JUDAISM *and* CHRISTIAN ART
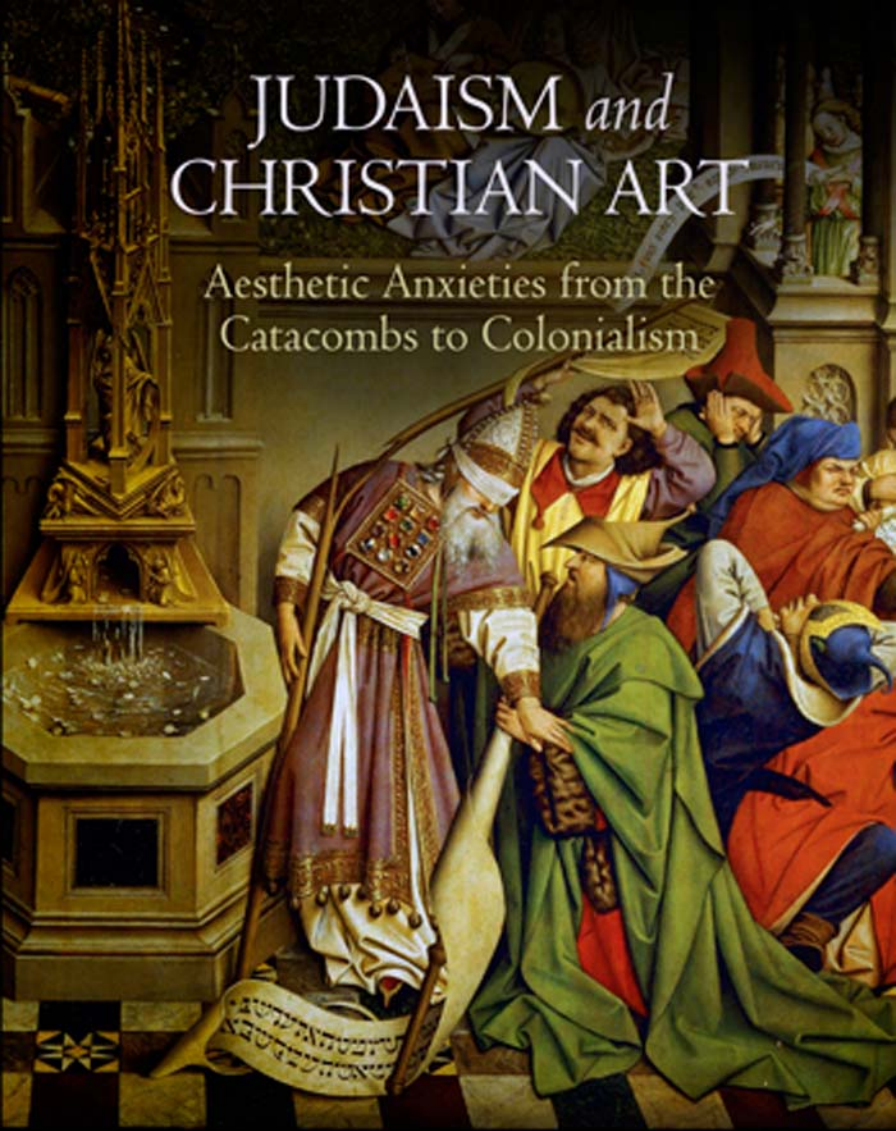
Aesthetic Anxieties from the Catacombs to Colonialism

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CHAPTER 11

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Poussin's Useless Treasures

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For the Augenblicks: Richard, Irene, and Eva

In the spring of 1647, Nicolas Poussin was hard at work on a set of seven pictures illustrating the holy sacraments of the Catholic church. He had already completed one full set for his chief supporter in Rome, the antiquarian Cassiano dal Pozzo. But then his French patron, Paul Fréart de Chantelou, had jealously demanded copies for himself—and Poussin had adroitly parlayed the request into an entirely new commission: not mere copies of the dal Pozzo series, but seven original paintings.[1] This second set of *Sacraments* would turn out to be the capstone of his career. Yet the work was long in completion, and Chantelou was demanding. *Baptism*, completed in 1646, was judged a disappointment. So when, on June 3, 1647, Poussin wrote to inform his patron that *Penance* was ready for crating, he took care to underscore the "loving diligence" with which he had executed the work (Figure 11.1).[2] He even made a stab at humor: "I am now sending you the *penance* I have made; I do not know if it will be enough to erase the blame for past faults."[3] He had been working up the picture for three years.

In both the series for Chantelou and the earlier one for dal Pozzo, Poussin illustrated most of the sacraments with biblical exempla. *Penance*, in each case, shows Christ's dinner at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–39): "And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's

11.1. Nicolas Poussin, *Penance,* 1647. Duke of Sutherland Collection, on loan to National Gallery of Scotland, Edinbugh. Used by kind permission.

house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.'' Poussin set this story in a Roman-style dining room. He put a lot of effort into ensuring the correctness of period detail.[4] What sort of *triclinia* should be used? How should they be arranged? How should the guests be seated? Poussin was, however, willing to jettison accuracy when the situation demanded. For example, his source for Roman dining customs, the *De arte gymnastica* of Girolamo Mercuriale (Venice, 1601), dictated that the host should sit at center; Poussin placed Simon the Pharisee at right, directly opposite Christ, in order to produce a bilateral contrast between Jew and messiah.[5] One consequence of this arrangement is that the penitent Magdalene is at the extreme left of the picture; Simon's startled gaze runs the full length of the canvas to reach her. The picture's chief dramatic action is not Mary's act of contrition but Simon's reaction to it, as described in Luke 7:39: ''And the Pharisee, who had invited him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner.''

11.2. Anonymous, after Nicolas Poussin, *Penance*, original c. 1636–40. Present location unknown. Photo after von Henneberg, 1987.

Here, to borrow Jean Starobinski's description of Corneille, "vision is the real point at which the action culminates."[6] For Poussin, the story of Christ's visit to the house of Simon was as much about visual recognition, its stakes and vicissitudes, as it was about penance.

It is useful, in this regard, to compare the picture for Chantelou with the earlier version for Cassiano dal Pozzo (destroyed by fire in 1816 but known through copies).[7] In the earlier version, a pillar at center bore a carved emblem: an open hand with an eye staring from its palm (Figure 11.2).[8] As Jean Badouin glossed this *manu oculata* in his *Recueil d'Emblèmes divers* (1638–39), it conveys the principle that "one must, so to speak, touch what people report with one's finger, before believing in it."[9] Blazoned on the Pharisee's house, it provides a key to his action and, by extension, to the underlying *pensée* of the picture as a whole.[10] Essentially contradicting the Pauline definition of faith as "the evidence

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of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), the emblem suggests the literalism of Pharisaic vision, its failure to see with *les yeux de la foi*, the eyes of faith, to recognize the Word in the flesh.

Although Poussin omitted the emblem from the version for Chantelou, he compensated by altering the costume of the Pharisees. Instead of generic Oriental garb, complete with turbans, they now wear carefully researched rabbinical attire. Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey have drawn attention to the inscribed bands over their foreheads.[11] These bands seem intended to represent phylacteries or *tefillin*, which Poussin (like some other gentile artists) has confused with the *tallit*, or prayer scarf. The inscriptions themselves, however, are not those that belong inside a phylactery. Instead, Poussin has taken the opportunity to blazon a motto across the Pharisee's brow. The text, as Cropper and Dempsey were the first to observe, is a subtly modified version of Psalm 25:15. Where the Bible reads, "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord," the headbands say, "Mine eyes are ever toward *the letter of the Law of* the Lord." The result may be bad Hebrew but it usefully glosses Simon's action. "His blind faith in the written law renders him unable to recognize the Lord, even with eyes turned full upon him; and this in its turn renders even more poignant Poussin's representation of the acknowledgment of Christ by a simple woman from the city, the penitent Magdalene."[12] The Hebrew text, in other words, serves the same function as the emblem in the earlier version: it is a cipher-key to the picture's *pensée*.

The change from emblem to inscription had two consequences. First, it explicitly judaized Simon's failure of vision. In the first version, the generic emblem and Oriental attire entailed no explicit connection to Judaism per se. Confession and penance were topics of fierce debate between Catholics and Protestants in the seventeenth century, and one might argue that the dal Pozzo picture merely used Simon to figure the "heretical" denial of the sacrament by the Calvinists and Lutherans.[13] With the version for Chantelou, however, Judaism itself is inescapably at issue. The messiah's presence contravenes more than the conventional wisdom of emblem-books; it overthrows the Wisdom of the Jews.

Second, the change from emblem to inscription made the picture significantly more obscure. Who, after all, could be expected to understand the text on Simon's brow? Certainly not Poussin himself; he must have had help from one of the scholars in his Roman milieu in order to compose and transcribe this modified line from the twenty-fifth psalm.[14] In general, the ability to read Hebrew was quite rare in France.[15] It could even be suspect: François Béroalde de Verville tells a story of a man who brought a Hebrew book to church for a prank; although by his own admission he could read the words "no better than

a monkey," he left it in his pew to be discovered by canon, who, equally illiterate, promptly denounced him as a magician.[16] Just so, Poussin's friend Gabriel Naudé complained, "Someone who understands Hebrew well is taken for a Jew or a *marrano*; and those who study mathematics or the less commonplace sciences are suspected of being enchanters or magicians."[17] "Almost all the syllables of this language, and the punctuation marks as well, are admirable mysteries [*mystères admirables*]," wrote the historian Léonard Bertaut in 1662.[18] A passage from Corneille's *Le Menteur* (1644) dramatizes the situation. The lying Dorante claims to know how to make a powder that can resurrect the dead; asked to reveal the recipe, he replies: "I would give it to you, just to make you happy, but the secret consists of a few words of Hebrew which are so hard to pronounce that, for you, they would be but useless treasures."[19] Hebrew contains the secret of defeating death, but nobody can read it. Just so, Poussin's text—a spell of sorts for unlocking the meaning of the picture—will have been for Chantelou a "useless treasure." All the more puzzling, therefore, that the artist should have told his patron, "The subject is represented in such a way that it seems to me that there is no need for interpretation provided only that one has read the Evangelist."[20] The effort that Poussin must have expended to obtain and transcribe the text, not to mention its importance to the picture, makes this statement puzzling.

What is going on here? Why present one's patron with a text he cannot read, a key that itself requires decryption? Having done so, why disavow the picture's complexity? These circumstantial questions give rise to more important ones about the picture itself. For reading, and the failure to read, are central to the narrative action: the chief drama, again, is Simon's failure properly to recognize the Saviour, hence to read the prophecies of His coming. But the Hebrew text makes reading a problem for the beholder as well. What, then, is the relationship between the gaze of the Pharisee, and that of the picture's own spectators? And why should Hebrew writing, specifically, be the way to figure this crux? To answer such questions requires an account of early modern concepts of the image and its relation to the written word, and of the role of Judaism—a certain idea of Judaism—in articulating and stabilizing such concepts.

There were few Jews in France in Poussin's day.[21] Expelled in 1394, they had begun to trickle back during the sixteenth century. Bordeaux was an important center for refugee *marranos* from Spain and Portugal (including Montaigne's family on his mother's side), as was Rouen; Avignon was home to remnants of "the Pope's Jews"; Metz had a small but growing community.[22] But the Bourbon kings maintained an official proscription on Judaism; France was in this respect far stricter than England, the Netherlands, or Italy. For most French

people, Jews were literally a "people of the book," known through literary representations and sermonizing. Cardinal de Richelieu was an avid collector of Hebrew manuscripts, which were hard to come by, and printed books in Hebrew could be purchased in Paris at the shop of an oddly named Rabbi L'Abbé.[23] As for Jewish learning, savants like Marin Mersenne and Blaise Pascal were familiar with talmudic and kabbalistic scholarship, and Maimonides remained a basic authority on questions of idolatry.[24] Yet, as we have seen, few people could actually read such texts in the original. Although Hebrew was taught at Port-Royal, even Pascal would have relied on translations.[25] In 1640, there were already efforts underway in London to establish a College devoted to Judaic scholarship, but the idea would have been unthinkable in France.[26] As a result, most French people—even educated ones—were ignorant of the realities of Jewish life. In 1637, the Venetian rabbi Leon da Modena published the first account of Jewish customs by a professing Jew for a gentile audience, under the title *Historia de' riti ebrei*; although it appeared in English by 1650, a French translation would have to wait until 1674.[27] Poussin's confusion in the matter of phylacteries was, in this respect, par for the course.

Untrammeled by facts, the French imagination was free to make of Judaism what it wished. In particular, it used Judaism as a way to think figurality and literalism. The guiding assumption, rooted in the Pauline epistles, was that the Old Testament was a cipher or, in Augustine's phrase, "a promise in figure."[28] Erich Auerbach, in a classic study, has shown how *figura* evolved in Late Antiquity from a rhetorical term for allusive discourse to a mode of reading that saw the Old Testament as a "pure phenomenal prophecy," every episode a prefiguration of salvation to come. "Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first."[29] Moses, for instance, was an *umbra* (shadow) or *figura* (figure) of Christ; the manna prefigured the eucharistic host, the brazen serpent prefigured the Crucifixion, just as Jewish circumcision prefigured Pauline "circumcision of the heart." Such interpretations in no way entailed that the Old Testament be merely an allegorical conceit. On the contrary, scriptural narratives were historically accurate in every particular; not so much the biblical text, but the very history of the world, was prophetic. Just as God was a real presence in the eucharistic Host even as the Host remained bread, so figural significance inhered in a biblical text that remained historically true.[30]

Judaism was a requisite foil to this figural or typological mode of reading. Where a radical allegoresis might deny the historical truth of the Old Testament narratives, hence the reality of Jewish history, Jews themselves were taken to embody the opposite error: literalism. As Augustine put it, they "accepted the

law in a carnal sense and did not understand its earthly promises as types [*fig-ures*] of heavenly things."[31] They attended only to the letter, not the spirit, of the Old Testament; and "the letter killeth" (2 Cor. 3:6). This view remained current in the seventeenth century.[32] Perhaps the only things on which Jesuits, Gallicans, and Jansenists could agree were that the Old Testament was figural, and that Jews were blind, carnal literalists. On the Jesuit side, authors like Juan Marquez, Antoine Girard, and Louis Richeome were firmly committed to typology and, by extension, to the notion of Judaic blindness.[33] Here is Richeome in a contemporary English translation: "The ancient Iewes could not write more clearly of the Figure of our Truth amongst the Shadowes of their Law: and he, that seeth not this Truth, brightly shining in the Sacrifice of the Law of Grace, is blinde at noone-day, and worse than a Iew."[34] At the opposite end of the political and theological spectrum, similar themes figure prominently in the writings of the Port-Royal scholars. As Pascal put it in a letter to Mlle de Roannez (October 1656):

For there are two perfect meanings, the literal and the mystical; and the Jews stopping at the one do not even think there is another and do not dream of searching for it. Just so the impious, on seeing natural effects, attribute them to nature without thinking that there is another author. And just as the Jews, on seeing a perfect man in Jesus Christ, did not think of seeking another nature in Him ("We did not think it was he," as, again, Isaiah put it), even so the heretics, on seeing the perfect appearance of the bread, do not think to seek another substance in it. All things cover up some mystery; all things are veils which cover God. Christians should recognize Him in everything.[35]

The figurality of the Old Testament, and the Jews' blindness to it—hence to Christ's true nature—were commonplaces. Richelieu subscribed to a version of this thesis, and the only difference between Pascal and his Jesuit nemeses in this regard was the severity with which the Jews were to be condemned for their obstinacy in misreading.

As Auerbach observed, figuralism tended to obscure the specifically Jewish character of the Old Testament.[36] Indeed, prior to the emergence of historical criticism in the later seventeenth century, the Old Testament was not available as a specifically *Jewish* text: what Pascal called *la perpetuité de la foi* subsumed it under a Christian reading.[37] This fact explains the availability of Old Testament narratives as exemplars in French discourse.[38] Moses, for instance, was the paradigmatic lawgiver for both Richelieu and the Parlement de Paris; David was the

exemplary opponent of tyranny for both monarchists and rebels.[39] Such references were varied and opportunistic, but they all assumed a non-Jewish Old Testament. When partisans of the Prince de Condé called him David to Mazarin's Goliath, for instance, the point was not that he was Judaic but that he was an underdog. In short, the Old Testament as such was not necessarily associated with Judaism, but a particular way of reading it certainly was.

But Jews were also understood to possess wisdom, albeit of a suspect type. Kabbalah was a source of fascination and contributed to the association of Judaism and sorcery. As Poussin's acquaintance Georges de Scudéry put it:

> As one can draw from the ingrate viper a powerful medicine . . . just so . . . the prudent reader . . . takes good from evil, light from shadow; sees the snare and avoids it wisely; and follows the main road to proceed securely. . . . With little effort one can follow the trails of the curious and wise kabbalists: to pass after them along these winding paths, and distinguish clarity from the Hebrew shadows. Everything the rabbis have written on the sublime, on the legitimate power of the great name of God, on the mysterious art of sacred numbers, and the occult power of images of them, in short, all the wisdom of ancient Judea, which she claims comes to her from the eternal Idea, which she claims to withdraw from the heavenly treasure-house, is to be found in these writings which we still preserve.[40]

In its mingled admiration and suspicion of Jewish lore, this text is typical of the period. For present purposes, the importance of kabbalism is that it stood as the antithesis of carnal literalism: it was rampant figurality, a cryptographic reading gone to a dangerous or ridiculous extreme.

In short, two tendencies dominated French representations of Jews and Judaism in Poussin's day. On the one hand, Judaism was a way to think about tropes. The Old Testament was "a promise in figure," with the corollary that the Jews were blind to this figurality. On the other, the Old Testament was exemplary, with the corollary that its narratives and heroes had no specifically Jewish character at all. These tendencies were symmetrical, in that each laid particular emphasis on paradigmatic relations. The former read the Old Testament as the base material sign of Christian truth, while the latter took the Old Testament itself as paradigmatic without reference to local (that is, Jewish) context. Each wound up effacing the Jewish specificity of the narrative. As a result, Judaism was less a matter of thematics or semiotics than of rhetoric and reading. Moses and the Old Testament were not inherently Jewish, but had to be judaized if and when the need arose. Conversely, particular modes of

reading—or, more accurately, particular travesties—could be "Jewish" regardless of circumstances.

Although working in Rome, where Judaism was legal and the ghetto well organized, Poussin adhered to many of these views. He was very much alive, for instance, to the figural or typological connotations of Old Testament.[41] A good illustration of his general attitude is the frontispiece he designed for the *Biblia Sacra* of 1642 (Figure 11.3). Engraved by Claude Mellan, it replaces the traditional allegories of Church and Synagogue with emblematic figures of Poussin's own devising. He identified them in a letter of 3 August: at left is History, at right Prophecy.[42] The latter is swathed in veils and holds a sphinx. Her veils represent the figural language of the Old Testament, as in 2 Corinthians 3:13–16 ("But even until this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart," etc.) or Pascal's sixteenth Provincial Letter ("Of Jesus Christ the Jews possessed only figures and veils, such as the manna and the paschal lamb").[43] The sphinx, Poussin says, stands for "Enigmatic Things," *Choses Énigmatiques* (for the Jesuit Juan Marquez, it represented *Figura*).[44] So total is Poussin's identification of the Old Testament with figural language that he can substitute for synagogue the personification of a rhetorical mode.[45]

Returning to the picture, Cropper and Dempsey have already shown that Poussin's Simon is a stock figure of Jewish carnality. Yet the cipher-key on his brow stresses that this literalism is, specifically, an attachment to the carnality of the text, as opposed to the evidence of the eyes: "Mine eyes are ever toward *the letter of the Law of* the Lord." Simon attends to letters—he reads—when he should simply be "turning his eyes" toward Christ. To make this point, Poussin asks his audience to read words they cannot understand. It is, of course, perfectly possible to appreciate *Penance* without reading the Hebrew inscription; people have been doing it for hundreds of years. But the words are clearly important, given the effort that went into producing them. Poussin must have been counting on someone, at some point, actually reading the inscription— otherwise, why bother? Insofar as he knew that his audience could not read Hebrew, he must have expected people to get the meaning at second hand (much as Poussin himself must have found someone to help him produce the text in the first place). Such ostentatious erudition was the artist's stock in trade. But, exactly because of its subtle modification of the biblical text, this inscription cannot be dismissed as mere pedantry. While Cropper and Dempsey showed that the text glosses the narrative action and reveals the metaphysical stakes of Simon's gaze, its decipherment is equally important. The text is about reading, but its own reading is also at issue.

What matters, in short, is not just the content of the Hebrew inscription, but also its form and, by extension, its address to beholders. These beholders—

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11.3. Nicolas Poussin (engraved by Claude Mellan), frontispiece to *Biblia Sacra* (Paris, 1641). Photo courtesy Epstein Archive, University of Chicago._

people like Chantelou, educated but unable to read Hebrew—are in a position symmetrical to that of Simon himself. Unlike the Pharisee, all such beholders will immediately recognize Christ. But the text is a different matter. Confronted with unreadable characters, "the letter of the Law of the Lord," most French people would have had to take their meaning at the word of others. They would have had to see with the eye of faith. In this way, the predicament of the narrative's main figure—Simon—reiterates that of the beholder of the narrative itself. *Penance* is an allegory or dramatization of its own beholding. The Pharisee cannot "read" the scene that unfolds before his eyes; if he could do so, if he could see as the Magdalene does, he would recognize the Savior come into his house. Just so, the beholder (in theory) cannot read the line of Hebrew. Simon stands to Christ, the "image of the invisible God," *imago Dei invisibilis* (Col. 1:15), as the beholder stands to the Hebrew word, the "letter of the Law of the Lord." Simon's reaction is disbelief. That of the beholder, who cannot make sense of the Hebrew line, is (must be) faith—and submission to the authority of the learned.

The picture establishes a hierarchy of text and image. Chantelou, or any other beholder illiterate in Hebrew, cannot be said actually to *read* the Pharisaic text at all; he merely *sees* it, learns from another the meaning of the *chose énigmatique*. The Hebrew characters are also depictions, part of the furniture of the tableau. It is as pictures of characters, rather than as words to be read, that they function for those who cannot understand them; they are, literally, "scripture for the unlettered." Even for the literate, however, simply reading the text would not suffice. Taken at face value, *à la lettre*, the words assert the importance of the letter of the Law. In their narrative and pictorial context, however, they admonish the opposite. We should *not* fix our eyes upon the letter of the Law but, like the Magdalene, should see Christ in our midst, "in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29). The picture contravenes the text, the Image contravenes the Word—which is, of course, exactly what this picture is all about.[46]

The result, however, is not a simple negation of the text. "Do we then make void the Law through faith?" asks St. Paul (Rom. 3:31). "God forbid: yea, we establish the Law." Following Simon's gaze across the canvas, the eye scans from right to left. A number of Poussin's compositions share this leftward movement (e.g., *The Death of Sapphira*, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, *The Golden Calf*). In this case, however, the organization has special significance, for the composition and indeed the very style actually evolve as the eye proceeds. Everything flattens. The right side, where Simon sits, is cluttered, the figures posed at angles to the picture plane; a foot basin in the foreground establishes the spatial relations clearly, while a deep niche opens into the background. At left, by contrast, the foreground is blank, the niche is lost in shadow; the main

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figures are in profile with crisp silhouettes, and the black oblong of Christ's couch sounds the dominant note. Between the two, the principle of isocephaly keeps the diners' heads on a single row, producing a frieze-effect that counteracts the perspectival recession at center. At the same time, Poussin introduces several archaisms of style on the left side of the canvas, including yellow-gold highlights on Christ's tunic—a late Gothic technique.[47] Christ's pose, meanwhile, derives from ancient Greek banquet reliefs. In sum, the left is relatively flat, relatively hieratic, more in the manner of a quattrocento altarpiece than a post-Renaissance easel picture. By comparison with the twisting, dramatic figures at right, Christ and the Magdalene are close to being symbols. They are fully realized images, but they are like letters. The assimilation of painted figures to written ones was dear to Poussin. As he would remark in conversation with André Félibien the following year, "Just as the twenty-four letters of the alphabet serve to form our words and express our thoughts, so do the lineaments of the human body serve to express the various passions of the soul in order to make appear on the outside what one has in the mind."[48] On offer, however, is not a simple antithesis but, rather, a chiasm. For the deeper side, the spatially realized side, is the side of Simon the Pharisee, the side of the letter of the Law of the Lord, the side of script; while the flatter side, the alphabetic side, is that of Christ, the "image of the invisible God."

The cumulative result may be seen as a pictorial alternative to the Hebrew text. *Penance* is a set of characters to be scanned from right to left, like a line of Hebrew. It is legible, however, not as letters but as images comprehensible to anyone with eyes to see—"provided only that one has read the Evangelist." A line of text, that is, for Gentile eyes. The unreadable Hebrew script thus functions as the model for a composition that, in its narrative and in its programmatic opposition of word and image, seems the very negation of "the letter of the Law of the Lord." Which is to say, the text is, exactly, "a promise in figure," redeemed through integration into a picture of redemption.

By way of contrast, Simon Vouet's altarpiece in St. Merri in Paris treats its Hebrew text in a very different manner (Figure 11.4). It dates to 1647, hence is one of Vouet's last works (he died the following year).[49] Here four saints and two prisoners adore the Holy Name of God, which appears above them in radiance. Overlapping bodies and sharply receding architecture produce a congested semi-circle of pictorial space in the picture's lower half. As often in Counter Reformation altarpieces, a figure at lower right extends an arm in the direction of the beholder while looking at a miraculous vision in the upper part of the frame. Here, a blue-clad prisoner and a saint in a bishop's cassock perform the function: they reach out in our direction, connecting the depicted

11.4. Simon Vouet, *Adoration of the Holy Name* (1647). Paris, St. Merri. Photo: Scala/ White Images/Art Resource, New York.

world with our own. At left, on the other hand, heavy robes of black and gold block access to the foreground. The lower half of the picture thus establishes a discrete spatial zone, screened from the beholder while yet giving access. In the register immediately above are five putti against a flat gold background. Their placement describes a sagging arc that reiterates the arrangement of the mortals at ground level, but with fewer spatial cues. Color links the groups as well. Over the gold-clad saint at left is a blond putto; over the black-clad saint is a black-haired one. Over the saint in rose and gold is blond putto with a pink sash; over the blue-clad prisoners, a blue-clad putto; over the black saint in the background, a dark putto with a grey sash. In this way, the Vouet establishes a connection between the mortals and the putti, even as the picture becomes relatively flat and ethereal as the eye moves upward. The climax is the Holy Name itself: יהוה. Thus the contemplative beholder progresses from the real, lived space of the church into the congested pictorial space of the picture's lower half, to the related but relatively flat zone of the putti, to the frankly two-dimensional text of the Name. Like his rival Poussin, in other words, Vouet manipulates space to make the object of veneration into something relatively two-dimensional and script-like. But where Poussin knit this device into an elaborate dialectic of word and image, Judaic and Christian, Vouet gives a straightforward teleology—from the lived space of the beholder to the flat text of the Tetragrammaton. In so doing, he recuperates the Hebrew as object of Christian meditation, much as a figural reading of the Old Testament might do.

But Poussin's own intricacies were not lost on contemporaries. In 1656, his old friend Philippe de Champaigne painted the story of Christ and Simon for the refectory of Val-de-Grâce (Figure 11.5).[50] This picture has been the subject of important discussions by Claude Gandelmann and Louis Marin.[51] It contains numerous details characteristic of Champaigne—the grid-like creases on the table cloth, the open curtain in the background, the pellucid spatial construction, the emphasis on reflections and glitter, the pastel tones. Yet it owes so much to Poussin that it seems fair to call it a response to the *Penance* for Chantelou.[52] The basic compositions are closely similar. In a 1668 *conference* on Poussin's *Eliezer and Rebecca*, Champaigne would seem almost willfully to misread his former colleague and friend; here, however, he was a remarkably sympathetic interpreter.[53] Gone are Poussin's left-to-right movement, the archaisms and the all-important phylactery. Instead, Champaigne provides a strongly centralized composition, illustrating a slightly later moment in the story, when Christ turns to the Pharisee, saying "Dost thou see this woman?" (Luke 7:44). There is, however, a Hebrew text embroidered on the hem of the Pharisee's garment and on his prayer shawl. Three sections are visible, all from the opening of the Decalogue as it appears in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 6. On the veil is

11.5. Philippe de Champaigne, *Christ at the House of Simon the Pharisee* (1656). Nantes. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

Shema Yisrael, "Hear, O Israel," and on the mantle the first commandment according to the conventional numeration of the day: "I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image."[54] Champaigne follows Poussin in seeing the meal at the house of Simon as a narrative centrally concerned with images and their relation to texts. But where Poussin emphasized the ethical and ethnic stakes of recognition and reading in the field of vision, Champaigne is more concerned with semantics. Perhaps because he was painting for a royal convent, and deeply involved personally with the Jansenists of Port-Royal (where Hebrew was taught), he seems to have taken some familiarity with Hebrew for granted. Instead of trading on the sheer obscurity of the text, at any rate, he plays a sort of game with the written words themselves. He hides certain key words in the folds of the Pharisee's garment, including "I am" and "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." God's statement of his own being is hidden in Simon's costume:

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he is the *Deus absconditus*, the Hidden God (Isa. 45:15), the *verbum absconditum*, the Hidden Word (Job 4:14), literally obscured behind the Pharisaic "veil." As with Poussin, painting *makes visible* this aspect of the text, this aspect of a specifically Hebrew Bible, hence this aspect of Judaism: its carnality. "Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" (Rom. 2:21). But, to repeat, the central difference between the two painters concerns, precisely, the comprehensibility of Hebrew. For Poussin, legibility as such is at stake; for Champaigne, the legibility of the text is not at issue so much as the visibility or occlusion of particular characters. In the one case, Judaism articulates a principle of utter inscrutability that painting, uniquely, can render visible; it is a differential element that organizes the picture from its spatial layout on upward. In the other, the inscribed letter of the Law is important as such, for it is only through attention to those letters—those *Hebrew* letters—that one can see the very occlusion of God's being, the hiddenness of the *Dieu caché*.

Poussin reverted to many of these themes with *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, painted in 1653 for the landscape architect André Le Nôtre (Figure 11.6).[55] The picture shares a number of features with the *Penance* of 1647. Like its predecessor, it articulates a narrative of feminine penance, a Hebrew text, and larger issues of legibility and vision. Even the composition bears a structural resemblance to *Penance*: two foreground groups flanking a perspectival recession at center, with the action consisting of a movement right-to-left parallel to the picture plane. Poussin was in the habit of repeating and revising compositions over many years, returning doggedly to certain themes and narratives; Le Nôtre's painting may be another instance of this tendency.[56] Like Champaigne's painting for Val-de-Grâce, albeit in a more oblique fashion, it extends and clarifies the themes of the 1647 *Penance*. In this case, Poussin has discarded antiquarian mise-en-scène in favor of a spare, theatrical setting, "Classical" more in organization than in any use of period detail.[57] In Bellori's words, it expresses Christ's judgment "with a great sense of painting."[58]

The Gospel source (John 8:2–11) is worth quoting in full:

And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in their midst, they said unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he

11.6. Nicolas Poussin, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, 1653. Paris, Louvre 7282. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Poussin here combines several episodes from the Gospel narrative in a single *Augenblick*. In John, the Pharisees first dispute with Christ, then he stoops to write, stands, and stoops again; the Pharisees depart with Christ still on the ground; he then rises and addresses the sinner. Poussin shows all these episodes simultaneously. Some Pharisees are arguing, some leaving, some examining the writing in the dust; Christ, meanwhile, is gesturing to the woman. Such departures from narrative sequence were not unusual in Poussin's work, and they caused much consternation in the academic debates of the 1660s.[59] Critics deplored the seeming illogic of Poussin's temporal condensations, their violation of the protocols of history painting. As one viewer—often thought to be Philippe de Champaigne—complained of *The Israelites Receiving Manna*, Poussin had shown the manna falling even as the Israelites were awake and harvesting it, "*ce qui est contre le texte de l'Ecriture.*"[60] Charles Le Brun defended Poussin by arguing that painting is condemned to show a single moment, lacking literature's resource of temporal duration. Poussin, he suggested, was motivated by a higher truth: what mattered was not temporal unity, or the accurate representation of single moment, but the communication of a narrative's deeper significance. "These different states and these diverse actions took the place, for him, of discourse or words as means to convey his thought."[61] Although the picture presupposes familiarity with the Gospel narrative, it corresponds to no specific moment in the narrative discourse. It is, rather, a meditation on the narrative, a *pensée* in paint, with various episodes (*péripéties*) distributed over the canvas in juxtaposition.

Something similar is going on in the organization of space. On the one hand, Poussin alludes to a quintessentially durational art: theater. His *péripéties* occur as if on a stage, with strongly foreshortened "wings" and an architectural backdrop.[62] The result is a disjunction between the figures and their setting. While Poussin's organization of the "actors" decomposes narrative time into the simultaneous presentation of multiple instants, his organization of the "set" asserts coherence and consistency while evoking the orderly narrative sequence of Classical theater. But there is more to the matter. Counteracting the perspectival recession of the architecture are certain features that tend to *flatten* the

composition. Three strong diagonals run from upper right to lower left: the pointing arm of a Pharisee, the pointing arm of Christ, and the stairway in the furthest distance. Arrayed in parallel, the three lines suggest a single plane surface and reduce the sense of depth; the line of the stairway, in particular, carries through into the arms of the two Pharisees behind the adulteress, thereby knitting the foreground into the background (and conversely). Chromatic affinities complement these lines and further bind together the near and the far: a Madonna-like woman in the shadows and Christ out front wear matching blue and red combinations.[63] Tethering the two is the only pavement line to run all the way from foreground to background; Christ and the Marian woman toe the same line, walk the same tightrope. This line establishes spatial relations on the ground, but it also lies perpendicular both to the pointing arms in the foreground and to the stairway in the distance. Depth, consequently, is always in danger of collapsing into pattern work. To see the arms, stairway, and pavement as a series of right angles on the plane surface of the canvas is to bracket the very spatial relations that it is the job of the pavement line to establish.

In short, just as the painting both asserts and negates distinctions of narrative time, so it asserts and negates relations of foreground and background. There is an established sequence of events, but they are presented in and through simultaneity; there are determinate relations of foreground and background, but they are presented in and through planarity. The picture reads both as perfectly ordinary history painting and as a sort of diagram or a page of text.[64] As if to signal the importance of such organizing structures, one wall of the Temple is still under construction, exposing its very armature to view.

It is by means of this oddly duplex system that Poussin revisits *Penance*. The Pharisees do not wear phylacteries, nor even "correct" attire; they resemble in this regard their counterparts in the picture for dal Pozzo. But they remain addicts of the letter, for the group at right is puzzling over the odd Hebrew inscription that Christ has written in the dust (Figure 11.7). The Gospel does not say what these words were. According to Church tradition, *primo scripsit, postea protulit*, "First he wrote, then he attested."[65] On this view, the words spelled out the dictum, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Quite a few early modern artists included the Latin version of Christ's dictum in their renderings of this scene; others employed mere scratches, or omitted the writing entirely.[66] In Poussin's case, it is often assumed that the words in the sand follow precedent in spelling out the words of Christ.[67] Yet the idea is implausible (would Poussin have gone to the trouble to obtain a Hebrew translation of the Greek or Latin New Testament?) and, indeed, untenable. The inscription is almost, but not quite, illegible, yet it is possible to spell out the first word. It is אנכי, "I am," as in, "I am the LORD thy God, which
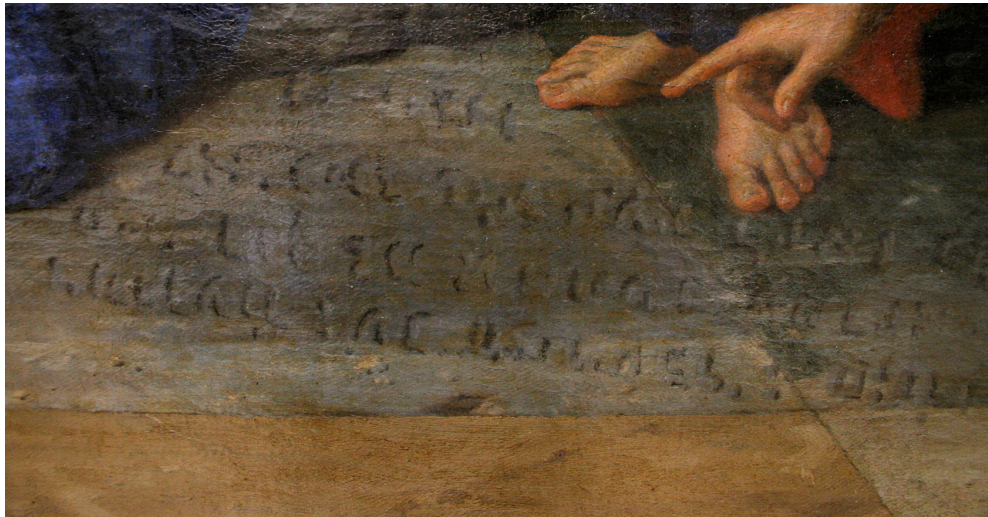
11.7. Detail of Nicolas Poussin, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*: the writing in the dust. Photo: Richard Neer.

brought thee out of the land of Egypt . . .'' (Ex. 20: 2). This word is the very one conspicuous in its absence from Philippe de Champaigne's picture for Val-de-Grâce. In Poussin's case, however, the text quickly peters out into barely legible characters: not quite Hebrew, but a sort of *hébraïsant* scrawl.

It is possible to spend a long time looking at this inscription. An informal survey of scholars at the University of Chicago, all versed in Hebrew, suggests that the inscription is at once enticing and frustrating, not quite nonsensical enough for immediate dismissal, nor sufficiently cogent actually to yield a reading. Instead, ''*mystère admirable*,'' it invites hours of fruitless headscratching. The beholder, in this situation, winds up in much the same situation as the Pharisees in the picture: pointing, puzzling, and conversing. Which is surely to the point: as in the 1647 *Penance*, the Pharisaic dilemma becomes the beholder's own.[68] It is as though Poussin had combined that painting with *The Arcadian Shepherds* to produce a narrative of reading in a Christian, as opposed to a pagan, context. In this case, however, although the text states the existence of God, it remains otherwise a cipher. A literate informant will not help.[69]

Once again, the distinction of word and image is at stake. For just as the Pharisees point at the ambiguous text, so Christ points to the adulteress. The symmetrical gestures suggest comparability, even root affinity, between the two: the adulteress is, in some way, like the Hebrew lines. Indeed, the pointing hands and rigid arms suggest nothing so much as *yadayim,* "hands," the hand-shaped

pointers used for reading the Torah (Figure 11.8).[70] But if the woman is a text of sorts, still she has a figural meaning that painting is uniquely positioned to show. Even as Christ points to her, there intervenes between them the distant woman holding an infant. The position of her arms mimics, in reverse, that of the adulteress; where the one holds a child, the other hugs herself in sorrow. The red and blue costume assimilates her to Christ, but also to any number of High Renaissance Madonnas (Raphael's Sistine or Small Cowper Madonnas, for instance). Exceeding the letter of the Gospel text, this Marian image is not really part of the narrative; the Virgin appears, literally, from amid the shadows (*umbrae*) of the Temple.[71] Christ points to her figure even as he points to the adulteress—points, that is, to two things simultaneously. Poussin had used this device elsewhere, notably in the closely related *Death of Sapphira*: Peter strikes Sapphira dead with a gesture for failing to tithe, and as he does so he points simultaneously to a tiny figure in the background who gives alms to a beggar (Figure 11.9).

In *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, this *making visible* of a double ostentation is a pictorial equivalent to figuralism. In pointing to the adulteress in forgiveness, Christ points to the Virgin, hence to the age of grace and charity that she brought forth. As the *Glossa Ordinaria* put it, "The woman taken in adultery signifies the Synagogue, which according to the tradition of the Fathers adulterated the law of Moses."[72] So she does here, in her affinity with the Hebrew line that so exercises the Pharisees. Yet Poussin reveals the mystic or figural meaning of this "text," its redemption in Christ's forgiveness.

Crucially, however, this simultaneity is visible only in and through a suspension of the picture's spatial organization. As we have seen, the composition combines two spatial logics. In the theatrical or scenographic mode of the stage-set, the Marian figure is in the distance, far behind Christ and the adulteress; he does not point *at* her but *before* her. Yet the mode of the *pensée* and the *péripétie*, the perpendicular and the plane, tells a different story. Here the canvas becomes an array of episodes in juxtaposition; seen in this manner—seen "flat"—Christ does point to the Madonna (or, more specifically, the hem of her garment). It is exactly when the canvas is seen like a page of text, as a plane surface and not an open window, that the figural meaning becomes apparent.

Where the 1647 *Penance* had contrasted depth of field on the right with flatness on the left, here the entire picture is at once recessive and planar. This disjunction is that between a literal reading and a figural one, between seeing Christ as pointing at an adulterous woman and seeing him as pointing at a figure of grace and charity. "Read the story *and* the picture," said Poussin to Chantelou of *The Israelites Receiving Manna*.[73] The advice holds good in this

11.8. Torah pointer (*yad*), Ferrara, mid-seventeenth century. Silver. Jerusalem, U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art. Photo reproduced by courtesy U. Nahon Museum of Italian Jewish Art, Jerusalem.

11.9. Nicolas Poussin, *The Death of Saphira*, c. 1652 (detail). Paris, Louvre inv. 7286.
Photo: Richard Neer.

case; story (the space of diegesis) and picture (the space of *péripétie* and *pensée*) both claim attention.

The Hebrew text in the dust, meanwhile, is illegible due in part to its integration into the space of the narrative. It is subordinate to the spatial and discursive regime of scenographia. Relative to the beholder, it is upside-down; placement on the receding pavement distorts it further. Even if the words made sense (which they do not), they would be hard to read; one must lean forward and peer at the vertical canvas just as the Pharisees stoop and peer at the horizontal ground. Neither point of view yields a cogent meaning; the text remains one of Poussin's "Enigmatic Things," *Choses Énigmatiques.* The upshot, however, is that the Hebrew lines are flat within the scenographic or narrative space—flat for the Pharisees—but distorted and strongly recessive for the picture's beholder, that is, for us. They are thus antithetical to the Madonna figure, who establishes the middle distance within the scenographia, yet is nonetheless an object of Christ's gesture for a beholder with eyes to see. The lines exist only within the space of the narrative, while the pair of the adulteress and the Madonna work simultaneously in flatness and in depth. The Hebrew, that is, exists only in a carnal, literalist mode that sees the narrative but not its deeper significance. As in *Penance*, the Pharisees keep their eyes turned toward the

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letter; but in this case, the letter is all but void of meaning, stating the Lord's "I am" but little more.

With this picture, Poussin decomposes the spatial and temporal regimes of classical painting: narrative sequence becomes the simultaneous presentation of *péripéties*, scenographia becomes the flatness of a page. Yet the result of these internal disjunctions is anything but subversive or paradoxical. Academic cavils notwithstanding, the picture has always been perfectly comprehensible. Even the text is not "austerely" nonsensical, to use the terms of contemporary American philosophy; it is not patent gibberish, but composed of meaningful characters that occasionally cohere into words and even statements ("I am").[74] So far from undoing the protocols of classical history painting (God forbid!), the picture takes them as its very ground ("yea, we establish the Law"). Poussin establishes precise conditions of intelligibility. It is necessary, first, to "read the Evangelist," for without background familiarity with the Gospel story his pictorial discourse will not be comprehensible; will not, in fact, be recognizable as a temporal *decomposition* at all. Just so, it is necessary to accept the conventions of perspectival recession in order to recognize the background Madonna as a *figural* counterpart to the adulteress. Seeing the collapse into flatness as, precisely, a *collapse*, as a pictorial *figura*, presupposes the normative value of pictorial depth. Beholders can and do establish logical relations, as Le Brun would have insisted. They establish them on the negative, as those rules, that Law, which Poussin has contravened—hence, by the logic of this picture, redeemed. As Christ redeemed the adulteress, that is, the Synagogue.

Poussin, in short, is trafficking in the ineffable. He establishes a transcendent perspective from which sense and nonsense are clearly distinct. For one sort of viewer—someone like Simon in *Penance*, or Philippe de Champaigne when he complained about *The Israelites Receiving Manna*—the picture is a kind of nonsense, a contravention of Scripture and of the rules of history painting. For another, however, it is exactly the violation of those rules that reveals the ineffable conditions of sense under the New Covenant. For present purposes, the crucial point is that the paradigm for this act of discrimination is the recognition of a *Hebrew* text as what might nowadays be called "substantial nonsense" relative to the Christian, iconic *péripétie*. The Hebrew lines literally ground the picture. They instantiate the standing conventions of intelligibility in history painting: ordered, sequential progression (one letter after another, follow them with a finger or a *yad*) and perspectival recession (marking out the pavement). But their significance only becomes visible in the recognition that their true meaning lies in Christ's gesture, in attending to Christ's gesture at the expense of the words on the ground.

In this way, Hebrew becomes a way to think history painting's grounding laws of space, time, and legibility, laws that Poussin states precisely in order to transcend them in his figural juxtapositions. The picture is not gibberish to just the extent, in just the same way, that the Hebrew text is not: its substance becomes visible within a matrix of figuralism. It is, of course, absolutely necessary that the words be in Hebrew if they are to fit into the narrative of charity and redemption on offer. That, indeed, is the special usefulness of Hebrew to this picture: as the figure of a set of rules, a law, a covenant, which is essential and yet transcended; which is revealed as essential in the moment of its transcendence in Christ. What might look like incoherence or paradox turns out to be redemption. An uncharitable viewer might call it *mauvaise foi.*

NOTES

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1. For a recent discussion of this episode, see M. Franken, "'Pour mon honneur et pour vostre contentement': Nicolas Poussin, Paul Fréart de Chantelou and the Making and Collecting of Copies," in *The Learned Eye: Regarding Art, Theory, and the Artist's Reputation*, ed. M. van den Doel and E. van de Wetering (Amsterdam, 2005), 181–89.

2. J. Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin* (Paris, 1994), no. 162.

3. C. Jouanny, ed., *Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin publiée d'après les originaux* (Paris, 1911), 356: "Je vous enuoye maintenant la penitense. que jei fette Je ne sey si elle suffira pour effacer la coulpe des fautes passées." On Poussin's correspondence with Chantelou, see H. Raben, "'An oracle of painting': Re-reading Poussin's Letters," *Simiolus* 30 (2003): 34–53; P. Mason, "The Letters as Deferred Presence: Nicolas Poussin to Paul Fréart de Chantelou, 28 April 1639," in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe: Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700* , ed. F. Bethencourt and F. Egmond (Cambridge, 2006–7); and especially O. Ranum, "Servitude and Friendship in the Letters of Poussin and Chantelou, with a Weak Coda on Chantelou as an Art Critic," http://www.ranumspanat.com/Poussin_Chantelou.htm (accessed December 12, 2008).

4. On Poussin's *Sacraments* generally, see W. Löhneysen, "Die ikonigraphischen und geistesgeschichtlichen Voraussetzung des 'sieben Sakramente' der Nicolas Poussin," *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 4 (1952): 133–50; C. Thompson, *Poussin's Seven Sacraments in Edinburgh* (Glasgow, 1980); M. Bruhn, *Die bieden Fassungen der "Sieben Sakramente" von Nicolas Poussin* (Hamburg, 1992) (non vidi); P. Rosenberg, ed., *Nicolas Poussin 1594–1665* (Paris, 1994), 240–52, 312–38; E. Cropper and C. Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* (Baltimore, 1996), 109–44; T. Green, *Nicolas Poussin Paints the Seven Sacraments Twice* (Watchet, England, 2000).

5. Green, *Seven Sacraments*, 269. On the question of Poussin's erudition and visual sources, see E. Wilberding, "History and Prophecy: Selected Problems in the Religious Paintings of Nicolas Poussin" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1997), 159–85. Wilberding shows convincingly that the general composition derived from J. Prado and J. B. Villalpando, *In Ezechielem Explanationes et Apparatus Vrbis, ac temple Hierosolymitani. Commentariis et Imaginibvs Illvstratvs* (Rome, 1596–1605).

6. Quotation from J. Starobinksi, *L'Œil vivant. Corneille, Racine, La Bruyère, Rousseau, Stendhal* (Paris, 1961), 44.

7. Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, no. 124.

8. The emblem appears on a recently discovered copy (J. von Henneberg, "Poussin's *Penance*: A New Reading," *Storia dell'arte* 61 [1987]: 229–39 and fig. 3; Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin,* 245 no. 65a), but not on a copy in Rome (Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin*, 245 no. 65). On the emblem, its role in the painting—arguing that it was a feature of the lost original—see M. Stanic, "Le mode énigmatique dans l'art de Poussin," in *Poussin et Rome*, ed. O. Bonfait (Rome, 1996), 93–118, at 98–100. On the role of emblems in religious art of the period, see M. Fumaroli, *L'École du silence. Le sentiment des images au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1998), 236–37.

9. Quoted in Stanic, "Le mode énigmatique," 99 and n. 22, where the emblem and its significance receive detailed discussion.

10. For Poussin's use of the term *pensée*, see *inter alia* Jouanny, *Correspondance*, 376.

11. Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin*, 116–17 and n. 18. The text is absent from the engraving in Prado and Villalpando, *In Ezechielem Explanationes* (Wilberding, *History and Prophecy*, 182).

12. Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin*, 117.

13. On the importance of the debate over penance to seventeenth-century art, see E. Mâle, *L'art religieux d'après le Concile de Trente. Étude sur l'iconographie de la fin du XVIe siècle, du XVIIe, du XVIIIe siècle. Italie—France—Espagne—Flandres* (Paris, 1932), 65–72. With reference to Poussin's picture specifically, see von Henneberg, "Poussin's *Penance*."

14. A likely candidate (as noted in Wilberding, *History and Prophecy,* 183) is the hebraicist and botanist Giovanni Batista Ferrari, a friend and sometime patron of Poussin from the circle of Cassiano dal Pozzo. On Ferrari, see D. Freedberg, "From Hebrew and Gardens to Oranges and Lemons," in *Cassiano dal Pozzo. Atti del Seminario internazionale di Studi. Napoli, 18–19 dicembre 1987*, ed. F. Solinas (Rome, 1989), 37–72; D. Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx: Galileo, His Friends, and the Beginning of Modern Natural History* (Chicago, 2002), 38–57.

15. On French collections of Hebrew manuscripts, see M. Garel, *D'une main forte. Manuscrits hébreux des collections françaises* (Paris, 1991).

16. F. Béroalde de Verville, *Le Moyen de Parvenir* (Paris, 1879 [1610]), 122: "Je lisois ne plus ne moins qu'un singe."

17. G. Naudé, *Apologie pour tous les grand hommes qui ont esté accusez de magie* (Paris, 1669), 25: "Celuy qui entendoit mieux la langue hebraïque estoit pris pour juif ou maran; et ceux qui recherchoient les mathematiques et sciences moins communes, soupçonnez comme enchanteurs et magiciens, quoy que ce fust une pure calomnie."

18. L. Bertaut, *L'illustre Orbandale, ou L'histoire ancienne et moderne de la ville et cité de Chalon-sur-Saône, enrichie de plusieurs recherches curieuses et diviséee en éloges. Tome I* (Paris, 1662), 15: "Cette langue . . . de qui quasi toutes les syllables, & mesme tous les ponctes, sont des mysteres admirable."

19. Pierre Corneille, *Le Menteur* IV.iii.1195–98: "Je te le donnerois, et tu serois heureux; / mais le secret consiste en quelques mots hébreux, / qui tous à prononcer sont si fort difficiles, / que ce seroient pour toi des trésors inutiles."

20. Jouanny, *Correspondance*, 356: "Le subiec est représenté en manière quil me semble quil n'a besoin d'interprête pourueu seullement que l'on aye leu l'euangille."

21. For overviews of the history of Jews in France during the earlier seventeenth century, see R. Mousnier, *The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy, 1598–1789* (Chicago, 1979), 413–28; B. Bedos-Rezak, "Tolérance et raison d'État," in *L'État baroque. Regards sur la pensée politique de la France du premier XVIIe siècle*, ed. H. Méchoulian (Paris, 1985), 143–87.

More recently, see D. L. Graizbord, "Becoming Jewish in Early Modern France: Documents on Jewish Community-Building in Seventeenth-Century Bayonne and Peyrehorade," *Journal of Social History* 40 (2006): 147–80.

22. Cf. F. Garasse, *La doctrine cvrievse des beavx esprits de ce temps, ou, Pretendvs tells* (Paris 1623), 273 ("les juifs qui sont aujourd'huy à Rome, à Mets, en Avignon").

23. See, e.g., M. Mersenne, *L'impiété des deistes, athées et libertins de ce genre* (Paris, 1624), 140–69. On the development of Mersenne's thought, see D. Garber, "On the Frontlines of the Scientific Revolution: How Mersenne Learned to Love Galileo," *Perspectives on Science* 12 (2004): 135–62. For Rabbi L'Abbé, see G. Simpliste, *Rymaille sur les plus célèbres bibliotières de Paris* (Paris, 1649), 4: "Le Hebreu est chez Rabbi L'Abbe, / Et tout L'Arabe chez le Bé."

24. On the importance of Maimonides, see G. Stroumsa, "John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry," *History of Religions* 41 (2001): 1–23, at 14–18. For an overview of *hébraïsant* scholarship in the seventeenth century, see S. Kessler-Mesguich, "Les hébraïsants chrétiens," in *Le Grand siècle et la Bible*, ed. J-R. Armogathe (Paris, 1989), 83–95; also S. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden, 1996). For the sixteenth century, see I. Zinguer, *L'Hébreu au temps de la Renaissance* (Leiden, 1992).

25. E.g., G. Postel, *Le thrésor des propheties de l'univers*, ed. F. Secret (The Hague, 1969); G. Postel, *Le candelabre de Moses*, ed. F. Secret (The Hague, 1971).

26. R. Popkin, "The First College of Jewish Studies," *Revue des études juives* 143 (1984): 351–64.

27. The 1684 translation has been reprinted as L. Modena, *Les Juifs présentés aux chrétiens: cérémonies et coutumes qui s'observent aujourd'hui parmi les Juifs* (Paris, 1998).

28. Augustine, *Serm.* 4.8, quoted in E. Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis, 1984), 41. For Paul, see 1 Cor. 10:6, 11, and 15:21; Gal. 4:21–31; Col. 2:16–17; Rom 5:12, Heb. 9:11.

29. Auerbach, *Scenes*, 11–78 (quotations at 39, 53).

30. Ibid., 31.

31. Augustine, *de Civ*. 20.28, quoted and translated in Auerbach, *Scenes*, 40–41. On Auerbach and Judaism, see J. Porter, "Erich Auerbach and the Judaizing of Philology," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2008): 115–47.

32. R. Popkin, "The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy: Scepticism, Biblical Prophecy and Science," *Nouvelles de la Republique de Lettres* 3 (1983): 35–63; H. Savon, "Le Figurisme et la 'Tradition des Pères,'" in Armogathe, ed., *Le Grand siècle et la Bible*. In French drama, see E. Marks, *Marrano as Metaphor: The Jewish Presence in French Writing* (New York, 1996), 21–42.

33. On Marquez, see L. Pericolo, *Philippe de Champaigne* (Tournoi, 2002), 160–65. On Richeome, see J. Vanuxem, "Les *Tableaux sacrées* de Richeome et l'iconographie de l'Eucharistie chez Poussin," in *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. A. Chastel (Paris, 1960), 151–62; von Henneberg, "Poussin's *Penance*"; F. Siguret, "La triple peinture des *Tableaux sacrés* du Père Richeome," in *Inventaire, Lecture, Invention. Mélanges de critique et d'histoire littéraires offerts à Bernard Beugnot*, ed. J. Martel and R. Melançan (Montreal, 1999), 195–210; F. Cousinié, *Le peintre chrétien. Théories de l'image religieuse dans la France du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 2000); C. Hughes, "*Embarras* and *Disconvenance* in Poussin's Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well," *Art History* 24 (2001): 493–519. On Girard, see Cousinié, *Le peintre chrétien*, 65–67. On Poussin and the Jesuits, see P. Santucci, *Poussin: tradizione ermetica e classicism gesuita* (Salerno, 1985).

34. L. Richeome, *Holy Pictures of the Mysticall Figures of the Most Holy Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Eucharist* (London, 1619), 160.

35. B. Pascal, *Œuvres complètes II,* ed. M. Le Guern (Paris, 2000), 30–31. The same sentiment appears in the sixteenth Provincial Letter and numerous *Pensées*. Compare also A.

Arnauld, *De la Frequente Communion* (Paris, 1643), 100: "The Jews believe themselves devout observers of God's law in observing some of its precepts according to the letter which kills, and not according to the spirit which gives life" ("Les juifs se croyoient tres-religieux observateurs de la loy de Dieu, en observant quelques-uns de ses preceptes, selon la lettre qui tuë, et non selon l'esprit qui donne la vie"); also: "It is pharisaic to attend to exteriors before attending to what's inside" ("c'est estre pharisien que d'examiner le dehors, avant que d'avoir examiné le dedans") (Arnauld, *De la Frequente Communion*, 169).

36. Auerbach, *Scenes*, 52–53.

37. On *la perpertuité de la foi*, see J. Miel, *Pascal and Theology* (Baltimore, 1969), 152. For the emergence of the concept of religious difference, with particular reference to idolatry, see Stroumsa, "Roots of Idolatry."

38. On the rhetoric of exemplarity, see J. D. Lyons, ed., *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton, 1989). On biblical themes in French tragedy, especially Garnier's *Les Juifves* (1583), see Marks, *Marrano as Metaphor*, 21–42; C. Mazouer, "Théâtre et religion dans la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle (1550–1610)," *French Studies* 60 (2006): 295–304.

39. Regarding Moses: Gabriel Naudé and Louis Machon both invoked him as an exemplary statesman in works commissioned by Richelieu (P. S. Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* [Cambridge, 1988], 171–72, 193–94), while at the opposite end of the spectrum Pomponne II de Bellièvre, president of the Parlement de Paris, regarded him as the lawgiver par excellence and collected pictures of him by Philippe de Champaigne and Poussin. Regarding David: when, in 1617, Louis XIII staged a *coup d'état* by assassinating Concino Concini, he was promptly hailed as a new David who had defeated a tyrannical Goliath (A. L. Moote, *Louis XIII, the Just* [Berkeley, 1991], 95–96); just over thirty years later, when the Prince de Condé led a rebellion against Louis XIV and Mazarin, he too became a David. The great rebellion, the Fronde or "slingshot," was named for David's weapon, while Abraham Bosse's print of *David and Goliath* (1651) gave the former the features of Condé, the latter those of Mazarin.

40. G. Scudéry, *Alaric, ou, Rome vaincue: poëme heroïque* (Paris, 1654), 194–95: "Car comme on peut tirer de l'ingrate vipere, un remede puissant . . . le lecteur prudent . . . tire le bien du mal; de l'ombre la lumiere; voit le piege tendu; l'esvite sagement; et suit le grand chemin pour aller seurement. Icy des curieux et sçavans cabalistes, avec peu de travail on peut suivre les pistes: traverser apres eux ces sentiers escartez; et des obscurs hebreux demesler les clartez. Tout ce que les rabins ont escrit de sublime; et du grand nom de Dieu la force legitime; et des nombres sacrez l'art tout misterieux; et l'occulte pouvoir des images des cieux; enfin tout le sçavoir de l'antique Judée, qu'elle dit luy venir de l'eternelle idée; qu'elle pretend tirer du celeste thresor; se trouve en ces escrits que l'on conserve encor." On Scudéry and Poussin, see J. Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting : Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (New York, 2006), 179.

41. W. Sauerländer, *Geschichte der Kunst—Gegenwart der Kritik* (Cologne, 1999), 90–116; K. Krause, "Die Kamele Eliezers und die Elephanten des Porus. Typologie und 'Parallele' in Historien von Nicolas Poussin, Sebastien Bourdon und Charles Le Brun," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 24 (1997): 213–30; Hughes, "*Embarras* and *Disconvenance*."

42. Jouanny, *Correspondance,* 87–88. See O. Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting* (London, 1990), 58.

43. Pascal, *Œuvres II*, 771: "Les juifs n'ont possédé de Jésus-Christ que les figures et les voiles, comme était la manne et l'agneau pascal." On the image of the veil, see P. Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge, 2006); also Fumaroli, *L'École du silence*, 242–43.

44. Poussin, in Jouanny, *Correspondance,* 87; Marquez, quoted in Pericolo, *Philippe de Champaigne,* 160.

45. Also by Mellan, but without evident input from Poussin, is the frontispiece to a Greek New Testament (1642). An angel incises a Greek text onto a pyramid; it translates as "Law of Love on Mount Zion." Supporting the pyramid is a cubic base, which bears in a relief a Classical figure with winged sandals incising a Hebrew text; it translates as "Law of Fear on Mount Sinai." Although intended for an erudite audience, the iconography is fairly straightforward and even a Hebrew-less reader could likely get the gist. For the print, see H. T. Goldfarb, *Richelieu: Art and Power* (Montréal, Cologne, and Ghent, 2002), 187, no. 77.

46. For the distinction between a "'theopoetics' of the image" and its opposition the "vanity of words," in Poussin and his Roman milieu, see Fumaroli, *L'École du silence*, 188–231, esp. 194–96.

47. I owe this last observation to Green, *Seven Sacraments,* 271–72, but have confirmed it through autopsy. It is most apparent if one compares the highlights on Christ's right arm to those on blue-clad figures elsewhere in the picture, notably St. John immediately to Christ's left, or the drinking man at center. Those on Christ are yellow-gold; those on the others are pale blue-white. On archaism in Poussin, see T. Olson, *Poussin and France* (New Haven, 2002), 156–59.

48. Félibien, quoted in Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, 163: "De mesme que les 24 lettres de l'alfabet servent à former nos parolles et exprimer nos pensées, de mesme les lineamens du corps humain à exprimer les diverses passions de l'ame pour faire paroistre au dehors ce que l'on a dans l'esprit."

49. For the date, see J. Thuillier, B. Brejon de Lavergnée, and D. Lavalle, *Vouet* (Paris, 1990), 351.

50. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes inv. D-982–2-1P. B. Dorival, *Philippe de Champaigne, 1602–1674: la vie, l'œuvre, et le catalogue raisonné de l' œuvre II* (Paris, 1976), 34–35, no. 53.

51. C. Gandelman, *Le regard dans le texte. Image et écriture du Quattrocento au XXe siècle* (Paris, 1986), 106–12; L. Marin, *Philippe de Champaigne ou la présence cachée* (Paris, 1995), 335–50; see also Pericolo, *Philippe de Champaigne*, 280–82.

52. On the relation between the two, see B. Dorival, "Poussin et Philippe de Champaigne," in Chastel, *Nicolas Poussin,* 64–68.

53. J. Lichtenstein and C. Michel, eds., *Conférences de l'Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, I* (Paris, 2006), 196–205.

54. On the representation of the Ten Commandments in early modern art, see O. Christin, *Les yeux pour le croire. Les Dix Commandements en images, XVe–XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 2003).

55. Paris, Louvre 7282. Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin,* no. 214, with earlier bibliography; Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, no. 207. See also S. Germer, ed., *Vies de Poussin. Bellori, Félibien, Passeri, Sandrart* (Paris, 1994), 102, 195.

56. Cf. P. Joch, *Methode und Inhalt: Momente von künstlerischer Selbstreferenze im Werk von Nicolas Poussin* (Hamburg, 2003).

57. Cf. Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin,* 38.

58. Germer, *Vies de Poussin,* 102. "Avec un grand sens de la peinture."

59. Superbly discussed in J. Thuillier, "Temps et tableau: la théorie des 'péripéties' dans la peinture française du XVIIe siècle," in *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes. Aktes des 21, Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn 1964* (Berlin 1967), 3:191–206. See also L. Marin, *To Destroy Painting* (Chicago, 1995), 41–44; L. Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Stanford, 1999), 5–28; Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting,* 157–97, esp. 178–85; J. Jurt, "Die Debatte um die Zeitlichkeit der *Académie Royale de Peinture* am Beispiel von Poussins *Mannalese,*" in *Zeitlichkeit in Text und Bild,* ed. F. Sick and C. Schöch (Heidelberg,

2007), 337–47. For Le Brun on the *The Israelites Receiving Manna,* see Lichtenstein and Michel, *Conférences,* 171–74.

60. Lichtenstein and Michel, *Conférences,* 171.

61. Ibid., 172: "Ces différents états et ces diverses actions lui tenant lieu de discours et de paroles pour faire entendre sa pensée."

62. On Poussin's scenographia, see F. Siguret, *L'Œil surpis. Perception et représentation dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle,* 2nd ed. (Paris, 1993), 161–71. On the theater mentioned at the 1667 *conférence,* see Lichtenstein and Michel, *Conférences,* 173.

63. It is sometimes suggested, plausibly enough, that this distant woman with child represents the offended wife, whose husband the adulteress has seduced. Yet it is not clear from the Gospel whether or not the adulteress has been with a married man. A related figure appears in Tintoretto's version of the scene in the Palazzo Barberini (Wilberding, *History and Prophecy,* 333).

64. On picture and diagram in Poussin, see R. Neer, "Poussin and the Ethics of Imitation," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 51–52 (2006–7): 298–344.

65. J. Dadré and J. Cuilly, eds., *Bibliorum sacrorum cum glosaa ordinaria* (Venice, 1603), 5:1154. Various other theories of what Jesus wrote naturally abound in medieval and early modern commentaries. Since Poussin's text is illegible, it is fruitless to speculate as to which theory, if any, he favored. Not only does the picture itself offer no support for any particular account, but it suggests that the whole question is misguided: had Poussin wished to take a position on this question, he could easily have done so by writing the appropriate words.

66. Iconographic tradition frequently omits the writing, as in Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* of 1593 (see J. MacDonnell, *Gospel Illustrations: A Reproduction of the 153 Images Taken from Jerome Nadal's 1595 Book* Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia [Fairfield, Conn., 1998]). Alternately, it replaces the writing with chicken scratches: see A. Osiander, *Harmoniae Euangelicae libri quator* (Antwerp, 1540); or Rembrandt, on whom see M. Podro, "Rembrandt's Woman Taken in Adultery," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 [1987]). Or the text simply repeats Christ's injunction, "Let you who are without sin cast the first stone": see P. Bruegel the Elder's version in the Courtauld, 1563; or J. Taylor, *Antiquitates Christianae, or, The History of the Life and Death of the Holy Jesus* (London, 1678).

67. See, for instance, K. Oberhuber, "Raphaël et Poussin," in Bonfait, *Poussin et Rome,* 73, and the Louvre's website, http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv = car_not_frame& idNotice = 2130 (accessed December 12, 2008): "Les Pharisiens déchiffrant les mots tracés par le Christ sur le sol: 'Que celui d'entre vous qui est sans péché lui jette la première pierre.'"

68. Marc Fumaroli arrives at a similar conclusion by a different route when he remarks, "It is as though the painter wanted to establish, between the his canvas and the spectator's eye, that type of mute, meditatative *sacra conversazione* which is the very subject of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*—as opposed to the hasty, frivolous or pretentious 'reading' which the Pharisees make of this dialogue between God and the sinner." Fumaroli, *L'École du silence,* 225.

69. There is some precedent for this conceit in an illustration to the same passage in John by Heinrich Vogtherr for the 1547 edition of Erasmus' New Testament. In that instance the Hebrew text seems to read something like *caas miadi,* "anger of my hand," but while the letters themselves are clear, their sense is not.

70. On the history of the Torah pointer, see N. Feuchtwanger-Sarig, "Chanting to the Hand: Some Preliminary Observations on the Origins of the Torah Pointer," *Studia Rosenthalia* 37 (2004): 3–35. The earliest known hand-shaped example, illustrated here, comes from Ferrara and dates to the late fifteenth century. Other examples are known from seventeenth-century Rome. I am grateful to David and Josef Stern for directing me to this article.

71. As Bätschmann puts its, she appears "almost as a moralistic allusion." Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin,* 81–82.

72. Dadré and Cuilly, *Bibliorum sacrorum*, 5:1153.

73. Jouanny, *Correspondances,* 21 (April 28, 1639): "Lisés l'istoire et le tableau."

74. The discussion of nonsense and ineffability here and in what follows derives from a reading of J. Conant, "Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism," in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond*, ed. A. Crary (Cambridge, 2007), especially 42–47.