Scholarly Debates over the Reception of the Laocoön in the Renaissance  28
Imitation in the Resurrection Altarpiece  34
Images of St. Sebastian  36
The Imitation of the Laocoön in Renaissance Christian Art  44

VII
CONTENTS

The Literary Reception of the Laocoön in the Cinquecento 47
Theories of Imitation 52
The Laocoön during the Counter-Reformation 54

III: Christian Tragedy 56
The St. Peter Martyr Altarpiece and Violence in Altarpieces 56
Christian Tragedy 59
Tragedy and the High Style 60
Precedents for Pictorial Violence 63
Fear, Horror, and Pity 66
Images of Violence and Religious Change in the Cinquecento 68
The Pleasures of Violent Art 69
Titian's Violent Paintings 70
The Limits of Violence in Art and Literature 74
The Morality of Violence in Sacred Art and Literature 76
Titian's Decorum of Violence 79
The Pietà and the Flaying of Marsyas 81

IV: Christian Petrarchism 84
Problems in Interpreting Titian's Pitti Mary Magdalene 84
Vittoria Colonna and the Magdalene 88
Pietro Aretino and the Magdalene 91
Santa Nafissa and Other Whores 94
Sacred Petrarchism 99
The Reception of Titian’s Pitti Mary Magdalene and Christian Petrarchism 103

V: Christian Epic 107
Titian's Murano Annunciation and Aretino's Life of Christ 107
Criticism of Aretino 117
Aretino’s Life of Mary and Titian’s San Salvatore Annunciation 118
Old Testament Apparitions 119
The Annunciation as a Terrifying Drama 120
The High Style and Christian Poetics 123

VIII
Contents

A Terribilità of Colore 124
Sprezzatura and Pittura di Macchia 128
The Success of Titian's Christian Epic Paintings 130

Conclusion:
Titian and the Decorum of Genre 132
Genre in Titian's Oeuvre 132
Precedents for Titian's Decorum of Genre 137
Pagan Genres and Christian Exigencies: Titian and Michelangelo 141
Titian and Literature 145

Epilogue:
Titian and the Counter-Reformation 148
Titian's Baroque Imitators 148
Literary Genre in the Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries 150
The Decorum of Genre and the Counter-Reformation 153

Appendix:
A Preliminary Catalogue of Writers with Connections to Titian 157

Notes 189

Bibliography 233

Index 259
ILLUSTRATIONS

Color Plates (follow page xvi)

I. Titian, Noli me tangere, National Gallery, London
II. Titian, Madonna of the Rabbit, Louvre, Paris
III. Titian, Madonna and Child with St. Catherine of Alexandria and the Infant St. John, National Gallery, London
IV. Titian, Resurrection Altarpiece, Santi Nazaro e Celso, Brescia
V. Gérard, Copy after Titian, Martyrdom of St. Peter Martyr, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel
VI. Titian, Mary Magdalene, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence
VII. Titian, Annunciation, San Salvatore, Venice
VIII. Rubens, Lamentation, Galleria Borghese, Rome

Figures

1. Titian, Portrait of Pietro Aretino, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence 6
2. Titian, Portrait of Pietro Bembo, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 7
3. Attributed to Titian, Concert Champêtre, Louvre, Paris 11
4. Titian, Three Ages of Man, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh 11
5. Titian, Baptism, Museo Capitolino, Rome 13
6. Youth being tempted in a garden, Vite dei santi padri, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice 16
7. Lorenzo Lotto, Allegory of Virtue and Vice, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 17
8. Fra Bartolomeo, Noli me tangere, Louvre, Paris 21
9. Titian, St. Mark Altarpiece, Santa Maria della Salute, Venice 28
10. Titian, Christ Crowned with Thorns, Louvre, Paris 29
11. Hagesandros, Polydorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes, Laocoön, Musei Vaticani, Vatican City 30
12. Titian, St. Sebastian, detail of the Resurrection Altarpiece, Santi Nazaro e Celso, Brescia 31
13. Hagesandros, Polydorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes, Laocoön, side view, Musei Vaticani, Vatican City 33

XI
ILLUSTRATIONS

15. Leonardo da Vinci, studies for the *Trivulzio Tomb*, Royal Library, Windsor  
16. Andrea Mantegna, *St. Sebastian*, Ca d’Oro, Venice  
17. Titian, *San Nicolò Altarpiece*, Musei Vaticani, Vatican City  
19. Titian, *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, Alte Pinakothek, Munich  
20. Titian, *St. Sebastian*, Hermitage, St. Petersburg  
27. Giambattista Cima, *St. Peter Martyr Altarpiece*, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan  
32. Raphael, *Entombment Altarpiece*, Galleria Borghese, Rome  
34. Titian, *Crossing of the Red Sea*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
35. Titian, *Jealous Husband*, Scuola del Santo, Padua  
38. Caravaggio, *Judith and Holofernes*, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome  
40. Titian, *Flaying of Marsyas*, Archbishop’s Palace, Kromeriz  
41. Titian, *Entombment*, Louvre, Paris  
43. Titian, *Mary Magdalene*, Hermitage, St. Petersburg  
44. Titian, *Woman with a Fur*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna  
45. Parmigianino, *Madonna della Rosa*, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden
ILLUSTRATIONS

46. Malipiero meeting Petrarch in the Woods, in Girolamo Malipiero, Petrarca spirituale, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice  101
47. Workshop of Titian, Mary Magdalene, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan  105
49. Titian, Annunciation, Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice  110
50. Titian, Annunciation, Duomo, Treviso  111
51. Mariotto Albertinelli, Annunciation Altarpiece, Gallerie dell’Accademia, Florence  112
52. Raphael, Madonna di Foligno, Musei Vaticani, Vatican City  113
53. Correggio, Annunciation, Galleria Nazionale, Parma  114
54. Titian, Assumption of the Virgin, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice  115
55. Raphael, Vision of Ezekiel, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence  121
56. Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City  125
57. Titian, Presentation of the Virgin, Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice  134
58. Titian, Venus of Urbino, Uffizi, Florence  135
59. Titian, Danae, Prado, Madrid  136
60. Titian, Nymph and Shepherd, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna  137
61. Giorgione, Castelfranco Altarpiece, Duomo, Castelfranco Veneto  138
62. Michelangelo, Doni Tondo, Uffizi, Florence  139
63. After Raphael, Stoning of St. Stephen, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua  140
64. Titian, Ancona Altarpiece, Museo Civico, Ancona  141
65. Titian, Pesaro Altarpiece, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice  143
66. Michelangelo, Bacchus, Bargello, Florence  145
67. Francesco Furini, The Penitent Mary Magdalene, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna  149
68. Guercino, St. Mary Magdalene in Penance, Pinacoteca, Musei Vaticani, Vatican City  151
69. Federico Barocci, Visitation, Chiesa Nuova, Rome  154
70. Bernini, Ecstasy of St. Teresa, Cornaro Chapel, Madonna della Vittoria, Rome  155
ABBREVIATIONS

DBI: Dizionario biografico degli italiani

FM: Floris and Mulas, 1997

LSA: Aretino, Lettere sull’arte, 1957

WT: Weinberg, Trattati, 1970–4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK BEGAN AS A DISSERTATION at Harvard University, written under the direction of the late John Shearman. John (as he asked us to call him after graduation) encouraged me to find an exciting and ambitious topic and talked to me for hours at a time about my research. He was enormously generous, letting me use his notes, his library, and his unpublished collection of Raphael documents, and even allowing my husband and me to stay at his house so that we could do further research in the Harvard libraries. I am still realizing how greatly his approach to the history of art has influenced my own.

I am also grateful to my other dissertation readers, Creighton Gilbert and Lino Pertile. Professor Gilbert was my undergraduate advisor at Yale, and it was because of his lectures that I decided to become an art historian. He has generously read and commented on everything I have written since then, including the dissertation and the book, with pages of line-by-line criticisms for each chapter. Professor Pertile has been extraordinarily patient and kind in helping a neophyte in Italian literary studies avoid embarrassment and in sharing his thoughts about the intersections between literary criticism and religious change in the cinquecento. He has corrected all of the translations and transcriptions for this book (although, of course, remaining mistakes are my own).

While at Harvard, I was supported by grants from the Mellon Foundation, the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, and Harvard University. I have, for the past two years, been able to carry out new research and substantially rewrite the book with the generous support of a postdoctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I have been fortunate enough to have access to the rich resources of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the Biblioteca Marciana, the Archivio di Stato in Venice, the British Library, the Hertziana, the Houghton Library, the Fischer Rare Book Library, and the Warburg Institute.

The readers for Cambridge University Press, Jodi Cranston and Alexander Nagel, both offered thoughtful, detailed, and informed criticism of the book. Alex has been a great friend, interlocutor, and supporter. He has not only read and commented on the whole dissertation and book (in various drafts), but has also carried on an
exciting ongoing debate with me over the last three years by e-mail and in person about art and the Counter-Reformation. His ideas, questions, and challenges have informed every chapter of this book. My editor, Beatrice Rehl, has been particularly patient and supportive when faced with a barrage of questions and requests.

Charles Hope generously agreed to read the entire manuscript of a total stranger and offered extremely useful criticism of both smaller points and larger ideas. Joseph Koerner, Stuart Lingo, Bette Talvacchia, and Randi Klebanoff gave helpful comments on various chapters. David McTavish, an unfailingly kind and learned colleague here at Queen’s, has read the entire manuscript and discussed many aspects of cinquecento painting with me. John Osborne, Cathleen Hoeniger, and my other colleagues here at Queen’s University have all been warm, welcoming, and supportive. I have enjoyed working here and discussing ideas with them.

I have many close friends who also study the Renaissance and have taught me a great deal. Kathleen Christian, a friend since the beginning of graduate school, has read a lot of my work and been a great intellectual companion. Nadja Aksamija, whose work on the Counter-Reformation I admire, is also the warmest of friends. There are many others that I manage to see at Harvard, in Italy, and at the Renaissance Society of America conference and wish that I could see more often: Filippo de Vivo, Maia Ghatan, Robert Goulding, Frederick Ilchman, Cindy Klestinec, Thomas McGrath, Margaret Meserve, Emily O’Brien, Lisa Pon, Jutta Sperling, Katy and Louis Waldman, and Mary-Ann Winkelmes. Here in Kingston, I’ve been comforted, cajoled, and cheered by the constant presence of our dear friends, Chris, Jeanette, Laurence, and Murley Herrle-Fanning.

My brother and sister-in-law, Luke and Monica Roman, are also academics and, although far away and very busy, have talked about ideas with me, read things for me, and been warmly supportive. I feel very lucky to have my parents so close in Toronto, as they are also my best friends. My grandparents, Rufus and Leslie Stillman, are the most elegant, cultured, and generous people I know. I first learned about art sitting on Rufus’s lap, leafing through what seemed to be huge books, as he told me the stories of the pictures and made them seem alive, funny, and sexy. They took me to art galleries in New York, supported my family in many ways, paid for my education, and sent me to Italy. I dedicate this book to them.

My husband, Tony, a scholar of Renaissance humanism, has read this book many times and advised me on every aspect of it. I am blessed to be able to travel to Italy with him, sit next to him working in the library and at home, and share everything with him. I could not possibly articulate how much he has given me. Our daughter Lucia, who was born just as I was checking the proofs, outshines all of Titian’s putti with her sweet beauty.