POUSSIN AND THE ETHICS OF IMITATION

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It is well known that Nicolas Poussin frequently incorporated motifs from antique and Renaissance art into his paintings. So conspicuous are the borrowings, in fact, that the identification of these sources has been an academic pastime for over three hundred years. Thanks to such research, we know that the richly clad female in *The Arcadian Shepherds* is a version of a classical statue, the Cesi Juno; that *The Israelites Gathering Manna* owes its composition to Raphael's *School of Athens*; that *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* includes figures from the Palestrina mosaic; and so on. In discerning such quotations, however, few scholars have ever suggested that they might be meaningful, that they might have something to do with the work's content.[1] Instead, the source, once noted, serves typically to establish an artistic pedigree. Source-hunting produces a particular sort of stylistic history that, while valuable in itself, leaves much of interest unexplored.

Although scholars have been reluctant to find meaning in Poussin's visual sources, they have been eager to find it in his literary ones.[2] Despite periodic "pleas for Poussin as a painter," the favored method for dealing with these works has been to decrypt them by means of literary ciphers.[3] Such iconologies tend to distinguish peremptorily between pictorial content and pictorial form in order to focus exclusively on the former. At their most extreme, they consign the pictures to the status of erudite book illustrations. Anthony Blunt's work is paradigmatic of this genre at its most learned and most dazzling. For Blunt, Poussin's paintings were, in effect, sensuous manifestations of Stoic ideas. His essential premise was that there exists a causal relation between any given picture and a text, such that the latter may explain the former. To know a picture's literary source is, on this view, to know the essential thing about it. Many recent studies have accepted this premise, either implicitly or explicitly. Whether or not he is taken to be a *peintre-philosophe*, Poussin has come to seem the most literary of painters.[4] His erudition is more textual than pictorial; surveying the literature, one gets the distinct impression that he is studied more in the library than the museum.

[1] The great exception to this tendency being Richard Wollheim's brilliant, idiosyncratic treatment of Poussin in ch. 3 of *Painting as an Art* (Wollheim 1987). See, more recently, Unglaub 2003, probably the best recent treatment of this topic.

[2] On the historiography of Poussin, see Verdi 1976; Carrier 1993; Bätschmann 1994; Bonfait 1998; Scott and Warwick 1999.

[3] A point argued already in Mahon 1965.

[4] On the *peintre-philosophe*, see Puttfarken 1999.

To be sure, some of the best work on Poussin—that of Louis Marin, say, or Oskar Bätschmann, or Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey—traffics constantly between formal and cultural history. But there remains a curious bifurcation in the treatment of Poussin's sources. One tendency locates *visual* sources only to declare them strictly meaningless; another locates *literary* sources in order to identify them with a picture's "meaning" or "content." This bifurcation is in fact exemplary. It is, in germ, what separates "the two art histories," the museum and the academy; the study of Poussin is the grain of sand in which to see a whole disciplinary world.[5] It is therefore significant that the recent spate of work on the painter has owed far more to the example of Blunt than to that of Marin. Each was a great scholar and each was a kind of iconologist, but where Blunt took the relation of *icon* to *logos* as largely settled, hence as a premise, Marin took it as the very topic of investigation, hence as a problem. The former tendency remains normal practice even today.[6] The point is not to disparage such work but to suggest a reason for pursuing alternatives. Twenty years after the New Art History, traditional oppositions of formalism and contextualism have returned with a vengeance, nowhere more obviously than in the study of this one canonical painter.

How might one escape this double bind? One route, little explored hitherto, would be to take the use of sources as meaningful in itself. Dramatic instances of citation and allusion, so integral to histories of style, deserve to be taken seriously: not merely as episodes in a life of forms but as constitutive elements of pictorial meaning. Rather than reducing pictures to texts, one might explore the relation between citation and *istoria*, between the rhetorical structure of allusion, on the one hand, and narrative thematics, on the other. Such a study would, of necessity, attend less to the content of any particular citation than to the fact of citation itself. In any given instance, it would matter less *which* artworks Poussin was incorporating than that he was incorporating *something*. We do not need a semiology of allusion so much as a rhetoric.

Such an approach is uniquely appropriate to Poussin's oeuvre. Although the citation of past art was common in early modern painting, Poussin took the practice to an extreme. His pictures are often pastiches, stitched up out of recognizable masterpieces from the remote and recent past. Such "quotations" were known in Poussin's day variously as *figure*, *astratti*, or *concetti*; and they were meant to be recognized.[7] As Junius put it succinctly, art calls for "erudite eyes," *oculos eruditos*.[8] The phrase enacts its own argument, for it is itself a quotation from Cicero: citation is self-justifying. This reciprocity between the thematic of citation and the citational form itself is characteristic of Poussin's paintings as well. The painter takes the relation of present practice to antique precedent as a significant issue. Indeed, citation—the routing of pictures through other, prior images—constitutes a central drama of his art. Regardless of the commission, Poussin returns continually to the question of how properly to acknowledge the past, and tradition—and, indeed, the *given-ness* of pictorial depiction itself. His programmatic and often polemical classicism needs to be seen in terms of an ongoing interrogation of depiction and citation, of depiction *as* citation. To recognize

[5] See Haxthausen 2002.

[6] See, for instance, Fumaroli 1994; McTighe 1996; Bernstock 2000. A more sophisticated, but still fundamentally text-based, account of the political dimensions of Poussin's art is Olson 2002. The classic alternative to an appeal to *Zeitgeist* is an appeal to biography (exemplified most recently in Unglaub 2004, where acute observation of a thematics of absorption and reflection cashes out as a narrative of Poussin's personal life). For a nuanced integration of *icon* and *logos*, see Unglaub 2003.

[7] Loh 2004, 490. As Jacques Thuillier puts it, "When Poussin introduced into a picture an archaeological detail inspired by Livy, or copied from a bas-relief, he was sure to be understood by Cassiano dal Pozzo and his circle, as by Chantelou and his Parisian friends: he knew how to excite their delectation in this way" (Thuillier 1967, 194; author's translation).

[8] Junius, *De pictura ueterum* (1637), 1.3.6, quoted in Nativel 1992, 159.

Fig. 1. Nicolas Poussin, The Plague at Ashdod *(The Miracle in the Temple of Dagon) (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

this practice as such, and to describe it in its properly historical dimension, are tasks that neither iconology nor formalism has accomplished.

1. Imitation and Copy

One painting offers particularly convenient access to these methodological and historical issues. Known today as *The Plague at Ashdod* and dating to 1630/1631, it occupies an important place in both formalist and iconological accounts of Poussin's œuvre.[9] To the former, the picture is a watershed between the sensual colorism of the "early years" and the austere classicism of the "middle period" (fig. 1). For the latter, the picture is the topic of an award-winning article in a recent issue of the *Art Bulletin*: the author relates it to seventeenth-century writings on pestilence, the idea being that the *Plague* is useful evidence in a project of cultural history.[10] The present essay will mount a very different argument, although the two positions need not be mutually exclusive. Probably the most significant difference between the argument that follows and the one in the *Art*

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[9] On the painting, see Bonfait 1994, 162–171.

[10] Barker 2004. For a precursor to this epidemiological account, see Mollaret and Brossolet 1969.

Bulletin has to do with the role of texts and the explanatory value that texts may or may not have when it comes to pictures. The point of offering an alternative, apart from the intrinsic interest of the artwork, is not to reject textual evidence outright nor to seal off the history of art from other modes of historical inquiry. It is rather to find alternatives to an historicism that idealizes *logoi*, words, and establishes as its goal the dissolution of nonverbal, nonlinguistic patterns of meaning into relatively pellucid discourse.

Obviously, texts have their uses, and we cannot get into this picture without using them. Poussin's narrative *matiera*, for instance, comes from the first book of Samuel.

> And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebene'zer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. . . . But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

As a matter of method, this Old Testament passage is a paradigm of the useful documentary text: it helps us to know what it is we see. It is evidence, against which we check our perceptions. Pair it with the picture: there on the left is the temple, with the shattered statue of Dagon and the Ark of the Covenant; and there, in the piazza, are the Philistines suffering their punishment. Academic art history characteristically takes this *iconographic* encounter of word and image as a model for broader *iconological* claims, and piles more and more texts upon the Bible passage: epidemiology, philosophy, what have you. In so doing, however, it tends to neglect specifically pictorial issues, and specifically pictorial evidence. The result is less a rigorous historical criticism than a version of antiquarian collecting: the essay as *Wunderkammer*, an assemblage of rare and recondite artifacts from the distant past, in which the visual specificity of the picture is secondary to its value as an artifact. Put differently: First Samuel has explanatory value, but what it does not explain is precisely what makes the picture different from the text. The painting is not the text but, at most, a pictorial replication of the text; what is distinctive and important about it is precisely the fact that it is *not* the Bible, not words on a page but marks on a canvas.[11]

The Ashdod picture fares better than most, because everyone who talks about it does at least mention its debt to Raphael—or, more precisely, to Marcantonio Raimondi's well-known print after Raphael, *Il Morbetto*, or *The Plague of Phrygia*, cut in 1515–1516 (fig. 2). The observation goes back to the seventeenth century, when Poussin's friend and biographer Bellori remarked, "In this *istoria*, Poussin imitates for the most part Raphael's *Morbetto*, engraved by Marcantonio."[12] The overall composition is, indeed, broadly allusive. In each case, a drama of pestilence plays out against a deep, recessive space at right, while an idol and an open architectural block screen the middle distance at left. But the borrowing extends to individual figures as well. Most obvious in this

[11] Were we to substitute the biblical narrative for another version of the same story—a paraphrase—it would make no difference. Thus it has recently been suggested that Poussin worked from a French translation of Josephus rather than from the Bible itself: a possibility that, however interesting, proves to have no impact upon our understanding of the picture beyond explaining why Poussin seems to have depicted rats, as per Josephus, rather than mice, as per his translation of the Old Testament. The text usefully helps viewers to identify what is being depicted, no more and no less. For Josephus, see Bull 2002. For a related discussion of reading in Poussin, see Marin 1999, 19, 27–28.

[12] "Pussino in questa istoria imitò in gran parte il morbo di Raffaello intagliato di Marc Antonio." Bellori 1672 (1931), 416.

Fig. 2. Marcantonio Raimondi (after Raphael), The Plague of Phrygia *(*Il Morbetto*) (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

regard is Raphael/Raimondi's trio of a man bending down to separate an infant from the body of its mother. Poussin evokes this group but does not copy it directly. The bending man appears at the center of the *Ashdod* painting, yet he has been reversed left to right and rotated counterclockwise by 90 degrees. The mother and infant also appear: they too have been rotated by 90 degrees—this time, clockwise—and the headrest has been omitted so that the mother lies flat. In effect, Poussin has swiveled Raphael's figures perpendicular to the picture plane, pivoting them in opposite directions like a pair of French doors. In much the same way, the man who flees into the background of *Il Morbetto* has a counterpart at the lower left of Poussin's picture. He has been rotated 180 degrees and reversed left to right: instead of fleeing into the picture, into depth, he flees out, effectively blocking access to the depicted scene.[13] On offer, in short, is a distinctive combination of citation and transformation. Poussin alludes to Raphael/Raimondi even as he decisively alters him, and both operations are so ostentatious as to demand attention.

[13] Poussin's operation is so bizarre that the pedigree of this figure has been missed even by scholars who have recognized the painting's relation to *Il Morbetto*. Doris Wild and Henry Keazor, for instance, have each sought prototypes in separate works by Annibale Caracci (Wild 1980, 39, n. 1; Keazor 1996, 62). There is, however, no need to look beyond *Il Morbetto* for the pose of this figure.

Complicating matters is the fact that *Il Morbetto* is not the painting's only "source." Equally evident are references to classical antiquity. Oskar Bätschmann has observed that the small house by the stairs at right derives from a Hellenistic relief, while the fragmentary column base at lower left comes from the title page of Sebastiano Serlio's *Terzo libro d'architettura*.[14] The most conspicuous borrowing, however, is situated midway between the intact building and the ruin: the mother-and-child pair at center foreground. This group has long been recognized as an allusion to Pliny's description of a lost painting by the classical Greek painter Aristeides of Thebes: "A captured city in which one sees a mother mortally wounded, with an infant who drags himself to her breast; the mother seems to perceive him and to fear that, as her milk is all dried up, he will drink only blood."[15] Poussin reconstructs this lost original by copying a statue from the Farnese collection, now in Naples (fig. 3).[16] This statue was discovered in the winter of 1514–1515 and provided a model for Raphael in *Il Morbetto*. Poussin, however, makes it clear that he is looking to the statue and not the print for his model in this instance. He paints the mother with her head flat on the ground, unlike Raphael but like the statue. More subtly, he omits to reverse this figure left-to-right relative to the print, as he had done with other citations of Raphael-Raimondi: it is therefore clear that the model is not the print but the statue.

It is significant that in its present state the Farnese statue does not include an infant. Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey have observed that the infant is absent as well from a drawing of the statue from the *Museo Cartaceo* of Cassiano dal Pozzo. They suggest that Poussin may have added the child himself, having learned from Cassiano "the theory that the Amazon once had a child at her swollen breast."[17] But the infant was no theoretical fancy. Its existence is securely documented in a drawing by Frans Floris of ca. 1540–1547 and by descriptions made at the time of the statue's discovery (fig. 4).[18] Floris's drawing indicates that the infant was heavily damaged, and the figure was removed in the course of the sixteenth century. Poussin gives us the statue as he knew it to have appeared on its initial discovery. Hence the mother-and-child in the Ashdod picture is the terminus of a short chain of replications: a painted restoration of what Poussin will have understood to be a sculpted version of a lost painting.[19] The result is a layering or palimpsesting of citations, as Poussin overlays a print after Raphael and a statue that is itself a version of Aristeides's picture.

Poussin's working method will have encouraged such odd manipulations. An early biographer tells us that, when working out compositions, "He made little wax figures in the nude in the proper attitudes . . . and set them up on a smooth board marked out in squares."[20] We have to imagine doll-like figurines on a proscenium, like a miniature opera set. One result of this procedure was that Poussin was able to use a given figure type as often as he wished, presenting it each time from a different angle: he had simply to reposition the relevant figurine on the "smooth board." Borrowing

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[14] Bätschmann 1990, 119. The further suggestion that the group of two men carrying a body derives from Raphael's *Entombment* is less convincing: only the man supporting the feet seems notably derivative.

[15] Plin. *HN* 35.98; author's translation. On the idea of ancient painting in Poussin's Rome, see Joyce 1992; Joyce 1999.

[16] The observation is credited to S. C. Emmerling's unpublished thesis of 1939 in Keazor 1996, 67, n. 24; I have been unable to consult Emmerling's work.

[17] Cropper and Dempsey 1996, 85.

[18] For full discussion of this material, see Stewart 2004, 202–204, 294–296.

[19] That modern scholars associate the Naples group with the sculptor Epigonos and not with the painter Aristeides is immaterial: what matters is that Poussin will have taken the allusion to Aristeides as self-evident. On Epigonos, see Ridgway 1990, 294, with Plin. *HN* 34.88.

[20] Joachim Sandrart, quoted in Blunt 1967, 242. Bellori records that Poussin modeled *The Worship of Venus* in just this fashion: Bellori 1976, 426. On the figurines, see, most recently, Arikha 1994, with earlier references.

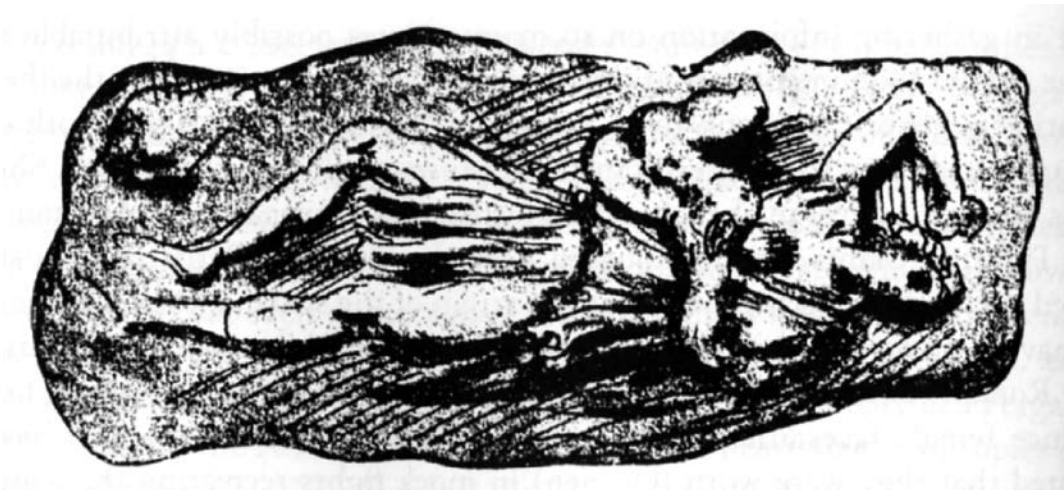*Fig. 3. The Farnese Amazon (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

Fig. 4. Drawing of the Farnese Amazon, ca. 1515 (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).

a pose from another artist will have involved an initial translation from two dimensions into three, followed by a retranslation back into two. Be that as it may, the result seems at once systematic and capricious. Had Poussin consistently reversed the figures left to right, for instance, it would be possible to surmise that he was trying to approximate Raphael's original drawing, as opposed to Raimondi's print after it. But because he did not alter the mother-child group in this way, nor for that matter the overall massing of architecture and open space, the reversals seem unmotivated. The rotation of some figures is even stranger: why does Poussin cause the fleeing man to run toward the beholder instead of into the background, and why does he set the central trio perpendicular to the picture plane and not parallel? A Wölfflinian might suppose that Poussin is simply following the dictates of period style. He shows his baroque colors by turning Raphael's profile actors to face the

Fig. 5. Nicolas Poussin, The Death of Sapphira *(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*
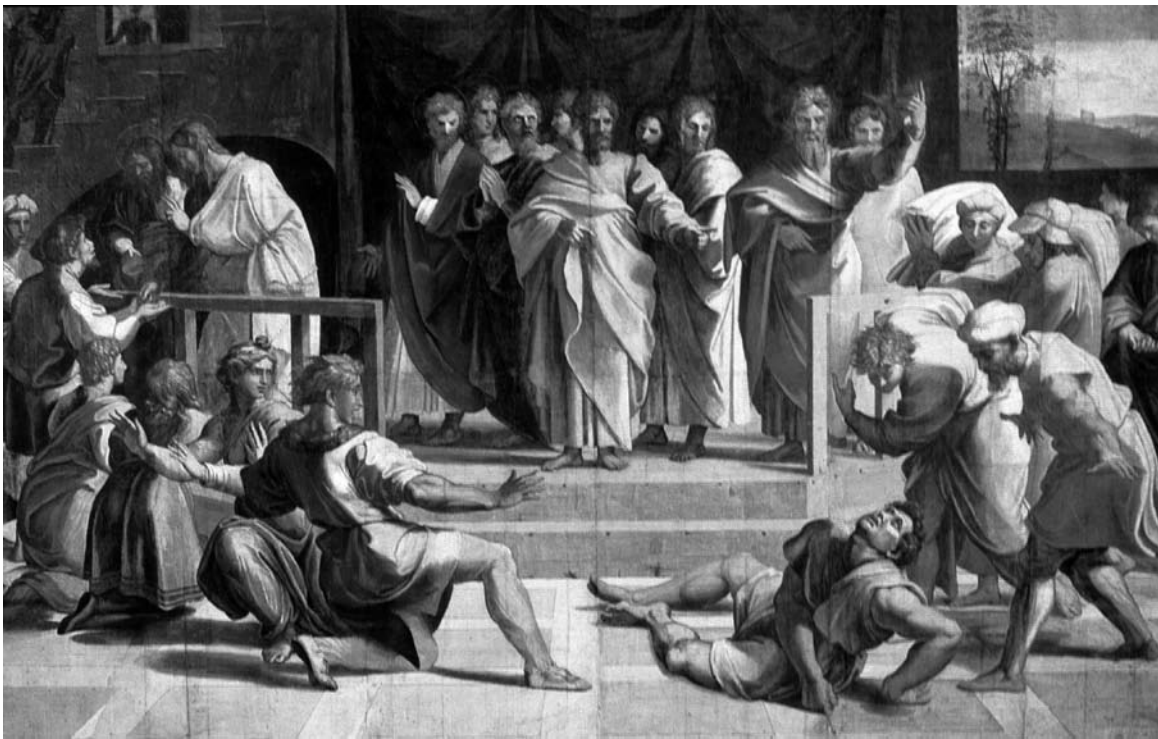

Fig. 6. Raphael, The Death of Ananias *(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

beholder. Yet this purely formalist explanation will not suffice. When, many years later, Poussin reworked Raphael's *Death of Ananias* from the Sistine Chapel into his own *Death of Sapphira* (ca. 1652), he again rotated the figures—only this time in the opposite direction, so that actors previously perpendicular to the picture plane were made to stand parallel with it (figs. 5, 6). The rule of period style is too inconsistent to have explanatory value in this situation.[21]

There is, moreover, a final allusion that defies explanation in such terms. The pudgy toddler in the foreground, fleeing to right with his right arm upraised, his head turned back, his mouth open in a cry, owes nothing to *Il Morbetto* or antiquity. The action is, in fact, undermotivated: in an atmosphere of general listlessness and disgust, the child recoils as from a moment of high drama. There is in fact a good reason for the sense that the boy is out of place. He has an unlikely pedigree: strange as it may seem, he derives from the fleeing altar boy in Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* in S. Luigi dei Francesi in Rome (1599–1600) (figs. 7–9).[22] This connection has been overlooked, perhaps because it has seemed inconceivable that Poussin should betray any debt to Caravaggio: a man whose art he avowedly detested. His friend Félibien reports that "M. Poussin . . . ne pouvait rien souffrir du Caravage, et disait qu'il était venu au monde pour détruire la peinture."[23] But the *Martyrdom* was famous—one sees its influence in works as diverse as the name piece of the Master of the Judgment of Solomon in the Galleria Borghese, and Pietro Testa's *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Galleria Spada—and Poussin can hardly have failed to see it, given that S. Luigi is the French church in Rome. Once recognized, this allusion transforms the entire foreground. It becomes apparent that, by rotating the *Morbetto* figures, Poussin has done more than obey the dictates of seventeenth-century style. He has given an extended gloss, a free variation, on Caravaggio's painting. Not just the fleeing child but the entire foreground group derives from *The Martyrdom of Matthew*. If the fleeing infant corresponds to Caravaggio's altar boy, then the dead woman corresponds to St. Matthew himself, jutting out perpendicular to the picture plane, while the bending man is a version of Matthew's assassin. The central group coheres simultaneously as a version of Aristeides, of Raphael, and of Caravaggio.

But, to repeat, "M. Poussin ne pouvait rien souffrir du Caravage." The reason had to do with his own understanding of the function of painting and of the role of citation in it. As a matter of general principle, the reuse and revision of prior images is the very stuff of Poussin's art: it is part of what makes him a classicist. As expounded in his letters, his views on the subject are much in keeping with the theories current in his Roman milieu: the writings of Bellori and Félibien are especially pertinent. As Panofsky has shown, the chief ambition of those authors was to find a middle way between cinquecento mannerism and the realism of the Caravaggisti and the Dutch.[24] Bellori, for

[21] By the same token, a not dissimilar group appears at the lower left of Luca Signorelli's *Rule of Antichrist* in the S. Brizio chapel in Orvieto: a masterwork of quattrocento "classic art."

[22] On this picture, see Puttfarken 1998.

[23] "M. Poussin . . . could not abide Caravaggio, and said that he had come into the world to destroy painting." Félibien 1725, 3:194. For the young Poussin's receptivity to Caravaggio, see the important remarks in Jullian 1960 (interestingly, Jullian connects the dead woman in *The Plague at Ashdod* to Caravaggio's *Conversion of St. Paul* in S. Maria del Popolo: the link is unconvincing given the figure's clear dependence on the Farnese statue and Raphael). For

an attempt to provide greater nuance to this antithesis, see Unglaub 2004. For a connection between Poussin's *Holy Family with Saints Elizabeth and John* and Caravaggio's *Madonna of Loreto* in S. Agostino in Rome (around the corner from S. Luigi), see Posner 1965. Posner aptly terms the result a "Caravaggio *riformato*."

[24] For Bellori, Félibien, and the theory of classicism, see Panofsky 1968, ch. 6. On seventeenth-century art theory, a key account is Puttfarken 1985. More recently, see the essays in Bonfait 2002, particularly Keazor 2002. On the theory's institutionalization in the second half of the seventeenth century, see Duro 1997, esp. 87–93. Texts like those of Bellori are not, of course, *sources* for Poussin's imagery: rather, they thicken the basically rhetorical description offered below.

Fig. 7. Caravaggio, The Martyrdom of St. Matthew *(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

example, disdained what he called "two opposing extremes, one entirely subject to the natural, the other to the imagination; . . . the former simply copied bodies as they appear to the eyes, indiscriminately; the latter did not consider the natural at all, following freedom of instinct."[25] If *la maniera* was thought to have no connection with nature, realism was thought to be *nothing but* nature.

Within this framework Poussin, like many of his contemporaries, made a sharp distinction between the rational *imitation* of the world in paint and the unthinking *copying* of it.[26] The former was positively valued, the latter negatively. So, for example, Poussin was able to define painting as "an Imitation with lines and colors on any surface of all that is to be found under the sun," even as

[25] Bellori 1976, 32.

[26] For this distinction in general, see the classic treatment in Panofsky 1968, ch. 6. More recently, Loh 2004 is a useful overview that devotes special attention to Domenichino and Gianbattista Marino, two figures with direct influence on

Poussin. On Poussin specifically, see Thuillier 1977; Thuillier 1983; Thuillier 1988, 92–93; Colantuono 1994; Brigstocke 1996; Graziani 1996 (Marino, again). Among his contemporaries, Forestier 1990 (Corneille); Nativel 1992 (Junius, Vossius); Marin 2001 (Montaigne, Descartes); Cropper 2005. For its afterlife in Winckelmann, see Fried 1986.

Fig. 8. Caravaggio, The Martyrdom of St. Matthew, *detail (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

Fig. 9. Nicolas Poussin, The Plague at Ashdod, *detail (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

he declared that he "despised those who are only capable of copying nature as they see it."[27] Where imitation involved an intellectually motivated alteration (or elevation) of the object in the act of depiction, copying was a mere reproduction of appearances.

Poussin associated Copying with Caravaggio and with the mechanical technique of printmakers. In one of his diatribes on the topic, he wrote:

> A painter is not a great painter if he does no more than copy what he sees, any more than a poet. Some are born with an instinct like that of animals which leads them to copy easily what they see. They only differ from animals in that they know what they are doing and give some variety to it. But able artists must work with their minds . . .[28]

Realist painters are guided by "instinct" rather than "their minds"; they leave the realm of humans to become mere "animals," unreasoning elements of the natural order. As Louis Marin has shown, it was precisely this conflation of painting and nature that Poussin attributed to Caravaggio when he said that the latter had come into the world "to destroy painting."[29] Copying is the death of art,

[27] Painting as imitation: letter to Fréart de Chambray, 1 March 1665, quoted and translated in Blunt 1967, 371–372. Despised copying: Félibien 1725, 4:81; Blunt 1967, 220, n. 9.

[28] Félibien, in Thuillier 1994, 163 (Thuillier 1960, 81). "Qu'un peintre n'estoit pas grand peintre lors qu'il ne fasoit qu'imiter ce qu'il voyoit, non plus qu'un poète, desquels il y en avoit qui estoient nez avec un certain Instinct semblable à celuy des annimaux . . . qui les portoit à faire facilement les choses qu'ils voient, differents seulement en cela des bestes qu'ils conoissent

ce qu'ils font et y aportent de la diversité. Mais que les gens habiles doivent travailler de l'Intellect . . ." The translation is from Blunt 1967, 220. Note that in this passage Poussin uses the verb *imiter* to describe a mode of depiction that I, following Panofsky, class under the rubric Copy. Again, Poussin's terminology is not consistent, but the underlying binary most definitely is. On the idea of the mechanical in French art theory of the time, see Posner 1993.

[29] Cf. Marin 1995b.

because a Copy is not really a picture in Poussin's understanding of the term: lacking idealization or elevation, it is just a replication of Nature. Likewise, in a letter of 1647, Poussin laments the fact that "poor painting has been reduced to the print, or better yet to the sepulcher (if, besides the Greeks, anyone has ever seen it alive)."[30] Like Caravaggesque realism, printmaking is deplorable because it is nothing more than the unthinking reproduction of an original. Yet where realism transforms its practitioners into animals, printmaking is a "sepulcher," a marker of absence and death. As Plato put it in the *Cratylus*, "The image must not by any means reproduce all the qualities of that which it represents, if it is to be an image."[31]

The opposition between naturalistic copying and idealistic imitation underwrites some of Poussin's basic ideas about painting. In a famous letter of 1642, for instance, he divides the act of seeing into two kinds, which he calls *Aspect* and *Prospect*. Though the substance of the text derives from Daniel Barbero's *La practica della prospettiva* of 1568, the guiding metaphors are consistent with Poussin's other pronouncements.

> You must know . . . that there are two ways of seeing objects, one of which consists in simply seeing [*voyant simplement*], and the other in considering with attention [*considérant avec attention*]. Simply to see is nothing other than to receive naturally in the eye the form and resemblance of the thing seen. But to see an object while considering it is quite different from the simple and natural reception of the form in the eye, as one seeks with particular application the means to know this same object well [*bien connaître*]: thus we may say that the simple Aspect is a natural operation, and that which I am calling the Prospect is an office of reason, which depends upon three things—knowledge of the eye, of the line of sight, and of the distance between eye and object—and this is the knowledge in which it is to be hoped that those who purport to give their judgment [of pictures] should be well instructed.[32]

Poussin's ostensible subject in this passage is the representation of objects in space. "Prospect" simply translates the Italian *prospettiva*, "perspective": hence the importance of the eye, the line of sight, and the distance between eye and object. More fundamentally, however, the difference between Aspect and Prospect is between nature and reason, resemblance and knowledge, passive and active. It is a trivial, "natural operation" to receive "the form and resemblance of the thing." By contrast, the exercise of reason plays itself out in seeking "to know well," *bien connaître*. The motivating intelligence of the enlightened man allows him to understand nature—to seek its Prospect with "particular application"—even as, in so doing, it marks him as distinct from nature and mere resemblance—from the Aspect of things. Briefly put, Prospect is analogous to imitation, Aspect to copying.

For Poussin, in short, painting must distinguish rigorously between a representation and the thing it represents. Understanding entails a certain apartness or spacing: in a word, a *perspective*. A

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[30] "La pauvre peinture [en fût] réduite à l'estampe, je pourrais dire mieux à la sépultre (si, hors de la main des Grecs, quelqu'un l'a jamais vue vivante)." In Jouanny 1911, 354.

[31] Pl. *Cra.* 432b. An image of Cratylus that was identical to Cratylus in every respect would, Socrates argues, not be an image at all but a second Cratylus.

[32] Blunt 1964, 62–63: "Il faut savoir qu'il y deux manières de voir les objets, l'une en les voyant simplement, et l'autre en les considérant avec attention. Voir simplement n'est autre chose que recevoir naturellement dans l'œil la forme et la ressemblance de la chose vue. Mais voir un objet en le considérant, c'est qu'outre la simple et naturelle réception de la forme dans l'œil, l'on cherche avec une application particulière le moyen de bien connaître ce même objet: ainsi on peut dire que le simple aspect est une opération naturelle, et que ce que je nomme le prospect est un office de raison qui dépend de trois choses, savoir de l'œil, du rayon visuel, et de la distance de l'œil à l'objet: et c'est de cette connaissance dont il serait à souhaiter que ceux qui se mêlent de donner leur jugement fussent bien instruits" (trans. author). Barbero: Goldstein 1966, 234, n. 8. On aspect and prospect in Poussin, see Goldstein 1966; Blunt 1967, 225; Bätschmann 1990, 35; Marin 1995b, 34–35; Cropper and Dempsey 1996, 210; Puttfarken 1999; Puttfarken 2000, 210–213.

painting that merely copied the appearance of its subject matter would not, in fact, be a representation at all: lacking the crucial, "perspectival" interval, it would be nothing more than the unthinking Aspect of the world, a "sepulcher" and not a picture.[33] This view virtually mandates a classicizing approach. Because painting cannot "mirror" its objects, because it is not Copy but Imitation, the relay of every image through other, prior images is its defining characteristic. Images, on this view, are never wholly original but are forever coming back to us with a certain alienated majesty—this last quality being the defining attribute of classicism.

In *The Plague at Ashdod*, Poussin uses extraordinary ingenuity to imitate (but not to copy) the archrealist Caravaggio, the printmaker Raimondi, the exemplary Raphael, and even the antique. The result is a polemical set piece of Imitation. Poussin folds Caravaggio's ultrarealism into a group in which every detail refers to other, prior figures and groups. He copies nothing directly from his models: everything is swiveled, rotated, flipped, reversed. Each figure, moreover, has a strangely multiple paternity. The man bending down while covering his nose, for instance, is at once Raphael's and Caravaggio's, just as the dead mother is at once a classical statue, a lost Aristeides, and Raimondi-after-Raphael. The effect is equivalent to palimpsest, one reference overlaying another. The relation to Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of Matthew* is the most complex of all, for although it structures the entire foreground, there is only a single obvious citation: the fleeing child, a key of sorts to unlock the pictorial cipher. Even this complex allusion is, moreover, but one element of a larger reworking of *Il Morbetto*, that is, a print or "sepulcher" that narrates a story of death. *The Plague at Ashdod* is an elaborate machine of Imitation, employing citation not just in contrast to but in active combat with the realism of Caravaggio and the mechanical copying of Raimondi. Transforming each painted figure into the sign of one or more other, prior figures is the essence of Imitation, hence the antithesis of the Copy. It asserts a radical *temporality* of the image, in the sense that the picture refers always and only to previous images and never coincides directly or immediately with the world or any other referent.[34] Whether this regressive structure is infinite—receding to azimuth—is a question to defer for the moment. For now it suffices to note that the practice of citation amounts to the negation of Caravaggio's realism and Raimondi's mechanical replication. By virtue of its transformations, the foreground group is an Imitation of these Copies, hence an ironization of Caravaggio's bestial realism and Raimondi's sepulchral replication. It is Caravaggio in scare quotes: a way of holding the Copy at bay or even defeating it.

This little drama plays out against a backdrop that, as has long been recognized, derives from contemporary stage sets. The scenography is explicit. Blunt went so far as to locate a source in Sebastiano Serlio's *Terzo libro d'architettura*, although the match is approximate at best.[35] Specificity seems less important in this matter than in the case of *Il Morbetto* or *The Martyrdom of Matthew*: Poussin seems to have been reaching for a broadly theatrical effect without any particular allusion in mind. Indeed, the background we see today is not, in fact, original: Poussin repainted it after Angelo Caroselli made a direct copy of an earlier version (fig. 10).[36] The gesture is indicative of the painter's abhorrence of reproduction, verging on mimetophobia. It also suggests strongly that the general effect of a backdrop was more important than the specifics of the architecture.

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[33] Cf. Marin 1995b.

[34] On the temporality of Poussin's mode, his "décomposition temporelle du sujet," see the superb discussion in Thuillier 1967.

[35] Blunt 1967, 92–93. For Poussin's scenographic settings, see Pinson 1997. It has been suggested that the background

in this picture is in fact the work of Poussin's roommate Jean Lemaire, but the evidence is lacking.

[36] Mahon 1999. For the circumstances of the commission, see also Boyer and Volf 1988. For copies after early states of Poussin's paintings, see Keazor 2000. On radiographs of the picture revealing a different architectural setting, see Mahon 1962, 27, n. 82.

Fig. 10. Angelo Caroselli, copy after Poussin, The Plague at Ashdod *(first state) (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

This generalized theatricality is as odd, in its own way, as the painter's varied manipulations of his prototypes. As Jacques Thuillier has remarked, *The Plague at Ashdod* observes only two of the three Aristotelian unities: those of action and of time.[37] Space is disjunct between temple and piazza, so the tableau is at the very least uncanonical as theater (a significant issue in the years immediately preceding *The Cid*). But scenography has its uses. For one thing, it establishes a sharp distinction between the depicted space and that of the beholder. Given the small format of the picture (148 cm × 198 cm), the dramatic "perspective rush" does not produce the all-encompassing illusionism of Renaissance altarpieces and frescoes. Rather, the *Plague* resembles nothing so much as Poussin's own little box for working out compositions: the figures appear as on a toy proscenium. Hence it is significant that, where *Il Morbetto* has a man running into the background, enhancing the suggestion of depth, Poussin reverses the direction of the movement. The man in the left foreground blocks access to the depicted space even as, turning to look over his shoulder, he remains bound to it himself. The net effect is radically opposed to Caravaggesque attempts to implicate the beholder in the space of the picture. In the *Plague*, everything conspires to give the sense of a narrative setting that is at once dramatically recessive and clearly bounded. This distancing of distance is, of course, the very essence of the Prospect, *prospettiva*, on Poussin's understanding thereof. If citation is a way of establishing a gap or interval between image and model, Prospect establishes an equivalent gap between image and beholder.

[37] Thuillier 1967, 197.

The allusion to theater only heightens this sense. Scenography implies that the plague is a *performance* of sorrow, a deliberately theatrical or illusionist display. It is, literally, a tragedy, the fictionality of which in no way contradicts its pathetic effect. Montaigne addresses this distinctive feature of the theater, to be both affecting and illusory, when he notes, "We eagerly seek to recognize, even in shadow and in the fictions of the theaters, the representation of the tragic play of human fortune."[38] Imitation is an art of shadows and fictions, but effective all the same, and theater is a favored way to think this structure. The seventeenth century harped endlessly on the theme. Jean Starobinski has shown in a classic study that the paradox of theatrical representation—staging illusion in order to reassert the primacy of an essentialized truth—is a guiding theme of Corneille's dramaturgy.[39] An early work, *L'illusion comique* of 1636, is particularly explicit: much of the action consists of shadow play by *spectres parlants* against a backlit screen. Elsewhere, Rotrou's *Le véritable Saint Genest* (1647) likewise established an elaborate play of seeming and truth in representing a pagan actor who undergoes conversion and martyrdom while playing the role of a Christian who undergoes conversion and martyrdom: a sequence of events that begins with the actor discussing the scenographic backdrop of the play-within-the-play.[40] Here the layered illusions all tend toward an ultimate and indisputable truth, a climactic moment in which the actor and role both converge and separate: Genest stops acting in order to become his role, that is, a true convert and martyr. For present purposes there is no need to connect Poussin to any specific dramatic or critical text: it suffices to suggest that the theatricality of the backdrop is of a piece with the basic thematics of the picture. More specifically, the semantics of scenography (its theatrical association) recapitulates its syntax (its perspectival distancing). Both establish the radical alterity of the narrative, the utter distinction between image and original.

2. The Allegory of Imitation

The use of contemporary art theory to explain Poussin's citational method is a version of iconology. In this instance the application has been mildly unorthodox, if only because it has attended less to narrative thematics than to what might be called the rhetoric of the image: how the picture shows what it shows. Yet the mode of explanation remains basically traditional. Written sources (Bellori's treatise, Poussin's letters) explain why Poussin constructed his picture as he did. Such explanations have their uses, but they only go so far. Indeed, the truly distinctive feature of the Ashdod picture is not its somewhat programmatic staging of allusion and citation. It is, rather, the way in which that rhetorical structure relates to the narrative theme. *The Plague at Ashdod* is not just a set piece of Imitation and Prospect: it is an *allegory of Imitation*, a narrative of its own act of depiction. This allegorization does not occur in the relation between *icon* and *logos*. Rather, it occurs in the internal relations of one part of the picture to another, and in the external, interpictorial relations of one motif to another. Iconology can provide a vocabulary—the words or *logoi*—to describe this operation: it can tell us that the word for such a motif is *figura*, and it can tell us what people said about *figura*. But it can neither explain the event nor, strictly speaking, recognize it as such. It is a visual operation, not a verbal one.

We may proceed from the simplest and most pertinent of *logoi*: the picture's title. *The Plague at Ashdod* is its modern name, but Poussin himself called this painting *The Miracle of the Ark in the Temple of Dagon*.[41] The difference is significant. The original title implies that, so far as the artist was concerned, the chief narrative *matiera* was not in the center foreground but at upper left. The miracle in question is the destruction of the Philistine idol in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. There, inside the temple, the statue of Dagon has fallen and shattered. Alongside it stands the Ark, which hides the Hebrew alternative to idolatry: the tablets of Moses. Poussin, in short, offers a programmatic contrast between heathen idolatry and Old Testament piety. Modern readings have tended to emphasize the plague narrative in the foreground, and indeed that story does have visual prominence; but for Joachim Sandrart, writing in the later seventeenth century, this picture was first and foremost concerned with the dangers of idolatry.[42] The contrast between idol and Ark is between modes of representation: between the idolatrous assimilation of godhead to a graven image and a righteous insistence on the unrepresentability, the hiddenness, of the divine. Fittingly, the distinction is visual. Unlike Dagon, the Ark is not a cult statue. It is not God, nor even the image of God, but the container of the inscription of the word of God, a sign doubly or triply removed from its referent. The inaccessibility of the divine registers in the Ark's occlusion from view, hidden behind a column: we do not see all of it, but we know it is there all the same.[43] God is hidden or, as Pascal puts it, "Toute religion qui ne dit pas que Dieu est caché n'est pas véritable." Although the idea of the *Dieu caché* or *Deus abscontidus* is often associated with reform movements like Jansenism or Lutheranism, its currency in Poussin's Rome is the subject of a recent exhibition at the Villa Medici.[44] The miracle in the temple is the Second Commandment in action: a battle between statue and sign, ending in the literal destruction of the former.

This episode at left stands in a *figural* relation to the plague at right. Two distinct events are connected by the invisible agency of the divine. The statue falls, the people die, and what connects the two is nothing other than the power of the Lord. This relationship is not depictive but miraculous: the plague is not the representation of the fall of Dagon but its sign, its trope. To read this sign correctly is to experience revelation and the proofs of God's existence. That is just what the Philistines fail to do. Clustered before the temple, appealing vainly to their fallen idol, they fail to recognize a God known in and through signs and portents. We are thus faced with two antitheses. On the one hand, within the temple, there is an opposition between idol and ark. On the other, structuring the picture overall, there is an opposition of miracle and plague, temple and piazza, left and right. These antitheses are symmetrical: the one maps perfectly onto the other.

Plague : Miracle :: Ark : Jehovah

[41] For the documentation of the original title and the implication that the painting is more concerned with idolatry than pestilence, see Boeckl 1991. Keazor 1996 offers trenchant criticism of Boeckl's more idiosyncratic claims (of which there are many), but the basic point—that the painting was originally taken to be concerned with idolatry—remains significant and sound.

[42] Sandrart, quoted in Boeckl 1991, 143, n. 21. On the idea of idolatry in early modern France, see Weinshenker 2005.

[43] In Richard Wollheim's terms, the picture's representational content exceeds what it represents (Wollheim 1987, 65–67,

101–102). In conversation, Wollheim used the example of Manet's *Woman with a Parrot* in New York, which shows a woman in a floor-length dress. Although only the toe of one foot is visible poking out from beneath the hem, still the picture represents a woman with two legs. "We can see something even if we cannot see every part of it."

[44] This is not the place to rehearse the extensive literature of the Hidden God in the seventeenth century. Rather, as conceptual bookends to this study, see Goldmann 1959 and Marin 1995a. For the exhibition, see Bonfait and Mac-Gregor 2001.

In each case, the relation is figural, not mimetic. The Philistines fail to recognize the plague as a miraculous sign exactly as they fail to recognize the Ark as the tangible marker of the Hidden God. As idolators, slaves of the Copy, they are constitutionally incapable of bridging the gap between sign and referent—incapable, that is, of recognizing signs as such.

It is at this point that the import of Poussin's citational mode becomes evident. The foreground group, as we have seen, layers imitation on imitation in an implicit critique of mechanical copying: where Raimondi merely replicated Raphael, where Caravaggio exemplified the destruction of painting in and as the perfect reproduction of the world, Poussin offers an exemplary Imitation. In so doing he reiterates both the opposition of idol and Ark in the temple vignette and the correct and incorrect readings of the plague in the main scene. The logic of the picture suggests a structural equivalence between Caravaggio and Raimondi, defeated in and through Poussin's elaborate mechanism of citation and palimpsest, and the Philistine idol, defeated in and through a confrontation with the outward sign of the inscription of the voice in the burning bush.[45] The failure of the literal-minded Philistines to "read" the plague correctly, to *bien connoistre*, thus amounts to seeing only the Aspect of the plague, "the form and resemblance of the thing."[46] The assertion of these equivalences is the picture's main didactic task. It implies that the plague tropes the miracle not just narratively but rhetorically as well.

> Citation : Realism :: Imitation : Copy :: Ark : Idol

It follows that imitating the copyists—reworking Caravaggio and Raimondi—amounts to a defeat of idolatry. *The Plague* (or, better, *The Miracle*) is, on this view, not just a machine of Imitation but an antirealist polemic. By entangling Caravaggio in an ingenious web of allusion, Poussin ironizes realism—even as, by asserting a figural relation between the resulting group and the miraculous defeat of the idol, he assimilates that realism to the worship of idols. The picture's *istoria* is the allegory of its own citational structure.

3. A Note on the Index

By way of comparison, it is useful at this point to turn away from *The Miracle in the Temple of Dagon* to look at another painting: the late *Springtime*, from the great cycle of *The Four Seasons* (1660–1664) (fig. 11). Here, by a remarkable device, Poussin both shows and does not show the very moment of the Fall. Adam and Eve sit beneath the Tree of Knowledge, from which the serpent is conspicuously absent. They have not yet tasted the forbidden fruit: instead, Eve points at it suggestively. Yet this simple gesture is, in Poussin's version, tantamount to Original Sin itself: in the upper right corner, God already turns his back on his creations, hiding his face. Tasting the apple does not matter in this picture; it is as though merely *pointing at it* were enough to condemn mankind.[47] Indexicality is sin in its primal form.

[45] For the implicit assimilation of idol to painting, one might compare Charles Sorel's *Le Berger Extravagant* of 1627, in which a portrait of the ineffable beloved is described as an idol (Sorel 1972, 23): "Où est le peintre / si expert qui me la puisse tirer? Un / mortel ne la peut regarder fixement. / Il n'y a que l'amour qui / soit capable d'accomplir cét ouvrage; / aussi me l'a-t'il bien peinte / dedans le coeur. Je serois fort / aise pourtant de l'avoir s'il estoit / possible en un autre tableau, / pour le mettre sur un autel, / et en faire mon idole."

[46] The failure to read, note, occurs in a movement across the picture plane, as the people appeal to the idol, while movement into the picture is, as we have seen, blocked in the interest of a proper perspectival distancing.

[47] For a recent theorization of pointing, see Ferguson forthcoming.

Fig. 11. Poussin, Springtime*, 1660–1664 (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

There is some precedent for this notion elsewhere in Poussin's oeuvre. In *The Adoration of the Golden Calf* of 1633–1637, some Israelites dance wildly around their idol, while others, taking their lead from the white-clad Aaron, point at it fervently (fig. 12). As in *Springtime*, a small figure in an upper corner marks a counterpoint: Moses descending from Sinai, smashing the tablets of the law in disgust. One might contrast Moses's own act of pointing in *The Israelites Gathering Manna* of 1637–1638 (fig. 13). Standing beneath a great arc of rock, he gestures skyward in a manner derived from Raphael's *School of Athens*: as Pauline Maguire has noted, the stance is normally associated with Leonardo.[48] Poussin's Moses adopts this richly imitative stance to point at that which is absent—God in his heaven. The result is a particularly dazzling interleaving of citation and narrative. Although it is impossible to do justice to the picture here, for present purposes two points will suffice. First, the fall of manna is famously typological: it prefigures the sacrament of the Eucharist under the New Covenant. The typological relation is not mimetic or depictive but figural or indexical: the Jewish law, as St. Paul puts it, is "a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things" (Hebrews 10:1). Second, *The School of Athens* is itself figurative or prophetic: it counterpoints *The Disputation of the Eucharist* on the opposite wall of the Stanza della Segnatura. Within Poussin's narrative, Moses points to an absent referent; and that very gesture, within the overall composition of the picture, points as well to Raphael's great fresco. *The School of Athens*, in turn, leads to the *Disputation*, that is, to the very sacrament of which the manna is a prophetic sign. In this way, the citation of a (necessarily absent)

[48] Maguire 1995, 64–65. Maguire does not, however, pursue the significance of the connection (the symmetry between *The School of Athens* and *The Disputation*, on the one hand, and the manna and the Eucharist, on the other). On discussion of the painting in Le Brun's Academy *conférences*, see Duro 1997, 122–133.

Fig. 12. Nicolas Poussin, The Adoration of the Golden Calf *(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

Fig. 13. Nicolas Poussin, The Israelites Gathering Manna *(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

Fig. 14. Raphael (and assistants), God Appearing before Isaac *(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

Fig. 15. Nicolas Poussin, Springtime, *detail (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

pictorial source becomes a structuring metaphor, a way of allegorizing the absence of the deity and the promise of grace. And pointing, the index, is the key to the whole machine.

Or again, in *The Death of Sapphira* (ca. 1652), Poussin routes Peter's miraculously efficacious gesture, striking the miserly woman dead with a gesture, through tiny figures in the background: a man, chromatically linked to the saint, who gives alms to a beggar woman while pointing back into the foreground (fig. 5). Within the space of the picture the two gestures are spatially disjunct. But the relation of foreground to background is incoherent—the intermediate zone is a strip of grayish brown that seems too narrow for the implicit recession and that blends vaguely into the pavement and the parapet wall. The effect is to bring the cityscape forward, as though it were just behind the large actors; the picture plane remains flat despite the perspectival theatrics. On the surface of the canvas, the act of charity intervenes between the deadly finger and its object, as though to demonstrate the internal connection between God's punishment and his mercy. Peter's gesture is not direct for all its efficacy (efficacy and directness are at odds). Quite different are the pointing fingers of Eve and the idolatrous Israelites: in those cases, the object of the gesture is neither absent nor mediate but a visible and tangible presence.

In *Springtime*, Poussin opposes this criminal indexicality to the vision of God's retreating backside: like Moses in the *Adoration of the Golden Calf*, the Deity is a diminutive figure in an upper corner, and like Moses he reacts to the incident of sin in the foreground.[49] Literally a vision of the *posteriora Dei*, the God of *Springtime* suggests the famous passage in Exodus (33:23) in which Jehovah refuses to show Moses his glory: "Thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen."[50] Poussin shows an earlier moment in world history at which God first turned his face from mankind, veiling his glory and revealing only his back. He figures this, the inaugural instant of God's withdrawal, through an unmistakable (but hitherto unremarked) citation: his *Deus absconditus* is taken from Raphael's picture of God appearing to Isaac in the Vatican logge (itself a free variant upon Michelangelo's *Creation of the Sun, Moon, and Planets* in the Sistine Chapel) (figs. 14, 15). Raphael's deity appears in the near foreground, directing Isaac back to the land of Gerar.[51]

[49] It echoes as well the fleeing Mercury in the early *Landscape with Juno and Io* in Berlin.

[50] I am grateful to Joel Snyder for referring me to this passage.

[51] For the reputation of Michelangelo in the seventeenth century, see Thuillier 1957. Michelangelo was at times seen as an antitype to Caravaggio, that is, as a figure whose willful departures from the ideal and from nature represented an excess of *maniera*.

> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy
> seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham
> thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy
> seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed: because
> that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my
> laws. (Genesis 26:3–5)

Poussin moves this figure to the background without significantly altering the pose. The irony is deliberate: Adam and Eve have not obeyed God's voice, kept his charge, his commandments, his statutes, his laws; hence God does not direct them to the Promised Land but prepares to expel them from Eden. Citation is not just the vehicle of thematic allusion; it functions here as a pictorial equivalent to the hiding of God. His departure is, along with Eve's gesture, the only action in the picture: even Satan is absent, leaving a simple contrast between an act of ostensive pointing and an instance of citation. The distinction between the two would seem to hinge on precisely the terms familiar from the Ashdod picture, painted some twenty-five years previously. If the way to figure God's hiding of himself is by means of an image that appears, humbly, as mere Imitation—of Raphael and Michelangelo both—then the way to figure the sin of our first parents is through something like the opposite: a gesture predicated on the simultaneous presence of sign and referent.

Sauerländer has shown, in a classic study, that the entire sequence of *Four Seasons* is typological of the Second Coming.[52] To this insight one may add simply that, for Augustine and other Church Fathers, the Mosaic vision of the *posteriora Dei* was typological as well:

> Not unfitly is it commonly understood to be prefigured from the person of our Lord Jesus Christ,
> that His "back parts" are to be taken to be His flesh, in which He was born of the Virgin, and
> died, and rose again; whether they are called back parts on account of the posteriority of mor-
> tality, or because it was almost in the end of the world, that is, at a late period, that He deigned
> to take it: but that His "face" was that form of God, in which He "thought it not robbery to be
> equal with God," which no one certainly can see and live . . .[53]

The hiding of God figures the Incarnation, just as Original Sin paved the way for the Messiah's coming. This figural equivalence reiterates the citational matrix in which it is articulated. Citation figures the turning-away of God, which in turn figures the redemption of that very sin depicted in the main scene. The hiddenness, the unavailability, of a God known only through traces and allu-sions holds the promise of a day to come in which the face will be revealed and God will become immediate. The image will come at the time of the Resurrection.

4. The Restoration of Antiquity

Returning to Ashdod, the relation between the two halves of the picture, temple and piazza, is rigidly antithetical despite their interchangeability. Both scenes narrate the victory of signification over depiction: the Ark defeats the idol as Imitation defeats Copy. But they do so in symmetrically opposite ways. The temple vignette is a straightforward *istoria*: what falls in is not the allegory of an idol but, simply, an idol. There is no quoting, no ostentatious Imitation, but an utterly conventional act of pictorial narrative. The street scene, by contrast, is allegorical, not literal: the plague narrative

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[52] Sauerländer 1956. On the series, see, more recently, Bätschmann 1995; Marin 1995a, 77–84.

[53] Augustine, *On the Trinity* 2.17.28.

figures Dagon's fall for those who can read the signs. The pictorial means, accordingly, are citational, not depictive. In each case, rhetorical structure recapitulates narrative. The imitative and allegorical plague narrative mimics and allegorizes the primal event of the idol's destruction.

In sum, the temple vignette *narrates* the basic opposition: Ark defeats idol. The secondary narrative of the plague and its misreading repeat the first in a sacred, symbolic register, identified with the notional space between the piazza and the temple. Finally, in the foreground group, the opposition occurs not as narrative but as the citational structure of the group itself, quite apart from the story it happens to tell. This third degree of depiction is properly called *allegory*. To spell it out, the foreground group is *the allegory of the symbol of a narrative.* The phrasing is otiose in a way that the picture is not.

Allegory, citation, regress: these terms are shibboleths of poststructuralism, and it is necessary to insist that Poussin is by no means a deconstructivist *avant la lettre*. His layering, palimpsesting, and deferring do not occur in the interest of an endless *mis-en-abyme*. On the contrary, the citational allegory in the piazza depends for its effect upon the nonallegorical scene in the temple. The figural relation between these two incidents is the suture that holds the two halves of the picture together. The plague acts out, figures, the defeat of idolatry; but the defeat of idolatry, as we see it in the temple vignette, is literal. Behind the regress of citation, behind the drama and pathos of the foreground, is the comforting stability of history painting. Citation does not lead to endless regress because the sequence of replications has a fixed and determinate origin. This device is a way of containing allegory—of staging it in order to contain it.[54]

It is here that the role of the antique becomes apparent. We have seen that the plague allegorizes the fall of Dagon, and it does so in exemplary fashion. Even so, the foreground group imitates Caravaggio and Raimondi, and behind Raimondi is Raphael, and behind Raphael is the Farnese statue, and behind that is the lost masterpiece of Aristeides the Theban, restored in the restoration of the lost infant. Confronted with a print, Poussin had wondered whether anyone had seen "poor painting" alive since the time of the Greeks. Here he uses a print to revive a lost Greek painting in and through a thematic of citation and regress. That original is lost, invisible, and must be approached obliquely via the Farnese Amazon. Importantly so, for the purpose of this machine is to find a way to think, if only on the negative, a mode of depiction that will be free of the taint of realism while yet remaining recognizable as such. Derived ultimately from a Greek painting as unknowable and unseeable as Jehovah, *The Miracle in the Temple* names its invisible origin with the pictorial equivalent of a tetragrammaton. To put it as concisely as possible: what the Hidden God does within the narrative, a stipulatively absent, unknowable antiquity does within the pictorial system.

5. Pyrrhonism and the Return to Logos

A relevant point of comparison for this allegory will be found not in Derridean theories of the abyss but in the writings of Poussin's favorite author, Montaigne.[55] Such comparisons have no special explanatory value, but they do serve a forensic purpose. They help to establish what Carlo Ginzburg terms a "horizon of latent possibilities" for a picture by Poussin.[56] They help, that is, to show what

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[54] For Poussin himself as a figure of origin in later French academic discourse, see Scott 1999.

[55] On Montaigne and citation, see Compagnon 1979,

279–356. On Poussin and Montaigne, see Cropper and Dempsey 1996, 177–215.

[56] Ginzburg 1982, xx–xxi.

conceptual and rhetorical tools were potentially available to someone in the artist's historical position. Understood as circumstantial evidence—no more, no less—such texts can be illuminating. To be sure, a "paratactic" juxtaposition of texts and images yields a weaker historical claim than that on offer in contemporary iconology. But the weakness might be seen as an historiographic minimalism, a refusal of hyperbolic assertions of textual clarity in pictures.[57] No text will tell us what a picture means, and no picture will tell us what a text means, just because picture and text are not identical. Texts can illuminate pictures and suggest to us what pictures might mean. But such illumination is at best descriptive, not explanatory. It is a matter of describing a *dispositif*, of suggesting a shared grammar of concepts within which, and according to which, the painter could project new meanings, much as users of language employ existing words to project sense into new situations. The dilemma, hence the standard of proof, in such instances might be likened to the question of whether two people (say, Pascal and Poussin) are speaking the same language. What could count as proof of such sharing, beyond a description of what they do with their words and in response to them?[58] Just so, nothing can show that Poussin is sharing a grammar of concepts with Pascal or Montaigne or anyone else beyond a description of the actors' behavior, as registered in paint and ink. Such demonstration will not do away with skepticism; by the same token, however, if we find these writers and painters to be using concepts in similar ways, then that would amount to saying that they are "speaking the same language." Contextual data, such as texts, always and only describe possibilities. As Cavell writes, alluding to Wölfflin, "Not everything is possible in every period, but not everything possible in any period is known before its materialization."[59]

In the case of Montaigne the historiographic claim is less radical, insofar as Poussin was an avowed admirer of the *Essais*. As the inaugural figure of early modern philosophical skepticism, or *pyrrhonisme*, Montaigne was alive to the unsettling possibilities of untrammeled citation. His *Essais* are packed with quotations from Latin authors, often but not always translated and almost never attributed. Thus it can at times be difficult to tell where Montaigne ends and his sources begin: a practice for which he was roundly criticized by later authors like Malebranche. Montaigne himself acknowledged that "someone might say of me that I have here only a bunch of other people's flowers, having furnished nothing of my own but the thread to tie them."[60] But such de facto plagiarism was, on his view, a virtue. In "On the Education of Children," he advocates the wholesale appropriation of antique words and ideas, and opposes attributing the quotes one uses.[61] Such attribution, he argues, would amount to a vainglorious display of erudition, whereas the true goal of citation is to absorb exemplary wisdom so thoroughly that it becomes one's own.

> The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterwards they make of them honey, which is all theirs; it is no longer thyme or marjoram. Even so with the pieces borrowed from others; he [the well-educated child] will transform them and blend them to make a work that is all his own, to wit, his judgment. . . . Let him hide all the help he has had, and show only what he has made of it.[62]

[57] For a more extended discussion of parataxis in art history writing, see Neer 2002, 23–26.

[58] I take this point to be one of the great lessons of the ordinary language philosophy of Austin, Wittgenstein, and Cavell and therefore do not argue it explicitly.

[59] Cavell 2005, 283.

[60] Montaigne 1958, 808 (3.12).

[61] Montaigne 1958, 106–131 (1.26). On this passage, see Compagnon 1979, 350–351. See also "Of Physiognomy" (Montaigne 1958, 808–810 [3.12]).

[62] Montaigne 1958, 111 (1.26). "Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font apres le miel, qui est tout leur; ce n'est plus thin, ny marjolaine: Ainsi les pieces empruntees d'autruy, il les transformera et confondra, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien: à sçavoir son jugement. . . . Qu'il cele tout ce dequoy il a esté secouru, et ne produise que ce qu'il en a faict."

True "pilferings" amount to making a show of pedantry, the opposite of Montaigne's own practice of borrowing and appropriation.

> As for doing what I have discovered others doing, covering themselves with other men's armor until they don't show even their fingertips, and carrying out their plan . . . with ancient inventions pieced out here and there—for those who want to hide [their borrowings] and appropriate them, this is first of all injustice and cowardice, that, having nothing of their own worth bringing out, they try to present themselves under false colors. . . . For my part, there is nothing I want less to do. I do not speak the minds of others except to speak my own mind better.[63]

As Antoine Compagnon has observed, the crux of the *Essais* consists in this attempt to reveal a self in and through borrowed words. Montaigne figures this revelation of the idiosyncratic in and through the banal as an endless task, akin to the punishment of the Danaïds in Hades, who were condemned to fill a leaky jar with water drawn in sieves: self-representation is a doomed and eternal quest for plentitude, and in the end the self of the *Essais* remains hollow and void.[64]

In making these points, Montaigne borrows heavily—and without attribution, of course—from Seneca's thirty-third epistle, to Lucilius. Large sections of the essay are, by modern standards, plagiarized.[65] But Montaigne is simply putting his theory into practice. He argues for appropriation and borrowing by appropriating and borrowing from Seneca. As with Poussin, citation structures an account of citation. In much the same way, the final pages of Montaigne's great manifesto of *pyrrhonisme*, the "Apologie pour Raymond Sebond," consist largely of an extended, unattributed crib from Plutarch.[66] In each case, citation figures the quintessentially skeptical dilemma of the endless regress of language to infinity.

Similar problems troubled Pascal. A younger contemporary of Poussin, Pascal wrote chiefly in the 1640s and 1650s, but the *Pensées* appeared only posthumously, well after Poussin had retired from painting due to infirmity. Thus Pascal's fragments provide a horizon for Poussin's own possible understanding of these issues, even as there can be no question of direct influence. The causal relation between word and image is in this instance nil. Affinities or attunements between the two, therefore, are not *explanatory* but *descriptive*. Pascal and Poussin deploy concepts in a similar way; there is a shared pattern of use. The result of such a comparison will not be iconology but something like a natural history of Poussin's painting.

In the famous §131 of the *Pensées*, Pascal accepts, as one of *les principales forces des pyrrhoniens*, the suggestion that each of us may simply be dreaming the world we take for reality. This idea is a commonplace of both ancient and modern skepticism, but Pascal phrases it in rather more complex terms than some of his contemporaries. What he fears in particular is an endless regress of dreams, dreams within dreams within dreams.

> No one can be sure, apart from faith, whether he is sleeping or waking, because when we are asleep we are just as firmly convinced that we are awake as we are now. As we often dream we

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[63] Montaigne 1958, 108 (1.26): "De faire ce que j'ay decouvert d'aucuns, se couvrir des armes d'autruy, jusques à ne montrer pas seulement le bout de ses doigts: conduire son dessein . . . sous les inventions anciennes, rappiecees par cy par là: à ceux qui les veulent cacher et faire propres, c'est premierement injustice et lascheté, que n'ayans rien en leur vaillant, par où se produire, ils cherchent à se presenter par une valeur purement estrangere. . . . De ma part il n'est rien que je vueille moins faire. Je ne dis les autres, sinon pour d'autant plus me dire."

[64] Montaigne 1958, 107 (1.26): "Je n'ay dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide, sinon Plutarche et Seneque, ou je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse. J'en attache quelque chose à ce papier, à moy, si peu que rien."

[65] Compagnon 1979, 350–351.

[66] Montaigne 1958, 455–457 (2.12).

are dreaming, piling up one dream upon another, is it not possible that this half of our life is itself just a dream, on to which the others are grafted, and from which we shall awake when we die?[67]

Pascal's worry is not simply that we may be mistaking sleep for wakefulness but that there may be no real difference between the two. The question is one of origins: is there a beginning or an end to the sequence of grafts or dreams, or does it go all the way to infinity? The skeptical argument amounts to the claim that there is no end, and Pascal agrees that "Uncertainty as to our origins entails uncertainty as to our nature."[68] His self-appointed task is to find such an origin, an authentic wakefulness, and thereby to refute the pyrrhonian claim. His argument is worth pursuing.

It has two stages. Pascal begins by replacing the infinite regress of skepticism with mankind's infinite transcendence of itself. "L'homme," he says, "passe infiniment l'homme."[69] By this he means that humans are the only earthly beings capable of knowing their own metaphysical aporia, of falling victim to skepticism or denying it with dogmatism. The recognition of this condition is itself a marvel. Weakness turns out to be strength: man is wretched and confused and yet, uniquely of all creatures, he knows it. It follows that human nature is dual: constantly, infinitely, paradoxically both great and wretched. Pascal infers that man has fallen into corruption: "The point is that if man had never been corrupted, he would, in his innocence, confidently enjoy truth and felicity, and, if man had never been anything but corrupt, he would have no idea either of truth or bliss."[70] The dual nature of man, rational but ignorant, transcending itself to infinity, turns out to be proof of a still earlier perfection, now lost—hence of Original Sin and a fall from grace.

With this topic, Pascal identifies a third sequence: the transmission of sin. From the infinite regress of dreams grafted on dreams, to the infinite self-transcendence of man, he moves to the "flow," *écoulement*, of guilt over the six thousand years that separate him from Eden. "The knot of our condition takes its twists and turns in that abyss . . ."[71] Yet the abyss in question differs from the other regresses in *not* being infinite: it is, exactly, the six millennia that have transpired since the Fall. To be sure, widely read contemporaries like Isaac de la Peyrère were insisting that mankind had flourished long before Eden and that the story of Adam and Eve was closer to the end of human time than the beginning.[72] But Pascal ignores such claims, not necessarily because they were lunatic but because they were irrelevant. Whether humans have existed for six thousand years or sixty thousand, what matters is that there be a definite origin in the first place: an *In principio*. Pascal thereby solves the double problem of infinity: the infinity of dreams and the infinity of self-transcendence. Each leads inexorably to the historical moment of the Fall, to an absolute moment of historical origin at which all infinities come to an end. The Fall, hence sin, is the transcendental condition of language.

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[67] Pascal 1995, 33 (§131). Pascal 1962, 72: "De plus que personne n'a d'assurance, hors de la foi—s'il veille ou s'il dort, vu que durant le sommeil on croit veiller aussi fermement que nous faisons. Comme on rêve souvant, qu'on rêve entassant un songe sur l'autre. Ne se peut-il faire que cette moitié de la vie n'est elle-même qu'un songe, sur lequel les autres sont entés, dont nous nous éveillons à la mort . . ."

[68] Pascal 1995, 34 (§131). Pascal 1962, 73: "l'incertitude de notre origine qui enferme celle de notre nature." On Poussin and origins, see Wolf 1999.

[69] Pascal 1962, 74, 75 (§131).

[70] Pascal 1995, 35 (§131). Pascal 1962, 74: "Car enfin si l'homme n'avait jamais été corrumpu il jouirait dans son innocence et de la vérité et de la félicité avec assurance. Et si l'homme n'avait jamais été que corrumpu il n'aurait aucune idée ni de la vérité, ni de la beatitude."

[71] Pascal 1962, 75 (§131): "Le nœud de notre condition prend ses replis et ses tours dans cet abîme" (trans. author).

[72] On de la Peyrére, see Popkin 1979, 214–228.

To return to Poussin, the painter was an avid reader of Montaigne, yet he lacked that writer's corrosive self-ironization. Articulated, like the *Essais*, in a rhetoric of citation, his pictures more closely resemble the unpublished *Pensées* in their attempt to defeat *pyrrhonisme* on its own ground. It is conventional to oppose the classicism of Richelieu to the Jansenism of Port-Royal. But such tidy oppositions will not do for a painter like Poussin, whose classicism was attractive to the cardinal yet who lost no opportunity to escape Paris for Rome. Poussin was not a Jansenist, yet the affinity with Pascal is illuminating (both were readers of Montaigne).[73] *Springtime* shows humanity's fall into a world of signs and citations: innocence is a state in which it is not necessary to point, as Eve does, in which "neither truth nor bliss" pertains because there is neither falsehood nor misery.[74] "There was once in man a true happiness, of which nothing now remains to him but the empty mark and trace."[75] The counterpoint of a prideful claim to knowledge-as-pointing—*la vérité en pointure*—and a pious vision of the *posteriora Dei* amounts to a reenactment of the Fall into representation itself.

For its part, *The Miracle in the Temple at Ashdod* may be seen as an antiskeptical *essai* as intricate, in its own way, as Pascal's argument. Like §131, the picture stages the possibility of endless regress precisely in order to reassert the primacy of absolute origin. For Pascal, that pure anteriority is called the Fall; for Poussin, it is at once antiquity and the God hidden in signs and portents. *Pensée* §279: "Jusque-là l'ambiguïté dure et non pas après."

6. The Destruction of the Temple

But the machine is flawed. The Ashdod picture presents palimpsesting and citation as solutions to the problem of Imitation. The problem that it leaves unsolved, however, is the rendering of the idol itself within the literal, originary history painting of the temple vignette. How to figure, how to think, the Copy, when copying is sin? How to mark the idol for what it is without compromising the entire conceit of the picture?[76] There are basically two alternatives when it comes to rendering the idol: either one cites, or one does not. If one cites—if one puts the idol in quotation marks, adopting a motif from another picture—then the picture's programmatic assimilation of realism to idolatry would be fatally compromised: realism would not figure in the picture at all. The idol would be structurally identical to the God of *Springtime* or to the foreground group in Ashdod itself. If, however, one just paints an idol as realistically as possible, then one is guilty of the very fault one decries. This difficulty may seem recondite, but it evidently bothered Poussin, and we can see him addressing it directly when, a few years later, he painted his next cityscape: *The Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem* (1638), now in Vienna (fig. 16).

In this painting, commissioned by Francesco Barberini as a gift from the pope to the emperor Ferdinand III, the theme has obvious political overtones.[77] Within Poussin's oeuvre, however, its position is more interesting. It is, with the Ashdod picture and two versions of *The Rape of the Sabines*, one of four cityscapes executed in the 1630s. The narrative theme inverts, as in music, that of *The Miracle in the Temple at Ashdod*. Where the earlier canvas depicted a pagan idol destroyed by Jehovah, here

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[73] On Pascal, Montaigne, and citation, see Compagnon 1979, 306–308.

[74] On the fall-into-language in Pascal and in seventeenth-century French thought generally, see Melzer 1986.

[75] Pascal, *Pensées* §148: "Il y a eu autrefois dans l'homme

un véritable bonheur, dont il ne lui reste maintenant que la marque et la trace toute vide . . ."

[76] On the medieval antecedents of this theme, see Camille 1989.

[77] See the discussion in Rosenberg 1994, 260.

Fig. 16. Nicolas Poussin, The Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, *1638 (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

Jehovah's temple is destroyed by pagans; where the earlier depicted the death of idolators, here it is the Jews themselves who lie slaughtered. The textual source is Josephus, to whose account Poussin is predictably faithful.[78] In the left background is the massive colonnade of the Second Temple; at right, a burning building. Titus gallops in from stage right, too late to save the temple; at center left, soldiers present him with bound prisoners. All around is looting and carnage.

The relation to the Ashdod picture is sufficiently clear that is not really a surprise to find that the idol of Dagon has reappeared here, in the heart of Jerusalem. It lies at the dead center of the picture, with its head once again on the ground nearby. This time, however, blood trickles from the severed neck: although the pose is the same, the figure is no longer a broken idol but a murdered Jew (figs. 17, 18). The marginal statue has moved to the center; the pagan has become Jewish. The figure even retains its greenish hue, which no longer signifies *statuary* but *death*. What to make of this odd moment of self-citation? It is as though the former idol were occupying the place that, in Ashdod, had belonged to the Caravaggesque group—as though Poussin were doing to his own

[78] On Poussin and Josephus, see Bull 2002; Olson 2002, 64–68. Olson's suggestion that Josephus was especially appealing to the *noblesse de la robe* is convincing but can have little pertinence to a painting commissioned by the Barberini on behalf of the pope.
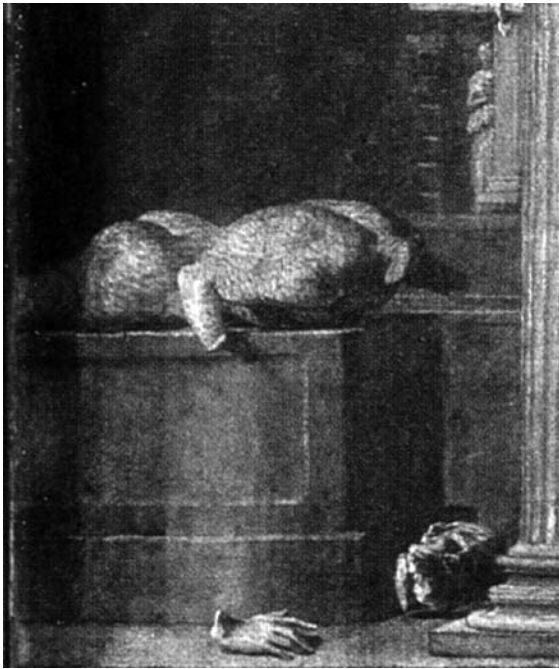
Fig. 17 (left). Nicolas Poussin, The Plague at Ashdod
*(*The Miracle in the Temple of Dagon*), detail
(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

Fig. 18 (below). Nicolas Poussin, The Destruction of the
Temple in Jerusalem, *detail (photo University of Chicago
Visual Resources Center).*

Dagon what he had formerly done to the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew.* Interpreted thematically, this
allusion might be taken to suggest that the Jews are, in the age of grace, de facto idolators. This
position was not uncommon in the seventeenth century; Arnauld, for instance, states in his *De la
frequente communion* of 1643 that salvation through deeds alone is at once idolatrous and Judaic,
in that both mistake mere externals for hidden, inner truth.[79] Pascal likewise condemns "the carnal
and judaic blindness which takes figures [i.e., typologies] for reality."[80] The idol fell in Ashdod,
and the Jew falls in Jerusalem.

The true God remains hidden. Titus, arriving too late to halt the destruction, is struck by a shaft
of light that enters the frame above and outside its upper edge. Of course, it is no mere sunbeam.
Poussin deploys a conceit with broad popularity in baroque art and architecture, from the paintings
of Georges de la Tour to the architecture of Bernini: present *lux* figures holy *lumen*.[81] This hiding
corresponds to the way that, in the Ashdod picture, the tablets of the Law were concealed within
the Ark of the Covenant, which was itself partially obscured and surrounded by images on all sides.
In the present instance, however, the material container of the Ark is replaced with divine light, at
once substantial and insubstantial. The Israelite-Dagon, a marker of Hebrew idolatry and literalism,
stands opposed to a representation of God-as-light proper to the New Covenant. The menorah is
extinguished and plundered; a different sort of light enters the world. Thus the destruction of the

[79] Arnauld 1643, 726. "Que si au temps des sacrifices char-
nels, et des ombres de la loy, Dieu tesmoigne par son proph-
ete, que c'est une espece d'idolatrie de le penser adorer en luy
desobeïssant, combine plus dans la nouvelle alliance, où il ne
peut souffrir que des adorateurs en esprit et en verité. C'est
estre juif de s'imaginer, que toutes les actions exterieures,
quelques saintes qu'elles paroissent, puissent plaire à Dieu,
si elles ne sont sanctifiées par son esprit."

[80] "L'aveuglement charnel et judaïque qui fait prendre la
figure pour la realité" (letter to Gilberte, 1 April 1648).

[81] On this conceit, with particular reference to the *Deus
absconditus* and French painting, see Armogathe 2001. Fu-
maroli notes in this connection that one of Poussin's earliest
works was an image of St. Dionyius the Areopagite, who
formulated the distinction between *lux* and *lumen*: Fumaroli
2001, 30. On Poussin's Rome, see Fehrenbach 2005.

temple seems to have all the pathos, and all the unremitting necessity, of the smashing of Dagon and the suffering of the Philistines. It is a view characteristic of seventeenth-century anti-Semitism: taking the Jews as opponents of Christ means viewing their plight as inevitable, however bitter.

The Destruction of the Temple is a return to the problematic of the Ashdod picture after some six years of successful classicism. The earlier picture had figured realism, or the pretense of immediacy in the absence of citation, as idolatry. To this idolatry it had opposed a metaphorical assimilation of classical allusion and Old Testament piety. It had figured this contrast in and through oppositions of piazza to temple, plague to miracle, pagan to Hebrew, Copy to Imitation, theater to diegesis. Jerusalem replaces all of these figures with a simpler opposition of Imitation and light, of that which is shown as present and that which is marked as absent. The idol moves out of the temple into the piazza, and in so doing becomes an image like any other, that is, an Imitation or citation. There are, in fact, no idols in Jerusalem; there is no Copy in that singular and ineffable city, just because there is no opposition between allegorical and literal narrative, piazza and temple, but (to repeat) a single opposition between the istoria within the frame and the divine light that streams in from outside. The problem of the idol is therefore avoided, and with it the dilemma of how to represent without copying. Citation is no longer the triumphant trumping of Caravaggism but a counterpoint to the ineffability of the Pater luminum. The flaw in the machine is thereby fixed, and the way is open to the triumphant classicism of the 1640s.

7. The Picture and the Diagram

One could write a book about the adventures of Imitation in the course of Poussin's career. But two broad points emerge even from this abbreviated treatment. The first is that depiction in (and for) Poussin is freighted with ethical consequence. His pictures stage representation as a metaphysical problem, but not trivially so: it is a problem of how to act. Merely theoretical discourse, of the sort one finds in Bellori's treatises or Poussin's own letters, is comparatively insignificant. On the contrary, the "ethical substance" for Poussin consists in what one does with images, either as maker or as beholder.[82] Terms like Imitation and Copying are descriptive of such actions and have no other significance. The identical figure can be an idol or Copy in one scene, an Israelite or Imitation in another: what matters is what you do with it. In short, Poussin's pictures do not illustrate or even allegorize moral philosophy; rather, they put ethics into practice. The second point is that neither iconology nor style history can do justice to this painterly ethics. They cannot do justice because they are each predicated on the abstraction of practice into theory. Formalism can recognize the relation of The Miracle in the Temple to The Martyrdom of St. Matthew, but it cannot see the moral stakes of that relation. Iconology can theorize Imitation and Copy, and it can relate Poussin to Stoic moralizing, but it cannot see his pictures as other than material correlates of cognitive or cultural Geister. The challenge, therefore, is to see how the making and beholding of pictures can themselves be lived ethical practices. Is there an ascetics of painting?

By way of answering, we may turn to one of Poussin's last works: the Landscape with Orion, painted for Michel Passart in 1658 (fig. 19).[83] The giant hunter Orion strides into the background from stage right. Having been blinded for attempting to rape the daughter of the king of Chios, he has been struck blind. He seeks the rising Sun, in whose rays he will find a cure and seems to be

[82] "Ethical substance": Foucault 1983, 238.

[83] On Passart, see Schnapper and Massat 1994; Olson 2002, 37–59.

Fig. 19. Poussin, Landscape with Orion, *1658 (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

making his way to the crest of a hill, behind which is a light-filled valley. Perched atop his shoulders is the diminutive figure of Cedalion, an assistant at the forge of Hephaestus, who serves as his guide. Cedalion seems to be asking directions from a man standing in the shade of a large tree. Immediately above and in front of him is a dark cloud, its edges gilt by sunlight: trails of vapor lead off to the right, suggesting that the cloud has been moving from right to left, floating before Orion. Leaning on the cloud is the goddess Diana, a figure of studied nonchalance. Great trees stand all around; in the distance, just above Orion's outstretched hand, is a lighthouse; at lower left, at the base of the hillock, is a leafy cave surrounded by blasted stumps.

The painting has long been admired; it once belonged to Joshua Reynolds and inspired an oft-quoted *ekphrasis* by William Hazlitt.[84] But it is known today chiefly as the subject of a celebrated essay by E. H. Gombrich.[85] In a few short pages, Gombrich provided a masterpiece of iconological analysis. The argument has met with all but universal assent and is something of a *tour de force*; it is therefore worth examining in detail.

Gombrich begins with the premise that Poussin worked from a brief *ekphrasis* in Lucian:

> Orion, who is blind, is carrying Cedalion, and the latter, riding on his back, is showing him the way to the sunlight. The rising sun is healing the blindness of Orion, and Hephaistos views the incident from Lemnos.[86]

[84] Hazlitt 1934, 168–174.

[85] Gombrich 1972, 119–122, first published in 1944. On the status of Gombrich's argument, see Carrier 1993, 105–144.

See McTighe 1996, 8, 35–36 for examples of the argument's current stature.

[86] Lucian, *De domo* 27–29, quoted in Gombrich 1972, 119.

Gombrich observes two important differences between image and text. First, Poussin includes Diana observing from a cloud; she does not appear in Lucian. Second, Poussin does not show Hephaistos observing from Lemnos. Does he show Hephaistos at all? Gombrich thought so: he saw the smith-god in the man who stands at Orion's feet, giving directions. But this identification is tendentious. Bellori called the figure simply a *homaccino*, or "little fellow," and there is in fact no reason to label him Hephaistos absent Lucian's account—with which the picture is quite inconsistent.[87] The connection with Lucian ought to be an hypothesis, not a premise. Indeed, the discrepancies between picture and text might lead one to conclude that the text is not especially pertinent. Gombrich, however, does the opposite: the discrepancies call for explanation. Specifically, they license inquiry into the presence of Diana.

For Poussin's friend Félibien, Diana is present because she is responsible for Orion's blindness.[88] Félibien is incorrect about classical myth—Diana killed Orion, but she did not blind him. The king of Chios performed the deed, because Orion had assaulted his daughter. Félibien does, of course, provide good evidence for what an associate of Poussin *thought* occurred in the story of Orion; maybe Poussin thought so, too. But Gombrich does not consider this possibility. Instead he turns to the euhemerist mythological handbook of Natale Conti for an explanation. Conti argues that Orion is the son of three fathers—Neptune, Jupiter, and Apollo—who signify water, air, and sun respectively. From this triple paternity he concludes that the Orion myth is "a veiled symbol" of "the origin and natural course of the stormcloud."[89] As for Diana, she naturally signifies the moon. "They say," writes Conti, "that he [Orion] was killed by Diana's arrows for having dared to touch her—because as soon as the vapors have ascended to the highest stratum of the air so that they appear to us as touching the moon or the sun, the power of the moon gathers them up and converts them into rains and storms, thus overthrowing them with her arrows and sending them downwards . . ."[90] From this passage, Gombrich concludes, "The long-stretched stormcloud through which the giant is striding, that conspicuously rises up from under the trees, expands through the valley, gathers up in the air and touches Diana's feet, this cloud is no other than Orion himself in his 'real' esoteric meaning."[91] Poussin has offered a pictorial version of euhemerist reading.

This argument is, to repeat, a classic of iconology and has acquired the status of orthodoxy.[92] On closer examination, however, the reasoning is very peculiar. Gombrich's point of entry is the discrepancy between Lucian and the picture: Diana is not in Lucian (nor in any other classical account of the blinding incident), but she is in Poussin. Gombrich then finds that Diana also appears in Conti, along with storm clouds. He concludes that Conti must be the source for Poussin's inclusion of Diana and the cloud. But the connection between the two halves of the argument, Lucian and Conti, is unclear. The question at hand is, What is Diana doing in a scene of Orion's blindness? There is nothing in Natale Conti that explains this peculiarity.[93] That is because, *even for Conti,* Diana has nothing to do with the blinding episode. His account of the cloud touching the moon evokes an entirely different part of the story, when the goddess kills her former lover after he regains his sight. The point is not trivial because for Conti the killing of Orion by Diana figures

[87] Bellori 1672 (1931), 455.

[88] Félibien, quoted in Gombrich 1972, 120.

[89] Gombrich 1972, 121.

[90] Conti, quoted in Gombrich 1972, 121.

[91] Gombrich 1972, 122.

[92] The closest thing to departures from Gombrich being Carrier 1993, 105–144 and Thuillier 1994, 38–39.

[93] The connection with Lucian is likewise tangential since Diana does not play a role in *any* classical account of Orion's blindness.

Fig. 20. Annibale Caracci, Pan and Diana
(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).

the moment in which storm clouds become rain; the entire meteorological allegory depends on the fact that the two characters come together at the moment of Orion's death *and not before*. In Poussin, by contrast, Diana and the cloud are integral to the narrative of blindness. As Gombrich himself remarks, "The . . . cloud on which she leans also forms a veil in front of Orion's eye and thus suggests some kind of connection between the presence of the goddess and the predicament of the giant."[94] In short, the original problem—why is Diana here?—remains unsolved. Gombrich has in fact answered not his own question but an entirely different one. He has not shown why Poussin included Diana in the scene of Orion's blindness when Lucian did not. Instead, he has offered an explanation for the simultaneous presence of Orion, Diana, and a storm cloud, and he has done so by ignoring the fact that the literary source that unites these three does so in an entirely different narrative context. There is a certain willfulness to this procedure that systematically ignores the poor fit between the texts—Lucian and Conti—and the picture. Lucian tells the same story in a different way; Conti tells a different story in a similar way; Poussin does something else altogether.

Such objections only take one so far.[95] The trouble consists in identifying the peculiarities in a picture that is itself an iconographic *hapax*. Gombrich at least appears to have found a connection among all the peculiarities. His argument would be more compelling if Diana were not regularly associated with clouds in seventeenth-century art and if Poussin were not in the habit of setting diminutive figures atop clouds in his pictures. As an example of a cloud-borne Diana that has nothing to do with Conti, one may cite a work by one of Poussin's most revered masters, Annibale Carraci: the *Pan and Diana* from the Palazzo Farnese in Rome (fig. 20). The goddess descends

[94] Gombrich 1972, 120.

[95] David Carrier has remarked that, "Since Orion is a puzzling image, we need to explain its peculiarities. Since Gombrich does that, only constructive criticism will cause us to critically reconsider his account." Carrier 1993, 110.

toward the caprine god on a puff of mist. Earlier still, a *Diana and Orion* of the 1540s, attributed to Giulio Romano or Niccolò dell'Abbate, has the goddess pirouetting atop a cloud to fire her arrows at Orion.[96] In literature, likewise, Diana is regularly associated with clouds. In Charles Sorel's *Le Berger extravagant* of 1627, for instance, she veils herself with them out of modesty.[97] In Rotrou's *Iphigénie* of 1641, she descends on a cloud as a *dea ex machina*: a bit of dramaturgy sensational in its time (Poussin was in Paris during the premiere).[98] The seer Calchas exclaims, in words that resonate with the *Landscape*: "Gods! What storm, moving all in a moment, steals from us the view of those azure plains?"[99] Rotrou's Diana is not merely cloudy but, like Poussin's own, she "steals the view." There is no need to invoke Conti, or any other specific source, to explain such a commonplace. Elsewhere in Poussin's oeuvre, meanwhile, cloud-borne figures abound. Among the early works, the drawing *The Origin of Coral* (Windsor), *The Empire of Flora* (Berlin), and the *Landscape with Juno and Io* (Berlin); among the late, *Springtime* (Louvre), *Ste. Françoise Romaine* (Louvre), and *The Birth of Bacchus* (Harvard). In short, neither a cloud-borne figure generally, nor a cloud-borne Diana specifically, is really a peculiarity in the *Landscape with Orion*. If anything, Diana represents a *narrative* peculiarity (she is out of place in this story as it comes down to us in texts) but not an *iconographic* one (there is nothing odd about Diana on a cloud).

Approaching the matter from the opposite direction, the *Aeneid* gives a magnificent description of Orion with his head in the clouds:

> Like tall Orion when on foot he goes through the deep sea and lifts his shoulders high above the waves; or when he takes his path along the mountain-tops, and has for staff an aged ash-tree, as he fixes firm his feet in earth and hides his brows in cloud [*et caput inter nubila condit*]; so loomed Mezentius with his ponderous arms. (10.763–767)

Just as Diana can ride on clouds without being an allegory of rainfall, so it is perfectly possible to associate Orion with clouds without thereby subscribing to Conti's exegesis. The iconography of Orion is so rare as to be intrinsically peculiar; if one must find a text to understand it, then the *Aeneid* seems altogether more plausible than a manual of esotericism. But perhaps such texts are red herrings. No text explains the real peculiarity in this picture. The real peculiarity is not the cloud but rather the feature that Gombrich identified at the beginning of his essay but never addressed: the presence of Diana at Orion's blindness and, by extension, the way she seems to float in front of his sightless eyes.

In this situation the picture itself warrants closer attention. It happens that discussions have overlooked two significant details. The first is the source of the Orion figure. Since Gombrich "solved" the *Landscape* more than sixty years ago, such questions have been neglected. In fact, Poussin seems to have worked from a fresco in the Benediction Loggia at S. Giovanni in Laterano: *Constantine's Vision of the Cross*, by Cesare Nebbia and Giovanni Guerra, painted in 1585–1590 (fig. 21).[100] The

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[96] The picture is in the Szépművészeti Museum in Budapest: Pigler 1968, 272 and pl. 108.

[97] Sorel 1972, 209.

[98] On the new use of machines in the 1640s, see the remarks by Alain Riffaud in Rotrou 1999, 381–386. On Rotrou's own appropriation and transformation of lines from Thomas Sébillet's translation of the *Iphigenia* of Euripides—a practice not unlike Poussin's own Imitation of Raphael and others—see Rotrou 1999, 354–356.

[99] Rotrou, *Iphigénie* 1855–1858 (Rotrou 1999, 509), trans. author. "Mais Dieux! quelle tempête en un moment émue, / De ces plaines d'azur nous dérobe la vue . . . ?"

[100] For this fresco, see Freiberg 1988, 622–624. Orion does bear a superficial resemblance to Poussin's illustration of a "Figure Moving against the Wind," in Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* (da Vinci 2002, 108, fig. 8). But the similarity to the fresco in S. Giovanni is, to my eye, much greater.

Fig. 21. Cesare Nebbia and Giovanni Guerra, The Vision of Constantine *(photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*

striding Roman soldier in the right foreground closely resembles Poussin's Orion in both pose and placement. The fresco is little seen today but occupied a prominent place in one of the great churches in Christendom, the Cathedral of Rome. There can be no doubt that Poussin knew it.

It seems a bit odd that Poussin should turn to this fresco, especially since Nebbia and Guerra were not specially revered in the 1650s. One possible explanation for the choice would be thematic or semiological: to see Orion's quest for the sun as analogous to the Roman soldier's efforts to see the vision of the Cross. On this view, the allusion suggests that Orion's blindness—a direct result of his lust and violence—is both a physical and a spiritual condition. Like the pagan soldier approaching the radiant vision, the giant stumbles both literally and metaphorically from darkness into light. As in *The Destruction of the Temple* some two decades previously, light signifies grace; clouds are an obstacle to it. Such images had broad currency in seventeenth-century art literature; they were appropriate to topics of the highest seriousness.[101]

The metaphorics of light takes us to the second neglected detail. In a picture that has as its central drama the quest for the sun, scholars have been remarkably incurious about the source of light. Where is the sun? The overwhelming sense, on first approaching the picture, is that the light is shining from the left background into the right foreground. It silhouettes the men who sit on the crest of the hill and causes the edges of Diana's cloudbank to glow. To my knowledge, every

[101] Such images had broad currency in the seventeenth century; one finds them, for instance, in Pascal. *Pensées* §149 reads, "Here is the state in which men are today. They retain some feeble instinct from the happiness of their first nature, and are plunged into the wretchedness of their blindness and concupiscence, which has become their second nature." (Voilà l'état où les hommes sont aujourd'hui. Il leur reste quelque instinct impuissant du bonheur de leur première nature, et ils sont plongés dans les misères de leur aveuglement et de leur concupiscence qui est devenue leur seconde nature). *Penssées* §477 reads, "Here is a strange monster, and a visible aberration. See him fallen from his place, he searches anxiously for it. That is what all men do. Let us see who has found it." (Voilà un étrange monstre, et un égarement bien visible. Le voilà tombé de sa place, il la cherche avec inquiétude. C'est ce que tous les hommes font. Voyons qui l'aura trouvée). Trans. A. J. Krailsheimer, modified by the author. For more instances of this *topos*, see Armogathe 2001; Miller 2002, 126–129.

commentator who mentions the light source locates it in the left background, somewhere beyond or behind the clouds. It is this inference that gives rise to the further sense that Diana is somehow blocking Orion's way, obstructing his access to the redemptive light. For Gombrich, as noted earlier, the cloud "forms a veil" between Orion and the sun. For Blunt, the bearded man on the ground is "pointing out to the guide the way to the rising sun."[102] For Pierre Rosenberg, "Orion . . . is walking through the clouds toward the rays of the sun, which will restore to him his sight," and, "Orion is walking towards the sun which is hidden by the clouds."[103] For Marc Fumaroli, whose French is untranslatable, "Une sorte d'ogive insolite encadre le fond du paysage où le soleil se lève: d'un côté le géant en route vers l'Orient . . . de l'autre un massif d'arbres monumentaux, à contre-jour, épaulant pour ainsi dire la butée d'Orion."[104] This impression is all but irresistible, especially given the way the light catches the edges of Diana's cloudbank. It looks almost as though the sun were behind the cloud, causing a nimbus to form around its extremities (this is the meaning of Fumaroli's term *contre-jour*). At the same time, a hole in the screen of trees at left reveals the sky brightening to white in farthest distance on that side, while the trees in the light-filled valley, directly above the heads of the silhouetted men on the hillcrest, cast long shadows that angle distinctly into the foreground. The commentators are presumably responding to these clues.

But this impression cannot be correct. Although the illumination of the background does suggest that the sun rises in the left distance, the disposition of shadows in the foreground indicates plainly that the light enters from somewhere in front and to the left of the picture plane. Each tree stump in the foreground is a veritable gnomon, casting a long shadow into the right background. Orion himself casts a similar shadow, while the illumination of his shoulders would be inexplicable if the sun were in the background. Even the stand of trees at left middle ground, so far from being in *contre-jour*, catches the light. There is no way satisfactorily to reconcile this foreground illumination with that of the background, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Poussin has been inconsistent.[105] This effect is unlikely to be accidental. Not only is the location of the sun of unique importance to this story, but Poussin is known to have been unusually fastidious in the disposition of his light sources.[106] As Cropper and Dempsey have shown, the *Communion* from the second series of *Sacraments* was a showpiece in this regard: the painter exercised considerable ingenuity in representing the play of shadows cast by an oil lamp with three separate wicks. Poussin knew just what he was doing.

So Orion is not, or not simply, walking toward the sun. There are at least *two* notional suns in this picture, one outside the frame in the space of the beholder, the other in the background. Recognition of this inconsistency clarifies the narrative action considerably. Cedalion, perched on Orion's shoulders, and the "little fellow" gesticulating below, are each pointing in different directions. The latter seems definitely to be sending Orion into the valley. The former points off to the left, but the exact angle of his gesture is uncertain. Although Cedalion's right arm is parallel to Orion's left, the twist of his body suggests that he is not pointing into the valley but to stage left. Or maybe not (the ambiguity is permanent). The result is a scene of exceptional pathos: Orion, huge and sightless, marches

[102] Blunt 1967, 315.

[103] Rosenberg 1994, 506 ("Orion . . . marche à travers les nuages orageux vers les rayons du soleil, qui lui rendront la vue"); Rosenberg and Damian 1995, 120.

[104] Fumaroli 1994, 535.

[105] We may even rule out the possibility that light streams from a source in front of the picture plane, reflects off the far hillside in the valley, and illumines the cloud from behind. For one thing, such a light would not illuminate the clouds so strongly; for another, it should cause the hillcrest trees and the giant Orion to cast secondary shadows, which they do not.

[106] Cropper and Dempsey 1996, 145–176.

purposefully in the wrong direction, while his guide, the craftsman who should be his eyes, bickers with a bystander over where to go. It is this spectacle that the goddess watches so impassively.

The notion that Poussin included two suns in his picture may seem impossibly contrived. Yet the notion of multiple suns has important precedent. In *Purgatorio* 16, for instance, Dante writes:

> Rome, that reformed the world, was accustomed
> To have two suns, which one road and the other,
> Of God and of the world, made visible.[107]

It might be tempting to read off Poussin's meaning from this passage. Orion, victimized by his own lust, massively corporeal, stands at a crossroads between salvation and the world. The allusion to Nebbia and Guerra might be adduced in support of such a reading. But there is nothing in the picture to suggest that these suns are individually symbolic of divine and earthly light, that the setting is Rome, or even that there are two roads. There is nothing pictorial that suggests any specific debt to, or even knowledge of, the *Purgatorio*.

If, however, we leave Florence for Rome, and the fourteenth century for the seventeenth, and Italian for French, then we find an even stranger description of multiple suns. On 20 March 1629 the citizens of Rome witnessed an extraordinary meteorological event: the appearance of five separate suns in the afternoon sky. This prodigy occurred shortly after Poussin's arrival in the city as a young painter. Technically known as *parhelia*, the multiple suns ignited scholarly controversy. Christoph Scheiner, the Jesuit opponent of Galileo, witnessed the event from Frascati. He communicated it in detail to Cardinal Barberini, who in turn informed the great Provençal intellectual Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc.[108] Peiresc produced a pamphlet describing the event, which he disseminated throughout Europe by means of his friend Pierre Gassendi (fig. 22). This scholarly call-to-arms did not go unanswered. Gassendi himself wrote a treatise on the subject, which first appeared in 1630 and was reissued in 1656 and then again in 1658 (the year of Poussin's *Orion*) as part of larger collections. The topic likewise exercised Christiaan Huygens, who was working on it in the 1660s, as well as lesser figures like Isaac Beeckman and Henri Reneri.[109] Descartes learned of the incident from the latter, who had received a pamphlet from Gassendi. To say that the news was significant would be an understatement. Descartes set out to provide a physical explanation of parhelia, and his work on this topic became the germ of *Les Météores*, which in turn gave rise to what would become the *Discourse on Method*. Although nowadays read in isolation, the *Discourse* was originally the preface to three studies of optics, geometry, and meteorology. *Les Météores* was the last of these studies, representing the climax of the whole project: *la Méthode* in its application to natural phenomena. The last chapter of *Les Météores*, the culmination of the culmination, is an explanation of the multiple suns of 1629.

What was at stake in parhelia? The epigraph to Peiresc's pamphlet, a passage from the first *Georgic* of Virgil, provides a gloss:

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[107] Dante, *Purgatorio* 16.106–109: "Soleva Roma, che'l buon mondo feo, / Due soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada / Facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo."

[108] On Peiresc, see Miller 2000. On Peiresc and parhelia, see Gassendi's own account: Gassendi 1992, 190–191.

[109] Gassendi's text is *Parhelia, sive soles quatuor qui circa verum apparuerunt Romae die XX mensis martis, anno 1629,* *et de eisdem Petri Gassendi Epistola ad Henricum Renerium* (1630, repr. 1656 and again as part of a *Petri Gassendi Opera* in 1658). For Huygens's *Dissertationem de corona & parheliis*, written in 1662 or 1663 but published only posthumously, see Huygens 1932. For Beeckman, see Beeckman 1953, 149–151. For Reneri, see the undated *Phaenomenon rarum et illustre Romae observatum 20 Martij Anno 1629* (Amsterdam). On the parhelia and Descartes, with a brief overview of the whole incident, see Gaukroger 1995, 217–219.

Fig. 22. Parhelia of 1629, from Peiresc's pamphlet of that year as preserved in the Journal *of Isaac Beeckman (photo University of Chicago Visual Resources Center).*
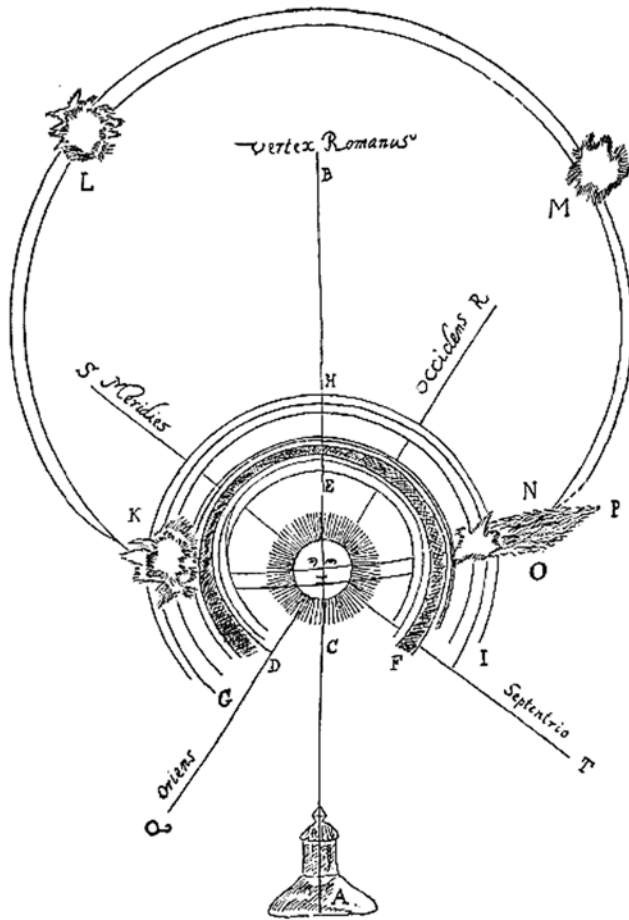
> Who dares to call the Sun
> A liar? It is he who often warns of secret [*caecos*] conspiracy
> And treachery and hidden swelling of war.[110]

In a time of insurgent *pyrrhonisme* and nascent empiricism, the possibility of a lying sun was both a problem and an opportunity. A problem because it demonstrated in startling fashion the power of pyrrhonian doubts about sense perception. The very vocabulary of rationalism was predicated on the veracity of the sun: reason was *la lumière naturelle*, "natural light," a cognitive counterpart to the self-evident clarity of sunshine.[111] The possibility of doubling a single candle flame by pressing on one's eyeballs was an old chestnut of skepticism, but a sun that appeared multiple under ordinary conditions was an altogether greater worry.[112] It was in fact a *topos* in its own right. Well before 1629, Montaigne had raised the possibility of multiple suns in the "Apologie pour Raymond

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[110] The pamphlet is preserved in Isaac Beeckman's journal: Beeckman 1953, 149–151. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.463–465 runs as follows: *Solem quis dicere falsum / audeat? Ille etiam caecos instare tumultus / saepe monet fraudemque et operta tumescere bella.*

[111] The term is Galileo's, *il lume naturale*, taken over by French mechanistic rationalists like Descartes.

[112] Double candles: attributed to Timagoras. See, e.g., Montaigne 1958, 447 (2.12).

Sebond." In a long and thoroughly pyrrhonian account of the fallibility of the senses, he quoted from the *Aeneid* (4.470) to make his point:

> This same deception that the senses convey to our understanding they receive in their turn. . . . What we see and hear when stirred to anger, we do not hear as it is. *Et solem geminum, Et duplices se ostendere Thebas* [Twin suns appear, and a double city of Thebes]. . . . To a man vexed or afflicted the brilliance [*clarté*] of day seems darkened and gloomy. Our senses are not only altered, but often completely stupefied by the passions of the soul.[113]

The line from Virgil is itself a celebrated reference to the moment in Euripides's *Bacchae* (lines 918–919) at which the drunken and fear-maddened Pentheus sees double: "Oh look! I think I see two suns, and twin Thebes, the seven-gated city." Montaigne, however, is less concerned with passing disturbances of perception than with its root fallibility. It is this altogether more significant aspect of the problem that the parhelia dramatized: the incident of 1629 brought a theoretical fancy to life. Precisely the significance of this *topos* for skepticism made it an opportunity for the rationalists of the seventeenth century: explaining the bizarre occurrence would be a significant victory both for the nascent science and for whomever could solve the conundrum. If Cartesian *méditation* amounts to stating the pyrrhonian argument in order methodically to defeat it, then the impetus of that enterprise lies in parhelia, as its demonstration consists in rationalizing the apparition. The lying, plural sun represents the conjunction of the extraordinary with the everyday: it forces a confrontation between the world of the Cartesian closet, in which the philosopher is prey to radical doubt about balls of wax and malicious demons, and the world of ordinary conversation, the world of weather and sunshine, in which it can be possible to hold such questions at bay.

There is no reason to suppose that Poussin had specific knowledge of Gassendi's or Descartes's discussions of parhelia.[114] But he was resident in Rome when the incident occurred in 1629, and the main actors were known to him personally: Cardinal Barberini was a patron, as was his retainer Cassiano dal Pozzo, and Poussin himself corresponded with Peiresc.[115] It is very likely that Poussin knew of the prodigy, even if he did not witness it personally. But the *Landscape with Orion* does not refer directly to this incident: Scheiner reported five suns, and the picture seems to imply only (!) two. The point bears repeating: the *Landscape* does not illustrate the event of 20 March 1629. Similarly, Montaigne does mention two suns but only in passing—would Poussin really have noticed the remark?—and he also mentions two cities of Thebes, which of course do not appear in the picture. The importance of these textual precedents lies not in providing sources for Poussin's meditation but in defining the significance of duplex suns. The "Apologie pour Raymond Sebond," the prodigy of 1629, and the scientific responses all suggest that parhelia were one especially important way in which skeptical doubt presented itself in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. They are, therefore, no more and no less than circumstantial evidence for the possibility that Poussin might himself have attached metaphysical importance to such a phenomenon. As with the suggested affinity between Poussin's *Springtime* and Pascal's discourse of the Fall, this claim is a weak or minimalist one: but, for just that reason, more plausible than Gombrich's emphatic but incoherent cryptography. The multiple sun was part of the vocabulary that Poussin had at his disposal: for his

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[113] Montaigne 1958, 450 (2.12). "Cette mesme pipperie, que les sens apportent à nostre entendement, ils la reçoivent à leur tour. . . . Ce que nous voyons et oyons agitez de colere, nous ne l'oyons pas tel qu'il est. *Et solem geminum, Et duplices se ostendere Thebas. . . .* À un homme ennuyé et affligé, la clarté du jour semble obscurcie et tenebreuse. Noz sens sont non seulement alterez, mais souvent hebetez du tout, par les passions de l'ame."

[114] The alleged affinity of Descartes and Poussin is a familiar theme. See most recently Keazor 2003.

[115] On Poussin and Peiresc, see Miller 2002, 129 and n. 187.

contemporaries and friends, it was *bon à penser*. What Poussin made of it, however, is not to be understood by reference to scientific treatises but to the pictures themselves.

Landscape with Orion combines themes that go back to Poussin's early successes of the 1630s: citation, vision, and light. Yet there are significant differences between the early works and the late. *Jerusalem* used light to figure an ineffable counterpoint to the potentially endless mediation of images that characterizes our postlapsarian world: idols and Israelites may merge into a single economy of representation, but the first cause of everything is the *Pater luminorum*. *Orion* quite deliberately splits that primal source in two. The reference to the Lateran *Vision of Constantine* makes this theme pictorially significant, explicitly linking Orion in his quest for the sun to a pagan seeking salvation in the symbol of Christ. Classicism here comes unmoored from its origins, as citation ceases to figure the primal and invisible source behind representations and becomes instead a way to signal the stakes in the possibility of a lying sun. The fussy erudition of the narrative and the trite metaphorics of blindness and carnality acquire genuine drama when integrated into Poussin's oeuvre in terms of light sources and citation. The absolute origin that the pictures of Ashdod, Jerusalem, and Eden go to such lengths to posit is in this one instance fractured. Like *The Destruction of the Temple*, *Landscape with Orion* is structured around two key elements: a central citation that reveals the allegorical stakes of the narrative (the idol-Israelite, the soldier-Orion) and an inferred light source that promises escape from the regressive structure of Imitation. The difference is simply that in the later picture that promise is utterly hollow even as it is stated with maximal emphasis. The reference to the *Vision of Constantine* may heighten the spiritual drama of the picture, but it is deeply ironic: far from an ecstatic revelation of the one true God in and through his most abstract sign—the Cross—Orion pursues a light that is incorrigibly plural. In *Landscape with Orion*, the possibility of endless regress, of a sun that lies, is not merely a theoretical fancy but an existential condition.

A contrast with Pascal is revealing. *Penseés* §109 states the skeptical dilemma in terms of language: two men use the same words to describe the same phenomenon, but does conformity of application entail conformity of thought? Pascal admits that it does not even though the odds are that it does.

> That is enough to cloud [*embrouiller*] the matter, to say the least, though it does not completely extinguish the natural light [*la clarté naturelle*] which provides us with certainty in such things. The academicians [i.e., Platonists] would have wagered on it, but that makes the light dimmer and upsets the dogmatists, to the glory of the pyrrhonian cabal which consists in this ambiguous ambiguity [*ambiguïté ambiguë*], and in a certain doubtful obscurity [*obscurité douteuse*] from which our doubts cannot remove every bit of light any more than our natural light can dispel all the darkness.

The metaphors of this passage—clouds, light, and most especially the ambiguity of whether there is anything behind the obscurity, whether the academicians are reckless in their wager or the pyrrhonians dubious in their doubts—are broadly consistent with those of the *Landscape*. But when Pascal had finished writing, he turned over the page and wrote on the back:

> The least thing is of this kind. God is the beginning and the end. Eccl.
> 1. Reason.

It is precisely this unitary point of origin and termination that Poussin eschews in the Orion picture—even if later, in the *Springtime*, he would reinstate it in his citation of Michelangelo.[116] Reason,

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[116] The translations of Pascal in this paragraph are those of
A. J. Krailsheimer, modified by the author.

la clarté naturelle, is precisely not the first principle in this picture, nor is there a God to serve as beginning and end. The only deity present is Diana.

So the question returns: why is she here? A departure from literary sources, the detail resists iconological reduction and remains unexplained in Gombrich's account. There will not be a satisfying explanation of Diana's presence if the *Landscape* is taken as an informed illustration of classical myth, euhemerist or no.[117] Only the picture's internal logic can provide a rationale. So it is worth looking more closely at what Diana is actually doing. Although she is the very figure of impassivity, her cloud-platform is oddly mobile. The wisps of vapor that trail off to right suggest that it is moving along with Orion, floating before his blind eyes as he stumbles along.[118] Since the goddess also seems to be veiling the sun, the obvious conclusion is that she is blocking Orion's access to the healing rays. This is the "connection between the presence of the goddess and the predicament of the giant," of which Gombrich spoke. Except that there may be no sun for her to conceal, and the whole apparatus is in the service of a falsehood. Diana's function is not to hide the sun but to *posit* it, to suggest all but irresistibly that the sun—and not merely *a* sun—is rising just behind the next hilltop. The clouds invite Orion and Cedalion to follow them in an attempt to get behind them; like a will-o'-the-wisp in reverse, the cloudbank seduces its victims by seeming to veil a light that is in fact a sort of mirage.

The victim of this deception is not just Orion but the beholder. For Poussin's strange conceit to work—for the picture to command the pathos that it does—some such duplicity is necessary. The gambit would not succeed if there were not some reason to suppose that the sun lay in an obvious spot. The sun must be hidden, *caché*; the dialectic of clarity and obscurity must be false or, at best, *une ambiguïté ambiguë*. To this end the painter sacrificed precisely that pedantic fidelity to antiquity for which he is generally esteemed. Diana and her cloudbank make no sense in terms of classical myth but are present in order to suggest a sun that may or may not be real. In this task they have succeeded admirably, if modern commentaries are any indication. In the *Landscape with Orion*, the oft-remarked pessimism of Poussin's last years attains a sort of zenith. Although the thematic affinity with the early works is apparent, the moralizing certitude of pictures like *The Miracle in the Temple of Dagon* or *The Destruction of the Temple* has evaporated. The allegorical structure of Imitation persists, groundless, in a world of prodigies and monsters.

8. Painting as a Way of Life

What is the point of making such pictures—each one learned, recondite, with all the intricacy of a cuckoo clock? However fussy and intricate they may be, they all insist upon the practical, lived experience of the vicissitudes of representation: people suffer and die, cities fall. To exemplify the

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[117] The assumption that Poussin was indeed informed, as Félibien was not, is crucial here. Absent such an assumption, any number of speculations would be possible. For instance, Diana killed Orion because he became enamored of Eos, the Dawn. One might imagine that Poussin has given us a melodrama, with the jealous goddess seeking to obstruct her beloved's access to his future lover. In comic form, this was the plot of Francesco Cavalli's opera *L'Orione* of 1653. The trouble, of course, is that such an explanation assumes a detailed familiarity with classical myth, even as it takes as its premise Poussin's ignorance of the details of Orion's story.

The libretto to *L'Orione*, by Francesco Melosio, makes no such mistake: Diana flees Orion in his blindness before he lands on the island of Delos and kills him accidentally while he is swimming. For the libretto, I have relied upon that included in a recording of the opera, as performed by the Opera Barocca di Venezia (Mondo Musica 1998, MFON 22249).

[118] Compare Thompson 1993, 49: "Orion's dynamic course into the painting is charted by the trails of vapor that pass beside him . . ."

abstract in the everyday is the special usefulness of such an image, as it is the usefulness of that theatrical genre—tragedy—to which Poussin compares his enterprise in *The Miracle in the Temple*. The result is a pragmatic, as opposed to theoretical, mode of philosophizing. It is possible and even useful to recast Poussin's narratives in terms of Imitation and Copy, Prospect and Aspect. But these abstractions have no intellectual, cognitive, or metaphysical priority over the pathos of the narratives and the beauty of the tableaux. To the contrary, these pictures show what is at stake in the esoteric movements of the sign. They show theory in and as practice.

For all their complexity, there is nothing methodical, in the Cartesian sense, about such paintings. Comparison with Peiresc's diagram is telling. The diagram lends itself to textual decipherment: the cryptographic method of academic iconology would be perfectly appropriate in that instance. Each element in the picture corresponds to an element in the text, such that the image functions as (mere) illustration. But the Orion picture operates in an entirely different register. It is worlds away from the diagram, still further from Gassendi's and Descartes's explanations, just as the earlier dramas of idolatry and sin are anything but scholastic. The purpose of such pictures is not to illustrate a text in the interests of an abstract and universal science. Rather, Poussin's paintings offer moral philosophy on the fly, occurring in the everyday contemplation of spectacles of extraordinary suffering, of humans who fail to see correctly, if at all. The narratives are edifying, to be sure, but they are edifying of beholders: they teach us how to look.[119]

In this way, Poussin solicits a mode of viewing attentive to the ethical stakes in representation: an ethically heightened seeing that amounts to a lived or pragmatic cultivation of the self, what Michel Foucault called "conversions of looking."[120] One aspect of such seeing is erudition, Junius's (and Cicero's) "erudite eyes": the ability to recognize allusions and to know classical and biblical narratives. Such erudition is not pedantry to the exact extent that it clarifies the ethical substance of each scene. Knowing that the Ashdod picture alludes to Caravaggio, or that there is something odd about the presence of Diana at Orion's blindness, may occasion self-satisfaction, but it also thickens considerably the moral texture of the individual works. The paintings are not *mere* exercises in erudition but allegorizations of quintessentially human dilemmas, clustering around representation and perception, skepticism and faith. Crucially, these dilemmas occur not merely within the depicted narratives but in their beholding as well, hence in the lives of the audience. *The Plague at Ashdod* dramatizes, as on a stage, a particular problem of viewing: how to do so ethically, morally, in a manner free from sin. *The Destruction of the Temple* reiterates the act of beholding within the picture, in the figure of Titus, who, by marveling at the presence in light of the hidden God, encourages us to do the same. The *Landscape with Orion* invites the beholder to seek vainly for the sun and thereby to make the giant's dilemma his or her own. In each case, Poussin makes the problem of depiction and of imitation, with all its risks and rewards, the beholder's own.[121] He thereby constitutes *looking at pictures* as an ethical concern in its own

[119] The seventeenth-century Academy would institutionalize this mode of beholding, just as later French pedagogy would institutionalize the tradition of Montaigne and Pascal. See Duro 1997 for this narrative (e.g., p. 8, "For the Academy, the significance of the discourse resided precisely in this link with other social structures, bringing painting into contact with the material fabric of political and institutional life.").

[120] Foucault 2005, 15.

[121] "Ce n'est pas par discours ou par nostre entendement que nous avons receu nostre religion, c'est par authorité et par commandement estranger. La foiblesse de nostre jugement nous y ayde plus que la force, et nostre aveuglement plus que nostre clair-voyance. C'est par l'entremise de nostre ignorance, plus que de nostre science, que nous sommes sçavans de divin sçavoir. Ce n'est pas merveille, si nos moyens naturels et terrestres ne peuvent concevoir cette cognoissance supernaturelle et celeste : apportons y seulement du nostre, l'obeissance et la subjection. . . . Si me faut-il voir en fin, s'il est en la puissance de l'homme de trouver ce qu'il cherche: et si cette queste, qu'il y a employé depuis tant de siecles, l'a enrichy de quelque nouvelle force, et de quelque verité solide. Je croy qu'il me confessera, s'il parle en conscience,

right. Looking at pictures models looking at the world; and the pictures themselves narrate the pitfalls and rewards of such beholding. For the ideal patron, one who lives with the work in his own home, this ongoing confrontation of image and beholder constitutes something very like an ethical or spiritual exercise.

The Orion landscape may serve as a case in point. In this instance the identification of viewer and protagonist may seem distinctly unpalatable (who wants to be Orion?). Yet reduction to aporia can be salutary. As Montaigne writes in the "Apologie":

> It is not by reasoning or by our understanding that we have received our religion; it is by external authority and command. The weakness of our judgment helps us more in this than its strength, and our blindness more than our clear-sightedness [*et nostre aveuglement plus que nostre clair-voyance*]. It is by the mediation of our ignorance more than of our knowledge that we are learned with that divine learning. It is no wonder if our natural and earthly knowledge cannot conceive that supernatural and heavenly knowledge; let us bring to it nothing of our own but obedience and submission. . . . Yet must I see at last whether it is in the power of man to find what he seeks, and whether that quest that he has been making for so many centuries has enriched him with any new power and any solid truth. I think he will confess to me, if he speaks in all conscience, that all the profit he has gained from so long a pursuit is to have learned to acknowledge his weakness.

It is just such a vision of the human—as forever seeking blindly, as recognizing in blindness and in the interminability of the search a certain backhanded glory—that Poussin evokes in his picture for Passart. The acknowledgment of such a state is, for Montaigne, the first step in an *ascesis* of the self.

The difference with Cartesian science, and with the diagram, thus consists in two points. First, Poussin's pictures are narrative in a way the diagram is not: they represent dilemmas of skepticism and representation as they are lived. Second, the pictures stage or allegorize the act of beholding itself, such that reading each picture enacts its thematic. To look at *The Miracle in the Temple at Ashdod* is to become enmeshed in the ethics of Imitation and Copy; to hunt the sun in *Landscape with Orion* is to mimic the protagonist. The diagram does not stage looking in this way, and its beholding is precisely *not* a problem for Descartes or Peiresc or Gassendi. Indeed, part of the point of the various illustrations in Descartes's treatises is to model an unproblematic or doubt-free mode of seeing, as if to enact the rationalization of vision in *La Dioptrique*. For Descartes, in the first *Meditation*, it is exactly *painting* that models deceptive appearances. For Poussin, by contrast, looking at a painting is not an obstacle to knowledge but the very crux of an ethical discourse.

In a sense these claims are familiar. It was, after all, the burden of Blunt's argument that Poussin's paintings were destined for philosophical contemplation. Was he or was he not a *peintre-philosophe*? The answer will depend upon how one takes philosophy. One great lesson of Montaigne is, in Pierre Hadot's words, that "philosophie est autre chose que discours théorique."[122] Montaigne's austere pyrrhonism was nothing if not lived. It was an ascetics, a care of the self, pertinent only in its everyday enactment; it took place in and as quotidian self-examination, in and as writing, in and as the decoration of one's study, the education of children, the contemplation of one's thumbs. As Hadot suggests, the *Essais* are a supreme example of the survival, into modernity, of the antique ideal of philosophy as a way of life. But Blunt and most modern commentators have not understood the *peintre-philosophe* in this manner. For Blunt, as for iconology generally, philosophy means abstraction,

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que tout l'acquest qu'il a retiré d'une si longue poursuite, c'est d'avoir appris à recognoistre sa foiblesse. L'ignorance qui estoit naturellement en nous, nous l'avons par longue estude confirmée et averée." Montaigne 1958, 369–370 (2.12).

[122] Hadot, Carlier, and Davidson 2003, 199.

and for a picture to have philosophical significance it must illustrate *un discours théorique*. The resulting art history sacrifices both art and history to method. In its properly historical sense, the phrase *peintre-philosophe* implies an ascetics of painting—painting as a way of life—that takes the contemplation of images as the very practice of a love of wisdom. Making and beholding pictures is a substantive ethical act.

In a late interview, Foucault suggested that an essential feature of the Cartesian revolution in philosophy was the dissociation of ethics from physics and logic. Where the antique and medieval worlds had assumed the mutual implication of these three branches of philosophy, Descartes constituted knowledge as something distinct from comportment and self-fashioning. "[T]he extraordinary thing in Descartes' texts is that he succeeded in substituting a subject as founder of practices of knowledge, for a subject constituted through practices of the self."[123] Foucault identified two key elements in this transition. The first was the decoupling of ethics and self-formation (*ascesis*) from rationality.

> Evidence substituted for ascesis at the point where the relationship to the self meets the relationship to others and the world. The relationship to the self no longer needs to be ascetic to get into relation to the truth. . . . Before Descartes one could not be impure, immoral, and know the truth. With Descartes, direct evidence is enough. After Descartes we have a nonascetic subject of knowledge.[124]

The second element was the recasting of philosophy's task from ascetics to epistemology, from a care of the self to a grasping of the world. Foucault called this second element the change from a subject of ethics to a subject of knowledge.

The rupture should not be overstated. Hadot justly criticized Foucault for making an excessively stark distinction between Cartesian and Stoic philosophy.[125] Not for nothing, he observed, did Descartes entitle his book the *Meditations*: an explicit allusion to Marcus Aurelius. The *Discourse* opens in a distinctly ethical register:

> [I]t is not enough to have a good mind, rather the main thing is to apply it well. The greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as well as of the greatest virtues, and those who go forward only very slowly can progress much further if they always keep to the right path, than those who run and wander off it.[126]

Only a few pages later, however, Descartes makes a sharp distinction between *la méthode* and the classical tradition of philosophical ethics. "I compared the moral writings of the ancient pagans to the most proud and magnificent palaces built on nothing but sand and mud."[127] Coming from a committed foundationalist, there could be no more damning characterization. Rather than breaking decisively with the classical tradition, the author of the *Meditations* retains the traditional vocabulary while recasting it decisively. He does not dispense with ethics, but he does subordinate it to knowledge, or *connaissance*. The first *Meditation* names itself as "action" as opposed to "deliberation."[128] But the action in question consists in pedagogy as the terminus of meditation. One does not know the truth by being pure and moral; one is pure and moral by knowing the truth.

[123] Foucault 1983, 251.

[124] Foucault 1983, 252.

[125] Hadot 1995, 206–212.

[126] Descartes 1968, 27.

[127] Descartes 1968, 31.

[128] Descartes 1968, 95.

Poussin stands at the cusp of this transition. He mobilizes the identical *topos* to the new science—the problem of multiple suns. But he does not distinguish the skeptical or epistemological problem from the ethical one. On the contrary: throughout his career he posits depiction and beholding as the very stuff of ethics even as, with the Orion landscape especially, he is fully alive to their epistemology. Physics, logic, and ethics remain intertwined, even as the vocabulary remains constant. There is a useful contrast with Peiresc's diagram, reused by Descartes. The diagram effectively sunders physics and logic from ethics. For all that an interrogation of sense perception is integral to a healthy life—a way to fend off madness, as Descartes puts it in the first *Meditation*—Descartes's solution leaves the ethical to one side. Even the *Discourse on Method* adopts a confessional mode, but in *Les Météores* the explanation is purely logical and physical. For Poussin, by contrast, the identical dilemma is nothing if not ethical The multiple suns in *Landscape with Orion* stage as tragedy what the diagram stages as knowledge.

Produced in Rome of the Counter-Reformation for the retainers of the Barberini and for the *noblesse de robe* of Louis XIII, Poussin's pictures defy easy categorization in political or social terms. They have been declared Jesuitical by some, secular and even bourgeois by others. But they resist such reductions. Their historical significance is not a matter of latent content (veiled allusions to the Fronde, say); they are not illustrative in this sense. Rather, their significance consists in an insistent coupling of epistemology and ethics, and an attendant constitution of beholding as a moral discipline. These works offer an early version of the idea of aesthetic contemplation as a spiritual exercise—an idea still at several removes from a sentimental nineteenth-century religion of art—and, for that very reason, worthy of attention.[129] There can be no more succinct statement of this project, at any rate as exemplified in these paintings, than to say that Poussin offers his beholders an *aesthetics of existence*.

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[129] As a young man in Paris, in 1622, Poussin had produced the décor celebrating the canonization of St. Ignatius Loyola; the notion of a spiritual exercise will therefore have been known to him if only in passing (Cropper and Dempsey 1996, 109). But my claim is exactly *not* that Poussin's work represents a Jesuitical ascetics. For Jesuits and Poussin, see, *inter alia*, Fumaroli 1994.

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