ABSTRACT

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During the second and third decades of the sixteenth century, Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530) distinguished himself within the city of Florence as a painter of considerable talent. He worked within a variety of religious institutions, creating altarpieces rich in theological complexity, elegant in formal execution, and dazzlingly brilliant in chromatic impact. This dissertation analyzes six of those altarpieces, offering a cross-section of Andrea's working life and stylistic development. Approaching the artist's career from this perspective provides modern audiences with a valuable glimpse into his strategies for marrying his own social ambitions to the spiritual teachings that informed ecclesiastical art. These strategies evolved as Andrea learned from each artistic commission he undertook, each altarpiece that he produced in dialogue with educated patrons and learned religious advisors. Over the course of his career, he himself privileged with increasing sophistication theological texts concerned with the idea of reform. I argue that Andrea's stylistic development as a painter describes this process of spiritual education. This argument reconsiders the established conventions of the art-historical monograph, as it adds significantly to the broader scholarly discussion of Renaissance religious art, shedding fresh light on early modern theories of subjectivity and sensation.

ANDREA DEL SARTO (1486-1530) AND THE ART OF REFORM

By

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Dedication

For Maryca,
e per la mia Bella

Acknowledgements

When I think about the development of this dissertation, about the many debts of gratitude I owe, I cannot help but recall the sage widsom of John Shearman, a great scholar of Andrea del Sarto. “It ought to be a sufficient punishment to find oneself married to an art historian; it is almost intolerable that he should want to write a book.” Of course, there is an important difference between a book and a dissertation, but that difference does not diminish the sacrifices my wife, Maryca, made in order to see this project come to fruition. I wish to thank her, first and foremost, for her love, for her encouragement, and above all, for her patience. I would also like to thank my parents, Joe and Patty Cody, who have always supported me, as well as my daughter, Isabella. I hope someday she will understand what an inspiration she is.

This project began in 2010 as a graduate seminar paper at the University of Maryland, College Park. It developed there, at the University of Maryland, under the guidance of Meredith Gill. She followed my work on Andrea del Sarto from its inception. She responded with enthusiasm when I expressed an interest in carrying my research beyond the seminar level, giving generously of her time and advice. The thoughts expressed in the following pages have been marked, in so many ways, by the imagination she always brings to the classroom, by the sensitivity she exemplifies in her own scholarship, and by the kindness she shows in all circumstances. What I owe her can never be repaid. I can only offer my thanks and look forward to the day that I can start paying it forward.

It is with a similar sense of profound appreciation that I recall the unflinching support I received from other teachers. Jane Long and Brent Adkins shaped my

thinking in important ways. I like to say that Jane, my art history professor at Roanoke College, taught me to look, while Brent, my undergraduate philosophy professor, taught me to read. Arthur Wheelock and Philip Soergel, two individuals I know to be extraordinarily insightful readers, paid me a great courtesy by agreeing to participate in my dissertation defense. Steven Mansbach and Anthony Colantuono, both of whom have been invested in this project from its beginning as a dissertation, have offered thoughtful feedback at crucial stages of my research. Their willingness to talk about issues ranging from the intersections of art and philosophy to the activities of iconographic advisors has been invaluable.

So, too, have been the gifts of friendship that have sustained me along the way. Debbie Down deserves special attention in this respect, as without her I might never have ended up at the University of Maryland. Henry "Quint" Gregory has been the very image of generosity. I warmly took advantage of his willingness to discuss any idea on more than one occasion. In much the same manner, I frequently turned to Lara Yeager-Crassel and Andrew Eschelbacher. Both gave freely of their time, energy, and expertise. At various stages, especially when I refined part of Chapter 4 for a presentation at the 2015 Middle Atlantic Symposium, I benefited from the insights of Renée Ater, June Hargrove, Yui Suzuki, Joshua Shannon, Nicole Riesenberger, Caroline Shields, and Maryl Gensheimer. Each of these remarkable individuals sharpened my thinking, and I am grateful for their efforts.

It is a pleasure, finally, to acknowledge the financial support I received towards this project. A Summer Research Fellowship from The Graduate School at the University of Maryland, College Park allowed me to spend several weeks in

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Ubi amor, ibi oculus.
[Where there is love, there is the eye.]

Albertus Magnus

The whole life of a good Christian is a holy longing.

Augustine

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Introduction

In many ways, this dissertation began in the summer of 2008. While in the midst of planning my first course on sixteenth-century Italian art, I came across John Shearman's 1965 monograph, *Andrea del Sarto*. Several things struck me about this book. It was insightful. It was precocious. But what struck me most—beyond even the author's electrifying treatment of Andrea's color—was the hushed silence that followed its publication. For more than twenty years, Shearman's study was the final word on this artist. And in that span of time, as the methods of art-historical analysis became the subject of intense scrutiny, Andrea del Sarto became a figure of marginal concern.[1] Even today, as if by some implicit agreement, art historians tend to see Andrea as a brilliant technician who worked in Florence at a time when developments of greater interest and import were happening in Rome.[2] This sense of Andrea's historical significance, or lack thereof, did not sit well with me, largely because it jarred with the power of Andrea's paintings, his altarpieces, in particular. The many panels he placed on the altars of Florence are nothing less than captivating, thoughtful, even eloquent attempts to address vital concerns within the artistic and religious cultures of Renaissance Italy.

The pages that follow were written with the intention of bringing Andrea's religious and artistic sensibilities into sharper focus. I offer an account of Andrea's career as a panel painter by tracing the course of his stylistic development within the

[1] For a discussion of how the discipline of art history evolved during the later twentieth century, see Fernie, "Introduction: A History of Methods," 18-21.

[2] See Hall, *After Raphael*, 12-94; idem., *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*, 65-95; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 73-100.

context of six altarpiece projects. Each of the six paintings singled out for close study occupies a position of privilege within the artist's oeuvre, especially with regard to Andrea's progression as a colorist.[3] Indeed, in terms of *colore*, these works serve almost as benchmarks that allow us to chronicle how the soft tonalities of Andrea's earliest creations evolved into the ethereal splendor of his mature paintings. A central thesis of mine is that Andrea's stylistic advancements are linked inextricably to the intellectual circumstances that he naturally encountered as someone involved in the process of creating liturgical art. A consistent theme thus emerges in the six altarpiece projects examined below, paintings that, when taken together, detail Andrea's increasingly sophisticated strategies for addressing the Christian idea of reform. "Reform," as I am using the term, describes an inexhaustible, internal process of meditation. It is a spiritual imperative whereby the human soul, renewing its relationship with God, refashions the fabric of its very substance in an effort to better embrace God's love and better reflect God's light—in an effort to reconfigure itself in the image and likeness of its maker.[4] This idea, I argue, was a source of enduring inspiration for Andrea del Sarto.

My thoughts, here, intersect with powerful traditions of Renaissance scholarship. These traditions focus on artistic patronage, broadly conceived, and on the particular dynamics associated with creating altarpieces in sixteenth-century Italy, most especially. When he agreed to produce pictures meant to stimulate devotion within a meditative and liturgical setting, Andrea del Sarto assumed a special burden.

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[3] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148. In prioritizing questions of color over questions of form, I am breaking with the most recent trends among scholars attempting to describe Andrea's style and development. Cf. Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 127-151; Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 181-274.

[4] Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 49-62, 153-167.

Michael Baxandall cast considerable light on the complexities of this burden when he famously described a Renaissance painting as "the deposit of a social relationship."[5] Other commentators, including Jill Burke and Michelle O'Malley, have illuminated matters further, drawing, in some cases, on anthropological discussions of "agency."[6] One notable study has convincingly demonstrated that the contracts Andrea and his contemporaries signed when they accepted client orders for religious pictures mark only a single event in a series of long and detailed negotiations.[7] These negotiations required skills beyond the ability to manipulate oils; they required diplomatic acumen and a large measure of intellectual flexibility. For in addition to their own ambitions, makers of Renaissance altarpieces also had the wishes of their patrons to consider, as well as the intentions of clerics who had a vested interest in the picture and its location.[8]

Over the course of several conversations, then, the artist and his interlocutors would discuss matters ranging from prices and materials, to pictorial form and execution, to the painting's content. Issues pertaining to fees and media were settled early on in the process. Such stipulations generally appear spelled out in legal documents. Matters concerning a painting's content and its visible expression, on the other hand, required a different level of attention. While contracts frequently broach these topics in a cursory manner, the subtleties involved in determining the iconography and visual character of an altarpiece necessitated a string of personal

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[5] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience,* 1.

[6] See Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 1-15; O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency," 417-441. Alfred Gell framed the notion of "agency" in *Art and Agency*, 1-11. It is explored in more depth in Svašek, *Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production*, 38-64.

[7] O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 1-12, 161-250.

[8] See Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 63-84.

meetings and verbal exchanges among the interested parties. These exchanges allowed for the formation of lasting social relationships and, most significantly, for transmissions of many types of knowledge.[9]

It is crucial that we understand the artist's role in the commissioning process. The artist was an interested party who fully participated and contributed to the learned conversations that informed the altarpiece in question.[10] In all six cases examined below, for instance, Andrea del Sarto would have exchanged ideas with his educated clients and with the learned religious officials who tended to the altars that his paintings were meant to adorn. These exchanges—the most notable of which included Augustinian friars affiliated with the San Gallo convent in Florence—led him to consider some of Christianity's most profound and pressing theological notions in the company of well-read individuals. In this respect, I see the commissions Andrea received as professional opportunities that allowed him to become increasingly familiar with Christian teachings, and I describe the arc of Andrea's stylistic development as a process of spiritual education.

Presenting Andrea's stylistic development as an index of his spiritual learning, however, is not meant to marginalize the painter's other modes of intellectual inquiry. On the contrary, over the course of his career, Andrea del Sarto engaged in practices that likened the products of his hand to the work of an author or poet.[11] He

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[9] O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 163-196.

[10] O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 191-195. Cf. Hope, "Artists, Patrons, and Advisors," 293-343.

[11] Cf. Wellen, "*La Guerra*," 181-232, quotation below from 201. It is worth noting that, since the eighteenth century, Andrea del Sarto has been associated with a mock-epic written in the Florentine dialect. The poem's history, however, is fraught with controversy. Many scholars believe it be a seventeenth-century creation falsely attributed to the sixteenth-century painter. Wellen, who associates the poem with Andrea, nevertheless describes it as a "literary pastiche," suggesting that the "original version may have been embellished by various hands throughout the century." In my view, even if we accept Wellen's arguments, Andrea's paintings remain the true trace of his poetic creativity;

consistently turned to the burgeoning field of early modern art theory and explored avenues of scientific investigation mapped out by Leonardo da Vinci. He devised a masterful strategy of imitation that intersects with theories pertaining to the *paragone* debate, that elevates his work above his rivals' creations, and that aligns his paintings with Florentine traditions of artistic excellence at the same time.[12] Pictorial style, specifically the formal conventions that scholars have long described in terms of 'classic' and 'High Renaissance' art, was an essential strategy in this regard. In my view, these modern-day art-historical descriptors point towards a series of compositional decisions that, in Andrea's time, resonate with efforts to promote Florentine civic and cultural identity.[13]

But, as I intend to show, these efforts at self-promotion were always conditioned by an abiding concern for the idea of reform, a concept that touches on the most basic Christian assumptions regarding religious experience, the senses, and the relationship between humanity and divinity.[14] This idea runs through Andrea's creative enterprise like a leitmotif, connecting this artist's work to the writings of St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Augustine. In their own elegant language, Andrea's altarpieces implored the beholder "to put off your old self, which is being

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Shearman's statement rings true: Andrea del Sarto "was indeed a poet, but not in words." Quotation from Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, 7.

[12] Cf. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 37-65;149. See Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 181-272, quotation below from 185. By privileging the connections among Andrea's work and Florentine artistic traditions, my arguments run parallel to Wellen's efforts to related Andrea's stylistic "simplicity and naturalness" to literary conventions in sixteenth-century Florence. By breaking the ties between Andrea's work and Roman precedents, however, I am questioning an important argument in Natali's study.

[13] Cf. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 14-121. In deference to Freedberg, whose views are discussed more fully below, I used the terms 'classic' style and 'classicism'. The terms themselves, however, will always appear framed by inverted commas. So, too, will 'High Renaissance' and 'Mannerism'. The inverted commas are my way of noting that the terms themselves are historiographic constructs, not self-evident locutions. They speak less to notions of "genius" than to certain impulses within Andrea's work that constitute a strategy of social performance.

[14] See Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 1-5.

corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"[15] (Eph 4:22-24). Andrea's knowledge of this spiritual construct deepened as his artistic abilities improved and his art-theoretical sensitivities became more refined. Such was his preoccupation with this theological notion that, according to my reading, his art was an "art of reform."

A brief overview of my reading might be helpful at this point. Andrea announced his preoccupation with reform theology early in his career with his *Noli me tangere* of 1510 (Fig.1), the focus of chapter one. This panel was the artist's first major altarpiece commission. It was also the first of three commissions he received for the altars in the Augustinian church of San Gallo, meaning that it marks the beginning of his professional interactions with the learned friars of that community. The intellectual who devised the iconography of Andrea's panel thought carefully about the biblical narrative it depicts. This friar thought carefully, as well, about issues outlined in Augustine's biblical commentaries, especially about the relationship Augustine establishes between physical touching and the notion of "spiritual touching." This last concept involves complex theories of vision. It serves, additionally, as a metaphor for the operations of the mind. And, as such, it corresponds to the spiritual exercise that Paul described as being "made new in the attitude of your minds" or as putting on the "new self."

[15] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references and quotations correspond to the New International Version.

Andrea's advisor engaged this matrix of ideas by developing a pictorial program that involved a number of dissemblant signs or exegetical *figurae.*[16] The garden included behind the protagonists in the *Noli me tangere* is a case in point. For a theologically informed audience, this parcel of land not only recalled important elements of the narrative presented before their eyes. It also recalled a series of narratives concerned with the mystery of Word made flesh. In this regard, the painted garden triggers an exegetical process of meditation that revolves on the doctrine of the Incarnation. According to Paul and other Christian writers, this style of thinking about the Incarnation has a profound effect on the "attitude" of the human mind. Augustine prescribes it as the means by which to "touch" Christ in the spiritual sense of the term.

Andrea responded to this matrix of ideas with impressive ingenuity. On the one hand, he gives us a rather novel demonstration of chiaroscuro modeling in the figure of Christ. This strategy of modeling the human form links Andrea's painting to the work and legacy of Leonardo da Vinci, the figure who allowed artists to approach a heightened sense of three-dimensional corporeality in their paintings. For this very reason, Andrea's strategy of modeling Christ's form creates a novel alliance among ideals of pictorial relief and notions pertaining to the Corpus Christi. The second way that Andrea responded to the theological content of his picture was by working the surface of this panel with unprecedented energy. He gave the picture a tactile quality that conflates the act of seeing and the idea of touching, recreating in visible terms a philosophical structure that is of the utmost importance to Augustine's thinking.

[16] On the nature of dissemblant signs, see Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 1-10.

The interests explored in the *Noli me tangere* continued to develop as Andrea matured, a fact that becomes apparent in chapter two, which focuses on the second panel Andrea executed for the Augustinians of San Gallo: the *Annunciation* of 1512 (Fig.2). In this altarpiece, the painter reconsidered Leonardo's chiaroscuro techniques. The figure of Gabriel, specifically, appears bathed in a radiant light, which renders the colors of the angel's garments unstable. Here, I argue somewhat against received wisdom, in that I present the unstable colors of Gabriel's garments as a wrinkle in Andrea's relationship with his older colleague, Leonardo. The younger painter broke with the strict chiaroscuro traditions exemplified in Leonardo's paintings and began instead to explore optical theories of light as presented in the older master's notebooks.[17]

The motivating factor that inspired this shift in Andrea's relationship with his older colleague can be found in the theological basis of the San Gallo *Annunciation* and, ultimately, I believe, in the stimulating conversations required by the commissioning process. The iconographic thrust of this painting, built on the firm foundation of Augustine's commentary on John's First Epistle, involves the issues of light, love, and exegetical reasoning. This altarpiece, much like the *Noli me tangere*, comprises a collection of pictorial *figurae* and attempts to trigger in the beholder a series of religious memories. When taken together, these memories invite the pious spectator to place the event of Christ's bodily conception within what is commonly described as the "economy of salvation," a phrase that refers to the sacrifice of Jesus as payment for the sins of humanity. Andrea's treatment of light extends this mode of

[17] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148.

spiritual inquiry, making the picture's luminosity a device as pregnant with religious significance as any of the iconographic elements included in the scene.

According to my analysis of Andrea's work after 1512, the interest in light and optical science that emerged within the Augustinian context at San Gallo spawned a period of intense study and technical innovation. This period of study reached an important threshold in, arguably, Andrea's most ambitious altar painting, the *Madonna of the Harpies* (Fig.3) of 1517. In this panel, the focus of chapter three, Andrea's interest in Leonardo's *colore* ventures most completely into the realm of the *paragone* debate. Additionally, and for the first time, Andrea's handling of light and color fully embraces Leonardo's optical theories, giving visible expression to the notions of *lustro* and *splendore*.[18] These critical terms allow us to describe the *Madonna of the Harpies* as a sophisticated artistic performance and—in the very same instance—as a sophisticated meditation on the mystery of Christ's Incarnation. Andrea's knowledge of religion has thus reached rather impressive proportions indeed. His handling of form and, especially, his manipulation of color are the primary signifiers, the *figurae*, the carriers of theological connotations. It is Andrea's abilities to articulate visibly the properties of light that tie this Franciscan altarpiece project to a tradition of thought that includes the ancient Church Fathers, as well as the Apostles. The writings of St. Bonaventure serve as an important source of inspiration in this regard.

Many of the notions in Bonaventure's texts that Andrea explores resonate with the final painting the artist executed for the San Gallo community. This painting,

[18] On the terms *lustro* and *splendore*, see Claire Farago's searching study of Leonardo's notebooks, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 63-88.

his *Disputation on the Trinity* (Fig.4), also dates to 1517, and it is the subject of chapter four. Working once more with the Augustinian friars, and thinking critically about Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Andrea gave expression to his accumulated knowledge. He explored the connections among issues of pictorial space and religious notions of visionary experience, in particular. Andrea's interests, here, strike a sympathetic chord, with Augustine's thoughts regarding the "eye of the body" and the "eye of the mind."[19] There is a rather remarkable similarity between Andrea's attempts to stimulate his spectator in the *Disputation on the Trinity* and Augustine's attempts to engage the reader of *De Trinitate*. Both artist and author aim to cultivate in their respective audience a form of pious desire that Augustine calls longing or yearning. This intention inspired Andrea as a colorist, as well. For the first time in his career, his manipulation of hues in this painting embraces the notion of *vaghezza*, a critical term that interweaves the vocabulary of artistic excellence with Augustine's theologies of desire.[20] In this regard, Andrea's color strategy in the *Disputation on the Trinity* demonstrates, once again, that spiritual demands and religious teachings consistently shaped this artist's professional endeavors.

As I show in chapter five, the two avenues of chromatic exploration that Andrea defined in 1517 converge in 1524, with the advent of the Luco *Pietà* (Fig.5). Here, Andrea continues to draw on Leonardo's theoretical speculations regarding light and color, as well as on the heritage of Florentine artistic culture. In a manner not seen in his previous work, the artist interlaces the notions of *lustro* and *splendore* with the critical weight of *vaghezza*. The way he relates these critical terms ties his

[19] See Miles, "Vision," 125-141; Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147.
[20] On the notion of *vaghezza*, see Stuart Lingo's admirable study, *Federico Barocci*, 125-141.

artful arrangement of hues to traditions of scriptural exegesis. These traditions allow for sustained meditation on the painting's iconography, in that they move seamlessly from areas of Eucharistic theology to theories of desire expressed in Augustine's writings. Andrea himself may very well have emphasized this last fact by modeling the formal composition of the Camaldolese panel on the high altarpiece of the San Gallo church.

The final phase of Andrea's artistic and intellectual development unfolds within the *Gambassi Altarpiece* (Fig.6), a Benedictine painting that dates to 1527 or 1528. This picture, the subject of chapter six, is another instance where Andrea deliberately recalls the Augustinian context at San Gallo. His allusion is quite telling, for in the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, the artist developed a treatment of light, color, and atmosphere that forged new connections among Leonardo's optical theories, Augustine's discussion of the human condition, and the mystery of the Incarnation. Significantly, these new connections—that is to say, the particular character of Andrea's *colore* in this painting—resonate with the special circumstances of this commission. The *Gambassi Altarpiece* belongs to the spiritual culture surrounding plague imagery, and, correspondingly, Andrea's handling of light and color privilege medical theories concerning the spread of contagion, as well as biblical discussions of healing.

As this introductory sketch of my arguments indicates, the narrative I develop is not strictly linear, nor is it comprehensive. It does not survey Andrea's entire oeuvre or provide an illustrated overview of his biography. The arc of Andrea's stylistic development unfolds in fits and bursts, in developmental "leaps" that are

themselves conditioned by the artist's participation in the socio-cultural process of producing altarpieces. The key point I want to emphasize is that Andrea's artistic choices not only serve as expressions of skill or as means of self-promotion. They not only tell us about the purely formal links among this artist's work and the accomplishments of his predecessors and contemporaries. Andrea's handling of paint and his approach to form are also part and parcel of Renaissance religious culture, the Augustinian intellectual tradition, in particular.[21] This artist was always concerned with facilitating a meditative experience that allowed the worshipful viewer to internalize the mysteries of the Christian faith. He took his mandate as an altarpiece painter seriously, attempting to cultivate a powerful feeling of *amore Dei* among his audiences. That sentiment is the type of all-consuming spiritual condition that reforms the worshiper's soul in the image and likeness of its maker. Because, as scripture states, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

The religious sensitivities that Andrea's works betray raise the all-important question of the artist's own spirituality and its connection to the conditions in which he made his living. Might we interpret his repeated professional efforts to visualize the mysteries of the faith as a form of personal meditation? Might we see Andrea's paintings as deposits of a deeply felt sense of piety? I raise these questions at various points in my dissertation, especially in the epilogue. But I also ask them now, because they point towards the broader implications of my arguments, one of which I

[21] Andrea del Sarto's interest in Augustine's theology is consistent with the saint's intellectual legacy. See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 1-28; Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation*, 3-13. For a discussion of Augustine's theory of reform and its reception among Renaissance intellectuals, see Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 153-283; idem., "Die mittelalterliche Reform-Idee und ihr Verhältnis zur Idee der Renaissance," 31-59; Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, xiii-xxvii, et. pass. See also O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform*, 1-18.

broached in my opening paragraph. The act of inquiring into Andrea's predilections for reform theology paints a different picture of the artist's life and work than the one handed down to us by critical tradition and, especially, by Giorgio Vasari.

A quick glance at one of the most interesting tales in *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori e scultori e architettori* makes this difference quite apparent. The tale concerns an event that occurred in Florence during an outbreak of plague in 1522. At this time, Vasari writes, one of the city's native sons, a young painter named Perino del Vaga, returned home from an extended stay in Rome, where he studied and became an independent artist. "*Secondo il costume antico*," a delegation of local practitioners decided to treat the expatriate to a tour of their city's monuments. Pausing before the frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, the locals began discussing Masaccio's achievements, which, in their opinion, outstripped the accomplishments of any painter working in their own time.

This pause was a cunning trap designed to place the returning youth in an unenviable position. Perino had two choices. He could agree with their assessment of Masaccio's achievements and admit publicly that, as one who trained in Rome, he had studied lesser examples. A statement of this nature would not only undermine his professional position but also strike a blow against the Roman *maniera* itself. Or he could challenge the view articulated by the Florentines. In this case, Perino would also be challenging Masaccio, a brazen act within the walls of Florence that might very well offend every potential patron who took pride in the towering legacy of that eminent figure.

The young painter boldly chose the latter course of action. He stated openly that he knew of many moderns whose work was more resolute (*più risoluti*), richer in grace (*più graziati*), and much more beautiful (*molto più belle*) than the frescoes in Santa Maria del Carmine. These statements were answered by the leader of the Florentine delegation, who invited the brash challenger to show the community this more exalted style by executing a new figure in the Brancacci Chapel, so that an accurate assessment might be made. Vasari describes this speaker only as a premier proponent of the Florentine tradition, as "*un maestro tenuto il primo in Fiorenza nella pittura*."[22] There is a consensus among scholars, however, that this description can refer to one artist and one artist alone: Andrea del Sarto.[23]

That Vasari did not mention Andrea by name is a perplexing piece of information, even more so given the fact that Vasari trained in Andrea's workshop from around 1525 to 1527. When we place this calculated omission against Vasari's *vita* of Andrea, however, the author's intentions become clear. According to the biographer, Andrea del Sarto was a rare talent, a brilliant technician who rose high enough to serve at the court of King Francis I, but who lacked the sense of boldness necessary to sustain this level of achievement. Andrea, in effect, preferred life in a small republican city filled with friends and loved ones to a place at the French court, even if the latter offered more prestige and a higher social standing. This preference jarred with the rhetorical interest of *Le vite*, a text designed to promote the circumstances of Vasari's career, the image of the court artist, and the agenda of the

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[22] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 5, 125-126.

[23] Parma Armani, *Perin del Vaga*, 51; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 155; Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 186-191. Shearman anticipated this line of argument without explicitly identifying Andrea as Vasari's "*maestro*" in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 99 n. 2.

Medici state.[24] For this reason—for what he took to be Andrea's grievous sin—Vasari interpreted the facts of Andrea's life in an unflattering light.[25] Timidity, missed opportunities, and the persistent obstructions of an overbearing wife are the prominent themes in the biography of this painter. Events that contradicted this interpretive strategy had to be managed carefully. A clever trap set for an impetuous young competitor in the Brancacci Chapel thus becomes the work of a nameless *maestro*. For the name "Andrea del Sarto" was already Vasari's "negative exemplum,"[26] a counterpoint to the laudable examples set by other artists who possessed what the author considered proper pride and ambition.

Vasari's rhetoric has proven quite powerful over the years. It was especially influential during the nineteenth century. The author's slanted biography of Andrea del Sarto found favorable reception in Alfred de Musset's theatrical play, *André del Sarto* (1833) and, most famously of course, in Robert Browning's dramatic monologue.[27] In Browning's fictional rendition, Andrea watches a sunset over Fiesole, contemplates his professional shortcomings, but finds solace in the fact that his wife, Lucrezia del Fede, is beautiful. In pure Vasarian spirit, however, Lucrezia emerges from Browning's text as a less than a faithful companion. Vasari's spirit is evident, as well, in the nineteenth-century monographic tradition, where commentators consistently defined Andrea's artistic personality in terms that opposed

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[24] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 1-8.

[25] See Pilliod, *Pontormo, Bronzino, Allori*, 1-10. Interestingly, Vasari's treatment of Andrea resonates with the author's attempts to marginalize a genealogy of painters that can be traced back to Andrea's workshop.

[26] Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 15, 21-78

[27] Other examples of the nineteenth-century treatment of Andrea's life are discussed in Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 2-6.

the idea of the "brilliant technician" to the image of an artist with intellectual predispositions.[28]

This sense of Andrea's artistic personality persisted well into the twentieth century, owing in large part to the formidable, and formative, influence of Heinrich Wölfflin. A Swiss scholar and a major exponent of the formalist methodology, Wölfflin published an assessment of the early sixteenth century entitled *Klassische Kunst* in 1898. This book sought to define 'High Renaissance' art, a notion commonly used among scholars of the late nineteenth century, but which lacked precision as a critical locution. Wölfflin, in turn, defined the 'High Renaissance' as the culmination of efforts among early modern artists and intellectuals to embody the cultural legacy of antiquity—hence the term, 'classic' style. He produced a set of chronological limits, c.1500-1525.[29] And, within those limits, he elaborated on the period's rise and decline. This last part of his analysis incorporated the Vasarian tradition. In separate chapters, Wölfflin traced the stylistic evolution of five artists: Leonardo, Michelangelo (whose work warranted two chapters), Raphael, Fra Bartolommeo, and Andrea del Sarto. Andrea himself became the "swan song" of the 'classic' style, his supposed shortcomings a premonition of the entire period's decline. The situation is made quite clear at the outset of Wölfflin's account of the artist's work. "Andrea del Sarto has been called superficial and soulless, and it is true that there are mediocre pictures by him and that in his later years he tended to sink

[28] See Guinness, *Andrea del Sarto*, v. "If the French are right in saying '*le style c'est l'homme*', it is in the works [of Andrea del Sarto that] these words are best verified. Pre-occupied with no sterile reasoning, busy with no research after philosophic ideas, never seeking in literature the inspiration of his art, he is above all and before all—*painter*—who approaches nature with a frank sincerity before which she opens to him her most profound secrets, while he interprets them with a force so completely victorious over every difficulty of technique that the effort appears to be to him but as child's-play, and his utterances but a further manifestation of her intimate mysteries."

[29] See Burke, "Inventing the High Renaissance," 11-14.

comfortably into routine; he is the only one of the first-rate talents who seems to have had some defect in his moral constitution."[30]

In 1963, several decades after Wölfflin's words appeared in print, the scholar's assessment of this painter struck a deep chord with Sydney Freedberg, whose monograph and catalogue raisonné of Andrea del Sarto's life and work continues to shape scholarly discussion.[31] Freedberg ordered Andrea's oeuvre and charted his stylistic development in ways that refined our sense of the 'classic' style, a term he defines as "of the highest class."[32] Andrea, he argues, developed as a painter by essentially climbing a ladder of artistic genius—"genius" being a self-evident creative principle in Freedberg's account. At the top of this ladder sat Leonardo and Michelangelo, the artists who invented the 'classic' style as Andrea was nearing the end of his training. Over time, their particular innovations, emanating from their work in an almost Platonic fashion, influenced the creations of other artists.[33] Freedberg arranges these protagonists into a hierarchy, so that Raphael ranks just below his older colleagues, followed closely by Fra Bartolommeo. Other, lesser painters file onto respective rungs.

Andrea del Sarto begins his career at the ladder's base. His earliest works, those dating between 1506 and 1514, detail how he acquired a mastery of naturalistic techniques, how he studied the lessons of the Quattrocento masters, and how he then

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[30] Wölfflin, *Classic Art*, 155.

[31] See Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 127-151; Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 181-274.

[32] Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 14. In this regard, Freedberg's study of Andrea del Sarto develops themes he explored in more detail two years previously, in *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*.

[33] See Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 14. "The innovators of this classical style developed it and demonstrated it with an authority that compelled their contemporaries to reshape their art, and for the artists of succeeding generations of the sixteenth century this style remained an inescapable precondition with which they had to deal."

began to approach higher planes of artistic expression. This development comes about as Andrea internalizes the lessons of his peers, so that it is possible for Freedberg to speak of the painter's work in terms of Raphaelisms and Leonardesque qualities, as predicated on Michelangelo's example, or as based on Bartolommeo's model. Between 1514 and 1521, Freedberg sensed an important shift in Andrea's style, a shift that marked his entrance into maturity. His figures became more monumental, his compositions more unified and harmonious, more balanced and geometrical in arrangement. These qualities, particularly the notion of formal unity—of the composition as "integer"[34]—elevated Andrea's art to the "highest class" of pictorial excellence. He crossed that threshold definitively around 1517, and from then on Andrea's paintings are comparable to Raphael's Roman creations. Andrea begins to withdraw from this level of supreme execution sometime between 1524 and 1527, at which point he enters into a final and, for Freedberg, unequivocal phase of decline. This phase lasts until the artist's death in 1530. Freedberg borrows from both Wölfflin and Vasari here, framing Andrea's decline as an intellectual crisis, which resulted in a loss of artistic vitality, and which betrayed an underlying lack of self-confidence.[35]

A significant set of assumptions informs Freedberg's treatment of Andrea del Sarto. Freedberg is, first and foremost, committed to the notion that art history belongs to the larger field of intellectual history, that thinking and knowledge manifest themselves in an artist's treatment of pictorial form. He is also committed to

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[34] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, 17.

[35] See Dvorák, "On El Greco and Mannerism," 191-205. Freedberg's views on Andrea's supposed crisis marry well with certain historiographical trends in the commentary on 'Mannerism'. Dvorák's discussion, which presents 'Mannerism' as a type of spiritual crisis, is a case in point.

the idea of cultural unity, a notion powerfully operative in nineteenth-century scholarship. In essence, Freedberg interprets an artist's formal rhythms as evidence of an artistic temperament shaped by the larger fluctuations of a historical environment.[36] Andrea del Sarto's later works are thus particularly interesting for Freedberg, as the painter remained committed to the 'classic' style while other artists were engaging in 'post-classical' experiments, creating the overly idealized, hyper-sophisticated works of art that might be described as *manieroso*. Andrea's paintings, then, demonstrate that "the 'Triumph of Mannerism' in Florence after 1520" was neither sudden nor complete.[37] But, in their shortcomings, and because of the artist's personal deficiencies, these same paintings also show us what Freedberg might call an empty 'classicism.' After 1524, Andrea's artistic style was no longer equipped to address the cultural "climate—sophisticated, unsettled, and compelled to introspection—[that] helped to shape the experiments from which the thesis of the Mannerist style came."[38]

The first true challenges to this tradition of commentary, focused as it is on the artist's supposed limitations, appeared shortly after the publication of Freedberg's monograph. In 1965, Raffaele Monti published his own study of Andrea del Sarto, attacking the tendency towards what he called "pseudo-historical prejudice,"[39] that is, the tendency to frame the artist as a passive or timid individual. By means of extricating Andrea from such a problematic framework, Monti attempted to analyze Andrea's personality and delineate his position within the sixteenth-century artistic

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[36] See Barolsky, "Sydney J. Freedberg, Historian and Critic," 135-142.

[37] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, vii. Cf. Friedlander, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting*, 3-43.

[38] Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 177.

[39] Monti, *Andrea del Sarto*, 14.

community without relying on the categories of 'classicism' and 'Mannerism.'[40] In this regard, however, Monti might have misjudged the mood of Renaissance scholars at the time, many of whom preferred to interrogate such stylistic categories.[41]

One such individual was John Shearman. Shearman's monograph on Andrea del Sarto, which includes a catalogue raisonné, marks a radical departure in the scholarship on this artist. His study managed, for instance, to disentangle the critical appreciation of Andrea's paintings from the rhetoric of Vasari's biography. And it did so in a manner that, unlike the studies by Freedberg or Monti, expanded the scope of the monographic tradition—or, at least, the monographic tradition as conceived by scholars around the middle of the twentieth century.[42] Whereas Freedberg's argument is concise and focused, offering a consideration of Andrea's art that revolves around a single theme (the 'classic' style), Shearman adopts a series of analytical lenses. He explores Andrea's artistic decisions in ways that broach the question of patronage; that take into account particular physical settings; that open onto discussions of iconographic traditions; and that look to a variety of pictorial sources. These sources include Italian paintings as well as northern prints. The image of Andrea that emerges from his pages is that of a pious, generous individual, a painter possessed of a quiet brilliance that does not wane in his final years. This approach allowed Shearman to reconsider the larger issue of stylistic labels. Andrea's work, he argues, might be classified as 'High Renaissance' in one instance, as 'Mannerist' in the next, and as

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[40] Monti, *Andrea del Sarto*, 13-17. In a manner comparable to Freedberg, Monti's attempts to position Andrea within the artistic community prioritize the artist's reception of other painters, Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo especially.

[41] See Cheney, "Introduction: Stylistic Problems in Mannerism and *Maniera*," 1-8.

[42] For a more developed consideration of the monographic tradition, see Guercio, *Art as Existence*, 2-23, 226-261.

‘proto-Baroque’ in another. This realization is one of the many novelties of Shearman’s analysis. He allows these stylistic categories not only to co-exist, but also to sit comfortably alongside one another, even to intermingle within a single picture.

This novelty is particularly evident in a truly brilliant chapter on color. As Shearman maintains, Andrea’s treatment of color develops over the course of his career, “from an initial proportion of his style that is normal among the more gifted Renaissance artists towards an abnormally dominant position among his apparent ambitions in his latest work.”[43] Shearman, in a rather dramatic break with tradition, interprets these late works in terms of the cultivation of *maniera*, an artistic ideal that had already come to define his incredibly influential understanding of ‘Mannerism’.[44] By his account, then, Andrea del Sarto is not the “swan song” of the ‘classic’ style or a “holdover” from a bygone era. He is, instead, the point of continuity between two historical periods.

The way in which Shearman interprets this painter and his place in history speaks, ultimately, to an issue of method. Wölfflin and Freedberg were primarily concerned with codifying those formal properties that allow us to fit, or maybe, to compress Andrea del Sarto into the (supraindividual) stylistic categories that made up their historiographic systems. Shearman, on the other hand, was more prone to refashion those stylistic categories and use them only insofar as they illuminated the

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[43] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131.

[44] See Shearman, “*Maniera* as an Aesthetic Ideal,” 200-221. See idem., *Mannerism*, 15-48, quotation below from 23. This observation touches on one of the most compelling and, at the time of its publication (1967), controversial theses of Shearman’s *Mannerism*. “Mannerism,” he maintains, “was latent in the preceding period to the same extent as were the many Baroque tendencies in sixteenth-century art, and it was as logical a sequel. One of the most characteristic things about Mannerism is that its birth was ideally easy and attended by no crisis.” For an insightful overview of the reception of this thesis, see Elizabeth Cropper’s Introduction to *Mannerism and Maniera* by Craig Hugh Smyth, 12-21.

cultural and deeply personal circumstances that informed Andrea del Sarto's choices as an artist. We see, in this instance, Shearman's unflinching support of an analytic system that privileges the concerns and critical terminology of the period under examination. This methodological orientation finds forthright expression in his *Mannerism*, a book published two years after his monograph on Andrea del Sarto. It appears, again, in Shearman's 1988 A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts:

> It goes without saying, I would have thought, that we cannot step right outside our time, avoiding, as it were, all contamination by contemporary ideologies and intervening histories; but 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 unreflexive 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.[45]

Many art historians, including many initial readers of Shearman's *Andrea del Sarto*, have cast an admiring gaze upon this sentiment, this sense of what it means to study history.[46] And yet, as noted at the very beginning of this study, a period of relative silence descended upon Andrea's work after 1965. That silence broke only when conservators undertook a large-scale restoration project in preparation for a celebratory exhibition in 1986, marking the five-hundredth anniversary of Andrea's birth.[47] This project, as well as the accompanying exhibition catalogue, helped free Andrea's paintings from accumulated layers of discoloring varnish, real and figurative. The subtle work of recovery continued, as well, in the 1994 exhibition,

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[45] Shearman, *Only Connect*, 4-5. See also, idem., *Mannerism*, 136.

[46] Note, for examples, the striking connections among Shearman, *Mannerism*, 81-91; Summers, "*Maniera* and Movement," 273-313; idem., "Contrapposto," 336-361; Cole, "The *Figura Sforzata*," 520-551; idem., *Ambitious Form*, 1-20. One might compare, as well, Shearman, *Only Connect*, 44-58 and Cole, "Cellini's Blood," 215-235.

[47] See *Andrea del Sarto, 1486-1530: Dipinti e disegni a Firenze*. The Louvre also put on an exhibition titled *Hommage à Andrea del Sarto* in 1986. Shearman reviewed these shows in "The Exhibitions for Andrea del Sarto's Fifth Centenary," 498-502.

L'officina della maniera, before reaching a culmination of sorts in 1998. At this point, Antonio Natali—a contributor to both exhibitions just mentioned—published his own assessment of Andrea's career.

Natali's volume does not offer a revised catalogue raisonné or a traditional assessment of the artist's style. Instead, the author uses Andrea's biography as a framework for an "extended essay"[48] on what he calls the spirit underlying the painter's visual poetics. Natali analyzes these poetics by focusing on Andrea's participation in a number of different cultural circumstances. These circumstances range from specific commissions, to the discussions Andrea had with his peers while studying the famous Battle cartoons by Leonardo and Michelangelo, to the even more stimulating theoretical conversations that took place within the studio of Baccio d'Agnolo, the architect and woodcarver who served as Andrea's collaborator on a number of occasions. This approach allowed Natali to explore the artist's extensive social connections, as well as the painter's interest in certain humanist and theological ideals—notions that are difficult to reconcile with Vasari's biography.

More so than any previous commentator, in fact, Natali writes against the image of Andrea promoted by Vasari. Natali presents Andrea del Sarto as a figure who consciously adopted a moral code of austerity, a code grounded in Ciceronian ethics and in the teachings of Girolamo Savonarola, the Dominican preacher who briefly rose to political prominence during Andrea's youth.[49] Natali argues, above all, that Andrea was a refined, intelligent painter with deep sympathies for his local

[48] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 8.

[49] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 67-93. Carlo del Bravo first posited a connection between Andrea's art and Savonarola's ideas in "Andrea del Sarto," 463-483.

culture and his spiritual environment.[50] He was "a major master of the *maniera moderna*, and at the same time...one of the most vibrant and articulated voices of Reformed Catholic culture."[51]

This reading finds an important measure of support in later sixteenth-century artistic commentaries—commentaries that also fascinated Shearman. Raffaello Borghini's *Il Riposo* (1584), a work often discussed in terms of the "Counter-Reformation," is perhaps the best known of these sources. Andrea's *vita* receives special attention in this text, which includes a dialogue among four friends concerning the status and purpose of religious art.[52] When it comes to presenting Andrea in a favorable light, however, the writings of Francesco Bocchi outshine even Borghini's efforts. Bocchi's affinity for Andrea's art is born, ultimately, of the fact that the two Florentines shared common interests. These interests, which range from matters of spirituality to matters of cultural politics, find expression in Bocchi's guidebook to the monuments of Florence, *Le Bellezze della Citta di Fiorenza* (1591), as well as in his essay, *Discorso sopra l'eccellenza dell'opera d'Andrea del Sarto* (1567). In both texts, the author displays a remarkable level of discernment when

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[50] Cf. Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 12-20. Wellen challenges Natali's interpretation of Andrea's character, framing the painter instead in terms of burlesque culture. Her argument derives from admirable discussions of two c*ompagnie di piacere*, which included Andrea among their members. In spite of Wellen's objections, I am sympathetic towards Natali's argument, which places more emphasis on Andrea's paintings. I have no doubt that Andrea enjoyed the social frivolities Wellen suggests, but I see no reason to suppose that a propensity for burlesque humor and a strong sense of piety are mutually exclusive.

[51] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 9.

[52] For an excellent discussion of Borghini's text and the challenges facing late sixteenth-century painters, see Lingo, "Raffaello Borghini and the Corpus of Florentine Art in an Age of Reform," 113-135.

discussing Andrea's pictures. According to him, the artist's paintings constitute an exceptionally elegant brand of mute poetry.[53]

The values and intellectual habits of these authors are intimately related to those of the artist and his collaborators, his patrons and advisors. What these later sixteenth-century commentaries give us, then, is a way of addressing the sustained and self-conscious modes of viewing practiced by individuals who lived around Andrea's time. Implicit in the writers' discussions of the painter's work is the idea that altarpieces existed within an environment of theoretical and spiritual discourse.[54] The Renaissance spectator was one who engaged with the art object, who thought about it, and who frequently answered the object's call for speech, whether in prayer or with praise, or both.[55] This realization, of course, places a certain premium on the observations recorded by Bocchi, Borghini, and, yes, by Vasari, as well, even as it requires an awareness of how the authors' rhetorical interests shaped the texts we use as evidence. I have tried to strike such a balance when I make note of these critics and their remarks in the following pages.

As this last statement suggests, I, myself, am sympathetic towards Natali's arguments, and above all to Shearman's study of Andrea del Sarto. Together, these scholars offer a culturally "embedded" understanding of this historical figure and his artistic production. As such, they speak to important shifts in art history as a discipline, as well as in the monograph as a model of art-historical scholarship. Shearman, for instance, anticipated a movement towards interests that would come to

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[53] Williams, "A Treatise by Francesco Bocchi in Praise of Andrea del Sarto," 111-139. As Williams demonstrates, Bocchi went to great lengths in order to connect Andrea's paintings to the principles outlined in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

[54] Frangenberg and Williams, "Introduction," 3-22. See also, Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto, 224-274.

[55] See Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 29-108; Shearman, *Only Connect*, 10-58.

typify the so-called "New Art History."[56] This movement involved a broadening of the discipline's investigative focus, so that relatively homogeneous discussions of style gave way to discussions of the external agencies that shaped artistic production and that defined an artist's subjectivity. Natali carries this line of investigation further. He offers an assessment of Andrea's character grounded in a prismatic conception of his work and a critical exposition of certain socio-cultural problems (such as Savonarola's spiritual ideas) that preoccupied Andrea and his contemporaries.[57]

The benefits of this approach, in terms of enriching our understanding of life in the sixteenth century, have been tremendous. But it is important to understand that these benefits have also come at a cost. When scholars of Renaissance art turned their attention away from the problems of style and stylistic development, to a certain extent they lost sight of the artist as what we might call a "singularity." This concept—borrowed from Gabriele Guercio and, ultimately, from the contemporary French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy—does not grant the human subject the status of an enduring, immutable essence. Nor does it entirely credit theories of human existence that, for instance, present the "author" solely as a function of discourse. On the contrary, the subject-as-singularity sits in the middle of this polemic, in the space between the metaphysics of presence and the critiques of deconstruction. The notion supposes the subject to be unfixed but extant as a biological given, as an irreducible

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[56] See Kaufmann, "What is 'New' about the 'New Art History'?," 515-520.

[57] There are interesting parallels among Natali's study of Andrea del Sarto and several other monographs published in the same years. See, in particular, Campbell, *Cosmè Tura*, 1-7; Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 1-5; Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 1-24. More recent studies fit comfortably within this tradition, as well. See Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 1-9; Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 2-9.

fact, or, to use Nancy's term, as "someone." This theoretical position, in turn, means that the continuum of a human life is perceived only through the dynamic of continuous being and continuous becoming.[58]

Freedberg's treatment of Andrea del Sarto is an excellent example of this dynamic. Andrea's oeuvre is a collection a paintings, a plurality, made by a single artist—a historical subject of singular talent who possessed a brand of intelligence and ambition that were uniquely his. These paintings thus constitute an indivisible body of work and allow us to address the continuum of Andrea's existence as a historical being. At the same time, however, Freedberg also traces the changes in Andrea's existence, his artistic and intellectual development, his growth, his decline. These shifts, inextricably linked to one another by the simple fact of Andrea's lifespan, delineate the artist's character of being as one who fashions and reveals himself by the actions of coming into being, that is, by his self-performance in art. If Freedberg interpreted these actions in terms of formalism and as movements towards 'classicism,' then when subsequent art historians broke with Freedberg's methodological assumptions, they also fractured his finely delineated portrait of Andrea del Sarto's singularity, reworking its pieces into a mosaic of the historical contexts Andrea once inhabited.[59]

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[58] Guercio, *Art as Existence*, 8-11. See also, Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 1-100. Cf. Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 142-148; Foucault, "What is an Author?," 101-120, quotation below from 117-118. In some respects, Nancy's concept of "singularity" allows us to answer a question Foucault asked at the end of his famous essay. "It would seem that one could also, beginning with analyses of this type [i.e. his essay], reexamine the privileges of the subject…perhaps one must return to this question, not in order to reestablish the theme of an originating subject, but to grasp the subject's points of insertion, modes of function, and system of dependencies…How can it activate the rules of language from within and thus give rise to the designs which are properly its own?...How, under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse?"

[59] This tendency is particularly evident in Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 1-20.

By inquiring into Andrea's stylistic development as a means of addressing his spiritual education, or, more specifically, as a means of charting his increasingly nuanced understanding of reform theology, the present study intervenes within the traditions of the art-historical monograph. My aim, here, is to recover the sense of Andrea del Sarto's singularity. For it is my conviction that, by paying attention to the particular dialectic of being and becoming that defined Andrea's existence within the social contexts of early modern altarpiece painting, we can contribute much to the larger scholarly discussion of Italian Renaissance art history. This contribution has everything to do with my phrase, the "art of reform."

This construction, the "art of reform," comprises terms of considerable interest within the fields of early modern studies.[60] After all, that the Renaissance saw the emergence of something like our own modern conception of "art" is a commonplace among scholars and students today, especially among those who have come across Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence*. In this important study, Belting established a powerful theoretical framework, describing the "image" and the "work of art" as two separate orders of crafted objects. The "image," he argues, was a point of access to the divine. Worshipers venerated this type of object and utilized it in an anthropological sense, placing it within the realms of belief and desire. The "work of art," by contrast, was a type of authorial product, a marker of its maker's skill, personal *maniera*, and social persona. According to Belting's line of reasoning, "art" emerged during the Renaissance as a response to religious problems that culminated in the Reformation. Debates regarding the spiritual efficacy of good works and the

[60] See Michael Cole's editorial remarks in *Sixteenth-Century Italian Art*, ed. M. Cole, 243-245, 303-305.

authority of the clergy called into question the entire economy of pious spending that supported the production of religious imagery. These problems compelled practitioners of the visual arts, as well as intellectuals sympathetic to their cause, to generate a new system of support and justification. They, in turn, created a critical vocabulary for artistic production, a new cultural discourse, "a hermeneutics of art."[61] This newly formed language resituated phenomena such as religious painting in a type of discursive space that differed from the established conventions of Christian culture, a type of discursive space that resembles the modern museum more than the medieval church. The Renaissance period itself, insofar as religious imagery is concerned, thus became a period of crisis. The history of the "image" was ending, the era of "art" was beginning, and those involved in the production of visual media—patrons, artists, and clerics—had to navigate new terrain.

The question of how Renaissance artists actually navigated this terrain has become inextricably linked to art-historical discussions of reform, thanks in large part to the significant contributions of Marcia B. Hall and Alexander Nagel. Building on, but also questioning Belting's theoretical framework, both of these scholars have recently developed historical narratives that complicate much of what we previously thought about sixteenth-century Italian art. Whereas earlier commentators tended to view questions of "reform" in terms of restrictions placed on artistic license, Hall and Nagel present such questions as important stimuli for artistic innovation.

Hall's analysis of Renaissance religious imagery, for instance, revolves around a widespread sense of anxiety. As painters became more adept at recreating natural appearances, she maintains, intellectuals began to worry that religious pictures

[61] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 1-17, 458-490. Quotation from 459.

could too easily support the practice of idolatry. They worried, as well, that the sensuous appeal of naturalistic pictures might distract the worshiper from his or her devotional activities. Artists of the early sixteenth century, by way of responding to this conflicted state of affairs, created a new style of visual address. They used devices affiliated with the "hermeneutics of art" in order to distance the beholder from the sacred narratives they rendered in visible form. Hall maintains that idealized figures and geometrically arranged compositions complicated any easy relationship between the painted figures and reality, allowing artistic likenesses to mediate notions of divine presence. In other words, in the conceptual space separating the worshiper from the sacred, artists interposed their own interpretations and inventions. What we, today, recognize as "art" thus originated as an intervention within Renaissance religious experience. This strategy, Hall argues, lasted until the Council of Trent clarified the function of religious imagery, allowing artists to address the beholder directly by engaging the senses and appealing to the emotions.[62]

Nagel's view of pre-Tridentine Italy is even more complex. The cultural conflict between the traditions of the "image" and the emergence of "art" precipitated what Nagel terms a state of "controversy." In this state, painters and sculptors devised a variety of strategies to interrogate the very pictorial devices associated with the new heightened conceptions of artistic production. The purpose of such interrogation was to reinvent the category of the sacred "image," or more specifically, to "save art for religion."[63] Towards this end, Renaissance artists excavated the foundations of painting, exploring the modes and status of drawing. They revisited antique and

[62] Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*, 1-15. See also idem., "Introduction," 1-20. Cf. O'Malley, "Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholics' Senses of the Sensuous," 28-48.

[63] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 9.

antique-style statuary as a means of recovering a more "primitive" sense of religiosity. Some members of the artistic and intellectual communities even promoted what Nagel calls a "soft iconoclasm."[64] These individuals explored alternatives to religious pictures by devising innovative architectural presentations of the sacred tabernacle that housed the blessed Host.[65] Each mode of inquiry, Nagel argues, produced new and innovative types of art, even new temporalities for art.[66] And yet, according to this line of reasoning, each mode of inquiry stems from the same intellectual impulse. Each involves "a good deal of thinking about the origins of image-making, however those origins might be imagined."[67]

This meditation on the origins of image-making fits comfortably alongside a broader cultural interest in restoring artistic practice to an imagined earlier state of purity and decorum. According to most scholars today, that interest defines the term "reform" as it applies to the arts.[68] Indeed, we are accustomed to discussing the "reform of art,"[69] a construction that recalls not only the edicts of the Council of Trent, but also the fiery sermons of Savonarola, as well as locutions such as "Counter-Reformation" and "Counter-Maniera."[70] In each instance, we are approaching the tensions and conflicts that arose when seemingly progressive pictorial strategies associated with the advent of artistic self-consciousness came up

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[64] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 10.

[65] See Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 1-10.

[66] See Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna," 647-668; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 7-19.

[67] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 2.

[68] For particularly insightful arguments that operate in this manner, see Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 1-9, 125-141; O'Malley, "Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholics' Senses of the Sensuous," 28-48; Gaston, "How Words Control Images," 74-90; Lingo, "Raffaello Borghini and the Corpus of Florentine Art in an Age of Reform," 113-135.

[69] See Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 1-22.

[70] See Hall, *After Raphael*, 173-214. These themes are explored, as well, in the author's, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation*.

against the authoritative traditions of religious practice. Or, to put it another way, the dominant understanding of "reform" in the arts is predicated on the supposition that "the category 'religious art' cannot be taken for granted,"[71] because the Renaissance religious picture, the altarpiece, in particular, "is a genre that serves two masters, art and the Church."[72] "In Italy," that is, "People did not experience two kinds of images but images with a double face, depending on whether they were seen as receptacles of the holy or as expressions of art."[73]

My construction, the "art of reform," rests on a different conviction. There are moments—many moments, I dare say—when the spheres of Renaissance art and religion worked together in perfect harmony, when they were indistinguishable from one another, when the glowing "face" that confronted the beholder of a Renaissance altarpiece was an exceptionally expressive system of artifice that inspired a desire to see God, as it were, "face to face" (1 Co 13:12).[74] In these instances, which fall outside the purview of the conflict narrative, the very developments that reshaped particular kinds of crafted objects into cultural products belonging to a higher level of intellection ("art") not only afforded Christian worshipers access to some of the most ancient articles of their faith. They also invite us, historians interested in the artistic culture of "Early Modern Catholicism,"[75] to search out an understanding of "reform" that corresponds to the internal realm of human experiences. This task, exploring the links between artistic expression and the interior domain of spiritual desire associated

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[71] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 2.
[72] Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*, 1.
[73] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458.
[74] My thoughts, here, strike a chord with Barolsky, "Naturalism and the Visionary Art of the Early Renaissance," 57-64; idem., "The History of Italian Renaissance Art Re-envisioned," 243-250; idem., "The Visionary Experience of Renaissance Art," 174-181.
[75] I am adopting the term, "Early Modern Catholicism," from O'Malley, *Trent and All That*, 1-15.

with reform as theological concept, has serious ramifications for how we imagine the role of the artist in Renaissance society. That Andrea himself painted in ways that invoke patristic writings on the relationship between humanity and divinity is, in many respects, a tantalizing hypothesis. For while his experiences were unique—or should I say, singular—they just might cast fresh light on the rich intellectual lives artists led at this point in history, as well as on the richness of human experience itself. In this regard, my study belongs to the wider field of humanistic inquiry, as much as it does to the field of Renaissance art history.

Chapter 1: A Touch of Reform in the *Noli me tangere*

Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent back over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me [*Noli me tangere*], for I have not yet returned to the Father."

Jn 20:10-17.

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Andrea del Sarto painted his *Noli me tangere* (Fig.1) in 1510, his twenty-fourth year of age.[76] He was young, ambitious, and grappling for the first time with the challenge of producing an altar painting.[77] Part of this challenge required balancing his need to cultivate a professional reputation with the interests of the other individuals involved in the project. Andrea exchanged ideas with at least one of the Augustinian friars at the San Gallo convent, his now-nameless iconographic and theological advisor. He

[76] The fact that he was sharing a workshop with Franciabigio during the year of 1510 makes it necessary to justify assigning the creative burst of energy that is the *Noli me tangere* to Andrea alone. Thankfully, there are a few definitive pieces of evidence that allow us to make a compelling attribution. Vasari, for instance, discusses this painting only in the life of Andrea del Sarto. And while Antonio Natali's keen eye detects the presence of Franciabigio "in the solid and well-turned form of the Magdalene, which seems carved of wood" (Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 32), the Magdalene's features are based on one of Andrea's drawings, a figure study made in preparation for this panel. See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 327. Christ's physiognomy is even more particular in its correspondence to Andrea's figure type. The body of this Christ, moreover, gives ample testimony to Shearman's assessment of Andrea as a colorist: this gifted artist was among the first painters to truly engage Leonardo da Vinci's system of color and chiaroscuro. I discuss this issue at some length below. See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-135; idem., "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 13-47. I discuss this issue at some length below.

[77] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 203-204, 387-388.

consulted with some member or members of the Morelli family, the Florentine citizens who commissioned this panel for their burial chapel, second to the left of the apse in the San Gallo church.[78] In this regard, Andrea most likely dealt with Leonardo di Lorenzo Morelli, a silk merchant whose features appear in a contemporaneous scene from the San Benizzi cycle (Fig.7) and in Andrea's slightly later *St. Tobias Altarpiece* (Fig.8).[79] Each of these parties—patron, advisor, and artist—had a stake in the *Noli me tangere* itself, meaning that Andrea took on a particular set of social responsibilities in accepting his contract. His task was to create one powerful demonstration of artistic skill that would satisfy a wealthy Florentine family, a prominent religious institution, as well as his own aspirations to become a presence within the Florentine artistic community.[80]

We can speak about the "patron's payoff"[81] in only the most general sense. This is due in large part to the absence of documentary material pertaining to the *Noli me tangere*, to the loss of the altarpiece's original frame and predella, as well as to our incomplete record of the Morelli family and its affairs.[82] Leonardo Morelli, at least, was an educated man. He studied in Pisa and owned several religious and classical texts. He himself authored two chronicles of Florentine history in the

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[78] Cecchi, "Profili di amici e committenti," 45. Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 138, n.443.

[79] Lydecker, "The Patron, Date, and Original Location of Andrea del Sarto's Tobias Altar-Piece," 349-353. Significantly, the figure identified in as Leonardo Morelli in the San Benizzi cycle has already been connected to the *Noli me tangere*. See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 16.

[80] On the social dynamics of altarpiece commissions, see Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 1-27; Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 76-83; O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 1-12, 163-221.

[81] I am borrowing this phrase, which is intimately related to the economy of information and game theory, and which describes the way patrons signal social status and affiliation through conspicuous consumption, from Nelson and Zeckhauser's introduction to *The Patron's Payoff*, 1-15.

[82] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 20-21.

1520s.[83] These pieces of information suggest that Morelli was a patron with deep sympathies for spiritual learning and for the cultural traditions of his native city. Andrea not only shared these sympathies. He also gave them form and color in the *Noli me tangere*, a fact that probably helps explain why Leonardo Morelli was so pleased with Andrea's work as to continue their professional relationship well past the completion of this panel.

In this regard, Morelli was not alone. Indeed, in the eyes of sixteenth-century observers, Andrea's first venture into the realm of altar painting was a shining success. Bocchi described the figures in the *Noli me tangere* as moving with "*bellissima grazia*."[84] Vasari was of the opinion that the coloring imparts "a certain softness and harmony that is sweetness itself."[85] The *Noli me tangere* was "so well executed," Vasari continues, "that it resulted in [Andrea] making two other panels not long afterwards for the same church."[86] It would seem, then, that the Augustinians were pleased with Andrea's work, as well.[87] They presumably found it to be artful and sophisticated, but also—in accordance with the standard demands placed on altarpieces during this period—instructive in Church doctrine and capable of inspiring piety.

That this panel received such a favorable reception among its initial audiences, especially among those predisposed towards spiritual learning, tells us a

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[83] Lydecker, "The Patron, Date, and Original Location of Andrea del Sarto's Tobias Altar-Piece," 351.

[84] Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 145.

[85] Vasari, *Le vite,* vol. 4, 346. "la quale opera per colorito e per una certa morbidezza et unione è dolce per tutto."

[86] Vasari, *Le vite,* vol. 4, 346. "che ella fu cagione che non molto poi ne fece due altre nella medesima chiesa."

[87] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 32. Natali convincingly outlines the prominent role played by the San Gallo Augustinians in directing altarpiece commissions to Andrea.

great deal about the nature of Andrea del Sarto's artistic ambitions at this very early stage in his career.[88] The collaborative nature of the Renaissance commissioning process necessarily entailed a type of intellectual exchange that fed into Andrea's own inventive proclivities. The pressures of working for a learned patron, and in particular of working with an advisor well versed in Christian theology, compelled this talented if relatively untried painter to grapple, not only with the artistic milieu of Cinquecento Florence, but also with some profound theological ideas.

Augustine, whose considerable influence on the history of early modern thought could only have been more pronounced within the San Gallo community, was one of the most important interpreters of John 20:17.[89] For this Father of the Church, Christ's words, "*noli me tangere*," enter into larger discussions concerning the nature of the senses, the relationship between knowledge and faith, and the mystery of the Incarnation.[90] These issues, I want to suggest, blend seamlessly in Augustine's mind with the imperative of reform, with the notion of pious desire, and with the theologian's ideal of Christian subjectivity. For these specific ideas, I argue, inspired Andrea del Sarto and as his advisor in the production of the *Noli me tangere*.[91]

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[88] Cf. Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 11; Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 228; Kleinbub, "To Sow the Heart," 86-87; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 35. My thoughts concerning Andrea's artistic ambitions and innovations stand in opposition to the standard interpretation of the *Noli me tangere*. The majority of modern commentators consider Andrea del Sarto's approach to the "*noli me tangere*" theme as a paradigmatic example of the artistic conventions, which is merely a diplomatic way of describing his painting as derivative. Natali suggests that at this stage in his career, "It is perhaps too soon to make any claims as to the extent to which Andrea del Sarto may have participated in theological questions."

[89] On Augustine's reception among the intellectual community of Renaissance Italy, see Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 1-28, et. pass.

[90] For an excellent overview of these themes and their connection to the *Noli me tangere*, see Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," esp. 1-16, 316-335.

[91] See Baert, "Mary Magdalene in *Noli me tangere*," 191. The idea of pious desire accords nicely with a literal reading of Christ's utterance, "*noli me tangere*," which translates as "do not wish to touch me," indicating an expression of the will. For an insightful exegesis of the phrase "*noli me tangere*," see Bieringer, "*Noli me tangere* and the New Testament," 13-27.

The Augustinian intellectual who devised the iconography of this panel wove together thematic elements taken primarily from Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, but also from his sermons and other published works, such as *De Trinitate*, as well as from the Bible itself.[92] Working with two different strategies of signification, one based on the human figure, the other on the exegetical *figura*, Andrea's advisor expounded on Augustine's thought, putting forth a penetrating interpretation of Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene and its relevance to the Christian Church. Of particular interest was the idea of "spiritual touching," a notion that signified faith and understanding, and that—in ways that remain to be explored—intersects with Augustine's theories of vision and the visionary.

For this theologian, the mechanics of corporeal and spiritual sight actually entailed a type of metaphysical touching.[93] Understanding, in other words, is not only a matter of seeing something clearly with the mind's eye. At a basic level, it is a matter of intellectual contact, of tactile continuity between the human soul and that which it considers.[94] In his reading of Christ's words, "*noli me tangere*," the ties linking understanding, sight, and touch afford Augustine the opportunity to address

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[92] Natali first connected this panel to Sermon 243 in *Andrea del Sarto*, 35, 199 n. 120. While the connections between Andrea's painting and Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John* has gone unnoticed, scholars have explored the parallels between this text and other depictions of the *Noli me tangere*. See, in particular, Kleinbub, "To Sow the Heart," 102-107.

[93] Cf. Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 316-335; Baert, "*Noli me tangere:* Six Exercises," Third Exercise; idem., "Touching with the Gaze," 43-52; idem., "Body and Embodiment," 15-39; idem., "Mary Magdalene in *Noli me tangere*," 189-221; Kleinbub, "To Sow the Heart," 81-129. While art historians have increasingly turned their attention to the role vision plays in images of the *Noli me tangere*, drawing heavily on Augustine's writings, no commentator has yet traced this issue in a way that elucidates the role touch plays in Augustine's understanding of vision.

[94] Miles, "Vision," 125-142; Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147.

the responsibilities of the devout Christian. "Understand Christ where he is co-eternal with the Father," he writes, "and you've touched him."[95]

Andrea, learning from this panel project about the complexity of Augustine's thought, directly engaged these themes in his artful handling of this painting's iconographic program. Specifically, Andrea's presentation of the resurrected Christ in this panel is a rather novel demonstration of chiaroscuro modeling, then a relatively new and unequivocally Florentine development, which changed the way artists approached the human figure.[96] In this instance, Andrea folded artistic ideals of three-dimensional form, what Leonardo da Vinci called *rilievo*, into the theological mysteries pertaining to the body of Christ. Andrea, that is, effectively married the most advanced practices of artistic communication available to him at the time, practices grounded in scientific theory and based in the traditions of his own city, to the central interests of the Christian faith.[97] This effort, the novel treatment of form he developed here in order to engage the mystery of the Incarnation, had a lasting impact on his approach to pictorial form in general.

His brushwork, which was all but unprecedented in Florentine painting, is an essential part of this narrative, as well. Andrea worked the surface of this panel with energy, leaving the movements of his hand visible by creating a feathery texture of impastos.[98] These impastos, these subtle touches, do more than simply enliven the surface of the picture. They give that surface a tactile quality that conflates the act of

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[95] Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 243.2, p. 302.

[96] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148. See also, Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 13-47; Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 63-88.

[97] Cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458-490; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 1-10, 73-100.

[98] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 135. Shearman remains the only commentator to remark upon this aspect of the *Noli me tangere*.

seeing with the idea of touching, recreating in visible terms a philosophical structure that is of the utmost importance to Augustine's thinking. The depth of the artist's consideration, of Andrea's ability to interpret his advisor's iconographic program by striking out against the traditions of Florentine painting and leaving his brushstrokes visible, betrays a level of theological understanding beyond what is normally ascribed to painters. It also betrays a concern on Andrea's part for inspiring a sense of piety in his beholder. This concern might suggest something personal, something perhaps of the artist's own piety. For within the context of this panel, the subtlety of Andrea's painterly touch directs the viewer's attention towards one of the central imperatives of Augustine's writings.

According to the Church Father, the pure intellectual effort required to understand Christ—to envision or to touch him in the spiritual sense—was an exercise that had profound effects on the human soul. It was a way of reforming the soul to its original state of image-likeness to God, of stripping off the "old self" and putting on the "new," and of transferring the will "from temporal things to eternal, from visible to intelligible, form carnal to spiritual things."[99] This, the goal of every devout Christian, the ceaseless process of spiritual renewal that is so important to the history of Christianity, became a fundamental concern for Andrea del Sarto as he stood before this panel with a brush in his hand.

[99] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 14.23, p. 389.

1.1: Figures and Figurae

The narrative that Andrea worked out with that brush is carried largely by the human figure. There is a tradition of commentary that places a great deal of emphasis on this fact. Scholars point to Andrea's ability to coordinate gestures, to his skill in harmonizing the movements among the actors that dominate his pictorial field, as evidence of a growing "distinctness of classicism in his style."[100] More importantly, however, these same pictorial qualities also tell us something about Andrea's abilities as a storyteller.

Mary Magdalene, dressed in simple blue and red garments, turns to find the resurrected Christ holding a triumphant banner and standing in a garden. His body, miraculously restored to a pristine condition, is muscular yet soft, nude save for the pale blue drapery that was his death shroud but that now hangs on his form like an ancient toga. Slightly flushed and overcome by the emotional force of this apparition, Mary drops to a knee as she reaches out towards Jesus. He, by contrast, turns away from the Magdalene's beseeching gesture, adopting a contrapposto pose that completes the reference to the ancient image of heroism.[101] The bodily exchange between the two figures, which Andrea expertly condensed into a colloquy of hands, translates perfectly the biblical phrase that serves as the panel's title. Mary extends herself in ardent desire to grasp he whose death she mourned, he whom she initially mistook for a gardener and then recognized as "Rabboni." But she pulls up short upon hearing Christ say, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father."

[100] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 11.
[101] See Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 227-228.

For religious scholars in the sixteenth century, no less than for the Church Fathers of late antiquity, the words Christ spoke at this moment contained a lesson of seminal importance.[102] As Augustine explains in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, the commandment that halts Mary's outstretched hand seems to contradict other passages from the Synoptic Gospels: "Now certainly before he ascended, he offered himself to his disciples to be touched...one also reads that women had touched Jesus, after the resurrection before he ascended to the Father. Among them was even this Mary Magdalene."[103] The women referenced here are the three *myrrhophores* or myrrh bearers, who appear in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as in the background of Andrea's panel—in the far right of the composition, just behind Christ's elbow (Fig.9).[104] By including this narrative in the painting, but awarding pride of place to the events recounted in the Gospel of John, Andrea's advisor stressed visually one of Augustine's principal points regarding the Gospels in general and John 20:17 in particular. Even when they contradict one another, the separate accounts of Jesus's life and actions are not mutually exclusive.[105] What seems to be a contradiction is simply an invitation to think anagogically, as Augustine does in his *Tractates*. Indeed, in *Tractate* 121, the Church Father concludes that Christ's words

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[102] See Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 223-266. See also Duport and Depril, "Marie-Madeleine et Jean 20, 17," 159-182.

[103] Augustine, *Tractates of the Gospel of John*, 121.3, p. 59.

[104] Mk 16: 1-6. "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said, 'You are looking for Jesus of Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him." See also Mt 28: 1-8; Lk 24: 1-11.

[105] Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 243.1, p. 302. The evangelists "don't all say everything," the Church Father writes, "things are said by some which are passed over by others. Not, however, in such a way that they must be thought to clash with each other—if there is no desire to pick holes, but a devout desire to understand."

to Mary contain some "mystical symbol,"[106] for "when Jesus gave this answer to her, he was teaching faith to a woman who recognized him and called him Master, and that Gardner was sowing a grain of mustard in her heart as though in his garden."[107]

The metaphor contained in this statement was important to Augustine, as well as to Andrea del Sarto and his advisor. The image of a "grain of mustard" is the Church Father's way of discussing the nature of a living faith, a faith that grows and strengthens over time if properly cultivated. At the same time, the analogy presents the means of cultivating that kernel of faith, for this particular phrase allows Augustine to approach the Bible itself as a living text. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, for instance, all use the same language when explaining the path to salvation: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." (Mt 13:31-32).[108]

Augustine is, in this regard, an accomplished exegete. By glossing the Gospel of John with a phrase that resonates with each of the other Gospels, he intensified the thematic import of his commentary and of John's narrative. The theologian effectively makes one particle of scripture the parcel of another, inviting his own readers to explore the rich avenues of inquiry contained within each excerpt of sacred text. As those readers discover the networks of textual associations he laid out, they uncover more and more of the Bible's mystical depths, discerning the fundamental principles that unite even those passages that seem to contradict one another. Inspired

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[106] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 121.3, p. 59.
[107] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 121.3, p. 58.
[108] See also Mt 17:19; Lk 13:18-19; Lk 17:6; Mk 4:30-32.

by the Church Father's example, they perhaps search for and find new ways to relate different biblical passages to the one already under consideration. In such instances of contemplative engagement, the lessons contained within scripture unfold *ad infinitum*. These lessons, Augustine believed, would arrive at and nourish the innermost sanctum of the reader's consciousness, tending to the seed that Christ himself sowed by assuming human form and triumphing over death.[109] For as Augustine explicitly states, the mystery that began with Gabriel's appearance and annunciation to the Virgin Mary is the "grain of mustard," the lesson in faith being taught here, in Christ's appearance and admonition to Mary Magdalene.

> "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to my Father" was said in such a way...[because] Jesus wanted it believed in him on these terms, that is, that he be touched spiritually on these terms, that he and the Father are one thing. For indeed he has in a certain way ascended to the Father in the innermost perceptions of him who has recognized him as equal with the Father; otherwise he is not rightly touched, that is, otherwise one does not rightly believe in him.[110]

This discussion, wherein the "grain of mustard" becomes a point of entry into the mystery of the Incarnation, illuminates several aspects of Andrea's *Noli me tangere*, particularly its setting. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in front of an enclosed garden, which, incidentally, is not dissimilar from conventual premises.[111] This enclosure thus provided a familiar point of reference for the Augustinian community and an appropriate environment for the biblical narrative that Andrea depicts: Mary initially mistook Jesus for a gardener. Together with the prominent tree located behind Mary at the edge of the composition, however, Andrea's garden also

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[109] See Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.7. 29-30, pp. 152-154. Augustine's own conversion is, of course, the ultimate model for the transformative effects of reading.

[110] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 121.3, p. 59.

[111] See Comito, *The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance*, 25-50.

functions as what Georges Didi-Huberman would describe as a dissemblant sign or an exegetical *figura*.[112] The garden, that is to say, is more than a stage that supports the drama of the human form unfolding in the foreground. For a theologically informed audience—certainly for the community of Augustinian friars, but also for educated laymen such as Leonardo Morelli—the setting of this pictorial narrative was a locus of memory, a point of intellectual departure, as well as a point of entry into the nature of a mystery. It facilitated a type of expansive mediation very much inspired by Augustine's treatment of the "grain of mustard" in the passage discussed above.

The enclosure in Andrea's painting is thus an allusive device. It simultaneously recalls the Garden of Paradise, the Crucifixion, as well as the gardens that frequently appear in paintings of the Annunciation. This network of thematic associations stems from a rich textual tradition. John the Evangelist, for example, describes how, "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid" (Jn 19:41). This account of a virgin tomb evokes the Virgin Mary's womb, untouched and fertile and linked to the image of the *hortus conclusus* from the Song of Songs by countless theologians.[113] The association of the Crucifixion with a garden also links the death of Christ, the second Adam, to the book of Genesis, which tells how humanity inherited the pain of death from the first Adam, whom God expelled from Eden, the original

[112] Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 1-10.

[113] Songs 4:12. "Hortus conclusus soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus." "You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain." See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 175-178. Didi-Huberman explains the connections between the Virgin Mary and the *hortus conclusus*, arguing convincingly that pictorial representations of an enclosed garden in images of the Annunciation figuratively represent Mary's role in the mystery of the Incarnation.

garden.[114] Augustine himself provides the final flourish that ties these references together. In a sermon given during the Octave of Easter, the Church Father highlighted the prominent role women played in each of these narratives, and, by extension, in the history of humanity's fall and salvation.[115] "Because mankind fell through the female sex, mankind was restored through the female sex; because a virgin gave birth to Christ, a woman proclaimed that he had risen again."[116]

Against this multivalent backdrop, the import of the event depicted in the foreground of Andrea's panel intensifies. The significance of Christ's admonition to Mary Magdalene continually unfolds as the viewer continues to call forth memories of different religious narratives concerned with humanity's triumph over death through Christ, weaving them together anagogically. This exegesis of the picture, grounded in the fertile soil of Andrea's garden, allowed sixteenth-century audiences to explore how this moment in history, when Jesus revealed himself resurrected, fits into the boarder scope of time eternal; how Christ's admonition to Mary Magdalene dovetails with Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary; how Christ's birth and death removes the stain of original sin. In this regard, the garden in the *Noli me tangere* is far from a mere plot of land. Its presence in the altarpiece triggers a type of devotional meditation that invites the beholder to plot the doctrine of the Incarnation, to recognize the Son as equal with the Father, and thus to "touch" Christ in the spiritual sense of the term.

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[114] See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 156-164, 175-182; Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 27-28, 223-227.

[115] For discussions of the *Noli me tangere* theme in light of gender issues, see Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 1-20, et. pass.; Baert, "Body and Embodiment," 15-39; idem., "Mary Magdalene in *Noli me tangere*," 189-221.

[116] Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 232.2, p. 289.

This last notion deserves further consideration, in that it makes Andrea's garden an analogue for Mary Magdalene and for the Christian Church. Augustine speaks to these layers of significance rather explicitly. Mary is likened to the fertile soil of this *hortus conclusus*, because Christ "the Gardener" is here "sowing a grain of mustard in her heart as though in his garden."[117] Elsewhere Augustine explains "that this Mary, to whom the Lord said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father', represents the Church, which precisely then came to believe in Christ when he had ascended into heaven."[118] In a similar vein, the verdant patch of land in Andrea's *Noli me tangere* embodies a desire to know Christ as co-equal with the Father, to touch Christ in the manner Augustine outlines. This fact strikes a sympathetic chord with the blushing figure of Mary Magdalene herself. It almost seems that, in her expression, Andrea wanted to capture visibly the words of a thirteenth-century Song from Provence written in the Magdalene's voice: "Then, I understood. And red and warm became my cheeks."[119] Here, Mary kneels before Christ, hears his admonition, and stays her outstretched hand. But she also responds to Jesus's utterance in a language of gesture and gaze that speaks of an intense spiritual longing for knowledge of Christ, a condition Augustine described as an intellectual and emotional ideal towards which every Christian—i.e. the entire Church—should aspire.

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[117] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 121.3, p. 58. An ancient tradition, dating back to the third century with Hippolytus of Rome, connected Mary Magdalene to the bride in the Song of Songs. See Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 244-245; Baert, "Mary Magdalene in *Noli Me Tangere*," 207-209.

[118] Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 243.2, p. 303. Augustine makes a similar point in *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 121.3, pp. 58-60.

[119] Quoted and translated in Baert, "*Noli me tangere*: Six Exercises," Third Exercise. The connection between flushed cheeks and the movements of the soul is an ancient idea that was very much alive in the Renaissance. See Marsilio Ficino's translation of Plato's *Phaedrus* in Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato, Volume I*, 21-23; Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 201-204.

The mighty palm tree located behind Mary adds another layer of nuance to this already complicated iconographic program. This tree is a powerful presence in the composition. Full and healthy with outstretched leaves, it echoes the figure of Christ in terms of its pictorial mass and scale. Here, in this device, the "grain of mustard" sown in the garden has become, as Matthew states, "the largest of the garden plants...a tree." The particular species of this tree fits nicely into the garden's frame of reference, as well. The palm is a ubiquitous symbol in the Christian faith. It alludes to the tree of life, signifies triumph over death, and the righteous of the Church. It speaks of victory over the temptations of the flesh and factors prominently in the liturgical celebrations of Holy Week, which commemorates the Passion of Christ and culminates in Easter.[120] All of these connotations are relevant to Andrea's altarpiece, for his tree is another dissemblant sign. It, too, engages a series of ideas related to the mystery of the Incarnation. The palm tree, precisely because it appears in the enclosure behind Mary, alludes to Christ's triumph over death. It alludes to Mary Magdalene's triumph through faith in Christ over sins of the flesh, and to the Christian Church, which attains everlasting life by following Mary's example and cultivating the seed of faith sown by Christ—that is, by spiritually touching Christ himself, the metaphorical tree of life. The network of thematic associations embodied in this pictorial sign thus allows the beholder to gain a deeper understanding of how the mystery of the Incarnation is itself the kernel of faith and salvation, the "mystical symbol" Augustine finds in Christ's words.

[120] Hassett, "Palm in Christian Symbolism," Retrieved June 18, 2013 from New Advent: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11432a.htm. See also, Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 227.

In this sense, we might say that Andrea del Sarto and his advisor represented the *Noli me tangere* twice, employing two different but intimately related systems of signification. Mary Magdalene is present as the figure kneeling before Christ, but she is represented also figuratively as the garden, a complex sign that embodies a desire to spiritually touch Christ Incarnate. Jesus likewise appears in bodily form, nude, idealized, and holding a triumphal banner. But he, too, appears figuratively, as the seed sown in the garden that has grown into a type of tree laced with connotations of sacrifice and triumph. Each system of signification informs the other, so that the altarpiece itself, as far as the iconographic program is concerned, hinges on the play between pictorial figures and exegetical *figurae*. The garden and palm tree allow the viewer to explore the larger context of Mary's interaction with Christ and to understand the spiritual implications of Christ's words. The figures of Christ and the Magdalene ground the network of ideas related to the enclosure in a specific biblical moment, providing the beholder with a point of entry into the mystery of the Incarnation, as well as a point of departure for their spiritual exercises.

What this means is that Andrea del Sarto's *Noli me tangere* is far more than an illustration of a signal narrative, far more than its ostensible "subject matter." It is, if I may borrow from Paul Barolsky, "the key to a type of devotional meditation that carries the worshiper far beyond the image itself."[121] We might even say that this panel invites the worshiper to recreate the *Noli me tangere* narrative a third time. Through its complex language of signification, this painting asks its beholders to consider Christ's words; to turn towards him intellectually, as the Magdalene does; and to begin to comprehend the incomprehensible mystery of his birth, death, and

[121] Barolsky, "The History of Renaissance Art Re-envisioned," 245.

resurrection. This type of contemplative engagement is the process Augustine describes as spiritually touching Christ. "For indeed," as the Church Father writes, Jesus "has in a certain way ascended to the Father in the innermost perceptions of him who has recognized him as equal with the Father; otherwise he is not rightly touched, that is, otherwise one does not rightly believe in him."[122]

1.2: Touching Christ

In the past decade, art historians have devoted a considerable amount of attention to the ideas sketched out in these last lines, taken from *Tractate* 121. The reason for this concern is relatively straightforward. The senses and their place in Renaissance consciousness are topics of enduring fascination, intimately related to the study of art.[123] And, here, a thinker who shaped so much of the period's intellectual landscape equates belief as spiritual touching with the worshiper's "innermost perceptions."[124] In essence, he explains, one touches Christ when one sees with the eye of the mind the mystery of the Incarnation, something that is less a knowable fact than an article of belief.

Recent research has shown that the privilege Augustine accords to internal sight in this instance had a dramatic impact on early modern pictorial interpretations of John 20:17. According to one scholar, for instance, the Church Father's commentary largely inspired artists to investigate the intersections among vision, the

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[122] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 121.3, p. 59.

[123] For a basic introduction to the senses and their place in the Renaissance artistic culture, see Quiviger, *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art*, 7-11, et. pass.

[124] For an in-depth analysis of the Renaissance reception of Augustine's thinking with regard to the senses, see Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, particularly 125-147.

visible image, and faith.[125] In light of these persuasive arguments, it has now become standard practice for art historians to speak metaphorically of the Magdalene "touching with the eyes" or of the transformative gaze of insight that occurs when she hears Christ speak.[126] Christian Kleinbub's lively study of Michelangelo's *Noli me tangere* from 1531 is a case in point. Kleinbub presents the exchange between Christ and the Magdalene as a moment of conversion, a turning of the heart in which "what was a seed of faith in Augustine's *Tractates* has been translated into an image of faith, that is, an image of Christ's face." "It is as if [Mary] is suddenly aware, filled with a new self-knowledge, and that by not touching, she now touches, just as she is touched more deeply by way of sight."[127]

Andrea del Sarto's first altarpiece for the San Gallo church has much to tell us about the intellectual and artistic legacy of Augustine's commentary on John 20:17. For Andrea and his advisor, too, were thinking critically about the relationships between sight and touch, between seeing and believing, as well as between art and spirituality. Indeed, the depth of their consideration allows us to qualify the issues at stake in *Noli me tangere* paintings in important ways. "Touching with the eyes" is no mere metaphor in this case.[128] And while the complicated connection between sight and touch does point to a turning of the heart, one that is intimately related to the act of conversion, we would do better to recall another passage from Augustine's

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[125] Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 1-20, et. pass.

[126] Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity of Touch," 316-335; Baert, "*Noli me tangere*: Six Exercises," Third Exercise; idem., "Touching with the Gaze," 46-48.

[127] Kleinbub, "To Sow the Heart," 108. While I have rearranged the order, both quotations appear on this page.

[128] See Miles, "Vision," 125-142.

writings. This passage proclaims that those who "turn to the Lord from the deformity which has conformed them by worldly lusts to this world are reformed by him."[129]

The thread tying this matrix of ideas together is Augustine's understanding of the human condition. The soul, as he pictures it, is far from a discrete entity that exists independent of the world around it. It is, instead, a loosely centered series of relations, an entity defined by the bonds of affection that unite it with the objects of its attention. Augustine, in fact, argues that attention and affection are one and the same thing. The attachments we form by repeatedly tending to material items or incorporeal ideas are an expression of love that shapes the self at a basic level. Even the images stored in the memory, he maintains,

> are bodies which [the soul] has fallen in love with outside itself through the senses of the flesh and got involved with through a kind of long familiarity. But it cannot bring these bodies themselves back inside with it into the region, so to speak, of its non-bodily nature; so it wraps up their images and clutches them to itself, *images made in itself of itself* [my italics].[130]

In this last phrase, we can begin to glimpse the significance of Augustine's entwined theories of sight, understanding, and touch. Margaret Miles, in a now-classic article from 1983, explained these ideas in terms of what she described as "the physics of sight."[131] Augustine subscribed to the theory of extramission, believing that the faculty of perception began with the eye admitting a ray of light into the external environment.[132] He considered this optical ray, energized and willfully projected towards an object in the sensory world, an extension of the soul that

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[129] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 14.22, p. 388. See Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 153-283.
[130] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 10.7, p. 293.
[131] Miles, "Vision," 125.
[132] For a helpful overview of the different issues and theories pertaining to vision, see Nelson, "Descartes's Cow," 1-15.

established a real connection between the viewer and the item viewed.[133] Sight, in short, was predicated on touch: "We see bodies with our bodily eyes because the rays which shoot out from them touch whatever we observe."[134] It is here, in this tactile moment of contact, that the soul forms out of its own substance the image of the sensed object and stores that image in the memory, a repository of "images made in itself of itself."

Contemplation, which Augustine describes in terms of the eye of the mind, operates in a similar fashion and with the same results.[135] When one envisions objects, when one calls forth and considers images stored in the memory, or when one ruminates on an abstract idea, the soul projects part of itself towards and "touches" that upon which it mediates. This projection, the visual ray of the mind's eye, is the will, which seeks to grasp the idea at hand and bring it into sharper focus. Every instance of contemplation for Augustine is thus an expression of desire, a conscious, intending extension of the soul towards that which it envisions. Contemplation, then, is an investment of cognitive energy that shapes and forms the human subject on an essential level. The more one contemplates an idea, the more one wills and desires that idea, the more effort one devotes to forming part of his or her very self, his or her own soul, in the image of that idea.

Aligning the eye of the body and the eye of the mind in this way allowed Augustine to frame the question of how to live a fulfilling life in terms of human responsibility—terms that are related intimately to the spiritual function of Andrea's

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[133] Miles, "Vision," 125-127.
[134] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 9.3, p. 273.
[135] Miles, "Vision," 125-142.

altarpiece.[136] As the will focuses habitually on corporeal objects, coveting the material qualities of these items more and more, the soul increasingly invests itself in the world of matter. Instead of the perfect unity that is the image and likeness of God, it becomes a multiplicity, lost and divided among the ever-changing forms it desires in the realm of the senses.[137] "Sin," Augustine explains, "is committed for the sake of all these things and others of this kind when, in consequence of an immoderate urge towards those things which are at the bottom end of the scale of good, we abandon the higher and supreme goods, that is you, Lord God, and your truth and your law."[138] By turning its attention towards these "supreme goods," on the other hand, the soul withdraws itself from the bonds of affection that tether it to the corporeal world and invests itself in the eternal nature of truth, of God himself. This process is synonymous with the idea of piety, of a living faith. It requires constant discipline and vigilance, a repeated effort and a habitual training of the will.[139] For to invest oneself in the divine is to overcome worldly temptations, to devote oneself to the contemplation of religious mysteries, and to cultivate that most profound human sentiment, *amore Dei*. "If you go on to ask me how the incarnation itself was done," Augustine writes,

> I say that the very Word of God was made flesh, that is, was made man, without however being turned or changed into that which he was made...If this is difficult to understand then you must purify your mind with faith, by abstaining more and more from sin, and by doing good, and by praying with

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[136] Miles, "Vision," 127-129.

[137] See Augustine, *The Trinity*, 10.7, pp. 292-293.

[138] Augustine, *Confessions*, 2.5.10, p. 30.

[139] Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.21.27, p. 131. "He is not only admonished to see you, who remain ever the same, but also healed to make it possible for him to hold on to you. So also the person who from a distance cannot yet see, nevertheless walks along the path by which he may come to see and hold you."

> the sighs of holy desire that God will help you make progress in understanding and loving.[140]

This passage offers the reader a word of caution. Here, and throughout his published works, Augustine adamantly maintains that grasping the totality of the divine, of what it means for the Word to have become flesh and blood, falls outside the purview of human understanding. Spiritually touching Christ, on the other hand, is not only a distinct possibility; it is the primary responsibility of every devout Christian.[141] One touches Christ by continuously and repeatedly contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, by desiring to know and understand Christ, and by cultivating a psychological state-of-mind that Augustine describes as faith, longing, love, or as the "sighs of holy desire."

Such sighs have a dramatic effect on the human subject. A careful reader of scripture, Augustine defines God himself as love, stating that whoever invests him or herself in a pure longing for God participates, or touches, God's very nature.[142] "If then the body," he writes, "is a sacrifice, how much more does the soul itself become a sacrifice, when it returns to God, so that, inflamed by fire of love for Him, it may lose the form of worldly concupiscence and, subject to His immutable form, may be reformed to Him and please Him because it has taken on something of His beauty."[143]

This process, the exercise of reform, finds figural and figurative expression in Andrea del Sarto's *Noli me tangere*. While his body language forestalls Mary's efforts to clutch him physically, the mystical import of Christ's utterance invites her to touch him spiritually, causing her to flush with the heat of her passion and to lean

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[140] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 4.30, p. 176.
[141] Miles, "Vision," 134
[142] Miles, "Vision," 135.
[143] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, quoted in Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 280.

forward in ardent desire towards the Word made flesh. The space between the figures is bridged—literally, in fact, for there is a bridge in the distance that lines up with the Magdalene's hand and eye—by Mary's gaze, which grasps the physical body before her while also recognizing Christ intellectually, as a mystery that is beyond her grasp. She sees him in the way that Andrea pictured him, as a heroic figure. At this moment, Christ is not a gardener but the Gardener of Augustine's *Tractates*, the triumphant savior who sows a "grain of mustard" in the heart. In the deepest recesses of her being, then, Mary Magdalene is touching Christ. She is turning towards him and being renewed by him. Divesting herself of her sinful love for corporeal pleasures, she is becoming more and more consumed by a desire for the divine, by the spiritual love that reforms the soul towards God himself.

The exegetical *figurae* included in this painting simultaneously clarify this process and invite the viewer to recreate in it internally. Andrea's enclosure and palm tree trigger a series of memories, alluding to specific biblical events that place Christ's appearance to the Magdalene in the context of humanity's spiritual salvation. By thinking of Christ's resurrection in terms that engage Adam and Eve's original sin in the Garden of Eden, the Annunciation, and the Crucifixion, the beholder turns his or her attention away from the mundane realm of material concerns, desiring more and more to grasp that which can only be touched. This continued searching for an understanding of what it means for the Word to have become flesh is the process of spiritual renovation that was so important to Augustine. Each moment spent contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation is a moment spent cultivating the "grain

of mustard" sown in the heart, a moment spent moving closer to what Matthew called the kingdom of heaven. For as Augustine himself writes in *De Trinitate*,

> That the Lord's bodily resurrection is a sacrament of our inner resurrection is shown by the place where he said to the woman after he had risen, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father." To this mystery corresponds what the apostle says, 'If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at God's right hand; set your thoughts on the things that are above (Col 3:1.)."[144]

1.3: A Painterly Touch

We may never know the precise nature of the conversations that informed Andrea del Sarto's *Noli me tangere*. Who said what, what pressures the Morelli put on this painter, what concessions Andrea and his patrons alike made to the Augustinians—many of these details were likely never recorded. And if they were, they have become victims to the accidents of history. The nature of the iconographic program outlined above, however, does provide us with a significant and hitherto unappreciated piece of information. The idea of reform preoccupied each party involved in this project.

I imagine this was due in large part to Andrea's advisor.[145] For this individual, a member of the Augustinian order, the *Noli me tangere* became a means of promoting an idealized form of self-understanding among the mendicant brotherhood. The selection of textual references woven together in this panel's iconographic program advocated a movement towards spiritual contemplation and facilitated the process of individual renovation, two concepts inextricably linked to the cloistered

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[144] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 4.6, p. 157.

[145] See in particular, Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 63-83; O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 1-12, et. pass.; O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency," 417-441. As no documentary evidence sheds light on this matter, I am intentionally framing these ideas as speculative. The division of labor that I suggest, however, stems from detailed studies of Renaissance patronage and the commissioning process.

life in general.[146] These same references also emphasized the writings of St. Augustine. Andrea's altarpiece thus gave Augustine himself a palpable presence within the San Gallo basilica, signaling the special ties that connected every black-robed friar to one of the pillars of the Christian Church.

In much the same manner, the panel provided the Morelli family with a point of access to this religious institution, to the figure of St. Augustine, and to the edifying wisdom that counted for so much of his legacy. The Morelli's "payoff," then, was linked tightly to the spiritual implications of Andrea's painting, as well. They, too, claimed ownership of the *Noli me tangere*, mediated on its imagery, and used it to signal their piety, sophistication, and generosity to the larger sectors of Florentine society. This particular form of self-fashioning was, in all likelihood, interlaced with the family's own genuine concern for the wellbeing of their souls. Leonardo Morelli, we will remember, was predisposed towards the type of spiritual erudition manifest in the *Noli me tangere*. We must imagine that he, like the vast majority of early modern Christians, would have been far from disinterested when it came to cultivating Christ's "grain of mustard."

Andrea del Sarto, the artist responsible for giving this erudite program visible expression, was no less invested in the spiritual thrust of its imagery. As a matter of fact, largely because it was so deeply ingrained in the Christian faith, and so intimately related to the devotional purposes of the Renaissance altarpiece, the idea of reform inspired in this young painter a burst of artistic creativity. His approach to the problems of pictorial form and color, here, introduced a series of developments that, over the course of the next two decades, would grow to become the hallmarks of his

[146] See Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 319-427.

style. He looked carefully at the traditions of his local culture, paying special attention to the work of Leonardo da Vinci. This careful study of Leonardo's *colore* strategies, of the technical developments that enabled Leonardo to pursue the ideal of *rilievo*, helped Andrea become, in Jacob Burckhardt's opinion, "the greatest colorist produced by the country south of the Apennines during the sixteenth century."[147] In this instance, however, imitating Leonardo was more than a method of professional study. It also enabled Andrea to offer up a sensitive interpretation of the *Noli me tangere* narrative and of Augustine's theology. Touching Christ was, for this painter, a religious imperative that found expression in the basic aspects of his practice, in his handling of paint, and in his open dialogue with the innovator of chiaroscuro modeling.

When Shearman wrote his insightful article on Leonardo's system of color and chiaroscuro, he outlined a shift in style that changed the pictorial treatment of the human body. Earlier painters, Shearman explained, modeled forms exclusively in "absolute color,"[148] so that variations in a hue's saturation and intensity came to denote a range of tonal values. As the preference for naturalistic painting became more of a pressing concern among artists and patrons in the Quattrocento, however, the limits of this technique also became more pronounced. The problem was that each pigment has its own specific tonal value, that in their fully saturated states, for example, blue is inherently darker than yellow. Because the potential range of tonal values differs from pigment to pigment, polychromatic figures modeled in absolute

[147] Burckhardt, *Der Cicerone*, quoted in Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol.1, 131.
[148] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 14.

color were destined to be "plastically inconsistent,"[149] that is, hard and fragment in terms of their tonal structure. This effect is especially noticeable in a figure such as St. Peter, whose traditional attire calls for both blue and yellow draperies.

At a very early point in his career, Leonardo confronted this problem by subjecting the techniques of painting to a new level of scrutiny. As is well known, he preferred working in oils, which enabled him to build forms slowly; to work across the composition rather than in one area at time; to lay in thin, translucent glazes of paint; and, most importantly perhaps, to model forms independently of color. Leonardo's unfinished *Adoration of the Magi* (Fig.10) provides us with a privileged glimpse into this innovative working process. After preparing the panel and laying out the composition, the first strokes of Leonardo's brush develop a layer of dark monochrome, a shadowy field of atmosphere from which his figures emerge as three-dimensional bodies. From this point, if he had brought the panel to a state of completion, Leonardo would have applied a series of colored glazes to the already modeled forms, using the brightest and most saturated colors to denote areas of light rather than shadow. Shearman describes the effect of this technique as "tonal unity."[150]

The figure of Gabriel in the *Annunciation* panel of 1472 (Fig.11), one of Leonardo's earliest paintings, captures this finished effect beautifully. Gabriel leans forward to address the Virgin, his torso casting deep shadows over his rich garments. While there is an inherent difference in the tonal values of the pigments used on this figure—the red of the draperies verses the white of the vestment—each color runs

[149] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 14.
[150] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 18.

through the same series of gradations. White and red both succumb to the soft, inky blackness of shade produced by that initial layer of monochrome. They emerge, fully saturated, in the areas touched by light. Light, in other words, affects each color similarly, so that Gabriel's red garments and white vestment achieve a uniform depth of shadow that is not contingent on the tonal range of the pigments themselves.[151]

With the development of chiaroscuro modeling, Leonardo effectively changed the way painters approached the problems of composition. He freed color to become a more expressive pictorial device. He allowed painters to create bodies with a convincing sense of relief, a fact that underlies much of his thought with regard to the *paragone* debate. And, because the boundaries of color planes are no longer marked by a shift in tonal value, he invited painters to creates pictures that are less linear—or to use the terms that Vasari appended to Andrea's first altarpiece for the San Gallo church—softer, more harmonious and sweet.[152]

The reference to Vasari's assessment of Andrea's coloring is hardly casual. Even a quick glance at the figure of Christ in the *Noli me tangere* is enough to notice the artist's detailed understanding of Leonardo's technique.[153] Andrea matched the modeling of Christ's flesh to the tonal scale of the draperies, creating the impression of a unified corporeal presence made visible by the play of light across its solid form. Moreover, the shadows around Christ's face and body are deep stretches of *sfumato* painting in which form and color largely dissolve. In this sense, they bear a striking resemblance to the darkened passages that give Leonardo's pictures their characteristic mood, as well as their dramatic sense of three-dimensionality.

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[151] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 16-22,
[152] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 16-22, 30-41.
[153] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-135.

The qualities linking the *Noli me tangere* to the work of Leonardo are even more striking in light of Andrea's training—or what we know of Andrea's training, in any event. Vasari informs us of an early and short apprenticeship with an unnamed goldsmith. During this time, the biographer writes, Andrea distinguished himself as a talented draftsman. His skill at drawing led to a second, three years apprenticeship with a certain "Gian Barile, a Florentine painter, but one of gross and vulgar taste."[154] This master, of whom no record survives, taught Andrea the basics of his practice and then arranged for him to enter the *bottega* of Piero di Cosimo. From what Vasari tells us, this stage of Andrea's training proved frustrating. The young apprentice apparently found Piero's personality difficult and thus quickly pursued other opportunities.[155] Exactly where he found those opportunities is a matter that requires a certain bit of inference. Shearman noted affinities between Andrea's earliest paintings and the work of Raffaellino del Garbo, a connection supported by an anonymous pre-Vasarian source known as the *Codex Magliabechiano*.[156] Natali perceptively describes certain commonalities among the predella Andrea executed around 1507, the *Pietà* (Fig.12), and Perugino's Florentine works. The pictorial rapport is enough to suggest some type of pedagogical relationship between the two painters, though not necessarily a formal one.[157]

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[154] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 343. "Gian Barile pittore fiorentino, ma grosso e plebeo."

[155] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 343-344. "Andrea disse al Francia [Bigio] che non poteva più sopportare la stranezza di Piero già vecchio."

[156] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 21-23.

[157] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 14-17.

What is most striking about this list of formative models is that none of these masters could have taught Andrea the intricacies of Leonardo's *colore*.[158] And, as it turns out, neither Andrea's early *Pietà* nor his other works dating prior to 1510 betray the same sophisticated understanding of chiaroscuro and *sfumato* that we find in the *Noli me tangere*. His small panel of the *Madonna and Child* (Fig.13) from 1508 is a case in point. This picture is thinly painted. There is a noticeable absence of evocative shading around the features of his figures, and only the blues demonstrate a depth of tonal resonance. Andrea's knowledge of Leonardo's innovations, in these works, seems diluted at best. Indeed, not even *The Baptism of Christ* (Fig.14), the first fresco Andrea executed in the Chiostro dello Scalzo, anticipates the tonal complexities of the *Noli me tangere*. In spite of the obvious parallels between grisaille painting and chiaroscuro modeling, the frescoed forms Andrea created in 1510 have a linear quality that distances them from Leonardo's techniques. These techniques, it would seem, did not prove a powerful source of inspiration until Andrea turned his attention to the first of his San Gallo panels.

Shearman, perhaps sensing that "inspiration" is too vague a term here, found it "interesting that this comprehensive interpretation of Leonardo's new colour-style is concentrated on the figure that is so Leonardesque in form and physiognomic expression."[159] Andrea's contemporaries, I believe, must have found this interesting, as well, for it points to the intensity with which this young painter studied the older

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[158] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 134. "During Leonardo's absence in Milan at the end of the Quattrocento a substitute for his presence, from the point of view of the history of colour, was to some extent provided by Perugino. The latter's understanding of Leonardo's revolution was limited to the creation of plastically consistent forms and did not extend to its spatial or expressive aspects. If we are right in believing that Sarto was trained in Raffaellino's workshop it is this diluted version of the new colour-style that he would have learnt, filtered down through Perugino to Raffaellino."

[159] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 134.

master within the context of this project. Even in this, his first real test in the competitive arena of altarpiece production, Andrea del Sarto entered into a dialogue with an established member of the artistic community. He deliberately associated himself with the work of one of the most famous figures of the Renaissance; a painter known for his intellectual prowess, his theoretical proclivities; an icon of Florentine culture who, as Vasari would come to write, initiated the *terza maniera*. In doing so, Andrea made bold claims about his artistic and intellectual capabilities, about his status among painters. He skillfully created the illusion of pictorial relief in a manner that must have resonated within the context of the *paragone* debate, as well. These are issues that preoccupied the artist at every stage of his career.

The figure of Christ, here, makes Andrea's engagement with sculpture a conspicuous feature of this painting. Jesus stands in a manner like so many classical statues: muscular and idealized, a toga-style garment draped over his form, his weight and motion effortlessly balanced in an eloquent contrapposto pose. Unlike those brittle if artfully carved blocks of stone, however, Andrea's Christ appears warm. His body is supple and soft. This figure thus carries all the connotations of the formal precedent—all the sophisticated references to antiquarian culture that formed a shared vocabulary between artists and *cognoscenti*—but it also privileges the medium of painting, the medium better suited to capture the qualities of living flesh.

In the same instance, Andrea's treatment of Christ's form communicates the central point of John's narrative: Christ appeared to the Magdalene in a living body, a body that she could see but not grasp. It is in this context, in the area of spiritual import, that the true measure of Andrea's thoughtful engagement with Leonardo

becomes apparent. This young and ambitious painter embraced the traditions of the older master precisely because Andrea could lend those traditions to his newly acquired theological knowledge. In his hands, the issue of pictorial relief quickly devolves into discussions of embodiment and the Incarnation. Andrea recognized, as well, the expressive and emotional dimensions of *sfumato* brushwork. That is to say, he rendered Jesus's form as a convincing corporeal presence, but he also conveyed that presence with an elusive touch.[160] Whereas he expressly defined the Magdalene's anatomy, making her jaw line manifest and accurately articulating the muscles in her neck, much of Christ's body remains fugitive to the eye. Deep shadows obscure the precise nature of his facial expression, while subtle hints alone describe his musculature. The effect extends Christ's message to the beholder. Just as he tells Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father," we cannot truly behold him.

This treatment of Christ's body privileges Augustine's writings in a number of ways. Augustine maintains that the most pressing concern of the devout Christian is nurturing a desire to see God with the eye of the mind, to gaze at him, as it were, "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). This phrase, taken from the Epistles of Paul, the true author of reform theology, appears frequently in Augustine's writings.[161] The Church Father uses it interchangeably with expressions such as "that contemplation which we are sighing and yearning to attain,"[162] demonstrating once again the theoretical ties

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[160] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 134. "Sarto saw that Leonardo's *sfumato* expressed not only a new vision of from but also a new range of emotional content. His figure of Christ is in both senses elusive."

[161] Cf. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2.28, pp. 117-118. Ladner addresses the primacy of Paul's notion of reform in *The Idea of Reform*, 1-5, 49-62.

[162] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.21, p. 80.

connecting spiritual sight and pious desire. In each instance, however he might articulate it, his message is the same: believing in God, having faith in Christ, is a matter of will, of searching with the faculties of internal perception for that which is by definition elusive, mysterious, and imperceptible. "Seek his face always"[163] (Ps 105:3), he explains, for "It is through this faith that we come at last to sight."[164] It is by touching Christ with the eye of mind that we come at last to grasp "so overwhelming a light,"[165] because as Augustine openly states, "this touching signifies faith; you touch Christ when you believe in Christ."[166]

The sensitivity with which Andrea considered this imperative, reiterating it in visual terms, goes beyond his calculated use of Leonardo's *sfumato* style to his basic handling of paint. A language of perceptible brushstroke pervades the entire surface of the *Noli me tangere*. It is particularly apparent around Christ's face (Fig.15), where elegant hatch marks and impastos obscure the details of his visage and align Andrea's representation of the risen savior with the idea of the *non-finito*. Andrea thus gave his panel a tactile quality, appealing to the sense of touch by way of sight in a manner that dovetails beautifully with Augustine's understanding of contemplation. By sketching this elusive picture of Christ, the artist made his altarpiece allusive. The *Noli me tangere* compels the viewer to look deeper, to search for the details deliberately withheld, to envision Jesus with the mind's eye, and—in a literal fashion—to seek Christ's face.

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[163] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.2, p. 395.
[164] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.21, p. 81.
[165] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.4, p. 67.
[166] Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 243.2, p. 302.

Andrea del Sarto took this notion, the imperative that fascinated St. Augustine, and found—which is to say invented—a way of communicating it without words, a way of expressing it with pictorial gestures and brushstrokes, in the subtle movements of his hand. This solution anticipates the work of Titian or even Michelangelo's late sculpture, but it has few precedents in the realm of Italian painting during or before 1510.[167] Indeed, as one scholar has insightfully pointed out, Leonardo himself might have been the first to criticize such a technique.[168] The delicate traces of Andrea's brush resonate less with the work of his contemporaries and predecessors, his professional colleagues, than with the work of theologians. They serve as an index of Andrea's spiritual learning.

Such a novel interpretation of Augustine's theology compels us, I think, to inquire into what it meant to Andrea del Sarto to be a maker of sacred pictures. Did he view his work as an expression of piety, as a form of devout worship capable of inspiring similar sentiments in his beholders? The archives have yet to provide us with a definitive answer, but I am inclined to think that he did, that he, like so many of his contemporaries, felt the spiritual burdens of producing religious art as much as he felt the social pressures of his changing profession. For while his choices addressed the concerns of his patrons and of the Augustinian community, his handling of paint seems to suggest something personal. Each stroke of his brush, every visible trace of Andrea's hand, conflates the act of seeing, as well as the

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[167] See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 8, et. pass. It is worth noting that there is one potential source from which Andrea might have drawn inspiration. His facture strikes a sympathetic chord with Fra Angelico's "*taches*," those pregnant blotches of paint that Didi-Huberman so perceptively analyzed as indices and as "a manner of touching."

[168] Nagel, "Leonardo and *sfumato*," 16. "For Leonardo, indeed, the trace of the artist's 'hand' in the work was an index of his failure to accomplish the goals of naturalism."

activities of envisioning an artistic composition— such as the *Noli me tangere*—with the notion of touching, recreating in tangible terms Augustine's own theory of what it means to long for Christ. Andrea, in effect, gave this theory his own painterly touch, working it into the visible texture of his panel in a way that can only be described as an art of reform.

Chapter 2: The Sweetness of the San Gallo *Annunciation*

Vasari's commentary on Andrea del Sarto's San Gallo *Annunciation* (Fig.2) is slightly deceiving. The author would have us believe that Andrea executed his second Augustinian altarpiece, dating to 1512, "for the friars of San Gallo,"[169] when in fact the patron was Taddeo di Dante da Castiglione, a member of the powerful Arte della Lana who was also active in government.[170] These few details, Taddeo's personal involvement in the city's administration, and his ties to the guild that oversaw the decoration of the Florentine Cathedral give us clues as to his reasons for working with an artist of Andrea's penchant. This painter, now a rising star within the artistic community, was quickly becoming an avid proponent of all things Florentine.[171] He was, at that very moment no less, active within one of the city's most prestigious institutions, SS. Annunziata, and busy in the Chiostro dello Scalzo. This last project comprised a fresco series depicting the life of St. John the Baptist, the city's patron saint.[172] Commissioning a painting from such an individual, then, could only have enhanced Taddeo's own patriotic credentials, not to mention his reputation for pious magnanimity. We can infer, as well, that Taddeo probably appreciated how the Annunciation theme underlined the connection between himself and the most important Florentine church dedicated to the Virgin, S. Maria del Fiore. Aside from these few statements, however, little can be said about Taddeo's involvement in the

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[169] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 354 "E per i frati di San Gallo fece in una tavola la Nostra Donna annunziata dall'Angelo."

[170] Cecchi, "Profili di amici e committenti," 45.

[171] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 8-9ff.

[172] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 18-23; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 28-33; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 37-65. See also, Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates," 303-311.

production of this panel. A lack of documentary evidence obscures our understanding of his interests, as does Vasari, who offers no help in this regard.

In other regards, however, Vasari gives us crucial pieces of information. His commentary informs us that the Augustinians played a rather active role in defining this painting.[173] Indeed, much like the *Noli me tangere*, the San Gallo *Annunciation* presents a narrative of considerable complexity. As with Andrea's first San Gallo commission, these complexities relate to the mystery of the Incarnation, the very mystery that occurred when Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary. The magnificent structure behind the Virgin; the arch separating her from the angel's outstretched hand; the crumbling ruin visible beneath that arch; the bent figure sitting on the steps, nude except for a single garment; the flowers in the foreground—these are all iconographic elements that function as exegetical *figurae*.[174] Together, they trigger a series of memories, recalling well-known articles of faith or passages of theological literature. These references provide the viewer with a fuller picture of how the Virgin's colloquy with Gabriel fits into the broader spectrum of humanity's salvation. We might even say that these *figurae* invite the beholder to conceive Christ at the moment of his bodily conception.

In this sense, Andrea's painting fulfills an imperative outlined in the widely disseminated *Catholicon* by the medieval theologian, Giovanni di Genova. Giovanni, a Dominican, charges religious imagery with producing in the beholder a memory of the mystery of the Incarnation ("*incarnationis mysterium...in memoria nostra*").[175] For Andrea's advisor, an Augustinian, this imperative resonated with the writings of

[173] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 50-51.
[174] See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 1-10.
[175] Giovanni di Genova quoted in Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 26, n.41.

his order's founder in important ways. The act of considering the Incarnation, of placing this mystery in the context of humanity's salvation, accords nicely with Augustine's theories of pious desire and reform. The theologian himself brings these issues together in his *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, the text that provides the best foil for understanding Vasari's claim that Andrea painted the *Annunciation* "*per i frati di San Gallo*."

According to Augustine, John's first letter is primarily concerned with the theme of love. This theme, he explains, finds its fullest expression in Christ, the redeemer of a fallen humanity. For that very reason, it also constitutes the central imperative of the Christian faith. Love, he writes, is "a sweet word but a sweeter act."[176] It involves continually contemplating the lessons of the Gospel until they have become deeply ingrained in one's character and begin to shape one's actions. It involves consistently, and actively, dwelling upon that supreme example of God's love, the mystery of the Word made flesh, until the desire to know, to see the Son as co-equal with the Father consumes the entirety of one's soul.[177] Augustine describes this ardent desire variously as longing, as yearning, or else as the process by which the soul renews itself in the image and likeness of its maker. The key to this scenario is that, as John explicitly states, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Thus, in desiring to know Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, in seeking with loving attention to understand the mystery of the Word made flesh, the worshiper welcomes the Word itself into his or her heart. In his *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine expresses this idea using language inherently relevant to a painting such as the San

[176]Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 8.1, p. 228.
[177] See Miles, "Vision," 125-142.

Gallo *Annunciation*. "Dwell, and you will be a dwelling; abide, and you will be an abode."[178]

As he did in his *Noli me tangere*, Andrea del Sarto devised an impressive strategy for expanding on this theological construct. The painter listened carefully to his advisor's instructions and consulted with his patron. Presumably, he asked questions and received clarification on matters that were not readily apparent while discussing the various ways he might lend pictorial form and color to such intricate theological notions. In this way, the act of producing this altarpiece allowed Andrea to deepen his understanding of Christian teachings and of Augustine's thinking. Most interestingly—and most significantly for our purposes—in the very texts that his advisor consulted, Andrea found a spark that would soon catch fire in the glowing works of his artistic maturity.

Augustine's theories of love are inextricably linked to his theories of light, which are some of the most engaging aspects of his thought in general.[179] The San Gallo friars were certainly aware of this connection, seeing as the Church Father's *Tractates on the First Epistle of John* draws the notions of light and love into a particularly tight embrace. At the same time that John proclaims, "God is love," he also states, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 Jn 1:5). Augustine responds to such verses by folding them into his theory of reform, interpreting darkness as sin and light as the fellowship of Christian love forged by faith in the Word Incarnate.[180]

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[178] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 7.10, p. 225.
[179] See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147.
[180] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.5-6, p. 126-129.

In the San Gallo *Annunciation*, correspondingly, Gabriel's form appears tonally unified, but the colors of his garments intermingle, as if they are called into being by the play of light. This novel treatment of form and color is, in part, a continuation of Andrea's investigations into Leonardo da Vinci's techniques of chiaroscuro modeling, techniques that were so important in the San Gallo altarpiece Andrea painted in 1510. In the *Annunciation*, however, Andrea is attempting to adapt the older master's convention to conditions for which they are ill suited: an open-air environment.[181] His effort, which is not entirely successful, is significant for several reasons. Andrea was once again presenting himself as Leonardo's intellectual heir, but he was also developing his predecessor's methods into a system that privileges *chiaro* rather than *scuro*.[182] In this regard, Andrea thought critically about an example of his own work; attempted, quite literally, to outshine his contemporaries, especially Mariotto Albertinelli; and began to display the theoretical sensitivities that Vasari alludes to in *Le vite*.[183]

But the key question is why? Why did this shift in Andrea's intellectual relationship with Leonardo—a shift the ultimately informed so much of Andrea's subsequent work—happen, here, in this painting? The answer, I argue, is that the particular pressures of this commission obliged Andrea to fold his own social ambitions into the matrix of Augustine's thought—that this clever young painter interrogated Leonardo's techniques as a means of investigating Augustine's theology.

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[181] See Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 23-26.

[182] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 136-137.

[183] See Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 346. "onde avvene che Andrea et Iacopo Sansovino allora giovane, il quale nel medesimo luogo lavorava di scultura sotto Andrea Contucci suo maestro, feciono sì grande e stretta amicizia insieme che né giorno né note si staccava l'uno dall'altro, e per lo più i loro ragionamenti erano delle difficultà dell'arte." Natali makes a convincing case for Andrea's interests in art theory in *Andrea del Sarto*, 37-40.

As a result, Andrea's treatment of color, his socially advantageous strategy of chromatic instability, makes light itself as pregnant and evocative a device as any of the iconographic *figurae* included in the San Gallo *Annunciation*. As if adding a layer of varnish—or better as, as if adding a dash of flavor, of what Vasari described as "sweetness"—to the intellectual texture of his advisor's iconographic program, the painter himself artfully turns the beholder's attention to crucial aspects of John's Epistle. These mingled sentiments of ambition and piety are perfectly expressed in the artist's signature, where he addresses Mary with what should be seen as a mixture of sincere reverence and false modesty: "Andrea del Sarto painted you as he carries you in his heart and not as you appear, Mary, so that he might spread your glory and not his name."[184]

2.1: Conceiving Christ

The *Annunciation* originally stood in the third chapel to the right of the apse, a fact that explains Mary's unusual position in the scene.[185] She appears on the viewer's left, a reversal of tradition—she most commonly appears on the viewer's right—that places her closer to the high altar.[186] She wears her familiar red dress and blue mental and stands beside an elaborate reading desk. Beautifully carved from rich wood and ornamented with garland motifs that recall classical altar decorations, this desk is, in

[184] I offer, here, an abridged translation of the original, which reads: "ANDREA DEL SARTO TA PINTA / QUI COME NEL COR TI PORTA / ET NON QUAL SEI MARIA / PER ISPAR / GER TUA GLORIA ET NON SUO NOME."

[185] See Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 138, n.441.

[186] This association, of course, accords nicely with her privileged position in the faith. Thomas Aquinas argues that Mary has priority even over God's angels in the first article of his *Exposition of the Angelic Salutation*. See Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, 822-827.

Bocchi's approximation, "a testimony to her saintly thoughts."[187] In other words, its fine quality and notional connection to ancient rituals stress the solemnity with which the Virgin approaches the act of reading, a sentiment that must have met with approval among the San Gallo friars. These friars would have agreed with Bocchi's description of the Virgin's attitude, as well. Mary, he writes, "appears to have taken fright at the appearance of the angel, just as Scripture recounts."[188] Her pose and expression suggest sudden movement. Gabriel's arrival apparently caused her to stand abruptly and turn slightly, an action that seems to have disturbed the pink and white roses now resting in the picture's foreground.

Gabriel himself kneels on a grey cloud, which blends almost seamlessly in places with the pale violets, pinks, and dove-grays in his robes. In his left hand, he holds the standard stalk of lilies, symbols of purity that affirm the Madonna's chastity.[189] His right hand extends in a perfectly eloquent gesture of address and blessing, a gesture that conveys the full force of his words: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28).[190] This message echoes above, as the dove of the Holy Spirit bursts onto the scene, trailing clouds and fiery light. Gabriel's companions, swathed in deep green and golden garments, look upon the exchange with adoration. These figures fulfill functions ascribed to angelic duty by Augustine, in that Gabriel

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[187] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 138. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 144. "testimonio de' suoi santi pensieri."

[188] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 138. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 144. "All'apparir dell'Angelo, come dice la scrittura, si mostra la Vergine in sembiante di temere."

[189] Cf. *Homily* 6 of Theodotus of Ancyra (d. before 446), quoted and discussed in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 268. "Innocent virgin, without defect, untouched, holy in body and soul, like a lily-flower among thorns, unschooled in the wickedness of Eve." The phrase, "a lily-flower among thorns," is taken from Ps 2:2.

[190] The NIV version reads, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." The Vulgate reads, "Ave gratia plena: Dominus tecum." I have opted for a translation closer to the standard English of the *Ave Maria* prayer and to the Douay-Rheims Bible.

serves as the divine messenger, while the other two angels worship God and witness his works.[191]

We, too, are about to witness God's work—arguably the most important of his works since, *Fiat lux*. In a split-second, Gabriel will complete his address, and the Holy Spirit will descend upon Mary, "overshadowing" her with "the power of the Most High" (Lk 1:35). But there are other witnesses to consider, as well. Immediately behind the Virgin is a towering structure, carefully positioned so that the lines of its corners and pilaster lead the eye towards the Madonna. The arch of the building's portico separates the Virgin from Gabriel, framing a crumbling ruin, while the portico's pillar creates a strong vertical down the center of the composition, accentuating the angel's eloquent hand. Three figures appear on the balcony above. One reads while the other two gaze down and point towards the events unfolding in the foreground. For Bocchi, their distance and diminished size demonstrates Andrea's "acute understanding"[192] of the human form. For Natali, these same qualities make the figures Old Testament prophets who foresaw the coming of Christ.[193] A virtually nude male figure sits on the steps below the pillar's base. He is yet another witness. He leans forward, drawing a bent knee towards himself, and turns to stare at Mary as she participates in the defining moment of the Christian faith.

There has been some debate about this seated nude (Fig.16). A few scholars have identified the figure as female.[194] Natali, however, interprets Andrea's nude as

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[191] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 51.

[192] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 138. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 145. "accorta intelligenza."

[193] Natali, "Il nuovo Adamo e l'antico," 25-26; idem.,, *Andrea del Sarto*, 51.

[194] Conti, "Quadri alluvionati," 13; Tofani, *Andrea del Sarto*, entry 7. It is worth noting that this portion of the painting has sustained more than its fair share of damage.

male and argues that the figure represents the fallen Adam, the embodiment of humanity's sinful nature, whose transgressions find redemption in the Incarnation of Christ, the "new Adam."[195] The argument is strong, for within the sphere of Christian theology, the connection between Christ Incarnate and Adam fallen is a veritable commonplace. The notion resonates, for instance, with the writings Paul and with the teachings of Augustine.[196]

The particular character of Andrea's figure, however, extends beyond even these seminal thinkers. Bonaventure describes sin as deformity, that is, as a type of bending of the human form. "Turning from the true light to changeable good, man was bent over by his own fault, and the entire human race by original sin."[197] St. Ambrose, whom Augustine described as "like a father,"[198] speaks of Adam's lack of clothing in a spiritual sense. He writes "that Adam, after he abandoned God's commandments through his transgression and contracted the debts of a grievous sin, was naked...He did not have the garment of faith...Adam remained naked; he could not clothe himself again, once he had been stripped of the unique clothing of virtue."[199] The Adam-figure in Andrea's *Annunciation* takes its pictorial form from this exegetical tradition.[200] He is less nude than very nearly naked. This is a marked contrast from every other figure in the scene, all of whom—angels, prophets, the

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[195] Natali, "Il nuovo Adamo e l'antico," 23-25; idem., *Andrea del Sarto*, 51.

[196] 1 Cor 15:22. "Far as in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive." See also Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.8.34, p. 176-177. Natali references Augustine's writings in *Andrea del Sarto*, 51.

[197] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, 1.7, in *Bonaventure*, 62.

[198] Augustine, *Confessions,* 5.8.23, p. 88.

[199] Ambrose, *Joseph*, 5.25, in *Saint Ambrose*, 206.

[200] Cf. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 51. In suggesting that Andrea and his advisors derived the form of the Adam-figure from a theological tradition, I am arguing against Natali. Natali maintains that "the posture of the nude seated on the steps of the palazzo [is] modelled on the *Ludovisi Ares*." While the *Ludovisi Ares* was famous in the seventeenth century, however, it was likely unknown until the end of the sixteenth century. No record of it exists prior to 1622. See Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 260. Causey, "Six Additional Heads of the Ares Ludovisi Type," 77.

Virgin Mary—can be described as clothed in virtue and the garment of faith. The Adam-figure is also bent. His back curves as he draws a knee inward and strains his neck to see the exchange between the Virgin and God's messenger, the exchange that will open the way of renewal to a deformed humanity.

In this regard, his placement in the composition is significant. The Adam-figure appears in the center of the painting, just below the pillar that accentuates Gabriel's gesture. Vasari tells us, as well, that the *Annunciation* originally had a predella (now lost) executed by Pontormo, possibly with the help of Rosso. The predella depicted a Dead Christ with two lamenting angels in the center panel.[201] Upon its completion in 1512, then, Andrea's altarpiece displayed the entire "economy of salvation" along its central axis. Adam sits in the background of the main scene, bent and naked. The Word becomes flesh in the foreground. And atonement found expression in the central panel of the predella, in Christ's sacrifice.

Significantly, for learned Christians in the early modern period, a unique sense of temporality linked the moments from sacred history that Andrea and his assistants so expertly aligned. The Church's exegetes calculated the date of the Annunciation as 25 March. God, they believed, created Adam on a day that coincided with this date. The calamity of the fall and expulsion from paradise also occurred on a 25 March, as did Christ's death on the cross.[202] Andrea's panel renders this temporal matrix explicit.

In this sense, the artist and his advisors did not simply seek to illustrate a familiar scene from the Gospel of Luke. They made Luke's verses into vehicles for

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[201] See Vasari, *Le vite,* vol. 4, 354. Natali discusses the predella in *Andrea del Sarto*, 50.
[202] Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 124-127.

other scriptural passages, embracing exegetical rather than iconological practices.[203] They dealt in the temporality of a mystery, and their efforts resulted in a picture that, in its semantic structure, is remarkably similar to Andrea's earlier *Noli me tangere*. The iconography of the *Annunciation* calls forth memories of religious narratives meant to intensify the beholder's understanding of Gabriel's colloquy with Mary. The painting invites the beholder to think beyond the literal exchange it depicts in the foreground, to interlace conceptually the moment when the Word became flesh with humanity's fall and Christ's death. This mode of devotional inquiry explores the figurative or anagogical significance of the painting's principle narrative. It transforms the pictorial interaction between Mary and Gabriel into a point of intellectual departure, compelling the beholder to use this representation of Christ's mortal conception as a means of conceiving Christ the eternal mediator. Another way of framing this idea, of course, is to say that Andrea's panel produces a memory of the mystery of the Incarnation.

A number of additional elements included in the *Annunciation* quicken this memory further. For instance, the pink and white roses at the Virgin's feet are rich *figurae*. Anyone familiar with the mystic rose from Dante's *Paradiso* would have no problem associating these flowers with the divine, or with the Virgin's place in heaven. In another widely disseminated text, Jacobus de Voragine explains that flowers are important to the Annunciation itself. "Nazareth means 'flower'; hence Bernard [of Clairvaux] says that the Flower will to be born of a flower, in 'Flower', in the season of flowers."[204] In this quotation—which must have appealed to the

[203] See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 1-10.
[204] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. 1, 197.

citizens of Florence, the "city of flowers"—"the season of flowers" refers to spring (25 March). "Flower" is Nazareth, while "a flower" refers to Mary. "The Flower," however, describes Jesus himself, a figurative association echoed by other medieval theologians, as well as the Church Fathers.[205] In *The Patriarchs*, Ambrose explains that "Christ sprouted in the womb of the Virgin...like a flower of good fragrance...Her flower is Christ, who destroyed the stench of worldly pollution and poured out the fragrance of eternal life."[206] In *Concerning Virgins*, Ambrose proceeds to expound upon the nature of Christ in ways that engage the very colors of the flowers in Andrea's *Annunciation*.

> For it is fitting, O Virgin, that you should fully know Him Whom you love, and should recognize in Him all the mystery of His Divine Nature and the Body which He assumed. He is white fittingly, for He is the brightness of the Father; and ruddy [that is, blushing pink], for He was born of a Virgin. The colour of each nature shines and glows in Him.[207]

So, too, do the colors of Christ's nature glow in the roses at Mary's feet. The pink flower points towards the red-garbed Virgin, the material cause of the Incarnation. The white flower, on the other hand, curls upward towards Gabriel, resonating chromatically with his garments and, ultimately, with the dove soaring above his head. This last connection, the chromatic sympathy between the white flower and the dove of the Holy Spirit, echoes Ambrose's admonition to the faithful: "remember that the marks of His Godhead are more ancient in Him than the mysteries of His body, for He did not take His origin from the Virgin, but, He Who already existed came into the Virgin."[208]

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[205] See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 160-161.
[206] Ambrose, *The Patriarchs*, 4.19, in *Saint Ambrose*, 252-253.
[207] Ambrose, *Concerning Virgins,* 1.9.46, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10, 370.
[208] Ambrose, *Concerning Virgins*, 1.9.46, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10, 370.

The architecture of Andrea's panting serves as yet another reminder of this basic article of faith, yet another invitation to conceive the mystery of Christ Incarnate at the moment of his bodily conception. The ruined structure in the background, framed by the pristine arch that separates the Virgin from Gabriel, expresses a familiar topos in scenes concerned with the advent of Christ, especially depictions of the Epiphany. The person of Jesus marks the transition from the Old Law to the New, from the crumbling covenant of Moses to the new covenant of Christ.[209] In Ambrose's words, "the Son of God, rising like the dawn through His birth from the virgin Mary, came late to a world that was growing old and on the point of perishing."[210] Paul, along with Augustine, discussed this idea, visibly figured in the structures Andrea juxtaposed in his *Annunciation*, as Christ coming in the "fullness of time."[211]

The arch of the portico itself is a more complex *figura*. In the past few decades, several scholars have explored the connections among archways constructed by linear perspective and scenes of the Annunciation. Long corridors like the one in Piero della Francesca's *Perugia Altarpiece* (Fig.17), they argue, allude to the mystery of the Incarnation, because they suggests the infinity of God becoming subject to geometric boundaries.[212] By comparison, Andrea del Sarto's arch is not so emphatic in its geometric construction, although Bocchi does describe Andrea's building as

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[209] See Heb 8: 7-13.

[210] Ambrose, *The Patriarchs*, 11.48, in *Saint Ambrose*, 267.

[211] Gal. 4:4; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 4.26, p. 171.

[212] See, for examples, Arasse, *L'Annonciation italienne*, 19-92; Marin, *Opacité de la peinture*, 159-205; Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 58-61. On the development of perspectival arches within Florentine depictions of the Annunciation, see Spencer, "Spatial Imagery of the Annunciation in Fifteenth-Century Florence," 273-280.

"executed with fine mastery of perspective."[213] Still, the interval the arch spans is pregnant. It separates Gabriel's outstretched hand from the Virgin, thus serving as the pictorial locus of their verbal exchange, of God's message and Word. Moreover, in bracketing open sky, it applies—to use an Augustinian turn of phrase—architectonic measure to celestial immensity.[214] Framing the crumbling ruin with this device, then, allowed Andrea and his advisor to subsume a reference to the perishing world of the Old Law in a *figura* that alludes to the birth of the new covenant, embodied as Christ, and for Andrea's worshipful viewers, as Christ's church, as well.[215]

These observations bring us to the building attached to the arch, the building that serves as a backdrop for the Madonna. It is an elaborate edifice ornamented with fully articulated expressions of the classical architectural vocabulary. It is also a multivalent edifice. On the one hand, this structure provides an appropriate setting for the Annunciation. As Voragine reminds his readers, "The Virgin Mary lived in a Temple from her third to her fourteenth year."[216] But on the other hand, the pictorial relationship between this temple-structure and the figure of the Madonna—the way the shadowed facade frames her face, the way the arches seem to spring from her shoulders as if she herself was a pillar, the way the corner pilaster extends the line of

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[213]Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*,138. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 145. "un casamento, che è tirato in prospettiva di raro artifizio."

[214] I am referring to the widely published apocryphal letter written in the thirteenth century, in which Pseudo-Augustine recounts a vision. He had been pondering the incomprehensible joy of souls in heaven, when the voice of Jerome admonished him: "Augustine, Augustine, what are you seeking? Do you think that you can put the whole sea in a little vase?...By what measure will you measure the immense?" Quoted and discussed in Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 128-129ff.

[215] See Col. 1:24. See Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 2.3, p. 147. Augustine goes so far as to describe the Church as the body of Christ.

[216] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol.1, 197.

her weight-bearing leg—invites a deeper reading. "Mary was the temple of God,"[217] according to Ambrose. In declaring herself the "servant" of the Lord (Lk 1:38), Mary became the material dwelling place of the divine Word, the locus of a mystery, and as another ancient theologian wrote, a "symbol of the Church."[218]

Andrea del Sarto's architectural vocabulary deserves special attention in this regard. The classicizing forms used to decorate this structure—the carefully rendered cornice, frieze, architrave, the capitals, arches, and pilasters—fit comfortably alongside well-known examples of Florentine architecture from the Quattrocento. Brunelleschi's designs for the nave of S. Spirito (Fig.18), the city's other Augustinian Church, and the loggia for the Foundling's Hospital, which is located next to SS. Annunziata, both find a sympathetic response in Andrea's *Annunciation*. Unfortunately, very little is known about the appearance of the San Gallo church. One of Giuliano da Sangallo's surviving architectural drawings, however, contains a loosely defined elevation plane (Fig.19), which suggests that Andrea may have derived the structure in his *Annunciation* directly from the design of the building meant to house the painting he produced. There is, in particular, a natural affinity between the architrave, pilaster, and arch formation in Giuliano's sketch and the relationship of those same forms in Andrea's altarpiece. In this case, the congregation that gathered before the *Annunciation* could easily have interpreted Mary as being a symbol of the Church proper, as well as a symbol of their church, their physical structure. For it, too, was pregnant with the Word of God.

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[217] Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit*, 3.11.80, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10, 146. Arasse, *L'Annonciation italienne*, 264-266.

[218] Ephrem the Syrian (ca.306-373), quoted in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 115.

The thematic import of these iconographic features thus adds further nuances to the exegetical play outlined above, where the Adam-figure, Gabriel's colloquy with Mary, and the Dead Christ of the lost predella combine to illuminate the mystery of the Incarnation. Andrea's architecture calls forth memories of theological commonplaces pertaining to the Word becoming flesh. The roses in the foreground invite the beholder to think beyond the painting's principle narrative, to consider the ineffable complexity of Christ's nature. When coupled, all the pictorial elements that make up the iconography of Andrea's *Annunciation*, the pictorial figures and the exegetical *figurae*, focus the beholder's attention on the most profound article of the Christian faith. The painting immerses its audience in the mystery, providing the viewer with multiple points of entry, multiple ways of approaching intellectually a religious principle that defies understanding. In doing so, this altarpiece not only instructs the worshiper in Christian doctrine. It also stimulates devotion. Indeed, for anyone familiar with Augustine's writings, the iconographic program of Andrea del Sarto's *Annunciation* cultivates the sweetest devotional sentiment of all, love.

2.2: Dwelling and Indwelling

The San Gallo community was certainly among those familiar with Augustine's writings. This Father of the Church, one of the most influential theologians in the history of Christendom, an intellectual of commanding stature in the early modern world, was the patron saint and spiritual protector of every friar residing at the convent.[219] His rule ordered their daily lives. His theology informed their thinking and ministry, their sermons and teachings, their relationships with lay worshipers, as

[219] See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 1-28.

well as the spiritual advice they provided to professional painters. Indeed, for the San Gallo friars, pictures concerned with the mystery of the Incarnation, such as Andrea's *Annunciation*, might recall any number of passages from Augustine's published works. But the particular nature of this painting's iconographic program intersects most profoundly with the Church Father's *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*.

Augustine originally wrote these ten sermons for a church in peril, for a church divided by schism and factional anger. His effort to restore unity became a call for love. Love, he believed, was both the basic principle of a good Christian life and the basic theme of John's first letter. It is by loving that the worshiper purges the darkness of sin from the soul and turns towards the light of Christ. "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all," John explains (1 Jn 1:5); therefore, Augustine implores his audience, "Let us walk in the light, as he [Christ] also is in the light, so that we may be able to have fellowship with him."[220] Walking in the light, he continues, means following "the way of love."[221] For according to this theologian, Christ's presence in the world—the very fact of the Word made flesh, the divine act that took place when Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary—is the most important, stimulating, illuminating, and impenetrable instance of love humanity has ever known.[222] Augustine believed that contemplating this mystery allows the worshiper to see that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8), or more specifically, to potentially "glimpse"[223] God in the act of love.

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[220] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.5, p.127.

[221] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.9, p.134.

[222] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John* 7.7, p.222. "As the Lord himself said 'Greater love no one can have than that he lay down his life for his friends', and there Christ's love towards us was proven because he died for us. By what is the Father's love towards us proven? Because he has sent his only Son to die for us."

[223] Miles, "Vision," 136.

The idea that love is active, that it requires effort and will, is the key to understanding how this theme resonates with Andrea's *Annunciation*. For Augustine, the whole issue of affection is bound up with his theories regarding desire, the senses, and human subjectivity—the same theories that underlie the notion of "spiritual touching" from chapter one.[224] Augustine envisioned the human soul, the essence of the subject, by describing its faculties. In these discussions, he paid special attention to the sense of sight. He adopted a theory of extramission, arguing that perception occurs when the eye emits a ray of light into the external world. This optical ray, energized and directed by the will, is an extension of the soul that encounters material items in the individual's sensory environment. In other words, when the eye willfully selects and lights upon a physical object, the optical ray actually touches that object. In this moment of sensory contact, Augustine explains, the soul forms out of its own substance an image of the sensed item, storing that image—now part of the soul's very fabric—in the memory.

Augustine modeled his theory of cognition, the faculty of internal perception, on this theory of vision. Calling forth memories, contemplating abstract ideas, envisioning images stored in the recesses of one's mind—all of these activities constitute a form of seeing, seeing with the "eye of the mind."[225] They are also subject to the will. For instance, one can call forth a memory that one desires. In this case, the mind turns its attention inward. The faculty of desire extends itself towards the idea or image sought by the intellect, gasps it, and subjects that object of thought to the intellect's powers of concentration. For this reason, Augustine describes the

[224] See Miles, "Vision," 125-142; Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147.
[225] Miles, "Vision," 125-142. Quotation from 125.

will, the faculty of desire, as the optical ray of the mind's eye.[226] The true significance of this logical maneuver is that it equates attention with affection. Every moment spent concentrating on an idea is a moment when the will engages that idea, a moment when the thinking subject is connected to that item of thought by the faculty of desire. And for Augustine, such active investments of desire qualify as bonds of love.[227]

Love, then, is an activity that fundamentally alters the shape, that is to say, the form of the human soul. Augustine's extended analogy between seeing as sensory experience and seeing as willful cognition revolves around this crucial point. Just as the experience of physical sight causes the soul to form out of its own substance images of sensed items, in intense moments of concentration, the soul extends itself towards a mental image in order to "see" it more completely. This effort causes the soul to stretch and rework its own fabric. The harder one concentrates, the more one exercises the faculty of desire, the more the soul extends itself towards and, with loving attention, forms itself after the article it seeks to understand.[228]

In discussing the effects of desire on the form of the soul, it is helpful to distinguish between the type of love that is harmful and the type that is beneficial to the human subject. When love binds the soul to worldly items, the soul becomes covetous, sinful, and fractured. It clings to various objects in the world of matter by, in a literal sense, actively shaping itself in the image of that which is external to itself. Coveted memories of sensory objects or pleasures of the flesh, Augustine explains, thus cause one to lose his or her sense of identity, his or her very self.

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[226] Miles, "Vision," 133.
[227] Miles, "Vision," 125-142.
[228] See Miles, "Vision," 128-129.

> Such is the force of love that when the mind has been thinking about [material] things with love for a long time and has got stuck to them with the glue of care, it drags them along with itself even when it returns after a fashion to thinking about itself...But the mind is mistaken when it joins itself to these images with such extravagant love that it even comes to think it is itself something of the same sort.[229]

Augustine describes this condition as "darkness." It is a form of spiritual obscurity that results in a fragmented soul, a soul that is indistinguishable from the material items, the vainglories, or the base pleasures after which it lusts.

The cure, the path to unity and light, is in a different type of love. "There are two loves, [that] of the world and [that] of God…When you have drained your heart of earthly love, you will drink in divine love."[230] Drinking in divine love is the process of reform. By continually training the intellect through religious rituals and devotional practices, Augustine argues, the devout Christian sees beyond worldly concerns. The worshiper, turning his or her attention inwards and upwards, focuses on the glories and riches of the next world, on the eternal truths that supersede the fleeting pleasures of here and now. These truths point to the Truth revealed in sacred scripture, namely, to the mystery of the Incarnation, the most profound example of God's love for humanity.

> The river of temporal things carries [us] along, but like a tree growing near a river is our Lord Jesus Christ. He assumed flesh, died, rose again, ascended into heaven. He wanted, so to speak, to plant himself near the river of temporal things. Are you being swept headlong? Take hold of the wood. Does love of the world whirl you about? Take hold of Christ.[231]

As the Church Father explains in this passage, taking hold of Christ is a matter of considering those ineffable facts that pertain to a mystery: "He assumed flesh, died,

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[229] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 10.7-8, p.293.
[230] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 2.8, p.150-151.
[231] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 2.10, p.152.

rose again." "Look," Augustine exclaims further, "one was put forward for our contemplation, Christ, and it was said to us, 'Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God' (1 Jn 5:1)."[232]

There is a delicate play of words here, a play that is important to Augustine's thinking and Andrea's painting. Augustine argues that when worshipers contemplate "Jesus as the Christ," they too are born of God. They become sons of God and true Christians.[233] In other passages, the Church Father frames the act of contemplation by imploring his readers to "let the Redeemer indwell,"[234] to let the mystery of the Word made flesh inhabit in their flesh, their hearts. "Dwell, and you will be a dwelling; abide, and you will be an abode."[235]

These skillful turns of phrase require careful reading. Augustine does not mean to suggest that considering the mystery of the Incarnation will enable the worshiper to see God, as it were, "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). This is where the analogy between sight and cognition, between the "physics of vision"[236] and the metaphysics of desire, breaks down.[237] What matters to Augustine in the act of considering Jesus as the Christ is not the acquisition of knowledge itself but wisdom, understood as the desire to understand.[238] He interprets this desire as an intense spiritual yearning cultivated through the contemplation of sacred mysteries, or else as the supreme manifestation of that most Christian sentiment, the condition of longing. In the state of holy longing, one concentrates on beholding intellectually the Word of

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[232] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 10.3, p.265.
[233] Augustine states this explicitly in *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 10.3, p.265.
[234] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John,* 4.1, p.173
[235] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 7.10, p.225.
[236] Miles, "Vision," 125.
[237] Miles, "Vision," 135.
[238] Augustine, *The Trinity* 10.2, p. 287. "The more therefore the thing is known without being fully known, the more does the intelligence desire to know what remains."

God, but—and this is the key twist—the soul does not form out of its own substance an image of what it desires. On the contrary, the worshipper actually participates in the substance of the divine.[239]

For all its sophistication, this argument is remarkably straightforward. Holy longing is a condition in which the soul becomes consumed by love for God, who is himself love. This act, becoming consumed by divine love, is a process that alters the metaphysical structure of the soul. Withdrawing itself from the forms of worldly concerns, the soul devotes all its attention, all its affection, to the mysteries of faith. It stretches out ardently, elongating itself, pouring every ounce of desire into the all-encompassing activity that is God. In this state of unrelenting desire, the soul exists as complete unity, as the very form of love, and therefore, as the image and likeness of that which it seeks.[240] Hence Augustine writes, "How shall we be beautiful? By loving him who is always beautiful. The more you love the more beauty increases; for love is the soul's beauty"[241] "Hold fast," he urges, "to the love of God, that as God is eternal, so also you may abide in eternity; for each person is such as his love is."[242] "'God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him' (Jn 4:16). They abide mutually in one another, he who holds and he who is held. You dwell in God,

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[239] Miles, "Vision," 137-138.

[240] Miles, "Vision," 136-142. See Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 153-283. See also Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 7.10, p.224-225. "But let no one imagine God for himself in regard to the desire of the eyes. For he makes either a huge form, or he extends some incalculable magnitude through places, as he increases through the fields, as far as he can, this light that he sees with the eyes, or he makes for himself some old man, as it were, of venerable form. You should imagine none of these things. [This] is what you should imagine if you wish to see God: 'God is love'."

[241] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 9.9, p.258.

[242] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 2.14, p.158.

[not so that you may behold God] but that you may be held; God dwells in you, but that he may hold you, that you may not fall."[243]

Both the language and the significance of these statements recall the iconographic program of Andrea del Sarto's San Gallo *Annunciation*. Such is the strength of this connection that the experience of viewing this painting mirrors an Augustinian interpretation of the narrative it depicts. Much like the Church Father, this altarpiece plays on the association between sight and understanding. Andrea represents the moment when the Virgin Mary conceived the Son of God through the dove of the Holy Spirit, when "the Most High" came to dwell within her. For Augustine's readers, this could only be the workings of love. "Love was shown by means of the dove," Augustine explains, "That form of the dove [was] the form in which the Holy Spirit came that love might be poured into us by him."[244] In a similar vein, the panel invites the beholder to dwell on the mysteries pertaining to Jesus's nature. The presence of the Adam-figure reminds the viewer why the Word became flesh. The lost predella recalled Christ's sacrifice, communicating an article of belief that Augustine explicitly states: "there Christ's love towards us was proven because he died for us."[245] The flowers in the foreground and the architecture in the painting's background adorn these memories, providing the viewer with metaphors and *figurae* that intensify every effort to consider the mystery of the Incarnation. Augustine describes this exact type of devotional engagement as taking hold of Christ, as drinking in divine love, or else as cultivating the condition of holy longing. And thus,

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[243] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 8.14, p.244.

[244] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 7.11, p.226. It is worth noting that, while this quotation is certainly relevant to Andrea's *Annunciation*, Augustine is actually discussing the dove that appeared in the Biblical account of Jesus's baptism. See, Mt 3:16, Mk 1:10, Lk 3:22, Jn 1:32.

[245] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 7.7, p.222.

for early modern audiences sympathetic to the Church Father's teachings, each moment spent in worshipful contemplation of Andrea's *Annunciation* was a moment spent yearning for God to announce his presence in their hearts. For the San Gallo friars, each moment spent considering this panel was potentially a moment when they could echo their patron's prayerful cry, "O Christ Jesus 'my helper and redeemer' (Ps 18:15). Suddenly it had become sweet to me to be without the sweets of folly."[246]

2.3: Delectable Light

It should come as little surprise that the theological thrust of this iconographic program accords nicely with the interests of a mendicant community. Andrea's advisor, who was certainly a mendicant himself, ensured that his fellow Augustinians found in this panel several ideas calculated to enhance their sense of purpose and self-understanding. By attempting to inspire devotion in the form of longing, capitalizing on Augustine's own entwined theories of vision and desire, the *Annunciation* touches on one of the principal preoccupations of the cloistered life: the idea of reform.[247] Andrea's advisor, moreover, wove scriptural references together with passages taken from other patristic and medieval texts, combining this material in a way that privileged the writings of the saint to whom every black-robed friar looked for spiritual guidance. This strategy, perhaps an attempt to underscore Augustine's privileged status as one of the *Doctores Ecclesiae*, also bolstered Augustine's presence within the San Gallo basilica. His ideas, already so important to the friars'

[246] Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.1.1, p.155.
[247] Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 319-427.

daily lives—already so evident in Andrea's *Noli me tangere*—manifested themselves in yet another facet of the mendicants' devotional enterprise.

The theological import of the *Annunciation* must have been of interest to Taddeo di Dante da Castiglione, as well. This panel stood in a chapel where he and his family prayed, a chapel where, given its spatial proximity to the high altar, he and his family claimed a special place within the hierarchy of the San Gallo community. The twin functions of such a space were inextricably linked in Italian society. Indeed, for wealthy patrons such as Taddeo, the connotations of piety and learning carried by altarpieces such as the one Andrea produced formed an indelible part of any assertions regarding social status.[248]

Taddeo's assertions probably played out in the form of verbal exchanges.[249] As one of the parties involved in the panel's production, Taddeo da Castiglione would have been in a unique position to elaborate on its sophisticated *invenzione* before friends and colleagues. Engaging in such conversations, even in hushed voices, was a way of producing a reputation for theological acumen and social magnanimity. For in this context, Taddeo not only tended to the wellbeing of his own soul. He effectively allowed others to share in the edifying devotional experience he financed.

The flowers in the panel's foreground likely presented Taddeo with an irresistible opportunity for this type of verbal display. These flowers are pregnant *figurae*, rich with theological connotations pertaining to the Word made flesh. To hear a member of the patrician class review these connotations, referencing the

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[248] For thoughtful analyses of altarpiece patronage, see Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 76-83; O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 1-12, 163-221; idem., "Altarpieces and Agency," 417-441.

[249] See Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 29-108. My notion of verbal exchange owes much to Michael Baxandall concept of the "period eye," specifically to idea that "Renaissance people were...on their mettle before a picture." Quotation from ibid., 36.

writings of Ambrose, Bernard, or Voragine, was to witness a spectacle of learning laced with sentiments of reverence and piety. Given their proximity to the Virgin Mary, the flowers in Andrea's painting also allude to Taddeo's affiliation with that most important of Florentine civic structures, S. Maria del Fiore. This reminder, in turn, underscores the underlying reasons for that affiliation: Taddeo's wealth, political contacts, social position, patriotism, and—not to be neglected—his own sense of religious devotion. Similar issues were at stake for the Morelli family in the *Noli me tangere*, as these were important concerns for Renaissance patrons in general. These issues were so important, in fact, that it is quite easy to imagine Taddeo explaining why he commissioned the San Gallo *Annunciation* by borrowing the now famous words of Giovanni Rucellai. Such acts of patronage "serve the glory of God, the honor of the city, and the commemoration of myself."[250]

There are thus a number of parallels linking Andrea's first two panels for the San Gallo altars. Both paintings emerged from a similar type of intellectual exchange among patron, advisor, and artist. Both paintings marry social concerns to issues of devotion and faith. And both paintings themselves are concerned with the same religious mystery, a mystery that Andrea's advisors approached by turning to intimately related textual sources. The *Noli me tangere*, which presents a Christ who has "not yet returned to the Father" (Jn 20:17), draws heavily on Augustine's commentaries on the Gospel of John. In much the same manner, the altarpiece that figures the moment when Christ took on bodily form in his mother responds to teachings put forth in Augustine's homilies on John's First Epistle. There is, in this sense, every possibility that the two panels were linked to one another in their own

[250] Quoted in Nelson and Zeckhauser, *The Patron's Payoff*, 1.

day. Contemporaries may have even envisioned them as a pair, as pendants by the hand of Andrea del Sarto.

Andrea only enhanced this impression by envisioning his compositions as mirror images of one another. In the *Noli me tangere* (Fig.1), Christ stands in a contrapposto pose, balancing his weight on his left foot while he turns towards the viewer's right, away from a kneeling Mary Magdalene. In the *Annunciation,* the Virgin Mary stands in a contrapposto pose. She moves towards the viewer's left, balances her weight on her right foot, and turns away from a beseeching Gabriel. When these two panels stood in the San Gallo church, on opposite sides of the apse, the movement of one composition spoke to that the other. Together, of course, they directed the viewer's attention towards the high altar, but this same visual relationship invited the beholder to compare the two paintings in a way that focused attention on the artistic development of their maker, as well.[251]

Predictably, with two years more experience, Andrea's handling of the human form in the *Annunciation* is more sophisticated than in the earlier painting. This is especially true when it comes to suggesting anatomy beneath drapery folds. Large sections of cloth fall over the figure of Christ in the *Noli me tangere*, allowing the light to play across long ridges and thick expanses of fabric. In the *Annunciation*, by contrast, Gabriel's garments group into tighter folds and creases, creating a more animated play of light and dark patches that, nevertheless, still suggests the relative

[251] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 32, 50-51. See also, Shearman's commentary on the *Annunciation* in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 136. It is worth noting that Renaissance altarpieces were collaborative efforts. Even though Andrea was responsible for the visual execution of the *Noli me tangere* and the *Annunciation*, certain areas of each painting bear traces of collaborators and assistants. Natali, for instance, recognized the hand of Franciabigio in the figure of Mary Magdalen in the *Noli me tangere*. He also wondered aloud about the commonalities between Pontormo's early work and the handling of the Virgin's draperies in the *Annunciation*. All commentators, myself included, agree that Andrea executed the figures of Christ in the earlier panel and Gabriel in the latter.

positions of the angel's body parts. It is tempting to attribute at least part of this newfound confidence with anatomy to Andrea's experiences in Rome, a city he might have visited around 1511, or to talk about the artist's increasing preference for the 'classic' style.[252] It is more accurate, however, to associate Andrea's approach to draperies and the human form in the *Annunciation* with his continued interests in the optical science that Leonardo called *chiaro e scuro*.[253]

Andrea had already demonstrated his considerable knowledge of chiaroscuro modeling in the *Noli me tangere*, a painting that, in Vasari's words, has "a certain softness and harmony [*unione*] that is sweetness itself."[254] This painting thus constituted a bold gesture on Andrea's part, for in his gentle modeling of the human figure and his elusive treatment of Christ's features, Andrea articulated his claim to fame. Here, in effect, was an artist capable and willing to carry on the experiments that tied painting to science and that earned the city of Florence a glowing cultural reputation.

Andrea, however, was not alone in wanting to align his work with Leonardo's innovations. In the same year that the *Noli me tangere* took its place in the San Gallo basilica, Mariotto Albertinelli completed his monumental *Annunciation* (Fig.20) for

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[252] Natali argues that the *Annunciation* constitutes explicit testimony that Andrea made a trip to Rome around 1511 in *Andrea del Sarto*, 51. See also Berti, "Per gli inizi del Rosso Fiorentino," 51. Shearman places the trip to Rome later in Andrea's career, around 1520, after he returned from France. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 4-5. Freedberg assosciates Andrea's handling of the human form with the 'classic' style in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 19; idem., *Painting in Italy*, 91.

[253] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 13-47; idem., *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148. For an excellent discussion of Leonardo's definition of painting as a "scientia media," see Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 65-68.

[254] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 346. "la quale opera per colorito e per una certa morbidezza et unione è dolce per tutto."

the Florentine Cathedral.[255] Here, too, Andrea's older colleague and rival looked to Leonardo's chiaroscuro system for inspiration. In the uppermost portions of the panel, the heavens open to reveal God the Father sending the dove of the Holy Spirit amid cloud-putti and a score of musical angels. The figure of the Virgin, who appears alongside Gabriel and two angelic witnesses, receives the Holy Spirit in a church in the lower portion of the composition. She is a study in monochrome. Careful modulations of deep blues and inky blacks allow the Madonna's form to emerge from murky shadows, fully illuminated and convincingly modeled. The messenger, by contrast, wears robes touched with color. His undergarment is the same deep blue as the Virgin's dress, but his outer garment, lined with pink silk, is a shade of pearl that adopts the color of its environment. It appears bright white in the highlights but quickly turns to darkened purple in the shade. Albertinelli's manipulation of hue and tone in this instance is quite clever. The effect, in terms of pictorial relief and tonal unity, is similar to what Andrea achieved in his *Noli me tangere*. It might even be better. Albertinelli's figures read as unified corporeal presences; their degree of relief, together with the general mood of the painting as a whole, sits comfortably alongside Leonardo's best works.

The setting is an essential part of Albertinelli's strategy. He placed his figures in a dimly lit interior, an environment of somber mood and high contrast. This shadowy environment naturally lends itself to the Annunciation narrative. After all, when Mary inquired as to how she might conceive Jesus, the angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow

[255] See Knapp, *Andrea del Sarto*, 97, 130; Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 18-19; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 136-137. Scholars have long recognized the relationship between Albertinelli's *Annunciation* and Andrea's second panel for the San Gallo altars.

you." (Lk 1:35). But it also lends itself to the techniques of tonal unity. Leonardo's procedure of modeling forms in chiaroscuro was rational but abstract. The degree of contrast he created in his pictures only approximates natural appearances in extreme conditions, where a strong directional light infiltrates a dark environment.[256] Albertinelli's setting, then, is the only environment suited for a naturalistic implementation of the modeling techniques Leonardo developed while in Florence.

This choice displays a detailed knowledge of the older master's methods, which would in turn prove professionally advantageous. The citizens of Florence had grown accustomed to Leonardo's ideas. They had celebrated him, awarding him prestigious public commissions, as well as the equivalent of the first one-man exhibition. Albertinelli, much like his younger contemporary from the so-called school of the Annunziata, wanted the Florentine public, or at least the intelligentsia, to recognize the association between his completed painting and Leonardo's intellectual legacy. Thus, when placed alongside Andrea's ambitions to don the mantle Leonardo discarded by leaving Florence in 1506—ambitions that are so evident in the *Noli me tangere*—Albertinelli's *Annunciation* resonates with all the force of a challenge. In some respects, the situation is not unlike the struggle Leonardo himself captured in his unfinished *Battle for Anghiari*. What we have, here, is a fight for the standard, for the right to carry the banner of the Florentine artistic tradition.

Andrea answered Albertinelli's challenge directly in the San Gallo *Annunciation*. His Virgin (Fig.21), for instance, is almost a perfect complement to

[256] See Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 19-22; idem., *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 133.

Albertinelli's Madonna—a fact that once again underscores the connection between Taddeo da Castiglione and the Florentine Cathedral. Albertinelli's figure, startled by Gabriel's appearance, stands, props her right foot on the base of her reading desk, and marks a page in the book that she holds in her right hand. Resting that book on her slightly extended thigh, she turns her head back towards the angel, touching her heart in a way that signifies her fullness of the Holy Spirit. Andrea's Madonna also stands, adopting a similar contrapposto pose. Propping her left foot on the base of her reading desk, she too marks a page in a book, which she holds in her left hand and rests on her slightly extended thigh. The right hand of Andrea's Virgin constitutes the only break in the symmetry between the two figures. She does not touch her heart. Instead, she curls her middle fingers slightly, creating a gesture of acquiesce that declares her the "servant" of the Lord.

For the citizens of Florence, always keenly aware of artistic competitions, these formal parallels tethered the two paintings together in a dialectic of ambitions shaped by the discipline of tonal unity. Quite understandably, this dialectic resonates in the field of color, as well. While Andrea's Madonna is clothed in her traditional hues, Gabriel's robes are a passage of supreme *virtù* (Fig.22). Here, Andrea used the same hues Albertinelli employed while painting his figure of Gabriel, but the younger painter applied his pigments with an unparalleled level of sophistication. Andrea flooded his figure with light, tucking the dark shadows beneath Gabriel's wings or else away from the picture plane, under the extended cloak of an angelic witness. This emphasis on light has a dramatic effect on the garments Gabriel wears. Subtle pinks and blues combine with luminous dove-grays and whites, and even with the vivid

undertones of the red ground that shines through to the panel's surface. A deft hand wove these chords of color together so that the overall impression of Gabriel's robes is one of unity, both in terms of color and tonal value. But in actuality, Andrea del Sarto has created fabrics of fluctuating hue. This treatment of color, glittering and unstable, was unlike anything he had previous produced.[257] By comparison, Albertinelli's shift from deep purple to bright white seems rather abrupt and altogether less skillful.

The setting of Andrea's *Annunciation* only adds to this impression. His figures do not inhabit a dimly lit interior with a strong directional light. On the contrary, Gabriel appears to the Madonna in the light of day, just as Christ appeared the Magdalene in the *Noli me tangere*. For an artist committed to tonal unity, this environment presents a real difficulty, a difficulty that even Leonardo never fully addressed in paint (at least not during his Florentine periods). This realization has led scholars to see Andrea's handling of color in the *Annunciation* as evidence of his dissatisfaction with the older master's convention. According to this line of reasoning, Andrea's initial displeasure, evident here, precipitated an outright revolt later in his career.[258]

To my mind, the situation is more complex. Andrea, for instance, could have opted for other color strategies if he was truly dissatisfied with the limits of Leonardo's methods. He might have turned to the example of Michelangelo's intense *cangiantismo*, as he did when describing the luminosity of divine agency in the

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[257] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 136-137. See also, Marcia Hall's discussion of Andrea's *cangiantismo* in the *Birth of the Virgin* fresco in *Color and Meaning*, 143-144.

[258] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 137. Shearman speaks of Andrea's "revolt" against Leonardo's *colore* system on page 145.

Healing of the Possessed Woman (Fig.23). The light that strikes the woman's chest in this fresco registers as a color-change, where yellow replaces the purple of her gown.[259] Fra Bartolommeo presented Andrea with other options, as well—options based on the Frate's experiences in Venice. But in the San Gallo *Annunciation*, Andrea remained committed to the discipline of tonal unity, to innovative Florentine methods based on scientific theories. He investigated Leonardo's chiaroscuro techniques by working within that technical tradition rather than against it. The subtlety with which Andrea moved seamlessly from light violets to pink, pale blue, and dove-grey in the angel's garments prioritizes Leonardo's achievement of relief even as it tries to approximate the effects of light in an exterior setting.

In this regard—and this is crucial—Andrea's handling of color ran parallel to Leonardo's written speculations. The effects of light on color in an open-air environment consumed Leonardo's attention between 1503 and 1506, while the artist was working on the *Battle of Anghiari*. During these years, Leonardo resided in Florence and wrote extensively about theories of reflected color.[260] What troubled him most was the fact that the type of diffused light prevalent in outdoor conditions penetrates shadows, reflects off lit forms, and affects individual pigments differently. These conditions not only ensure that the tonal qualities of multicolored objects are never the same as those of objects rendered in monochrome. They also allow colors to become unstable, to move, and to bleed into one another, to travel with and

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[259] See Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 92-115. The term "*cangiantismo*" refers to a painting technique where the artists changes pigments in order to suggest tonal gradations. Michelangelo's color strategy in the *Doni Tondo* would have been an important example of this technique. On this painting and its relation to Leonardo's methods of chiaroscuro, see Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 38-41.

[260] Farago, "Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*," 301-330; idem., "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 71-77.

respond to light. This line of inquiry intersects with Andrea's *colore* strategy in the San Gallo *Annunciation*, in that both Leonardo and Andrea explore the notion of chromatic instability as a means of expressing the effects of outdoor light on colored objects.

How exactly Andrea might have learned of Leonardo's theories remains an open question, but it could not have been difficult. Leonardo and Andrea spent several years working in the same city, a rather small city with a vibrant intellectual community and a lively network of painters. Discussions pertaining to the burgeoning field of art theory were common. Vasari, for instance, notes that Andrea and his friend Jacopo Sansovino often conferred with one another regarding the "difficulties of art"[261]—a phrase the author associates with the *paragone* debate, which was of interest to Leonardo, as well. Natali convincingly places Andrea among those who frequently gathered in the studio of Baccio d'Agnolo. These gatherings, which took place as early as 1500, and which included artists as well as men of letters, Florentines as well as foreigners, provided Andrea access to a stimulating forum of theoretical exchange. It is entirely conceivable that the tenor of these meetings informed the discussions that took place when Andrea and his colleagues regrouped in the Sala del Papa to study the Battle cartoons, the very project that inspired Leonardo's theoretical ruminations.[262]

When placed in this context, the whole issue of chromatic instability registers with new impetus. A viewer comparing Albertinelli's *Annunciation* and Andrea's *Noli me tangere* could easily come away with the impression that the older painter

[261] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 346. "difficultà dell'arte."
[262] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 18-19, 37-40.

has a better understanding of chiaroscuro modeling. Albertinelli places his figures in the appropriate environment, after all. In the San Gallo *Annunciation*, however, Andrea—quite literally—outshined Albertinelli by grappling with aspects of Leonardo's thought that his rival simply disregarded, which is to say, by confronting problems that Leonardo himself left unresolved. Andrea's efforts are not entirely successful, but the message is clear nevertheless. If Albertinelli's panel showed the Florentine public that more than one painter understood the techniques of tonal unity, then the San Gallo *Annunciation* made it clear that only one painter was prepared to step out from Leonardo's shadow. Andrea, and perhaps Andrea alone, was continuing the artistic explorations that brought renown to the city of Florence.

In this sense, Andrea's *colore* is both a layered application of glazes and a type of multivalent gloss. The red undertones, the warm grays and soft whites, the light blues and pale violets that make up Gabriel's draperies allow the beholder to measure the active intensity of light in this panel. Simultaneously, this same chromatic play allows the beholder to measure the relative merit of two artistic rivals, as well as the development of a single painter who produced two altarpieces for the San Gallo church. The *Noli me tangere* was Andrea's earliest attempt to showcase his understanding of Leonardo's techniques and intentions. In the *Annunciation*, Andrea pushed those techniques to their limits, revising them in an attempt to continue working through their underlying intensions. Vasari touches on this idea in his description of Andrea's *colore*. Using terminology that links the *Annunciation* to the *Noli me tangere*, Vasari notes the care Andrea took in painting Gabriel and his companions. Gabriel is a figure "in which one can see a very pleasing harmony

[*unione*] of color." The angels that accompany Gabriel demonstrate a "soft sweetness" (*dolcezza sfumate*), perfectly suited to their character and appearance.[263]

It is interesting to note that Vasari ascribes the virtue of "sweetness" to Andrea's handling of color and chiaroscuro in the *Annunciation*, when Andrea's advisor invented an iconographic program predicated on the devotional efficacy of love. Augustine described love as a "sweet word, but a sweeter act" (*Dilectio dulce verbum, sed dulcius factum*). This is a coincidence of language, but a coincidence that points to something real.[264]

Mary Carruthers has shown that Augustine's used the term "sweetness" as a metaphor for knowledge of God or holy wisdom. This metaphor, she explains, stems from the etymological connection between "wisdom" ("*sapientia*") and "flavor" ("*sapor*"), a lexical association that allowed Augustine to describe the fleeting experience of connecting with the divine as *dulcis* or *suavis*.[265] For Vasari, "sweetness" refers to the gentle graduation of tones in Andrea's handling of chroma, the subtlety with which one tint blends seamlessly into another. This arrangement of hues creates a pleasing harmony of soft, luminous colors, which in turn creates a tender or sweet pictorial mood. Not coincidently, in the *Annunciation*, this sense of sweetness has everything to do with the play of light, a theme that figures prominently in Augustine's writings, as well.

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[263] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 354, 346. "una tavola la Nostra Donna annunziata dall'Angelo, nella quale si vede un'unione di colorito molto piacevole, et alcune teste d'Angeli che accompagnano Gabbriello, con dolcezza sfumate e di bellezza d'arie di teste condotte perfettamente…" Note the parallels between the terms used here and those Vasari used to describe the *Noli me tangere*: "la quale opera per colorito e per una certa morbidezza et unione è dolce per tutto."

[264] I describe Vasari's use of the term "sweetness" as coincidental, because I do not meant to imply that he chose this term with Augustine's writings in mind.

[265] Carruthers, "Sweetness," 999-1013. I have touched on only part of Carruther's analysis of "sweetness" here. Her article provides a thorough overview of the term's usage in the medieval period.

In his *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine discusses light at some length, always with regard to the mystery of the Incarnation and the idea of reform. For example, when the theologian inquires as to God's motivations for assuming human form, he writes, "Why did he do what he did: that the Word was made flesh?...What did he wish to teach?...Hear: 'that God is light,' [John] says, 'and in him there is no darkness' (1 Jn 1:5)."[266] The Church Father continues, "And perhaps we shall be near to it if we come to know what this Light is and attach ourselves to it that we may be illuminated from it, for in ourselves we are darkness"…"because darkness pertains to the old man, but light to the new. What does the Apostle Paul say? 'Strip yourselves of the old man and put on the new'."[267] Light, here, is a metaphor, a most profound metaphor that describes everything from God's eternal nature, to the imperfection of the human condition (darkness, the absence of light), to the edifying effects of stripping off the old self and putting on the new. This process, the imperative of reform, involves attaching oneself to the Light in order to be illuminated. It involves a type of devotional sentiment that Augustine describe as "walking in the light,"[268] following "the way of love,"[269] or as "taking hold of Christ."[270]

Andrea's light references all of these ideas. This multivalent device serves, in a single instance, as a means of professional self-promotion, as a conceptual gloss that directs the beholder's attention to the mysteries of the faith, and as a metaphor for the illumination that occurs when one conceives Jesus as the Christ. In this sense, the

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[266] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.4, p.125.
[267] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.4, p.126; 1.10, p.135.
[268] See Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.5, p.127.
[269] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.9, p.134.
[270] See Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 2.10, p.152.

very strategy Andrea devised in order to position himself among the city's intelligentsia contributed to the devotional efficacy of the San Gallo *Annunciation*. In this altarpiece, as in the *Noli me tangere*—as in every other altarpiece we will examine—Andrea developed his professional ambitions out of the intellectual framework established by the exchanges he had with his advisor. The entire art-theoretical dialogue he was having with Albertinelli and Leonardo, the professional rivalries that were at stake in the San Gallo *Annunciation*, all center on a powerful nexus of artistic execution and theological speculation.[271]

It is little wonder, then, that Andrea should single out Gabriel with his luminous brush. The messenger is an angel, and according to Augustine, God created the angels when he proclaimed, *Fiat lux*.[272] Gabriel is also the divine messenger who informs the Virgin that she will give birth to a son, a man who according to the Nicene Creed is "begotten not made," "one in being with Father," "God from God, Light form Light." This last phrase quickly devolves into an exegetical reading of Luke's verse, "the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The biblical term, "overshadow," is a notion that encompasses discussions of shadows, lights, and clouds, a fact that marries well with Andrea's treatment of Gabriel, who kneels on a cloud.[273] His pictorial appearance thus inspires in the faithful a type of contemplation that might lead to the ineffable if fleeting experience of divine illumination. Andrea painted with these ideas in mind, manipulating pigments in a way analogous to how

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[271] Cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458-490; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 73-100.

[272] See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 186-187.

[273] The association of "overshadow" with shadows, light, and clouds is discussed in Gill, "Until Shadows Disperse," 258-260. I address these issues at some length in the coming chapters, as well. Wölfflin sensed the importance of depicting Gabriel kneeling on a cloud when he remarked, "For the first time since the Gothic period the angel comes on clouds, for the miraculous is once again permissible in sacred pictures." Wölfflin, *Classic Art*, 172.

his advisor worked with texts. This artist, too, privileged Augustine's writings, attempting to instruct the beholder in church doctrine and to inspire devotion. What Vasari might have interpreted as the "sweetness" of the San Gallo *Annunciation*, then, was simply a means of facilitating a much "sweeter act." Bocchi, indeed, seems to state this explicitly. The writer notes the artful treatment of Gabriel's garments: "One could not express with what skill the draperies of these figures are represented: the angel addressing the Virgin is the most beautiful of all in this respect."[274]

> An incredible amount of care has gone into this figure; it bends its knee in a sign of humility and does reverence to the Madonna; its pose is exceedingly graceful, stimulating devotion in the viewer, and in a marvelous way rekindling the memory of that moment, memorable above all others, when the Virgin, while she lived on earth, received the angelic message.[275]

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[274] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 138. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 145. "Egli non si potrebbe esprimere con quanta arte siano panneggiate queste figure; & l'Angelo, che annunzia sopra tutto in questo è bellissimo,"

[275] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 138. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 144. "è incredibile industria, che si vede in questa figura, mentre che piegale ginocchia in sengo di humilità, & fa riverenza all Madonna, & si scorge in sua movenza una eccessiva grazia: pero che fa nascere in altrui divozione, & in guise mirabile accende la memoria dall'atto, oltra tutti memorabile, quando mentre che vivea in terra fu questa Vergine annunziata."

Chapter 3: Light from the Light of the *Madonna of the Harpies*

There is a complicated body of written evidence connected to the so-called *Madonna of the Harpies* (Fig.3), Andrea del Sarto's most famous painting. The panel, for instance, gets its name from Vasari's description in *Le vite*. Here, the writer informs his audience that Andrea executed the altarpiece for a Franciscan friar of Santa Croce.[276] This friar, the Governor of the Nunnery of San Francesco de' Macci, "delighted in painting"[277] and required a panel for the high altar of the nuns' church (which is now destroyed). Being a "*conoscente di Andrea*,"[278] the Frate thus petitioned his friend to paint "Our Lady standing on high upon an octagonal base, with adoring Harpies that sit at the base's corners."[279]

As a number of scholars have pointed out, however, Vasari's account is less than accurate. There are indeed hybrid creatures on the Virgin's pedestal. They appear just below Andrea's signature and frame the cartouche that bears the date as well as the beginning of a hymn dedicated to the Assumption of Mary.[280] But these creatures are not harpies. This complication has caused many commentators to search for a means of reconciling this picture with established methods of iconographic

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[276] For a possible identification of this friar, see Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 87-89. Natali's identification is largely predicated of his apocalyptic interpretation of the *Madonna of the Harpies*, which I intend to dispute. Natali first presented this interpretation in "L'angelo del sesto sigillio e 'l'altro amico dello sposo'," 46-54.

[277] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 357. "dilettava molto della pittura."

[278] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 357.

[279] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 357. "In que sta tavola dipinse una Nostra Donna ritta, rilevata in sun una basa in otto facce, et in sulle cantonate di quella sono Arpie che seggono adorandola." Both Bocchi and Borghini follow Vasari's description.

[280] Above the date, the cartouche reads: "AD SUMMŪ. REGNA TRO/NŪ. DEFER/TUR IN AL/TUM" The lines come from a fourteenth hymn written by Giacomo Caetani degli Stefaneschi: "Ad summi regina thronum defertur in altum"; "The queen is raised up to the throne of the Almighty." Quoted and translated in Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 201, n.113.

analysis. Simona Cohen has most recently, and most convincingly, presented these creatures as signifiers of Original Sin.[281]

The whole situation becomes even more perplexing when we place Vasari's description next to the initial contract for the *Madonna of the Harpies*. This document, dated 1515, designates Andrea's patron not as a Franciscan friar but as the abbess of San Francesco, "*Soror Gostantia Johannis de Meleto*."[282] It also charges Andrea with executing a painting of the Virgin and Child crowned by two angels and flanked by John the Evangelist and Bonaventura, who was to appear "*ad usum cardinalis*."[283] These specifications, of course, do not coincide with the altarpiece Andrea actually signed in 1517. In the final version, St. Francis takes Bonaventure's place. The two angels that were supposed to crown the Virgin instead support her as she stands on her octagonal base. The whole ensemble appears before an architectural niche, bathed in a dazzling light that allows the colors of Mary's garments to emerge in their full brilliance, and visited by a dark cloud that hovers mysteriously behind the Virgin's form.

Aside from the insertion of St. Francis, many of these pictorial features have been deemed Andrea's own inventions—and for good reason.[284] This altarpiece is arguably Andrea's most ambitious venture in panel painting. He adhered fully, for perhaps the first time in his career, to the conventions of what scholars have long

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[281] Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art*, 241-262. See also, idem., "Andrea del Sarto's Monsters," 38-45. Cohen's analysis recuperates ideas first expressed by Shearman, who identified the creatures as sphinxes in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 47. Natali interprets the so-called harpies as apocalyptic locusts in *Andrea del Sarto*, 84. For the sake of clarity, I will continue to refer to the Andrea's panel by its traditional title.

[282] The contract is transcribed in Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 74-75; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 391-392.

[283] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 74; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 391.

[284] See Wallace, "Florence Under the Medici Pontificates," 308-309.

referred to as the 'High Renaissance' or 'classic' style. This calculated maneuver effectively aligned his work with a high point in his city's cultural history and made him a champion of Florentine artistic traditions. The pedestal, likewise, is an instrument of visual rhetoric, one that immediately recalls conventions of monumental sculpture.[285] This type of address falls well within the purview of Andrea's expertise as a master of visual communication. The setting, a fictive niche, serves to enhance the pedestal's function, giving the beholder the impression that he or she is witnessing a stone statue come to life. Indeed, Andrea's early modern commentators paid special attention to the lifelike quality of Andrea's figures, their degree of relief in particular. So, too, did John Shearman, when he explained how Andrea's treatment of space, specifically the eradication of the picture plane, redefined the relationship between picture and spectator.[286] In these instances, Andrea emerges from his work as anything but the "timid soul" handed down to us by critical tradition.[287] This painting stages a visionary experience, and in that experience, we become witnesses to an exceptionally witty and learned *paragone* conceit.

On a basic level, Andrea seems to assert the primacy of painting over sculpture. The manner in which Andrea articulated this assertion, however, is rather more complicated. Light and color, those most painterly of the painter's tools, serve as the agents of Mary's animation, marking a clear difference between the form of the Virgin and the stone that surrounds her. This panel, moreover, displays a poetics of light that is completely novel and that—in ways that have so far gone unnoticed—resonates deeply with the burgeoning field of sixteenth-century art theory. Andrea's

[285] Wright, "'...con uno inbasemento et ornamento alto'," 8-53, esp. 19-20.
[286] Shearman, *Only Connect*, 59-60. See also, Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 168-171.
[287] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 8-9, et. pass.

poetics stems directly from the experiments he began earlier in his career as a panel painter, when he first grappled with the intellectual heritage of Leonardo da Vinci. Those ventures into the discourse of *chiaro e scuro*, which yielded such sweet results in 1512, continued to inform Andrea's work in the intervening years. But his interest in chiaroscuro modeling, in the problems of pictorial relief, luminosity, and stunning *colore*, reached a new level of sophistication in 1517, in his *Madonna of the Harpies*. While among the Franciscans, Andrea del Sarto achieved chromatic effects that embrace notions of *lustro* and *splendore*. By visualizing these two ideas—ideas that Leonardo himself inscribed in the lexicon of early modern artistic criticism—Andrea simulated a degree of three dimensionality that could rival sculpture, while demonstrating an ability to manipulate lights and colors that no sculptor (and perhaps no other painter) could hope to match. This type of theoretical nuance manifests a remarkable degree of professional drive. In a single instance, Andrea tightened the bonds between the *Madonna of the Harpies* and the Florentine milieu while placing his work well beyond the ken of the craftsman.

At the same time, the very ideas that inform his handling of paint, indeed the entire theoretical edifice that supports Andrea's efforts at professional self-promotion—everything from his visionary treatment of space to his dazzling *colore* to his *paragone* conceit—reinforces the devotional efficacy of the *Madonna of the Harpies*. Within the church of San Francesco, Andrea's pictorial strategies blended seamlessly with a set of theological commonplaces that would have been familiar to any educated and devout beholder, particularly a member of the Franciscan order. These commonplaces find eloquent expression in the writings of Bonaventure, the

Seraphic Doctor of the Franciscan order; in the work of some of Bonaventure's fellow medieval theologians; and in the sacred scriptures. Significantly, each notion engages by means of dissemblance the mystery of the Incarnation and the idea of reform.[288] Andrea's altarpiece thus affirms an established precept of the Christian faith: "the image [i.e. the *imago Dei*, the soul] is reformed...When by faith the soul believes in Christ as the uncreated Word and Splendor of the Father."[289]

Andrea's artistic and religious achievements should serve as a reminder for scholars today. Even though artists of this caliber were beginning to enjoy a bit more creative license at this point in Renaissance history, the production of an altarpiece was still a collaborative affair. And that collaboration could, and often did, play out without crisis or controversy.[290] According to recent research, in fact, the very process of commissioning a work of art was an exercise in negotiation; it involved verbal exchanges that continued well after the signing of legal documents.[291] This was standard business protocol.

In the case of the *Madonna of the Harpies*, then, the body of written evidence we have at our disposal provides a loose sketch of the negotiations that took place within the context of the commission. These negotiations certainly included the abbess of San Francesco and Andrea del Sarto. They probably included Vasari's friar from Santa Croce, as well. For I see no reason to suppose that Vasari, who served as

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[288] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 47-51; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 83-87; Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art*, 241-262. By arguing that the *Madonna of the Harpies* is fundamentally concerned with the mystery of the Incarnation and that it engages traditions of dissemblance, I am exploring avenues left uncharted by the traditional iconological interpretations of this altarpiece. My understanding of dissemblance owes much to Didi-Huberman's groundbreaking research in *Fra Angelico*, 1-10, et. pass.

[289] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure*, 89.

[290] Cf. Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 1-10; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458-490.

[291] O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 163-196, especially 195-196.

an apprentice in Andrea's workshop, was completely mistaken about the involvement of a Franciscan friar—especially if that friar was on friendly terms with Andrea del Sarto and had a vested interest in the decoration of the nun's church.[292] The most likely scenario is that Vasari's friar became an active interlocutor sometime after the signing of the 1515 contract, when the real work of determining the painting's semantic texture began. At that point, this member of the Santa Croce community seems to have asserted his authority, or at the very least to have served with Sister Gostantia as co-patron and theological advisor for the talented and highly ambitious artist who, arguably with this panel, became the premier painter in Florence.

It is important to stress, however, that Andrea himself was actively involved in the learned discussions that informed this panel.[293] Indeed, the list of pictorial features that scholars have designated as Andrea's inventions suggests that both his patrons and advisors took an interest in what this painter had to say. Andrea, after all, brought a considerable amount of knowledge to bear on this project. He understood that pictorial style could be a form of patriotism—a sentiment that appealed to even the most devout Florentine. He knew about debates regarding the relative merit of painting and sculpture. He was well versed, as we have seen, in the pictorial traditions of dissemblance, in the valence of light, and in the idea of reform.

These last three ideas, especially, became something like common ground for the individuals involved in the production of the *Madonna of the Harpies*, a meeting

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[292] Cf. Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art*, 248-250, quotation below from 241. It is worth noting that Vasari was not as "oblivious to the iconographic complexities" of this painting as some have claimed. If Cohen is correct in identifying the hybrid creates on the Virgin's pedestal as figurations of Original Sin, then there is a type of semantic sympathy between these creatures—which allude to the soul's loss of grace—and the harpy, a mythical hybrid creature that snatches souls.

[293] Cf. Hope, "Artists, Patrons, and Advisors," 293-343.

place for the agendas of each party. When his Franciscan colleagues discussed Bonaventure's take on spiritual illumination or waxed eloquent on the benefits of contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, Andrea was ideally positioned to contribute to that conversation, to add his own inflections to the matters under consideration, and, ultimately, to lend those notions visible expression. As a result, he was able to respond to his advisors suggestions with zeal and insight, communicating them in what can only be described as the language of "art."[294] This language, Andrea's own particular dialect of spiritual communication, may very well tell us something about his own religious convictions.[295] For ultimately, I mean to suggest that the level of care Andrea del Sarto devoted to his task, that the way he addressed the theological underpinnings of this particular painting, had a dramatic impact on his pictorial style.

3.1: The Painter on the Pedestal

The *Madonna of the Harpies* has been called a "transitional work," in that with this panel, "some of the more extreme aspects of [Andrea's] art begin to recede in favour of relative restraint and simplicity."[296] This statement refers to the fact that Andrea complicates the way historians divide the sixteenth century into artistic periods. According to the received wisdom, the birth of 'Mannerism', a style of extreme

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[294] Cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 470-490.

[295] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 83. My thoughts regarding Andrea's religious convictions agree with Natali, who made several important observations that support this assessment of the artist's character. One such observation was that Andrea often demonstrated his generosity towards religious institutions. His fee for the *Madonna of the Harpies* was forty gold florins, but, as the contract indicates, he accepted only thirty florins, donating the rest to the convent of San Francesco as an expression of his love for God: "et florenos decem dictus Andreas sponte dicto monasterio donavit amore Dei."

[296] Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 136.

artifice and sophistication, occurs around 1520.[297] Many commentators believe that this period emerged as a challenge to the more restrained—by which they generally mean "tasteful" or "reasonable"—compositional principles of the 'High Renaissance' or 'classic' period.[298] Andrea, however, seems to want to reverse this sequence, and in several cases, scholars have celebrated this fact as his most noteworthy contribution to the history of art. While he pushed against the established traditions of the 'classic' style early on in his career, his paintings after 1517 sit comfortably next to the work of an earlier generation.[299]

Such a pivot in the basic logic governing Andrea's approach to artistic form does indeed deserve serious attention. "Extreme" is perhaps a strong word, but the painter's *Marriage of St. Catherine* (Fig.24), executed almost immediately after the San Gallo *Annunciation*, is a perfect example of his more inquisitive manner. This painting, to be sure, features a balanced composition. The putti standing on the upper ledge echo each other in gesture and attitude. Catherine's pose of turning in towards Christ complements that of Margaret, who twists in the opposite direction. The panel as a whole displays a propensity for symmetry, order, and harmony, much like Leonardo's paintings at the close of the Quattrocento or the work of Fra Bartolommeo, "the protagonist of High Renaissance painting style in Florence in the decade after Leonardo's departure."[300]

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[297] See Shearman, *Mannerism*, 15-48.

[298] See Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 14-17. For a more extensive treatment of 'Mannerism' and its historiography, see Elizabeth Cropper's "Introduction" to Smyth, *Mannerism and Maniera,* 12-21; Hall, *After Raphael*, 5-11; Cropper, "The Decline and Rise of Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino," 343-353.

[299] Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 127-151. See also, Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 1-42.

[300] Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 84.

In this way, Andrea shrewdly acknowledged the stylistic conventions that his Florentine viewers expected to see, while also inquiring into the limits of those conventions. Only Andrea's central figures form the stable triangular shape that is so prevalent among Florentine paintings produced in the early sixteenth century. The presence of John the Baptist in the foreground, together with the putti standing above the seated saints, superimposes another set of dynamic angles on those created by the central figures. This second set of angles quite literally turns the tradition of triangular compositions on its head, giving a commentator such as Freedberg reason to pause.[301] Andrea's arrangement appears less like something one might praise as pure 'High Renaissance' form and more like his own personal monogram, which he placed in the lower left of this picture.

By contrast, the figural composition in the *Madonna of the Harpies* manifests what Freedberg himself described as an "extraordinary command of classical *disegno*."[302] Andrea has essentially taken the formal logic he employed in the *Marriage of St. Catherine* and disentangled it from his complex system of angles. There is in the later panel a clear hierarchy, a pleasing level of variety mixed with a sense of stability, order, and, as previously noted, "restraint and simplicity." Mary stands out for her bright colors and her placement on an elevated platform, which raises her above Francis and the Evangelist. Together, these two attendant saints form an overtly graceful contrapposto—a gestural antithesis that ascribes to rules of

[301] Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 92. "The *Marriage* [*of St. Catherine*] seems a momentary extreme, assimilating classical principles of form with deep intelligence but then testing the limits of expression they might be expected to contain." See also, idem., *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 24-44; Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 132-136.

[302] Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 95.

decorum operative prior to the advent of 'Mannerism'.[303] Francis turns in towards the Virgin and Child, while John turns out towards the viewer. Their postures are perfectly balanced, absolutely idealized, and yet seemingly natural. The putti that support Mary echo the saint's gestures with studied ease, adding their poses to the picture's elegantly harmonized formal rhythms.

Similar qualities exist in such monuments of the 'classic' style as Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (Fig.25) from 1513, a work frequently referenced in relation to Andrea's panel. Fra Bartolommeo's own *Salvator Mundi* (Fig.26), executed for SS. Annunziata the year before Andrea installed his altarpiece in San Francesco, is an even more important source of inspiration.[304] In Bartolommeo's painting, two putti hold a roundel, plaque, and chalice in the foreground, their arms positioned in a way that strikes a sympathetic chord with the angels in Andrea's altarpiece. Above his putti, the Frate depicts Christ standing on an elevated platform, before an architectural niche, and in the company of attendant saints. The compositional parallels in the *Madonna of the Harpies* are striking. There is the same aversion to distracting decoration, a similar degree of balance, and an equally clear sense of hierarchy in the two pictures. Bartolommeo's arrangement of the four Evangelists is, admittedly, less strictly governed by the idea of antithesis. But the Frate's figures do echo each other in gesture and pose, creating a sense of formal harmony comparable to that in Andrea's painting. There is even an analogous relationship in the way both artists align the outermost figures in their compositions with the pilasters that help define their architectural backdrops.

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[303] See Summers, "Contrapposto," 336-261.
[304] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto,* vol. 1, 42; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 237.

If we bracket all considerations of artistic periods and stylistic categories for a moment, then these formal parallels take on an altogether different character. Andrea did not so much shy away from the formal complexities of the fledgling phenomenon now called 'Mannerism', nor was he simply bending to the authoritative expression of "genius" that some would describe as 'High Renaissance classicism'. The style he adopted in the *Madonna of the Harpies* was a bold decision, a type of performance motivated by the cultural environment of Florence in the second decade of the sixteenth century.[305]

At first glance, we might be tempted to say that Andrea's city was experiencing a moment of artistic and intellectual ascendency. A Medici was Pope. But that Pope, Leo X, was a great admirer of Raphael's work and did not necessarily appreciate an artist with Andrea's cultural interests.[306] Indeed, scholars have long referred to this point in the history of Andrea's city as "the Romanization of Florence,"[307] a phrase that describes an almost systematic process of cultural transformation, which threatened certain traditions that our painter held dear.

The nature of this threat became manifest in 1516, when Leo entered into negotiations with the aged Giuliano da Sangallo, one of foremost architects in Florence. The project in question concerned a façade for the church of San Lorenzo, a stronghold of Medici magnificence, and an architectural masterwork from the fifteenth century. Sangallo's designs spoke of Medici largess. They celebrated Leo

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[305] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto,* 8-9, et. pass. Cf. Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, vii-viii, et. pass.; idem., *Painting in Italy*, 1-17, 90-95; Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 127-151.
[306] See Hall, *After Raphael*, 36-53; idem., "The High Renaissance, 1503-1534," 132-160.
[307] Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*, 98.

himself. But they also employed an architectural vocabulary that was, in the words of one commentator, "distinctly Roman rather than Tuscan in flavor."[308]

Andrea del Sarto could hardly fail to take note of these developments or to interpret their cultural implications. The scale and prestige of such a project attracted a great deal of attention, especially when Sangallo died shortly after supplying Leo with preliminary designs. By 1517, in fact, none other than Michelangelo had wrested the façade commission away from two of Andrea's closest friends, Jacopo Sansovino and Baccio d'Agnolo. Michelangelo had appealed directly to the Pope and to his cousin, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici. He traveled to Rome with his famous wooden model, now in the Casa Buonarroti (Fig.27), and with the promising combination of consummate skill and unbridled ambition. Indeed, he proposed a façade the likes of which had not been seen since antiquity itself, a freestanding structure of pure marble comprising twelve monumental columns made from the largest blocks of stone quarried in over a thousand years. As William Wallace so accurately observed, "In the largely medieval city of Florence, crowded with buildings constructed of heavy brown *pietra forte*, the façade of San Lorenzo would be a glittering white wonder: a Roman import."[309]

There can be no doubt that many citizens, especially those who counted themselves among the Medici *amici*, welcomed the prospect of such architectural grandeur. The project, however, likely inspired much suspicion, as well. Florentines were by tradition jealous guards of their cultural autonomy, as well as their artistic patrimony. An old line of self-aggrandizing rhetoric even promoted Florence itself as

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[308] Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates," 295.
[309] Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates," 296.

the direct heir of Latinate civilization, as a "new Rome."[310] This idea is fundamentally at odds with the "Romanization of Florence." Here, then, is where regional pride and anxiety meet, where we can begin to hear the whispers of unease emanating among certain sectors of an artistic and intellectual community dedicated to local conventions. Citizens sympathetic to this position, citizens looking to grab hold of a sense of autonomy that was slipping away, were in need of a cultural champion, of an artist capable of reinserting a rich and distinctly Florentine mode of visual address into contemporary discussions.

This notion raises another issue. When one surveys the field, it becomes clear that capable champions were in short supply, especially among painters. Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio was then operating a busy workshop, but his work has never favored well when placed next to the monumental achievements of his contemporaries.[311] Albertinelli had died in 1515. And, perhaps most significantly of all, Fra Bartolommeo, the painter who had been carrying the torch of Florentine innovation—Andrea's older colleague and great rival, Raphael's friend and, to a certain extent, mentor—was on his death bed. The Frate probably did not even see the full effect of his inspiration on the *Madonna of the Harpies* in its finished state.

Faced with these pressures, Andrea opted for a pattern of formal arrangement that bodied forth a carefully measured argument. In the *Madonna of the Harpies*, he was presenting himself as a proponent of the compositional features that earned Florence cultural distinction as the cradle of the *maniera moderna*. He was claiming,

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[310] See Kent, "Florence," 7-34.

[311] See Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates," 292. Wallace describes one of Ridolfo's most important projects, the Cappella dei Priori in the Palazzo della Signoria, as "fussy and *retardataire* given what else was happening in Florence by 1515." For a more extensive discussion of Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio's work, see Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 103-125.

once again, his place as the city's artistic standard barrier, campaigning for the newly (or in any event, nearly) vacant position of *caposcuola*, and showing himself ready to compete on an international level. He was, in a sense, placing his work on a pedestal, presenting himself as the latest protagonist in a long line of cultural visionaries to flourish within the city of flowers.

This last idea—which we will also encounter in the following chapter—finds a rather literal form of expression in the *Madonna of the Harpies*. This is a visionary altarpiece. With his talents for illusionism, his knowledge of human anatomy, and his abilities to describe the natural appearance of drapery folds, Andrea created a clever spatial conceit. Every effort has been made to suggest that the picture plane does not exist, that the painted figures gazing out from this flat panel are part of the beholder's natural environment. Shearman defined this conceit as a novel fiction that both artist and audience buy into, arguing that the absence of an apparent physical barrier breaks down any sense of psychological separation between the two worlds, real and depicted.[312] This, of course, only serves to intensify the viewer's affective experience of Andrea's art, a strategy that enhanced the devotional efficacy of his altarpiece as it elevated the artist's stature among sixteenth-century intellectuals.

Andrea's audiences, after all, were well equipped to appreciate his type of visionary naturalism. They lived, worked, and worshiped within the city that saw the completion of Masaccio's *Trinity*. They were part of the culture that nurtured the development of the *pala* and that, broadly speaking, considered religious art to be a means of inspiring a higher form of seeing.[313] Such was the ubiquity of this idea that

[312] Shearman, *Only Connect*, 59-60, et pass.
[313] See Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, 65-121.

one art historian has posed the rather serious question: "Might we not say that *all religious art of the Italian Renaissance is visionary* in that it was intended to elevate the viewer's or worshiper's mind to the contemplation of holy beings who exist in a spiritual realm that lies above and beyond the world of appearance?"[314]

According to this compelling line of reasoning, the long struggle that saw the birth of Vasari's grand *maniera*, the struggle where artists developed increasingly sophisticated strategies for recreating the world of appearance, was never just about style in and of itself. By painting religious subjects naturalistically, artists from Giotto to Andrea del Sarto and beyond sought to move their beholders, to stimulate devotion, to inspire intensified forms of contemplation by presenting the sacred with a visceral sense of immediacy.[315] Hence the refrains of praise so often employed by the period's commentators, that works of art seem real, that painted figures seem to move and breathe, that only the figure's voice is lacking.

These frequently used phrases may seem trite to some of today's readers, but they were hardly empty words when first spoken. On the contrary, they mark a significant intersection between the special demands Christianity placed on sacred imagery and what has been termed the emerging "hermeneutics of art."[316] Receiving such praise was an important accolade for an ambitious artist in this period. The idea that a painter could "give life" to inanimate media helped establish an analogy with the creative act of God, precipitating the notion of the "divine" artist.[317] Humanist

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[314] Barolsky, "The history of Italian Renaissance art re-envisioned," 244.

[315] Barolsky, "Naturalism and the Visionary Art of the Early Renaissance," 317-324; idem., "The visionary experience of Renaissance art," 174-181; idem., "The history of Italian Renaissance art re-envisioned," 243-250.

[316] Cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458-490, quotation from 459.

[317] Campbell, "'Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva'," 596-598. See also, Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist*, 3-18.

scholars, moreover, developed these idioms of acclaim from classical texts.[318] When applied to the work of a Renaissance painter, such commonplaces as "the figures seem alive" linked the artist in question to connotations of skill, learning, and sophistication associated with the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome—cultures that, according to many of those same humanist scholars, considered painting to be a vocation rather than a craft.[319]

On yet another level, the idea that naturalistic painting could evoke a powerful emotional response—that naturalistic painting could inspire movements of the soul—established connections among the visual and literary arts. Capturing and conjuring sensations of affections were traditionally aspects of the poet's enterprise, but they quickly became categories of pictorial excellence, too, as writers developed tropes of praise from such well-known examples as Petrarch's commentary on Simone Martini's portrait of Laura.[320] Scholars have shown that this cross-fertilization of critical terms lent support to artists looking to sever ties with the manual disciplines.[321]

Painters of Andrea's generation were especially adept at eliciting this type of response from their beholders. Building on artistic research that encompassed everything from the study of human anatomy and linear perspective to theories of

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[318] See Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 51-120; Shearman, *Only Connect*, 108-148; McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance*, 33-55, especially 44-47.

[319] See McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance*, 8-9, 59-77.

[320] Petrarch, Sonnet 78 in *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 178. "When Simon received the high idea which, for my sake, put his hand to his stylus, if he had given to his noble work voice and intellect along with form / he would have lightened my breast of many sighs that make what others prize most vile to me. For in appearance she seems humble, and her expression promises peace; / then, when I come to speak to her, she seems to listen most kindly: if she could only reply to my words! / Pygmalion, how glad you should be of your statue, since you received a thousand times what I yearn to have just once!."

[321] Shearman, *Only Connect*, 108-148; Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*, 1-14.

vision and visionary experience, they developed strategies of pictorial address that demanded a fully engaged spectator.[322] Fra Bartolommeo was himself an important proponent of this tradition. His *Lucca Altarpiece* (Fig.28), executed in 1508-1509, includes several notable inventions.[323] The light-suffused cloud that appears behind God the Father, signifying the realm of heaven, has recently been described as a "glowing cloud glory," an unprecedented means of rendering the invisible visible. His cloud-putti are novel devices that address the same problem.[324] The most compelling visionary aspect of this altarpiece, however, is also rather traditional: Bartolommeo's treatment of space.

The relationship between the architectural foreground and the distant landscape is ambiguous, making it difficult to determine the relative position of the pictured saints.[325] This difficulty may complicate any easy equation of the pictorial realm and the viewer's reality. But there is no denying the presence and proximity of Bartolommeo's expertly rendered figures. The artist's spatial ambiguities communicate a sense of the miraculous. They emphasize the way Bartolommeo draws on naturalistic techniques in order to suggest that the picture's heavenly realm is, mysteriously, about to erupt into the beholder's surroundings.[326]

This painter knew Masaccio's work in Santa Maria Novella, with its famous program of linear perspective. He was more than familiar with the formal devices of

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[322] Shearman, *Only Connect*, 10-58, et. pass.

[323] For a particularly insightful discussion of this altarpiece, see Vusich, "Divinus Amor Extasim Facit," 79-165.

[324] Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 10-45, especially 23-32. On the cloud-putto, see also idem., "At the Boundaries of Sight," 117-133; Shearman, "Raphael's Clouds, and Correggio's," 657-668.

[325] See Vusich, "Divinus Amor Extasim Facit," 79-85; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 80-82.

[326] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 82.

his Dominican predecessor, Fra Angelico, who had a habit of placing small but convincingly rendered objects in the immediate foreground of his paintings, thus inviting the beholder to interpret the surfaces of his altarpieces as liminal thresholds.[327] In the same manner, Bartolommeo placed an expertly painted flower and a convincingly foreshortened book in the immediate foreground of the *Lucca Altarpiece*. These iconographic elements redefined the picture plane as a threshold, reinforcing the visionary quality inherent in the artist's spatial ambiguities.

Raphael was one of the first artists to respond to Bartolommeo's innovations. The *Sistine Madonna* (Fig.25), arguably his most explicit investigation of the visionary, employs some of the Frate's signature devices. The Virgin and Child appear before a glowing cloud glory and surrounded by cloud-putti. Two angels lean on the barely described parapet, part of a framing system that notionally belongs to the realm of the viewer. Much like Bartolommeo's earlier painting, then, Raphael's picture stages a privileged moment of visionary experience. As he does in so much of his Roman work, the artist aligns the beholder's sensory engagement of paint on canvas with notions of insight that move the mind beyond the *saeculum*.[328]

When Fra Bartolommeo began working on his *Salvator Mundi* (Fig.26), he returned to the visionary themes that he and Raphael had been developing. Here, however, there is an important difference. This painting does not present its beholders with a glimpse of the heavenly realm. The sacred figures appear in the *saeculum* itself. In fact, the risen Christ and the four Evangelists occupy a space deliberately

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[327] Vusich explores the role of inset images in Fra Bartolommeo's work in "Divinus Amor Extasim Facit," 1-20, et. pass.

[328] Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 27-45. On the relationship between Raphael and Fra Bartolommeo, see Borgo, "Fra Bartolommeo e Raffaello," 499-507.

modeled on the environment of SS. Annunziata, which is to say, on the physical surroundings of the painting's intended audience. Over eighty years ago, Erwin Panofsky accurately described the psychological impact of such a spatial conceit: "in transforming the *ousia* (reality) into the *phainomenon* (appearance), [the painting] seems to reduce the divine to a mere subject matter for human consciousness; but for that very reason, conversely, it expands human consciousness into a vessel for the divine."[329] We have to imagine that the Dominican friar who produced this altarpiece was keenly interested in this manner of expanding human consciousness. But it is important to note that the Frate's painting struck near contemporaries as a stunning artistic achievement, as well. According to Bocchi, this picture is "as real as paint can be."[330]

In effect, Andrea's visionary treatment of space in the *Madonna of the Harpies* operated in the same fashion, satisfying several concerns at once. Firstly, and most importantly, it allowed the artist to address the abiding requirements of ecclesiastical art. This panel was an object meant to inspire the type of engagement that Panofsky describes. It was, more specifically, intended for the context that Bonaventure calls, "the quiet of contemplation."[331] I will have more say later on about the theological material that inspired our painter in this regard, but for now it is worth noting that within the church of San Francesco, Andrea's audience of nuns could do more than simply look upon the Virgin and Child, St. John and St. Francis.

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[329] Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 72.

[330] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence,* 211; Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 222. "molto è simile al vero." See Vusich, "Divinus Amor Extasim Facit," 7. My argument regarding Bartolommeo's spiritual inclinations and artistic ambitions strikes a chord with Vusich's study of the friar-painter, which puts "particular pressure on the claim that Fra Bartolommeo's pious and artistic ambitions were mutually excluding."

[331] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure*, 61.

They could gaze upon sacred figures who gazed back, who seem to exist in the same environment. They could look upon the protagonists of the *Madonna of the Harpies* in a state of perpetual anticipation, with Petrarch's verses ringing in their minds—if only the figures "could reply to my words!"[332] And for that very reason, they could also expand their own consciousness, making it a vessel for the Word itself.

At the exact same time, the visual decisions that account for this suggestion of intimacy work as part of a clever strategy for professional and social self-promotion. By creating a visionary altarpiece, Andrea nuanced the dialogue he was having with Bartolommeo and Raphael in terms of pictorial style. He aligned his work with critical terms that linked painting to the literary arts. And he catered to potential patrons in Florence—patrons who expected artistic excellence, who admired innovation, who had a highly developed sense of regional pride, and who might have been feeling uneasy about the looming shadow Rome was casting over their local art scene.

To read the early modern commentaries on the *Madonna of the Harpies* is to glimpse the success of this strategy. Borghini notes the presence of "a transparent cloudy smokiness...that appears to move over the buildings and the figures."[333] In this regard, the late sixteenth-century intellectual followed Vasari's description in *Le vite*, which explains that, of all Andrea's works, contemporaries held this painting in the highest regard. Vasari, too, emphasized Andrea's talents for illusionism, noting "*un fumo di nuvoli trasparenti sopra il casamento, e le figure che par che si muovino*."[334]

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[332] Petrarch, Sonnet 78 in *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 178. "se responder savesse a' detti miei!"
[333] Borghini, *Il Riposo*, 207.
[334] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 358.

As one might expect, Bocchi goes into greater detail, and significantly, he focuses the vast majority of his praise on the power of Andrea's verisimilitude.

> The face of the Virgin does not seem painted but real and of flesh...Christ, winsome and most beautiful, puts a hand to the Virgin's breast and...smiles at the viewer with such joy that words could not easily express with what incomparable skill He is depicted. The mother's face, her hands, and the Child's limbs do not seem to be painted things but real, not made of pigments applied with a brush, but flesh itself, and extraordinarily like beings capable of speech and action.[335]

The figure of John the Evangelist, he continues, "is truly outstanding and without equal in beauty: his face is alive and far from being painted, seems wholly natural."[336] "No less beautiful is the Saint Francis...The head is real, not illusory, and made in such a way that it seems to be living and in relief."[337]

The author then concludes his discussion with a brief tale that touches on some of the themes we have been addressing.

> A man very expert in painting was amazed one day when a caretaker at the church climbed on the altar to arrange some things: he [the expert] astutely observed how the three figures of Andrea had greater relief than the real man. Truly, this wonderful artist has taken art to such heights that it seems incapable of advancing any further.[338]

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[335] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 164; Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 169-170. "Il volto dell Vergine non par dipinto, ma verro, e di carne...Il Cristo bellissimo vezzosamente, messa la mano al petto della Vergina...ride con tant gioia verso chi il guarda, che non parole non si direbbe di leggieri, come con arte incoparabile e state effigiato. Non par cosa finta, ma vera, ne sembrano pennellate di colori ma di carne, il volto della madrea, le mani, le membra del figliuolo, e simili oltra modo à chi fauella, quasi fanno segno di muouer la persona, e di atteggiarla."

[336] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 164; Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 170. "Il Vangelista Giovanni di vero per bellezza rara è senza pari: è la testa viva, e lontana da cosa finta sembra di esser del tutto naturale."

[337] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 164; Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 170-171. "Ma non è minor la bellezza del San Francesco...E' vera la testa, non equivoca, e fatta in quella guisa , che vivamente pare, che sia di rilievo."

[338] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 164; Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 171 "Perche già disse con suaio auui so un huomo della pittura molto intendente, abbattutosi un giorno, quondo un ministro dell Chiesa salito sopra l'altare ordinaua alcune cose; come le tre figure di Andrea di questo huom vivo più erano di rilievo. Et di vero tanto con l'arte è ito in alto questo maraviglioso artefice, che più oltre non pare, che il suo vigore si possa avanzare."

In Bocchi's approximation, then, Andrea had reached a level of achievement similar to that of Apelles, Pliny the Elder's master of verisimilitude.[339] The *Madonna of the Harpies* was not only "marvelous beyond all reckoning." It was not just a work "of stupendous coloring."[340] This altarpiece, this distinctly Florentine creation, was more convincingly naturalistic than the reality of nature itself.

3.2: The Pursuit of Brilliance

With this last quotation, the idea of "stupendous coloring," Bocchi touches on yet another important aspect of Andrea's ambitions. For the coloring of the *Madonna of the Harpies* is nothing short of brilliant. The Virgin's robes show a remarkable range of hues. A smoky blue drapery covers part of her rose-colored dress. Her white hood overlaps a yellow scarf, which falls across the pink ruffle of her upper sleeve and curls under the olive green material she wears on her extended forearm. Soft red cloth drapes John the Evangelist, whose shirt is grey-violet, and whose scarf transitions from a stony blue to hot orange. With uncommon skill, Andrea wove these chromatic chords through the hair and wings of the putti and, ultimately, into the seemingly monochromatic habit of St. Francis.

This garment, a veritable performance in and of itself, is another instance where Andrea engaged the available lexicon of early modern art criticism.[341] It is an example of a virtuoso painter grappling with *difficultà*, of an artist deliberately raising pictorial difficulties only to overcome them with seeming ease. Shearman explains

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[339] See McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance*, 48.

[340]Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 163; Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 168-169. "di colorito oltra ogni stima mirabile, e stupendo."

[341] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 67-81.

the problem quite well. "Considered in the abstract, a group of three figures, of which the first is monochrome from iconographical necessity and the second and third elaborately polychrome by choice, produces a potential unbalance which would normally be avoided."[342] Andrea's solution to this possible issue harkens back to the strategy of chromatic instability he employed in the San Gallo *Annunciation*. The habit of St. Francis gives every impression of being grey-brown, but the complexity and subtlety of its build up, a nuanced layering of glazes applied with short brushstrokes, incorporates both the cooler and the warmer hues that appear elsewhere in the picture. This clever application of paint, this conspicuous instance of *virtù*, saves the picture from the potentially jarring effects of chromatic imbalance. Its intricate structure also engages the ideal of *varietà*, an artistic virtue prized by Andrea's contemporaries, and one that might easily be applied to the disposition of hues in the *Madonna of the Harpies* as a whole. The best way to describe the color of this painting, however, is with reference to the notion of *bellezza*, a critical term that refers to the type of dazzling, fully illuminated color Andrea pursued for much of his working life.[343]

We have tracked some of this pursuit already. As he worked on paintings such as the *Noli me tangere*, studying the tonal strategies developed by Leonardo, Andrea quickly became aware of what Leonardo always understood. The discipline of tonal unity only conforms to natural appearances in very particular circumstances. And while the established conventions of chiaroscuro modeling allowed painting to rival illusionistically the properties of sculpture, they suppressed the intensity and purity of

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[342] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 141. See also, Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 146-147.

[343] Shearman established Andrea's interest in *bellezza di colore* in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148. See also, Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 67, 143-148.

the painter's pigments.[344] The San Gallo *Annunciation* was Andrea's first attempt to address these limitations. Responding to the theological discussions that informed this panel's iconography, he developed a method of increasing the quantity of color while preserving the unified quality of his tonal structure.

This manner of painterly exploration, of inquiring into the flexibility of his pigments, tells us something crucial about Andrea's ambitions as an artist. He demonstrates, here, that light and hue are not separate categories of pictorial expression. He reminds us, as well, that while he was incredibly interested in the full potential of his palette, in the ideal of *bellezza di colore*, he was unwilling to sacrifice the sense of relief Leonardo had achieved for painting with the science of *chiaro e scuro*.[345] The years following the completion of the San Gallo *Annunciation*, leading up to the remarkable execution of the *Madonna of the Harpies*—and ultimately to the Luco *Pietà*—bear witness to a series of interconnected chromatic experiments that continue this ambitious line of inquiry.

The first of these experiments occurs in a painting we have addressed already in terms of form, the *Marriage of St. Catherine* (Fig.24) from 1512-1513. In this painting of intense chroma, Andrea grappled once again with the problem he considered in the San Gallo *Annunciation*. The Virgin and Child, positioned in the center of the picture, sit under a heavy canopy that partially shields them from the light. This canopy creates deep pockets of shadow, cleverly justifying the use of chiaroscuro modeling in an open-air setting. It also creates a system of spatial registers.

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[344] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 20-22.
[345] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148.

Because the Virgin tucks her right foot underneath her throne, the naturally dark blue mantle that covers her leg reads as shadow. As she extends her left foot to the edge of the step, on the other hand, a powerfully bright light falls over the red dress that clothes her shin, washing the color out of the highlight. The play of light thus reads as a gentle but indelibly boundary, one that separates the saints from the more sacred Virgin and Child. The most successful use of this construct is, not surprising, the focal point of the picture's narrative. St. Catherine, who wears a bright orange mantle with a gold reverse over a light blue dress, extends her hand towards the Christ Child, ready to receive the ring he proffers. As she does so, her arm passes beneath the canopy, moving from an environment of intense light to one of shade. The blue of her dress makes this almost mystical transition apparent. Areas of pale pigment describe where light hits her back, while deeper, darker saturations of blue gradually define the movement of her arm away from the picture plane.

This clever spatial scheme notwithstanding, Andrea still faced real difficulties in the field of *colore*. In the *Marriage of St. Catherine*, he distributed bright swaths of color across the panel, approaching the ideal of *bellezza di colore* largely without resorting to methods based in *cangiantismo* practices.[346] The issue is that Andrea was trying to create the conditions for viewing such dazzling color without sacrificing that all important sense of relief or tonal unity, which painters cultivated in part as a means of rivaling sculpture. In this regard, we see that he was still struggling with the limitations of Leonardo's convention. Whereas the qualitative requirements of tonal unity placed certain limits on the quantity of bright color in the San Gallo *Annunciation*, Andrea reversed his priorities in the Dresden panel. He gave greater

[346] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 138.

prominence to his desire for increased amounts of bright color in his composition. The result is that color and chiaroscuro fit together less comfortably.[347] Andrea paid careful attention to the effects of bright light on colored forms, noting the optical phenomenon we call luster, where the most intense areas of highlight are colorless. He exercised all of his considerable ingenuity attempting to account for the tonal properties of individual pigments. But he has yet to fully synchronize the range of values expressed by those individual pigments across his composition. There is, for example, something unsettling about the juxtaposition of Mary's legs, the right enveloped in shade, the left bathed in light.[348]

The problem is an old one, stemming from the fact every pigment has its own tonal value in its pure and fully saturated state.[349] Conveying a sense of three-dimensionality with fully illuminated colors, then, requires an almost alchemical knowledge of one's materials, an awareness of the tonal relationships among different concentrations and mixtures of individual pigments, and an ability to manipulate those relationships in order to suggest that a single light source affects forms of various colors. Such was Andrea's goal.

In the *Birth of the Virgin*, a fresco executed in SS. Annunziata in 1514, he pursued this goal with a renewed sense of studious urgency. Specifically, he chose to develop further his strategy of chromatic instability. His reasons for revisiting this method in a mural project have to do with the technical limitations of his medium.

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[347] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 137.

[348] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 210-211; Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 34-35. The panel has suffered from overzealous cleaning in the past, which could explain some of the more glaring patches of light. But the damage is not so serious as to obscure Andrea's developing sophistication with regards to *colore*.

[349] See Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 18.

Fresco does not lend itself to the layering of glazes one enjoys when working with oils, as Leonardo discovered to his own detriment. On the other hand, it does lend itself to the type of subtle integration of hues that Andrea demonstrated in the San Gallo *Annunciation*.[350]

This technique is a heightened, almost hyper-sophisticated form of *cangiantismo*, a method Andrea had already employed, albeit tentatively, in the atrium of SS. Annunziata, in the San Benizzi cycle. In the *Birth of the Virgin*, however, his *cangianti* are a matter of infinite nuance, a smooth integration of colors that captures a full range of tonal values. This effect is especially evident in the garments worn by the maiden kneeling beside the basin and framed by the doorway (Fig.29). Bright yellows serve as the highlight, while warm browns and purples describe the shadows. Carefully measured mixtures of colors, chosen for their close association in terms of tone, articulate the values in between. The result is a radical compromise between tonal unity, on the one hand, and a richness and variety of color on the other.[351] This compromise can only have enhanced Andrea's credentials within Florence, for when juxtaposed with his earlier techniques in the San Benizzi cycle, Andrea's *colore* quite literally painted a picture of artistic growth.

Two paintings completed around the same time as the *Madonna of the Harpies* bear witness to a connected mode of chromatic experimentation. The *Portrait of a Young Man* (Fig.30) in London and the *Borghese Madonna and Child*

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[350] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148. My discussion, here, calls into question one of Shearman's conclusions regarding Andrea as a colorist, namely that he applied novel solutions to problems of hue and tone in panel projects only after he developed them in fresco.

[351] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1., 136-137; Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 143-144. See Farago, "Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*," 310-314. By adapting the principles of tonal unity to fresco, Andrea solved a problem that contributed to the failed execution of Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*.

(Fig.31) are essentially studies in monochrome. With few exceptions, each painting revels in the tonal range of a severely restricted palette dominated by blue.[352] In the London *Portrait*, for instance, Andrea placed a pale, blue-grey sleeve next to a dark blue vest, which the sitter wears over the exposed fabric of a white undershirt. Effectively, he used the garment with the darkest value to separate the lightest element in his composition from the chromatic middle tone. And yet, he carefully synchronized the tonal scale of each individual color-area, giving the beholder the impression that the same light affects each saturation of blue pigment according to its inherent value structure.

These studies in virtual monochrome placed Andrea in good company. Indeed, with his works, the Florentine tradition gained a foothold in an artistic rivalry that already featured the most prominent painters active in Rome and Venice. Raphael, in his *Baldassare Castiglione*, and Titian, in his *Man with a Blue Sleeve,* had tackled the same challenge Andrea addressed in his London *Portrait*.[353] Andrea's dialogue with the Roman school is even more pronounced in the *Borghese Madonna*. The defined anatomy and contorted poses of his nudes, together with the drama of his foreshortening, recall formal devices associated with the late work of Raphael and with the ideal of *maniera*.[354] Interestingly, the *Madonna of the Rose* (Fig.32), completed in Raphael's workshop near the end of the master's life, bears a striking resemblance to Andrea's panel. Raphael and his assistants executed their picture with the same palette Andrea used a few years earlier: a large amount of blue, accents of

[352] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 140-141.
[353] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 140.
[354] See Summers, "Contrapposto," 336-361.

green and pink, set against dark neutrals. Andrea's efforts, it seems, did not go unnoticed in the Eternal City.[355]

What has largely escaped the notice of modern scholars, however, is that this *colore* strategy is also part of Andrea's lifelong dialogue with Leonardo. With his studies in virtual monochrome, Andrea was attempting to build on Leonardo's system of chiaroscuro, to develop a technical logic that maintained the virtues of tonal unity while considering the individual values of different color saturations. In his London *Portrait*, for instance, the painter allowed his darker applications of blue to run through a different series of gradations than his lighter saturations. He then expertly coordinated the range of values expressed on each garment worn by his sitter, so that, together, the individual areas of color speak to a consistent light source that plays across the figure's back and shoulder.

This is precisely what he did not do in the *Marriage in the St. Catherine*. Andrea was missing that crucial layer of understanding, that delicate formula for coordinating the values expressed by different hues, and his attempt to describe accurately the effects of light on pale and dark color planes suffered for it. He acquired the necessary knowledge by, first, refining his abilities to manipulate several colors within a defined spectrum of tonal value (as in the *Birth of the Virgin*) and, later, by exploring a wider register of tonal values within a strictly confined color spectrum (as in the London *Portrait*). Because of this line of experimentation, Andrea was ultimately able to capture the very conditions that Leonardo sought so arduously:

[355] I thank Anthony Colantuono for bringing this comparison, as well as the possibility that Raphael's workshop was responding to Andrea, to my attention.

the conditions in which the greatest quantity of light reveals the greatest variety of fully illuminated, naturalistic color.[356]

There is a simple reason why this aspect of Andrea's response to his great predecessor has yet to receive the attention it deserves. Whereas Andrea pursued these avenues of inquiry solely in mediums of visual expression—on canvas, plaster, or panel—Leonardo took a slightly different approach. Some of his most significant considerations of color unfold in the pages of his notebooks. These dense, disorganized, and fragmented documents have proven equally fascinating and frustrating for scholars of Renaissance art.[357]

In the early 1990s, however, Claire Farago published a series of important studies that made Leonardo's thinking with regard to *colore* far less cumbersome. Exploring the links among Leonardo's writings and scientific discussions regarding how the eye receives information, she explained that Leonardo sought the means of composing paintings according to optical principles. One of his principal concerns, she argues, was the problem of reflected color. Investigating this matter led Leonardo to draw close associations between mental and painted images, between the sense of sight and the faculty of imagination. The association stems from the fact that he inherited a theoretical tradition of cognitive psychology, which derived much of its character from the rules of geometry. Proponents of this tradition considered the imagination to be part of a complex of internal organs that operated like a mirror,

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[356] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol.1, 131-148.

[357] There is a vast body of learned writing on Leonardo's notebooks and art theory. I refer the reader to the papers collected in volume four of *Leonardo da Vinci: Selected Scholarship*, edited by Claire J. Farago. See also Veltman, "Leonardo da Vinci: A Review," 381-388. For an illuminating investigation that traces connections between Leonardo's theoretical writings and working practice, see Fiorani, "The Colors of Leonardo's Shadows," 271-278.

receiving images produced by rays of colored light bouncing off the surfaces of external objects. Thus, the greater the quantity of perceived light, the greater the amount of information received by the eyes, the more stimuli reach the imagination. Working within this conceptual framework, Leonardo theorized that the painter who mastered the techniques of *colore* possessed a privileged means of engaging his or her audience. By recreating the most beautiful effects of light, tone, and color with scientific accuracy—in other words, in accordance with the optical rules of experience—the painter could stimulate the beholder's imagination in powerful ways.[358]

This power has everything to do with Leonardo's thoughts regarding *lustro*. Whereas today the term luster generally refers only to the sparkling highlights that form on the ridges of illuminated objects, *lustro*, for Leonardo, was part of the larger problem of reflected color. He described luster as a point of bright light that rebounds off a lit surface and penetrates the eye with such intensity that it overpowers the pupil. The resulting sensation is a blinding, white-hot pain that essentially overloads the internal faculties and causes the pupil to contract, thereby restricting the viewer's experience of natural stimuli.[359]

This discussion of the pupil's response to light touches on an inherent tension that concerned Leonardo for much of his literary career. He noted that the conditions governing *lustro* also reveal the greatest and most beautiful variety of fully

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[358] Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 63-88; idem., *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 92-117; idem., "Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*," 319-321.

[359] Leonardo, *Madrid Codex II*, fol. 26v, cited in Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 75. "Quando il predetto obbietto sarà forte luminoso, la popilla, non la potendo soportare, si fa ttanto minore, che la similitudine di tale luminoso obbietto viene alla popilla non manco diminuità de ssple[n]dore che di magnitudine."

illuminated colors in nature, an optical phenomenon that Leonardo refers to as *splendore*. In these conditions, which are found in open-air environments, the sensory world becomes a dazzling display of brilliant hues. Light overwhelms the pupil, but it also penetrates shadows, reflects off lit objects, and carries traces of local color from one item to the next. For someone with Leonardo's visual sensitivities, then, this is an almost cruel paradox. The best conditions for experiencing the greatest amount of natural beauty, understood in terms of apparent color, are also the worst possible conditions for optical experience itself.[360]

Painting, as Farago demonstrates, provided Leonardo with a way out of this paradox. A viewer might not be able to tolerate nature's most intense, colorful light, but Leonardo argued that paintings based on optical principles could recreate the effects of *lustro* and *splendore* in conditions better suited to the pupil's basic capacities. When viewed in a setting that allowed the pupil to dilate, pictures filled with bright light and color that behave according to the laws of nature impress themselves upon the beholder's internal faculties with considerable force. This line of reasoning effectively claimed that painted works of art could stimulate the beholder in ways nature could not. That capability, insofar as it is based on scientific discourses, largely accounts in Leonardo's mind for painting's superiority over poetry, music, and especially works of sculpture.[361] For as he explains, "*La scultura non è scientia ma è arte meccanichissima.*"[362]

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[360] Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 75-77; idem., *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 106-110.

[361] Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 94-99. For an example of Leonardo exploring the visual force of painting in ways that overcome the limitations of natural experience, see Farago's excellent discussion of the *Mona Lisa* in "Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*," 319-321.

[362] Leonardo da Vinci, *Parte Prima*, 35 in Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 256.

There is a real connection between Leonardo's theoretical discussions of *lustro* and *splendore* and Andrea del Sarto's pursuit of *bellezza di colore* in the *Marriage of St. Catherine*. A radiant light falls across his scene, washing the color from the areas of drapery that its touches directly. These areas of luster coincide with a medley of fully illuminated colors, colors so bright that they would overpower the pupil if experienced in nature. The conditions Leonardo describes in print are thus exactly those that Andrea attempts to reproduce on panel, meaning that his investigations and experiments prior to the *Madonna of the Harpies* attempts to increase the visual force of his pictures.

It is worth noting, again, that Andrea probably did not have access to Leonardo's notebooks. As a mature apprentice, however, Andrea did have access to Leonardo himself. Vasari tells us that, as a student, the younger painter spent much of his free time in the company of other apprentices, drawing in the Sala del Papa, the same space that served as Leonardo's studio while he worked on his Battle cartoon.[363] This project, which necessitated his presence in Florence, coincided with the most significant developments in Leonardo's writings on color, developments that concern the properties of reflected light, of *splendore*.[364] During these same years, Andrea participated in learned exchanges with the sculptor, Jacopo Sansovino, and was part of the eclectic group of artists and intellectuals that gathered around Baccio d'Agnolo.[365]

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[363] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 344.

[364] See Farago, "Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*," 318-328. Farago points out that the thoughts contained in Leonardo's notebooks were probably intended for oral recitation in *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 40-47.

[365] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 37-39.

Each of these experiences invited the intelligent young painter who would later execute the *Madonna of the Harpies* to engage ideas of lingering fascination among the artistic community. Andrea's own paintings suggest that he capitalized on those opportunities, that these experiences fed into his natural inclinations as a colorist. They helped inspire the investigations that began in the San Gallo altarpieces, as well as the chromatic strategies deployed in the *Marriage of St. Catherine*. These strategies in turn led to the developments documented in the *Birth of the Virgin*, the London *Portrait* and the *Borghese Madonna*: a period of sustained exploration focused on how the eye receives information pertaining to light and color.

The *Holy Family* in Paris (Fig.33)—a highly significant painting that possibly helped bring Andrea back into Leonardo's orbit at the French court—marks an important step in the line of inquiry that leads to the *Madonna of the Harpies*.[366] When the Paris panel, which dates to 1515, is set against the *Marriage of St. Catherine*, we glimpse something like the arc of Andrea's technical learning, for there is a more convincingly coordinated system of tonal relationships among the hues in the later picture. The blue of the Virgin's hood and skirt sits comfortably next to the pink of her dress, the yellow of her under sleeve, the white of her collar, and the delicate material of her transparent scarf. We see, as well, that traces of *lustro* fleck Mary's sleeve, and that her transparent scarf picks up hints of blue along its upper ridge, presumably from light reflecting off her hood. These are explicit instances where Andrea's interests run parallel to Leonardo's, where the younger Florentine

[366] On the connection between this version of the Holy Family and the French court, see Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 60. See also the essays collected in the recent exhibition catalogue, *Göttlich gemalt*, edited by Syre, Schmidt, and Stege, especially Delieuvin, "Andrea del Sartos Gemälde für den französischen Hof," 53-77.

captured the effects of light in all their splendor. Andrea attempts to suggest another, even more powerful example of this phenomenon in the cloth draped across the Virgin's lap. Judging from the section of fabric that emerges under Christ's foot, this garment is white. As it passes the bright hues of the Virgin's illuminated robes, however, it takes on colors reflected from the fabrics it touches—recalling Gabriel's draperies from the San Gallo *Annunciation* with its unstable mixture of reds, violets, and blues.

This section of cloth constitutes a virtuoso performance similar to the habit of St. Francis in the *Madonna of the Harpies*. In this sense, it provides further confirmation that, in the years immediately preceding the Franciscan altarpiece, Andrea del Sarto was deeply invested in optical problems that were part and parcel of Leonardo da Vinci's intellectual legacy. These problems concerned the virtue of chromatic brilliance, and yet, by folding that artistic virtue together with scientific discussions regarding the mechanics of vision, Leonardo and Andrea, together, approached another type of brilliance. Andrea invested his paintings with the theoretical weight, the learning of his predecessor's thinking. In doing so, he assigned the objects produced by his hand to a higher order of cultural production, where they became, in essence, works of the mind—objects authored, not made.

When he installed the *Madonna of the Harpies* on the high altar of San Francesco, Andrea presented his viewers in the city of Florence with his most persuasive demonstration of intellectual acumen to date. He did not yet capture the effects of fully illuminated color in an open-air setting—that would have to wait until the Luco *Pietà*—but this is the first painting where he is fully in command of the

theoretical issues he had been exploring in his earlier work.[367] There is no question, here, that the artist is a master of *chiaro e scuro*. He modeled his figures so convincingly that Bocchi singled them out for praise. Referring to St. Francis, the author exclaims, "the part touched by strong light is well-illuminated; the dark parts, in contrast, with exquisite skill and without having an outline to their colour, show the whole form in such a way as to suggest that other parts would be visible if the viewer were to move."[368] The cloud hovering behind the Virgin, moreover, operates simultaneously as an allusion to Leonardo's *sfumato* style and as a "dark foil," a device Leonardo frequently employed as a type of shadowy ground in order to create a more dramatic sense of relief.[369]

The decision to engage Leonardo so explicitly, to make use of the techniques that made Leonardo famous, casts sharp light on another subtle aspect of Andrea's development. In his earlier work, especially in the first two of his San Gallo altarpieces, Andrea's impressive understanding of *sfumato* painting lent a noticeable degree of softness to his forms. This effect is particularly evident in his treatment of facial features, as velvety pockets of shadow often appear around his figures' eyes. By 1517, however, such softening shadows have largely disappeared from Andrea's paintings, and his treatment of the human form in general has acquired a more convincingly sculptural character. This movement towards plasticity underscores the painter's critical consideration of sculpture as an artistic medium. Vasari makes note of this in *Le vite* when he tells us that Sansovino made models for Andrea, and, in

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[367] See Shearman *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 140.

[368] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 164; Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 171. "La parte toccata dal lume con vigor gagliardo è ottimamente illuminata, e l'oscuro all'incontro con arte isquisita, e senza bauer termini in suo colorito, mostra il tutto, come si muova."

[369] Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 23-27.

fact, the Evangelist in the *Madonna of the Harpies* is based on Sansovino's *St. James* (Fig.34), which the sculptor completed in 1517 for the Duomo.[370]

There is an exceptionally thoughtful strategy at play here. The position of John's legs, the turn of his head, and especially the relationship between his front most arm and cuffed sleeve all recall the carved figure of St. James. These formal allusions to Sansovino's sculpture help weave Andrea's painting further into the fabric of Florentine artistic culture, directing the viewer's mind to the work of a contemporary citizen and to an important civic structure. Additionally, they intensify Andrea's already intense exchange with Leonardo. By imitating an actual statue in an altarpiece where there is such an overt concern for the science of *chiaro e scuro*, Andrea invited comparisons between painting and sculpture, engaging a learned debate in which Leonardo's theories remain an important touchstone.[371]

Andrea, however, also makes it clear that he has stepped out from Leonardo's shadow, that after years of struggle and research he has finally realized artistic ideals that Leonardo only approached in theory.[372] In the *Madonna of the Harpies*, Andrea achieved a level of pictorial relief that rivals statuary, as well as any painting by that ingenious first protagonist of the *terza etá*. But his altarpiece also glitters with bright, fully illuminated colors, colors handled in a perfectly scientific manner. John's red draperies run through a different series of tonal gradations than those expressed in his violet-grey shirt. And yet Andrea has modified and coordinated the values expressed by each pigment so that the eye easily accepts the polychrome figure as a unified form. Much the same can be said for the figure of the Madonna. Standing on a

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[370] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 82-83.
[371] See Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 3-91.
[372] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 140-141.

pedestal, positioned in an architectural niche, she is the most direct allusion to sculpture in this scene. Her garments, however, constitute an expertly developed texture of dazzling chroma. Light and color have miraculously animated a figure who, presumably moments before, was as brittle and cold as one of Sansovino's marbles. Andrea's animating luminosity, moreover, is an extended essay in the optics of reflected light. Patches of *lustro* adorn Mary's sleeve. Traces of John's hot red garment alter the appearance of his scarf, while the rich *splendore* of the scene itself washes over the habit of St. Francis. If Leonardo made painting a science, elevating it above that "*arte meccanichissima*," which requires great "*faticha di corpo*,"[373] then Andrea would have his viewers understand that he continued those scientific explorations. He, in effect, surpassed his great predecessor by realizing painting's true nature as a *scientia media*. He is now the new luminary of the Florentine tradition, the one elevating painting to even higher orders of God-like intellection.[374]

What is truly remarkable is how seamlessly these arguments blend with those articulated by the *disegno* of this painting. By embracing a set of formal devices associated with the 'classic' style, a style "precociously conceived by Leonardo da Vinci,"[375] Andrea opened lines of exchange with the most prominent of his contemporaries, especially Fra Bartolommeo and Raphael, the prince of Rome. Andrea then redoubled these efforts with his visionary treatment of space. This strategy of self-promotion positioned our painter at the forefront of his city's artistic community, while also providing him with the means of inserting himself into the

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[373] Leonardo da Vinci, *Parte Prima*, 36 in Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 257.

[374] The term *scientia media* describes Aristotelian sciences that mixed theoretical and practical knowledge. Farago demonstrates that Leonardo considered painting to be such a science in "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 65-68.

[375] Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 15.

intellectual class. Andrea's *colore* clarifies each of these assertions, largely by augmenting the visionary form of the *Madonna of the Harpies*. The optical effects of his colors are predicated on an affiliation between sight and imagination; they are designed to overawe the beholder, to give the spectator a sense of the supersensible.

Andrea is a very neat logician in this regard, because the threads tying his *disegno* and *colore* together deliberately recall one of the most important Florentine altarpieces of the Cinquecento, Fra Bartolommeo's *Vision of St. Bernard* (Fig.35). This panel—the first executed by the Frate after taking religious orders, a painting produced during the very years when Bartolommeo and Raphael built up their rapport—has recently been connected to St. Bernard's own theories of divine love and to traditions of contemplative mysticism. These issues, and Bartolommeo's treatment of them in this picture, are intimately related to theological discussions of light, sight, and spiritual illumination.[376] The Frate presents the Virgin appearing to the kneeling saint amid a choir of angels. A bright, raking light falls across the heavenly figures, ultimately landing on Bernard, as well. These conditions create deep shadows, sharp contrasts on the Madonna's garments, and rich *cangianti* among the angels. By suppressing the middle tones, and treating the angels as, we might say, a chorus of colors, the Frate differentiated between the realm of visionary experience on the right and the earthly environment of the saints on the left. The light that falls on Bernard connects the two sides of the composition, as is evidenced by the shadow Mary casts on the saint's habit. In this regard, the drama of light acts as a metaphor for the internal workings of Bernard's soul as it lays bare Bartolommeo's artful sophistication.

[376] Cf. Vusich, "Divinus Amor Extasim Facit," 21-63.

Andrea essentially reoriented the experience evoked in Bartolommeo's panel. We might even say that Bernard's vision serves as an analogue for the act of viewing the *Madonna of the Harpies*, for by placing the Virgin on a pedestal and presenting her to the viewer frontally, Andrea allowed the viewer to assume the role occupied by the saint in his rival's earlier altarpiece. He drew on some of the same techniques the Frate used, employing chiaroscuro and exploring the ties among light, sight, and spiritual illumination. But Andrea also distanced himself from this early work of the friar-painter, developing strategies of *colore*—explicitly Florentine strategies—that remained nascent in Bartolommeo art after his travels in Venice.

Andrea's drama of light is the drama of *lustro* and *splendore*, terms concerned with how a painting might stimulate a viewing subject. In theory, the brilliant light that falls upon the figures in Andrea's painting comes from the beholder's environment. It penetrates the seemingly nonexistent picture plane, reflects off the variety of richly colored surfaces included in the scene, and returns to the beholder, stimulating his or (especially) her imagination in ways that even nature could not. Andrea, here, uses the power of supremely naturalistic art to paint in a way that invites us to approach something like the supernatural. We, the beholders, are bathed in light from the light of the *Madonna of the Harpies*, a fact that must have had a particular resonance among Andrea's Franciscan audiences.

3.3: In "the quiet of contemplation"

That being said, the question of whether or not this altarpiece was well received among its beholders in the San Francesco community must remain open, at least up to

a certain point. Records of initial on-site impressions are rare luxuries, and unfortunately, no such document is available to us in this case. What we have, instead, is rather strong circumstantial evidence, such as the eloquent testimony of Andrea's near contemporaries. The trajectory of Andrea's career after completing this project is highly suggestive, as well.[377] He was, quite simply, an artist on the rise, an artist who, in short order, would be summoned back to the Augustinian convent at San Gallo and then onward to the court of King Francis I.[378]

Such indicators of favorably public opinion leave little doubt, in my mind at least, that Andrea's friend and patron from Santa Croce—the influential friar who, in Vasari's words, "delighted in painting"—appreciated the artful execution of the *Madonna of the Harpies*. I have to imagine that the abbess of San Francesco also would have been pleased with Andrea's work, for by this point in the Renaissance period, artistic skill benefited more than the one wielding the brush. The sheer measure of Andrea's refined talent in the *Madonna of the Harpies* conferred honor on his patrons. His visual language tightened the bonds between the Franciscan institutional network and what we might call the living texture of Florentine culture. On a more personal level, the sophistication of Andrea's brushwork aligned his clients with the emerging social persona of the "art patron," presenting them to the

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[377] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 64-80. Andrea completed a number of projects around the time that he finished the *Madonna of the Harpies*. These include frescos in SS. Annunziata and the Chiostro dello Scalzo, the *Borghese Madonna* and London *Portrait* discussed above, as well as his contributions to the Borgherini bedroom decorations. For an overview of the Borgherini bedroom commission, see Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates," 311-314.

[378] For an illuminating counterpoint, see the discussions of Rosso's fortunes after 1518 in Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 35-64; Hall, *After Raphael*, 62-63. See also, Campbell, "'Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva'," 596-620.

wider public as cultured and magnanimous individuals, as citizens of discerning taste and keen intelligence.[379]

In this case, those cultured and magnanimous individuals were also religious officials. They would have immediately understood that, when it comes to paintings made for devotional purposes, artistic skill conferred honor on the sacred figures or narratives depicted, too. We cannot overstate his point, especially given the figures in question. For the nuns of San Francesco, the Virgin Mary was the most sacred of feminine exempla. She, more than any other saint, embodied the virtues of chastity and compassion for Christ, the same virtues that guided the sisters' spiritual activities.[380] St. Francis, of course, was the patron saint of the nuns' church, as well as the entire Franciscan order. By taking the place originally allotted for Bonaventure in Andrea's altarpiece, this preverbal *Alter Christus* not only gained a more pronounced presence within his own house of worship. He also reinforced the nuns' sense of belonging to a larger corporate body. The same document that informs us of Bonaventure's initial involvement in the painting also names the abbess of San Francesco as "*Soror Gostantia Johannis de Meleto*." The language here, specifically the use of "Johannis" (a male's name), would suggest some familial connection between the abbess who served as one of Andrea's patrons and the saint pictured opposite Francis: the Apostle known for his love of both Christ and Mary, the

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[379] I am persuaded by Jill Burke, who argues that the notion of the "art patron" emerged as practitioners of the visual arts defined themselves as "artists" in *Changing Patrons*, 1-14. Baxandall addressed the cultural value of artistic skill in *Painting and Experience*, 1-27. My thoughts regarding artistic patronage and the living texture of Florentine culture stem from ideas presented in O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency," 417-441.

[380] See Ambrose, *Concerning Virgins*, 2.1. "Let, then, the life of Mary be as it were virginity itself, set forth in a likeness, from which, as from a mirror, the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue is reflected. From this you may take your pattern of life, showing, as an example, the clear rules of virtue: what you have to correct, to effect, and to hold fast."

youngest of the Evangelists, who is, according to Vasari, in the act of writing his Gospel.[381]

When the Franciscan nuns gathered before this altarpiece, when they celebrated mass or approached the painting in prayerful reflection, they thus gazed upon a collection of figures calculated to enhance their sense of purpose and communal identity. They looked upon John, author of some of the most inspiring scriptural discussions of light and love, and presumably recognized the special connection between this figure and their own mother superior. They looked upon Francis, a figure they knew to be "a light for believers,"[382] a saint "so absorbed" by the light of divine love "that his spirit shone through his flesh when for two years before his death he carried in his body the sacred stigmata of the passion."[383] And they looked upon Mary, who redeemed the sins of Eve by serving as the material cause for the Incarnation. See stands on a pedestal, atop creatures meant to embody that selfsame idea of Original Sin, as well as a cartouche that references her own assumption, when Christ acknowledged the pivotal role she played in the redemption of humanity. Bonaventure frames that role by stating that "the Holy Spirit came upon her like a divine fire inflaming her soul and sanctifying her flesh in perfect purity."[384] In a real sense, he, the most influential theologian of the Franciscan order, a thinker associated with this project from its inception, placed the Virgin "inflamed" by

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[381] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 358. "che scrive lo Evangelio." Cf. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 84-89; idem., "Witnesses of Light," 69-70. Natali follows Raffaello Borghini's account (*Il Riposo*, 207), where the author describes John as "in the act of writing his *Revelations.*" Vasari's account is preferable both because of the author's connection to Andrea del Sarto and because of St. John's age in the *Madonna of the Harpies*.

[382] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* in *Bonaventura*, 179. See also, Natali, "Witness of Light," 70-75.

[383] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventura*, 55.

[384] Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, in *Bonaventura*, 127.

"divine fire" on a metaphoric pedestal, just as Andrea placed her on a painted one, bathed in splendor and radiance.

These observations only begin to explore the devotional significance of this altarpiece, where so much of what Andrea does with paint positively begs to be interpreted within the context of spirituality. For instance, when he adopted the compositional principles now identified with the 'classic' style, drawing heavily on the idea of contrapposto, Andrea imbued his handling of form with the notion of *grazia*.[385] "*Grazia*" is an incredibly rich term, one that immediately folds issues of artistic virtuosity into theological discussions of divine grace.[386] This connection is important to the *Madonna of the Harpies* for the simple fact that divine grace was a topic of enduring fascination for any devout Christian in this period, let alone anyone affiliated with the religious orders. The most profound instance associated with God's gracious gifts is none other than that mysterious moment when the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you (Lk 1:28). Significantly, as well, the Greek term for "grace," *charis*, is a term associated with luminosity and brilliance. These notions find their fullest expression when Gabriel details to Mary the manner in which the Word will become flesh in her womb: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you (Lk 1:35).[387]

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[385] See Summers, "Contrapposto," 336-361; Hall, *After Raphael,* 82-83.

[386] See Emison, "Grazia," 427-460.

[387] The Vulgate reads: "Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi *obumbrabit* tibi" (My italics). On the connection between *charis* and luminosity, see Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 197. Didi-Huberman's discussion of St. Antonius' writings, which describe Mary as *lux nova* and state that her grace shines forth on humanity, is especially interesting. "Mary *illuminata in se*, filled and traversed by grace, becomes *illuminatrix in alios*, source of a light that humanity must receive to understand its chance for redemption."

The original term used in this passage is *episkiazo* ("to throw a shadow upon, to envelop in shadow, to overshadow"), which appears in the context of three New Testament miracles. Luke's narrative of the Annunciation is arguably the most important instance, but the word also occurs in accounts of the Transfiguration, when "a bright cloud enveloped them [the witnessing Apostles]"[388] (Mt 17:5), and in Acts 5:15, which describes Peter's healing of the sick. It is a notion that manages to incorporate theological discussions of shadows, clouds, and light simultaneously. Jerome, who rendered *episkiazo* as *obumbra*, imparted this complexity of meaning to his Latin readers, and ultimately, to generations of Renaissance artists, who captured the full range of significance when painting scenes of the Annunciation by including golden rays of impregnating light.[389] Jacobus de Voragine, that extraordinarily popular biographer of saints, is an important intermediary in this regard. He explains,

> A shadow ordinarily is formed by light falling on a solid body, and neither the Virgin nor any pure human being could contain the fullness of the deity: but '*the power of the Most High will overshadow you*', and in her the incorporeal light of the godhead took on the body of mankind, in order that she might bear God.[390]

Andrea's *Madonna of the Harpies* gives visible expression to these ideas, Voragine's words in particular perhaps. The figure of the Christ Child is an essay in chiaroscuro, a pictorial device formed by the exchange between the dazzling, incorporeal light that falls upon Mary and the shadowy cloud lingering behind her body. This entire construct deliberately evokes the valence of *episkiazo* and

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[388] The Vulgate reads: "ecce nubes lucida obumbravit eos."

[389] Gill, "'Until Shadows Disperse'," 259-260, 269-270 n.39-41. See also, Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol," 175-181.

[390] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. 1, 199.

obumbra.[391] What this means, then, is that Andrea's cloud functions less as an iconological symbol than as a *figura*.[392] This mysterious mass of atmosphere, visible but insubstantial, is a specter that, within the context of prayerful reflection, holds the viewer's attention as it opens itself up to a form of meditation associated with scriptural exegesis. Andrea's cloud invites the beholder, especially the Franciscan beholders who gathered before this painting—the nuns who likely had the *Ave Maria* on their lips—to consider the "overshadowing" act of the Holy Spirit.

This very act ultimately lends meaning to the ideas evoked by the Virgin's pedestal. Mary overcame Original Sin by serving as the material dwelling place of God's Word.[393] For that same reason, as Voragine explains, she was assumed body and soul into heaven. "Then the Savior spoke and said, 'Arise, my dear one, my dove, tabernacle of glory, vessel of life, heavenly temple! As you never knew the stain of sin through carnal intercourse, so you shall never suffer dissolution of the flesh in the tomb'."[394] In this manner, Andrea's presentation of the Madonna, his placing her on a pedestal before a dark foil of *sfumato* painting, facilitates an exchange of religious narratives that stretches across sacred time. The events of Genesis intersect with the most profound instance of the New Testament, which devolves into a widely held

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[391] My thoughts regarding the religious significance of chiaroscuro run parallel to those expressed by Edward Olszewski in "How Leonardo Invented Sfumato," 4-9; and Alexander Nagel, who argues in part that *sfumato* served as a "device to represent the metaphysical unknown" in "Leonardo and *sfumato*," 7-20, quotation from 18.

[392] Cf. Shearman, *Only Connect*, 60; Del Bravo, "Andrea del Sarto," 463; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 83-89. By framing the cloud as a dissemblant sign, I take a different position than Shearman, who first interpreted this feature as incense smoke; Del Bravo, who insists that it constitutes a symbol of transience; and Natali, who argues that the mass of black mist should be read as smoke issuing from the bottomless pit described in *Revelations*. It should be noted, however, that the logic of dissemblance does not necessarily preclude Shearman's interpretation. It is the nature of dissemblance to use optical verisimilitude as a means of approaching a different, ineffable truth.

[393] See Dunlop, "Flesh and the Feminine," 129-147.

[394] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. 2, 82. Note the way this passage compares Mary to several loci: "tabernacle of glory, vessel of life, heavenly temple."

article of belief founded on apocryphal writings. This exchange makes Mary herself a veritable field of exegesis, a "figure" in what we might call the "early modern" and the "medieval" sense of the term.

Andrea's light, that most allusive of pictorial devices, allows us to follow this line of reasoning further. There is, indeed, a long tradition linking the mystery of the Incarnation and the idea of divine presence to notions of *lustro* and *splendore*.[395] Dante, an intellectual of the highest standing among the Florentine people, addressed this tradition in the twenty-fourth Canto of his *Paradiso*. There, after describing how the souls of the blessed dance in a dazzling wheel of spinning radiances, the poet attempts to convey the power of hearing the heavenly chorus. He describes "a song so divine that my *fantasia* does not repeat it to me; therefore my pen leaps and I do not write it, for in our imagination, not to mention in our speech, these folds are of colors too vivid."[396] The key terms, here, are "folds" (*pieghe*) and "colors too vivid" (*troppo color vivo*). These ideas largely correspond with Andrea's treatment of Mary's drapery folds. Their vivid coloring is a product of a light so intense that, if it were experienced in nature, it would overwhelm the imagination in the manner described by Dante. In his commentary on Dante's poem, which appeared alongside the first printed edition of the *Divine Comedy* in 1477, Jacopo della Lana made this correspondence even more substantial. He glossed the verses quoted above by specifically relating the poet's description of heaven as colorful "folds" to the way

[395] See Barasch, *Light and Color*, 177-178.

[396] Dante, *Paradiso*, 24:23-27. Translation based on that offered by Charles Singleton in Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, 269. "...un canto tanto divo, che la mia fantasia nol me ridice. Però salta la penna e non lo scrivo: chè l'imagine nostra a coati pieghe, non che 'l parlare, è troppo color vivo."

painters render the play of light and color over drapery folds.[397] In the *Madonna of the Harpies*, then, the *splendore* reflecting off Mary's garments is a splendid, a perfectly poetic way of conveying the unimaginable nature of divinity. This is precisely what Voragine describes as the "incorporeal light of the godhead," which overshadowed the Virgin "in order that she might bear God."

On yet another level, Andrea's *splendore* embraces ideas reaching all the way back to the early Christian Church. At the Council of Nicaea, the ancient fathers authored the Creed that describes Jesus as "God from God, Light from Light." Bonaventure himself references this terminology when he elaborates on the Word emanating from the Father: "the Eternal Light generates from itself a coequal Likeness or Splendor, which is consubstantial and coeternal."[398] St. Bernard more simply describes Christ as "the splendor of the Father"[399] (*splendor Patris*). In each case, the ancient and medieval theologians were responding to scriptural passages. The very same Evangelist portrayed in Andrea's altarpiece stated clearly, "God is light" (1 Jn 1:5) and depicted Jesus as "the true light that gives light to every man" (Jn 1:9). The Old Testament, of course, is full of thought-provoking verses, such as "And let God's splendor be upon us"[400] (Ps 90:17); or "For Sion's sake I will not hold

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[397] Jacopo della Lana in Schlosser Magnino, *La letteratura artistica*, 91. "Note che 'l dipintore, quando vuole dipingere pieghe, conviene avere una colore meno vivo che quello della vesta, cioè più scuro, e allora appaiono pieghe; imperquello che in ogni piega l'aiere è oscuro che in la superficie, e però se lo colore della piega e di sè superficie; e così sarebbe contrario alla intenzione del maestro pintore."

[398] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventura*, 72.

[399] Quoted in Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol, 176.

[400] The Vulgate reads: "Et sit splendor Domini Dei nostri super nos." The NIV reads: "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us."

my peace, and for the sake of Jerusalem, I will not rest till her Just One comes forth as splendor, and her savior be lighted as a lamp"[401] (Is 62:1).

In this sense, the very logic behind Andrea's *colore* in this painting—the same logic that elevates painting itself to higher order of intellection—functions as yet another *figura*. With a stroke of pure ingenuity, this artist invited his audiences to think beyond the optical veracity of the picture's glittering hues. His handling of light and color in the *Madonna of the Harpies* is based on the laws of nature, but the effects he captures are also more wonderful than are anything experienced in the natural world. He creates folds too vivid for the imagination. His *colore* serves as a metaphor for the hypostatic nature of Jesus Christ, conjuring images of the "Just One" coming forth into the world as a light for Jerusalem, which is to say, for the entire Christian faith.

When placed against the backdrop of this figurative play, Andrea's *paragone* conceit becomes a lure towards devotion, as well. The *concetto* involves the most ethereal of pictorial devices (light) animating what was, in Leonardo's terms, the most materialistic of the visual art forms (statuary). In a similar vein, Renaissance commentators frequently discussed miraculous images in terms of material "transfigurations," citing perceptible changes in the physical qualities of cult objects as potent signs of divine agency.[402] Andrea reframes this type of "transfiguration" as an artful display, cleverly referencing a biblical narrative connected to the term

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[401] The Vulgate reads: "Propter Sion non tacebo,et propter Jerusalem non quiescam, donec egrediatur ut splendor justus ejus,et salvator ejus ut lampas accendatur." My translation follows the Douay-Rheims in this instance.

[402] Holmes, "Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence," 446-450. Cf. Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 80-86; Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*, 79-80. Shearman first noted Andrea's archaism in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 47. Herein lies the significance of Andrea's frontal presenting of the Virgin, a reversion to an archaic or Byzantine type.

episkiazo/obumbra, while refashioning his own painterly skill as an almost miraculous pictorial language capable of conveying the imminence of the divine. Couching this suggesting in an exchange between stone and the very substance identified with God, moreover, touches on themes explored by scholastic theologians, early modern writers, and Renaissance painters alike.[403]

Agnolo Gaddi's *Annunciation* in the Prato Cathedral (Fig.36) elucidates these themes nicely.[404] All the standard narrative details are present in this painting, so there is no mistaking the miracle taking place. Gabriel appears to Mary in her chamber. The angel's hand indicates speech. God the Father sends the Holy Spirit towards the Virgin, who gestures her acceptance of divine will and looks towards the approaching dove. Exactly what happens in this series of transactions, however, is far from clear. Gaddi, for instance, does not explicitly represent the union of divine and human natures—how could he? He does not even explain how the angel entered Mary's chamber, for there is no door or open window. This is a crucial observation, in that it presents Gaddi as a painter of dissemblance. The room, like Mary's womb, like the "enclosed garden," is perpetually sealed, impenetrable.

Yet Gaddi placed a pregnant "patch"[405] of marbled color immediately behind Gabriel. This smattering of paint is ostensibly a colored stone. As such, it bears the stamp of Abertus Magnus, who likened the mystery of the Incarnation to the

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[403] See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 86-101; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 270-277. Nagel traces an intellectual tradition linking *De Mineralibus* by Albertus Magnus and *De Harmonia Mundi* by Francesco Zorzi. Albertus described the efficacy of precious stones, especially marbles, maintaining that such stones were the recipients of "the power of the heavens." He presented this power as astral light originating from God. In his book, which he published in 1525, Zorzi interpreted Albertus' heavenly lights as angels; stones he framed as receptacles of divine influence.

[404] My discussion of Gaddi's *Annunciation* follows Didi-Huberman's insightful interpretation in *Fra Angelico*, 192-196.

[405] Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 194.

combination of light and matter, and who invited considerations of *Maria terra* or *Maria petra*, that is, Mary the material cause of the Incarnation.[406] Gaddi explored these notions in a clever manner. The chromatic qualities of his marbled patch connect it to Mary's womb, covered by a red dress, and to Gabriel's wings. This last association recalls the prototypical image of the *Annunciation* venerated in SS. Annunziata (Fig.37), where the angel actually enters Mary's bedroom by traversing the architecture. Presumably, then, the marbled patch in Gaddi's fresco acquired its agitated chromatic character when God's messenger and Word—both of which are associated with light—passed through the chamber wall. The device is thus a mineral figuration of the mystery pertaining to the Virgin's body, a way of aligning (*pace* Albertus) the Virgin with the ideas of dwelling place and light infused stone. The series of faux-marble panels located below Gaddi's fresco extends these associations.[407] These patches of color conflate Mary's chamber, as well as Mary herself, with the Prato Cathedral, the physical and present dwelling place of the Word—or to use Voragine's terms, the beholder's own "tabernacle of glory, vessel of life, heavenly temple."

Essentially, Andrea and his advisors wove this figurative line of reasoning into the *Madonna of the Harpies*, where light has saturated and miraculously transformed what we can only assume was a stone statue shaped like the Virgin. I have been describing this conceit as a process of animation, in the sense that light—as a manifestation of the divine—imbues otherwise lifeless matter with *anima*. Andrea's participation in the *paragone* debate thus speaks to Mary's role as the receptacle for

[406] See Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 202-205.

[407] Given Vasari's insistence that Andrea worked with a friar from Santa Croce, it worth noting that similar frescoes of marbled color adorn the sacristy of Santa Croce.

"the splendor of the Father," as well as to her bearing forth "the life [that] was the light of men" (Jn 1:4). Worshipers familiar with Bonaventure's writings might look upon this altarpiece and consider the relative merit of the visual arts as they recalled passages such as, "he who is *the image of the invisible God* (Col. 1:15) and *the brightness of his glory and the image of his substance* (Heb. 1:3)...is united by grace of union to an individual of rational [i.e. human] nature."[408]

More to the point, discerning observers might give expression to their admiration for Andrea's art, as well as to the transformative sense of devotion it inspires, by calling upon a common topos of praise. This topos, most famously expressed by Anton Francesco Doni in *I Marmi* (1552), associates the beholder's experience of standing transfixed before fantastic art with the idea of material transfiguration, of the viewer transformed into stone: "can it be that you [the beholder] have been changed into marble?"[409] –Can it be that the beholder of Andrea's painting becomes, in a manner analogous to the Virgin, a dwelling place for the Word, an embodiment of Psalm 90, "And let God's splendor be upon us?"

This, then, is the true nature of Andrea's brilliance. As he exchanged ideas with his patrons and advisors, he not only continued to develop his advantageous strategies for handling pictorial form and color. He also took advantage of his interlocutors' expertise. Learning from these well-read individuals, he worked his own artistic strategies further into the theological traditions that he encountered in San Gallo. His *colore* does not necessarily work in tandem with a collection of iconographic *figurae*, as it did in the San Gallo *Annunciation*, where his treatment of

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[408] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure*, 72.

[409] Doni, *I Marmi*, quoted in Shearman, *Only Connect*, 47-48. Doni is describing a viewer's experience in Michelangelo's New Sacristy.

pictorial light was as evocative as, say, the flowers that appear in the panel's foreground. Instead, light and color have largely become the dominant language of signification.

This point should be stressed, if only because it wreaks havoc with our standard, period-based model of history. This artist interlaced the most current art-critical theories—theories associating painting, optical science, and poetry—with references to a higher, ultimately ineffable truth. The techniques that presented his creative act as "divine" thus operate in a most "medieval" manner. They are *figurae*, a means of lifting the beholder's mind to the contemplation of divinity itself. Or to put it another way, everything about the *Madonna of the Harpies* belonging to the field of discourse that coincides with our modern understanding of "art" was a point of departure towards that spiritual activity the Franciscans would understand as the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, the soul's journey into God.[410]

My reference, here, is quite deliberate. The famous, widely disseminated, extraordinarily dense, and yet surprisingly short work of theology that bears this title was an important touchstone for Andrea and his advisors. This book, one of Bonaventure's masterpieces, is a searching meditation on the mystical affections of love, longing, and desire for Christ. The author leads his reader up a spiritual ladder and across an arresting landscape of thought, which has much in common with the exegetical field that is the *Madonna of the Harpies*. Taking his cue from the six-winged Seraph that appeared to Francis on Mount La Verna, Bonaventure divides the soul's journey into "six levels of illumination,"[411] each of which he outlines in an

[410] See Barolsky, "The history of Renaissance art re-envisioned," 246.
[411] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure*, 54.

individual chapter. The seventh and final chapter describes the soul's pure rest in mystical ecstasy, when its affections pass over into God.

The author begins this journey by examining the material world in chapter one and the operations of the senses in chapter two. These topics are fundamentally linked for Bonaventure, as they were for Augustine. The material world is the world of God's creatures, and whether sentient or non-sentient, every element experienced in the domain of sensibility bears traces of God's creative act, qualities that detail his divine nature. "Thus we see them in...substance, power and operation. From these, as from a vestige, we can rise to knowledge of the immense power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator."[412]

This leap is possible because of sense knowledge, the means by which the external environment enters the microcosm of the soul. The mind, according to Bonaventure, filters the perceived world by a process of judgment. Judgment is a reasoning of abstraction. It notes the sensible qualities of a given item that exists in one place and at a certain time, and it derives from those qualities the original ideas that exist above and beyond all transience. Beauty, for instance, is a matter of proportional harmony for this saint. When one perceives beauty in the sensible world, one can find in that perception the numerical laws that determine proportional harmony and, therefore, beauty in general. These laws exist in a sphere of mathematical certainty. They are universal and eternal and thus "the foremost vestige leading to Wisdom," which "leads us most closely to God."[413]

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[412] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure*, 64.
[413] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure*, 75.

In sketching these arguments, I do not mean to suggest that Andrea and his advisors were attempting to illustrate Bonaventure's theses concerning the nature of beauty. The relationship between text and altarpiece is more complicated than that. It has to do with the structure of the saint's thought, with the theology of the soul that he imparted to his readers, and indeed, to the entire Franciscan order. Bonaventure's arguments rest on a few subtle but indelible assumptions. He holds, following the writings of the Areopagite, that all creation stems from the self-diffusion of the Trinity. From this standpoint, the world and humanity are an overflow of divine love. All experiential goodness, grace, and beauty correspond to eternal archetypes that exist as attributes of the most divine, the *locus originis*. This is what Bonaventure has in mind when he writes of experiential qualities as "vestiges,"[414] as traces or footprints of the creator. Another way to describe these qualities would be as *figurae*, as dissemblant signs that engage the senses but direct the mind to qualities that pertain only to the mysteries of faith. Andrea and his advisors appealed to the senses in the very same way. They shared this system of symbols with the Seraphic Doctor. They might have derived it from the Doctor's own text.

Indeed, dissemblance is the very road by which Bonaventure leads his reader on a journey into God. As even my brief sketch of some his arguments suggests, that journey turns inward. Beginning with chapter three, Bonaventure leaves matters that pertain to the eye of the body and moves increasingly among those that concern the mind's eye. He considers the faculties of the soul: memory, understanding, and will. "Here," he writes in a wonderfully Augustinian fashion, "the light of truth, as from a

[414] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure*, 60. For a more elaborate discussion of the *figura* as a vestige, see Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 48-49.

candelabrum, glows upon the face of our mind, in which the image of the most blessed Trinity shines in splendor."[415] This analysis quickly devolves into his fourth chapter, where the saint launches himself into a concise but inspired exegesis of scripture. Scripture, he maintains, allows the devout Christian to move upward through the image of God in the soul. It purges the mind of any remaining shade of sensory data, because scripture tells of God's grace manifest in Christ, who restored humanity. By contemplating this grace, the life and mystery of Jesus Christ, the soul comes to desire direct contact with God. Chapters five and six give intellectual expressions to this desire. Bonaventure offers up his considerations of the divine unity as Being and the Good, using the names designated for God in the Old and New Testaments, respectively.

The curve of Bonaventure thinking, here, rests on another crucial assumption. This saint considered the human soul to be a malleable entity, an ethereal tissue fundamental shaped by the nature of its engagements and the orientation of the will. When the subject desires worldly pleasures, the soul orients itself toward that which is changeable and base, that which belongs to a lower order of existence. Bonaventure refers to this type of sinful engagement with the world as the "bending" of the soul, or else as a type of deformity.[416] The mode of contemplative engagement outlined in his text, however, represents a very different orientation of the will, an orientation where "the universe itself is a ladder by which we can ascend into God."[417]

Bonaventure, that is, meant to engage the intellect and the will simultaneously. "For no one is in any way disposed for divine contemplation that

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[415] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 79.
[416] See Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 62-63.
[417] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 60.

leads to mystical ecstasy unless like Daniel he is a *man of desires* (Dan. 9:23)."[418] According to this saint, when the soul desires knowledge of that which is above, it stretches its own fabric upward, almost like an elastic band, until, in its very nature, it passes into a state of unbridled affection for the divine. "In this passing over," he explains,

> all intellectual activities must be left behind and the heights of our affection must be totally transferred and transformed into God. This, however, is mystical and most secret, which *no one knows except him who receives it* (Apoc. 2:17), no one receives except him who desires it, and no one desires except him who is inflamed in his very marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent into the world.[419]

Bonaventure elaborates on this mystical secret in chapter seven. At this point, he maintains, the act of contemplation reaches an impasse endemic to the human condition. "When you contemplate these things," he warns, referring to everything covered in his preceding pages (i.e. the universe itself), "do not think that you comprehend the incomprehensible. For you still have something else to consider...which strongly leads our mind's eye to amazement and wonder."[420] With its limited capacity for understanding, the human mind cannot "see" the fullness of the divine. The worshiper can only wonder at it, admire it, and long for it. This point is all too often misunderstood, according to Bonaventure. When the soul "glimpses the light of the supreme Being, [it] seems to itself to see nothing. It does not realize that this very darkness is the supreme illumination of our mind, just as when the eye sees pure light, it seems to itself to see nothing."[421]

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[418] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 55.
[419] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 113.
[420] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 104-105.
[421] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 97

What the saint describes, here, is the most profound of religious experiences, the moment when knowledge gives way to wisdom. This is the process of reform, the very same process so eloquently addressed by Augustine, as well as Andrea's first two San Gallo altarpieces (his third will follow suit).[422] Significantly, Bonaventure's language also dovetails beautifully with the *Madonna of the Harpies.* His terms resonate with the cluster of ideas contained within *episkiazo* and *obumbra.* His argument is inherently visual, as well, largely because it depends on the theories of corporeal and spiritual sight that intertwine sensation, understanding, and desire.

These issues mark the deepest intersection of Bonaventure's text and Andrea's painting. By suggesting that the picture plane do not exist, Andrea followed the Franciscan saint, exploring the connections among different modes of seeing. This clever bit of illusionism, as we mentioned, gives his figures a visceral sense of immediacy, an effect calculated to enhance the beholder's affective experience of the altarpiece. We are dealing, then, with the same spiritual construct that allowed Bonaventure to negotiate the inward turn of his journey.

Andrea and his Franciscan advisors negotiated a similar inward turn when they coupled the artist's stimulating treatment of pictorial space with a particularly artful system of *figurae*, a system that was itself sympathetic to Bonaventure's understanding of the vestige. The poetics of light and color, form and relief continually devolve into increasingly sophisticated metaphors for the Word made flesh. Each metaphor, each *figura* offers the beholder another layer of understanding, another way of focusing the mind and will on that which can only ever be a mystery.

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[422] See Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 115. "...in this state of unknowing, be restored, insofar as is possible, to unity with him who is above all essence and knowledge."

For even after a thorough consideration of Andrea's many evocations of that most fundamental tenet of the Christian faith, there is, as Bonaventure writes, "still something else to consider...which strongly leads our mind's eye to amazement and wonder." We might recall the valence of *obumbra*, here, and say that Andrea's *figurae* adumbrate the mystery of the Incarnation. They are designed to give the painting's beholders just enough knowledge to leave them wanting more, to make them burn with a yearning that reforms their souls in the image and likeness of a God who is himself yearning and longing, light and love.

In this regard, we can speak of the exchange between this altarpiece and its spectators as having an annunciatory structure. Andrea's gifts for illusionism make the spectator far more than a bystander. John and Francis engage the viewer, as does the Christ Child, whose alluring smile falls upon the beholder in much the same manner as the splendorous light falls upon the Virgin. This light recalls John's famous pronouncements, which are echoed in so many of the quotations above: "God is light" (1 Jn 1:5) and "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16). It paints Francis as "a way of light and peace," through which the Lord enters "into the hearts of his faithful."[423] It gives rather explicit expression to Psalm 90:17, "And let God's splendor be upon us," conflating this verse with Paul's discussion of the "face to face" vision (1 Cor 13:12). The act of tracing each of these textual associations constitutes what we might call a flight of thought, what early modern intellectuals would call a movement of the soul. With each of these movements, the soul focuses more of its attention on that which is above, meaning that its delicate fabric recovers the primordial shape or form of image-likeness to God.

[423] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, in *Bonaventure,* 179.

That Andrea's light, which falls upon the Virgin, also radiates from the altarpiece itself is thus the most significant of all his many inventions. In theory at least, it is supposed to overawe—or should I say, overshadow—the viewer with its pictorial intensity, stimulating the imagination as an iridescent spark that ignites the flames of holy desire in the heart. Andrea's glowing hues serve, then, as a metaphor for divine presence within the picture only insofar as they also inculcate the Word within the worshiper's own being. We might borrow from Bonaventure and say that Andrea's *colore* has the potential to elevate the spectator's mind to the place where "absolute and unchangeable mysteries of theology are hidden in the superluminous darkness of a silence teaching secretly in the utmost obscurity."[424] In this place, the light in the *Madonna of the Harpies*, the light that Andrea spent years developing, becomes "the fire that totally inflames and carries us into God by ecstatic unctions and burning affections. This fire is God."[425]

[424] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 114.
[425] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in *Bonaventure,* 115.

Chapter 4: The *Disputation on the Trinity* and the "Sighs of Holy Desire"

The *Disputation on the Trinity* (Fig.4), the third, final, and most prestigious of the paintings that Andrea del Sarto produced for the San Gallo altars, struck its initial commentators as a supreme statement of artistic accomplishment. Borghini simply described it as the best of Andrea's paintings in oils.[426] Bocchi, in both his *Discorso* and in *Le Bellezze*, proclaimed this painting "more wonderful than any picture anywhere."[427] Vasari, for his part, noted Andrea's expertise in matters of naturalism, paying particular attention to his knowledge of anatomy, his ability to render convincing affects, and his elegant juxtaposition of youthful and mature figure types.[428] Vasari informs us, as well, that the issue of artistic execution weighed heavily on the minds of the Augustinian friars at the San Gallo convent.

> In the chapels of the church just outside the San Gallo gate, there were already two panels by Andrea and many others, which were not equal to his. For this reason, and because there was a commission to be given for another panel, those friars persuaded the owners to give the commission to Andrea.[429]

We are now reasonably sure that the "owners" in question were Lorenzo and Francesco Peri, two brothers in a little-known but prominent Florentine family.[430] For

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[426]Borgini, *Il Riposo*, 208.

[427]Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence,* 134. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze,*136. "è oltra tutte le tavole di tutti i luoghi marauigliosa." See also Bocchi's *Discorso* in Williams, "A Treatise by Francesco Bocchi in Praise of Andrea del Sarto," 122-139.

[428] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 365. "E certamente questa, fra tante opere, fu dagli artefici tenuta a olio la migliori, con ciò sia che si vede in quella una grandissima osservanzia de le misure delle figure et un modo molto ordinate e proprio nell'arie delle teste, dando dolcezza alli giovani e crudezza alli vecchi, e mescolato de l'una e dell'altra in quelle di mez[z]a età, oltra che i panni e le mani erano oltra modo bellissme."

[429] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 364. "Erasi in San Gallo fuora della Porta nelle capelle della chiesa fatte, oltra alle due tavole di Andrea, molte altre, le quali non paragonano le sua; e così avendosene allogora un'altra, operarono que' fratti col padrone della cappella che ella si dovesse dare a lui."

[430] Cecchi, "Profili di amici e committenti," 43-45.

reasons that remain unclear, the Peri significantly influenced the painting they commissioned, more so than the donors who commissioned Andrea's earlier Augustinian panels.[431] This is striking indeed, seeing as the Peri chapel was dedicated to none other than St. Augustine himself, a fact that largely explains why the friars negotiated to ensure that the contract for the *Disputation on the Trinity* went to a painter of known merit. For the Augustinians, it seems, there was little room for mistakes when it came to the altarpiece dedicated to their founder and protector. And who better to undertake such a challenge than the artist who, as the famous saying goes, painted "*senza errori*?"[432]

That a religious institution might take such an interest in the work of Andrea del Sarto provides us with a familiar starting point for this chapter. What Vasari reveals about the Augustinians' involvement in this commission—and it is worth noting again that Vasari, who began his training in Andrea's workshop, was in a position to know such details—is a curious piece of information. It suggests, on the one hand, that several parties had a vested interest in this painting. It confirms, as well, what we already know about the connections between artistic skill and professional success. Good work was good for business. But, on the other hand, the type of privilege the Augustinians bestowed upon Andrea suggests that the value of his work could not be measured in economic terms alone. The San Gallo friars knew him to be an artist capable of articulating sensitive religious material in striking visual terms. He was, first and foremost, a maker of a very particular kind of crafted object,

[431] See Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 63-84. Burke's insightful analysis of patronage and chapel decoration in Santo Spirito presents a model for understanding how the relationships and power-dynamics within a community shift over time.

[432] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 9.

an object that aided in devotion and inspired piety. In this sense, his good work—his skillful execution, alluring *colorito*, and visionary *disegno*—was good for the soul; it may have even constituted a "good work" in the spiritual sense of the term.

Much of what I have to say, here, contributes to an established tradition of art-historical scholarship, specifically to the line of investigation commonly described as patronage studies.[433] The *Disputation on the Trinity* was a collaborative endeavor undertaken by the Peri family, the Augustinian friars, and Andrea del Sarto. Each of these parties brought a unique set of concerns to bear on the project, concerns that they discussed, negotiated, and compressed into a single, albeit multivalent altarpiece. That altarpiece was a way of coloring the social relationships established by the circumstances of its commission; it was a way of rhetorically shaping how the public of sixteenth-century Florence understood the interactions between the San Gallo friars and the Peri family, not to mention the cultural relevance and historical position of Andrea del Sarto. But it was also a means of engaging the deepest questions concerning religious experience and human subjectivity, issues that were relevant to all parties involved, especially the Augustinians.

In developing the iconography for the *Disputation on the Trinity*, Andrea's advisors, who were certainly members of the Augustinian community, drew on two important textual sources.[434] The first was Augustine's own *De Trinitate*, a text fundamentally concerned with the fabric of the soul, the nature of the senses and

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[433] My understanding of artistic patronage owes much to Baxandall, *Painting and Experience,* 1-27; Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, 97-121; Burke, *Changing Patrons,*76-83; O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 1-12, et. pass.; and especially, idem., "Altarpieces and Agency," 417-441.

[434] Cecchi, "Profili di amici e committenti," 45. Given the lack of documentation, any discussion of the specific individuals who might have served as Andrea del Sarto's iconographic advisors can only be speculative. Cecchi nevertheless raises a few intriguing possibilities, including Fra Antonio Dulciati, the Prior of the San Gallo convent.

cognition, and the edifying effects of pious desire. Of particular interest to the San Gallo friars were passages that associated clouds with the Holy Spirit and the idea of theophany, a term that describes those intense visionary moments in history when God revealed himself to humanity.[435] The second textual source was an episode from Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, where Augustine's power of speech induces a visionary experience in others. By glossing Augustine's treatise with the material taken from Voragine's *vita*, the Augustinians devised an iconographic invention that granted the founder of their order a distinguished status. For in Andrea's panel, the Church Father himself, his eloquence, his insightful teachings, enables others to glimpse the approaching Trinity.

Working with the painting's patrons, the friars made special adjustments to this pictorial construct that reflected the concerns of the Peri family. In this panel, the figure of Augustine speaks to the patron saints of the Peri themselves.[436] These figures—specifically Lawrence and Francis, probably Peter Martyr, and maybe Sebastian, and the Magdalene, as well—afforded the Peri a privileged relationship to the painting and the ideas expressed in its imagery. In the guise of their patron saints, their spiritual surrogates, the Peri claimed an intimate understanding of Christian theology. They essentially took part of the depicted vision and made it their own, rhetorically presenting their social relationship with the San Gallo friars—Augustine's heirs in the early modern world—as a spiritually edifying bond and obligation.

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[435] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 89-93. On the use of clouds as a sign for theophany during the sixteenth century, see Shearman, "Raphael's Clouds, and Correggio's," 657-668.

[436] Cecchi, "Profili di amici e committenti," 46.

A central thesis of mine is that Andrea del Sarto expanded on this iconographic invention in his execution of *The Disputation on the Trinity*. He made important choices with regard to the naturalism of his figures, color, and the panel's relationship to the spectator, all of which associate the beholder's optical encounter of pigment on a flat surface with the idea of visionary experience. He then coupled these choices with a strategy of formal imitation that connected his painting to important works of art from the Florentine canon. Significantly, the artistic monuments he chose to associate himself with all constitute a pictorial tradition concerning the modalities of sight. In this way, Andrea envisioned himself as an exceptionally gifted painter who belongs to a class of intellectuals, as a champion of his own local culture, and as a pious artist capable of bringing the beholder closer to the represented saints and the depicted theophany.[437] We might say that, with his considerable skills in handling a brush, Andrea invites the mind's eye to enter the picture by creating the impression that the Trinity's manifestation and the saints' *conversazione* are physically present before the eye of the body.[438]

This manner of engaging the spectator strikes a sympathetic chord with Augustine's own attempts to stimulate his reader in *De Trinitate*. In this text, Augustine explores the nuances of the triune God, drawing on a number of intellectual traditions that allow him to search for the type of understanding that Paul describes as the "face to face" vision of the divine (1 Cor 13:12). But Augustine's manner of articulating this project is not meant to actually bring the Trinity into sharp

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[437] Cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence,* 458-490; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 1-10, 73-100; Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*, 65-96.

[438] See the illuminating articles by Paul Barolsky: "The Visionary Experience of Renaissance Art," 174-181; "The History of Renaissance Art Re-envisioned," 243-250; "Naturalism and the Visionary Art of the Early Renaissance," 317-324.

focus. He means, instead, to inspire in the reader a sense of longing for direct contact with God. This expression of desire, this spiritual yearning, constitutes the Church Father's most basic and profound understanding of Christian piety.

It also constitutes the central theme of Andrea del Sarto's *Disputation on the Trinity*. The particular pressures of this commission afforded Andrea the chance to grapple once again with some of Augustine's most complex, engaging, and influential ideas, and to do so with the guidance of Augustinian friars—experts on topics at hand. The decisions he made in terms of the execution of this painting bear the marks of this intellectual exchange. Color, as we might expect, is perhaps the most significant marker. In this panel, Andrea arranged his hues so as to cultivate the ravishing quality that contemporaries referred to as *vaghezza*, a locution that is itself laced with notions of desire and longing.[439]

This introduction of a new term into the artist's chromatic vocabulary simultaneously heralds the stunning color-schemes that typify his works in the 1520s and reinforces the central thesis of our larger investigation. Andrea's handling of paint is more than a supreme statement of artistic accomplishment. It betrays, as well, a sophisticated consideration of Christian theology, specifically, here, of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. For in this altarpiece, Andrea del Sarto's artful attempts to engage the spectator are—much like Augustine's efforts to stimulate the imaginative faculties of his reader—aimed at eliciting the "sighs of holy desire,"[440] an expression of that devotional state-of-mind that effectively and affectively reforms the worshipper's soul.

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[439] See Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 125-141.
[440] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 4.31, p. 176.

4.1: Patron Saints, Surrogate Selves, Paradigms of Reform

The *Disputation on the Trinity* comprises six saints who are engaged in a conversation about one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith. That mystery appears in the background, where, enveloped by a thunderous cloud and rushing forward, a sharply foreshortened God the Father supports the Crucified Christ. Mary Magdalene and Sebastian kneel at the bottom of the panel, closest to the picture plane. They hold their standard attributes and gaze up at four clerical figures, all of whom stand atop a stone step. Augustine, the eminent theologian, the unquestionable authority on the doctrine of the Trinity, is pictured there, furthest to the left. He is bearded, dressed in the black habit of the Augustinian order, and draped in a green cope that, together with his crosier, denotes his rank of bishop, the highest rank of any pictured cleric. He rests one arm on what seems to be a broken column, an unusual attribute to find with this saint but an appropriate one given its affiliation with the virtue of fortitude and the saint's status as a "pillar of the church."[441] The other arm extends in an articulate gesture that conveys in mute terms the force of his commanding voice. For an open mouth and the subtle hint of teeth confirm that he, and he alone, is speaking (Fig.38). The three saints who stand with Augustine, who are closest to the Trinity, who hold books, and who, also, have halos and wear liturgical vestments, listen to the Church Father's oration with rapt attention. Lawrence, the youngest of this group, positions his grill at a slight angle, allowing the

[441] Marcantonio Raimondi depicted the virtue of Fortitude as a female figure with a broken column around 1520. The engraving can be found in Resnick and Curtis, *Representing Justice*, 11. Aquinas discusses the virtue, citing Augustine in order to align Fortitude with the capacity for reason, in Question 123 of his *Summa Theologica*.

vertical line of its edge to mark the panel's axis and direct the eye upwards towards the divine apparition. He stands quietly by Augustine's side, fixing the theologian with a conscientious stare.[442] Much the same can be said of Peter Martyr, the Dominican saint, the cleft on his head evident, his face eloquent with concentration. Francis, who stands furthest to the right, stares down with an unfixed gaze and presses a hand to his chest. His is a gesture that, while clearly displaying the external markings of his stigmata, associates the depth of his compassion for Christ with the ecstasy he feels internally, in his heart.

This is a complex scene, a scene fundamentally concerned with a theological dialogue and pregnant with social implications. We can glimpse something of the *Disputation on the Trinity*'s complexity when we place this assortment of saints against the information we have concerning the painting's commission and initial context. Limited though this information may be, every piece of extant evidence suggests that these six figures are patron saints, that they embodied the intricately woven relationships that existed between the Peri family and the Augustinian friars of the San Gallo convent, and that they functioned as what we might call "surrogate selves."

[442] That Lawrence is looking at Augustine rather than the spectator is readily apparent when the painting is viewed in person in the Galleria Palantina. The direction of Lawrence's gaze, however, can be difficult to determine in reproductions of Andrea's painting. It may seem that the saint is actually looking out at the spectator, but a careful investigation of the figure suggests otherwise. Lawrence's irises, for instance, are pushed into the corners of his eyes, aligning his stare with the speaking saint who stands before him, slight to the right but forward in space, rather than with the viewer, who would presumable position him or herself before the center of the panel, in line with Lawrence's grill and the gap between Sebastian and the Magdalene. Further confirmation is provided by a quick comparison with the *Gambassi Altarpiece*. In this later panel, the same figure of Lawrence, which Andrea modeling on the same individual, is positioned in roughly the same position. But this saint does, indeed, gaze out at the spectator, and significantly, his irises are not pushed to the corners of his eyes.

Of the figures pictured in the *Disputation on the Trinity*, Mary Magdalene and Sebastian are the most difficult to interpret. The archives have yet to offer an explanation of their presence. They were, however, eminently popular saints in the early modern era. As the prototypical reformed sinner, on the one hand, and as a Roman soldier turned plague saint, on the other, these figures appealed to a great many worshipers. Iconographic traditions would suggest that they were associated with the Peri family in some particular manner, perhaps marking affiliations with specific cults or confraternities, or embodying the more general desires just referenced, namely a desire for atonement and for protection from illness.[443] The ubiquity, and arguably the immediacy, of these concerns within Italian Renaissance society probably explain the proximity of the figures themselves. For when compared to the four standing figures, Sebastian and the Magdalene seem almost to belong to beholder's environment. They do not wear liturgical vestments, have halos, or hold books. They kneel at the bottom of the panel, look at the dialogue above, and press against the picture plane.

We can describe the four saints in the upper-register of Andrea's panel as being more specific in reference, as, together, Vasari's statements and the records Alessandro Cecchi brought to light throw these figures into sharper relief. Augustine, for instance, is an obvious reference to the San Gallo friars, and two of his interlocutors are the patron saints of the brothers, Lorenzo and Francesco Peri. Building on this information, Cecchi suggested that the proximity of Lawrence, Francis, and Peter Martyr might imply that the Dominican was the patron saint of

[443] Cecchi, "Profili di amici e committenti," 45-47. On the iconographic traditions that suggest a connection between the saints in the *Disputation on the Trinity* and the Peri family, see Jill Burke's discussion of the altarpieces in the Augustinian church of Santo Spirito in *Changing Patrons*, 63-84.

another Peri brother or relative, the record of whom is now lost. He also wondered about the relative position of Lawrence and Augustine in Andrea's composition, which could point to Lorenzo Peri's personal devotion to the Doctor of the Church; one of the few details we know about Lorenzo is that, in 1524, he named his son Agostino.[444]

These last two ideas are speculative, too speculative, I dare say, for many scholars. What makes them compelling—at least to my mind—is the underlying inference that paintings such as the *Disputation on the Trinity* actively embody larger and otherwise intangible cultural processes. Cecchi examines this altarpiece as a historical artifact, presenting it not as a mere illustration of an already documented past, but as part of the record itself. This is, of course, a familiar way of approaching art-objects. It informs, if not the entire discipline of Renaissance art history, than certainly the specialized branch of scholarship known as patronage studies. We can find an echo of this approach in Michael Baxandall famous adage, "painting is a deposit of a social relationship,"[445] as well as in Michelle O'Malley's more recent anthropological investigations into the "agency" of Renaissance altarpieces.[446]

The *Disputation on the Trinity* fits comfortably alongside such notions of cultural agency, in that it lends form and color to the principal concerns of the individuals involved in its production. To be more precise, not only does the presentation of these particular saints embody the social relationships established by the commission itself. It also underlines the spiritual and theological exchanges that informed the commission. The saintly dialogue rendered visible, here, features

[444] Cecchi, "Profili di amici e committenti," 45-47.
[445] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 1.
[446] O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency," 417-441.

Augustine, the founder and protector of the Augustinian order, indoctrinating figures associated with specific members of the Peri family into the highest levels of spiritual understanding. By framing the figural narrative in this manner, the painting iconographically re-presents the social relationship between the San Gallo friars and the Peri as a pedagogical relationship.

This strategy of self-fashioning, which presented Andrea's patrons and advisors to the Florentine community in glowing terms, was far from an empty gesture. Insights gleaned from the research of many scholars working on the relationship between art and identity in the early modern period suggest that this construct would have helped the Peri family and the Augustinian friars codify their own understanding of self.[447] This is an important point. Andrea's altarpiece allowed a select group of sixteenth-century individuals to project themselves—psychologically, or better yet, spiritually—into the roles pictured by their patron saints, their spiritual surrogates. It invited members of the Peri family to envision their relationship with the Augustinians as a religious dialogue, and by extension, to envision themselves as students of one of the most respected and influential thinkers in human history. Likewise, for the San Gallo friars, all of whom would have identified with the image of their founder, the *Disputation on the Trinity* promoted an idealized form of corporate solidarity. This altarpiece linked their place in Florentine society, and specifically their relationship with the Peri family, to the ideas embodied in Augustine's figure—to the act of disseminating spiritual wisdom, and to the

[447] See Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, 1-13, et. pass.; Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance,* 29-93; Colantuono, "Estense Patronage and the Construction of the Ferrarese Renaissance," 196-143. Scholars of early modern Italy have generated an extensive commentary on the relationship between art and identity. Rather than compile a rather cumbersome list of this material, I refer to the reader to three sources that have shaped my thoughts on this matter.

Church Father's thoughts on this most sacred of religious mysteries. That the founder of the Franciscan order and an important Dominican saint are here absorbed in the teachings of their spiritual protector, who happens to be wearing the Augustinian habit, can only have enhanced the friars' sense of self-confidence and dignity, as well as their sense of purpose and their identification with the *Disputation on the Trinity*'s didactic thrust.

Vasari, as it turns out, touched on this particular purpose when he described Andrea's panel as a picture of four figures "*che disputano de la Trinità*."[448] Within the early modern intellectual community, the Latin term "*disputatio*," from which the Italian verb "*disputare*" derives, could mean what is commonly thought of today as a disagreement. But it was most commonly used to describe a rhetorical method of teaching. This method consisted of a formal discussion centered on a particular topic or question. The discussion proceeded in a dialectical fashion, where the participating parties entertained multiple perspectives on the issue at hand. Eventually, this exchange culminated in a *determinatio*, where a knowledgeable authority on the matter presented the official or correct answer to the initial question.[449]

That moment, the articulation of the *determinatio*, is the exact moment represented in Andrea del Sarto's *Disputation on the Trinity*. Augustine speaks, expounding the doctrine on the Holy Trinity that he himself formulated. And his teachings are so powerful, so intellectually stimulating, that they enable the other saints to imagine the mystery he describes. The figures placed alongside the Church Father, these surrogates for the patrons of the painting, "see" the Trinity that rushes

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[448] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 364. Cf. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto,* 89.
[449] Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle* Ages, 102-105.

towards the foreground, emerging in a dark and rumbling cloud, because of their privileged relationship with the founder and protector of the Augustinian order.

In *De Trinitate*, Augustine describes this type of visionary and intellectual phenomenon as the most edifying experience of human life, as "the sight which everyone yearns to behold who aims to 'love God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind (Mt 22:37)."[450] Andrea's advisors, being well versed in the traditions of Christian scholarship, particularly in Augustine's writings, were hardly unaware of the connections between the pedagogical narrative they developed for the *Disputation on the Trinity* and the ideas expressed in this last quotation. The valence of sight and understanding; of love, desire, and the soul; of humanity and divinity run through the iconographic texture of this altarpiece as leitmotifs, even if they have all but escaped scholarly investigation.

The one scholar who has explored these themes in Andrea's altarpiece is Natali. It was Natali who first noticed the iconographic oddity that is Andrea's Trinity group (Fig.39), where in place of the more conventional dove or flame, Andrea's advisors selected the form of a rumbling, reddish cloud to signify the Holy Spirit. The source for this device is the discussion of clouds in the second book of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, for the Church Father, "as the only speaking figure in this holy assembly, is necessarily meant to be understood as speaking his own words."[451]

In this section of his all-important treatise, Augustine examines the Old Testament theophanies. His investigations, here, are an attempt to guide his reader through the labyrinth of scripture. By exegetically interpreting the historical record

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[450] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2.28, p. 117.

[451] Natali, "Firenze 1517," 32-39; idem., *Andrea del Sarto*, 89-93. Quotation from 90. See also, Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* vol.1, 300.

preserved in sacred texts, Augustine hopes to explore intellectually the enigmatic doctrine of the Trinity, which eludes human understanding even while it captivates the mind of every devout Christian.[452] When he comes to the book of Exodus, to the pillar of fiery clouds the led the people of Israel from Egypt and to the clouds on Mount Sinai, Augustine argues that these manifestations of the divine were the workings of the Holy Spirit.[453]

The rich texture of layered brush strokes at the top of Andrea's panel reiterates Augustine's argument, making Andrea's cloud a figuration or *figura* of the Holy Spirit, a form that "sprang into being in time in order to signify him and show him in a manner suited to human sense."[454] This symbolic correlation, however, is more complicated than scholars have yet to acknowledge, for Augustine's understanding of clouds and theophany calls for a slightly broader frame of reference than we commonly associate with iconological signs. This device requires a logic of dissemblance. The cloud as theophany, the Church Father explains,

> visibly expressed and presented to mortal eyes, is called the sending of the Holy Spirit. Its object was not that his very substance might be seen, since he himself remains invisible and unchanging like the Father and the Son; but that outward sights might in this way stir the minds of men, and draw them on from the public manifestations of his coming in time to the still and hidden presence of his eternal sublime.[455]

When placed against this passage, the cloud in Andrea's painting becomes a multivalent device. This undulating, mysterious mass of atmosphere marks the

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[452] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2.1, p. 97. "People who seek God, and stretch their minds as far as human weakness is able towards an understanding of the Trinity, must surely experience the strain of trying to fix their gaze on *light inaccessible* (1 Tim 6:16), and the difficulties presented by the holy scriptures in their multifarious diversity of form, which are designed, so it seems to me, to wear Adam down and let Christ's glorious grace shine through."

[453] Augustine, *The Trinity,* 2.24-26, p. 114-116.

[454] Augustine, *The Trinity,* 2.12, p. 106. Natali, "Firenze 1517," 32-39; idem., *Andrea del Sarto*, 89-93. See also Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 1-10.

[455] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2.10, p. 104.

"sending of the Holy Spirit," a miraculous and visionary event that "stirs the minds of men," triggering a purely intellectual process in the human soul.

In this sense, the *Disputation on the Trinity* describes visibly an event that is both visionary and invisible. The cloud completes the image of the Holy Trinity and, at the same time, characterizes the cognitive activities of the six saints located in the painting's foreground. These figures, significantly, do not look upon the approaching godhead with their physical eyes. They listen intently to Augustine and internalize his words to such an extent that they glimpse the depicted theophany with the faculties of spiritual sight. The saints, that is, see the Trinity with what Augustine describes as the eye of the mind, or—and here Francis's gesture becomes especially important—"the eye of heart whereby God may be seen."[456]

This profound consideration of the modalities of vision touches on some of Augustine's central preoccupations in *De Trinitate*, including the nature of desire and the idea of reform. What connects these topics of intense fascination is the theologian's understanding of the physics of sight.[457] Like many thinkers before and after him, Augustine believed that the mechanics of perception began with the soul emitting a line of light into the external world. This line of light, which passes through the eye as an optical ray, establishes something like physical contact between the internal realm of the perceiving viewer and the material universe. In this instance, when the soul actually "touches" or be*holds* that which commands its attention, it forms out of its own substance an image of the object in question—which is to say that part of the soul itself takes the shape or form of items presented to the senses.

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[456] Augustine, Sermon 88.5.5, quoted in Miles, "Vision," 125. See also, Kleinbub, "To Sow the Heart," 81-129.

[457] Miles, "Vision," 125-142.

The mechanics of spiritual sight, of the eye of the mind, operate according to similar principles. The soul, that is, projects part of itself towards the item or idea that draws the mind's attention. That projection, according to Augustine, is the will, the basic human faculty of intent or desire. By framing the will as the "optical ray" of the mind's eye, Augustine not only blends the physics of seeing with the metaphysical anatomy of understanding. He also underlines an important theological principle: the effects of willing are essentially the same as those of seeing.[458] The soul incorporates the form of that which it desires into the fabric of its own substance, so that every expression of the will is an exercise in self-determination.

This last sentence brings us to the very core of Augustine's larger project in *De Trinitate*. With every page, with every word of this text, the Church Father is attempting to envision God as the Trinity, but also to inspire in the reader a passionate, burning desire for that same vision. For by attempting to see the Trinity with the mind's eye, the soul desires that which is eternal. It effectively wrests itself from the mundane concerns and trivial affairs of this world, turns inward, and pursues the infinitely more admirable realm of divine truth. In these instances of contemplative activity, where the worshipper is searching for or willing an understanding of God's Trinitarian nature, he or she engages in a type of desire that purifies and renews the soul by tapping into the highest, most blessed levels of reality, namely, God himself. Augustine describes this expression of desire as longing, yearning, or more simply as love. We are dealing with an emotional and contemplative condition in which the soul perpetually refashions its own nature by continually forming more of itself in the image of the Holy Trinity—which is to say,

[458] Miles, "Vision," 125-142; Gill, *Augustine in the Renaissance*, 125-147.

by continually reforming itself towards that which it already is at a fundamental level: the image and likeness of God.[459] John's important proclamation rings through this theological construct, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

The figures in Andrea del Sarto's *Disputation of the Trinity*, particularly the standing saints, embody this spiritual process. They are paradigms of reform. Such is the strength of their longing for God, of their yearning to see intellectually what Augustine describes with words, that they begin to experience an internal theophany. The distance between the Trinity and the saints is important in this respect, as it is in perfect keeping with Augustine's *De Trinitate*. At the end of this text, the Church Father writes,

> you are unable to fix your gaze there [on the Trinity] in order to observe this clearly and distinctly. You cannot do it, I know. I am telling the truth, I am telling it to myself, I know what I cannot do. However, this same light has shown you those three things in yourself [the faculties of memory, understanding, and will], in which you can recognize yourself as the image of that supreme trinity on which you are not yet capable of fixing your eyes in contemplation.[460]

In both Augustine's text and in Andrea del Sarto's *Disputation on the Trinity*, then, the direct vision of God is forever imminent. God can be seen, but only with the mind, only at a distance, and only as a glimpse.[461]

That Andrea placed his saints on separate spatial registers adds another level of nuance to the already variegated relationship between this painting and Augustine's theology. The figures of Augustine, Lawrence, Peter Martyr, and Francis all wear liturgical vestments, hold books, and have halos. They are also closer to the

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[459] Ladner, *The Idea of Reform,* 153-283.
[460] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.50, p. 435.
[461] For Augustine's distinction between the glimpse and the gaze, see Miles, "Vision, 133-137.

approaching theophany. They see more of God's eternal nature, because their wills have been thoroughly focused on the mysteries of faith by scriptural exegesis and religious rituals—as well as, it would seem, by the Doctor of the Church himself, the eminent theologian and pedagogue.[462]

The issue of spiritual instruction brings us back to the matter of cultural agency and to the types of pressure the *Disputation on the Trinity* initially exerted on the individuals involved in its commission. I say "pressure" intentionally, for through this painting the Peri not only marked their place among the community centered on the San Gallo church. They not only laid claim to an intimate understanding of Christian theology. They also assumed an obligation of working towards the religious ideals embodied by their patron saints, specifically the ideal of continual spiritual renewal. The San Gallo friars, for their part, assumed a certain social and spiritual responsibility in presenting their patron saint as an agent of reform—a responsibility that was, itself, inextricably linked to the apostolic mission of monasticism proper.[463] The Augustinians essentially presenting their role in Cinquecento society as that of helping to doctor the souls of their neighbors and friends, including but not limited to the Peri family.

In order to tie these issues together, as if with a final flourish of iconographic insight, Andrea's advisors glossed the material they took from Augustine's *De Trinitate* with an episode from one other textual source: Jacobus de Voragine's *vita* of St. Augustine in the *Golden Legend*. The particular passage they selected describes how a woman, listening to the Church Father saying Mass, "was rapt in ecstasy at the

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[462] See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 129-131; Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael,* 2-9.

[463] Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 319-424.

elevation of the Lord's Body and saw herself placed before the tribunal of the most holy Trinity. Augustine was also there, standing with bowed head and discoursing most attentively and sublimely about the glory of the Trinity."[464] Voragine's choice of words, here, is important. The term "tribunal" describes an authoritative body that stands on a raised platform, such as the stone step upon which Augustine and the other clerical figures authoritatively stand in Andrea's painting. Augustine's pillar, likewise, lends the figure an architectonic ascendency, very much in keeping with the tribunal theme. The idea of "ecstasy," moreover, describes the type of visionary and intellectual experience already discussed with regard to Andrea's cloud and the cognitive activities of his figures.[465]

Andrea's advisors, it seems, capitalized on the thematic potential Voragine's narrative offered and essentially inserted the patron saints of the Peri family into the author's visionary "tribunal." In doing so, the Augustinians infused their sophisticated, visionary, and socially informed iconographic construct with a measure of the miraculous, which must have had a real impact in the San Gallo church. Standing atop the altar dedicated to St. Augustine, the *Disputation on the Trinity* existed within a liturgical environment. It was the backdrop for the rituals of mass. When a priest blessed the Eucharist in front of this painting, then, the worshippers' experience of the altarpiece would mirror Voragine's legend. With the elevation of the host, the "Lord's body," the beholders would look upon the *Disputation on the Trinity* and—perhaps experiencing something like the ecstasy so palpably embodied

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[464] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. 2, 130. On the connections among this episode from Voragine's *vita* and the Quattrocento pictorial traditions of depicting Augustine in ecstasy before the Trinity, see Cooper, "St. Augustine's Ecstasy before the Trinity in the Art of the Hermits," 198-201.

[465] Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-143, 160-162. See also, Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 90-98.

by Francis, or the absorption etched into Peter Martyr's face—find an authoritative body of saints, with Augustine "discoursing most attentively and sublimely about the glory of the Trinity."

4.2: Visionary Execution

The complexity of his advisors' iconographic program seems, we might say, tailor made for Andrea del Sarto, an expert on matters of the eye who surely appreciated the challenge of visualizing the visionary and the invisible. He approached this challenge with care, beginning by meditating on the role of the "woman" from Voragine's narrative. The Magdalene is most obvious corollary for this role in Andrea's painting. Obviously, she herself is a woman, the only female figure included in the scene. She occupies a position of some privilege. While one cannot help but notice the meticulously modeled torso of Sebastian, the bright and powerful hues of the Magdalene's garments demand immediate and lasting attention. Their enticing quality, and specifically, their resonance with the blazing colors allocated to Lawrence and God the Father, draws the beholder's eye into the composition while also emphasizing the position of the Magdalene vis-à-vis the picture plane. She and Sebastian are so close to this invisible barrier, in fact, that they call the barrier itself into question. This is a rather novel conceit, in that it expands the Magdalene's role in the composition with regard to Voragine's narrative. As a popular saint, she—and Sebastian, too—provided Andrea's beholders with a type of exemplary guise, a means of ideating a place for themselves within Augustine's audience. In this regard,

the pregnant void separating the figures in the foreground has the character of an open solicitation.

The original context of the *Disputation on the Trinity* would have made this impression all the more evident. In the Peri chapel, the painting would have been elevated, and Andrea's perspective scheme would have coincided with the beholders' angle of viewing. The panel also would have been bathed in the soft, flickering glow of candles, maybe even in a colored light filtered by stained glass windows. In this environment, the contrast between the painting's tinted atmosphere and the figure's bright colors would have been more pronounced, intensifying the saints' visual power and presence.

Andrea, in effect, used his considerable talents and keen intelligence to create a suggestion of intimacy, of physical proximity, thereby allowing his figures to become powerful figments in the viewers' imagination. In this vision conjured before the beholders' eyes, there is one continuous environment, which originally included the saints, the approaching Trinity, and those members of Florentine society present in the San Gallo church. This is an altarpiece where, if I may borrow again from Panofsky, "the miraculous becomes a direct experience of the beholder, in that the supernatural events in a sense erupt into his own, apparently natural, visual space and so permit him really to 'internalize' their supernaturalness."[466]

This optical conceit largely depends on the artist's knowledge of the human form, but also on his skillful suggestion of pictorial relief and his attention to the

[466] Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 72.

picture plane.[467] It finds further reinforcement in the raking light that floods into the panel, as if from the realm of the viewer, and in the arrow that has slipped from Sebastian's grasp (Fig.40). Expertly foreshortened, this fallen shaft comes to rest at a slight angle across the panel's lower edge, where it flirts with the beholder's space and rather ostentatiously underscores in brilliant orange Andrea's abbreviated Latin signature: "AND. SAR. FIO. FAB."

The placement of this arrow is a bold gesture. It simultaneously indicates and claims ownership of the pure artistry involved in Andrea's treatment of the picture plane, which is less of a limit and more of a liminal threshold. Such a self-conscious display of pictorial wit would not have been lost on the patrons and connoisseurs of Florentine society. Indeed, audiences in early modern Italy were simply well versed in the visual poetics associated with these types of illusionistic performances. In the years immediately preceding the execution of the *Disputation on the Trinity*, Raphael and Fra Bartolommeo had developed increasingly sophisticated strategies for aligning the visible with the visionary, continuing a tradition of artistic experimentation that dates back at least to the development of linear perspective in the Quattrocento.[468]

Andrea, then, had good reason to emphasize his treatment of the picture plane in this altarpiece. His talent for illusionism not only translated the theological

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[467] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol.1, 45. "The figures are projected as if they might be elements of statuary: it is not without good reason that it has been observed that the composition recollects, probably not altogether casually, the early fifteenth-century *Quattro Santi Coronati* of the Or San Michele. The [painting's] structure is not, in any literal sense, a planar one, but the imminence of its substance to the picture plane imparts to that plane a different importance than it had before in the designer's mind."

[468] Barolsky, "The visionary experience of Renaissance art," 174-181; idem., "The history of Renaissance art re-envisioned,"243-250 ; idem., "Naturalism and the Visionary in Early Renaissance Art," 317-324. See also Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 10-45; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 80-88; Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 177-227. Freedberg stresses Andrea's debt to Fra Bartolomeo and draws comparisons with Raphael in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol.1, 44-46.

program authored by his advisors into visible terms. It also played to the expectations and tastes of the cognoscenti. It presented Andrea himself in the same light as Raphael, the prince of Rome, and the highly regarded Florentine, Fra Bartolommeo. And it carried some serious intellectual weight. As several scholars have stressed, the ability to stimulate the beholder so directly, to address, in a sense, the beholder in a manner analogous to visionary experience, opened up to the realm of painting modes of intellectual and emotional exchange normally associated with the capabilities of an author.[469]

Analogies between the visual and the verbal arts, between the communicative potentialities of painters and experts of the written word, were never casual during the Renaissance. When painters claimed to practice a vocation rather than a craft, they based their assertions on these precise comparisons. This fact must have been readily apparent to Andrea del Sarto, who composed the *Disputation on the Trinity* at a time when artists were busy severing the ties between their profession and the manual disciplines. He, after all, lived and worked in the city that claimed many of the period's most prominent artistic "visionaries" as native sons.

In this altarpiece, Andrea del Sarto sought to associate himself with several of these prominent Florentines. He, for instance, deliberately modeled his four standing saints on Nanni di Banco's *Quattro Santi Coronati* (Fig.41).[470] Both compositions feature groups of heavily robed saints that stand in a semicircle and participate in a

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[469] Shearman, *Only Connect*, 59-107; Prado, "The Subject of Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 67-91; Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*, 1-14. See also, Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147; Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 2-9, et. pass. Cf. Nagel, *The Controversy of Art*, 73-100.

[470] This connection is noted in Wölfflin, *Classic Art*, 174; Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 45; Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates," 308-309. Shearman, in particular, stresses Andrea's interests in his Quattrocento predecessors in *Andrea del Sarto,* vol. 1, 163-178.

dialogue. In ways that further anticipate Andrea's interests, Nanni put a lot of effort into making his figures accessible to the beholder. His saints were a tour-de-force of Quattrocento naturalism. Their movements, proportions, and features have been meticulously studied. They are of different ages and all suggest different degrees of pathos. And, most importantly, the figures on either side of the composition step out of the sculptural niche.

This intrusion into the spectator's space was a novel strategy that enhanced the sculpture's sense of immediacy. If we wanted to simplify the matter, we could say that Nanni's saints demanded more of the beholder's attention, which gave the figures' ideological import a more refined and commanding delivery. But the decision to extend the figural group beyond the normal architectural confines of the niche was anything but simple. Nanni manipulated his representation of four early Christian saints in ways that subtly redefined the physical relationship between the sculpture itself and the environment of viewing. The heightened sense of corporeal presence thus created effectively blurred the line between the empirical experience of the real object he crafted in his workshop and the intellectual experience of the divinities evoked by the artistic forms he invented.

Andrea's attention to the picture plane is intimately related to Nanni's spatial experiments, meaning that the parallels between the two works mark an instance of artistic exchange. On the one hand, when placed next to Nanni's sculpture, Andrea's figures assume the form of a theoretical statement regarding the virtues of painting in general. His technical skill—his mastery of pictorial relief and the lifelike quality of his figures, which received such high praise in the early modern commentaries—

asserts the primacy of his medium in the area of representing the qualities of the human body.[471] On the other hand, and more importantly perhaps, in adapting Nanni's figurative forms to the identities and actions of the saints required by the commission he received, Andrea acknowledged his predecessor's merits as an artist. His treatment of the picture plane fashions something like a Florentine genealogy of artistic creativity. For much like Nanni di Banco, Andrea del Sarto insists that his viewers be more than passive observers. He invites them to enter into a dialogue with the saints he pictures, which is to say that he, too, blurred the line between the empirical experience of the real object he made for the altar of St. Augustine and the intellectual experience of the divinities evoked by the artistic forms he invented.

This interest in matters of intellectual pedigree led Andrea to broaden his frame of reference and engage two other Florentine monuments from the fifteenth century. Both of these monuments are concerned with problems of pictorial space, the modalities of sight, and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. As this cluster of ideas already implies, one of these pictures is Masaccio's *Trinity* fresco in Santa Maria Novella (Fig.42). The drama of this painting hinges on the illusion of a continuum between the painting's setting and the beholder's natural environment. This impression, a product of Masaccio's abilities to organize space according to geometric principles, largely depends on his handling of the fictive architectural framework, which reads as if it extends from the surface of the wall. Masaccio's gifts for illusionism, so innovative for his time, quicken the exchange between his naturalistically rendered figures and the viewing public. He confronts his audience

[471] See Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 365.Vasari explicitly mentions ideas central to the *paragone* debate when he describes, "un San Bastiano, il quale ignudo mostra le schiene, che non dipinte ma di carne vivissime paiono."

with a vision of the triune God that is seemingly accessible to the physical senses.[472] He transforms, in other words, the act of seeing his fresco into a metaphor for spiritual sight, intensifying the imaginative activities that Augustine in *De Trinitate* describes in terms of devotional meditation and pious desire.[473]

Andrea del Castagno's *Vision of St. Jerome* (Fig.43) in SS. Annunziata—a church Andrea knew quite well—served as the other point of reference for the *Disputation on the Trinity*. The parallels between the two projects are easy to discern. In Castagno's painting, Jerome and two female figures occupy the foreground, while overhead the Trinity rushes toward the picture plane, sharply foreshortened, accompanied by attendant seraphim, and bursting forth from thin, red clouds.[474] Here, the clouds do not signify the Holy Spirit, whom Castagno rendered in the traditional form of the dove. They do, however, mark the apparition of the divine, describing an intellectual experience of theophany that ultimately erupts into the beholder's space. As Masaccio did before him, then, Castagno sought to align notionally the visible with the visionary. The dramatic recession of the Trinity, which is accessible to the physical senses of the figures even while it is a manifestation of the internal movements of Jerome's soul, recalls the rules of linear perspective that were so important for the fresco in Santa Maria Novella. Unlike his great predecessor, however, Castagno uses the techniques of linear perspective to extend the Trinity itself into the viewer's environment. He, too, transformed the act of seeing his painting into a metaphor for spiritual sight, but his metaphor presents the most

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[472] Barolsky, "The history of Renaissance art re-envisioned," 243-245.

[473] It is worth noting that, to my knowledge, no scholar has yet investigated the connection between Masaccio's fresco and Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

[474] Rice, "St. Jerome's 'Vision of the Trinity'," 151-155; DeAngelis, "A New Source for Andrea del Castagno's *Vision of St. Jerome*,"113-135.

supreme level of divinity to the beholder with a degree of drama and intensity not found in Masaccio's painting.

Andrea del Sarto essentially quoted Castagno's Trinity group in the final painting he produced for the altars of San Gallo. Responding to the demands of the Augustinian friars, he set the godhead further back from the picture plane so as to bring his figuration of the mystery in line with Augustine's writings, and maybe even with Masaccio's precedent. But Andrea nonetheless presented God the Father supporting the Crucified Christ at a sharp angle, emerging from clouds, and in the form of a visionary apparition presented to saints.

In this sense, we can say that Andrea used his visual sources rhetorically. He imitated these monuments from the Quattrocento tradition knowing that the compositional choices he made would trigger in his fellow citizens a series of memories connecting his own painting to Nanni's sculpture and to the frescos by Castagno and Masaccio. In this way, he constructed an argument about his place in the cultural and intellectual history of Florence. The logic, however complex it might be in execution, is wonderfully simple in conception. If his clever treatment of the picture plane claimed a status comparable to that of an author, then the decision to engage visually the work of Nanni, Masaccio, and Castagno might be understood as a method of formal "citation." Andrea was locating himself within a lineage of artistic "visionaries" based in his own city, even while he invited comparisons between his painting and the work of Raphael or Fra Bartolommeo. Andrea was, in short, presenting himself as the artist working in the *maniera moderna* while also

continuing the traditions established when the culture of Florence was in full bloom.[475]

The real accomplishment, here, is that all of Andrea's efforts at affirming his intellectual status and artistic pedigree augment the *Disputation on the Trinity*'s theological program. Andrea developed a clever approach to the problem of pictorial space, stimulating the imaginative faculties of the beholders in a way that drew them into the painting's iconographic invention. He then invented a system of formal references and visual cues that embedded this particular work within a learned context that was primarily concerned with the modalities of sight. Every choice he made gave form and color to his own social ambitions. But every choice he made also focused the beholders' attention on the crux of the painting's iconography, as well as a central theme of Augustine's theology: the idea of visionary experience.

This interpretation of the *Disputation on the Trinity* strikes a sympathetic chord with the writings of Andrea's most sympathetic commentator. According to Bocchi,

> No one has ever represented character (*costume*), that is, the expression of the mind and thoughts on the face, better than Andrea has done here. St. Augustine is so impassioned in revealing the counsels of his heart, and so resolute, that he seems to wax hot, so that those around him, hearing his words, may truly grow in faith. The other Saint [Peter Martyr] is thoughtful and intent; one sees his spirit shining in his face, revealing his innermost desires. His thoughtfulness is so lifelike, so true, so vivid, that he seems wholly alive, and certainly to have been made by nature itself rather than by art. The wonderful St. Lawrence, who listens with quiet attention to the speaker, is the image of a serene soul...As a sign of respect and in deference to those with greater understanding, St. Francis modestly puts his hand to his chest; in his face great sanctity is revealed with incredibly fine skill. The hand that I am speaking of does not seem painted but alive, not made of pigment but of flesh; one sees bones and nerves rendered with overwhelming beauty, so that it projects from the surface of the picture with such force, and at the

[475] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 163-178; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 137-196.

> same time with such grace, that the human mind does not, and cannot ask for any greater conformity to reality and nature than is found in this figure.[476]

As this admittedly rather lengthy passage indicates, Bocchi was clearly struck by the veracity of Andrea's depiction of the human form. He spends a considerable amount of time drawing the reader's attention to the care Andrea took in laying in the features of each face and in producing animated gestures. It is no coincidence, however, that the manner in which Bocchi addresses Andrea's approach to the problems of naturalism runs parallel to Augustine's theology of desire. The figure of Augustine himself is "impassioned in revealing the counsels of his heart...so that those around him, hearing his words, may truly grow in faith." The face of Peter Martyr reveals his "innermost desires." He is "thoughtful and intent." Lawrence, "the image of a serene soul," "listens with quiet attention," and Francis is the embodiment of "great sanctity." These descriptions capture more than Andrea del Sarto's ability to represent "*costume*." They also capture a crucial part of the artist's intellectual contributions to the invention of this altarpiece. In working with his Augustinian advisors, Andrea "found" or "discovered" the particular expressions and gestures that

[476] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 135. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 137-138. "Il costume poscia, cioè l'animo del volto, e il pensiero, nessuno, come qui ha dipinto Andrea, espresso mai meglio: però che è pronto Sant'Agostino, mentre che mostra l'avviso del cuor suo, e risoluto in suo proposito sembra di esser caldo, onde con sue parole appresso chi ode nel vero maggior fede si acquisti: pensoso poscia, e intento è l'altro Santo, e si ve de l'animo, come traluce nel volto, che è pésosa con quella vivezza tanto vera, tanto pronta, che mostra quel che vuole, e par vivo del tutto, e senza fallo, che sia fatto della natura, e non dall' arte. E mirabile il S. Lorenzo, che con quieta attenzione ascolta, chi favella: ha sembiante di animo riposato...In segno di rispetto, e di rimettersi à chi è più intendente, mostra il S. Francesco, che có modestia si pone al petto la mano, e nella fronte dimostra gran santità con artifizio incredibilmente raro: la mano, di cui io favello, non par dipinta, ma viva, ne di colori, ma di carne: si veggono l' ossa, i nerui con eccessiva bellezza effigiati: si spicca dalla tavola con tanta forza, con tanta grazia, che più nó chiede l'avviso humano, anzi chieder nó puote, se non quello, che è conforme, come è questa figura, al vero, e alla natura."

quickened the theologically charged drama of the scene by giving visible form to the movements of the soul.[477]

Bocchi continues:

> The St. Sebastian kneeling below is also very beautiful; the naked part of his figure has great force of relief and seems wholly real, as if the paint had become flesh...And though one may admire the Magdalene, also kneeling, one cannot praise her as she deserves; her head is painted with wonderful beauty of colouring, and is so similar to the kind of flesh one constantly sees in life that it seems undeniably real. The hands are surpassingly beautiful, understood and represented with consummate care; the figure is as a whole beautiful for its expression of devotion, remarkable for its lifelikeness, and extraordinary for its soft colouring. This wonderful artist understood how to make objects seem to project from the surface of the picture and stand out in relief; for just as in reality the edges of a living body are not clearly defined, so he has delicately tinted the air around his brightly coloured [figures] in such a way that it blends with them at those places where their forms appear to the eye to terminate. These figures do not seem to be made of paint, but of flesh, not clothed by art, but by nature itself; and if one forgets about the paint and all the skill involved, they are replaced in the mind by the actions themselves, which appear to be real beyond question; the viewer is convinced that the figures have assumed poses, that they speak, that they are anything but painted.[478]

These last lines speak to the very phenomenon that, as Panofsky described so long ago, permits the beholder to "internalize" the depicted event.[479] Bocchi's comments,

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[477] Cf. Kemp, "From 'Mimesis' to 'Fantasia'," 547-598. The theoretical term "invenzione" derives from the Latin "invenio," which means "to find" or "to discover." For a comparable discussion of Michelangelo making formal decisions that resonate with Augustine's thinking, see Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 188-207.

[478] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 135. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 138-139. "Il S. Bastiano, che da basso è ginocchione, è bellissimo altresì: il quale có gran forza di rilievo nella parte di sua persona ignuda pare artifizio è rara, anzi stupenda. Egli ben si puote ammirar la Maddalena, la quale è ginocchione, ma non lodarla à pieno, come chiede la bisogna; è fatta la sua testa con mirabil bellezza di colorito; e tanto è conforme alla carne, che senza dubbio pare, come adhora, adhora si vede ne vivo, che sia naturale. Sono le mani bellissime oltra ogni stima, e intese, e effigiate con somma industria, ella nel tutto come è bella per divozione, mi rabile per vivezza, rara par dolce colorito: e so come nel vero non si scorgono i termini nel corpo vivo ne crudi, ne terminati, così questo maraviglioso artefice ha dolcemente tinta l'aria intorno di colore abbagliato, che quasi unito, ove nella vista il corpo ha suo fine, fa poscia quando è bene inteso uscir quel lo fuori della tavola, che è dipinto, e del tutto il mostra rilievo. Non pare, che siano fatte di colore queste figure, ma di carne: non da artifizio, ma da la natura panneggiate: però chese punto si pone in oblio il colore, e l'artifizio, sottentra nell'animo quello, che adoperano, che sia vero senza dubbio: e pare, che l'huomo in suo pensiero si risolva, che atteggino la persona, che favellino, e che ogni altra cosa siano, che dipinte."

[479] Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 72.

in this sense, are particularly important, for they convey the affective dimension of Andrea's approach to pictorial form and color. And in doing so, they touch on the specific issue that connects the execution of the *Disputation on the Trinity* to Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

In this text, Augustine's thought moves from matters of scripture to matters of philosophy and language; from the external operations of the senses to the interior activities of human cognition; all the while exploring the commonalities between God and humanity and reflecting upon the beautiful inadequacy of that same likeness. In each of these probing inquiries, Augustine is looking for a way to express rationally the ineffable truth of the Trinity. The entire treatise, in fact, is an exercise in spiritual sight, for he is attempting to find a language or a philosophical system capable of articulating the mysteries of faith. But he is also acutely aware that he is "attempting to say things that cannot altogether be said."[480] Each line of investigation he pursues thus brings him closer to his quarry only to leave him and his reader stranded in a state of perpetual inquiry, wanting more.

The experience of reading *De Trinitate* is thus an affective experience. Augustine's theological inquiries are not about acquiring knowledge; they are about the act of questioning itself, of searching for and desiring that which can be seen only in the light of faith. This state of perpetual desire is Augustine's ideal form of Christian subjectivity, the condition of longing or yearning. At the end of his text, Augustine compresses this profound lesson into a personal prayer. "I have sought you and desired to see intellectually what I have believed, and I have argued much and

[480] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.1, p. 189.

toiled much. O Lord my God, my one hope, listen to me lest out of weariness I should stop wanting to seek you, but let me seek your face always, and with ardor."[481]

Bocchi's comments suggest that the experience of looking at Andrea's *Disputation on the Trinity* evoked a related sentiment. This artist, Bocchi explains, did not simply render the emotional and intellectual character of his saints in a manner that corresponds to natural appearances. Andrea articulated those ephemeral conditions of the human psyche in a compelling language of gesture and expression, a language meant to induce in the beholder the very same expression of desire rendered visible in pictorial form. Andrea's figures are moving. They are so persuasively evocative, so acute in their correspondence to natural human affect that they direct the mind, almost by means of emotional transference, to the internal realm of motivation that preoccupied Augustine in many of his writings.[482]

Whether we are reading *De Trinitate* or viewing the *Disputation on the Trinity*, the goal is the same; both Augustine and Andrea are attempting, as the theologian writes, "to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best we can the things that are above."[483] Like the Church Father, Andrea developed a number of strategies to direct the viewer's attention along avenues of investigation that lead back to a theology of desire, and therefore to the reformation of the soul. His abilities to imitate nature allowed him to capitalize on the devotional efficacy and the affective potentiality of naturalism in general.[484] Andrea's treatment of the picture plane

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[481] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.51, p. 436.

[482] For a discussion of pictorial naturalism and affective devotion, see Barolsky, "The history of Italian Renaissance art re-envisioned," 243-250.

[483] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.2, p. 66.

[484] See Barolsky, "Naturalism and the Visionary Art of the Early Renaissance," 317. "Naturalistic, devotional art brings the beholder closer to the Holy Spirit by rendering its manifestation to the corporeal eye though appearances and, that confrontation made, the worshiper is encouraged by the

enhanced this process, for the way this painter engaged the eye of the body appeals to the faculty of spiritual sight. Andrea's talent for manipulating oils thus draws his beholders into the picture, inviting them to envision the depicted event, which is to say, to cultivate a sense of yearning for the very vision represented in paint. This painter used all of the skills at his disposal, all of his cunning, all of his art, to imitate Augustine, attempting to elicit from his audiences in sixteenth-century Florence "the sighs of holy desire."[485] For his figures

> do not seem to be made of paint, but of flesh, not clothed by art, but by nature itself; and if one forgets about the paint and all the skill involved, they are replaced in the mind by the actions themselves, which appear to be real beyond question; the viewer is convinced that the figures have assumed poses, that they speak, that they are anything but painted.

4.3: Attending to Color

Andrea del Sarto's *Disputation on the Trinity* constitutes a nexus of social ambitions and spiritual aspirations, of real individuals attempting to shape their public identity while also grappling with the deepest questions concerning human nature and religious experience. If the iconographic program devised by the San Gallo friars, in conjunction with the Peri family, framed these issues as a theological dialogue, then Andrea's choices gave that dialogue form and color. I have so far paid the issue of color little attention in this chapter. I would like to turn now to this most widely appreciated aspect of Andrea's style as a means of assessing the arch of his intellectual development thus far, and of sketching its course into the 1520s.

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image to rise beyond mere appearances to the contemplation of pure spirit." The similarity between these words, Andrea's intentions, and Augustine's discussion of theophany is striking.

[485] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 4.31, p. 176.

To consider Andrea entering into an agreement regarding the completion of a third altarpiece for the San Gallo church is to consider an artist who is himself looking back over his career. His previous works for the Augustinians mark profound moments of engagement with the conventions of chiaroscuro modeling. In this respect, Andrea's handling of color in the *Disputation on the Trinity* operates in a similar vein. He pushes the deep shadows created by chiaroscuro modeling away from the picture plane, providing viewers with a veritable clinic in the quality of three-dimensionality he can now achieve by carefully coordinating the tonal range of individual color-planes.[486]

There is, for instance, no discrepancy between the spectrum of values expressed on Sebastian's milky flesh and inky draperies. The unified effect, which emphasizes the play of light over solid form, gives us the impression that we are closer to this figure than to the saints standing in the background. The concentration of bright hues on the Magdalene produces the same impression, as the darker pigments are all consigned to the figures located further from the picture plane. The one conspicuous exception to this rule occurs in the figure of Lawrence, whose garment is a vivid layering of brown and red glazes. Chromatically, Lawrence is a display of *virtù*, an eye-catching demonstration of Andrea's proficiency in arranging hues. By placing Lawrence slightly behind dark folds of fabric, Andrea capitalized on the visual power of the figure's chroma while maintaining his spatial system.

The dramatic course of study that began in the *Noli me tangere* and resulted in the *Madonna of the Harpies* has thus come full circle in the *Disputation on the Trinity*. Andrea's first two paintings in the Augustinian church manifested his

[486] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 141-142.

intentions of working within Leonardo's theoretical system, of attempting to maintain the discipline of tonal unity while cultivating the impact of chromatic *bellezza*. This latest expression of Andrea's abilities highlights the level of success he has achieved. Andrea's technical capabilities for creating tonal harmony among his glittering hues are on full display.

This is only one of the qualities that connect the *Disputation on the Trinity* to the artist's slightly earlier *Madonna of the Harpies*, that visionary and brilliant painting that Andrea executed in the company of Franciscans. In both pictures, Andrea considers his place in the history of Florentine culture and adopts formal principals affiliated with the 'classic' style: stability, order, and above all, compositional unity. He explores theological discussions concerning the modalities of sight in each case, as well. Working closely with learned individuals, he turned to intimately related textual sources, building on the solid foundation he acquired previously in the company of Augustinian intellectuals. But while religious theories of light and spiritual illumination continued to preoccupy this painter, Andrea's *colore* in the *Disputation on the Trinity* marks a new development of considerable significance.

Here, Andrea is less interested in the properties of reflected light than in the ability of color to move the eye into and through the composition. He devised a system based around isolated chords of color that speak to one another. This system allows the gaze to travel from the bright orange and pink in the Magdalene to the reds in Lawrence and God the Father; from the Magdalene's amber sleeve to the golden-green of Augustine's cloak; from the habits worn by Peter Martyr and Francis to

Sebastian's flesh tones and smoky blue draperies. In Andrea's hands, these rich and vivid hues transform into textures and materials, often into delicate fabrics. But they also play off one another with a degree of stylized fluidity, so that part of what the beholder encounters in looking at this altarpiece is soft facture and the eloquent, chiastic rhythm of the colors responding to one another across the panel's surface—what Shearman would describe as "*maniera* in coloristic terms."[487]

Andrea, then, responded to the emerging taste for heightened forms of artificial beauty in sixteenth-century painting even as he stayed true to the established conventions and rules of decorum that characterize the 'classic' style, which artists, particularly in Rome, were beginning to eschew.[488] His talent for modeling and his understanding of chiaroscuro produced figures, that as Bocchi writes, "take hold of the mind as things of nature do."[489] The delicate rhythm of colors across the two-dimensional plane, on the other hand, gives the *Disputation on the Trinity* a degree of *bellezza* that is conspicuous, cutting-edge, and captivating (even if it does not exactly align with the notion of s*plendore*). Andrea used the powerful effect of his glittering hues in the same way that some of his contemporaries and students used elegantly twisting bodies in their own compositions: he wanted to draw attention to his work, to his propensity for creating stunning "art."[490]

Andrea's preoccupation with attracting and holding the beholder's gaze is an important point of reference for any discussion of the concerns that motivated the

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[487] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 142, quotation from 147. See also, idem., *Mannerism* , 15-48.

[488] Cf. Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 28-56, et. pass.; Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 127-151.

[489] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 136. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 142. "fermano la mente altrui, e, come in cosa naturale."

[490] See Summers, "Contrapposto," 336-361.

execution of this panel. For "attention" itself is a complicated idea, one that connects the history of art to the histories of rhetoric and theology.[491] Quintilian and Cicero, for instance, made specific recommendations regarding not only the inflection of the voice but also the movements of the body and the use of clear facial expressions, arguing that such devices could engage and even cajole the audience. Late antique and medieval theologians, for their part, devised practices of prayer, meditative reading, and religious rituals, all of which were meant to focus the worshiper's attention on God. Augustine described these activities as exercises that honed the faculties of spiritual vision, which ultimately cultivated the condition of longing. Later thinkers, such as the medieval writer, William of St. Thierry, added to this list of edifying exercises. Writing in a most Augustinian vein, William maintains that the devout Christian should consider religious imagery, "so that our bodily eyes may possess something on which to gaze...worshiping not the picture's likeness only, but the truth the picture of your passions represents."[492]

Renaissance painters adopted many of these ideas. Comments such as the remarks of William of St. Thierry were obviously important for makers of ecclesiastical art. So, too, were the instructions of Cicero and Quintilian, for much like the ancient orator, early modern painters sought to delight, instruct, and move their audiences.[493] The way color functions in the *Disputation on the Trinity* fits nicely into this intellectual tradition—so much so, in fact, that we should consider

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[491] Gaston, "Attention and Inattention," 253-268. See also Barolsky, "The history of Italian Renaissance art re-envisioned," 243-250. Marcia Hall's notion of "making strange" touches on similar ideas. See idem., *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*, 8-15, et. pass.

[492] William of St. Thierry quoted in Gaston, "Attention and Inattention," 256. Augustine is likely the direct precedent for William's comments. Cf. Sight "is the most excellent of the body's senses, and for all its difference in kind has the greatest affinity to mental vision." Augustine, *The Trinity*, 11.1, p. 304.

[493] See Spencer, "Ut Rhetorica Pictura," 26-44.

Andrea del Sarto to be an important forerunner to that expert cultivator of *vaghezza*, Federico Barocci.[494]

Bocchi suggests as much when, making every effort to distinguish Andrea's coloring from the overly idealized "*vago colorito e allegro di Raffaello*,"[495] he nevertheless applies the term "*vaga*" to Andrea's *Madonna del Sacco* (Fig.44). Significantly, Bocchi's discussion of this fresco recalls his commentary on the *Disputation on the Trinity*. "When seen from a distance, this picture [the *Madonna del Saco*] is *vaga* for its softness; as one approaches, one thinks it is real; when one examines it up close, one simply cannot believe that it is not in relief, that the figures do not move, and that the poses they assume are not those of living persons."[496]

These terms, *vaga*, *vago*, and *vaghezza*, have no directly corollary in English. *Vago* and *vaga*, the gendered adjective, are frequently rendered as "lovely" or "charming," but Stuart Lingo has recently shown that "alluring" or "ravishing" are better approximations. The idea of ravishing art, of art that cultivates a sense of ardent allure, or *vaghezza*, derives much of its theoretical power from the terms' etymological relationships with two separate verbs: *vagare*, "to wander," and *vagheggiare*, a particularly important term that can be translated as "to gaze at fondly," "to yearn for," or "to long for." As the sixteenth century progressed, these ideas, which concern the workings of sight and desire, became increasingly associated with color, and specifically with the arrangement of hues throughout a

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[494] See Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 1-9, et. pass.

[495] Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 140.

[496] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence,* 217. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 232. "Questa, quando si vede dilungi è vaga per morbidezza; quando si appressa, si stima, che sia vera: quando ci è sotto l'occhio, non si descrede l'huomo in se stesso, che non sia di rilievo, e che non pensi, che le figure si muovano, e come fa huom viuo, che atteggino vivamente la persona."

composition.[497] Lomazzo, for instance, concluded his chapter, "How one arranges colors in *istorie*" with, "And this is all the foundation of the necessary *vaghezza* that colors must have when placed in painting; once this is understood and observed, the works will succeed in being agreeable, *vaghe*, and delightful to the eye."[498] A few decades earlier, Paolo Pino writes, "I do not intend *vaghezza* to mean beautiful ultramarine of sixty scudi an ounce...the true *vaghezza* is nothing other than *venustà* or *grazia*, which is generated from a combination or rather just proportion of things, so that, as the pictures have these properties, they also have the property of *vago* and the painter is honored."[499]

The history of this *vago* color is, if not an altogether new subject of scholarly investigation, then certainly one bound to become an important area of research in light of Lingo's examinations. Andrea del Sarto deserves a place in this narrative, for he thought critically about his approach to the problematics of color, using his hues with shining success to enrapture his audiences. We get a sense of what Bocchi meant when he described the *Madonna del Sacco* as *vaga* when we let our eye travel over Andrea's graceful color juxtapositions. The arrangement of sympathetic hues—moving from Joseph's yellow drapery to his purple tunic, from this tunic to the Virgin's bright blue and turquoise sash, then to her coral dress, and over to the purple cloth worn by Christ—is lovely indeed.

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[497] Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 125-141. See also, Sohm, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy*, 110-112, 193-200.

[498] Lamazzo, *Scritti sulle arti*, quoted in Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 132. "E questo è tutto il fondamento della debita vaghezza che debbono avere i colori compartiti per le pitture; il quale tuttavolta che sarà inteso et osservato, ne riusciranno le opere convenienti, vaghe e dillettevoli a gl'occhi."

[499] Pino, *Dialogo di Pittura*, quoted in Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 132. "Non però intendo vaghezza l'azzurro oltremarino da sessanta scudi l'onzia...la vera vaghezza non è altro che venustà o grazia, la qual si genera da una conzione over giusta proporzione delle cose, tal che, come le pitture hanno del proprio, hanno anco del vago et onorato il maestro."

A similar chromatic logic finds expression in Andrea's stunning *Last Supper* (Fig.45), a fresco of 1526-1527. In this painting, the artist used a limited palette. He arranged his colors so that particular hues repeat across the composition, but he was also careful to make sure that every color strikes a sympathetic chord with its neighbor. Greens couple with yellow, yellows with warm reds, purple, or sky blue, and so on. It is quite easy to see how, if we follow sixteenth-century lore, a mob bent on destruction might stop and gaze fondly at this fresco, losing the taste for havoc as the eyes of every individual move across Andrea's alluring field of hues, always yearning for the next ravishing glitter of chroma.[500]

The allure of these fresco projects ultimately stems from experiments Andrea conducted nearly a decade previously, in the convent of San Gallo, as a means of responding to Augustine's theological writings. There, in the *Disputation on the Trinity*, Andrea was not simply painting a pretty picture. He lures his spectators into the painting with bright and glittering glazes of oil paint. He holds the beholders' attention and delights their eyes, inviting them—quite literally—to wander from colored form to colored form. This ravishing handling of paint makes it difficult to ignore his considerable skills with a brush, while also facilitating the type of sustained looking necessarily for the beholder to consider deeply the painting's spiritual program. Color, in short, makes the pictured *conversazione* more engaging, more sensuous even, which in turn makes the figures themselves more affecting. Their confident gestures and the emotional resonance of their facial expressions, their radiant draperies and soft hues compel the beholder to pursue intellectually what

[500] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 162-171. I am referencing a legend, recorded by Vasari and by Benedetto Varchi, where a mod laid siege to the monastery of San Salvi but spared the refectory in order to preserve Andrea's painting.

Augustine describes as "the sight which ravishes every rational soul with desire for it, and of which the soul is the more ardent in its desire the purer it is; and it is the purer the more it rises again to the things of the spirit."[501]

[501] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2.28, p.118.

Chapter 5: The Splendor of the Luco *Pietà*

Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world…Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

John 6:49-51, 56.

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Few forces in the early modern world elicited such fear as the plague. In 1522, that dark and wreaking specter crept across the Italian peninsula, reaching Florence by the end of the year. Every citizen with the means to do so fled, including Andrea del Sarto, by then the most sought after of the city's painters. Wishing to remove his family—his wife, sister-in-law, stepdaughter, as well as an assistant—from harm's way, Andrea retreated to the region of Mugello, taking shelter among the Camaldolese nuns of San Pietro a Luco.[502] His stay in Luco was not terribly long, lasting only until November of 1524, but it was a period of exciting artistic activity. He executed three paintings for the Camaldolese church: a *Pietà* (Fig.5) for the main altar, as well as two smaller pictures, a panel of the *Visitation* and a canvas depicting "a most beautiful head of Christ."[503] Unfortunately, the latter two paintings are now lost, but the Luco *Pietà* survives.[504] Sitting comfortably alongside so many

[502] For an overview of this convent's history, see the essays by Benvenuti and Gagliardi and Nelli in Baldacci, et al., "*Le Contesse di Luco*," 13-61.

[503] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 376. "una bellissima testa d'un Cristo."

[504] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 260-261, 398-399. Andrea received eighty *fiorini* in payment for the *Pietà* on 11 October 1524. There is another receipt in the name of "*Raffaello suo garzone*" for payment of ten *scudi* "per magistero della tavola d'Andrea del Sarto." This document is dated 6 October 1527. Scholars have not been able to identify this Raffaello or convincingly account for his activities with regard to the Luco *Pietà*. The most convincing suggestions would connect the

masterpieces in the Galleria Palatina, this panel constitutes one of the most thought-provoking and moving creations of Andrea's artistic career.

In this composition, we find those same proclivities that inform every example of Andrea's work examined thus far. The *Pietà* is a picture that reflects on the history of Renaissance painting, paying particular attention to developments that took place in Florence. With a characteristic level of sensitivity, Andrea modeled his formal arrangement after notable works by important predecessors. Michelangelo, Fra Bartolommeo, and Pietro Perugino are his principal interlocutors. By this point in his career, however, Andrea's methods of pictorial citation had taken on a slightly new set of inflections. His position as *caposcuola* of the Florentine community was relatively secure. It was the Florentine artistic tradition itself that had come into question. More so than ever before, artistic experiments in Rome, experiments that art historians traditionally identify with the *maniera moderna*, threatened the prestige and prominence of Andrea's native city, which once dominated the European art world.

Andrea attempted to address this troubling situation in the Luco *Pietà*—and, once again, he did so with style. While he may have explored ideals associated with 'Mannerism' in the realm of color, Andrea's strategy of imitation and his pattern of formal arrangement establish a dialectics of style, one that engages in rivalries among regional "dialects" of artistic expression. As one might expect, Andrea's thoughtful take on this issue privileges the achievements now identified with 'classic' or 'High Renaissance' art and, more importantly, with the visual "dialect" he recognized as his

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1527 payment to the predella, which is later than Andrea's panel and by a different hand, or to the frame.

own. Indeed, the level of consideration dedicated to the 'classic' style in this panel defies conventional wisdom, in that Andrea forces us to reconsider how we think about the *maniera moderna*, its affiliation with Roman art, as well as its relation to the much maligned *maniera devota*.

Andrea, of course, had good reason to think about the *maniera devota* in this panel. For all the sophistication he poured into the formal arrangement of the Luco *Pietà*, he was still in the business of producing an altarpiece. Both he and his patrons were intent on creating an art-object that instructed the faithful and inspired devotion. These were time-honored demands placed on all paintings meant to serve as liturgical instruments.

That the ceremonial component of this enterprise preoccupied everyone involved in the creation of the Luco *Pietà* is immediately apparent from the panel's iconography. The Eucharistic wafer and chalice appear before a scene of Christ's loved ones mourning his death. As one commentator has argued, this juxtaposition "stands as an open declaration of the reality of the presence of Christ's body in the bread and wine consecrated by the celebrant and, conversely, as a refutation of the doubts cast upon the doctrine of transubstantiation in just this period by the transalpine Reformers."[505]

This concise statement, I believe, accurately describes the brief Andrea received upon accepting his commission from Caterina della Casa, the abbess of San Pietro.[506] His charge, which he most certainly discussed at length with learned members of the Camaldolese community, was to lend form and color to these

[505] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 160.

[506] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 398-399. Caterina della Casa is specifically named in Andrea's receipt of payment for the Luco *Pietà*.

embattled articles of belief: the Eucharist, the doctrine of transubstantiation, the *Corpus Christi*. This was no easy task, but it was, as it turns out, a source of considerable inspiration for a painter of prodigious skill whose previous engagements involved the tenants of the Christian faith.

Andrea delved into his vast holdings of artistic knowledge and, as he so often did, devised virtuoso methods of pictorial address that stimulated the deepest levels of his beholder's spiritual consciousness. His interest in 'classic' patterns of formal arrangement resonates with notions of grace contained within the word "Eucharist" itself. His figures, an auspicious collection of saints, some of whom might have been modeled on individuals known to the Camaldolese sisters, embody pious emotions so powerfully that they summon sympathetic feelings among worshipful spectators. Vasari touched on this communicative ability—a "poetic" ability grounded in the traditions of the *maniera devota*—when he asserted that Andrea's saints "truly have spirit and soul."[507] The affective bond thus formed between object and audience has the effect of making Christ's death a living memory, which is of course the whole point of celebrating the sacrament at mass.

This memory only becomes more vivid in light of Andrea's *colore*. On the one hand, his treatment of color and pictorial light here continues to draw on the rich heritage of the Florentine tradition, especially on Leonardo's theoretical speculations. Indeed, in the Luco *Pietà,* Andrea realized one of the chief ambitions he shared with his elder colleague. An impressive array of brilliant colors co-exists in their fully illuminated state without compromising the sense of three-dimensionality that unifies the outdoor scene. In other words, Andrea has created a unified impression of

[507] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 376. "abbiano veramente lo spirito e l'anima."

pictorial relief, while finally achieving the effects of *splendore* in an open-air environment. Those same chromatic effects, on the other hand, cultivate a sense of *vaghezza*, the pictorial ideal connected to the condition of longing.[508] Andrea's lush hues adorn a scene concerned with Christ's sacrifice. They appear in conjunction with the stark whiteness of the host, which is set against white linen and curiously foreshortened in order to catch a flicker of light on its edge (Fig.46). In this way, Andrea's highly artful *colore* lures the spectator's attention back to the Eucharist, to the issue of Christ's death, and ultimately, into the domain where "in Christ we who are many form one body" (Ro 12:5). To look upon Andrea's painting within a liturgical setting is to relish it, to savor it, and to digest it, to see the colorless host open, quite literally, onto a colorful field of exegesis that presents the Son as "the radiance of God's glory [qui cum sit *splendor* gloriæ], and the exact representation of his being" (Hew 1:3).[509] As we can already begin to sense, then, the color of the Luco *Pietà* recalls the artistic and intellectual context Andrea encountered among the Augustinians of San Gallo.

The reference to San Gallo is purposeful, formal even. Once again, Andrea is navigating an arresting landscape of ideas, a landscape dominated by none other than Augustine himself. The Luco *Pietà* is, at its most fundamental level, an intellectual exercise that draws the mysteries of the Eucharist together with theories of the senses, desire, human subjectivity, and the idea of reform. Andrea's searching study of these fascinating notions accounts for the special place this panel occupies in his career, for

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[508] See Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 189-207.

[509] The Latin is taken from the Vulgate. The emphasis is mine. For a sympathetic interpretation on Gertrude of Helfta's views on the whiteness of the Eucharist, see Astell, *Eating Beauty*, 85-98, especially 89.

the particular stage it marks in his stylistic development. His agile mind encased some of Christianity's most ancient beliefs in a level of pictorial accomplishment that can only be described as "art."[510] We might even evoke Ann Astell's thoughtful analysis of Eucharistic imagery and say that Andrea's manner of lending form and color to the mysteries of Christ's body is so masterful that it allows him to assume the role of the apprentice. For,

> Eating the Eucharist was...simultaneously to "see" Christ and to "touch" this vision, to reach out for it, and to embody it virtuously. More basically it was to be seen and eaten by Christ, drawn to Him, and incorporated into Him as "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Eating the Eucharist was, in short, productive of an entire "way" of life, a virtuous life-form, an artwork, with Christ Himself as the principal artist.[511]

5.1: Dialects and Dialectics of Maniera

According to Vasari, the Luco *Pietà* is a clear indication of how much Andrea delights "in finish and perfection in art." It was, the author elaborates, a source of renown for the convent of San Pietro, as well.[512] In spite of this high praise—which is notably absent any reference to the artist's supposedly "timid" character—the Luco *Pietà* has not always found favorable reception among later critics. Natali and Shearman may describe Andrea's altarpiece as stimulating, poetic, or even, as a "glowing jewel of the finest purity."[513] But Jacob Burckhardt in the late nineteenth century and Fritz Knapp in the early twentieth century found the painting's

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[510] Cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458-490; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 1-10.

[511] Astell, *Eating Beauty*, 14.

[512] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 376. "Per le quali maravigliose considerazioni si conosce quanto Andrea si dilettasse delle fini e perfezzioni dell'arte; e per dire il vero, questa tavola ha dato più nome a quel monasterio che quante fabriche e quante altre spese vi sono state fatte, ancorché magnifiche e straordinarie."

[513] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131. See also, Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 160-161.

contemplative mood unappealing. In their minds, the reserved attitudes of Andrea's figures clash with the narrative of Christ's death, which calls for passionate mourning.[514] Freedberg expressed this sentiment most adamantly in his monograph. Using language that continues to shape scholarly opinion, he writes,

> The mood of the event seems too reticent and gentle, so that its meaning recedes behind the impressiveness of the manipulation of the form. The restraint of content is intended, but has gone too far...Andrea has fallen into the dangerous possibility that awaits the artist who works on the highest plane of classical development. There is a disparity between the aesthetic and ethical values of the painting...the *Pietà* comes perilously close to being an exercise of formalism.[515]

These comments touch on an issue that requires careful consideration. The Luco *Pietà* is indeed highly contrived, its formal arrangement finely wrought. Andrea's composition is symmetrical, balanced, and chiastic in organization. At the center, the Virgin holds up the lifeless arm of her son, whose loved ones gather before the tomb for a final moment of meditative embrace. Christ's body is nearly pristine and idealized. He bears only the subtlest hints of the Passion, traces of his heroic sacrifice. He is nude, save for his cool blue loincloth. His form rests on a white stretch of fabric draped over an altar-like slab, which will soon seal his burial chamber. And his head tilts forward into shade—into the "shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). St. John the Evangelist props up Christ's torso, twisting to look diagonally at the Virgin mother and, past her, at St. Paul, bearded and animated. Paul's arm extends towards the center of the painting. The forcefulness of his hand, with his fingertips

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[514] See Burckhardt, *Der Cicerone*, 885; Knapp, *Andrea del Sarto*, 65. Shearman quotes both works in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 100-101, n.1.

[515] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 68. See also Hall, *After Raphael*, 59. Freedberg's thoughts are echoed by Hall: "His [Pontormo's] master—and the *caposcuola* (head of school)—Andrea del Sarto, was adept at creating harmonious and balanced compositions without letting them appear contrived. Sarto's handling of emotion, however, especially religious emotion, was reticent, restrained to the point of being bland."

picking up traces of luminosity, complements the evacuated quality of the hand that the Virgin cradles in her own. St. Peter stands opposite Paul, clutching his keys and gazing downward mournfully. Peter's pose resonates with that of St. Catherine, who kneels before Paul with her hands crossed over her chest, and with her broken wheel visible at her side. St. Mary Magdalene kneels before Catherine, clothed in bright pink and bathed in Andrea's characteristically brilliant light.

With John and the Virgin, the Magdalene completes the triad of protagonists who actually witnessed the death of Jesus, a role that Andrea acknowledges in a rather clever manner.[516] Just as John props up the fallen savior, just as the Madonna supports Christ's wounded hand, the Magdalene encounters Jesus's body. His foot rests on her lap, not far from her oil jar.[517] In a positively eloquent gesture, she responds to this tangible connection by bringing her clasped hands up, almost to her chin. Her brow creases, and her cheeks flush. A few strands of hair fall from the cord she wears, as she retreats inward, composing her face into an expression of intense concentration and devotion. She stares not so much at the hand of Christ but through it. The drama of his sacrifice, together with the profundity of its implications for the history of humanity, unfolds quietly in the realm of her interior—a statement that holds true for all six saints included in Andrea's panel.

Unnoticed by any of these figures, with the possible exception of Peter, is the Eucharistic wafer and chalice in the immediate foreground. The inclusion of the sacrament is logical in an altarpiece dealing with the sacrifice that was Christ's death. After all, Christ himself proclaimed the connection, passing the cup to his disciples

[516] See Jn 19:25-27.
[517] See Lk 7:37.

and breaking the bread and stating, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). According to one commentator, however, these same liturgical objects, the bread and chalice, "distance the viewer from the specific moment represented," reinforcing the painting's "distinctly formalized, conceptual" character, its "retrograde" 'High Renaissance' quality.[518] This apparent privileging of form over content is the very issue that, as Freedberg sensed, requires careful consideration. For Andrea was, without question, deeply concerned in this picture with the conventions of pictorial form that have come to define a period style.

Even a cursory glance at this panel is enough to see that much about the Luco *Pietà* fits the conventional definitions of 'classic' or 'High Renaissance' art. The symmetry of the scene is explicit, the balance between naturalism and idealization undeniable, the contrived order of the figural groupings wonderfully choreographed. These qualities, eschewed by many of Andrea's contemporaries during the 1520s, recall the artistic achievements that separate, conceptually, the early Cinquecento from the Quattrocento.[519] In both its mood and compositional logic, for example, the Luco *Pietà* bears a striking resemblance to Michelangelo's famous *Pietà* in the Vatican (Fig.47). The strict geometry of the sculpture's figural composition, the high degree of finish, and the quiet sense of interior activity conveyed by the Virgin's

[518] Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 140. It is important, as well as interesting, to note that while Franklin's assessment of Andrea's *Pietà* dovetails with many of Freedberg's observations, the two scholars take a radically different approach to the question of period styles.

[519] See Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 33; Freedberg, *Painting in Italy*, 14-17. Cf. Hall, *After Raphael*, 1-9. I note here a deeply ingrained tendency among art historians to identify the 'classic' style as conceptually belonging to the Cinquecento, even though the dates normally ascribed to that period style do not entirely fall within the sixteenth century.

expression, as well as by the play of light and shadow, all resonate with Andrea's altarpiece.[520]

There is every reason to believe that these parallels are more than a matter of coincidence. Andrea would have seen Michelangelo's sculpture when he visited Rome. He might have even talked with Michelangelo about it, seeing as the two artists almost certainly knew each other. They ran in the same circles. They walked the same streets.[521] And they grew up in the same artistic tradition. Michelangelo acknowledged this last fact in 1498 when he proudly signed his *Pietà* in Plinian fashion, conspicuously mentioning his place of birth.[522]

This is where Andrea's formal choices begin to complicate the prevailing narrative of sixteenth-century artistic history. Scholars have become accustomed to thinking about pictures such as the Luco *Pietà* in terms of "the Romanization of Florence."[523] Hence the use of words such as "retrograde." By 1524, we say—not without reason—that the Florentine tradition no longer garnered the respect it previously enjoyed. The Eternal City reigned supreme. The towering achievements in the Vatican *Stanze*, the monumental accomplishment that is the Sistine Ceiling, and the magnificence of two Medici pontificates created a grand shadow, which loomed

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[520] See Wallace, "Michelangelo's Rome *Pietà*," 243-255. Wallace convincingly argues that, in its initial environment, Michelangelo's sculpture was lit from above, meaning that the Virgin's face was cast in shadow while the body of Christ was fully illuminated.

[521] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 37-38. For an informative discussion of Michelangelo's activities in Florence between 1515 and 1525, see Wallace, *Michelangelo*, 113-129. It is worth noting that Michelangelo counted among his friends two of Andrea's closest *amici*, Jacopo Sansovino and Baccio d'Agnolo. This remained true even after Baccio and Jacopo lost out on commissions at San Lorenzo. Michelangelo is listed as being among those intellectuals who gathered in Baccio's studio to discuss questions pertinent to the visual arts, as well.

[522] Michelangelo signed his *Pietà*, "MICHAEL A[N]GELUS BONAROTUS FLORENT[INUS] FACIEBA[T]." On this signature and for further bibliography, see McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance*, 183-203, especially, 184-186.

[523] Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*, 98. See also Hall, *After Raphael*, 64-69; Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates," 295-297.

large over the cramped streets that Andrea called home.[524] This process reached a seemingly inevitable culmination in the cultural policies of Cosimo I de' Medici and in the writings of Vasari.[525] With the aid of *Le vite*, and with the benefit of hindsight, historians have thus produced a compelling version of events: Florence may have given birth to the *terza età*, but the *maniera moderna* was really a Roman phenomenon.

For Andrea, however, this narrative had yet to be written. He did not have the same benefit of knowing what the coming decades held in store for his city. Nor was he able to read Vasari's influential text. It would be a mistake, then, to suppose that Andrea's understanding of stylistic modernity depended on Roman precedents, which is to say, that it coincided perfectly with the historical narrative Vasari handed down to us.[526] On the contrary, while Andrea likely shared some of the author's views regarding the advent of the *maniera moderna*, he also seems to have recognized distinct and co-extensive modalities within the modern language of pictorial style.

Even in 1524, the 'classic' style was a viable, indeed a desirable option for an artist in Andrea's position. It was not yet the "stunted hothouse plant" that suffered in Florence, that never achieved "the grandeur of Raphael's and Michelangelo's … creations in the second decade [of the Cinquecento] in Rome."[527] It was, instead, a living language of artistic expression, a full-fledged modern language that embodied

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[524] See Hall, *After Raphael*, 2.

[525] Hall, *After Raphael*, 55-128, 215-222, quotation below from page 219. "The relieflike style, transformed in Rome into the Maniera almost at the moment Cosimo assumed power, would be imported to Florence for the political purposes of elevating the image of the duke."

[526] Cf. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 149.

[527] Hall, *After Raphael*, 55-56.

the richness of Florentine culture, its glittering past, its sophisticated present, and its promising future.

This understanding of the 'classic' style runs through the latter half of Andrea's career like a leitmotif. We encountered it already in the *Madonna of the Harpies*, where Andrea adopted the "restraint and simplicity"[528] associated with our notion of 'High Renaissance' art. We found it at work again in the organization of the *Disputation on the Trinity*, where the figures stand in a stable group that embodies the "rigour and purification"[529] of 'classical' arrangement. In each case, Andrea's choice to embrace this set of compositional principles was a choice to promote the artistic traditions that had become such an important part of his city's—not to mention, his own—cultural identity.

Andrea's travels in France, which placed him once again in close proximity to the extraordinary personality of Leonardo, the author of the 'classic' style, seem only to have enhanced the younger artist's dedication to this brand of the *maniera moderna*. The strict pyramid that is the composition of Andrea's *Charity* (Fig.48), executed at the French court in 1518, might easily be compared with any of Raphael's *Madonna and Child* paintings from the beginning of the sixteenth century, or with the figural arrangement of Leonardo's own *Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (Fig.49) for that matter. When he returned to Italy mere months after Leonardo's death, Andrea encountered an artistic community beginning to experiment with the very conventions he was then promoting. And yet he still refused to abandon the tried and true pictorial institutions that marked what has been called "the high moment in Florentine art of

[528] Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 136.
[529] Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 137.

the sixteenth century."[530] His Vienna *Pietà* (Fig.50) from 1520 may appeal to the viewer's emotional sympathies more openly than his Luco *Pietà* does, but it is hardly less stringent in its adherence to the formal ideals associated with 'High Renaissance' art. Andrea's *Madonna of the Steps* (Fig.51), perhaps the last panel executed prior to his departure for Mugello, likewise presents the beholder with a triangular grouping of idealized yet naturalistic figures. Free of complex formal conceits and elaborately twisting poses, no one would mistake this work for a Roman production.

In this sense, Andrea del Sarto, in his work, kept that explicitly Florentine line of artistic innovation alive and well. He could not have known, as many scholars would argue now, that he was actually keeping it on life support, that the Roman style would become in Vasari's hands the only modern style. What we might call the Roman dialect of the *maniera moderna* represented but one form of expression available to Andrea and his contemporaries in 1524. And for someone in Andrea's position, that dialect represented a distinct threat.[531]

The formal composition of the Luco *Pietà* is an attempt to answer that threat. By continuing to adopt features now identified with the 'classic' style, Andrea was speaking the language of the *maniera moderna* with a distinctly Florentine accent. He shows himself to be an artist of the sixteenth century, but he promotes only those stylistic features born in his city of birth. The decision to maintain the delicate balance between naturalism and idealization was a conscious and open rejection of

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[530] Hall, *After Raphael*, 55.

[531] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 99. "A certain stability between the schools of Rome and Florence was restored by the accidents of the minor migrations of artists between the two cities in 1522 and 1523, first as a result of the arrival of the plague and of Adrian VI in Rome, and then of the Florentine phase of the plague and the election of Clement VII. But although the contribution of Florentine artists peculiarly gifted for this purpose—conspicuously Rosso—was very great, the stability represented, in terms of ideas, the triumph of Roman *maniera*."

contemporaneous Roman ideals. Moreover, by inviting comparisons with Michelangelo's early *Pietà*, that magnificent sculpture that belongs to the Eternal City, but that embodies Florentine innovations—that literally is inscribed, FLORENT[INUS]—Andrea is creating a type of logical argument that runs counter to certain elements of the narrative ultimately codified by Vasari. Andrea reminds his viewers of a moment when Rome looked to Florence for guidance. This is a crucial moment indeed, in that it centers on Michelangelo, a powerful source of inspiration for the central Italian artistic community, and locates one of the first Roman iteration of the *maniera moderna* within the sphere of Florentine achievements.

The plague of 1522 intensified the need for such a reminder.[532] It was the plague that caused Perino del Vaga to flee Rome, where he had trained as a painter, and return to Florence, where he too was born. When he arrived in his native city, a delegation of local artists greeted him with a walk through the spaces of civic memory. As they accompanied the returning youth on this tour of the city's monuments, they stopped to consider the many virtues of Masaccio. At this point, Perino lamented the fact that he could not execute a figure beside one that his colleagues were then admiring, claiming that his Roman style of painting was more graceful than even the peerless work of this great protagonist from the early Renaissance. Andrea himself, the leader of the Florentine delegation, decided to call Perino on his gamble, suggesting that space be allocated to the newly arrived twenty-year-old within the Brancacci Chapel.[533]

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[532] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 5, 125-126. See also Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 99.

[533] As I outlined in my Introduction, Vasari does not name the leader of the Florentine delegation, but there is a consensus among scholars that the speaker is none other than Andrea del Sarto. Parma

What Andrea proposed, in short, was a rather explicit dialectic. By comparing the modern achievements of Rome against one of the best painters the history of Florence had to offer, the particular relationship between the two traditions would become apparent. So, too, would the truth-value of Perino's claim. I think we have to imagine Andrea addressing his younger contemporary with a smile on his face, because for an artist of Andrea's pedigree, Perino's claim was unimaginably reckless; one could only be found wanting when compared to Masaccio.

The plague reached Florence before this project could be pursued, but Perino did manage to execute a drawing of the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand* (Fig.52) during his sojourn. Significantly, the cartoon was meant for a fresco in the church of Camaldoli. This composition served as a powerful demonstration of the most current trends in Rome, trends that emerged from the studios of Raphael, trends that were taking hold even among Andrea's former pupils, Rosso and Pontormo.[534] The overly idealized approach to the human form, the "relieflike"[535] treatment of space, the theatrical gestures that ideate heightened, hyper-sophisticated notions of elegance and grace, make Perino's composition an impressive example of what we have come to call 'Mannerism'.[536] Given the competitive nature of regional traditions, the Florentines must have viewed it with great interest. Andrea del Sarto, who arrived at the Camaldolese convent in Mugello shortly after his exchange with Perino, and

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Armani, *Perin del Vaga*, 51. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 155. Shearman anticipates this notion in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 99 n2.

[534] See Natali, "From the *Spedalingo Altarpiece* to the *Deposition*," 85-93; Mozzati, "Pontormo, or on *prontezza*," 95-101; and Natali, "The Bread of the Altar," 231-239.

[535] I am borrowing the term "relieflike" from Hall, *After Raphael*, 2.

[536] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 149-159; See also Hall, *After Raphael*, 78-80; Shearman, *Mannerism*, 15-48.

conceivably, with Perino's drawing fresh in his mind, might have been more interested than most.

The circumstances of Andrea viewing Perino's cartoon are rather different from the circumstances of the proposed fresco project in the Brancacci chapter. In the *Martyrdom* composition, Perino was not placing himself in competition with an artist whose influence could be measured by surveying a century of truly exceptional painting. Perino was presenting, instead, a rival claim to the heritage of Masaccio, whom Vasari praised for having "worked in manner so modern."[537] Someone else, another artist living in the sixteenth century, needed to supply the counterpoint to Perino's claim, to defend the honor of Florence.

Andrea del Sarto was that artist; his Luco altarpiece was the counterpoint.[538] What Freedberg and others have described as the aesthetic values of the *Pietà* actually operate within the intensely fascinating sphere of cultural politics. For while artists in Rome reveled in "self-conscious stylization,"[539] in idealizing forms "away from the natural,"[540] Andrea opted for a more balanced approach. He infused his forms with heightened notions of beauty without sacrificing verisimilitude, thereby reiterating the values that characterized the *maniera moderna* at the moment of its birth, that is, when it first bloomed in the city of flowers. When it comes to the modern language of pictorial style, he maintains, Florence is the *locus classicus.*

The dialectic that plays out in Andrea's handling of form assumes even greater force in light of two other pictorial associations that make up the artist's

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[537] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 5, 125-126. "avesse lavorato con una maniera sì moderna."

[538] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 8-9 et. pass. My thoughts, here, echo Natali's assertion that Andrea was not the timid soul described in Vasari's *Le vite*.

[539] Shearman, *Mannerism*, 35.

[540] Shearman, *Mannerism*, 19.

strategy of imitation. The first of these associations connects Andrea's altarpiece to a painting that is nearly contemporary with Michelangelo's sculpture, namely, Perugino's *Lamentation* (Fig.53), executed in 1495 for S. Chiara in Florence.[541] The two paintings depict essentially the same moment, where Christ's loved ones gather before his tomb for a final embrace. Notably, too, both artists treat Christ's body in a similar fashion. In each case, one figure props up the savior, who is nude—except for a blue loincloth—clean, and possessed of that ideal physique that denotes heroism. Christ rests on a stone slab draped in white linen. And the Virgin, hooded in white and located in the center of the pictures, supports her son's lifeless arm. The figures that gather around Jesus mark yet another moment of similarity. As in Andrea's Luco *Pietà*, the protagonists of Perugino's narrative mourn without expressing overt passion. The Perugian's is an altarpiece with a quiet mood. It, in fact, expresses that type of emotional sentimentality that is typical of the *maniera devota*.[542]

The "devout style" was a mode of pictorial address that Baxandall likened to Renaissance practices of preaching, which were themselves based on the examples of the Church Fathers, especially Augustine. These practices, labeled "*devotus*" in early modern literature, aimed at being easily understood and "good for edifying and instructing the people."[543] Their general character is intimately related to St. Thomas Aquinas's understanding of devotion, which involves a willful turning of the mind

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[541] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 69; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 260-261. Scholars have long associated Andrea's composition with Perugino's *Lamentation*.

[542] On the characteristics of the *maneria devota*, see Dempsey, "The Carracci and the Devout Style in Emilia," 388-402; Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," 7-57.

[543] *Ars predicandi et syrmocinandi* (1412), quoted in Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 150.

towards God through meditation, as well as the mingled experience of joy at God's goodness and sadness for the inadequacy of humanity.[544]

Perugino was a master of the "devout style" in painting, of adapting these discussions concerning the nature of sermons to the means of visible communication. In the *Lamentation*, he used generic figure types and stock gestures to describe affective states of mind. The restraint he placed on expressivity captures that mingled sense of joy and sorrow described by Aquinas. The protagonists of his narrative mourn the fallen savior, but their faith in God's plan saves them from true despair. Combining this handling of the human form with a tender and naturalistic application of color, Perugino thus provided his viewers with a visual framework for meditative activity. His paintings served as a pictorial ground on which his pious beholders could imagine sacred stories by imposing personal details—familiar faces and locales—that would intensify their experience of devotional engagement, their spiritual turn towards God.[545] These pictorial practices earned Perugino an impressive international reputation by the end the Quattrocento. They account, as well, for the fact that his work continued to exercise considerable influence in the territory of Emilia during the sixteenth century, even after he himself, together with the *maniera devota*, fell into disfavor among the Florentines and Romans.[546]

Vasari seized on Perugino's fall from grace among the central Italians as an indication of the region's preference for the artful sophistication of the new modern style. He emphasized this development by including an invective against the *maniera*

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[544] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 148-150. See also, Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," 25-26.

[545] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 46-47. On the place of color within the *maniera devota*, see Dempsey, "The Carracci and the Devout Style in Emilia," 388-392.

[546] Dempsey, "The Carracci and the Devout Style in Emilia," 388-402.

devota in *Le vite*. He described the famous failure of Perugino's altarpiece at SS. Annunziata—where earlier the Florentines celebrated Leonardo's cartoon of the *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*—and recounted an episode where Michelangelo referred to Perugino as "*goffo nell'arte*."[547]

In part, this sentiment resonates with the 'classic' organization of Andrea's composition. The clarity and chiastic order of the Luco *Pietà* embody the artistic achievements that supplanted Perugino's manner and, for Vasari, marked the debut of the *terza età.* This panel, however, also suggests that Andrea del Sarto had a more measured opinion of Perugino's devout style, that Andrea found something in this mode of pictorial address worth preserving. Exactly what he found becomes clear when we consider the other painting that Andrea imitated, the painting that—and this will be rather important below—sat on the high altar of the Augustinian church of San Gallo: Fra Bartolommeo's *Pietà* (Fig.54) of 1511-1512.[548]

Here, the compositional parallels are exceptionally strong, so strong in fact that the visual connection reads as a direct quotation, similar in effect to the strategy employed in the *Disputation on the Trinity*. Andrea and Bartolommeo represent the same moment. They include almost the same cast of figures. And they arrange those figures in an analogous manner. Bartolommeo places the dead Christ in the center of his composition, on an altar-like slab that is draped in white cloth. The Madonna draws Jesus's body into her embrace with one hand, while the other holds up her son's lifeless arm. John kneels behind the savior, supporting his torso, while the

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[547] Dempsey, "The Carracci and the Devout Style in Emilia," 388-391.

[548] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 68-69; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 260-261; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 160. Bartolomeo's painting has been cut down, and for a long time, a dark layer of overpaint obscured the figures of Peter and Paul. Even so, art historian have been noting the connection between Bartolomeo's and Andrea's *Pietàs* for some time.

Magdalene collapsed across Christ's feet, weeping openly. The sheer emotional weight of the scene is almost too much for Peter and Paul. They lean in towards the center, conveying that depth of feeling that Freedberg and others expected to see in a dramatic depiction of this narrative.

This degree of feeling, the apparent emotional agony captured by Bartolommeo's figures, is precisely what those same scholars believed Andrea's picture lacks. For all the apparent commonalities linking the two paintings, for all the similarities that connect Andrea to the previous leader of the Florentine tradition, the younger artist created an altogether different sense of emotional resonance. He did so by adopting a more formalized model of figural arrangement. His Magdalene is straight-backed rather than bent over with grief. His Peter and Paul stand firm instead of leaning in towards Christ. Their poses take part in an almost perfectly coordinated system of gestures. Indeed, every movement in the Luco *Pietà* answers a complementary action on the opposite side of the picture. Both Peter and the Magdalene bring their hands up and into their bodies. His turn counterbalances the angle of her torso. The tilt of her head establishes a line that picks up the curve of the Virgin's shoulder and runs through the bunched folds of Peter's draperies. Catherine's crossed arms find a sympathetic response in Peter's, as well. Paul's outstretched arm, on the other hand, aligns with the curve of Christ's neck and with John's bent forearm. In much the same fashion, the angle of Paul's body, a brilliant complement to the poses of Peter and the Magdalene, answers John's twist, elaborating the delicate rhythms that run through Andrea's composition. The chiastic order thus established is far more insistent than anything in the Frate's composition

when it comes to embodying the values of the *maniera moderna* in its earliest, Florentine idiom. On a fundamental level, Andrea's counter posed formal rhythms are a variant of the *contrapposto* motif, a principle of pictorial ornament intimately related to the artistic ideals of *varietà*, *facilita*, and especially, *grazia*.[549]

But, at precisely the same time, for all his interest in the modern lexicon of artistic virtuosity, Andrea was also intent on creating a pictorial mood akin to that of Perugino's *maniera devota*. Perugino, for instance, conveys a contemplative form of emotion with slight tilts of the head, folded hands, and quiet expressions. Andrea learned from Perugino, incorporating those lessons into his own sense of stylistic history by employing many of the Perugian's devices in the Luco *Pietà*.[550] A telling comparison is that between Andrea's Magdalene and the female figure standing to the left of the Magdalene in Perugino's panel. Their gestures mirror each other quite well, almost as well as Andrea's formal composition mirrors that of Bartolommeo's *Pietà.*

This observation raises serious questions regarding the relationship between two modes of visual expression operative during the sixteenth century, modes of expression that, even in 1524, were becoming regional dialects. Andrea, in effect, negotiated a novel synthesis of elements taken from each stylistic impulse, the modern and the devout, the central Italian and the Emilian, thereby establishing another type of dialectical discussion within the formal character of his *Pietà*. This particular dialectic resolves differences between these two important manners of pictorial expression, manners that Vasari would later separate and render as opposing forces.

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[549] Summers, "Contrapposto," 336-361. See also, Hall, *After Raphael*, 82-83.

[550] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 11-35. This argument lends support to Natali's assertions that Perugino actually played a role in Andrea's training.

It is little wonder, then, that Vasari went to such lengths in order to marginalize Andrea in *Le vite*.[551] Not only did Andrea present an alternative to the pictorial style ultimately identified with the Medici state. He also anticipates the concerns of several later sixteenth-century intellectuals. These intellectuals include art critics often identify with the "Counter Reformation," such as Borghini and Bocchi, as well as artists belonging to the order of Correggio, Barocci, and the Carracci.[552] The golden thread of artistic ingenuity connecting Andrea to these figures shines brightest, perhaps, in the Luco *Pietà*. Here, Andrea engaged the work of Fra Bartolommeo, Michelangelo, and Perugino so as to infuse the formal sophistication of the *maniera moderna* with the pious efficacy of the *maniera devota*—so as to present the 'classic' conventions of the Florentine tradition as an updated devout style, as well as the source of all modern Roman innovations.

In this regard, there is a definite spiritual orientation to Andrea's treatment of form and the human figure in this panel. The saints in the Luco *Pietà* are eloquent with affection. More so even than Perugino's figures, they fully embody the idea of meditation devotion, giving everything implied by that concept a degree of presence, a potency, a sense of immediacy not found in the older master's *Lamentation*, or even in Bartolommeo's *Pietà*. When Bocchi turned a critical eye to Andrea's paintings later in the century, he referred to this exact quality as *costume* or "character." The notion—and here we find an echo of Vasari's "*lo spirito e l'anima*"—refers to the illusion of spiritual presence.[553] It is a quality, Bocchi maintains, that affects the beholder on an emotional, on an intellectual, and on an ethical level. The affect is

[551] See Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 168-204.
[552] See Dempsey, "The Carracci and the Devout Style in Emilia," 388-402.
[553] Williams, "A Treatise by Francesco Bocchi in Praise of Andrea del Sarto," 113-114.

transitive as well as transformative, in that the "character" of Andrea's figures elevates the viewer's mind, inspiring what Bocchi calls "a certain sweet pleasure" or "a certain terror mixed with sweetness," "waves of delight and amazement, astonishment and pleasure in the soul."[554]

In these lines, Bocchi touches on aspects of Andrea's composition that recall Aquinas's definition of devotion, as well recent scholarship on the *maniera devota.* When we view the Luco *Pietà*—if I may borrow from Keith Christiansen—"We are meant to experience empathetically the feelings of each participant."[555] Peter's quiet sorrow, Paul's contemplative charge, John's flushed concern, Catherine's silent reverence, the Virgin's knowing piety, the Magdalene's meditative intensity—each one of these sentiments appeals to the viewer's heart and mind. Andrea's altarpiece allows for a type of emotional transference, one that speaks to the role of art and exemplarity within Renaissance religious culture. His saints, that is, do more than model a particular way of reacting to or of remembering the death of Christ. They call for the worshipful beholder to remember Christ's death in the fashion they themselves embody, to experience the mingled sense of joy and sorrow that turns the mind towards God. The Luco *Pietà,* we might say, begs for a more engaged spectator.[556]

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[554] Quoted in Williams, "A Treatise by Francesco Bocchi in Praise of Andrea del Sarto," 120. "un certo soave piacere," "un certo terrore, il quale con soavità è mescolata, onde, si come io avviso, diletto e maraviglia, piacere e stupore negli altrui animi si genera."

[555] Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," 36.

[556] See Shearman, *Only Connect*, 10-58.

5.2: Christ's Death in Living Memory

Spectators of this sort were in plentiful supply within the church of San Pietro. There, Andrea's painting served as high altarpiece, as a liturgical instrument that invited every worshiper to think carefully about the ceremonies of mass. There, Andrea's altarpiece interacted with a group of Camaldolese nuns, individuals well versed in the scriptures, accustomed to the sensations of meditative activity, and by extension, well-practiced in the mnemonic art of visualizing sacred stories and mysteries.[557] The sisters of San Pietro were trained to contemplate religious narratives in a manner that made those episodes of the distant past both present and meaningful. Andrea appealed to these particular skills with his handling of pictorial form and color. Indeed, he may even have invited the sisters of San Pietro to imagine Christ's death by picturing individuals they knew as participants in the sacred drama.

Picking out portraits in Renaissance paintings can be a dangerous game.[558] There is the peril of imprecision at every turn. The figures of Peter and Paul in this panel are a case in point. They are quite naturalistic, and yet they share many features, including the shape of their noses; the relationship between their eyes, cheekbones, and foreheads; and the way their beards fall around their mouths. In my view, these figures constitute a generic type or ideal rather than approximations of specific people. But the possibility that Andrea, like so many other painters from this period, fashioned some of his figures after real individuals is not easily dismissed. There is written evidence to support the supposition, and a careful survey of Andrea's work

[557] For an overview of the mnemonic techniques that informed Camaldolese spirituality, see Bent, *Monastic Art in Lorenzo Monaco's Florence*, 11-46. See also, Belisle, "Overview of Camaldolese History and Spirituality," 3-26.

[558] For an excellent and concise investigation of this very question, see Wallace, "Leonardo as Plato," 8-11.

turns up several familiar faces, which seem less generic than the two apostles standing in the *Pietà*.

One such case includes a handful of Madonnas that have the same distinctive features, features that, according to several scholars, belong to Andrea's beloved wife, Lucrezia del Fede.[559] The pensive figure of the Virgin in the *Madonna of the Steps* is a good example. The Virgin in the Luco *Pietà* is another. Her physiognomy is particularly close to the sketched *Portrait of a Woman* in Berlin (Fig.55), which is generally accepted as a portrait of Lucrezia, and which bears a striking resemblance to a preparatory study Andrea made several years previously for the *Madonna of the Harpies* (Fig.56).[560] Scholars have connected the figure in this study to the artist's wife, as well.[561]

In a similar manner, it is just possible to recognize the countenance of John from the Luco *Pietà* in the *Disputation on the Trinity* (Fig.57). The features appear again, more clearly this time, in the *Gambassi Altarpiece* (Fig.58). In both instances, Andrea gave the figure of Sebastian the same angled nose, deep-set eyes, and rounded cheeks. There are two possible explanations for this observation. Either Andrea built up a body of character drawings that he used in multiple compositions, or he worked out the particulars of each composition by asking individuals around him to serve as

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[559] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 137-142, 203 n. 2-5. See also Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 212. A significant piece of evidence that supports the connection between the Virgin in the Luco *Pietà* and Lucrezia is the report of statements made by Lucrezia herself to Jacopo da Empoli, who was copying Andrea's *Nativity of the Virgin* fresco around 1570. According to the report, Lucrezia states that Andrea included her portrait in his scene. Giovanni Cinelli augmented this report in his seventeenth-century extension of Bocchi's *Le Bellezze*. He informs the reader that, *secondo alcuni*, Lucrezia's features are those of the first woman greeting the Virgin. This figure appears to be a younger version of the Madonna in Andrea's *Pietà*.

[560] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 74-78, 175-176.

[561] See Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 365. It is difficult to conduct even this brief survey of works and not recall Vasari's statement regarding Andrea's tendency to model feminine figures after his wife's features: "perciò che non faceva aria di femine in nessun luogo che da lei non la ritraesse."

figure models. The latter seems to have been his preferred method of developing pictorial characters; hence, Bocchi's conviction that Andrea was a master of *costume*. We still have, for example, an exquisite preparatory drawing for the Magdalene in the Luco *Pietà* (Fig.59), as well as an even more remarkable drawing for Peter Martyr in the *Disputation on the Trinity* (Fig.60).[562] Both sheets have the quality of life studies. While no such drawing exists for the figure of John in the *Pietà*, or for the figures of Sebastian in the other panels mentioned, the face that appears in these paintings has a studied character. It conveys a powerful impression of internal presence. And, most notably of all perhaps, it seems to age with each subsequent representation. The passage of time is particularly noticeable in the figure's hairline. The sitter, if we can call him that, was thus likely a studio model, an apprentice—or perhaps a workshop assistant with a specialized skill—posed in a way that allowed Andrea to perform a figure study for the composition on which he was working at the time. It might be, then, that we are looking at the face of the apprentice who traveled with Andrea to Mugello.

The individualized features that grace the figures of Catherine and the Magdalene in the *Pietà* could easily belong to the other members of Andrea's Mugello party. The visage of Catherine appears again on the figure of St. Catherine in Andrea's *Sant'Agnese Altarpiece* (Fig.61), which dates to the very end of the artist's life. St. Agnes herself recalls the Magdalene from the Luco panel. Even though these particular figures—Agnes and Mary—look in different directions, and even accounting for the effects of age, the commonalities are readily apparent. Their faces

[562] It is worth noting, here, that the features of Peter Martyr in the *Disputation on the Trinity* greatly resemble those of John the Evangelist from the *Madonna of the Harpies*. The figures of Francis in both panels bear a strong resemblance, as well.

have the same rounded shape. They have the same trace of soft tissue under their eyes and the same point in their nose. The distance between these commissions is important, as well. It suggests that the models traveled with Andrea to Luco and then remained with him upon his return to Florence. Of course, any attempt at identification would be mere conjecture at this point, but the figure of Catherine seems youthful to my eye, which would make Andrea's stepdaughter, Maria, a likely candidate.[563] As for the Magdalene, I tentatively suggest that Andrea's sister-in-law served as the artist's inspiration—Andrea's sister-in-law who also happened to be named Maria.[564]

If there is any truth to these assertions, then Andrea's studio practices take on layers of intellectual and social significance. There is a Petrarchan quality to the way Andrea consistently modeled the Virgin after his wife. Specifically, the artist picturing his beloved in heavenly guise recalls Sonnet 77, which praises Simone Martini's portrait of Laura. "But certainly," Petrarch writes, "my Simon was in Paradise, whence comes this noble lady; there he saw her and portrayed her on paper, to attest down here to her lovely face."[565] The association between Lucrezia del Fede and Laura, between Andrea's paintings and Petrarch's poetry, only becomes more intense when we read the last clause quoted above in the original language: "*per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso*."[566] One can only imagine how Petrarch's use of the word "*fede*" would have affected an artist such as Andrea del Sarto, a painter deeply

[563] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 191. Cf. Di Pietro, "I disegni di Andrea del Sarto negli Uffizi," 127-232. Freedberg identifies Maria as the model for the figure of Catherine in the *St. Agnes Altarpiece*. The identification I am proposing, here, building on Freedberg's keen insights, would cast further doubt upon Filippo di Pietro's assertion that Andrea's daughter-in-law served as the sitter for *Portrait of a Woman with a Petrarchino*.

[564] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 3.

[565] Petrarch, Sonnet 77 in *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 176.

[566] Petrarch, Sonnet 77 in *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 177.

devoted to his wife and predisposed to appreciate a poem that entwined the pictorial arts with the power of love.

At the same time, and in a similar manner, Andrea's studio practices accord nicely with a set of ideas explicitly outlined in a spiritual handbook written for young women in 1454. That handbook, which Baxandall connected to the *maniera devota*, implores its reader "to impress the story of the Passion on your mind" by shaping "in your mind some people, people well-known to you, to represent for you the people involved in the Passion." "When you have done all this," the author continues,

> putting all your imagination into it, then go into your chamber. Alone and solitary, excluding every external thought from your mind, start thinking of the beginning of the Passion...Moving slowly, from episode to episode, meditate on each one, dwelling on each single stage and step of the story. And if at any point you feel a sensation of piety, stop: do not pass on as long as that sweet and devout sentiment lasts.[567]

In many ways, this passage describes how Andrea's worshipful audience engaged his altarpiece—it might even describe how Andrea himself thought about the act of painting, about his own talents for and process of artistic invention. Significantly, Vasari tell us that Andrea happily applied those talents to the task of producing his *Pietà*, because the nuns of San Pietro showed the artist, his wife, and his entire party more and more kindness each day.[568] As much as it was a commodity, then, Andrea's skillful handling of the brush was also a token of appreciation bound up with notions of honor and generosity. By including likenesses of the other people whom the sisters welcomed into their community for that brief stint of time, Andrea

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[567] *Zardino de Oration* (Venice, 1454), quoted, translated, and transcribed in the original in Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 46, 163-164.

[568] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 375-376. "Quivi dunque standosi quietamente, mise mano all'opera; e perchè quelle venerande donne più l'un giorno che l'altro facevano carezze e cortesie alla moglie, a lui et a tutta la brigata, si pose con grandissimo amore a lavorare qella tavola."

wove these notions further into the visible texture of a devotional painting. In other words, he not only produced a "deposit of a social relationship."[569] He also colored that relationship, effectively inserting his party into the spiritual exercises that defined the nuns' daily lives. He invited the sisters to remember, to picture, and perhaps to pray for himself and his loved ones, as the sisters considered the loved ones of Christ mourning the savior's death.

Such a clever interlacing of history and memory, of friendship, devotion, and art, dovetails wonderfully with the larger processes involved in commissioning an altarpiece.[570] For a period of several months, Andrea del Sarto and certain representatives of the Camaldolese community—as is so often the case, their names have not come down to us—invested their energies in a single task. Agreements were drawn up, fees and schedules established. And discussions took place. These discussions covered everything from what figures would be included in the *Pietà*, to how they would be arranged, to the way Andrea would give visible expression to the core concerns of his patrons. These fruitful exchanges allowed Andrea to lend his particular gifts to the project of visualizing a sacred narrative, to build social relationships, and to develop further his understanding of theological issues. For while the sisters of San Pietro no doubt appreciated Andrea's stylistic acumen, his artifice—which brought renown to their convent—as members of a religious order, the crux of their concern was religious in nature. They wanted an art object that

[569] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 1.

[570] As in previous chapters, I refer the reader to Michelle O'Malley's discussion of the complex system of exchanges involved in commissioning art objects in *The Business of Art*, esp. 163-196. See also, Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 1-27; Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 76-83.

would inspire the beholder to dwell on Christ's Passion and facilitate the willful turn towards God that reforms the soul.

The inclusion of St. Peter, the patron saint of the nun's church, allows us to glimpse part of their strategy for addressing this concern. So, too, does the figure of St. Catherine, the spiritual protector of Caterina della Casa.[571] These particular saints allowed the Camaldolese community a special type of intimacy when it comes to the spiritual thrust of their altarpiece. Peter's presence as a witness to Christ's sacrifice serves as an analogue for the act of attending mass and, especially, of receiving the sacrament in the church of San Pietro. By including her own spiritual proxy in this scene—by placing Catherine in close proximity to the mystery of Christ's death—Caterina singled herself out from among the church's attendees as leader. She simultaneously associated herself with higher levels of religious understanding and put forth a carefully structured argument. Under her guidance, in the very structure that sheltered Andrea's original viewers, Christ's bodily sacrifice was not some event that belonged to a history departed. It was a living mystery preserved in the body of Christ's church, as his members gathered to receive the Eucharist in accordance with his word: "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19).

We have arrived at the central issue, at the very items included in the foreground of the Luco *Pietà*. What is the Eucharist? What did Christ mean when he took bread, broke it, and called it his body? How might one visualize such a complex mystery? —Should one visualize such a complex mystery? These were questions asked repeatedly during the sixteenth century. These questions ultimately changed the landscape of European culture, cutting away at established hierarchies of power and

[571] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 101.

accelerating the religious debates that transformed this period into an Age of Reform.[572] As is well known, certain proponents of the Protestant Reformation challenged the idea that the bread becomes Christ's body during mass. Others took issue with the traditional interpretation of Eucharistic presence, transubstantiation. Defenders of Catholic orthodoxy combated these views at every turn.[573] But even within the Catholic Church, there were critical voices that championed the belief in Eucharistic presence as a means of expressing hostility towards religious art, a sentiment normally associated with Protestant denominations. This move towards iconoclasm within the Roman faith stems from what Nagel describes as "a semiotic contest."[574] Why privilege pictures (or signs) of Christ's body, the iconoclast might ask, when the actual referent, the Eucharist, is on hand?

Whether or not Andrea or his patrons intended to enter this fray by producing the Luco *Pietà* remains unclear, but this larger context proves illuminating nevertheless. Andrea's altarpiece is remarkably free from any sense of hostility towards religious art. Neither the painter nor his patrons were inclined "to rethink the structures and functions of art from the ground up."[575] If anything, they affirmed the continued validity of those structures and functions. They sought to instruct the viewer and stimulate devotion, and in so doing, they presented something like a response to the iconoclastic tendencies within the Roman Catholic Church by elaborating a doctrinal position that can only be described as profoundly orthodox.

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[572] For an overview of the history of Eucharistic debates, see Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*, 1-170; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 12-82. The papers collected in the recent volume, *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* are particularly informative, as well, especially Lee Palmer Wandel's "Introduction," 1-12.

[573] See O'Malley, *Trent*, 147-148.

[574] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 200-205.

[575] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 2.

That the Luco *Pietà* gravitates towards the teachings officially promoted by the papacy is readily apparent. Andrea and his patrons made this painting for the high altar of a Catholic church, a church dedicated to none other than St. Peter himself. The presence of Peter and Paul within the scene, moreover, immediately brings to mind the famous Vatican basilica then under construction. Upon closer inspection—almost as if to eradicate any trace of suspicion regarding the painting's theological leanings—Andrea placed the crossed keys on one of the jewels that adorns the chalice in the foreground (Fig.46). This smallest of details symbolically alludes to the throne of the saint who stands before the rock tomb, clutching those same keys to his chest—the saint whom Christ indicated when he said, "on this rock I will build my church…I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 16:18).

These references to pontifical authority, as well as the relatively straightforward act of juxtaposing the dead Christ with the liturgical instruments of the sacrament, articulate an important series of arguments regarding the legitimacy of the Catholic faith. They point to the lineage of St. Peter. They ground the ceremonies of mass in scripture. And they invoke the intellectual traditions that connect the early modern Church based in Rome to the Early Church of Christian antiquity. The words of Ambrose are almost conjured into being in Andrea's panel. "As often as we receive the sacraments, which are transfigured by the mystery of the holy prayer into flesh and blood, we proclaim the death of the Lord."[576] For Andrea's audiences in San Pietro, the Luco *Pietà* would have also recalled the words of St. Peter Damian, one of the great minds of the medieval period, and arguably the most important Camaldolese

[576] See Ambrose, *De fide*, 4.10.124, quoted and translated in Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West,* 16.

theologian. "That same body of Christ which the blessed Virgin bore, which she cherished at her bosom, girded in swaddling clothes, nurtured with maternal care, it is that, I say...which we now receive from the sacred altar, and we drink its blood in the sacrament of our redemption."[577]

Peter Damian touches on an important association. By linking the mysteries of the sacrament to Christ's mortal birth, he draws on the connection between two dynamic articles of faith, namely, the belief in Christ's presence within the Eucharist and the mystery of the Incarnation. The association is scriptural in origin. John (who is present in Andrea's *Pietà*) addresses it in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, informing the reader of Christ's pronouncement: "I am the living bread that comes down from heaven." We hear it, too, in the very word "Eucharist," a term that derives from the Greek *charis*, which translates to "*gratia*" in Latin and "*grazia*" in Italian. This etymological pedigree points to the shared essence that unites Christ's historical and sacramental bodies. Both are the product of divine grace. Hence the angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary: "Hall, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). Hence Paul's gloss on Christ's sacrifice: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:4-5).

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[577] Peter Damian, *Sermons*, quoted and translated in Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 22. "Illud siquidem corpus Christi quod beatissima Virgo genuit, quod in gremio fouit, quod fasciis cinxit, quod materna cura nutriuit, illud inquam...nunc de sacro altari precipimus, et eius sanguinem in sacramentum nostrae redemptionis haurimus." See Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, 1-26; Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 633-650; as well as Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, 169-188. It is worth noting, as well, that Ambrogio Traversari, who was elected General of the Camaldolese Order in 1431, and who wrote a treatise on the Eucharist, proved a particularly able heir to Peter Damian's ideas. Traversari translated the works of John Chrysostom, another advocate of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, and modeled much of his own thought after the writings of Ambrose.

This extended discussion of God's grace weighed heavily on the mind of Andrea del Sarto, whose task it was to articulate the complex doctrines pertaining to Christ's bodies—"bodies" in the plural. We are talking about a rather significant artistic challenge, a challenge that Andrea approached, firstly, in the very form of his painting, by adopting the graceful principals of the 'classic' style.[578] His entire commentary on the origin and nature of the *maniera moderna* doubles as a means of theological communication. Andrea's pursuit of pictorial *grazia* emphasizes the redemptive power of Christ's gracious sacrifice as it engages the ritual repetition of that sacrifice in the Eucharist, which—*pace* Paul—quickens worshipers together in Christ's living body, the Christian Church. We might say, then, that Andrea's own *maniera* acts like an exegetical *figura*, placing this particular episode from sacred history within the broader economy of salvation, which Christ himself offered to every devout believer in the present by stating, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."

The fact that Christ offered salvation only to the devout believer was another important concern for every Christian, including Andrea and his patrons. The concern might have had a somewhat immediate dimension in Luco, in that members of early modern society often ascribed the perils of this life—an outbreak of plague, for instance—to God's displeasure with the quality of human devotion. But the more pressing aspect of this concern had to do with edifying effects of devotion, that is, with the health of the souls gazing up at the Luco *Pietà*, engaging its imagery and moving characters. Here again Paul is especially helpful in elucidating a complex point. Paul explains that to receive the sacrament in an unworthy fashion is to sin

[578] See Emison, "Grazia," 427-460.

against the body and the blood, to imbibe sickness rather than to abide in Christ. "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick." (1 Co 11:29).

Andrea did everything in his power to forestall such an eventuality. Working closely with his patrons, religious officials steeped in the intellectual heritage of the Christian faith, he developed an altarpiece that laid bare the doctrine of Christ's presence in the Eucharist in order to focus the beholder's spiritual energies on the act of "recognizing the body of the Lord." This task involved more than simply juxtaposing the bread and wine with the scene of sacrifice unfolding before Christ's tomb.[579] Andrea colored this iconographic juxtaposition in a way that resonates precisely with the reasoning and language underlying the edicts passed in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, which codified the doctrine of transubstantiation.[580] The Eucharistic wafer and Christ's earthly body appear as two "species" that share a common "substance," for Andrea paints both corporeal manifestations of the divine in the same ethereal light.

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[579] Cf. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 160.

[580] See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 14-35. The relevant passage from the First Canon of the Fourth Lateran Council reads: "There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed *(transsubstantiatio)* by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself gave to the Apostles and their successors." Translation taken from Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, 236-296.

5.3: The Bread of Life in Living Color

The light that enters the Luco *Pietà* is prismatic in every sense. It reveals the picture's hues with a glittering clarity that approaches the ideals associated with 'Mannerism', adding to Andrea's already quite complex take on the issue of pictorial style. In a similar fashion, Andrea used light to reflect on the development of his own style, throwing two issues in particular into sharper relief: his rise to prominence within the Florentine community, and his increasing facility when it comes to communicating theological issues. In this regard, the light that enters the Luco panel imparts yet another measure of sophistication to Andrea's formal citation of Fra Bartolommeo's high altarpiece for the Augustinian convent of San Gallo.

There, in that church, almost fifteen years before he traveled to Mugello, Andrea del Sarto began investigating Leonardo's *colore* strategies.[581] In his first Augustinian commission, he deployed a system of color and chiaroscuro that was remarkably adept in its ability to engage art theoretical and theological discourses, simultaneously. In his second San Gallo panel, which coincides with the completion of Bartolommeo's *Pietà*, Andrea took his investigations a step further. In addition to the techniques that played out in Leonardo's actual paintings, Andrea engaged ideas Leonardo sketched out in his notebooks and expressed in public forums. Specifically—and again as a means of responding to the theological material that informed the iconography of his altarpiece commission—Andrea attempted to work out a method for achieving the effects of tonal unity in an open-air environment. This

[581] See Shearman, "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 13-47; idem., *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148.

task, by no means resolved in the San Gallo *Annunciation*, involved increasing the quantity of brilliant color in his composition.

Andrea's prolonged preoccupation with the ideal of *bellezza di colore* reaches a new level of sophistication in the *Madonna of the Harpies*. After much research into the technical capabilities of different pigments and the optical principles of reflected color, Andrea arrived at the effects of *lustro* and *splendore*.[582] These concepts, which in Andrea's hands engaged a thrilling range of spiritual teachings, derive from Leonardo's understanding of the pupil, the power of art, and the operations of the imagination.

Essentially, Leonardo argued that the imagination, a complex of internal organs connected to the senses, receives visual data in the form of colored light. These rays of light enter the eye after reflecting off surfaces in the realm of sensibility. From this theoretical position, it follows that to increase the amount of perceived light would not only increase the experience of beauty, conceived as apparent color. It would also spark heightened forms of inspired thinking, stimulating the imagination in the most direct way possible.

For Leonardo, however, this very realization presented a problem. He noticed that the most stimulating conditions one can experience in nature are the conditions that produce *splendore*, where the greatest amount of light reveals the greatest variety of fully illuminated color. But—and herein lies the issue—the circumstances governing *splendore* only occur in conjunction with the experience of *lustro*. *Lustro*, Leonardo argues, refers to a point of bright light that rebounds of a lit surface and

[582] See Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 63-88; idem., *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone*, 99-117; idem., "Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*," 301-330.

penetrates the pupil with an overwhelming intensity. This level of intensity, the blinding gleam often experienced when gazing at shiny surfaces on a bright sunny day, registers as a searing pain that makes the pupil contract, which, in turn, limits the amount of colored light sensed by the imagination. The paradox that is this theoretical situation is almost cruel, in that the human eye is never able to perceive the fullest expression of nature's splendor. But for Leonardo, and for Andrea del Sarto, the situation was opportune, as well.

Leonardo believed painting could resolve this difficulty. He argued that paintings based on optical principles could recreate the effects of *splendore* and *lustro* on the beholder's imagination in conditions better suited to the pupil's basic capabilities. In other words, if the internal logic of pictorial light accurately described the most stimulating conditions of natural light, then the painting in question could reproduce the internal sensations of *splendore* in a natural setting (such as a church) that allowed the beholder's pupil to dilate. This scenario would, Leonardo believed, allow art to stimulate the beholder's imagination in ways that even nature could not.[583]

Andrea sought to give tangible expression to these theoretical conditions in 1517, when he sat down with representatives of the Franciscan order to discuss an altarpiece that explored the mystery of the Incarnation. The product of this exchange, the *Madonna of the Harpies*, was another stunning alignment of artistic expression and spiritual introspection, a careful calibration of art-critical terminology that allowed notions such as *splendore* to blur the lines separating painting, science, and theological inquiry. Andrea achieved a similar type of success in his other important

[583] Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 63-88.

panel from 1517. This was his third and final painting for the altars of San Gallo, the *Disputation on the Trinity*. His strategy with regard to color, here, involved arranging hues across the composition in a way that embraced the ideal of *vaghezza*, a notion that interlaced his own artful handling of *colore* with Augustine's theories of desire.

The dazzling array of fully illuminated colors in the Luco *Pietà* marks the next step in this line of chromatic inquiry, the step where the ideals of *bellezza di colore*, *splendore*, and *vaghezza* find expression in one singularly beautiful instance. It is an instance, moreover, where Andrea achieved the very goal he started seeking among the Augustinians. For in this, a panel produced twelve full years after he completed the San Gallo *Annunciation*, the greatest quantity of fully illuminated color appears in an open-air environment without disrupting the consistent impression of pictorial relief.

The key to Andrea's success in the Luco *Pietà* is that he has fully mastered the tonal properties of his pigments. He is able, for instance, to coordinate the range of values expressed by each plane of color, even when those color planes are variations of the same or related hues. Paul's shirt is a paler version of the color that makes up the Virgin's mantle. And yet, in spite of this relationship, Andrea avoids any hint of monotony or repetition. Instead, respecting the inherent complexity of each color variant, he calibrates the degree of light reflecting off Paul's sleeve and Mary's shoulder so that the individual saturations of violet appear consistent in terms of relief while maintaining their own chromatic identity. Much the same could be said with regard to Paul's drapery, the red cloth hanging across John's torso, and the Magdalene's gown. Each garment glitters with an individualized, highly polished

color-intensity. And yet each garment derives from the base color red. Each garment expresses a range of tonal values specific to its own intrinsic properties—meaning that the highlights on the Magdalene's bright pink dress are paler than those on John's drapery, which is a slightly darker shade of vermilion. And yet, together, this splendorous collection of color planes strike concordant notes in the unified harmony that is Andrea's overall tonal structure.

That being said, there is an element to Andrea's *colore* strategy, here, that complicates a strictly linear or autonomous view of the artist's stylistic development between 1517 and his sojourn in Mugello.[584] In this panel, Andrea concentrates his hues into specific areas, treating them as part of a gem-like arrangement. Nothing in the Luco *Pietà* resembles the scarf worn by John in the *Madonna of the Harpies* or the Virgin's stole from the *Madonna del Sacco*.

The paucity of reflective *cangianti* is especially noticeable when compared to the Vienna *Pietà* (Fig.50), a panel that gives us a good indication of Andrea's color explorations in the years immediately following his stay in France. The artist who executed this picture was deeply invested in the properties of light and reflected color. Christ's body lays across the lower portion of the composition, nude except for a pink stretch of fabric that covers his groin. A radiant light falls on his form, creating bright streaks of *lustro* on his lone drapery. This same light carries the pink of Christ's garment throughout the scene, leaving hints of color on the white hood of the Virgin, on the cloth spread beneath the fallen savior, and on the pale scarf worn by the angel

[584] Andrea's oeuvre has suffered several losses from this period. For example, of the paintings Andrea executed at French court—and Vasari says there were many—only the *Charity* survives. And unfortunately, a series of restorations in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries have left this painting in a ruined state. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 243. For a more general account of Andrea's lost works from this period, see Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 82-107.

to the viewer's left. In a similar fashion, it picks up the red of the other angel's shirt, tingeing his scarf, and transfers the blue of the Virgin's mantle onto the peaks of Christ's folded loincloth.

The treatment of color in this painting is thus a continuation of the strategies employed three years earlier in the *Madonna of the Harpies*. As in that Franciscan altarpiece, Andrea deployed the effects of reflected color within a composition still dominated by a somber range of tonal values, values that lend the Vienna *Pietà* the desired mood, of course. He seems, in some sense, to have used the project as a way to reinforce his understanding of Leonardo's theory and practice. This is unsurprising, seeing as Andrea may have been conferring with his older colleague in France between May 1518 (when Andrea departed for the court of Francis I) and May 1519 (when Leonardo died).

A similar interest informs Andrea's handling of hues in the *Madonna of the Steps* (Fig.51), which he completed in 1523, as well as his *Panciatichi Assumption* (Fig.62), which Andrea left unfinished when he departed for Mugello. In the latter instance, the apostle on the far right is highly suggestive. This figure is presumably St. Peter. He holds the bunched folds of his yellow drapery, showing the deep green reverse, and gazes up at the ascending Madonna. His shirt, still in the preliminary stages of development, is merely a base glaze of blue with what appears to be subtle layers of red in the shaded areas. This combination of hues suggests that the finished product would have been a garment of rich chroma, such as that worn by St. Joseph in the *Madonna of the Steps*.[585] At first glance, this figure appears to be draped in pink

[585] Natali offers an overview of the scholarly discussion regarding the iconography of this painting in *Andrea del Sarto*, 137-138.

cloth, but closer inspection reveals a stunning array of subtle shifts in hue, delicate touches of blue and gold that communicate the play of light across a shimmering fabric. The effect has all the subtlety seen in the habit of St. Francis from the *Madonna of the Harpies* and is a more developed version of the technique used on Gabriel in the San Gallo *Annunciation*.

Andrea, however, opted to avoid such virtuoso displays of color transfusions in his Luco *Pietà*, focusing instead on creating the impression of an "exotic bouquet"[586] of colors and a light of supreme intensity. The most dramatic example of Andrea's interest in the problem of reflected color is, correspondingly, the occurrence of *lustro*. Slashes of sparkling highlights appear in choice locations, down the front of the Magdalene's dress; on the ridges of Christ's blue cloth; on the red fabric spilling—almost like blood—over John's knee; and, most interestingly of all, along the thin edge of the Eucharist wafer (Fig.46). With these careful strokes of his brush, Andrea captured the precise effects Leonardo discussed in his notebooks. These surfaces, in theory at least, reflect a powerful light towards the beholder, creating an illusion that recasts Andrea's *bellezza di colore* in the role of *splendore*, that most stimulating of optical phenomena that connects painting to science as it overcomes the limitations of sensory experience and overwhelms the viewer's imagination.

The intricate ties connecting Andrea's color to theories of sight and imagination touch on issues that pertain to the notion of *vaghezza*, as well.[587] This notion, too, remained an important concern for Andrea in the years separating the Luco *Pietà* and the most alluring of his San Gallo altarpieces. The fresco Andrea

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[586] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 145.
[587] See Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 125-141.

painted in the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano in 1521 is a case in point.[588] The scene, the *Tribute to Caesar* (Fig.63), is a historical allegory that refers to the gifts Lorenzo the Magnificent received from the Sultan of Egypt in the fifteenth century. Andrea, therefore, adopted a palette that is, in the words of one commentator, "sumptuous, brilliant, and exotic," that recalls "oriental silks and gives the impression of extravagant festivity."[589] Alluring pockets of purple, jewel-like swaths of red, luminous browns and golden yellows, cool turquoises and soft blues populate the scene. The repetition of these select hues causes the eye to meander through the composition. Carefully modulated *cangianti*, such as those that articulate the figure kneeling before Caesar, convey the workings of light as they ravish our gaze. Likewise, the delicate relationships Andrea established by placing complementary hues next to one another charm our senses. The fresco, then, contains a familiar color strategy, one that anticipates the techniques Andrea would later use in his *Madonna del Sacco* and *Last Supper*. His disposition of hues is, in a word, *vago*, a term that perfectly addressed the circumstances of his commission. This is an attention seeking strategy, a strategy meant to catch the eye and captivate the gaze. Standing before this fresco, amidst extraordinary trappings of wealth, the beholder instantly becomes an appraiser examining an elaborate collection of gems—gems of artistic virtuosity that enhance the artist's and the patron's reputation.

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[588] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 100-104. Alessandro Allori added to the right side of the composition later in the century, about roughly one-third of the present field. But Andrea's portion of the picture is still in good condition.

[589] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 143.

In the Luco *Pietà*, Andrea again arranged his gem-like hues with an eye for sympathetic juxtapositions.[590] The slate blue and rosy red of John's garments create pleasing effects in and of themselves, but their proximity to the luminous blue cloth lying over the savior's groin, or to Christ's creamy flesh tones, or to Peter's golden yellow draperies, only intensifies their power to beguile the eye. Peter's draperies, meanwhile, strike a chord with the Virgin's purple mantle, which in turn resonates with Paul's lilac shirt. This relationship echoes that between the Virgin's fiery dress and Paul's outer garment. The cloth draped over the Magdalene's shoulder, grassy green in color, complements the Virgin's gown, while the Magdalene's own dress hits a pleasing note with the sapphire cape she apparently just shrugged off, as well as with Catherine's beryl attire. Catherine's yellow wrap completes the effect, picking up the theme of Peter's drapery as it enriches the purples visible on Paul and the Madonna, as well as the blue of John's tunic.

As he did in the *Disputation on the Trinity*, then, Andrea attempts to lure the spectator into the Luco *Pietà* with a pleasing play of hue. He means to grab the viewer's attention with lush glazes of oil paint, to lead the eye on a wandering journey from colored form to colored form. Renaissance commentators described this type of allure with the terms *vago* and *vaga*, adjectives that draw their power from associations with the verbs *vagare* ("to wander") and *vagheggiare* ("to gaze at fondly," "to yearn for," or "to long for").[591] The latter term, of course, interlaces the whole problematic of pictorial color with the issue of desire in general and, given

[590] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 145-147. Shearman identified this quality with the values of 'Mannerism.'

[591] Lingo, *Federico Barocci*, 125-141.

Andrea's overt references to the San Gallo convent, with Augustine's theology of desire in particular.

This last connection—the one linking Andrea's color to Augustine's thought—together with the timeline established by the preceding matrix of pictures and ideas, poses an interesting question. If Andrea had all of these techniques and theories at his disposal in 1517, and if he continued exploring them over the next few years, why did he wait until 1524 to infuse the notion of *bellezza di colore* with the valence of *splendore* and *vaghezza*? The answer, I maintain, has everything to do with the realities of commissioned work. The nature of altarpiece production in early modern society did not allow artists to focus solely on problems that pertain to the emerging field of art criticism. They had the wishes of their patrons to consider, their advisor's instructions to address, as well as the abiding concerns related to the spiritual function of religious art. Andrea was always sensitive to these demands, so much so that his development as a painter was conditioned both by his own singular talents and ambitions and by the circumstances of the commissions he received. Indeed, as a panel painter, nothing galvanized his innate capabilities more than the mysteries of the Christian faith.

The special dynamic of color in the Luco *Pietà* is the result of a thoughtful painter attempting to visualize the mysteries of the Eucharist. The impenetrably bright light that falls upon Christ and the bread—leaving bright flecks of *lustro* on the savior's garment, as well as the edge of the wafer itself—recalls a collection of biblical passages that allow the viewer an intimate spiritual encounter with the *Corpus Christi*. Some of these passages are quite familiar to us already. The most

important, perhaps, comes from John's First Epistle: "God is light" (1 Jn 1:5). In this sense, Andrea's light communicates that most profound doctrine of Eucharistic theology. Both the historical and the sacramental bodies of Christ, he argues, participate in one ineffable essence—or better yet, they embody one ineffable "substance." That substance is light, which is synonymous with the love (1 Jn 4:8) that shines brightest in Christ's Passion. As Christ himself states, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." (Jn 15:12-14.).

The fact that Andrea surrounds the fallen savior with a splendorous color scheme only adds to this exegetical line of reasoning. Dante's discussion of heaven's folds, together with Jacopo della Lana's commentary, resonates with Andrea's treatment of drapery folds.[592] Likewise, the first verse from chapter sixty-two of Isaiah inescapably comes to mind when looking at this painting: "For Sion' s sake I will not hold my peace, and for the sake of Jerusalem, I will not rest till her Just One comes forth as splendor, and her saviour be lighted as a lamp."[593] We might, as well, look upon Andrea's altarpiece and hear the commanding voice of St. Bernard, who described Christ as "the splendor of the Father."[594]

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[592] Dante, *Paradiso*, in *The Divine Comedy*, 269. "...un canto tanto divo, che la mia fantasia nol me ridice. Però salta la penna e non lo scrivo: chè l'imagine nostra a coati pieghe, non che 'l parlare, è troppo color vivo." Jacopo della Lana in Schlosser Magnino, *La letteratura artistica*, 91. "Note che 'l dipintore, quando vuole dipingere pieghe, conviene avere una colore meno vivo che quello della vesta, cioè più scuro, e allora appaiono pieghe; imperquello che in ogni piega l'aiere è oscuro che in la superficie, e però se lo colore della piega e di sè superficie; e così sarebbe contrario alla intenzione del maestro pintore."

[593] The Vulgate reads: "Propter Sion non tacebo et propter Jerusalem non quiescam, donec egrediatur ut splendor justus ejus,et salvator ejus ut lampas accendatur." My translations follows the Douay-Rheims Bible in this instance.

[594] Quoted in Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol," 176.

Audiences in the sixteenth century could just as easily connect the splendor of the Luco *Pietà* to several discussions of the Eucharist itself. In a vernacular sermon on the Lord's prayer, for example, Nicolas of Cusa described Christ's body as bread, as spiritual food, and as an "incomprehensible spiritual splendor."[595] The Italian humanist, Donato Acciaiuoli, articulated this same idea in a sermon from 1486. "If it were possible, beloved Fathers and Brothers, that through divine grace there might be manifest the splendor of that most Holy body and the glory of the Savior as most faithfully we must believe is in that sacrament, what sense would not remain confused?"[596]

Conceptually, then, Andrea's *colore* operates as an exegetical *figura*. It captivates the gaze and acts like a prism, radiating this entire array of textual associations upon the worshipful spectator. Largely because its art-theoretical basis involves a type of supersensible experience, Andrea's light and color draw the beholder's attention to the impenetrable yet wonderful article of faith that is the *Corpus Christi*: its historical reality, its incomprehensible divinity, its continued presence at mass as the bread of life and the memory of Christ's sacrifice. Focusing on this mystery, pondering it, is exactly what Paul meant when he implored the worshiper to look upon the Eucharist and discern the body of the Lord (1 Co 11:29). It is also an act that approaches the process Christ himself discussed when he stated, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:57).

There is, in this regard, a distinct parallel between the act of receiving the Eucharist and the act of meditating on Andrea's Luco *Pietà*. The connection largely

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[595] Quoted in Astell, *Eating Beauty*, 2.
[596] Quoted in Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 646.

depends on the affiliation among sight, attention, and affection—an affiliation implicit in the notion of *vaghezza* and explicit in the writings of Augustine.[597] Love, according to this Church Father, is a form of spiritual "seeing" that is intimately related to the act of attending to the valence of Andrea's *colore*. The desire to conceive Christ in all his divine glory and splendor, to "see" God in the mysteries of faith, is an exceptionally edifying expression of love. In these moments of contemplation, when the worshiper willfully and intellectually pursues that which is unintelligible, the worshiper's internal faculties take on the form that Augustine calls longing or yearning. This form is love in its most fundamental configuration. Essentially, the entire fabric of the soul stretches out, reaching towards God as trees grow towards the sun, trying to grasp, to gaze upon, to digest, and to savor the divine. The sense of yearning is never truly satisfied, of course, not in this life at least. The infinity of God escapes humanity's finite understanding. But the consequences of trying with every fiber of one's being to attain to the unattainable, of trying to gaze at that which one can only hope to glimpse, are profound nevertheless. The condition of longing reforms the soul in the image and likeness of God who is love (1 Jn 4:8).

For this reason, Augustine describes the sensation of longing as the most fulfilling of human experiences. In several passages, he does so in terms that devolve quickly into discussions of the Eucharist and of light. He recounts hearing God proclaim, "I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into

[597] Miles, "Vision," 125-146; Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147. See also, Astell, *Eating Beauty*, 1-26.

me."[598] Elsewhere he describes his mind's attempt "to discover the light by which it was flooded":

> So in the flash of a trembling gaze it attainted to that which is. At that moment I saw your 'invisible nature understood through the things which are made' (Rom 1:20). But I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed. My weakness reasserted itself, and I returned to my customary condition. I carried with me only a loving memory and a desire for that of which I had the aroma but which I had not yet the capacity to eat.[599]

This type of "loving memory" is precisely what Andrea del Sarto sought to impart to his audience in the church of San Pietro. He participated in regional debates by advocating for the supremacy of the Florentine artistic tradition, and he connected his handling of a brush to forms of poetic and scientific inquiry. But he judiciously folded those social and cultural issues into religious discussions that centered on the idea of reform. Once again, it is this idea that preoccupied the artist, shaping his social concerns and inspiring one of the finest altarpieces he would ever produce. Andrea's graceful style of formal arrangement implored his beholders to ruminate on the Passion of Christ and the Eucharist, to conceive of both as manifestations of God's grace. His mastery of the human figure, and perhaps, too, his clever use of figure models, augmented that recollection, providing his viewers a taste of what it means to abide in Christ as Christ abides in them. Andrea's delicious colors, cleverly arranged like glittering candies that beg for optical consumption, kindle the flames of holy desire in anyone who savors the radiant light that falls upon the savior.

Members of the Camaldolese order were an ideal audience in this regard. Their founder, St. Romuald, advised his first followers, "The path you must follow is in the Psalms—never leave it...take every opportunity you can to sing the Psalms in

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[598] Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.10.16, p. 124.
[599] Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.17.23, p. 127-128.

your heart and to understand them with your mind."[600] If the sisters of San Pietro followed this advice, then they might have summed up the entire thrust of the Luco *Pietà* with a single line of scripture: "And let God's splendor be upon us"[601] (Ps 90: 17).

[600] Matus, *The Mystery of Romuald and the Five Brothers*, 158.

[601] The Vulgate reads: "Et sit splendor Domini Dei nostri super nos." The NIV reads: "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us."

Chapter 6: In the Shadows of the *Gambassi Altarpiece*

Vasari's remarks regarding the *Gambassi Altarpiece* (Fig.6) are few. He explains that Andrea del Sarto executed the panel for a good friend, a glassblower called Becuccio da Gambassi, who has since been identified as Domenico di Jacopo di Matteo.[602] Becuccio's portrait, together with that of his wife, originally appeared in the predella (Fig.64), below a panel that, as Vasari states, depicts a visionary apparition of the Virgin and Child with "four figures, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Sebastian, and St. Roch."[603] A quick glance at Andrea's altarpiece is enough to see that Vasari's information was incomplete. The Virgin and Child do indeed appear in glory, seated on a stunning arrangement of luminous clouds and before a watery sun. John the Baptist and the Magdalene kneel before them, separated by winged cherub heads, which emphasize the scene's visionary character. Sebastian and Roch stand to the viewer's right, the former fully visible, the latter obscured as if seen through a haze. But Andrea also included Sts. Lawrence and Onuphrius, both of whom stand on the viewer's left. These two figures are the patron saints of the site where Andrea's panel originally stood, Santi Lorenzo e Onofrio, a church attached to a convent of Benedictine nuns.[604]

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[602] Conti, "Andrea del Sarto e Becuccio bicchieraio," 161-165.

[603] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 377. "Tornato Andrea a Firenze, lavorò a Becuccio bicchieraio da Gambassi, amicissimo suo, in una tavola una Nostra Donna in aria col Figliuolo in collo, et abbasso quattro figure, San Giovanni Battista, S. Maria Madalene, S. Bastiano e San Rocco; e nella predella ritrasse di naturale esso Becuccio e la moglie, che sono vivissimi."

[604] Conti, "Andrea del Sarto e Becuccio bicchieraio," 161-165. A copy of Andrea's panel sits atop the altar of the Pieve di Santa Maria a Chianni in Gambassi. This fact has caused some confusion over the painting's original location. Caterina Caneva clarifies the issue in her catalogue entry for the *Gambassi Altarpiece* in *Andrea del Sarto 1486-1530*, 134.

The fact that Vasari's information was incomplete helps us to date the *Gambassi Altarpiece* to 1527 or 1528, when political upheavals in Florence sent the author back to his native Arezzo.[605] This date is highly significant for several reasons. We are dealing with years characterized by a great sense of uncertainty, years that saw the sacking of Rome, as well as the expulsion of the Medici from Andrea's native city. A particularly vicious outbreak of plague only exacerbated these circumstances, sowing even more anxiety among the citizens of Florence.

Andrea del Sarto considered the complexity of this situation in ways that run counter to certain long-held suppositions regarding the artist and the final stages of his career. In what amounts to a remarkably bold—and yet, by this point in our study, somewhat familiar—gesture on his part, Andrea arranged the *Gambassi Altarpiece* according to the principals now identified with the 'classic' style. These visual conventions articulate Andrea's belief in the enduring legacy of his city and its cultural achievements. They also elaborate on the position he accords himself within the history of Florentine art. We get a glimpse of this position when we consider Andrea's strategy for engaging certain themes affiliated with 'Mannerism', themes that connect the visuals arts to other branches of learning. This artist's strategy of imitation throws this discussion into even sharper relief, for in the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, Andrea del Sarto effectively imitates himself, referring back to his own accomplishments among the Augustinians of San Gallo.

This method of self-citation dovetails nicely with the spiritual interests of Andrea's patron and advisors. Andrea and his friend, Becuccio da Gambassi, would

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[605] On the date of Andrea's panel, see Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 160-162; Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 267; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 171.

have discussed this project at some length. The artist also would have consulted with representatives of the Benedictine community. These exchanges led Andrea to investigate new ways of merging art-theoretical discourses concerning light and color with the basic teachings of the Christian faith. Of particular interest to this line of inquiry is Andrea's colorful nimbus, the light-suffused cloud that all but envelops the figures included in his *sacra conversazione*. In this area of the composition, Andrea explored the atmospheric properties of reflected color, weaving elements taken from Leonardo da Vinci's scientific discourses into a tradition of exegetical thought that revolves around light, shadows, and clouds.

This novel invention, the mysterious *figura* that overshadows the saints who witness the apparition of the Madonna and Child in the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, turns out to be the final flourish in Andrea's development as a colorist.[606] Indeed, the artist's subsequent—which is to say, his last—altarpieces build on this particular innovation. In the upper register of the *St. Agnes Altarpiece* (Fig.61), Andrea created a vibrant atmosphere of color that effectively translates the typical medieval gold background into naturalistic terms of light. In the *Annunciation* lunette of 1528 (Fig.65), he used this same device in order to reinterpret the mystery of the Incarnation. As Shearman so keenly observed, Andrea's atmospheric light is, in this instance, a "pervasive presence in the space in which the miracle in enacted."[607]

This development in Andrea's handling of color, which found expression for the first time in the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, touches on the principal concerns of our analysis. Scholars have connected this panel to an outbreak of plague in 1527, a fact

[606] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 145-148.
[607] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 146.

that aligns the *Gambassi Altarpiece* with a tradition of art designed to secure heavenly favor against the pestilence.[608] A fundamental thesis of mine is that Andrea's *colore*, here, marks a significant phase of his spiritual education, a phase where he applied familiar concepts to new problems associated with plague imagery. Specifically, his treatment of light, atmosphere, and color privileges medical theories regarding the spread of contagion, as well as biblical discussions of healing. The most important of these discussions concerns the notion of "throwing shadow upon" (*episkiazo* or *obumbra*), as when Peter healed the infirm with his shadow (Acts 5:15) or when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin Mary (Lk 1:35). It my contention that something similar happened to the spectator who considered Andrea's artful execution within the context of meditative devotion, something that registers, once again, with Augustine's most profound speculations regarding religious experience and the human condition:

> Who can comprehend it? Who will give an account of it in words? What is the light which shines right through me and strikes my heart without hurting? It fills me with terror and burning love: with terror inasmuch as I am utterly other than it, with burning love in that I am akin to it. Wisdom, wisdom it is which shines right through me, cutting a path through the cloudiness which returns to cover me as I fall away under the darkness and the load of my punishments.[609]

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[608] Natali makes the connection between the *Gambassi Altarpiece* and the plague of 1527 in *Andrea del Sarto*, 171. Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 267. For a discussion of art designed to secure heavenly favor against the plague, see Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 485-532.

[609] Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.9.11, p. 227. See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147.

6.1: From the Shadows of History

Modern commentators have largely followed Vasari in giving the *Gambassi Altarpiece* scant consideration. The exception is Freedberg, who framed this altarpiece as "a work of crisis."[610] The crisis in question concerns Andrea's response to an important shift in the currents of stylistic history. The era of 'classicism' was coming to a close. The period known as 'Mannerism' was beginning to emerge in the grace and beauty of Michelangelo's serpentine bodies. And Andrea del Sarto, the last great proponent of the 'classic' idiom, was left wandering in the chasm between these two creative impulses, lacking both the conviction that pervaded his earlier work and the temperament to pursue heightened notions of elegance associated with the ideal of *maniera*. The effect of this crisis on Andrea's work, according to Freedberg, took the form of a stylistic "retrenchment,"[611] a descent in artistic accomplishment born from an "exhaustion of creative energy."[612] In the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, he explains, Andrea's figures seem uninspired, his color blanched and pallid.

This line of reasoning has had a lasting impact on the critical tradition, a tradition that has consequently pushed Andrea's late works—this altarpiece, in particular—into the shadowy realm of historical obscurity.[613] But does the *Gambassi Altarpiece* really belong there, in the shadows of history? Does Andrea del Sarto belong there, for that matter? My answer is a resounding, "No." The terms that inform this established mode of scholarship—'classic' and 'Mannerism'—are useful, maybe even essential, when it comes to shaping the sixteenth century into periods of

[610] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 83.
[611] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 81.
[612] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 82.
[613] Franklin echoes aspects of Freedberg's commentary in *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 143-145. Cf. Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 8-9 et. pass.

study. But the terms themselves are constructs. As one scholar has insightful explained, they allow us to "mold history according to our needs and vision and values,"[614] and, as such, they can eclipse as much historical material as they illuminate.[615] In this case, compressing the *Gambassi Altarpiece* into a purely formalist framework of analysis marginalizes the profound mixture of concerns that inspired this painting.

Andrea was hardly unaware of the new trends taking shape among the artistic community of sixteenth-century Florence, trends that privileged 'Mannerist' experiments concerning the *figura serpentinata*. Michelangelo's *Victory* (Fig.66), created in the same year as the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, exemplifies the 'Mannerist' version of this ideal of bodily movement. Michelangelo arranged his figural torsions so as to accentuate the chiastic principles embodied by the ancient *Doryphoros* (Fig.67), or by his own *David*.[616] Taking the shape of a flame-like spiral, the *Victory* exemplifies an over-rotated contrapposto. The figure twists beyond its natural limits, allowing the beholder a view of the human body where portions of the back, side, and front present themselves simultaneously for inspection.

This over-rotation breaks with established conventions of artistic decorum as it aligns with a venerable tradition of rhetorical teaching. David Summers has

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[614] Hall, *After Raphael*, xii.

[615] This is Franklin's argument in *Painting in Renaissance Florence*, 1-3. John O'Malley raises similar issues regarding the critical categories used to describe sixteenth-century religious culture in *Trent and All That*, 1-15.

[616] See Shearman, *Mannerism*, 81-91; Summers, "*Maniera* and Movement," 273-313, quotation below from 298. Summers shows that while Leonardo invented the *figura serpentinata* around the beginning of the sixteenth century, other artists, principally Michelangelo, transformed it into a 'Mannerist' idiom. Significantly, this transformation occurred primarily in Rome: "As might be said of the Late Renaissance style in generally, the *figura serpentinata* was born in Florence and matured and flourished in Rome…By 1525 it had spread from its new center of concentrated development and elaboration to other parts of Italy, becoming, as Shearman has written, an essential element of the *maniera*."

insightfully described the points of reference, here. On the one hand, we have Leon Battista Alberti cautioning artists against arranging the figure in a way that displays chest and back at once. On the other hand, Quintilian's discussion of Myron's *Discobolus* compares the twisting movement of the body to the rhetorical figure of antithesis, associating the human form with the elegance of ornate diction and with the virtues of *gratia* and *varietas*.[617] By shrugging off Alberti's recommendations, Michelangelo created an explicit antithesis in his sculpted body. He thereby likened his own practice as a sculptor to the work of an orator. This is an effort at social distinction, Michelangelo's attempt at articulating the difference between an artist and an artisan. And that distinction largely depends on the Florentine's detailed understanding of anatomy. Michelangelo, in effect, knows the human body so well that he can make it gracefully perform actions in art that would be utterly graceless or even impossible in the natural world.[618]

Andrea's treatment of the human form in the *Gambassi Altarpiece* is idealized, but none of his figures twist in the way that can be described as serpentine or flame-like. On the contrary, Onuphrius leans in towards the Virgin and Child, adopting a balanced, comfortable pose by resting his weight on his staff. Darkness all but obscures his face. His hair is unkempt and haggard, a clear indication of his ascetic lifestyle. His virtually nude body, however, is toned, naturalistic, and studied with meticulous care. That care, evident in the musculature of the saint's shoulder,

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[617] Summers, "*Maniera* and Movement," 273-313; idem., "Contrapposto," 336-361. See also, Shearman, *Mannerism*, 81-91.

[618] Cf. Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 81-82. The "decline of a classicism bound to nature, as Andrea's was, had ceased to be vital one among the attitudes of Florentine visual culture. Instead, vitality gathered like an emanation around the workings of the supreme Michelangelo...His classicism was taken, not in its integrity, but in its aspect of abstraction, as a formative authority for Mannerism."

arm, side, and leg, is displayed for the viewer's consumption. It serves as both a corporeal indication of the saint's inward goodness and a pictorial demonstration of the artist's skill.[619] For much like Michelangelo's *Victory*, this profile view of the male form leaves little doubt that its maker understood the anatomical structure of the human body.

Andrea's knowledge of anatomy only becomes more evident as the eye travels around the composition. John the Baptist, the exemplar of the ascetic lifestyle, kneels in front of Onuphrius. His torso faces the Virgin, but his head—an obvious portrait to my eye—turns back to engage the spectator. The resulting pose, which interestingly enough recalls Michelangelo's *Victory*, gives us a picture of the figure's nude back, shoulder, and arm. Here again, Andrea seized the opportunity to elaborate on the male form. He carefully describes the deltoid muscle, the bicep, and the triceps. Evident, as well, is the relationship between the trapezius, which covers the neck, spine, and shoulders, and the latissimus dorsi, muscles that wrap around the ribs.

Sebastian, standing to the right and gazing up at the Virgin, completes this anatomical exposition. A blue cloth drapes his body, falling from his shoulders and across his groin. His legs and developed torso are exposed, the arrangement and musculature an almost perfect mirror of the ancient *Doryphoros*. This saint, in other words, fully embodies the ideal physique and stance, which, for viewers in early modern Italy, carries several important connotations. These connotations speak to

[619] On physical beauty as a sign of spiritual goodness, see Talvacchia, "The Word made Flesh," 49-73.

ideals of sanctity, as well as to Andrea's artistic skill, his anatomical knowledge, and his familiarity with the heritage of classical antiquity.[620]

There are, in this regard, distinct commonalities between what Andrea and Michelangelo were trying to accomplish in their respective creations. The *Victory* alludes to classical sculpture and ancient rhetoric. It showcases multiple views of the human body in a single instance. Andrea, too, gives us multiple views of the human body, depicting the male form from front, back, and side in a single panel. He alludes to ancient sculpture with his athletic physiques and his conspicuous use of the contrapposto pose. And, in the very same instance, he links his activities as a visual artist to the principles of ancient rhetoric.

As in previous works, Andrea uses the ideal of antithesis to arrange his composition as a whole. The outward turn of Sebastian's body complements the inward turn of Onuphrius. A similar relationship exists between the poses of John and the Magdalene. This chiastic compositional logic lends the *Gambassi Altarpiece* a pleasing degree of *varietà*, while also providing opportunities to cultivate *grazia*. Indeed, the delicate curve that unites the four otherwise counter posed figures is an exceptional example of artistic grace. That curve begins in the shoulder and arm of Onuphrius. It runs across John's back and down his bent arm, across the imaginary line connecting the Magdalene's right hand and left elbow, up her arm and along the edge of Sebastian's bunched draperies. The clarity and order of this arrangement, the way it avoids monotony while imparting a unified rhythm to the composition, strikes a chord with Michelangelo's expansion of the contrapposto motif in the *Victory*. Both

[620] On Sebastian's connection to Renaissance bodily ideals, see Talvacchia, "The Double Life of St. Sebastian in Renaissance Art," 226-248.

artists are linking their methods of pictorial arrangement to notions of eloquent speech. Both artists, that is, distance themselves from the realm of craft production, from what we might describe, borrowing from Quintilian, as "common and vulgar usage"[621] within the formal lexicon of the pictorial arts.

The difference, of course, is that Michelangelo accomplished all of this in a single figure, whereas Andrea's strategy plays out across a painting comprising several figures. This is a difference with an important distinction—a distinction, however, that allows us to see past formalist models of historical analysis. Andrea and Michelangelo put essentially the same skill set on display, but Andrea is able to communicate his professional agenda while adhering to the rules of decorum outlined by Alberti. His reasons for abiding by these traditions are not difficult to discern. Freedberg touched on them when he explained that the composition of the *Gambassi Altarpiece* "recalls the symmetry of the Luco altar, or the formal order in the *Harpies*."[622] The notion of decorum codified by Alberti was, by the sixteenth century, a deeply ingrained aspect of Florentine artistic culture.

In this sense, the *Gambassi Altarpiece* marks less of a "retrenchment" of Andrea's style than a reaffirmation of Andrea's deep sympathies for the heritage of his native city. When he received this commission, he opted for a pattern of formal arrangement that balanced naturalism with idealization, that privileged stability and compositional symmetry.[623] Scholars have long used these qualities to define the 'classic' or 'High Renaissance' period. Andrea, however, would have viewed these

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[621] Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, 2.13.11.
[622] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 82.
[623] With regard to Andrea's idealized naturalism and Alberti's understanding of figural decorum, see Alberti, *On Painting*, 2.35, p. 71.

pictorial qualities from a slightly different perspective. To someone in his position, they were artistic conventions that emerged at a particular high point in the history of the city that he called home, modes of pictorial address that defined the Florentine dialect of the *maniera moderna*. Carrying on that civic legacy was an important concern for Andrea even at what turned out to be this late stage in his career.

In fact, the timing of this painting is highly significant. As Andrea was completing the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, the Italian peninsula was in the grips of catastrophe. Plague was once again wreaking havoc, so much so that the Florentines established a permanent municipal body tasked with addressing the problems stemming from the epidemic.[624] At the same time, Florence was also experiencing political upheavals brought on by the Holy Roman Emperor's sacking of Rome. For as soon as news of the Sack reached Florence, the powerful Medici were expelled and a republican government reinstated.[625]

Exactly how Andrea del Sarto felt about this political shift remains unclear. There is reason to believe that he himself had republican sympathies.[626] But there are also reasons to be cautious when it comes to reading those sympathies into his artistic productions. There is a difference between the mechanics and policies of governance, on the one hand, and the richer and more varied texture of human experiences that make up our notion of culture, on the other. It would be problematic, for instance, to interpret Michelangelo's 'Mannerism' as inherently anti-republican, even if the Medici dukes later appropriated works such as the *Victory* for political purposes. In a

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[624] Cipolla, *Miasmas and Disease*, 1-9.
[625] See Wallace, "Florence under the Medici Pontificates, 1513-1537," 322-328.
[626] See Wellen, "Andrea del Sarto," 168-180. On Andrea's friendship with Ottaviano de' Medici, see Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 71-75, 125-126.

similar vein, Andrea's compositional choices in the *Gambassi Altarpiece* should not be viewed as an outright manifesto detailing his commitment to the anti-Medici government, even if Vasari later interpreted Andrea's 'classicism' through the lens of Medici politics. Andrea del Sarto himself was concerned primarily with the pictorial traditions that sustained his image of Florence as an important center for the arts and learning. Hence his continued preoccupation with the style later viewed as the culmination of Renaissance ideals.

Embracing the 'classic' style, however, was only part of Andrea's strategy for promoting Florentine culture. He also continued to develop what I have been calling his method of formal citation. We have seen him use this technique repeatedly and with a variety of intentions thus far. Andrea frequently modeled elements of his compositions in ways that engaged the work of his rivals. He often referred to important predecessors or associated himself with certain friends and colleagues, other individuals dedicated to the traditions of his native city. He especially liked to engage works of sculpture as a means of investigating the relative merit of the visual arts. These were ideas that continued to captivate Andrea until the very end of his life. In the Medici *Holy Family* of 1529 (Fig.68), for example, the particular form of the Virgin and Child deliberately recalls Michelangelo's own Medici *Madonna and Child* (Fig.69), a grouping of over-rotated, sculpted bodies that Andrea must have seen in progress in the artist's Florentine studio. When we come to the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, however, we notice that something interesting has happened, something novel,

something that adds another degree of nuance to Andrea's already quite complex system of formal imitation. He begins to cite his own work.[627]

I am not only referring to the similarity between the position of the Madonna in this panel and that of the Virgin in the *Madonna of the Steps* (Fig.51), which served as a model for the workshop panel in Raleigh (Fig.70). I am speaking, specifically, of the formal parallels among the kneeling saints in the *Gambassi Altarpiece* and the corresponding figures in the *Disputation on the Trinity* (Fig.4). The positioning of John the Baptist and the Magdalene is so precisely in line with that of the earlier San Gallo figures that the association moves beyond the realm of common similarity and begins to articulate a bold argument.

Not only does Andrea highlight one of his greatest triumphs by reminding viewers of the *Disputation of the Trinity*, a picture that dates to the year when he took on the role of *caposcuola*. He also presents a view of his turbulent times that is unmistakably positive and hopeful, maybe even triumphant. Florence was experiencing profound shifts in governance while dealing with an outbreak of plague. The Medici (for the moment, at least) had fallen from grace, creating a great deal of unease with regard to support for the arts and learning. And yet, Andrea del Sarto presented himself, his work, as a bastion of artistic activity capable of withstanding even these forces of change. He gave form and color to pictorial conventions that connected the city of his present to its glittering past. He made it clear, with this instance of formal quotation, that the most sought after of Florentine painters maintained the high level of excellence that so recently made the small city-state the envy of every territory with cultural aspirations. For the act of modeling his kneeling

[627] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 267.

saints on his earlier San Gallo panel extends the line of artistic accomplishment established in the formal properties of the earlier painting. This picture, we will remember, engages the work of Andrea del Castagno, Masaccio, and Nanni di Banco, connecting Andrea del Sarto to a line of Quattrocento "visionaries," to artists and monuments that represented the peak of his city's prestigious heritage.

These are not the actions of a timid painter.[628] Nor are they choices that speak to an "exhaustion of creative energy."[629] In this altarpiece, Andrea devised a means of presenting himself as an intellectual, operating in ways that run parallel to the stylistic experiments associated with the advent of 'Mannerism'. At the same time, he presents his own paintings as being worthy of quotation and study. In this sense, Andrea del Sarto was acting as both artist and art historian. For much like the scholars who construct and maintain interpretive categories such as 'classicism' and 'Mannerism', this painter used a set of stylistic conventions in order to mold history according to his needs, values, and vision.

6.2: Shades of Brilliance

The intellectual legacy of Leonardo da Vinci remained a crucial, if complicated, element of Andrea's historical vision.[630] The nature of this exchange comes through quite clearly, as we have seen, in the Luco *Pietà*. In this altarpiece, Andrea aligned the pictorial ideal of chromatic *bellezza* with the study of optics and, specifically,

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[628] See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 8-9, et. pass.
[629] Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 82.
[630] Cf. Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 131-148. idem., "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro," 13-47.

with Leonardo's ruminations on reflected color.[631] Andrea never abandoned this interest in reflected color. Until the year of his death, he created paintings meant to quicken the beholder's imaginative experience by approximating the optical power of what Leonardo termed *splendore*.[632]

Bocchi gives eloquent testimony to this fascination in his commentary on the *Madonna del Sacco* (Fig.44), a fresco that dates to 1525. Remarking on the Virgin's white garment, Bocchi writes, "The shadows are subtly tinted with red, perhaps because the abundant red of the robe is reflected in the white."[633] The panel paintings that Andrea executed towards the end of his life allow us to trace Bocchi's observation further, linking it more concretely to Leonardo's study of optics. The figure of St. Michael in the *Vallombrosa Altarpiece* of 1528 (Fig.71) wears gleaming armor, a yellow drapery, a blue skirt, and crimson leggings. The effect Andrea captured on the lower portion of the figure is quite similar to what Bocchi described with regard to the *Madonna del Sacco*. Light penetrates the shadows, transferring individual hues so that the red of Michael's pants rebounds off his drapery and, now tinged with yellow, affects the local color of the archangel's skirt. The lower panels of the *St. Agnes Altarpiece* (Fig.61) are likewise alive with reflected color. The shadows of Catherine's pink hood pick up traces of her orange dress. Margret's shawl appears to be silk, its soft blue fabric shot with hints of pink reflecting off her own garment. Agnes herself wears a yellow wrap over a grey-violet dress and is seated on

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[631] Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 63-88.

[632] See Farago, "Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered," 75-77.

[633] Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*, 216. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze*, 230. "sono l'ombre oscuramente rossette, forse per lo copioso color rosso dell vesta, che nella bianchezza è riflesso." Shearman notes the suggestion of reflected color in the *Madonna del Sacco* in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 144.

blue fabric. The blue resonates in the purple shadows of her gown, while subtle vestiges of warm grey register in the folds of yellow that fall across her chest.

When compared to these paintings, the color scheme of the *Gambassi Altarpiece* does indeed give us reason to pause, as Freedberg noted. Far from the splendor that we have come to expect from this painter, the *Gambassi Altarpiece* appears on first glance to embrace the example of Leonardo's early work, where deep shadows and *sfumato* brushwork restrict the possibility of chromatic brilliance. The Paris version of the *Madonna of the Rocks* (Fig.72) provides a good comparison, as the red and green of the angel's garment, together with Mary's yellow sash, punctuate the painting's otherwise inky atmosphere. Similarly, the most prominent hues in Andrea's panel are the cool blue-grey of the atmosphere and the neutrals that describe earth, flesh, and hair. The pale yellow of the Magdalene's sleeve, the bright orange of her drapery, and the light red of the Virgin's dress provide accents of color. The overall effect has much in common with the softness of Leonardo's chiaroscuro—the very quality that Vasari described as "sweet" in Andrea's first two San Gallo paintings.

There is, however, an important difference between the *Gambassi Altarpiece* and Leonardo's Paris panel. The iridescence radiating from Andrea's Virgin and Child creates a mood quite unlike the one that pervades the *Madonna of the Rocks.* Whereas the latter painting recalls the gloom of night, Andrea's luminosity has the character of a watery sunrise. The younger Florentine added soft yellows and pinks to his misty *sfumato*, charging the pictorial environment, the atmosphere itself, with the optical properties of reflected color.

What we are describing, here, is the latest—and as it would turn out, the last—phase of Andrea's life-long dialogue with Leonardo. In his theoretical writings, Leonardo devoted a great deal of time to considering how the problems of reflected color informed the idea of aerial perspective. He thought of air as comprising many infinitesimal mirrors or "*attomi*," which both attract and refract light. Following Aristotelian logic, he even devised experiments in order to determine why smoke and clouds take on their ash-grey or blue color.[634] The issue of aerial color receives special attention in passages contained within the *Codex Urbinas*. There, Leonardo explained, "air in itself has no more colour than does water, but it is the humidity mixed into it...which thickens it; and when it is thickened, the solar rays which strike it illuminate it."[635] In another passage, Leonardo elaborates on this process: "the air takes the light from the sun and the darkness from the privation of the sun. Therefore, it is tinged with as many various colors as interposed between them [light and darkness] and the eye."[636]

These passages marry well with the visual effects Andrea conjures in the *Gambassi Altarpiece*. The Virgin and Child appear, surrounded by dense, humid air particles that take the form of clouds. As Leonardo described, the clouds have an ash-grey color. They are tinted blue but also tinged with "as many various colors" as one finds in the sky at sunrise. Atmosphere and hue are thereby made inseparable, fused into a ubiquitous, artfully brilliant, scientific, evocative ether. Significantly, the very

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[634] Bell "Aristotle as a Source for Leonardo's Theory of Colour Perspective after 1500," 104-106.

[635] UC 140v, quoted in Bell, "Aristotle as a Source for Leonardo's Theory of Colour Perspective after 1500," 102. "l'aria in se non a colore piu che s'habia l'acqua ma l'umido che si mista con essa dalla meza regione in giu e quello che la ingrossa et in grossando li razi solari che vi percotano v'aluminano."

[636] UC 140v, quoted in Bell, "Aristotle as a Source for Leonardo's Theory of Colour Perspective after 1500," 102. "...l'aria piglia la luce dal sole et le tenebre dalla privattione d'esso sole adonque si tinge in tanti vari colori quanto son quelli infra li quali ella s'inframette infra l'occhio e loro.."

hues Andrea worked so delicately into this ether find respondents in the saintly figures. Sebastian's blue drapery and the Magdalene's grey dress answer the most immediately apparent colors of the clouds. The Magdalene's sleeve and orange drapery, together with the Virgin's dress, resonate with the pale luminosity glowing beneath the humid air particles that surround the figures. The cloth draped over the arm of the Baptist, meanwhile, acts as something of a chromatic bridge. Transitioning from hot orange in the shadow to lilac in the highlight, it speaks to both the warm undertones and cool density of the picture's atmosphere.[637]

It is important that we understand what Andrea has accomplished with this new approach to *colore*. The *Gambassi Altarpiece* stands comfortably alongside such novel creations as Raphael's *Transfiguration* (Fig.73), his *Sistine Madonna* (Fig.25), as well as Fra Bartolommeo's *Lucca Altarpiece* (Fig.28), in that Andrea's handling of light and atmosphere unites some of the most advanced theories regarding sight with the notion of visionary experience.[638] This union, which depends on the valence of clouds, builds on the strategy of professional self-promotion that we have been tracing in the previous chapters. Andrea is presenting himself as an artistic "visionary." His figures are rendered naturalistically. Several of them deliberately gaze out from the picture, addressing the spectator with a degree of directness that breaks down any sense of psychological separation between the viewer's reality and the painted environment. This connection, dramatically enhanced by the

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[637] Shearman *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 145-146. Shearman expertly described these effects when he stated, "the atmosphere is now saturated in vibrating colour; it is not a restraint upon the over-all chromatic effect, but an enhancement of it and a means towards a more absolute unity of the parts."

[638] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 146. Shearman rightly described the visionary quality of Andrea's atmosphere when he wrote, "In the Gambassi *Madonna*, as in Raphael's Sistine *Madonna*, the nebulous, limitless background is a recasting in naturalistic and credible terms of the earlier gold background, preserving its spiritual meaning." See also, Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 27-30, 40-45, 120-145; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 80-86.

meteorological naturalism of Andrea's colorful nimbus, and by the chromatic sympathy between the garments of his figures and the air they breathe, invites the beholder to participate in the drama of the altarpiece. That participation, in turn, opens onto a type of emotional engagement associated with the power of eloquence, a fact that places Andrea among those members of his profession respected for their intellectual abilities as well as their skill with a brush. Raphael and Fra Bartolommeo certainly belong to this elite group.

And yet, as much as Andrea's *Gambassi Altarpiece* stands alongside such important works as the *Transfiguration*, the *Sistine Madonna* and the *Lucca Altarpiece*, it also stands out from them by giving more emphasis to Leonardo's science of reflected color. Andrea, for instance, separated the idea of a "glowing cloud glory"[639] from the cloud-putto, opting for the more tangible winged cherub heads as a means of contributing to his iconography of divine apparition.[640] In effect, this decision allows light and color to become even more evocative in his panel than in the works of his predecessors. While the bright cloud in Raphael's *Transfiguration* provides a backdrop that speaks to Christ's divinity, while the background in the *Sistine Madonna* is shimmering and limitless, while Bartolommeo's clouds support the physical presence of God the Father, Andrea's atmosphere has a presence of its own. His *colore* serves as more than a background, more than a support. It washes over the figures, overshadowing them at times. Presumably, because Roch, Lawrence, the Baptist, and the Christ Child gaze out from the picture plane, this light-suffused cloud of color is about to overshadow the spectator, as well. Its sense of immediacy

[639] Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, 27.

[640] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 146. Sharman described this decision as an "elimination of the literal residue of the symbol."

make it a purveyor of the visionary, inviting the beholder to interpret his or her optical encounter with oils on a flat panel as an analogue for the experience of a divine apparition.

In this regard, Andrea's formal quotation of the *Disputation on the Trinity* acquires another layer of significance. As we will remember, clouds are incredibly important in this, the last of Andrea's San Gallo altarpieces. The rumbling mass of atmosphere that surrounds the Father and Son is a *figura* of theophany that Augustine describes as "the sending of the Holy Spirit."[641] This notion, derived from the Church Father's reading of Exodus, accords nicely with Andrea's atmospheric *colore* in the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, too. Here, in fact, Andrea builds on the Church Father's exegetical practices by aligning Augustine's sign for the third person of the Trinity with light. This association immediately recalls several biblical passages. John's inspired statement, "God is light" (1 Jn 1:5) comes to mind. So, too, does Luke's description of the mystery of the Incarnation. The relevance of this last textual allusion has much to do with the pictorial juxtaposition of a light-suffused cloud, the Virgin Mary, and the infant Christ—the Christ Child who happens to be the only male Andrea pictured with displayed genitalia.[642] When Mary inquired as to how she was to become pregnant with the Word, the angel Gabriel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35). The term "overshadowed" incorporates theological discussions of light, shadows, and clouds.[643] It appears in the context of Peter's healing "shadow" in the

[641] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2.10, p. 104.
[642] On Christ's genitalia as a sign of the Word's Incarnation, see Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 3-106.
[643] Gill, "Until Shadows Disperse," 259-260, 269-270 n.39-41.

Acts (5:15), as well as in the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration. Mark frames this last visionary moment by relating the brightness of the cloud that surrounded Christ (Mk 9:1-7), while Luke specifically tells of how the apostles "entered the cloud" itself (Lk 9:34).

Each of these textual associations informs our understanding of Andrea's imagery. In the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, the Virgin and Child appear in visionary fashion before a collection of saints, all of whom are explicitly overshadowed by the divine light that is the Holy Spirit. The saints' presence in the composition, their idealized bodily forms, as well as their privileged relationship with Mary and Christ, speak to their inward goodness. They are "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk 1:15). This fullness mirrors the mystery of the Incarnation as it echoes the experience of the apostles who "entered into the cloud" and saw the brightness of Christ's divinity. To borrow once again from John, Andrea's cast of divinities are holy figures who have fellowship with Christ, who "walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 Jn 1:7), because they devoutly believe that Christ himself is "the true light that gives light to every man" (Jn 1:9). They abide in him, as he, his spirit, abides in them.

This exegetical play can be extended to encompass Andrea's spectators. The beholders who considered the *Gambassi Altarpiece* in its original setting, who looked to this picture as a means of enhancing their experience of devotional meditation, must have found Andrea's artful execution exciting. The *grazia* of his composition resonates with notions of divine grace, enhancing the picture's incarnational thrust.[644] The idealized forms of his saints direct the mind towards ideals of sanctifying goodness, while the figurative valence of Andrea's *colore* invites the beholder to

[644] See Lk 1:27-28.

contemplate the notion of "walking in the light," the incomprehensible nature of God who is light, as well as the awe-inspiring complexity of Christianity's central mystery, that moment when Mary received the Holy Spirit and was overshadowed by the Most High.

This action, the exercise of considering this network of religious ideas, enters into the context of Augustine's theology of desire—as Andrea, who in this very painting cited his own earlier Augustinian altarpiece, must have recognized. The Church Father's theology of desire plays on theories of sight, spiritual insight, and the soul. He modeled his understanding of cognition, "the eye of the mind," on what he took to be the physical mechanics of perception, "the eye of the body."[645] This rather intricate construct allowed Augustine to talk about spiritual contemplation as an act of desire, which is synonymous with affection and, more importantly, with love.

Love is one of the most complex notions discussed in the Church Father's theological writings. The power of this idea derives from the fact that love itself is the very substance of the divine. Hence, it is also the ideal form of the human soul. "Form," here, literally refers to shape, in that the expression of love stretches the fabric of the soul, allowing it to extent towards and even model itself after its beloved. By conceiving the soul in this fashion, as a bound and malleable collection of desires, Augustine is able to frame the relationship between sin and righteousness as a problem of the will's orientation. His thinking derives from established hierarchies that privilege spirit over matter and, as a result, that place the soul on a higher order of reality than the body.

[645] Miles, "Vision," 125-142. See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 125-147.

When human beings focus their affections on worldly aspirations, Augustine argues, the soul gravitates towards the transient and the temporal. These qualities belong to the lower order of being, the corporeal order characterized by multiplicity and matter. When the will is oriented in this fashion, then, the human soul effectively lowers itself. It develops a sinful and fragmented nature by modeling itself after the many material items it covets.

On the other hand, when worshipers partake in religious rituals, practice scriptural exegesis, or study spiritual teachings, they attend to mysteries of the faith. This expression of desire stretches the soul towards higher levels of existence, towards the realm of pure spirit and the ultimate unity that is God himself. Righteousness, for Augustine, is not simply a matter of attaining knowledge of the divine, of seeing God with the eye of mind. It is rather the desire to see God, the all-consuming expression of yearning or longing that refashions the fabric of soul in the image and likeness of the One who is light and who is love (1 Jn 4:8).

The spectator enters into Andrea's light-suffused cloud in this manner. The spectator, that is, desires to see God by attending to the intricate network of associations connecting the artist's handling of visible form and, especially, color to the series of biblical passages outlined above. The power of Andrea's "art" invites us to reflect on scriptural lessons with loving care, to yearn for and to conceive Christ as the Word, much as Mary conceived the Word in her womb; to dwelling on the Word in a manner that allows the Word to indwell; and to figuratively step into the picture's luminous ether, much like the apostles who witnessed the Transfiguration—or again, much like the Virgin who received the Holy Spirit. To digest Andrea's artful

execution, to breath in his many shades of brilliance, is ultimately to consider a question voiced by Origen. "What does it profit me to say that Jesus came only in the flesh he received from Mary, if I do not show he came also in my flesh?"[646]

6.3: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High"

Origen's, however, is not the only question that demands our attention. Andrea del Sarto was an exceptional painter. The eloquent strokes of his brushes gave visible expression to ideas of the utmost complexity. But he was still a painter subject to the cultural mechanisms of artistic patronage. How, then, did Andrea's skillful execution of the *Gambassi Altarpiece* reflect the interests of the other parties involved in this project? What did Becuccio da Gambassi gain by commissioning this panel? And for that matter, how did the altarpiece benefit Andrea's theological advisors, representatives of the Benedictine community of nuns from Santi Lorenzo e Onofrio? These queries ultimately touch on a matter of considerable interest, in that they allow us to examine how the circumstances of this commission contributed to—or better yet, conditioned—the shifts in Andrea's style that emerged in this painting.

Unfortunately, no record exists of the negotiations that informed the *Gambassi Altarpiece*. What we have at our disposal, instead, is a vast body of scholarship on Renaissance artistic patronage, and the evidence provided by Andrea's panel itself. In the first instance, a familiar set of ideas comes into play. Artistic skill, for instance, was an important commodity in sixteenth-century Italy.[647] The

[646] Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentaries and Homilies*, 3.7, quoted in Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 126.
[647] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 1-27.

sophistication evident in Andrea's treatment of form and color served to indicate his patron's cultural refinement. These same qualities also bestowed honor on the institution that housed the altarpiece in question. What this means is that both Becuccio and the Benedictines had every reason to appreciate and to encourage the many ways that Andrea del Sarto enhanced his standing within the Florentine professional community.

The fact that the *Gambassi Altarpiece* originally included portraits of Becuccio and his wife allows us to elaborate further on the stakes of this collaborative enterprise. The reason Andrea's panel reflected the interests of multiple parties is that it served as type of cultural "agent," embodying the relationships and obligations established by its commission.[648] Viewers in Santi Lorenzo e Onofrio would have gazed up at this example of expert artistry, seen the donor portraits tucked inside the frame, and found a material marker of the special bonds connecting a renowned painter, a prominent mercantile family, and a religious institution. This marker was both a record and a performance of social interaction. It helped provide its makers with a sense of being-in-the-world, detailing their relative positions within the Gambassi and Florentine communities, and adding notions of urbanity and acumen to the range of public personae available to them. Scholars generally describe this type of social behavior as "self-fashioning."[649]

As the thematic thrust of Andrea's altarpiece makes clear, this joint exercise in self-fashioning was tied fundamentally to issues of spirituality. Specifically, the

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[648] See O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency, 417-441; Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 63-84; Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 1-27.

[649] See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 1-9. See also the essays collected in *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art*, edited by Mary Rogers.

Gambassi Altarpiece touches on a defining preoccupation of the Christian faith.[650] Artist and patron joined forces with a Benedictine convent in order to inspire the type of meditative activities that reform the soul. The Benedictines, of course, would have found this line of reasoning particularly appealing.[651] But, in truth, neither Andrea del Sarto nor Becuccio da Gambassi could fail to appreciate it. For when the *Gambassi Altarpiece* is presented in this light—which is to say, when we consider the rich *figura* that is Andrea's light—all the effort and resources devoted to this artistic endeavor become "good works" in the spiritual sense of the term. Indeed, Andrea's panel, this object meant to inspire devotion, ostensibly becomes one-half of a spiritual transaction designed to secure heavenly favor.[652]

The cast of divinities included in the *Gambassi Altarpiece* speak directly to the painting's transactional properties. The Virgin and Child are the subject of the depicted visionary experience, the locus of divinity itself. They serve as the prime focus of devotional engagement. With his gaze turned towards the picture plane, John the Baptist responds to the spectator, acting as intercessor. This is a role that would have "hit home," so to speak, with Andrea, Becuccio, and their fellow citizens of Florence, especially if Andrea modeled the features of this figure on those of an actual individual.[653] The Magdalene is more difficult to explain. What can be said is

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[650] Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 9-35, et. pass. See also Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, xiii-xxvii.

[651] See Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 319-424.

[652] On art as a type of spiritual transaction, see Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 485-532.

[653] See Gaston, "Attention and Inattention," 253-268. Including recognizable features in paintings was a popular strategy for holding the spectator's attention. It is worth noting, too, that Andrea used studio models for several the figures in the *Gambassi Altarpiece*. Lawrence appears to be a slightly older version of the same figure in the *Disputation on the Trinity*. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Sebastian's features corresponds to figures in both the *Disputation on the Trinity* and the *Luco Pietà*, and there is reason to believe that Andrea's wife Lucrezia served as the inspiration for the both the Virgin and the Magdalene.

that she was a popular saint, an exemplar whose status as a reformed sinner spoke to the desires of a great many worshipers. Her presence in this scene is an open invitation to all sinners to ideate a place for themselves within the painting's visionary program. Lawrence and Onuphrius, on the other hand, require far less guesswork. They are explicit allusions to the dedication of the church where Andrea's panel originally stood. These two figures thus offered a specific path of intercession to the picture's original audience. Lawrence—the patron saint of glassblowers and thus a figure of importance to Becuccio—gazes out of the picture plane, reassuring worshipers in his church that their presence is known and that their prayers are being heard. [654] Onuphrius gazes up at the Virgin and Child. His mouth opens slightly, as if he is about to speak on behalf of his viewing supplicants.

This type of engagement blends seamlessly with Augustine's theology of desire, in that it constitutes an imaginative performance that requires the spectator's attentive participation.[655] Within the context of meditative devotion, these suggestions of intimacy—of interaction between representation and reality, between the celestial and the terrestrial—heighten the picture's ability to command the beholder's worshipful gaze. This is the very gaze that cultivates the experience Augustine describes as longing.[656] The hope, then, was that the expression of piety elicited by the *Gambassi Altarpiece* would be looked upon favorably by the divinities in heaven, that the saints who protected the congregation of Santi Lorenzo e Onofrio would

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[654] Shearman notes that Lawrence is the patron saint of glassblowers in *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 267.

[655] See Shearman, *Only Connect*, 59-107.

[656] See Miles, "Vision," 130-131.

respond to the worshipers' attention by tending to the community's needs—which is to say, by performing the actions pictured in Andrea's panel.

Sebastian and Roch allow us to expand on our discussion of the special burden assumed by the *Gambassi Altarpiece* in its original setting. These figures are plague saints.[657] Roch was a fourteenth-century pilgrim. During his lifetime, he traveled throughout Italy providing what comfort he could to the stricken. He himself contracted the disease but was cured by divine power. Later, after he finally arrived at the end of his life, he became a conduit for that same power by performing miracles of healing.[658] His role with regard to disease was therefore "therapeutic"[659] in nature. Worshipers venerated Sebastian, on the other hand, primarily for his preventative efficacy. Unlike Roch, there was no historical connection between disease prevention and the fourth-century Roman soldier whose devotion to Christianity resulted in a double martyrdom, the first—which he survived—involving a volley of arrows, the second a fatal bludgeoning. Indeed, Sebastian only became a plague saint after medieval hagiographers described his posthumous miracles. The most notable of these signs concerns a pestilence that swept through Rome and Pavia during the late seventh century. The disease only ceased, according to Jacobus de Voragine, when the faithful erected an altar to the venerated double-martyr.[660]

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[657] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 267; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 171.

[658] See Marshall, "A New Plague Saint for Renaissance Italy," 543-549; idem., "A Plague Saint for Venice," 153-188. See also Talvacchia, "The Double Life of St. Sebastian in Renaissance Art," 240.

[659] Rinaldi, "Le immagini della peste nella cultura figurativa veneziana," 214-215.

[660] See Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. 1, 101. By the sixteenth century, this episode from the saint's legend had developed into the principal concern of Sebastian's cult. See Barker, "The Making of a Plague Saint," 90-132; Talvacchia, "The Double Life of St. Sebastian in Renaissance Art," 226-248.

Scholars have demonstrated that this affiliation, Sebastian's powers to protect worshipers from the plague, largely depends on the symbolic valence of arrows.[661] Since antiquity, arrows served as a metaphor for divine retribution, suffering, and disease, as when Homer described Apollo's furry in the *Iliad* as a plague sent by the archer to against the Greeks. There are significant echoes of this notion in the Bible, as well. Job, for example, describes divine punishment when he laments, "The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison" (Job 6:4). The Psalms, meanwhile, connect this imagery specifically to disease and humanity's sinful nature. "O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin" (Ps 38:1-3).[662] As the Renaissance scholar Pierio Valeriano explains, Sebastian's martyrdom fits into this symbolic tradition.

> No one doubts that the arrows of Apollo sent against the Greeks absolutely clearly signified the plague. There is wide discussion about them in Homer...Christian piety proposes for itself, out of the number of divinities, Sebastian as a protector against the plague, assailed with arrows as he was, offering testimony of his faith in Christ.[663]

This last phrase is significant, in that it points to the parallels between Christian martyrdom and the Passion. Sebastian's experience with the arrows constitutes a drama of suffering, death, and resurrection in direct analogy with Christ. The Roman saint offered up his body to God, accepting the pointed shafts that symbolize the plague, as a form of restitution for the sins that brought the plague on

[661] See Talvacchia's insightful discussion in "The Double Life of St. Sebastian in Renaissance Art," 231-236.

[662] Both of these biblical passages are quoted and discussed in Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 493-495.

[663] Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 446, quoted in Talvacchia, "The Double Life of St. Sebastian in Renaissance Art," 235.

humanity in the first place. According to the teachings of his cult, Sebastian's sacrifice and resurrection mean salvation and health for those who venerate him.[664]

In Andrea's panel, this concern for the plague colored the other saints' acts of intercession on behalf of the beholder. Roch, enveloped by the cloud of the Holy Spirit, gazes out of the picture plane so as to acknowledge the beholder's presence—much like Lawrence, the Baptist, and the Christ Child. Roch's gaze, however, holds out a particular promise, the promise of therapeutic protection against disease. Sebastian, meanwhile, turns his attention to the Virgin.[665] He holds out his symbolic arrows in a gesture of offering and displays his pristine body, an image of anatomical perfection that demonstrates his abilities to preserve against the forces of the plague. His presence, together with that of Roch, thus turns the focus of this *sacra conversazione* to keeping safe the individuals involved in the production and veneration of the *Gambassi Altarpiece* around 1527, when Italians were suffering yet another outbreak of pestilence. In a real sense, the painting amounts to a visible prayer, which echoes the most venerable of sources: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust'" (Ps 91:1-2.).

Such is the nature of the spiritual transaction initiated in this altarpiece. Andrea, Becuccio, and the Benedictines, each of whom could point to this object as a sign of their piety, set up what one commentator has described as "hierarchical relationships of mutual obligation"[666] among themselves, the Santi Lorenzo e

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[664] Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 495-496.

[665] For a discussion of the iconographic traditions that identify the Virgin with plague relief, see Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 506-515.

[666] Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 488.

Onofrio congregation, and the spiritual personae pictured in the panel. The "good works" that produced the *Gambassi Altarpiece*, that ultimately enhanced the devotional experiences taking shape within the shelter of the Benedictine church, constituted a proactive measure designed to deliver the community from the pestilence.

What is absolutely striking about this scenario—and yet absolutely in keeping with our assessment of this painter's style as a measure of his spiritual education—is how carefully Andrea del Sarto considered his role in the matter. The nature of artistic commissions ensured that Andrea only began the process of designing the *Gambassi Altarpiece* after consulting with the other parties involved in the project. These consultations were important forums of intellectual exchange, forums where Andrea was obliged to consider intricate problems in the company of other learned individuals.[667] Gifted *sarto* that he was, he tailored his treatment of form and color in the *Gambassi Altarpiece* to the primary concern of his patron and advisors, to the desire for protection against the plague. And seeing as the *Rule of Saint Benedict* makes special provisions for tending to the infirm, it should come as little surprise that Andrea's execution of this painting evokes not only miracles of healing, but also then current theories regarding the spread of contagion.[668]

During outbreaks of plague, Renaissance physicians relied on standards of medicine very different from those of today, standards based on theories of the humors and miasmas. Miasmal atoms constituted an ill-defined but ubiquitous sense of "infection in the air." Foul orders rising from marshy waters, volcanic eruptions,

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[667] See O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 163-196.
[668] See Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 300-309.

and decaying waste degenerated into "sticky" and corrupt air particles that could spread disease by inhalation or even physical contact. One might contract the plague from simply walking past offensive refuse or from breathing in the stenches emanating from the sick.[669]

For similar reasons, many people in the Renaissance were afraid even to make eye contact with the infirm. This superstition stems from Aristotelian theories of sight. In contradistinction to the theory of extramission that informed Augustine's thought, many medical and optical theorists in the medieval and early modern periods argued that the eye captured rays of light—"likenesses" or "species"— sent forth by objects in the sensible environment. These rays, they believed, penetrate the pupil, pass along the optical nerve, and lodge themselves within the recesses of the beholder's cognitive faculties. Doctors at this time supposed that these same "species," when emitted by the infirm, could transmit disease, as well.[670]

Faced with the task of creating an altarpiece meant to protect against the plague, a sickness brought on by sin and ostensibly spread by foul air particles and polluted forms of vision, Andrea del Sarto created a novel pictorial conceit designed to counterbalance each of these issues. He aligned theories of atmospheric color with the notion of visionary experience, creating a pictorial conceit that accords with discussions of "sweetness." He engaged an exegetical tradition that alludes at once to the Holy Spirit, to the substance of divinity, to the Incarnation of Christ, and to healing powers of St. Peter's shadow. He accomplished all this, addressing the demands of his commission, by effectively merging some of the most advanced and

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[669] Cipolla, *Miasmas and Disease*, 1-9.
[670] Berger, "Mice, Arrows, and Tumors," 51.

sophisticated discussions of "art," as we would understand the term today, with some of the most ancient and complex imperatives of the Christian faith. The most significant of these imperatives is the idea of reform, a notion fundamentally concerned with the health of the human soul. In this regard, we are addressing that consistent preoccupation that runs through Andrea del Sarto's entire career as a panel painter. This very preoccupation touched the *Noli me tangere*, flavored the San Gallo *Annunciation*, and illuminated the *Madonna of the Harpies*. It allowed us to envision the *Disputation on the Trinity* and savor in the Luco *Pietà*. It looms large, here, as well, in the shadows of the *Gambassi Altarpiece*.

Epilogue

Upon his death at the age of forty-four, Andrea del Sarto was laid to rest in SS. Annunziata, which, at that point, was both a church of supreme importance dedicated to the Virgin and, in some respects, a temple to the artist's own talent. One of Andrea's assistants sought to honor his master in this regard. He asked a Florentine humanist of note to compose an epitaph. He then had that epitaph carved into a marble tablet and set within the church. Vasari tells us that certain citizens charged with the care of SS. Annunziata resented the tablet being set up without their permission and had it removed before 1538.[671] But in the seventeenth century, a friar more sympathetic to memorials, a friar who perhaps recognized Andrea's many contributions to the artistic traditions of the Seicento, had a bust of the painter placed in the Chiostro dei Voti.[672] There, the bust joined Andrea's own self-portrait in the far right of his *Journey of the Magi* (Fig.74), the fresco he completed in 1511. He is the heavily-damaged pointing figure gazing out at the spectator, standing alongside his friends, Jacopo Sansovino (the full-length figure) and, just visible at the picture's edge, the musician Francesco Ajolle.[673]

When I visited the Annunziata in September of 2013, this fresco was undergoing some much-needed restoration. I was able to glimpse the restorer working on the left side of the painting and watch, somewhat curious I have to admit, as she deftly considered the weathered figures, brush in one hand, cigarette in the other. It

[671] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 396-397.
[672] Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 195.
[673] Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, 353.

struck me at that moment that soon the two of us would be engaged in parallel tasks. When she turned her attention to the right side of the painting, she would be scrutinizing the traces of the artist's brush, attempting to discern his methods of self-imaging. My discussion of Andrea's altarpieces, likewise, has attended to the matter of artistic self-fashioning. By my account, and in ways that invite comparisons with a paradigm of living known as the *vita mixta*, this matter is inextricably linked to the artist's increasingly sophisticated contemplation of reform theology.[674] Everything about his altarpieces—his skillful handling of the brush, his eloquent *disegno* and brilliant *colore*—triggers a type of contemplation that focused on the incomprehensible mysteries of the faith. This proposition begs the question as to what Andrea himself might have thought about his professional activities. It invites us to consider, as well, what Andrea's example might tell us about the experience of being an artist in sixteenth-century Italy.

There is reason to suppose that Andrea del Sarto was a pious individual.[675] We know that Andrea was generous, that, for instance, he donated a fourth of his payment for the *Madonna of the Harpies* back to the Franciscan convent out of "*amore Dei*."[676] We know that he signed his San Gallo *Annunciation* by dedicating his work to the glory of the Virgin. We know, as well, that he cultivated relationships among important religious institutions; that members of those institutions sought him out when they wished to adorn their facilities with religious art; that he participated in confraternities; and that at least one of those organizations, the Compagnia di San

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[674] See Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance*, 95. The *vita mixta* describes a way of life that combines the contemplative practices of ascetic monasticism with learned engagement in worldly affairs.

[675] Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 1, 1-13; Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 67-93.

[676] See Freedberg, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 74-75.

Sebastiano, held a mass for his soul after he died.[677] These anecdotal details may seem unexceptional given Christianity's ubiquity within Renaissance society, but for that very reason, they remind us of an important point. Andrea del Sarto operated within the inherited framework of the Christian faith, a faith that essentially hung in the air like the particles of colored light in his *Gambassi Altarpiece*.

When placed against this cultural backdrop, Andrea's repeated efforts to visualize, to pictorially form and, we might say, reform religious mysteries take on deeply suggestive properties. In a real sense, each painting examined in this dissertation required the artist to search for the type of spiritual understanding that he was inviting his audience to seek for themselves. While these efforts—intrinsically meditative as well as artistic—were not exactly private, I suspect that they were profoundly personal. Andrea's professional endeavors led him across an arresting terrain of thought, from the splendor of Christ's body to the wonders of the Trinity, from the wonders of the Trinity to the real presence of the Eucharist, through the shadowy nuances of light as metaphor and into the illuminating obscurities of scripture and theology.

This pattern of prolonged spiritual exploration seems to echo in two of the most thought-provoking paintings Andrea made for SS. Annunziata. His so-called *Dead Christ* (Fig.75) is a hauntingly beautiful fresco. It has suffered over time and because of its removal to the Accademia, but it retains much of its original power to beguile the eye. A strong, raking light falls upon Christ, who appears seated in his shadowy tomb. His body, expertly defined in terms of anatomy, resonates with the neutral hues of the surrounding area, while pockets of color—the yellow cloth upon

[677] See Shearman, *Andrea del Sarto*, vol. 2, 403, Doc. 112.

which rest the instruments of the Passion, the red garment that covers the savior's groin, as well as the subtle crimson of his blood—accentuate the markers of Christ's sacrifice. This emphasis is an important narrative cue. For Andrea has perfectly positioned the figure between states of slumber and wakefulness, that is, between death and resurrection, between darkness and light. Christ's arms hang gently, turning slightly to expose the wounds on his palms, but his feet are firmly planted, as if about to support his weight. The position of his head is equivocal, in that we cannot tell if it hangs or if Christ is lifting it up. The suggestive quality of Christ's pose gains in intensity in view of the fact that Andrea gives the spectator a clear picture of the damage inflicted by the crown of thorns. This juxtaposition, where traces of the Passion appear on a body in transit, a body that is still and yet moving between this world and the next, makes Andrea's fresco just as mysterious as Rosso's slightly later (but much more famous) panel.[678] The way light falls on the form of Andrea's Christ, accentuating his muscular corporality, alludes to the basic nature of his being God incarnate. The evidence of his suffering and the hint of his Resurrection adumbrate the immensity of his love, while the evident care Andrea took in articulating these ideas speaks to a level of attentiveness that theologians, Augustine especially, would describe in similar terms as *amore Dei.*

Andrea's earlier but equally evocative panel, the *Christ Redeemer* (Fig.76), which is still located in the Annunziata, is a perfect complement to his *Dead Christ* fresco. In this intimate bust-length rendering of his features, Christ emerges from the shadowy depths of chiaroscuro, wearing a bright red garment and a quiet expression.

[678] See Stefaniak, "Replicating Mysteries of the Passion," 677-738; Shearman, "The *Dead Christ* by Rosso Fiorentino," 148-172.

He holds his hands across his chest, displaying the wounds of his crucifixion. But, here, he is very much alive. Andrea has used all of his considerable talents to present Christ as present, both physically and psychologically. He peers out at the spectator with a warm gaze and slightly flushed cheeks, conveying a sense of inward intensity that is both visually pleasing, as an example of artistic virtuosity, and spiritually moving. Upon seeing this panel, according to Bocchi, "one is inspired to a sense of majesty and reverence...contemplating it, the flame of devotion is lit."[679]

The effect Bocchi ascribes to this picture derives from the fact that it has few direct iconographic precedents. The format stems from the iconic tradition, specifically from the "Man of Sorrows" theme, where Jesus appears broken and bloody, in bust length, and with his wounded hands held across his chest. While maintaining this familiar compositional schema, however, Andrea has inverted the mood and tone of the pictorial prototype. His is a joyous vision of the risen savior. The figure's immediacy, his anatomical verisimilitude and piercing gaze, speak to Christ's victory over death, to the redemptive purpose of his sacrifice and suffering, and ultimately to Christ's enduring presence in the world.

This last notion aligns beautifully with the purpose of Andrea's painting. In the sixteenth century, as today, the *Christ Redeemer* adorned the exterior of a sacramental tabernacle, which many theologians discussed as a metaphor for the tomb, as well as Mary's womb. In a rather literal sense, then, the issues of pictorial likeness and divine presence collide in and around this small panel. Andrea del Sarto's gifted rendering of Christ makes the savior inescapably alive in the mind of the devout beholder. This realization directs attention to the Eucharist contained in

[679] Quoted in Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 101.

the tabernacle itself and thus to the rituals and beliefs that allow worshipers to participate in Christ's Church, his living body. As in so many of his paintings, the experience of Andrea's *Christ Redeemer* thus adopts a mysterious structure. We might describe this experience as annunciatory, incarnational, or Eucharistic, but the effect is what matters: the moving power of Andrea's art compels the beholder to welcome the Word into his or her flesh.

I think that we have to imagine something similar taking place with regard to Andrea del Sarto himself as he created these pictures, which, together, arguably constitute a more fitting monument to the artist than the portraits on display in the Chiostro dei Voti. In these two paintings, Andrea contemplated, envisioned, and then rendered visible the mysteries pertaining to Christ's body. If we are right about him being a pious individual, then for all of his social ambitions, we are dealing with a painter who most likely thought of his professional activities as a type of spiritual exercise, and more specifically, as a means of personal renewal. In other words, we have been describing an "art of reform" in the purest sense. Andrea del Sarto was not a painter who attempted to change the institutions of religious art, who felt the need to rethink its categories, or challenge its status. He was a painter who challenged himself, who made the means of visible expression into a vehicle for his personal communion with Christ.

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