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**The Language of Gestures in some of El Greco's
Altarpieces**

**in two Volumes
Volume I**

by

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Summary

This study explores El Greco's language of gestures. The first part will explain the preconditions for the general development towards rhetorical gestures and draw parallels with El Greco's artistic development in the sphere of gestures. In addition, handbooks on gestures are introduced. The second part will analyse how El Greco applied gestures, using examples of his paintings. It will reveal how El Greco developed some gestures over more than thirty years, and how he creates with their help an intense concentrated mood in his paintings. It will also demonstrate how he worked by means of hyperbole to evoke an inspiring atmosphere, how he created space with the help of gestures and gaze, and how he transformed the meaning of some 'model' gestures he took over from famous Italian painters. Finally, this work seeks to renew and intensify the analysis of gestures in painting as a way of approaching the paintings and revealing layers of meaning that can not be found by an analysis solely focused on iconographic topics. In this study the body is taken as a mediator of signs, difficult to read, but decipherable. This study is intended to be a step forward in approaching a deeper understanding of the codified language of gesture. It should open the way to an intensified concern with the language of gestures, with the reading of bodily signs in paintings.

Introduction

1. Aims of the Thesis

This work explores the language of gestures used by El Greco in his Spanish altar paintings. From his arrival in Spain, presumably in 1576, until his death in 1614, El Greco created works, in which a repertoire of gestures can be determined. A detailed examination of the significance of particular gestures used by El Greco in his paintings will be made, to help to understand the narrative structure and content of his paintings. In a painting like the *Agony in the Garden* (fig.1)¹, if El Greco's gestural language is familiar, several gestures which he often employed in his paintings can be distinguished. The gesture of the approaching angel, for example, can be detected in works like the *Espolio* (fig. 61), the *Caballero con la mano al pecho* (fig.2)², or the *Santo Domingo Assumption* (fig. 15) It is a greeting to a superior personality with an auto-referential, as well as an entrusting, character³. The angel approaching with a chalice in his hands refers to the paragraph in which Christ repeats three times the words: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: however not as I will, but as thou *wilt*."⁴ The angel greets Christ and it is clear that he comes directly from the Father, also visible by

¹ Oil on canvas, 102,2x113,7cm, Toledo (Ohio), The Toledo Museum of Art.

² Oil on canvas, 81x66 cm, 1582-85, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

³ See the analysis of this gesture on p.92 and especially p.175.

⁴ Matthew, 26, 39ff, and also: Mark, 14, 35ff, Luke, 22, 42. In the gospel of Luke an angel appears strengthening Christ, and Mark mentions the three Disciples which are visible in the painting, Peter, James and John.

the ray of light which emanates from above.⁵ The gesture of Christ's right hand is likewise a gesture which often reappears in El Greco's work. An analysis of it reveals that it is not only a leading of the gaze towards the little group on the left side, the sleeping disciples (fig. 3), but that it has a protective significance⁶. The very similar gesture of Christ's left hand points already to the difficulties in the analysis of gestures, and shows the need for careful comparison. The gesture leads the viewer's eye to the group of Judas and the pursuers. As Christ already knew who would betray him and what was to happen the gesture can only be interpreted as setting the seal on his fate.⁷

This short example demonstrates how a detailed deciphering can lead into an opening up of complex theoretical contents. By analysing the language of gestures, literary as well as visual sources are detected and allusions of theological significance are discovered, which allow a broader understanding of El Greco's pictorial programmes, which often have complex theological contents. Furthermore his narrative strategy can be discovered: how he transfers the complex theological meanings into a 'readable' language. In this process of discovery, the narrative structure is examined by means of gestures: how El Greco narrates through gestures, how he incites emotions in the beholder through the gestures of his figures.

One can also realise that El Greco not only used gestures to convey emotions, but also to construct space. The space in many of El Greco's

⁵ The angel as a mediator between Christ and his Father is a subject which reveals the strong influence of the 'Celestial Hierarchy' by Dionysius the Areopagite.

⁶ See the analysis of this gesture on p.174f, and the chapter about the paintings of the *Purification of the Temple*.

⁷ See for the analysis of this gesture p. 132.

paintings lacks a central perspective and often it is not a space which can be walked through. Instead of applying concurring contemporary rules of space-forming, El Greco builds space through gestures and gazes. How exactly he does this, and what ends such a negation of a three-dimensional space served, is a further point of investigation. Concurrently, this work will demonstrate how preoccupied with problems of composition El Greco was, within this preoccupation focused on the human figure.

As the theme suggests, a close analysis of different paintings is undertaken, regrettably leaving aside the very complex area of colour and light and their signification. Only symbolical elements which are essential for the understanding of the paintings are included. It should be pointed out that a complete reading of the paintings is not possible through the analysis of the language of gestures, but rather what is attempted is the search for a new methodology for interpreting them.

How El Greco was involved in creating paintings that animated the pious beholder and supported the beliefs of his patrons (or how he failed to do so in the painting of the Martyrdom of St. Maurice) will be demonstrated. How he gave artistic form to the concepts of his patrons, supporting the ideas of Counter-Reformation is another subject of investigation.

2. Movement and ‘to be moved’ in Art Theory of the Renaissance

By the middle of the 15th century a theoretical treatise on art had already been published, which was concerned with the representation of movement in painting: Leon Battista Alberti’s “*della Pittura*”.⁸ Alberti ascribed a leading role to the movement in painting, postulating that it is the outstanding aim of painting to please and move the soul of the beholder and that this should be achieved by representing moving figures in a painting. His main idea about which emotions a painting could evoke was derived from the rhetorical actio-theorem. Like the rhetorician, who had to create in himself the necessary emotions, representing them in his *actio/delivery*, in order to recreate the same emotions in the mind of his audience, so the painter should also, by means of the movements of his painted figures, arouse the emotions of the beholder, evoking the same ones.

This theory of the ‘Affektenlehre’ in painting was repeated by almost every art theoretician of the Renaissance. The term ‘affect’ is applied in this study as meaning ‘emotionally moved’. It was therefore not an unfamiliar idea in the art theory of the time that the movements of the body were a means of expression for the movement of the soul. On the contrary, this is a postulate on which the whole of “painting the affect” was based. Taking Alberti as a starting-point for this concept, that through the liveliness and dynamic movements of a figure emotions can be evoked and mediated, one

⁸ The author uses the following two editions: Alberti, Leon Battista; On Painting, transl by Cecil Grayson, London, 1991, and Alberti, Leon Battista; ‘Trattato della Pittura’, in Leone Battista Alberti’s kleine kunsttheoretische Schriften, (ed) Janitschek, Hubert, Wien, 1877.

can find in Leonardo da Vinci one of the leading figures who developed this approach by elaborating a readable body-language. From the middle of the 16th and in the 17th century, an exaggeration of this approach can be seen in the Mannerism, but also an internalization of it, for example, in a painter like Rembrandt .

Stimulated by various theoretical writings on art and a consideration of antique rhetoric, which after the Council of Trent was accompanied by a new stress on the duties of the preacher, an intense preoccupation with the possibilities of expression by means of bodily movements occurred in painting. How could the emotional state of a figure be expressed through a physical and also static representation of a body ?

This main question leads to the fact that the forms of expression through body-language that once had been found and were seen as ‘ideal’ were repeated. The result of this development was a codifying of gestures. This codification becomes apparent not only by gestures reappearing in paintings, but also in various treatises on gestures. It can be established that the practice in painting anticipated the written theory and served as a formative element.

Two questions result from the above, which will be examined when commenting on El Greco’s theoretical background. The general development in art and art theory will only be touched on. The first question is concerned with how the decisive rhetorical theory of *delectare*, *movere*, and *docere*, or, summarising the theory, of *persuadere*, (persuading the beholder) was transmitted to painting. There are two ways to transmit the concept of persuasion, the art of persuading, to painting, which are, again, derived from

rhetoric: voice and movement. Our attention in this particular study is directed to the possibilities of the art of persuasion by means of bodily movements, which should transform the ‘mute’ paintings into the ‘speaking’ ones. Another, and no less important medium which could be analysed in this context is colour, but this is beyond the scope of this study. The second question arises after the transmission of the concept of persuasion to painting. If the audience should be convinced by means of movements (and the voice) which should stimulate its emotions, how could this concept be applicable to painting? How could the painter evoke emotions in the beholder? One of the means to reach this aim was included in the rhetorics: the most obvious, bodily movements, a language of gesture. How can we reconstruct this elaborate language of gesture today and understand its meaning?

3. Gestures, defining terms

Before reaching the main object of this study the term ‘gesture’ has to be clarified. In this thesis the term is not limited to the movements of the hands, but has a broader application. In many renaissance writings the term embraces the whole body and the possibility of its expression. Gesture therefore is not only the expressivity of the hands, but of the whole body. The complexity of the term is quite easily evaluable if we look, for example, at Giovanni Bonifacio’s definition of the term. In Giovanni Bonifacio’s *L’arte dei Cenni*⁹, which will be analysed later, the terms *atto*, *cenno*, *segno*

⁹ Bonifacio, Giovanni, *L’Arte dei Cenni*, Vicenza, 1616.

and *gesto* are nearly synonyms. Gian Paolo Lomazzo in his *Trattato dell' arte della pittura*¹⁰, used the term 'moto' in various senses, as remarked by Barasch: "*moto* ist unübersetzbar, weil es eine Fülle von Bedeutungen hat. Es kann ebenso Körperbewegung, Geste und Gesichtsausdruck wie auch Leidenschaft, Charakter und sogar Grazie bedeuten"¹¹ This indicates how already in the Renaissance the terms 'gesture' or 'movement of the body' were confused. Modern scholars have tried to restructure the term, or differentiate it.

In his article *El Greco's language of gestures*, Wittkower tried to: ...differentiate between three or even four 'pictorial' types of gestures: namely "descriptive, symbolic, rhetorical and automatic ones. In pictures the distinction between the latter two is often blurred,...

Descriptive gestures, like pointing, elucidate a story or narrative...Rhetorical (and implicitly automatic) gestures reflect and illuminate emotional conditions. Only at periods when the arts are primarily concerned with the human problem of psycho-physical reactions can an absorbing interest in rhetorical gestures be expected."¹²

He concludes that "it is therefore not by chance that rhetorical gestures came into their own during the anthropocentric Italian Renaissance."¹³ Therefore it seems clear that gestures served as a transmitter.

Wittkower further explains that

¹⁰ Lomazzo, Giovanni P.; *A Tracte containing the Artes of curious Painting Carving and Buildinge*, Oxford, 1598, transl. Haydocke, Richard, (1970).

¹¹ Barasch, Mosche; *Der Ausdruck in der italienischen Kunsttheorie der Renaissance*, in: *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 1967, vol.12, pp. 33-69, pp.63f.

¹² Wittkower, Rudolf, 'El Greco's language of gestures', in: *Art News*, 56, 1957, p.45.

”symbolic gestures belong mainly to pre-Renaissance art; from the fifteenth century on they are, as a rule, confined to such attitudes as blessing. I call this a symbolic gesture because, in contrast to the rhetorical ones, we are faced with a code which must be known in order to be understood.”¹⁴

He further states that descriptive and rhetorical gestures can take on a quasi-symbolic meaning. He mentions as an example the out-flung arms of Mary Magdalene in paintings of the Entombment of Christ, which was a conventional formula of grief.¹⁵ He defines such quasi-symbolic gestures as true ‘signs’,

”since the beholder correctly interprets them as physical responses to affective states of mind. The symbolic gesture, by contrast, has an emblematic rather than a psychological basis; the position of the fingers in the Byzantine blessing, to quote one example, adumbrates the first and the last letters of the name of Christ.[...]

But a gesture may also be a true sign and a true symbol in one. This happens when a specific extraneous meaning is added to the descriptive or rhetorical gesture. Only then are we faced with a code which should be deciphered on two levels, the direct psycho-physical and the indirect symbolic one.¹⁶

Wittkower concludes that this is the major problem with El Greco’s language of gestures.¹⁷ Thus gestures in El Greco’s paintings are not only transmitting emotions, but are often alluding to a symbolic meaning. The analysis of this

¹³Ibidem, p.47.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p.47.

¹⁵ Barasch, Moshe, *Gestures of Despair*, New York, 1976.

¹⁶ Wittkower, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁷ Ibidem..

double function of gestures as 'Bedeutungsträger', which is to say as carrier of meaning, is a subject of this thesis, taking up the ideas initiated by Wittkower.

In general terms, gesture accompanies speech and stresses what is said. It underlines moments of the speech which are important to the speaker, or to be more precise whose importance the speaker wants to transmit. In everyday life the deciphering of body language plays an important rôle. It is not only the rhetorician who uses gestures to transmit his message; in every conversation, the contents, rational or emotional, are mediated via gesture.

To talk about gesture or body-language in paintings at first may seem to be a paradox, as the first is always associated with movement and the latter is static by nature. The represented movements are therefore 'frozen'. The painter had the task of choosing a moment in the movement, or THE moment in the movement which allows the beholder to relive, to recreate the whole movement. A moment had to be chosen which included the whole movement, either as defining a definite action, or permitting an ambivalence. (An excellent example of an ambivalent movement can be seen in Giorgione/Titian's *Pastoral Concert*.¹⁸ It is not clear if the woman with the mug in her hand is scooping up or pouring out the water. An X-ray of the painting shows that in a first drawing the movement was unambiguous while the change allows us to conclude that the painter wished the movement to be ambiguous.)

If the painter found the moment which adequately transmitted the movement (and the content of the message), he then had to represent it vividly. The

¹⁸ 1508-9, oil on canvas, 110x138 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

vividness of the representation of a movement was essential to its power to persuade. The aim of the beholder was now to ‘read’ this vividly displayed movement in a coherent context. To reconstruct this way of ‘reading a painting’ is one of the aims of this study. Another term has therefore to be defined, that is the term ‘reading’ in connection with painting. John Shearman clarified in his book *Only Connect*¹⁹:

...it will be found to describe an activity entirely visual, not in fact logocentric, and not in fact transfused from literary criticism (although it would not worry me if that were the case). There seems to be no other word which adequately describes a kind of looking which, like reading, follows through.²⁰

In this thesis I adopt the significance of the phrase ‘reading a picture’ described as a way of looking that ‘follows through’.

4. Handbooks on Gestures

Gestures have their source in a temporal and spatial context, and their meanings are often hard to identify. Some gestures are conserved over the centuries, as for example the gesture of blessing. This gesture is not a spontaneous, expressive one, but a bearer of a symbolical meaning. Other groups of gestures are the ones based on antique rhetoric, with Quintilian the main source here, and the ones which are derived from a biblical context. As well as their textual sources both groups have visual ones, mainly sculpture and relief. Aids to deciphering and understanding these gestures is given by

¹⁹ Shearman, John; *Only Connect*, Princeton, 1992.

treatises written in the last third of the 16th and in the first half of the 17th century. The most difficult to understand are the spontaneous, emotionally loaded gestures. Often they are only understandable in their context and by comparing them with similar gestures in other paintings.

This empirical method carries the danger of subjectivising. A preventive measure is to contextualise carefully, this means to evaluate all known facts about the circumstances in which a painting was made.

Therefore an analysis of the language of gesture does not mean a leaving aside of historical facts, but on the contrary is dependent on a close and intensive examination of the same. The ‘process of codification’ mentioned above is another aid to deciphering gestures, especially as spontaneous gestures were developing in this way.

Benito Arias Montano’s text, *liber ieremiae, sive, de actione, ad sacri apparatus instructionem, benedicto arias montano, hispalensi auctore editus*²¹, *antwerpen, christophorus plantinus*” which was published as a part of his polyglot Bible in 1571, is not used primarily in this study as an aid to deciphering gestures, but to demonstrate that already at this time a discussion of the expressional possibilities of gestures was under way and that El Greco was familiar with it. A primary aim of this study is to open up the *liber ieremiae* for art historical research. In the opinion of the author it is a text not only highly valuable for Spanish research into art history but also for Italian and Dutch.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 5.

²¹ *Biblia Sacra Polyglota* dedicated to Philip II, (ed) Arias Montano, Benito, published in 8 volumes, Antwerp, 1571. In the edition in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid the ‘liber ieremiae’ is located in vol. 8, pars 2.

Giovanni Bonifacio's *L'arte dei cenni* gives a broad overview of the different kinds of gestures. Although published after El Greco's death it is, in my opinion, a useful source, because it records not only symbolical and biblical gestures, but refers to everyday gestures, allowing us to draw conclusions as to a deciphering of spontaneous gestures.

Bonifacio's treatise reflects the usage and the understanding of gestures in the last third of the 16th century. It can be realised that as well as very specific everyday gestures, or to be more precise gestures which certainly were at the time 'in vogue', gestures at the time had a relatively constant meaning. The flood of images and information in the end of the 20th and the beginning 21th century make us forget that during the 16th and 17th centuries the process of change in this area was much slower and more controlled, at least as regards the change of meaning in gestures.

The third main source used in this study as an aid for decoding confirms this. John Bulwer's *Chirologia or the natural language of the Hand and Chironomia or the Art of Manual Rhetoric*²² (1644) uses the Bible as its main source, but also refers to Quintilian, Cicero and writings from the beginning of the 17th century. The treatise is of outstanding significance because as well as the fact that it is based on a wide range of authors it is the only treatise known to have illustrations. On a total of five plates 120 gestures are depicted. They render visible the often difficult to comprehend descriptions of the movements and allow a visual comparison. This possibility of a visual comparison and the author's reference to earlier

²² Bulwer, John, *Chirologia or the natural language of the Hand, Chironomia or the Art of Manual Rhetoric* first published 1644 by Tho. Harper, edition used in this thesis: James W Cleary (ed), 1974, Corbondale and Edwardsville.

sources legitimise the use of this treatise, published thirty years after El Greco's death.

5. State of Research

In 1957 Rudolf Wittkower published his article *El Greco's Language of Gestures* a pioneering work in the study of gestures in painting in general and especially promoted research into El Greco's work. The article refers to an analysis of single gestures in El Greco's repertoire and tries to interpret them. Wittkower's approach is an empirical one: "namely to generalise from single observations and to check and re-check additional observations against generic results." This methodology, as already mentioned, is problematic in that it does not refer to literary sources, but is totally dependent on the eye of the connoisseur. Nevertheless the article contains very useful information about the different qualities of gestures in general as well as revealing the specific character of El Greco's language of gestures.

A more general approach to gestures in art was made by Ernst Gombrich in his article *Ritualized Gestures and Expression in Art*.²³ Here Gombrich seems to follow the general approach undertaken by Wittkower, classifying different kinds of gestures.

Mosche Barasch²⁴ has broadened in various studies the understanding of gestures in painting. Unfortunately he was too focussed on discovering

²³ Gombrich, Ernst; 'Ritualized Gestures and Expression in Art', in: Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, series B, vol. 251, 1966, pp 393-401.

²⁴ Barasch, Moshe; 'Der Ausdruck in der italienischen Kunsttheorie der Renaissance' op.cit., and from the same author: *Gestures of Despair*, op.cit.; 'The Crying Face', in: Artibus et Historiae VIII, 13, (1987), pp.21-36.

certain ideas which were thought to have been hidden in gestures. None the less, his works have the merit of having drawn more attention to the possibility of examining gestures in painting.

Other monographic studies made significant contributions to the field, such as Chastel ²⁵who mentions the handbook of Bonifacio in the context of historical texts important for the understanding of body language represented in Renaissance painting, or Dal Pozzolo ²⁶, who applies the same source to identify gestures used by Tintoretto.

Preimesberger, in his most important contribution to this field of art history, his article *Tragische Motive in Raffaels Transfiguration*²⁷ uses as an aid to decoding the above mentioned work of John Bulwer. Preimesberger's remark that Bulwer was a collector of a kind of *canon* of gestures, which he compiled from important renaissance paintings encourages the use of Bulwer as an medium for decoding renaissance painting.²⁸ It should also be mentioned that as well as these visual sources Bulwer may have used 16th century sources of art theory, such as Vasari's *Vite*²⁹ and Lomazzo's *Trattato dell' arte della pittura*. Both works refer to a wide range of examples and therefore have a *canonical* character.

Following the example of Preimesberger, Bulwer's *Chirologia...Chironomia* is used as an aid to decoding, mainly by German speaking researchers.

²⁵ Chastel, André; 'Gesture in Painting, Problems in Semiology', in: Renaissance and Refomation, New series, vol. X, no. 1, p.9.

²⁶ Dal Pozzolo, Enrico; 'Rilevanze gestuali nell'opera del pittore: Problemi di metodo e legittimità interpretative', in: Jacopo Tintoretto nel quarto centenario della morte: atti del convegno interna. di studi, Venezia, 24.-26. Nov.1994, (Ed) Rossi, Paola, Puppi, Leonello, Quarderni di Venezia Arti, 3, Padova, 1996, pp.145-154.

²⁷ Preimesberger, Rudolf, 'Tragische Motive in Raffaels Transfiguration', in: Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, 1987, 50, pp.89-115.

²⁸ Ibidem, p.102.

²⁹.Le opere di Giorgio Vasari con nuove annotazione e commenti di Gaetano Milanesi, Firenze 1906.

Victor I. Stoichita, among others, in his book *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*³⁰ explains a specific gesture by using Bulwer. This short and by no means complete overview of the development of research into gestures in painting, which should lead to a deeper understanding about the ‘*storia*’ of a painting, demonstrates that this is a relatively young branch of art history.

6. Thesis Structure

To avoid a wholly subjective interpretation, the investigation of gestures in painting requires a theoretical grounding which will form the basis of the first part of this thesis. The point of departure for this thesis will be El Greco’s treatment of expressions and gestures and his contribution to their codification. Instigated and informed by his artistic experiences in Italy, this aspect of El Greco’s art validates a shift in conceptualisation, and effectively places the Spanish artistic tradition within a more general European tradition.

Everything we know about El Greco to date indicates that he was a knowledgeable artist. Francisco Pacheco, a Spanish artist of the 17th century, in his *Arte de la Pintura* even calls him a “great philosopher”.³¹ The discovery of El Greco’s annotated copy of Vitruvius’ texts on architecture³², as well as the *Vite* of Vasari³³, allow a more informed view of El Greco’s

³⁰ Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, London, 1995, pp. 182f.

³¹ Pacheco, Francisco, *Arte de la Pintura*, (ed) F.J. Sánchez Cantón, Madrid, 1956, p.159.

³² Marías, Fernando and Bustamante, Agustín; *Las ideas artísticas de El Greco*, Madrid, 1981.

³³ Salas, Xavier de; Marías Fernando; *El Greco y el arte de su tiempo- las notas de el Greco a Vasari* Madrid, 1992.

artistic perspective. They also reveal his preoccupation with Italian art theory and that he maintained Italian contacts while living in Spain.

The impact on and significance for religious painting of the Council of Trent, provides the context of the first chapter. An explanation of the fundamental ideas of *persuadere* and the *actio*-theorem, as formulated by classical rhetoricians, will form the introduction to an overview of 16th century theories of art. Although not falling strictly within this time frame, Alberti's "*della pittura*"³⁴ will also be included in this overview. Alberti's 15th century work instigated a transfer of rhetorical theory to painting in the Renaissance, and the influence of this work lasted well into the 16th century. These two main subjects will be treated in the second and fourth chapter while the third chapter, concerning Luis de Granada's *Rhetorica Ecclesiastica*³⁵, a Spanish preaching manual, forms a link with Spain. It is placed within the described tradition, and reveals in particular the Iberian conceptualisation of rhetoric and performance. A close analysis of several of El Greco's paintings will demonstrate how the transfer of rhetorical persuasion to visual art took place. Through a careful analysis of these paintings it will be shown that specific gestures were used to evoke particular responses in the beholder, thereby achieving a greater *Wirkmacht*, that is to say a greater power of effect. The aim is to show how the interconnections between verbal rhetorical theory and artistic practice led to the establishment of a visual rhetorical system.

The analysis of Benito Arias Montano's work, besides placing the Spanish tradition within an international context that typically focuses on

³⁴ Alberti, *op.cit.*

artistic developments in Italy, will provide a link between the theory of bodily movements and El Greco's artistic conception. The examination of three 17th century gesture handbooks takes into consideration the process of codification that had taken place over two centuries and will serve to illuminate the specific meaning and significance of particular gestures as well as their different purposes and modes of delivery.

The second part of this work takes two of El Greco's altarpieces for its subject matter: the paintings for *Santo Domingo el Antiguo*, the first large commission El Greco received in Spain, and the turn-of-the-century works for the seminary of Doña María de Aragón, also called the *Colegio de Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación*. Although together forming the core of a precise analysis of gestures, these two works will be approached somewhat differently. An examination of the work's effectiveness, and in particular its enlisting of a visual rhetoric linked to *persuadere* will form the approach to the paintings for *Santo Domingo el Antiguo*, while an investigation of the narrative construction will form the approach to the Aragón works. Besides these two significant works, a number of smaller works will also be drawn into a similar analysis because of their contribution to the argument being developed in this thesis.

The next chapter will be taken up with two paintings normally included amongst the Aragón works: the Prado *Resurrection* and the *Pentecost* from the same museum. El Greco's abiding interest in the Mass as an *event* can best be demonstrated with these paintings. In the previous chapters the close connection between paintings and the actual occurrences

³⁵ Luis de Granada; *Rhetorica ecclesiastica*, Barcelona, 1770, first published in Latin in 1576, Lisbon.

in the Mass will have been touched upon, but a special focus in this chapter should illustrate the artist's intense preoccupation with this *event* giving a integral view of El Greco's intellectual and artistic conception.

The 'series' of paintings known as *The Purification of the Temple*, although not altar pieces, reveal the development of El Greco's composition as well as giving insight into the use of a repertoire of gestures. Their analysis should close this study.

Critical Methodology

The analysis of a language of gestures is by its very nature a method closely oriented to painting. Therefore the first approach is a detailed description of the issues in the painting, and in particular the painted movements of the figures. Shearman's concept of 'reading' a picture as mentioned in the introduction, is one basic element in this methodology. Victor I. Stoichita's approach, focusing on the painting as the revealing element of a underlying profound theoretical background, is followed. An intense examination of the issue painted raises the question about the specific meaning of the various gestures. This question becomes more insistent if a gesture reappears in different paintings and situations as is the case in the work of El Greco. The significance of the various gestures may be found by using literary sources, ideally contemporary, for example handbooks on gestures or rhetoric, or by comparing gestures in other paintings where the significance is known, or more clearly expressed. Every gesture in a painting has a particular meaning, and this meaning is connected to a theoretical background, provided that it is

not a purely spontaneous gesture, expressing a spontaneous emotion, although even this spontaneous gesture belongs to the programme, because it is intended as spontaneous. A gesture always has to be read in its context, because, even if it can be seen as a sign, its meaning can change significantly with its context.

More obviously detectable and easily understandable(given a Christian background) are meanings in symbolic, ritualised gestures as for example the blessing gesture.

Parallel to the process of ‘codification of gestures’ taking place during the 16th and 17th centuries, El Greco developed his own, personal, vocabulary of gestures. In his personal vocabulary El Greco attached specific emotions to gestures, that is to say, used these gestures as bearers of particular meanings that repeatedly appear in the canon of his work. The decoding of this vocabulary of gestures generates a more subtle reading by offering access to multiple layers of meanings in El Greco’s work.

The connections and interrelations of the gestures within the painting should be analysed after their different meanings are established. This step of the analysis is followed by summing up these meanings and interrelations, and deriving from them the mediated content. The visual and literary sources, provided that they are relevant to the message of the picture, and their implicit contents should be distilled.

Rudolf Wittkower followed this method up to a certain point in his small but crucial study *El Greco’s Language of Gestures*³⁶. He was the first to develop a new picture of the artist, founded more on philosophical,

³⁶ Wittkower, op.cit.

theoretical and theological than on mystical thinking. He has drawn our attention to the important influences of the *Celestial Hierarchy* by Dionysius the Areopagite on El Greco's handling of light and form, as well on some figurative motifs. In this connection he made some illuminating discoveries about El Greco's use of gestures. For example he states that for El Greco gestures "were signs with an unalterable meaning."³⁷ Although I cannot agree with this statement, I support the hypothesis that El Greco chose 'his' gestures by considering the meanings of them in other pictures, selecting his sources by means of an art theoretical background and using them freely. Most important is that Wittkower's study shows that a reconstruction of theological and philosophical backgrounds is possible through the examination of gestures in paintings. In contrast to Wittkower, I would rather like to distinguish between natural and rhetorical gestures. A natural gesture would be a gesture expressing a spontaneous emotion, like covering the head if somebody wants to hit you. A rhetorical gesture would include Wittkower's 'descriptive' gesture, because to "elucidate a story or narrative"³⁸ belongs to the antique rhetorical principle of 'delight, move and teach'. That is to say, a rhetorical gesture does not primarily "reflect and illuminate emotional conditions"³⁹ but has to persuade the beholder, like an orator has to persuade his audience by means of his actio. Anyhow a rhetorical gesture in this sense is a carrier of emotion, and can also take on the state described by Wittkower when it is fused with 'symbolic' meaning. I try to omit the term 'symbolic gestures', because the transition between a rhetorical and a symbolic gesture

³⁷ Ibidem., p.45.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem.

is fluent. Beside the ever mentioned gesture of blessing, there is nearly no comparable stable 'symbolic' gesture. It is exactly the transition from a rhetorical to a symbolic gesture that happened with the codification of gestures. When is a gesture still rhetorical - descriptive, emotional - and when is it becoming symbolic? As 'symbolic' always implies a fixed emblematic meaning, I prefer to define the gesture as 'codified': a codified rhetorical gesture, as for example, the heavenward gaze.

The same problem appears incidentally with natural gestures, as will become clear in the Bonifacio chapter. But what is a natural gesture? For example, gestures of protection, readable in all cultures, although we have to bear in mind, that for example the crouching and the covering of the body with hands and arms may have a further significance in another culture. Waving the arm can signify a goodbye as well as being a signal of drawing attention. Therefore I would like to introduce the term 'enrichment of a gesture' which is an enrichment of its meaning. In the first place, a gesture might be a protective gesture, covering the head, but it might be enriched by a further meaning. This is the case with gestures in El Greco's paintings. A natural gesture becomes enriched by a profound meaning. The gesture is natural *and* rhetorical. Another issue with gestures in El Greco is that also rhetorical gestures are 'enriched'. El Greco transfers gestures and their inherent meanings from other paintings, recontextualising them, and awards them a further meaning. He opens the range of meaning. That is why it is significantly difficult to decipher El Greco's language of gesture.

Victor I. Stoichita's analysis of the *Seeing Body* in his book *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* likewise demonstrated how

complex meanings were transmitted by gestures. He states that the aim is to “expose a figurative code used and the message envisaged by the representation of the particular gesture.”⁴⁰

In addition to a reconstruction of the function of the painting, its original location and the intentions of the patrons (if known) should help to uncover further layers of meaning. This approach can contribute to the understanding of the narrative strategy applied by El Greco, because it offers the knowledge about the public it was made for (as it makes a difference whether a painting is made for an Augustinian seminary or a Benedictine convent), and the Patron the church was dedicated to.

In the special case of El Greco, as the inventory of his library is conserved, as well as his annotations to Vasari's *Vite*⁴¹ and to Vitruvius⁴², it is easy to imagine that complex programs are detectable in his pictures. His documented friendship with such important literary figures as Luis de Gongora and Fray Hortensio Félix Paravicino (fig.6), the latter not only a known poet but an influential preacher, allows us to evaluate El Greco's pictorial programs as highly elaborated works.

The examination of El Greco's paintings will show how he developed in them the relationship between rhetorical and codified gestures. It will reveal how El Greco tends in the representation of gestures towards a certain degree of codification. However, this process of codification should not be overemphasised, through the repetition of gestures a certain degree of

⁴⁰ Stoichita, *op.cit.*, p. 163.

⁴¹ Salas and Marías, *op.cit.*

⁴² Marías and Bustamante, *op.cit.*

readability was reached. This necessity was mentioned by Michels in his study *Ethos and Pathos*:

independently of how highly we estimate the genius, the claim to inventiveness or the creativity of an artist, the particular representation has, if it is not to withdraw into complete mysteriousness or only be explicable through abstractions, to take up a pattern of experience and emotional modes which has to be familiar to a specific public, or that are habitually and conventionally connected with specific objects or contents.

This is a particular requirement for an artist who claims to express metaphysical qualities, although aware that they are not ascertainable in their pure truth by the senses, let alone physically depictable.⁴³

Therefore El Greco's language of gestures must have been understandable for at least the circle of his patrons and that part of the public which had access to his paintings. It is clear that this 'understanding' or better the 'readability' of his paintings became increasingly lost in the 17th century, as comments about the extravagance and eccentricity of his paintings become more frequent.

Last but not least this thesis contributes to the theory of reading gestures as signs and the understanding of the body as a sign. The

⁴³ Michels, Norbert; Bewegung zwischen Ethos und Pathos- Zur Wirkungsästhetik italienischer Kunsttheorie des 15. Und 16. Jahrhunderts, Münster, 1988, p. 50, translation mine: "Doch unabhängig davon, wie hoch man die Genialität, Schöpfungsanspruch oder Schaffenskraft eines jeweiligen Künstlers ansetzt, die jeweilige Darstellung muß, wenn sie sich nicht in völlige Rätselhaftigkeit oder nur durch Erläuterung verständliche Abstraktion zurückziehen will, an Erfahrungsmuster und emotionale Schemata anknüpfen, die einem bestimmten Publikum vertraut sind oder aus Gewohnheit und Konvention mit bestimmten Gegenständen oder Inhalten verbunden werden. Dies muß besonders erforderlich sein für einen Künstler, der beansprucht, metaphysische Qualitäten zum Ausdruck zu bringen, obwohl er von diesen das Bewußtsein hat, daß sie in ihrer reinen Wahrheit nicht sinnlich zu erfassen, geschweige denn materiell darstellbar sind."

establishment of the body as a sign and how the body fulfils this function is revealed. The body is seen not only as a mere body but as a bearer of meaning.

Part I

Preconditions

1. The Council of Trent

- **Precondition for the development of a codification of gestures**

Before we examine rhetoric tradition and its reception by and adaptation to Christianity in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, we must briefly examine the Council of Trent, an event which had a decisive influence on the contemporary conception of painting, and especially the decree *De invocatione, veneratione et Reliquiis Sanctorum et sacris Imaginibus*.

At the Council of Trent, which can be considered as a general response to the Protestant reform, the last session was partly concerned with a decree justifying the usage of religious images. The decree of 3 December 1563, *De invocatione, veneratione et Reliquiis Sanctorum et sacris Imaginibus*, especially pointed out the didactic quality of images:

...let the bishops diligently teach that by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon; also that great profit is derived from all holy images, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts

bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct imitation of the saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety.⁴⁴

‘Holy images’ not only served as a ‘libri pauperum’ but as becomes clear on reading the passage above, they should prompt imitation. It is particularly important to notice that this encouragement to imitate should be ‘set before the eyes of the faithful’, as it reveals the rhetorical character a painting should have. The ‘setting before one’s eyes’ is, for example, a term to be found in preaching manuals like the one by Luis de Granada, analysed below, as well as in the writings of Leonardo.

The decree further defended the adoration of images against the suspicion of idolatry by reaffirming the decrees of the Second Council of Nicaea:

Moreover, that the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints are to be placed and retained especially in the churches, and that due honor and veneration is to be given them; not, however, that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them by reason of which they are to be venerated, or that something is to be asked of them, or that trust is to be placed in images, as was done of old by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ and venerate the

⁴⁴ The Canon and Degrees of the Council of Trent, transl. and intro. by Schroeder, H. J., Rockford,

saints whose likeness they bear. That is what was defined by the decrees of the councils, especially of the Second Council of Nicaea, against the opponents of images.(sic)⁴⁵

This was an important and sensitive point as the Protestants were accusing the Catholic Church of Idolatry. Thus it was the veneration of the ‘Prototypes’ and not the image itself which deserved devotion. Of course this difference was not seen in this way by the faithful. The decree also reassured the intercessional character of images⁴⁶ where again not the image itself but the ‘prototype’ behind it was transmitting the message.

Following the Council of Trent’s Decree treatises were written concerning theological questions about sacred images. Among these are Carlo Borromeo’s *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae*(1576) or Gabriele Paleotti’s *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1581).

1978, p.216.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p.215f.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

2. Delivery and persuasion in rhetorical tradition.

The early transferral of the ideas of rhetoric to painting, and in particular ideas regarding delivery and reception can be easily established, as the study *Giotto and the Orators* by Michael Baxendall has demonstrated.⁴⁷ Artistic theory as well as artistic practice was strongly connected to several rhetorical notions. Painters and theorists borrowed terms from the antique discipline and the most obvious connection is the one between *delivery/actio* and *persuasion/persuadere*. This chapter presents a brief overview of the terms *actio* and *persuadere*, where the term *persuadere* stands for the entire rhetorical trio of *delectare*, *movere* and *docere*.⁴⁸

In antique rhetoric an orator had to fulfil five tasks:- *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and finally *pronuntiatio*, or *actio*.⁴⁹ The fifth and last part of the preparation, the *pronuntiatio* or *actio*, was always highly regarded and is the part which most interests us in the interpretation of painting. Various treatises on rhetoric repeat the famous anecdote about Demosthenes who, “when asked what was the most important thing in oratory gave the palm to delivery and assigned it second and third place as well, until his questioner

⁴⁷ Baxandall, Michael, *Giotto and the Orators*, Oxford, 1971.

⁴⁸ The terms “movere” and “persuadere” are relatively interchangeable, see for example: Von Rosen, Valeska; *Mimesis und Selbstbezüglichkeit im Werk Tizians*, Emsdetten, Berlin, 2001, who in footnote 105, p.265, points to, Bernadino Daniello, *La poetica*, Venice, 1536. Daniello refers to the three terms as *insegnamento-diletto-persuasione*.

⁴⁹ Meier-Eichhorn, Ursula; *Die Gestikulation in Quintilians Rhetorik*, Frankfurt, Bern, 1989, p.7.

ceased to trouble him.”⁵⁰ This oft-repeated anecdote reflects the emphasis placed upon the *pronuntiatio/actio*.

Pronuntiatio/actio was divided into two sections, one concerned with the voice of the orator and the other with his *gestus*:

Delivery (*pronuntiatio*) is often styled action (*actio*). But the first name is derived from the voice, the second from gesture. For Cicero in one passage speaks of *action* as being a *form of speech*, and in another as being a *kind of physical eloquence*. None the less, he divides action into two elements, which are the same as the elements of delivery, namely, voice and movement. Therefore it matters not which term we employ. But the thing itself has an extraordinarily powerful effect on oratory.⁵¹

Actio therefore denoted the movements of the orator. These movements had to be passionate and filled with character to animate the emotions of the audience. To persuade the listener was the task of the orator and he therefore had not only to delight and to teach, but also to move.⁵² The basic tenets of the *actio*-theorem were, firstly, that outward, physical movements could express inward, emotional and spiritual movements, and secondly that through the physical movement the inner movements were communicable

⁵⁰ The institutio oratoria of Quintilian, with an english translation by H.E. Butler, in four volumes, London, 1993, vol. IV, p.245. Further only quoted as Quintilian.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p.243.

⁵² Cicero, De Oratore, II Vols, tranl. by H. Rackham, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1968: "nihil est enim in dicendo, ... maius, quam ut faveat oratori is, qui audiet, utique ipse sic moveatur, ut impetu quodam animi et perturbatione magis quam iudicio aut consilio regatur"; vol. II, xli, 178, p. 324f and very similar also vol. II, xliv, 185, p.331; Quintilian, op.cit, bk III, 5, 2; VIII; Horace, De arte poetica,

and even transferable to the listener. The orator had to re-create in himself the desired emotions: "summa enim, quantum ego quidem sentio, circa movendos adfectus in hoc posita est, ut moveamur ipsi."⁵³ These emotions had then to be expressed by means of body-language (and voice). The orator was then able to move the audience to experience the same emotions and was thus able to persuade them:

nihil est enim in dicendo, ... maius, quam ut faveat oratori is, qui audiet, utique ipse sic moveatur, ut impetu quodam animi et perturbatione magis quam iudicio aut consilio regatur.⁵⁴

The entire third chapter of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* is concerned with *actio*. After a general introduction Quintilian instructs the reader in the correct use of the voice and from paragraph 65 to 150 describes different gestures and postures in more or less detail. For instance: "One of the commonest of all the gestures consists in placing the middle finger against the thumb and extending the remaining three:"⁵⁵ After the description of the gesture he explains its use: "It is suitable for the *exordium*, ..." ⁵⁶ (i.e., the introduction to a speech).

A further example clarifies the different qualities of gestures employed by Quintilian:

I do not know why some persons disapprove of the movement of the fingers, with their tops converging, towards the mouth. For we do this

236/237 (Verse 99ff.): "non satis est pulchra esse poemata: dulcia sunt et quocumque volent animum auditoris agunt"

⁵³ Quintilian, *op.cit.*,: "The prime essential for stirring the emotions of others is, in my opinion, first to feel those emotions oneself.", vol. II, bkVI, 2, 26, p.430-433.

⁵⁴ Cicero, *De oratore*, *op.cit.*,: "Now, nothing in oratory,..., is more important than to win for the orator the favour of his hearer, and to have the latter so affected as to be swayed by something resembling a mental impulse or emotion, rather than by judgement or deliberation.", vol. II, xli, 178, p. 324f.

⁵⁵ Quintilian, *op.cit.*, Bk XI, 3, 92.p.293.

when we are slightly surprised, and at times also employ it to express fear or entreaty when we are seized with sudden indignation.⁵⁷

Some of the gestures described do not receive as much attention, being clearly too familiar to his contemporaries to need detailed explanation.⁵⁸ The fact that gestures were derived from daily life and used frequently was pointed out by Fritz Graf in his study of the gestures of Roman actors and orators:

All this – the restrictions and the selection of gestures – points in the same direction: rhetorical gestures are highly conventional; they are a selection and adjustment of gestures from daily conversation to the purpose of public speaking.⁵⁹

Gestures used by orators therefore underwent a process of codification, as they derived from an every day use and later became conventional.

Cicero distinguishes between the gestures of an orator and those of an actor.⁶⁰ An actor is only “reproducing the words”, whereas an orator is “conveying the general situation and idea.”⁶¹ While the distinction between actors and orators is not relevant to this context, Cicero’s focus on gestures once again reinforces the important role that gestures were considered to

⁵⁶Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Quintilian, *op.cit* Bk. XI, 3, 103, p.299.

⁵⁸ For a precise analysis of § 65- 150 see. Meier-Eichhorn, *op.cit*.

⁵⁹ Graf, Fritz; ‘Gestures and Conventions: The Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators’, in: *A cultural History of Gesture*, (ed) Bremmer, Jan; Roodenburg, Herman, Cambridge, 1993, p. 47.

⁶⁰ The greek term “Hypokrisis” for “actio” still refers to its relation with the word for actor “Hypokrites”; see. B. Steinbrink, ‘actio’ in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol 1, Tübingen 1992, Sp. 43; Plett 1993a, 332.

⁶¹ Cicero, *De oratore*, *op.cit*, bk III, §220, p.177.

play in expressing a “general situation and idea.” Once again, the high status of gesture in antique rhetoric is demonstrated.

Quintilian had already realised the power of gestures in painting and had identified their ability to express feelings and evoke the same in the beholder:

Nor is it wonderful that gesture, which depends on various forms of movement, should have such power, when pictures, which are silent and motionless, penetrate into our innermost feelings with such power that at times they seem more eloquent than language itself.⁶²

This high estimation of gestures in painting by an authority like Quintilian served as a justification as well as a stimulus for the development of a more and more elaborate language of corporeal movements in painting in the Renaissance and later periods.

⁶²Quintilian, *op.cit.*, bk XI, 3, 67, p.281.

3. Luis de Granada's *Rhetorica Ecclesiastica*

- Reception of Antique Rhetoric and Advice for the Preacher

Following the antique tradition, authors of rhetorical treatises stressed the importance of the *actio/pronuntiatio*, but this emphasis seldom went further than once again quoting the famous anecdote about Demosthenes. Dilwyn Knox, however, in his study about the theoretical background of gestures in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, observed a change :

This picture changes from about the middle of the sixteenth century. Rhetorical manuals, both Catholic and Protestant, reinstate *actio/pronuntiatio*, and sometimes elaborate on delivery and gesture in great detail.”⁶³

Luis de Granada's *Rhetorica ecclesiastica, sive de ratione concionandi libri sex* (1576), an important Spanish preaching manual, demonstrated this new emphasis. The analysis of this preaching manual offers an understanding of the purpose of gestures and the importance they had in daily life. In particular, the treatise was concerned with the daily Mass, and especially the preacher's "performance" - the sermon, and its reception by the "audience" - the congregation. It allows a parallel to be drawn between the function of the sermon and that of painting. It also reveals the new significance placed on persuasion in the concept of religious oratory as well as in religious painting

⁶³ Knox, Dilwyn; 'Late medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Gesture', in: *Die Sprache der Zeichen und Bilder, -Rhetorik und nonverbale Kommunikation in der frühen Neuzeit*, (ed) Kapp, Volker, Marburg, 1990, p.16.

after the Council of Trent. The short remark made by Ruiz Zarate shows the broad intellectual dimensions of the *Rhetorica ecclesiastica*:

Works like his were late fruits of the Christian humanism promoted by Erasmus and Luis Vives in the north of Europe, and Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in Italy.⁶⁴

His connecting de Granada's treatise to such influential thinkers reveals its supremacy and importance for Spanish intellectual circles.

The *Rhetorica ecclesiastica* was one of the most important preaching manuals printed prior to 1600 and holds the view that oratory could be presented as performance.⁶⁵ In it, de Granada quotes long passages from the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. He includes the beginning of the third chapter of the Book IX of the *Institutio Oratoria* at length, and of course the famous anecdote regarding Demosthenes.⁶⁶ He formulates clearly the reason why one should learn rhetoric and states its aim :

se deve aprender el arte de la rhetorica, para que podamos persuadir al Pueblo lo que queremos: esto es, no solo decirlo de suerte[forma]que crea ser verdad lo que decimos, sono [sino]que execute lo que ya creyo ser verdadero y honesto, que es lo mas dificil de conseguir.⁶⁷

De Granada, like Gabriele Paleotti, in his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* which was published only five years later, stresses the fact that persuasion should animate the pious listener/ beholder to action.

⁶⁴ Zarate, Ruiz; *Gracian, Wit and the Baroque Art*, New York, Bern, Frankfurt, u.a., 1996, p.43.

⁶⁵ Barnes, Gwendolyn; *Sermons and the Discourse of Power: The Rhetoric of Religious Oratory in Spain (1550-1900)*, umi, microfilm, 1988, p.28.

⁶⁶ Luis de Granada, *op.cit.*, lib VI, cap.VI, p.464f.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, lib. I, cap. I, p. 4. In brackets the modern translation of the terms.

In the second book of the *Rhetorica ecclesiastica* deGranada advises the preacher to give priority to the emotional state of his audience over their doctrinal instruction. He holds the opinion that through evoking good affects in his audience the preacher will overcome their depraved emotions, reasoning that depraved affects rather than ignorance tempt men to sin:

singularmente toca esto al predicador, cuyo principal oficio, no tanto consiste en instruir, quanto en mover los animos de los oyentes; siendo cierto, que mas pecan los hombres por vivo y depravacion de su afecto, que por ignorancia de las verdades; y los afectos depravados, como un clavo con otro, han de arrancarse con afectos opuestos.⁶⁸

Therefore, for de Granada, *movere* was the most important aspect of a sermon, only after which came teaching and delighting. He distinguishes between the dialectician who only has to convince with arguments and the preacher who has to apply *delectare*, *movere* and *docere*. He also indicates the necessity of the “hermosura del estilo” and the “variedad de las materias” as means of delighting and moving the audience. All the preacher’s efforts are focused on moving the audience to action.

Porque primeramente, para hablar a proposito para persuadir, es menester, que enseñe, que incline, que deleyte. Al Dialectico, que pretende probar una cosa dudosa, le basta que enseñe: esto es, que convenza con argumentos lo que quisiere. Pero como el orador no acostumbra solo conciliarse la fe de sus oyentes, sono tambien

⁶⁸Ibidem, op.cit., lib.II, cap. XI, p.105f.

moverlos a obrar alguna cosa; amas de probar con argumentos, deve con la hermosura del estilo, y variedad de las materias, deleytarlos, conmoviendolos afectos, e impeliendolos a obrar. Y asi enseñar es de necesidad; deleytar de suavidad; rendir es proprio de la victoria.⁶⁹

The same notion appears in Paleotti's *Discorso*, here not only concerning the sermon/speech and the preacher/orator but including the painter and the image as well.

Via Cicero originally, and St. Augustine's subsequent rewriting of "*Docere necessitatis est, delectare suavitatis, flectere victoriae,*" Paleotti inherits the idea of the need to instruct, to delight and to move. ⁷⁰

The opinion that the audience attends more to the emotional impact of the delivery is of course a notion we are already familiar with. De Granada thinks that the art of rhetorical persuasion is able to convince the faithful and therefore he infers that it must be applied in the presentation of a sermon. His aim is to make the listener pliable, by stirring up his emotions and by this means gain influence over him.

...and as in all things, form is valued more than the substance that receives the form, I would venture that many priests, spending as much time and energy in artifice as in substance, pay almost no heed to elocution and pronunciation, when without them, the ignorant common people despise the most excellent artifice..... and

.... the best way to save souls, then, is to exploit the emotional potential of religious oratory to the maximum. First, preachers should capture the listeners' attention and goodwill with the sweetness and

⁶⁹ Ibidem, lib. II, cap. II, p.51f.

elegance of their language and the artistry of an effective delivery. In this way they will be able to bring their listeners to a state of astonishment (*suspensio*), transforming them into pliable material to be moulded. Once listeners become a captive audience in the emotional sense, preachers should use all the resources available to install in them the reaction (anger, compassion, sadness, fear, love, hope, admiration, or awe), effectively manipulating their spirit, their ultimate behaviour in the real world.⁷¹

Moreover, the preacher should vividly re-create events. He should do this by:

painting something with words, so that it does not seem like it is being described as much as it is taking place before one's very eyes: being generally known that all the emotions are greatly stirred when something's greatness can be seen.⁷²

In Catholic tradition (itself following antique tradition) the eye was seen as superior to the ear, in contrast to the greater emphasis placed on the ear in the Protestant tradition.⁷³ This emphasis helped lead to the pronounced development of preachers in Protestantism – to which de Granada's book was a reaction – and the focus on music tied to a rather negative view of painting. The supremacy of the eye was closely linked to the idea that painting (as well as gesture) could be universally understood much more easily than the spoken word.

⁷⁰ St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Madrid, 1957, vol. 15, Bk 4, chap. XII, § 27, p. 295.

⁷¹ Luis de Granada in: Barnes, Gwendolyn; *op.cit.*, p. 29.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 31f.

The preacher's objective, to sum up, was defined as persuading his audience through stimulating their emotions. He should achieve this not only by mediating the content but by "performing" his sermon. Through his delivery the listener should be encouraged to re-live the holy event referred to in the sermon. This recreation should then incite the listener to good deeds, a notion much discussed following the Reformation, because the Protestants rejected the effectiveness of "good deeds" as a help to salvation. This process of persuasion was adopted by artists with the result that reception by the beholder took on a new significance.

⁷³ Jones, Pamela M.; 'Art Theory as Ideology: Gabriele Paleotti's Hierarchical Notion of Painting's Universality and Reception', in *:Reframing the Renaissance*, (ed) Farago, Claire, New Haven, London, 1995, p. 128.

4. To Move and Persuade in Art Theory

Preaching manuals and treatises on art theory reveal that there was a general interest in the late 16th century in the antique theory of *actio* and *persuadere*. As the relationship between rhetoric and painting had already been established by the classical authors, the adaptation of rhetorical theories to painting could be anticipated. Leon Battista Alberti⁷⁴ in his treatise *della pittura* had already transferred rhetorical theory to painting in the 15th century, and as early as 1557, Ludovico Dolce, in his *L'Areino. Dialogo della Pittura*⁷⁵ stressed the importance of *movere* in the sense of moving the emotions of the beholder. One of the most explicit formulations, with a strong emphasis on *movere*, was made after the Council of Trent by Gabriele Paleotti in his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*(1582).⁷⁶

The following examination will address two main aspects: first, how various authors transferred the rhetorical theory of *delectare*, *movere* and *docere* to painting; and second, how different authors conceptualised the relationship between corporeal movement and the task of persuading the beholder. It will become clear that each author approached this vital issue differently. From his perspective as a painter, for instance, Leonardo da Vinci prioritised methodological and technical aspects of painting, while Paleotti, a bishop, was concerned more generally with the persuasive power

⁷⁴ Spencer, John R.; 'Ut Rhetorica Pictura', in: Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, vol. 20, 1957, p.39.

⁷⁵ See the remark by Boschloo, A.W.A, Annibale Carracci in Bologna. Visible Reality in the Art after the Council of Trent, II vol., The Hague, 1974, p 141.

of painting. Despite these differences in approach, I have followed the chronological order in reconstructing the texts in order to reveal an overall continuity and development of thought regarding the relationship of rhetoric and painting.

⁷⁶Paleotti, Gabriele; 'Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane', Bologna, 1582, in: Barocchi, Paola; Trattati d' arte del Cinquecento, 3 vol., Bari, 1960-62, pp. 117ff.

4.1 Alberti's *della pittura* - The body expresses emotions of the soul

It is evident that Alberti's treatise is informed by the theories of antique rhetoric, and especially by the writings of Cicero and Quintilian. Painting, as it was seen by Alberti, has to fulfil the same task as rhetoric, namely to teach, to delight, and to move (*docere, delectare et movere*), and he was among the first to transfer these ideas to the concept of *istoria*:

Sara la storia qual tu possa lodare et maravigliare tale, che con sue piacevolezze si porgera si ornata et grata, che ella terrà con diletto et *movimento d' animo* qualunque dotto o indotto la miri.⁷⁷

The spectator, whether learned or untutored, should be delighted *and* moved when looking at a painting. This became the declared aim of a history painting. Alberti goes further to explain by which means this "movimento d' animo" should be effected:

A *historia* will move spectators when the men painted in the picture outwardly demonstrate their own feelings as clearly as possible. Nature provides...that we mourn with the mourners, laugh with those who laugh, and grieve with the grief-stricken. Yet these feelings *are known from movements of the body*.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Alberti-Janitschek, *op.cit.*p.117; or in english Alberti-Grayson, *op.cit.*, p. 75, italics mine, I choose the italian version because the english translation is quite unclear.

⁷⁸Alberti-Grayson,*op.cit.*, p. 76; Alberti-Janitschek, *op.cit.*,:...movera l'istoria l'animo quando li huomini ivi dipinti molto porgeranno suo proprio movimento d'animo. Intervene da natura quale nulla piu che lei si truovacapace di cosa ad se simile, che piangiamo con chi pinge et ridiamo con chi ride et dolianci con chi si duole. Ma questi movimenti d'animo si conoscono dai movimenti del corpo, p.120f. Alberti's Examples, laughing and crying seem to indicate that he was familiar with the "Actio-Theorem" how it was used by Horace in: *De arte poetica*, 236 (verse 101 ff.): "ut ridentibus adrident, ita flentibus adflent/ humani voltus. si vis me flere, dolendum est/ primum ipsi tibi: tum tua me infortunia laedent ...". see Spencer, *op.cit* ,p. 35.

This passage is derived from antique rhetoric . It is a notion which can be found in Leonardo's writings about painting, as well as in Lomazzo's *Trattato dell' Arte della Pittura*.⁷⁹

The parallel between Alberti's affective theory and Cicero's was already the subject of investigation. Spencer pointed out that: "Affective gesture is at the core of Alberti's theory of painting as it is in Cicero's theory of rhetoric."⁸⁰ Thus it becomes clear that antique rhetorical principles are applied in Alberti's theory of painting. The guidelines described by Alberti require a clear and easily 'readable' language of gesture. Through accessible language a painting should be more comprehensible and its persuasive power increased.⁸¹

Alberti's contribution to the development of a new concept of painting, focused more on the spectator and on reception, was that he adopted the rhetorical theory of *delectare, movere* and *docere* for painting. He claimed, following the *actio*-Theorem, that an emotional expression displayed in a picture (by bodily movements) evokes the same emotion in the beholder.⁸² This theory, of persuading through the demonstration of emotions by bodily movements, was one of the main issues of his treatise. By this transfer he brought a new notion into the theory of western painting and a theory which was adopted by the theorists of Counter-Reformation.

⁷⁹ Lomazzo *op.cit.* Bk II, p.1f and p.15. I used this english edition of the *Trattato*, if not otherwise indicated.

⁸⁰ Spencer, *op.cit.*, p.41.

⁸¹ Krüger, Klaus; 'Innerer Blick und Ästhetisches Geheimnis: Caravaggios Magdalena'; in: Barocke Inszenierung, (eds) Imorde, Joseph, Neumeyer, Fritz and Weddingen, Tristan, Emsdetten/Zürich, 1999, p. 35.

⁸² Michels, Norbert; *op.cit.*, p.23.

The albertian paradigm that “we grieve with the grief-stricken”(a paradigm of course derived from antique rhetoric) is a directive that was still in its prime in the Spain of the Counter-Reformation⁸³ and applies to El Greco even more because of his Italian ‘background’.

4.2 Vivid Display - Leonardo da Vinci’s remarks on Motion

Although Leonardo’s writings on painting were not published, either in his or in El Greco’s lifetime, his ideas were widely known in artistic circles. It is known that Lomazzo had studied Leonardo’s manuscripts, and adopted his ideas.⁸⁴ Even if El Greco did not have any direct contact with Leonardo’s ideas about figure painting, which seems quite impossible, he was certainly familiar with his theory via Lomazzo’s treatise on painting.

Leonardo thought that the painter had to represent two main things in a painting, the human being and “il concetto della menté sua. Il primo è facile, il secondo difficile, perché s`ha a figurare con gesti e movimenti delle membra.”⁸⁵

A painting should present an event *vividly before our eyes*. Luis de Granada used the phrase, “taking place before one’s very eyes” to emphasise how this would stir up the emotions of the listener. Leonardo now applies

⁸³Stoichita, *op.cit.* p. 164.

⁸⁴Leonardo da Vinci, *Sämtliche Gemälde und die Schriften zur Malerei*, (ed) Chastel, André, München, 1990, p.67.

⁸⁵ Leonardo da Vinci, in: Barocchi, Paola, *Scritti d’Arte del Cinquecento*, vol. VII, tomo II, p.1722. For a explanation of the term ‘concetto’ in Leonardo see : *Die Anfänge der Maniera Moderna-Giorgio Vasari’s Viten*, (ed) Nova, Alessandro, translated and comment ; Feser, Sabine; Lorini, Victoria; Hildesheim, 2001, CD-Rom, Glossar: concetto.

this dictum to painting and, goes further to declare painting superior to poetry. Poetry, limited by the linear progression of the words, has to unfold events before the eyes successively in time; painting however can do this in one instant:

La pittura ti rappresenta in un' subito la sua essentia nella uirtù uisiua e per il proprio mezzo, d' onde la impressiua riceue li obietti naturali, ...; e la poesia riferiscie il medesimo, ma con mezzo meno degno del l' occhio, ilquale porta nell' impressiua più confusamente e con più tardità le figurationi delle cose nominate, che non fa l' occhio, uero mezzo infra l' obbietto e l' impressiua, il quale immediate conferisce con somma verità le vere superfitie et figure di quel, che dinnanzi se gli appresenta ...(sic!) ⁸⁶

It can hardly be ignored that Leonardo at this point addresses the *Wirkmacht*, that is to say the *effective power* of images. He thus adopts the antique theory of *enargeia* which in the literary theory of the Cinquecento was defined as an “elevated clarity of vividness of expression in placing the event or image before the eye.”⁸⁷ It is clear that Leonardo follows a different interpretation from his literary contemporaries; he puts the concept of *enargeia* into the service of painting and contrasts it with poetry. He gives examples of the effective power of images contrasting them with the ability of poetry:

poni scritto il nome di dio in un loco e ponui la sua figura a riscotro, vedrai quale sia piu reverita;...tolgasi uno poeta che descriva le belleza

⁸⁶Leonardo da Vinci, *Libro di pittura/ Das Buch von der Malerei*. Nach dem Codex Vaticanus(Urbinas), ed, translated and comment by Ludwig, H., Wien, 1882, Vol.1, §23, p. 40f.

⁸⁷ Shearman, *op.cit.*, p.208.

d'una dona al suo innamorato, tolsi uno pittore che la figure, vedrai
dove la natura volgera piu il giudice innamorato.⁸⁸ (sic)

Obviously Leonardo's comparisons are not just, but they illustrate his desire to confer on painting the same status as that of poetry. He declares further that not only is the ability of painting to bring a *storia* instantly to the eyes of the spectator necessary, but also vivid representation through gestures is required. In one of his later statements about painting, Leonardo writes that the depicted movements should be displayed vividly:

Se le figure non fanno atti pronti e quali co' le membra <et> isprimino
il concetto della mente loro, esse figure son due volte morte, perché
morte son principalmente, che la pittura in sé non è viva, ma
isprimitrice di cose vive senza vitta; se non se gli aggionghe la vivacità
de l'atto essa riman morta la seconda volta. (sic)⁸⁹

The statement that painting by its own means is dead but can depict living things is already a powerful judgement, by which he emphasises the 'how' of a representation. He concludes this passage by stressing that painting is twice dead if what is depicted is not represented alive. In paintings like the *Last Supper* or the *Adoration of the Magi* one can realise the practical base to Leonardo's theoretical claims. Both paintings are examples in which the inner state of mind of the depicted figures is vividly expressed through their gestures. This idea is once more reinforced by Leonardo's comment:

⁸⁸The notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, in two vol., New edition, New York, 1972, vol.1. p. 328; "Write up the name of God in some spot and set up His image opposite and you will see which will be most revered... Take a poet who describes the beauty of a lady to her lover and a painter who represents her you will see to which nature guides the enamoured critic."

⁸⁹ Leonardo da Vinci; 'Codex urbinas latinus', 1270, f.132v, in: Paola Barocchi; *op.cit.*, vol. VII tomo, p. 1722.

“Quella figura è laudabile che ne l’atto meglio esprime la passione del suo animo.”⁹⁰

Leonardo was also occupied with highly codified rhetorical gestures as we can see in a study called *Christ among the Doctors in the Temple*, the original of which is unfortunately lost, but preserved in a copy by Bernardino Luini (fig.4).⁹¹ Here the young Christ is depicted making a recognisably rhetoric gesture in which he is counting (arguments) on his fingers, using his right hand to indicate the fingers of his left hand. Leonardo may not have been familiar with Quintilian’s very precise description:

It is never correct to employ the left hand alone in gesture, though it will often conform its motion to that of the right, as, for example, when we are counting our arguments on the fingers...⁹²

However, in his own writings, Leonardo is similarly explicit. In fact, Leonardo’s treatment is even more prescriptive, reinforcing the significance gestures held for him.⁹³

⁹⁰ Leonardo-Richter; *op.cit.*, p.292, “That figure is most admirable which by its actions best expresses the passion that animates it.”

⁹¹ Shearman, *op.cit.*, p.36.

⁹² Quintilian, *op.cit.*, p.305, bk XI, III, § 114.

⁹³ Leonardo-Richter, *op.cit.*, p.297. “If the matter in hand be to set forth an argument, let the speaker, with the fingers of the right hand hold one finger of the left hand, having the two smaller ones closed:”

4.3 Ludovico Dolce's *L'aretino* - The Venetian Link

El Greco's Italian career started in Venice, therefore one of the influential Venetian 'treatises', Ludovico Dolce's *L'aretino, Dialogo della Pittura* published in 1557 should be briefly examined. This consideration is focused on the already established rhetorical notions. Although El Greco's status as a pupil of Titian is disputable, Titian's influence on El Greco's work is more than evident.⁹⁴ In Titian's atelier, besides experience with theoretical and practical techniques in painting, El Greco certainly would have had the opportunity to encounter Ludovico Dolce and to be exposed to the latest Italian art-theory reflections of the day. As Dolce had translated the two main rhetorical works by Cicero, the *Orator* as well as *de oratore* it is hardly surprising that he makes a rhetorical notion central to his own work. Dolce places further requirements on the painter, in a language which will, by now, be familiar:

Finalmente ricerca al Pittore un'altra parte: della quale la Pittura, ch' è priva, riman, come si dice, fredda, & è a guisa di corpo morto, che non opera cosa veruna. Questo è, che bisogna, che le figure movano gli animi de' riguardanti, alcune turbandogli, altre rallegrandogli, altre sospingendogli a pietà, & altre a sdegno, secondo la qualità della historia. Altrimenti reputi il Pittore di non haver fatto nulla: perche questo è il condimento di tutte le sue virtù: come avviene parimente al

⁹⁴ Wethey, *El Greco and his School*, 2 vols, Princeton, New Jersey, 1963, vol. I, p.7, quoting a letter from Giulio Clovio to Alessandro Farnese.

Poeta, all'Historico, & all' Oratore: che se le cose scritte o recitate mancano di questa forza, mancano elle ancora di spirito e di vita.⁹⁵

In Dolce's statement are echoes of Leonardo's remarks about the "figure morte" and the need to animate the beholder: the aim of painting is to animate which can only be done by painting figures vividly in action.

In a section of the *Dialogo* where the characters are discussing the artistic requirements of invention, Aretino speaks about "la energia delle figure."⁹⁶

Shearman, in *Only Connect*, highlights the conflated content of the term *energia*. He traces its origins to two Greek concepts derived from poetics and rhetorical theory. The first term, *enargeia*, means the "desirable clarity or vividness in placing the subject evidently, as if present before the eye." The second term, *energeia*, "is a selective emphasis of force of detail in illustration that tends toward hyperbole." This term was now conflated to the Italian term *energia*, "by which he [a Venetian theorist] means an artificial clarity and (to that end) a measure of hyperbole."⁹⁷ A figure with *energeia* is therefore a figure which for the sake of readability favours hyperbole. This phenomena is observable in paintings by for instance Titan, Raphael or Correggio (fig.5).

El Greco was certainly familiar with Dolce's notion of *energia*, but developed his own particular method of achieving increased readability. El

⁹⁵ Roskill, Mark W., Dolce's 'Aretino' and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento, New York, 1968, p.156.

⁹⁶Ibidem, p.129.

⁹⁷ Shearman, op.cit.,p.211, Shearman refers to studies by B. Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance, Chicago, 1961,pp. 64, 433-44 and B. Hathaway, The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy, Itaca, 1962, pp.10-11, 28, 84, 190, where the terms and the relationship of the theorists are treated.

Greco's conceptualisation of *energia* relied upon the elongation of some figures and the negation of logical pictorial space. The subtraction of extraneous detail emphasised the focus on the actual *storia*. This is not to suggest that for Greco to create *energia* he was only applying *this* method, but with the help of these examples it is easy to give an explanation for his often discussed stylistic 'extravagances'. Besides the means mentioned above, El Greco developed his own powerful hyperbole, a kind of concentration or condensation by which he focuses and intensifies the view of the beholder. This intense involving of the spectator into a dense, emotional atmosphere is a reason for the often severe critique of the work of Greco up to the present day.

A theoretical background can be discovered for the hyperbole inherent in the extreme elongation of most of the figures in El Greco's later works. In his remarks on Vitruvius El Greco wrote:

...Therefore no painter, who created something important was occupied with geometrical relations. Giulio Clovio used to tell the following story: Talking with Michelangelo about the significance of Geometry in art he explained...everybody who is concerned about Geometry is stupid and regrettable.⁹⁸

It is interesting to find how El Greco neglects geometry in this remark, a subject highly estimated by Alberti⁹⁹ and certainly a subject which El Greco himself had mastered as he was said to have written a treatise on

⁹⁸ Marías and Bustamante; *op.cit.*, p.143, translation mine.

⁹⁹ Alberti-Grayson, *op.cit.*, who wrote: 'I want the painter,..., to be learned in all the liberal arts, but I wish him above all to have a good knowledge of geometry.', p.88.

architecture.¹⁰⁰ This statement seems to be a reference to a passage found in Vasari, who wrote that Michelangelo:

imperò egli usò le sue figure farle di nove e di dieci e di dodici teste, non cercando altro che, col metterle tutte insieme, ci fussi una certa concordanza di grazia nel tutto, che non lo fa il naturale; dicendo che bisognava avere le seste negli occhi, e non in mano, perchè le mani operano, e l' occhio giudica.¹⁰¹

Actually El Greco had drawn an eye in profile next to this passage in his copy of Vasari's *Vite*, the only drawing he made in the whole book!¹⁰²

Already Brown had drawn attention to this passage as a basic source of El Greco's artistic philosophy.¹⁰³ It also reveals that for El Greco ideas were more important than a personality cult, following in this aspect

Michelangelo, but remarking that he (Michelangelo) was a good man but could not paint.¹⁰⁴ It is quite obvious that elongation was a means of hyperbole for Greco and not expression of insanity. We have only to look at a portrait as marvellous as the one he did of his friend *Paravicino* (fig.6)¹⁰⁵, as late as 1609, to know that there is no doubt about his mental health.

Another short consideration of the *Dialogo* reveals Dolce's thoughts on the dynamic between painter and beholder, an especially relevant point for El Greco:

¹⁰⁰ Marías and Bustamante, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-23.

¹⁰¹ Vasari, *op.cit.*, vol. VII, p.270.

¹⁰² Salas and Marías; *op.cit.*,p. 45.

¹⁰³ *El Greco und Toledo*, Exh. Cat., (ed) Brown, Jonathan, Berlin, 1983, p. 109

¹⁰⁴ Pacheco, *op.cit.*: 'preguntando yo a Domenico Greco el año 1611 qual era mas difícil el debuxo o el colorido? me respondiese que el colorido. Y no es esto tanto de maravillar como oírle hablar con tan poco aprecio de micalael angel (siendo el padre de la pintura) diciendo que era un buen hombre y que no supo pintar.' p. 370.

In cio si puo ricercare il parer del vostro virtuoso Silvestro, eccellente Musico, e sonatore del Doge: ilquale disegna e dipinge lodevolmente: e ci fa toccar con mano, che le figure dipinte da buoni Maestri parlano, quasi a paragon delle vive. ... Questa è certa imaginatione di chi mira, causata da diverse attitudini, che a cio servovo, e non effetto o proprietà della Pittura. ... L'ufficio adunque del Pittore è di rappresentar con l'arte sua qualunque cosa, talmente simile alle diverse opere della natura, ch'ella paia vera.¹⁰⁶

As one can see in this dialogue, the argument that the painted figures of a good master appear to be speaking is countered with the response that this only happens through the imagination of the spectator. It is not something inherent to painting but rather something the painter has to create. An important aspect of painting is touched upon, namely the *stimulation* of the imagination of the beholder. It is exactly in this notion that Dolce is developing further or amplifying Leonardo's ideas about the animating figure. It becomes clear that Dolce's viewpoint is that of the spectator in contrast to Leonardo, who as a painter certainly takes the part of the creator. Dolce stresses the recreative act of the spectator, the active part a beholder has to fulfil. El Greco, influenced by this idea tried to integrate this thought which was initiated by Dolce: not only to bear in mind the power of the image to create emotions (by means of motion in the painting) but to stimulate the power of imagination in the beholder. The result of this concept

¹⁰⁵Oil on canvas, 112x86,1 cm, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.

¹⁰⁶Dolce-Roskill, *op.cit.*, p. 98 (Fabrini and Aretino); "Here one might solicit the opinion of your man of talent Silvestro For he draws and paints commendably, and gives us a tangible conviction that the figures painted by masters of quality are speaking, almost as they were alive. This idea is plain imagination on the spectator's part, prompted by different attitudes which serve that end. It is not an

is that many paintings of El Greco have a multitude of layers of meaning, which are difficult to decipher and should be analysed carefully. A further difficulty is that Greco had designed the different layers also on different receptional levels.

4.4 Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*

- The theological aspect of *persuadere*

The *Discorso* by Gabriele Paleotti, Bishop and later Cardinal of Bologna, was to become an influential text addressing the appropriacy of sacred images. A guideline had been urgently needed after the Council of Trent's decision to place the responsibility of determining the appropriacy in the hands of the Bishops and "others who hold the office of teaching and have the charge of the *cura animarum*."¹⁰⁷ Paleotti's *Discorso*, published in 1581, was not the first to attempt this task, but subsequent Spanish theoretical treatises on art in the 17th century indicate its importance. Paleotti's ideas about religious paintings, their purpose of "service" and his theory about persuasion and the didactic function of sacred images were directly referred to in, for example, Pacheco's *Arte de la Pintura*.¹⁰⁸ The *Discorso* was written originally as a guideline for his diocese but its influence spread widely throughout southern Europe. Other earlier treatises

effect or a property of painting. ... Thus it is business of the painter to represent with his artistry objects of all sorts, and to render them so similar to nature in all its diversity that they appear real."

¹⁰⁷ The Canon and Decrees of the Council of Trent, *op.cit.*, p.215.

¹⁰⁸ Cañedo-Argüelles, Cristina; 'La Influencia de las Normas Artísticas de Trento en los Tratadistas españoles del Siglo Diecisiete', in :*Revista de las Ideas Estéticas*, vol. XXXI, no.127, 1974, p.227.

actually exist, for example Molanus' *De picturis et imaginibus sacris* and Giovanni Andrea Gilio's *Due Dialogi*, both published in 1570, to which Paleotti owes some ideas. Paleotti's *Discorso*, however, seems especially appropriate because he is the first to give protracted consideration to the psyche of the beholder. In Paleotti the idea of the *libri pauperum* was not an empty convention; a visible sign for this is that he chose to write in the vulgate and not in Latin, like his predecessors.¹⁰⁹ In the chapter about *Delivery and Persuasion in Rhetorical Tradition* it was already pointed out that gestures derived from daily life and were highly conventional. Cicero¹¹⁰ as well as Quintilian¹¹¹ declared that gestures could be used universally because they were understandable for everyone. From this point of view one can understand the Renaissance notion that gesture was a universal language¹¹². Parallel to the issue of the universal language of gesture, Paleotti argues that painting serves as an instrument to make ourselves intelligible, even if the person we are showing the picture to does not understand our language.¹¹³ He declares, drawing upon Catholic tradition, that painting is a universal language, a language given by God to mankind, and therefore has to be defended against the critique of the Protestants, who wanted it banned. He attributes extraordinary power and possibilities to painting, which of course had to be used in the service of the Church.¹¹⁴ He

¹⁰⁹ Boschloo, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p.138-141.

¹¹⁰ Cicero, *De oratore*; *op.cit.*, bk.III, § 223, p.179.

¹¹¹ Quintilian; *op.cit.*, Bk XI, 3, 66-67; 87.

¹¹² Knowlson, James R.; 'The idea of gestures as a universal language in the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries', in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 26, 1965, pp.495-497.

¹¹³ Boschloo, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.122.

¹¹⁴ Jones, Pamela M; *op.cit.*, p.128.

insists that for “infiniti poverelli che non sanno leggere”¹¹⁵, painting was a way of gaining access to God.

Boschloo’s study regarding the influence of the Council of Trent on religious art at the end of the 16th century reveals that the “starting point of Paleotti’s *Discorso* is that art, and particularly religious art,...has a function of service.” Boschloo continues, “he (the painter) is like the preacher who wants to win over his congregation to himself and his faith, in the hope of gaining divine grace.”¹¹⁶ In a similar vein to de Granada, Paleotti also suggests that “persuasion” should urge the beholder to action:

...altro effetto che deriva dalle cristiane pitture, molto notabile e prencipale, il qual a guisa degli oratore è dirizzato al persuadere il popolo e tirarlo col mezzo della pittura ad abbracciare alcuna cosa pertinente alla religione.¹¹⁷

Paleotti goes a step further than either Dolce or Leonardo in that he gives painting not only the function of persuading the beholders, but also of prompting them to specifically *religious* participation. Emotions could be used to move the “lost” beholder/listener. In this moved condition, the beholder could then be easily instructed in the right and “true” belief.

For Paleotti, Cicero’s dictum of “*dilletare, insegnare e movere*” remained valid. The notion of *dilletare* was seen as a pleasurable but not absolute necessity. As a Bishop concerned with his congregation, rather than a painter concerned with technique, *insegnare* and *movere* took precedence.

¹¹⁵ Paleotti, *Discorso*, Bk 1, chapter 24, pp.224-5.

¹¹⁶ Boschloo, A.W.A.; *op.cit.*, vol. 1: p. 122.

¹¹⁷ Paleotti, Gabriele, *Discorso*, Lib. I, cap. XXI, in: (ed) Barocchi, Paola, *op.cit.*, vol. II, pittura, scultura, poesia, musica, Turin, 1978, p.333.

Paleotti, as Boschloo points out, “demands of the artist completely different knowledge, that is of the Bible and the Church Fathers, of history and the physical sciences, and not literature or mythology.”¹¹⁸ Interestingly, books on all of these are to be found in El Greco’s library.¹¹⁹

4.5 Lomazzo’s *Trattato dell’ Arte de la Pittura*

A treatise which was especially concerned with the question of how to express the passions through gestures was Gian Paolo Lomazzo’s *Trattato dell’ Arte della Pittura*, first published in 1584. The 1614 inventory of El Greco’s library describes a book as ‘tratado del arte de la pintura’ which is traditionally identified as Lomazzo’s.¹²⁰ El Greco’s intense preoccupation with how to depict emotion through gestures more than justifies the presence of Lomazzo’s treatise in his library. Lomazzo, in describing gestural attitudes used to convey emotions from antiquity and in constructing gestural models provided a treasure trove of information for Greco. The second book of Lomazzo’s treatise is the earliest systematic classification dedicated to ‘passions expressed by motion’.

The treatise might have come into El Greco’s possession via the artist Federico Zuccaro who had worked for the influential Farnese family at the

¹¹⁸ Boschloo, A.W.A., *op.cit.*, vol. 1 p.123.

¹¹⁹ Marías, Fernando and Bustamante, Agustín;*op.cit.*, pp.50-56. I share the view of Marías and Bustamante that an inventory can not absolutely demonstrate the readings of its owner, but it gives us an impression of his main preoccupation, compare: p.45.

¹²⁰ Marías, Fernando, Bustamante, Agustín; *op.cit* p.50.

palace of Caprarola, near Rome in the late 1560s and early 1570s.¹²¹

Although it is assumed that Zuccaro and El Greco met while still in Italy, Zuccaro also worked at El Escorial from 1585-88.¹²² It has been suggested that he might have visited El Greco during his stay at El Escorial, bringing with him Lomazzo's treatise and also the *Vite*, by the painter and biographer Vasari, which will be mentioned later.¹²³

El Greco's painting of the *Laocoon*¹²⁴ (fig.7) could be seen, in one respect, as a visual statement of his knowledge of Lomazzo's treatise. It is a rare instance of El Greco's handling of a classical theme and is therefore of special importance in his work. Lomazzo mentions the antique *Laocoon* group found in Rome in 1506, as exemplifying *dolore*.¹²⁵ In it, different activities such as lamentation, painful groaning and dying are demonstrated. Greco, taking up the theme, transforms the famous model and especially the physiognomy of Laocoon. In the course of the Counter-Reformation it was debated whether Laocoon was crying, or only groaning. As Laocoon's physiognomy was taken to represent the 'exemplum doloris', the distinction was essential because the expression was to serve as a model for the physiognomy of a martyr.¹²⁶ Lomazzo writes that "Not differing much from these [the Laocoon-group], should be Saint Sebastian's actions, when he

¹²¹ Marías, Fernando; 'El Pensamiento artístico del Greco: de los ojos del alma a los ojos de la razón', in: Exhibition Catalogue, *El Greco- Identidad y transformación*, Madrid, 1999, p.154.

¹²² Koshikawa, Michiaki; 'El Greco and Frederico Zuccari', in: *El Greco in Italy and Italian Art*, op.cit., pp. 357- 371 and *Lexikon der Kunst*, Leipzig, 1994, vol.7, p. 943 and Trapier, Elisabeth Gué; 'El Greco in the Farnese Palace Rome', in: *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, vol. 51, 1958, p73

¹²³ Salas, Xavier de; Marías Fernando, op.cit.

¹²⁴Oil on Canvas, 137,5x172,5; 1610-1614. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection.

¹²⁵ Lomazzo, op.cit. p.68.

¹²⁶ Ettliger, Leopold D.; 'Exemplum doloris. Reflections on the Laocoon group'; in: *Festschrift für Erwin Panofsky, De artibus opuscula XV*, (ed). Meiss, M. v., 2 vol., New York, 1961, --vol. II, pp. 121-126.;p. 121.

was shot to death.”¹²⁷ If Laocoon were to cry out in pain, he could not serve as a model, because the death of martyrs implied silent suffering. The physiognomy of a martyr should not only be deformed by pain, but should also express the sense of rapture through a heavenward gaze.¹²⁸ El Greco’s *Laocoon* is clearly not crying and, although looking towards the serpent in his right hand, his head is turned oddly heavenwards. El Greco also transforms Laocoon’s facial expression, adapting him to the requirements of the Counter-Reformation. Additionally, his much earlier *St. Sebastian*¹²⁹ also shows the saint gazing blissfully heavenwards. Interpreting the requirements that Lomazzo sets out for the representation of martyrs, El Greco transforms certain aspects of already well-known subjects.

4.5.1 Lomazzo’s contribution to a theory of movements in painting

Lomazzo’s theory of motion, that is to say his concept of the moving body in a painting, owes something to Leonardo as well as to Alberti, in that pictures have to stir the emotions of the beholder and that the beholder should be animated to imitate what he sees in a painting.¹³⁰ According to Lomazzo, images become suggestive if a picture expresses “the true naturall motions.” (sic)¹³¹ After a short introduction to the general theme and the value of gesture in painting, Lomazzo explains “the passions of the mind and their

¹²⁷ Lomazzo, *op.cit.*, p.69.

¹²⁸ see Le Bruns ‘douleur aigue’ p.82, edition from 1751, new edition from: A Method to learn how to design the Passions, Los Angeles, 1980.

¹²⁹ Oil on canvas, 191x152 cm, 1577/78, Palencia, Cathedral.

¹³⁰ Lomazzo, *op.cit.*, Bk. 2, chap.1 p.1.

effects on bodies.” He describes the influence of the seven planets on motion, before coming to the different emotions, like *melancholie*, or *fearfulness*, etc. His descriptions are not nearly as specific as those found in the treatises on gesture, but already demonstrate progress towards codification. The following example should demonstrate how Lomazzo, instead of describing physical movement, explains the action of patience with emotional movements, and with the aid of exemplary scenes:

PATIENCE

Patience hath actions of humility, voide of defence, and (in a word) such as are usually expressed in the Passion of Christ; Insomuch that Painters are bound to represent it in Christ with al the effects thereof, when the Iewes misused and derided him; but especially when hee is made bound to the piller and whipped, shewed to the people, and crowned with thornes, whiles hee carried the Crosse to the mount, whereupon hee was fastned, and lifted up into the ayre; where hee never shewed any signe of resistance, escape, or avoyding his Martyrdome. As also did the blessed Martyres for love of him in their Martyrdomes, tortures, and deathes; where they *standing* most patiently did sometimes *lift up their eies to heaven* in hope, sometimes *downe* in humility; framing their externall gestures according unto the evill they indured. (sic)¹³²

One can see that only after mentioning the behaviour of Christ during passion and comparing it to the one of martyrs Lomazzo makes very short

¹³¹ Ibidem.

remarks about the physical comportment of the figures and even these short remarks are all accompanied with emotional attributions: “standing ...patiently; lift up their eyes to heaven in hope; down in humility. “(sic!) For that reason it is quite difficult to apply this kind of description to painting. It becomes clear that Lomazzo as an artist refers to visual examples, but as he does not mention them with references, it is not possible for the reader to identify the various paintings, let alone particular movements.

In another example, he does become more concrete, but it also reveals the variety of gestures that can express an emotion:

DEVOTION

There are besides these, certaine proper actions of devotion; as to stand with the face cast down on the earth, as Christ did in the garden; and with the head declining on one shoulder, as many holy and religious men use to doe; to looke up to heaven with the arms spread abroad, and sometimes a crosse, after the manner of kinges; to kneele, lifting up the handes to heaven; to plait the fingers within each other towards the chinne, with an inclining countenance, to spread abroad the armes, with the head handing downe, to lie groueling upon the earth with the face downewardes and such lie, as are use by all Christians, whensoever they humble themselves before God. Howbeit I hold this to be the most convenient action, *that he which praieth cast his eyes up towards heaven.* (sic)¹³²

In this paragraph Lomazzo offers different movements to express devotion and at first it appears as if he gives them like threading pearls on a string,

¹³² Lomazzo, *op.cit.*, Bk II, chap. 16, p.72f, italics mine.

but in the very last sentence he prioritises the *heavenward gaze*. That signifies that he not only puts examples at our disposal but gives advice. In both examples the gaze heavenwards is mentioned, first in connection with patience and second with devotion. The *heavenward gaze* is a general formula for the “communication with the divine” the turning of the soul heavenwards. It serves as an expression of martyrdom and elevation to heaven, or may be a sign of inspiration.¹³⁴ Lomazzo, in prioritising the *heavenward gaze*, certainly follows Vasari who claims that the face of the *Santa Cecilia* by Raphael “reflects the delight of ecstasy.”¹³⁵ The consequence of this assertion was that her expression was taken as exemplary. The face of *Santa Cecilia* (Fig 9) with its turned up eyes was seen as the visible manifestation of the ‘Soul in Ecstasy’.¹³⁶ Thus the *Santa Cecilia* became the visual model for the ‘gaze heavenwards’ in the late Renaissance period. Her gesture was codified and re-used by many painters, including El Greco as we will see later.

Besides this description of the relationship between inner and outer movement, Lomazzo’s relationship of form to ideas is reflected in El Greco’s striving for his own form of expressing *movere*. Lomazzo argues that:

For the greatest grace and life that a picture can have is that it expresses ‘motion’: which the painters call the ‘spirit’ of a picture:

Nowe there is no forme so fitte to express this ‘motion’, as that of the flame of fire...for it hath a ‘conus’ or shape pointe where with it

¹³³ Lomazzo, *op.cit.*, Bk. II, chap.10, p.31.

¹³⁴ Henning, Andreas; ‘Die Physiognomie der Vision, Inspiration und Anbetung’, in:Exhib. Kat.: Der himmelnde Blick, zur Geschichte eines Bildmotives von Raffael bis Rotari, Dresden, 1998, pp.20-23.

¹³⁵ Stoichita, *op.cit.*, p. 166, who states that Vasari neglected the whole antique tradition of this “gaze heavenwards” and also the St. Sebastians by his master Pietro Perugino, certainly familiar to Raphael.

seemeth to divid the aire, that so it may ascende to his proper shape.

(sic)¹³⁷

The flamelike shape of some of El Greco's figures, especially in the works of his later years, immediately springs to mind. The further connection between this flamelike shape and spirituality, and its relation to neo-platonism, known both to Lomazzo and to El Greco, is outside the scope of this thesis.¹³⁸

4.6 Conclusion

This brief examination of some significant art theoretical treatises indicates how interwoven antique notions of rhetoric are into modern (Renaissance) theories of history painting. The transfer of the *actio* theorem as well as that of *persuadere* to painting opened the way to a new emphasis on the role of the spectator in painting. This theory was applied to painting practice.

Tracing the development of gestures in the works of art preceding El Greco gives ample evidence of the symbiotic dynamic between theory and practice. An examination of some of the more exemplary works will form the content of the following section.

¹³⁶ Ibidem.

¹³⁷ Lomazzo Giovanni Paolo, Trattato dell' arte de la pittura; Reprografischer Nachdruck der Ausgabe Milano 1584, Hildesheim, 1968, p.29; libro primo, chap.1, I quote the whole section in italian for a better understanding: Et in questo precetto parmi che consista tutto il secreto de la pittura, imperoché la maggior grazia e leggiadria che possa avere una figura è che mostri moversi, il che chiamano I pittori furia de la figura. E per rappresentare questo moto non vi è forma piú accomodata che quella de la fiamma del foco la quale, secondo che dicono Aristotele e tutti I filosofi, è elemento piú attivo di tutti e la forma de la sua fiamma è piú atta al moto di tutte, perché ha il cono e la punta acuta con la quale par che voglia romper l'aria et ascendere a la sua sfera, si che quando la figura averà questa forma sarà bellissima.

¹³⁸ See. David Davies; 'The influence of philosophical and theological ideas on the art of el Greco', in: Actas del XXIII Congreso de Historia del Arte, España entre el Mediterraneo y el Atlantico, 3 volumes, Granada, 1973, vol.2, pp.243-249.

5. Art Theory and Art Practice:

towards the ‘rhetorical gesture’

The relationship between practice and theory was complex, mutual and *not* unidirectional. Theory informed practice and practice informed theory. With Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, a development took place, from gestures as delivering symbolic meaning to gestures as delivering symbolic *plus* emotional meanings, that lent a new quality to gestures in painting. The increasing emphasis on the role of the spectator supported this new development, and this development in turn increased the emphasis on the role of the spectator that had already been initiated by the new Church requirements of religious painting after the Council of Trent.¹³⁹ That is to say, the demand of *persuadere* generated a conception of involving the spectator in the process of recognition. Boschloo points out that, “Many [artists] were not only fully aware of the presence of a spectator, but also tried to involve him intensely in what was being depicted”¹⁴⁰ And Alberti had already started to involve the spectator into the *storia*, demanding not only more affective gestures but also, for example, a *festaiuolo*, a person “..sia nella storia chi admonisca et insegni ad noi che ivi si facci.”¹⁴¹ A more

¹³⁹ See for “a more engaged spectator” John Shearman; Only Connect, *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁰ Boschloo, *op.cit.*, p.5.

¹⁴¹ Alberti-Janitschek, *op.cit.*, p.123; Alberti-Grayson: “I like there to be someone in the ‘historia’ who tells the spectators what is going on,...”, p.77.

engaged spectator demanded and promoted a development towards hyperbole and visual rhetoric.¹⁴²

Correggio and Titian were forerunners of this new means of expression. Boschloo confirms that “In addition to Florence and Parma, it was particularly Venice where, in the years 1515-30 the breakthrough to an emotional charged art occurred, which was so important for the future.”¹⁴³ This development was, of course, anticipated by Leonardo as well as by Raphael. The *Last Supper* by Leonardo has long been considered a schoolbook, encompassing a whole repertoire of gestures. Gestures which were not symbolic, but charged with emotional meanings, reached a new high point in Leonardo’s work. Chastel writes, “Even a secondary personage is no longer a simple bearer of a gesture useful to the composition; he is abruptly endowed with his own reality.”¹⁴⁴ Although Chastel is interested primarily in gestures in Caravaggio, it is significant that he draws on Leonardo’s work as an important source to explain the shift towards the “expressive gesture”¹⁴⁵

Raphael was one of the artists who also drew heavily on this source, developing his own, more moderate handling of emotionally-charged gestures. In his *Transfiguration* (fig.8), Raphael uses disciples from the *Last Supper* as models for his own disciples; for example, the gesture of St. Philip, holding both hands at chest height, palms turned inwards while the

¹⁴² Shearman, *op.cit.*, Chapter V: History and Energy, pp.192-226, especially pp.209-225.

¹⁴³ Boschloo, *op.cit.*, p.92.

¹⁴⁴ Chastel, André, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*

whole upper body leans slightly forward, stems directly from Leonardo.¹⁴⁶ Raphael's tapestry cartoons for the Sistine Chapel reveal direct links to Leonardo's *Last Supper* as well as the *Adoration of the Magi*, "which Raphael must have studied most intensively in Florence for he exploited its repertoire from his first to his last days in Rome."¹⁴⁷ Both pictures depict a large variety of emotions. For example, the group of disciples on the right side of the *Last Supper* clearly inspired Raphael's representation of a group of men talking in the centre of the cartoon *Paul Preaching in Athens*. This cartoon, in particular, was accessible to Titian in the late 1520's as it was displayed in the house of one of his patrons, Zuanantonio Venier.¹⁴⁸ The exhibition, described by Shearman as "a great moment in Venetian history painting", also included Raphael's now lost cartoon of the *Conversion of Saul*.¹⁴⁹

While Leonardo explored the use of emotionally-laden gestures, Raphael went further to augment these gestures through a process of emphasis. Shearman points out that Raphael emphasised some parts of the body, to achieve a better readability.¹⁵⁰ This stressing of some parts and enlarging them in contrast to others is called, by Shearman, hyperbole or 'visual rhetoric', understanding "a rhetoric (as) a system of information prioritised for persuasive effect..."¹⁵¹ In paintings like the *Death of Saint Peter Martyr*, (fig.9, a picture which only comes down to us in copies),

¹⁴⁶ Preimesberger; *op.cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁷ Shearman, John; Raphael's Cartoons in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, London, 1972, p.129.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem.* p.207.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 223.

¹⁵⁰ See Shearman, 1992, *op.cit.*, for an explicit explanation of the development of hyperbole in visual arts, pp.212-222, where he also mentioned the above, p.217.

Titian applied this hyperbole or visual rhetoric, “as a selective emphasis and de-emphasis systematically applied to anatomy for expressive clarity.”¹⁵² Through this mode of application, artists such as Leonardo, Raphael and Titian demonstrate their knowledge of the effectivity of rhetorical method. They attempt to transpose effective rhetorical methods to painting, finding particularly accessible those methods that relied upon representations of the body to underline chosen meanings. The linking of rhetorical method to physical representations led to the establishment of rhetorical gestures.¹⁵³

The search by artists for more convincing formulas to express their meanings more clearly led to an increased repetition of those they found particularly effective. Painters searched for models – representations containing adequate postures, gestures and emotions. On being copied, the model was taken into the new picture, its recontextualisation inevitably affecting the emotional expression. As will be seen in the following study, El Greco often made use of models, modifying their expression according to his purposes. The informed spectator was aware of the various sources of different models, recognising them in later paintings. This process of recognition intensified the overall contemplation of painting

El Greco, like Raphael, frequently adopted models from other artists, especially Michelangelo (who also played an important role in the development of gestures), Titian, Correggio and Raphael. He was able to integrate models from various sources into his compositions, creating a unique combination of expressions, mediating to the beholder not only the

¹⁵¹ Ibidem, p.212

¹⁵² Ibidem.

content of his narrative, but evoking emotions as well as conveying complex theological programmes.

In general, as well as specifically in painting, the historical development of gestures tended towards codification. Not only are rhetorical gestures codified, but Leonardo's emotionally-laden and spontaneous gestures become systematised as well. Attesting to this process of codification is the increasing number of treatises on gestures, be they preaching manuals, (i.e. by Luis de Granada); books on movement (i.e. by Benito Arias Montano); treatises on signs (i.e. by Giovanni Bonifacio); or art treatises like Lomazzo's.

¹⁵³ remind, Wittkower *op.cit.*, distinguishes in his article different types of gestures, amongst others he also mentions the rhetorical gesture, p.39.

6. Benito Arias Montano's *liber ieremiae*

- El Greco's initiation into a rhetoric of gesture

The book by Benito Arias Montano called *liber ieremiae, sive de actione, ad sacri apparatus instructionem...* published as early as 1571, gives an impressive overview of 'biblical movements'. As Montano can be linked to El Greco during his stay in Rome, the analysis of the *liber ieremiae* can provide an insight into the thinking and preoccupations of El Greco while apprehending the 'maniera moderna'.

Benito Arias Montano had been a member of the Spanish congregation at the Council of Trent, during which period he was a theologian of the Counter-Reformation.¹⁵⁴ He became Royal Chaplain in 1566 and was involved in the construction of El Escorial, instigating especially its architectural analogies with the Temple of Solomon. He was one of the main exponents of a neo-Latin poetic, stressing the importance of the Bible for religious poetry.¹⁵⁵ Montano returned to the thinking of St. Jerome in re-emphasising the importance and necessity of antique rhetoric in relation to religious poetry.¹⁵⁶ As it also was for his contemporary and compatriot de Granada, 'conmovere' was more important to Montano than 'convencere'.¹⁵⁷ Inspired by the thinking of Erasmus of Rotterdam, whose own books were frequently banned under various Grand Inquisitors,

¹⁵⁴ Sanchez Rodrigues, Carlos; Perfil de un humanista: Benito Arias Montano, Huelva, 1996, p.10f.

¹⁵⁵ Gomez Canseco, Luis; Marquez, Miguel A.; Benito Arias Montano: Tractatus de fuguris rethoricis, Huelva, 1995, p.41.

¹⁵⁶Ibidem., p.51.

Montano aimed for a more literary rather than mystic-allegorical interpretation of the Bible.¹⁵⁸ On behalf of Philip II of Spain, Montano became the supervisor of the Plantin publication of the *Polyglot Bible*, which was dedicated to Philip II. Montano's *liber ieremiae* formed part of the explanatory appendix, or Apparatus, to this new translation of the Bible, which was the main source of the objections by the Roman curia that led to its initial prohibition by the Pope.¹⁵⁹

Montano's letter of December 29, 1576 from Spain and addressed to Fulvio Orsini, the librarian of the Farnese Palace in Rome, indicates that Montano can be associated with the Orsini-circle, and, more importantly here, with El Greco.¹⁶⁰ In the letter Montano also mentions Giulio Clovio, a close friend and occasional artistic subject of El Greco's, who appears in the Minneapolis version of the *Purification of the Temple*; still further confirmation of a connection between Montano and El Greco. Although no document exists that clarifies the relation between the two, Montano and El Greco had mutual friends, including Luis de Castilla, whom El Greco had met in Rome.¹⁶¹ It can be assumed that El Greco had met Montano in the Farnese Palace and had the opportunity of getting to know the biblical scholar's ideas about "movements of the body". Montano had, in fact, been

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem., p.58.

¹⁵⁸ Bataillon, Marcel, *Erasmus y España*, Madrid, 1950, p. 739.

¹⁵⁹ Rekers, B.; *Benito Arias Montano*, London, 1972.

¹⁶⁰ "The (Farnese) Palace was visited by Benito Arias Montano who later became the head of the El Escorial library, as well as by Luis de Castilla – a theologian from Toledo – and by the scientist Pedro Chacón who helped Pope Gregory XIII to create the new calendar." Ludmilla Kagané, 'Problems concerning the attribution of the 'Portrait of Ercilla y Zuñiga' to El Greco', in: *El Greco in Italy and Italian Art, op.cit.*, pp. 223-231, p.227 and Brown, Jonathan, *El Greco und Toledo, op.cit.*, p.82.

¹⁶¹ Ruiz, Elisa; 'Los años romanos de Pedro Chacon: Vida y obras'; in: *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica*, 1976, vol.10, p. 192; Mann, Richard G.; *El Greco and his Patrons*, Cambridge, 1986, p.30.

in Rome to defend his Polyglot Bible, especially the Apparatus containing the *liber ieremiae*.

It was Luis de Castilla's father, Don Diego de Castilla, who was to commission Greco's first altar painting, the retable for the Santa Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo. Interestingly, involving a significant part of the retable is the defence of Mary's virginity, a subject close to Montano's heart. Over his lifetime, Montano's thought would return regularly to topical issues in painting and Montano's biographer, B. Rekers, states. "Since they [Montano and Fray José de Sigüenza] were in charge of the library, they were asked to give their advice on the decorations. Montano had always been interested in pictorial art."¹⁶² Montano's disciple and chronologer of El Escorial, Fray José de Sigüenza, describes the later conception of the decoration of the library of El Escorial as being informed by Montano's abiding interest in art. This lifelong interest goes some way to explaining the existence of the *liber ieremiae*

If it is already striking that Montano, a biblical scholar, produces a text about gestures, it is even more remarkable that he places this text in the appendix to a multilingual Bible. The most unusual aspect is that the *liber ieremiae* explores neither religious nor spiritual themes, but effectively places physical movements in relation to the Bible. Other issues concerning the text's function also arise. The function of other supplements, such as dictionaries, grammatical explanations or the description of the heavenly Jerusalem, is easily detectable, but a text concerning movements of figures of the Bible forms a rather different, unusual and problematic subject matter.

¹⁶² Rekers, *op.cit.*, p.115.

Even the most superficial reading of the *liber ieremiae*, verifies Montano's intense interest in the body as means of communication and expression and reveals the relation between his work and humanistic thought. His scientific approach reveals his intention to interpret the Bible in a literary rather than mystical manner.

In clinical detail, Montano generates an exhaustive analysis of the possibilities of expression generated by different parts of the body, using passages from the Bible as confirmation of his ideas. The main text, arranged according to the various parts of the body, is subdivided according to possible actions or activities. These subdivisions consist of the first part focused on physical description; the second, drawing on biblical references. By pursuing a physical and not affective order, several emotions appear frequently, listed under various parts of the body. That is to say, *dolor*, or pain, appears under *oculi* (eye) and *manus* (hand), and may be further subdivided into the more precise expressions of *dolor vehemens* (vehement pain) or *dolor gravissimus animi* (grave or serious pain of the soul) each with its specific mode of gestural expression. Montano's accompanying gloss to the main text informs the reader of the particular activity described and where the citation used in support can be found in the Bible.

Example 1

MANUS

(gloss)

(main text)

Oratio

Manus in altum sublatae, orantis & miseriam suam
profitentis habitus est, s.s.e. ¹⁶³

psal. 27.2

(Hear the voice of my supplications, when I

psal. 76.2.

cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands towards thy
holy oracle."...etc.)¹⁶⁴

Example 2

LACHRYMAE

(gloss)

(main text)

Affectus in

In oratione lachrymae affectum arguunt maximum s.s.e.

oratione:

audivi orationem tuam, & vidi lachrymam tuam; ecce
sanavi te.¹⁶⁵

4. reg.20.5.¹⁶⁶

(I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy
tears: behold, I will heal thee:...)

Example 3

OCULI

(gloss)

(main text)

Oratio

Oculos attollunt orantes & petentes aliquid a

¹⁶³ Montano, *op.cit.*, liber ieremiae, p.12. "Hands lifted high is the posture of someone praying and declaring his/her misery.

¹⁶⁴ In the original the quotations from the Bible are always in latin !

¹⁶⁵ Montano, *op.cit.*, p. 9. "In prayer tears suggest very great emotion..."

Deo, s.s.e.

Joh. 11.41. Jesus autem elevatis sursum oculis, dixit, Pater,
 gratias ago tibi

Joh. 17.1. &c. Et in coena, elevatis oculis in caelum gratias
 egit, & fregit. Et haec loquutus Iesus, elevatis
 oculis in caelum, dicit, Pater venit hora,
 &c.&c.¹⁶⁷

(...and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said Father...These
word spoke Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven
and said, Father...")

Although the very plausible relationship between Montano and El Greco should not overdetermine the impact of Montano on El Greco's work, Montano's detailed descriptions prefigure distinct gestures found in Greco's *St. Peter in Tears*¹⁶⁸ (fig.10) and *St. Peter in Penitence* as well as in the *Magdalena* images. Montano was certainly not the first to detail the gaze heavenwards or the depiction of tears; both have their history in literature as well as in painting. But Montano's influence, possibly through the *liber ieremiae*, on El Greco's extraordinary usage of both is not to be discounted.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Montano uses this strange quotation for the second book of kings as he counts Samuel 1st and 2nd as the first books of Kings and Kings 1st and 2nd as the 3rd and 4th.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 8. "People praying and asking God for something raise up their eyes..."

¹⁶⁸ Oil on canvas, 108x89,6 cm, 1580/86, Barnard Castle, The Bowes Museum.

¹⁶⁹ see: Barasch, Mosche; *Imago Hominis. Studies in the Language of Art*, op.cit., , and from the same author; 'The Crying Face', *op.cit.*

7. Towards Codification

- Handbooks on Gesture as an aid to decoding Paintings

Considerable work on rhetoric and its relationship to painting was done during the 16th century, developing the ideas already initiated in the 15th century by Alberti. This development and its conceptualisation was an interchangeable process between visual arts and art theory. In the 17th century, a process of consolidation occurs as these ideas, debates and experiments slowly settle into place. This settling is expressed as a systematisation, as writers as well as visual artists attempt to categorise and classify gestures. Three texts produced in the 17th century reveal this process of systematisation concerning bodily expressions. The *L' arte dei Cenni* published by Giovanni Bonifacio in 1616, a north Italian lawyer, provides a wide range of gestures, from so-called universal (spontaneous), to symbolic, and socially codified ones. John Bulwer, an English physician, published his work, *Chirolugia or the Natural Language of the Hand*, together with his *Chironomia or the Art of Manual Rhetoric* in 1644, in which he explains systematically the movements of the hands and fingers, “first in relation to natural significations, and then in relation to artistic usage in public address.”¹⁷⁰ Bulwer’s works are especially important for decoding gestures in the visual arts, because they are the first to be accompanied by illustrations. The third text, a publication of a paper presented by Charles Le

¹⁷⁰Bulwer, John; *op.cit*, p.ix.

Brun, a French painter, at a conference in 1668¹⁷¹, differs through its didactic character from the two previous works. Like Bulwer's works, his *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les Passions* provides the reader with very original illustrations alongside the text.

These three handbooks are not only differentiated by the fact that they are directed towards a different readership but also by the fact that they differ in conception, where Bonifacio and Bulwer have more in common.

Bonifacio points out in the second book of his treatise that it was applicable to nearly every aspect of daily life, as well as to the sciences and therefore not addressed to a special audience. Bulwer's *Chirologia* and *Chironomia* were primarily directed to orators, and reveal the same empirical approach as Bonifacio's. Le Brun's work is also an attempt at systematisation, but as his work is dedicated to teaching visual artists it is free of all citations of literal sources and his text has a strong descriptive character.

In the second part of this thesis, these three handbooks will contribute to deciphering the meanings of gestures. They will help unravel the different kind of gestures (spontaneous, symbolic, etc.) interwoven by El Greco, and provide easier access to their decoding. As the Montano text opened an insight into the thinking of El Greco, and in particular his ongoing considerations regarding how to depict the passions, these handbooks can explain to the 21st century spectator the meaning and significance of gestures used by El Greco in his paintings.

¹⁷¹ The date of the conference is disputed. Some scholars date it to 1668 others to 1678, see: Charles Le Brun, A Method to learn to Design the Passions, Los Angeles, 1980, p.v.

7.1 Giovanni Bonifacio's *L'arte dei Cenni*

I concetti de gli animi nostri in quattro maniere si possono esprimere;
con i cenni-, co'l parlare, con lo scrivere, e con i simboli.¹⁷²

Although it was not exactly true, as Bonifacio proposes, that no one had previously written about “parlare in silentio”, his work generally underscores the growing significance of categorising bodily expressions. He grounds his ideas in the works of the classical authors of rhetoric theory, as well as the Bible. A central tenet of *L'arte dei Cenni* is Bonifacio's idea that gestures are more natural to the mind than words. The first part of Bonifacio's work provides a systematic verbal description – moving from head to toe – of over 600 different gestures. In the second part, Bonifacio is concerned with the application of these gestures in various disciplines including history, ethics, politics, agriculture, medicine, navigation, etc. In his discussion of the application of gestures in the field of poetry, Bonifacio airs the continuing *Paragone* between Poetry and Painting. He begins by commenting upon the similarity between poetry and painting in that each, through its particular means, expresses human affects. He quotes the well-known phrases from Horace's *ut pictura poesis* in support of his ideas.¹⁷³ He stresses further that the more detailed ‘described’ gestures are (in poetry as in painting), the most vivid; “the passions and the affections of the soul”¹⁷⁴ reappear before our

¹⁷² Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, p.3.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, p.553.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, *op.cit.*, p.554.

eyes. Also drawing on Quintilian and St Augustine for support, he focuses on the power of images and their great effect on the soul. He also mentions the decrees of the Council of Nicaea, and their reaffirmation at the Council of Trent, that are pertinent to his argument. This leads to an emphasis in Bonifacio's work on the Catholic notion of the eye rather than the ear as the primary sense organ, an argument already mentioned earlier. Reading like a passage from Leonardo's *Paragone between the Poet and the Painter*, Bonifacio's text states:

La pittura pero esprime più vivamente, più facilmente, e più universalmente que non fa la poesia. Vivamente perchè fanno più moto nell'animo nostro quelle cose che ci sono rappresentate avanti a gli occhi, che non fanno quelle che ci passano per gli orecchi....
facilmente, perchè in una occhiata si vede quello, che se non con lunghezza di lettura sarebbe compreso. Universalmente ancora, per che la pittura è equalmente intesa da tutte le nationi, benche di linguaggi differenti; il che non avviene nella Poesia.¹⁷⁵

Gestures are closely linked to painting. Besides the Catholic preference for the eye, the notion of the universal language of gestures reappears as an argument for painting and against poetry. Bonifacio supports his ideas with several examples to prove the supremacy of painting. He does not dedicate a separate chapter to painting, but treats it under the category of poetry. We can speculate that he maintained direct contact with painters, either through his occupation as a lawyer, or was simply an educated man of his time, but his work establishes that that he was very aware of the possibility of using

¹⁷⁵Ibidem, p.555f.

gestures in painting as an instrument of expression. His remark about the Council of Nicaea concerning the appropriateness of paintings in churches reveals his occupation with painting.

Bonifacio understood gestures as signs:

Cenno adunque è un atto, ò gesto del corpo, co'l quale senza parlare alcuna cosa significhiamo...segno è generalmente detto il cenno...gesto è detto questo atto, e questo cenno. ¹⁷⁶

For Bonifacio therefore 'cenno' is an action or a gesture of the body with which we can express ourselves. He equates 'cenno' and 'segno', terms which can only be translated as 'sign'. Therefore a gesture is an action and a sign. In total, all four terms are interchangeable, signifying bodily actions that transmit meaning. Furthermore Bonifacio distinguishes between universal (spontaneous) gestures and codified gestures (social or symbolic). For example, in the seventh Chapter, which is about the face - 'della faccia' -, the 8th mode, that is to say the 8th possible expression of the face, describes a universal gesture:

“volta [la faccia] verso la terra

è natural gesto di dolore, e di vergogna.”¹⁷⁷

Still nowadays the shameful downward gaze is a spontaneous reaction and understandable, at least in central Europe. Other gestures, however, are classified as codified. The following describes a symbolic gesture used in a specific context, such as the Mass:

In Chapter 27, 'delle mani', the 5th mode reads as follows:

¹⁷⁶Ibidem, pp.13-15.

“Del gesto della benedittione

questo è gesto religioso...., che si benedicono con la mano destra
tenendo distese la dita indice, e medio, e l'altre raccolte.”¹⁷⁸

This describes the gesture of benediction of the Catholic Church.

A shift in conceptualisation has to be recognised at this point as later audiences might no longer have found certain gestures as “natural” as Bonifacio identified them to be. For example, Bonifacio describes the act of

“Levar le mani al cielo” as

questo è gesto di pregare da dio alcuna gratia, overo di
ringratiarlo de'beneficij ricevuti: e par che accenni desiderio di
voler abbracciar i piedi della sua Maestà, overo di voler nelle
braccia ricever quella gratia, che dal cielo pregando s'aspetta:
& è gesto naturale”.¹⁷⁹

But raising the hand heavenwards does not necessarily fall within the “natural” or daily repertoire of a 21st century audience. Instead it has undergone a process of codification. So, while Bonifacio’s work provides an excellent *aid* for the interpretation of gestures, one must bear in mind the intervening processes of codification. Yet Bonifacio’s work remains significant because of the variety and richness of the gestures he addresses, many of which appear in El Greco’s work. Besides the act of raising the hands heavenwards, an ubiquitous gesture in El Greco’s work, the heavenward gaze, another El Greco mainstay, also appears twice in

¹⁷⁷Ibidem, p.44.

¹⁷⁸Ibidem, p.278.

¹⁷⁹Ibidem, p.275, emphasis mine.

Bonifacio. Once the “faccia volta verso il cielo”, appears described as: “si come si volta la faccia, cosi è segno che si volti l’animo verso il Cielo à Dio...”¹⁸⁰ and later the “occhi volti al cielo” is detailed as “quando si prega, overo si ringratio Dio si rivoltano gli occhi al Cielo”¹⁸¹ Bonifacio’s treatise, although published considerably later serves as an aid to identifying many of El Greco’s gestures, but the ambiguity of gestures, and the similarities between some movements with totally different meanings complicates the applicability of his work.¹⁸²

7.2 Bulwer’s *Chirologia...Chironomia* and its sources

Bulwer’s *Chirologia or the natural language of the Hand and Chironomia or the Art of Manual Rhetoric*, although published in 1644 and so even later in date than the Bonifacio, is a important source for the art historian trying to identify gestures in painting, primarily because it is illustrated. (fig.11)

John Bulwer a physician, was influenced to write the

Chirologia...Chironomia by Francis Bacon’s judgement of Aristotle who remarked in his *Advancement of Learning*:

For Aristotle hath very ingeniously and diligently handled the fractures of the body, but not the gestures of the body, which are no less comprehensible by art and of greater use and advantage. For the lineaments of the body do disclose the disposition and inclination of

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem, p.43.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, p.120.

¹⁸² See: Dal Pozzolo, *op.cit.*, p.148.

the mind in general, but the motions of the countenance and part do not only so , but do further disclose the present humour and state of the mind and will. Far as your Majesty saith most aptly and elegantly, *As the tongue speaketh to the ear, so the gesture speaketh to the eye...*¹⁸³

James W. Cleary wrote in his introduction to his new edition of Bulwer's text:

Francis Bacon gently criticises Aristotle for his omission of the gestures of the body and astutely observes the close relationship between gestures of the body and the dispositions and inclinations of the mind.¹⁸⁴

Bulwer refers to Bacon as the “great light of learning”¹⁸⁵ and takes Bacon's critique as the starting point for his endeavour.

Bulwer was primarily interested in gestures because he was convinced of the universal character of the language of gestures:

This natural language of the hand as it had the happiness to escape the curse at the confusion of Babel, so it hath since been sanctified and made a holy language by expression of our Saviour's hand whose gestures have given a sacred allowance to the natural significations of ours. And God speaks to us by the signs of his hands (as Bernard observes) when he works wonders which are the proper signs of his hand.(sic)¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Bacon, Francis; *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed Spedding, J; Ellis, R. L., and Heath D.D., Cambridge, 1869, vol. 6, *Advancement of Learning*, p.238.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p.xiii.

¹⁸⁵ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p.5.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p.19.

Bulwer, as well as Bonifacio, was convinced that the “language of Gesture” was a more effective and “natural” language precisely because it neither had to be learned nor to be translated.¹⁸⁷

It becomes quite clear in Bulwer’s preface “To The Candid and Ingenious READER” that for him gesture does not only imply the movements of the hands but also of the whole body and especially of the head:

For after one manner almost we clap our hands in joy, wring them in sorrow, advance them in prayer and admiration; shake our head in disdain, wrinkle our forehead in dislike, crip our nose in anger, blush in shame, and so for the most part and the more subtle motions.(sic)¹⁸⁸

Therefore he announces his intention to write another treatise that he calls: *Cephalonomia, or the rule of the head*, which unfortunately was never written. In fact three other writings of Bulwer are known today, which demonstrate his interest and intentions. One is the *Philocophus: Or the Deafe and Dumbe Mans Friend* (London, 1648) which was a commentary on the education of deaf-mutes; another is the *Pathomoyotomia: Or a Dissection of the significative Muscles of the Affections of the Minde* (London, 1649)

a study of the muscles of the head and their relation to emotion; and *Anthropometamorphosis, Man Transform’d: Or the Artificiall Changling* (London 1650, 1653, 1654), an indictment against those nations and races of men who for the sake of custom, tampered with the form of the human body.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Knowlson, *op.cit.*, pp.495-508, especially pp. 495-497.

¹⁸⁸ Bulwer, *op.cit.*,p.5.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p.xliii.

This brief description shows that Bulwer, although using codified gestures derived from painting has a background and interest on a more empirical level, developed though his training as a scientist. His *Chirologia...Chironomia* reveals in its structure an approach which is profoundly formed by the humanistic notion of concentrating on the body.

The *Chirologia* is structured into a introduction, consisting of a Dedicatory Epistle, a Preface, and Commendatory Poems. In the main part Bulwer discusses 64 gestures, of which 48 are illustrated in two plates. As a kind of appendix he added a part called *Dactylogia or the Dialects of Fingers*, wherein he explains 25 gestures of the fingers of which 24 are illustrated.

The discussion of the gestures follows in general a simple pattern. Firstly Bulwer describes the movements of the gesture, secondly he explains its significance, and thirdly he quotes examples from ancient, medieval, or contemporary historians and poets, as well as the Bible to underline the meaning given to a specific gesture.

In fact he quotes the Bible 214 times and for example Plutarch, who is the next most quoted, 37 times.¹⁹⁰ Cleary comments:

In the *Chirologia* Bulwer proffers an objective survey of how man's intellectual and emotional nature affects the movements of the hands and fingers. In the *Chironomia* he carries the reader to a specific art wherein gesture is of prime importance. This art is the art of oratory.¹⁹¹

Therefore through the *Chirologia* we are helped to identify intellectual (!) and emotional affects of man by analysing gestures. The *Chironomia* was

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, p.xx.

focused on oratory and therefore was intended as a guide for the orator. It is interesting to note that the main source of quotations used by Bulwer in the *Chironomia* is the already familiar *Institutio Oratoria* by Quintilian, which he quotes 30 times, followed by the Bible with 28 quotes.

The *Chironomia* is structured in four sections. The first is called *The canons of Rhetoricians Touching the Artificial Managing of the Hand in Speaking* and lists 49 gestures, 24 of which are illustrated. In these canons it explains how one can express emotions like ‘grieving’ or ‘showing shame’. The second section *Indigitatio: Or, The Canons of the Fingers* is concerned with the movements of the fingers “when expressing more refined concepts such as numbering arguments on the fingers.”¹⁹²

In the third part *The Apochrypha of Action: Or, Certain prevarications against the Rule of Rhetorical Decorum* actions are numbered which are unsuited to the orator. The fourth part *Certain Cautionary Notions* summarises some general principles of oratory. In our context the first part is primarily of interest, because of the description of gestures in connection with antique authors.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem, p.xvi.

¹⁹² Ibidem, p.xviii.

7.3 Le Brun's *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les Passions*

Charles Le Brun, a 17th century painter, spent three years in Rome studying antique and Italian Renaissance art and later was one of the founders of the Academie Royale in Paris. During his career at the Academie in Paris, Le Brun presented a paper entitled *Methode pour apprendre à dessiner les Passions*¹⁹³, aimed at providing a methodological approach to teaching the depiction of the passions. Working from the standpoint of a painter and academician, Le Brun attempted to construct a corpus of examples that in his opinion best expressed a specific passion. Essentially a handbook for teachers and students, Le Brun's work, in its concept and approach addressed a very well-defined audience of artists. In *Visual Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, Stoichita, who also draws on Le Brun's work to explore how certain passions were depicted, states that "Le Brun attempted to codify a whole tradition of work devoted to the study of physiognomy, and his 'method' gets as far as the ambiguous stage of a manual."¹⁹⁴ Focusing solely on facial expressions, Le Brun mostly uses figures stripped of all extraneous or identifying details to illustrate how specific emotional states are best drawn. Venturing almost into caricature, Le Brun creates a series of neutral, mask-like figures to explain the different positions the parts of the face – the lips, eyebrows, eyes, etc – would adopt during a particular emotional circumstance. He accompanies these figures with detailed textual explanations. An example demonstrates the character of Le Brun's study:

¹⁹³ Le Brun, Charles; op.cit.

Esteem (fig. 12)

Esteem is represented by a fix'd attention and sedate motion of the Parts of the face that seem fully directed towards the object which causes such attention: For then the Eye-brows will appear advanced over the Eyes and bent down towards the Nose, the other part somewhat elevated; and the Pupil raised up.

The veins and muscles of the Forehead and those about the Eyes will appear somewhat full; the Nostrils drawing downwards, and the Cheeks gently falling about the Jaws.

The Mouth a little opening, the corners drawing back and hanging down.(sic)¹⁹⁵

It becomes clear that Le Brun, in contrast to his predecessors, concentrates purely on anatomical descriptions. He does not bother either with defining the emotion, only describing its physical appearance, nor does he quote literary sources to justify his description. He does not even refer to a literal or visual source as a confirmation for his detailed description.

For Le Brun's contemporaries his work provided a useful resource, allowing students and academics, or in short any artist, to refer to a common source of information regarding expressions. (In passing it can be pointed out that Le Brun's work conforms well to the more general 17th century tendency towards an identification and systematisation of so-called "classical" forms.) Le Brun's work also makes a valuable contribution to 21st century critical approaches to 16th century art, in providing an excellent information resource regarding how emotions were read, expressed (through painting) and formed

¹⁹⁴ Stoichita, Victor I. ; *op.cit.*, p. 170.

the material for a process of codification. Remarking upon the significance of Le Brun's work, Stoichita confirms that,

In trying to understand the rhetoric of the face with particular reference to seventeenth-century Spanish art, the Le Brun system is useful, however, if we look on it as the synthesis of a whole tradition, and moreover if we consider Spanish art to be written *within* that tradition."¹⁹⁶

Stoichita refers here to the fact that Le Brun extracted his faces from visual models of the Renaissance.¹⁹⁷ He supports this argument giving as an example the Spanish, but Italian-trained, painter Jusepe de Ribera. However, my work draws the significance of Le Brun's work into the late 16th century, in particular to El Greco, who, because of his extensive experience in and connection with Italian art, can be even more readily situated within this tradition.

¹⁹⁵ Le Brun, *op.cit.*, p.25.

¹⁹⁶ Stoichita, Victor, *op.cit.*, p.170, italics mine.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*

Part II

Developing the Preconditions

1. Representing Passions – Animating the Pious Beholder

The Santo Domingo el Antiguo Altarpieces

In the following it will be pointed out that El Greco was deeply concerned with the question of how to present passions in painting. He analysed his visual sources carefully, using gestures with specific meanings. He took over from models gestures with a ‘codified’ meaning, enriching his pictures with this incorporation. With the help of his own visual repertoire, which he enriched in Italy, especially with Giulio Clovio and the Fulvio Orsini¹⁹⁸ circle, but of course also in Venice with the Titian circle, he had a wide range of models available. He was also in possession of drawings and prints made from famous originals. Nonetheless it is not the intention of this thesis to give a complete overview of El Greco’s visual sources, or of the various studies concerned with this subject.¹⁹⁹ Generally I have only chosen to mention models if they are, in my view, of basic importance, or to complete the search for the sources. With Lomazzo he had a handbook for choosing his visual sources, or at least a support for his choice. Not less important in

¹⁹⁸ See for a closer analysis of El Greco’s stay in Rome: Trapier, Elisabeth Gué; *op.cit* , and Robertson, Clare; El Greco, ‘Fulvio Orsini and Giulio Clovio’, in: El Greco of Crete, Proceedings of the international Symposium, Iraklion, 1-5 Sept. 1990, 1990, (ed) Hadjinicolau, Nicos, Heraklion, 1995, pp. 215-226.

¹⁹⁹ Wethey, *op.cit*; Johannides, in: El Greco of Crete op.cit., pp. 199- 214; Robertson in: El Greco of Crete op.cit.pp.215-226; El Greco in Italy and Italian Art, op.cit., to name only a few.

this respect is the fact that Vasari's *Vite* were also in El Greco's library.²⁰⁰

The discovery of Vasari's *Vite* annotated by El Greco as well as by Federico Zuccaro and later, probably after El Greco's death, by his disciple Luis Tristán, gives us the chance to learn about El Greco's ideas about painting. His often polemical 'responses' to Vasari's statements about northern Italian artists, often directly addressed to "Giorgio" (Vasari), have led to the assumption that they might have known each other.²⁰¹ Fernando Marias, in his monograph on El Greco, also suggests this : "Giorgio Vasari -a quien Domenikos debia haber conocido durante su estancia en Italia."²⁰² The annotations made by El Greco to the lives of Titian, Correggio and Michelangelo offer a broader insight into his artistic thought. Also, Vasari's glorification of certain works of art and his emphasis on their importance might have influenced El Greco's choice, even though he often criticised Vasari.²⁰³

The main paintings of El Greco's first large commission, the retable for Santo Domingo el Antiguo, should serve as a first and early example for the elaborate language El Greco developed to animate the pious beholder.

The retable of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo (fig.13), was El Greco's first large commission in Spain. The circumstances of how he received this commission are still unclear.²⁰⁴ We can however establish a link between El Greco and his first patron, Don Diego de Castilla. Don

²⁰⁰ Salas, Xavier de; 'Un ejemplo de 'las vidas' de Vasari anotado por El Greco', in: Gazette des Beaux Arts, 1967, pp.176-180.

²⁰¹ Salas and Mariás, op.cit., pp.45-48.

²⁰² Mariás, Fernando, El Pensamiento, op.cit., p.154.

²⁰³ Salas and Mariás, op.cit.,

²⁰⁴ For a summary of the history of the commission and the convent, see: Mann, Patrons, op.cit., pp.13-22.

Diego was the father of Luis de Castilla, a friend whom El Greco had met in Rome. From a document dated 23 September 1579²⁰⁵ we know that El Greco came to Toledo for this commission, which was the first major project in his career.²⁰⁶ A memorandum between Diego de Castilla, the Dean of Toledo²⁰⁷ and El Greco exists and is exhibited now in the Museum of Santo Domingo el Antiguo. This document mentions that six pictures have to be painted for the main altar and two for the side altars. In a document presumably later, dated 8 August 1577 the two subjects of the side altars are mentioned as *Nativity* and *Resurrection*, in which the figures of St. Jerome and St. Ildefonso were to be included.²⁰⁸

The commission of the Altarpieces from El Greco formed part of a general reconstruction of the Church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, carried out by Diego de Castilla who was executing the will of Doña María de Silva. He as well as Doña Maria de Silva intended to use it as their burial chapel.

The retable consists of six paintings and five sculptures, and a *Santa Faz* also painted by El Greco was later added instead of the coat of arms of Maria de Silva or Diego de Castilla.²⁰⁹ The sculptures and frame of the Altarpiece were made to El Greco's designs by Juan Bautista de Monegro. El Greco corrected and added some major details to the design, which are documented in two letters he wrote to the Dean.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵Zarco del Valle; 'Documentos inéditos para la historia de las bellas artes en España', Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España, 55, Madrid, 1870, p.604.

²⁰⁶Wethey; op.cit., vol. 2, p.3.

²⁰⁷Mann; Patrons, op.cit., pp.2-12.

²⁰⁸San Roman, Francisco de Borja, 'Documentos del Greco referentes a los cuadros de Santo Domingo el Antiguo', in: Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología, 1934, pp.1-13.

²⁰⁹Wethey, op.cit., vol. 2, p.5; Marías, Fernando; El Greco, Madrid, 1999, p.147.

²¹⁰Marías, Fernando; El Greco, op.cit. p.146.

In the centre of the High Altar (fig.14) is the picture of the *Assumption of the Virgin*.²¹¹ (fig.15) To the left and right of it, flanking the main painting are full length pictures of *St John Baptist* and *St. John the Evangelist*.²¹² Above them are small panels with three quarter length saints, *St. Benedict*²¹³ on the right and *St. Bernard*²¹⁴ on the left. Wethey explains the inclusion of these particular saints : "Obviously the presence of these saints is explained by the fact that the nuns are Bernardines who are members of the Cistercian reform of the Benedictines."²¹⁵

Above the central panel was situated the painting of the *Trinity*²¹⁶. Between the *Assumption* and the *Trinity* was installed the *Santa Faz*²¹⁷ . "At the apex of the altarpiece stand sculptured personifications of Faith, Charity and Hope."²¹⁸ At the sides at the height of the Trinity stand two prophets. The themes of the side altars are, on the Gospel side, the *Adoration of the Shepherds*²¹⁹ and on the Epistle side, the *Resurrection*.²²⁰

²¹¹ Oil on canvas, 401x228 cm, 1577/79, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago; signed in cursive Greek letters on a cartellino at the lower right.

²¹² Both oil on canvas, 212x78 cm, in situ.

²¹³ Oil on canvas, 116x80 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado.

²¹⁴ Oil on canvas, 113x75 cm, location unknown.

²¹⁵ Wethey, *op.cit.*, II, p.4.

²¹⁶ Oil on Canvas, 300x179 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado.

²¹⁷ Oil on canvas, oval, 76x55 cm, in situ.

²¹⁸ Davies, David; 'The Relationship of El Greco's altarpieces to the Mass of the Roman Rite', in: *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed Humfrey, Peter; Kemp, Martin, Cambridge, 1990,p.231.

²¹⁹ Oil on canvas, 210x128 cm, Santander, Emilio Botin Sanz .

²²⁰ Oil on canvas, 210x128 cm, in situ.

1.1 The central canvas of the High Altar - The Assumption of the Virgin

The painting *the Assumption of the Virgin* (fig. 15) is divided into two parts. In the upper part Mary is floating upwards surrounded by angels (fig. 16) and in the lower part the Apostles are grouped around the empty tomb (fig. 17). They are arranged in two main groups, one on the left and the other on the right of the painting leaving a small strip of sky visible. Three hands reach into this open sky. One of these hands, belonging to an apostle who is shown from the back, is depicted against the blue sky. This is the only patch of blue sky in the whole painting, therefore this hand is given special emphasis. Furthermore this hand is placed in the middle of the painting, exactly below the crossing point of the diagonals. This hand in such a privileged position belongs to the figure in a yellow garment with a red toga, standing at the left of the painting with his back to the spectator. His left hand is invisible but the palm of his right hand is turned upwards to Mary. From this hand the index and middle finger of his hand are only slightly stretched, but his ring finger is bent into his palm, crossing his thumb from the viewer's perspective. With the only patch of blue sky around this hand and the described gesture a double effect is created. Lifting up the Virgin, presenting her and introducing the spectator to the painting, drawing the spectator's attention to the significant event.

Quintilian describes this gesture as an alternative to a gesture applied once by Demosthenes, but serving the same purpose:

The following gesture is admirably adapted to accompany modest language:... Sometimes we may hold the first two fingers apart without, however, inserting the thumb between them, the remaining two pointing inwards, while even the two former must not be fully extended.²²¹

Bulwer explains it as a gesture used by the antique orators demanding silence, before they began to speak.(fig.18)²²² This figure is therefore a classical figure shown from behind, leading into the picture, presenting the central theme of the Assumption, as if he wants to speak about it, demanding silence so that the picture can speak. His gesture was used by El Greco again in the same retable. *St. Benito* (fig.19) in the half-figure painting placed on the right, next to the *Assumption*, in the second storey, makes the same gesture, only he is in another state of the movement, pointing downwards. His gesture also has an indicating character, towards the main altarpiece. El Greco repeats this gesture in his painting of the *Martyrdom of St. Maurice* (fig.66), in a figure which stands on the right side, holding the banner.²²³

In the *Assumption* the figure seen from the back is the only one standing in front of the tomb, partially obstructing the view. All the other figures are either standing behind or beside the tomb. In front of him, for the beholder behind him, stand five other figures, only partly visible. At the left border of the painting, stands an apostle dressed in green. He is turning his head to the right, so that we can only see his head, with grey hair and a long beard, but not his face, because it is blocked by the head of the figure seen from the

²²¹ Quintilian, *op.cit.*, Bk, XI, III, § 96, §98, p.297.

²²² Bulwer, *op.cit.*, plate F, illustration A, Canon I, p.196-198.

²²³ See chapter 4 in the second part for a closer analysis.

back. The top of his right foot is also visible. Next to him we can only see a dark spot, presumably the head of another apostle. Next to this, beside the head of the figure seen from the back is the head of a young Apostle. He has a small beard and looks to the left, outside the painting, but his view is not focused on anything; he seems to be contemplating, looking into another world to learn how to understand the event. Behind him stands another Apostle with only his face partly visible. He is looking downwards, for he has not yet perceived the Assumption and is therefore still mourning. His state of recognition is also expressed through the fact that his face lies in deep shadow. Next to him his antipode is depicted, with his face immersed in light, looking up to the ascending Virgin. This figure is dressed in blue and red like the Virgin, only in a slightly different colour tone. He is the only one in the left hand group looking upwards to the sky where heaven opens, seeing the actual happening. His face expresses rapture.(fig. 20) Looking up while bending the head slightly and showing mostly the whites of the eyes was already the codified gesture for rapture. He is looking up at the Virgin but does he see her? From his viewpoint, underneath the clouds he could only see the crescent moon and the soles of Mary's feet, but what is reflected in his expression is that he is having an inner vision.

On the right side of the painting there is a group of six Apostles. In the background on the left of this group stands an Apostle looking down into the empty tomb with his head in dark shadow. It is easy to recognise that he is also still mourning, unenlightened by the happening above him. Next to him and partly obscuring him stands a young Apostle who seems to be talking to another elderly Apostle, dressed in green and red. Behind and in

between them stands a middle-aged man, looking down and painted in a darker tone to express his state of mourning.

The elderly Apostle dressed in green and red lays his right hand on his breast and bends his head down, as if considering something which the younger Apostle to his right has said to him. They are not grief-stricken, but already in a state of consideration. A similar gesture like the one made by the elderly Apostle, but using both hands, had been used by Raphael in the *Transfiguration* (fig.8)²²⁴ and by Leonardo in the *Last Supper*²²⁵, and was identified by Preimesberger as "benevolentiam ostentit". This identification was made by Preimesberger with the help of John Bulwers *Chirologia or the Natural Language of the Hands*²²⁶ in which a plate (fig.21) shows the two hands in the same way as in the paintings of Raphael and Leonardo.

Nevertheless the meaning of the gesture varies a little in all the paintings. El Greco only painted one hand in this position. As an answer to the young man, the gesture may express benevolence. The young man, whom he is inclining towards, looks attentively at him as if waiting for an answer or understanding the message of the gesture.

Another possible interpretation is given if we consider Bonifacio:

mano al petto

Il mettersi la mano destra aperta al petto, e chinare alquanto la testa è atto di riverire, & è particolar gesto di quei popoli d'oriente, che in simil atto non si scuoprono la testa per la difficoltà che haverebbono in levarsi, & rimettersi

²²⁴Preimesberger, Rudolf; *op.cit.*, p 101.

²²⁵Ibidem.

²²⁶Bulwer, John, *op.cit.*, p. 189, plate D, ill. R.

il turbante.²²⁷

Bonifacio deciphers this gesture as one of reverence and a special kind of greeting which reminds us of the angel in the example at the beginning. Nevertheless the Apostle seems to want to express with this gesture his reverence to the dead Mary (a kind of farewell) and it also expresses his benevolence in answering the younger one. El Greco applied this gesture also in the *Espolio* (fig.61), painted at the same time for Sacristy in Toledo Cathedral.²²⁸

El Greco uses a simple formula to express different stages of recognition in this painting. If a figure looks down and is covered in shadow, or the skin colour is painted in a darker tone, the state of mind is still that of mourning; the lighter the tone of the skin colour, the more they recognise. El Greco also breaks this simple rule.

In the middle of the painting, below Mary, is the already mentioned patch of sky with the hand of the figure seen from behind. Further to the right, there is another hand reaching into the sky, pointing upwards. It belongs to a figure who is in the middle of the right group. He is looking down to another apostle pointing up with his right hand and holding his toga with his muscular left arm. Although he is looking down, he is aware of the Assumption, pointing to it. The gesture of pointing was a common one. Bulwer describes it as follows: "The forefinger put forth, the rest contracted to a fist, is an express of *command* and *direction*, a gesture of the hand most *demonstrative*."(fig.22)²²⁹ St. John the Baptist, on the side panel of the same

²²⁷ Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, p. 278.

²²⁸ See chapter 3 in the second part of this thesis.

²²⁹ Bulwer, *op. cit.*, p.124, plate C, F; Quintilian,*op.cit.*, Bk, XI, III, § 94, p.295.

retable also makes the same gesture. It is a gesture which is frequent not only in El Greco's paintings; a marvellous example, with a double gesture of commandment can be studied in Raphael's tapestry cartoon *Charge to Peter*. The pointing Apostle bends down to the crouching figure in the foreground. The foreshortening of the pointing arm indicates how deep in space the Apostle is standing and what a vigorous movement he is making, almost falling over the crouching Apostle in the foreground. The pointing arm is in parallel to one of the main diagonals of the painting, which gives it even more accent. It is remarkable that he is not only pointing up, but forward, as if he is standing behind Mary. His vigorous movement well expresses his urge to tell what he has just seen, the Assumption of the Virgin.

El Greco pushes the group of the four Apostles who are standing behind the pointer into the depth of the painting, creating through this more pictorial space. The figures standing in the background seem not only to be in the depth of the painting, but underneath the clouds, thus it is impossible for them to see the Assumption.

The pointing figure on the right mirrors, with some variations, the figure seen from behind in the left foreground in front of the tomb and the floating Virgin, because he is standing behind the tomb and the Virgin, creating a balance in the composition.

He looks down, but is he looking at his colleague? The crouching Apostle looks up, but not at the apostle who nearly falls over him, but at Mary. He is the third one whose hand is reaching into the sky. His right hand seems to lift up the other one of the figure seen from the back, as if he is passing on the message. The gesture is the same, only seen from another viewpoint.

He is the one who is the lowest in the painting, but he is not only looking up but also lifting his hand up to heaven. His left hand holds a book, which we can only see from the front. His thumb is in the pages of the books as if he does not want to lose the page he was reading. In the front of the book is a *cartellino* which says: doménikos theotokópoulos krès ó deíxas 1577. This figure was identified by Braham as St. Peter and he assumed that Michelangelo's St. Bartholomew from the *Last Judgement* served as a model.²³⁰ Joannides remarks that a drawing by Michelangelo in the Archivio Buonarroti " is even closer to El Greco's figure"²³¹ Thus obviously one can see a michelangelesque influence in this figure. In contrary to other adoptions by El Greco, here he changes the whole emotional connotation of the figure. While St. Bartholomew's face mirrors a feeling between anxiety and reproach, his right hand holds the knife towards the Resurrected, demonstrating the tool of his martyrdom, El Greco's St. Peter looks peacefully up to the Virgin, inviting the beholder with his open hand to join in the holy event. Maybe El Greco, whose critical remarks on Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* are known,²³² wanted to demonstrate with this figure that he could use Michelangelo's figure as a model but change its expression to devotion, thus following the 'decorum' for a pious theme.

However, the figure also serves a special purpose, as he is looking up, seeing the Assumption of the Virgin, an event which was not described in the Bible, but holding what is possibly the Bible in his hand ; resting on it, he

²³⁰Braham, Allan; 'Two notes on El Greco and Michelangelo', *Burlington Magazine*, cviii, no.759, June 1966, p 307.

²³¹Joannides; *op.cit*, p.209.

²³²Mancini, Giulio, *Considerazioni sulla Pittura*, (ed). Marcucchi, (comment) A. Salerno, L., 2 vols. Rome, 1956-7, I, pp. 230f.

may demonstrate the roots of the Assumption and declare its appropriateness. This supports the counter- reformational character of the painting.

There are four figures who are most important in creating the pictorial space: the figure seen from behind, the pointing figure, the crouching Apostle, and the one who looks up to the Virgin in the left group. The figure seen from behind, simply marks the furthest forward point in the front, creating the border for the spectator. His hand shows only a little foreshortening. The pointing Apostle helps to move the group into the depth of the pictorial space, also by standing behind the ascending Virgin. Spatially in the middle of these positions is the crouching Apostle in the right foreground. He looks up to the Virgin, and in doing so he has to bend his neck and turn his head to the right, so that we can hardly see more than his profile. His elbow is positioned over the corner of the tomb, his forearm parallel with its removed cover and his right thigh is also paralleled with the corner of the tomb. He is kneeling with his right knee on another book, which is a somewhat thinner than the base of the tomb. The perspective of the book on the floor and also the small strip of ground at the left of the painting shows a different perspective from the tomb. One realises now that El Greco changed the perspective within the lower level to make it possible for the spectator to look into the empty tomb. What becomes clear is that El Greco created an ambiguous space, not following linear perspective, but for the purpose of demonstrating his theme clearly.

The Apostle in the left group dressed in blue who looks up to the Virgin clearly stands behind her. The position of the Virgin in space is defined through these four figures.

In the upper part of the painting the Virgin Mary is shown in a Gloria.(fig.16) She stands on the crescent moon, a symbol for the Immaculate Conception. "This motif was certainly intended to express the widespread belief that the Assumption was a direct consequence of the Immaculate Conception."²³³ Six angels are painted at the left and two at the right dressed in colourful robes. On the right three naked cherubs are also shown .

The Virgin looks up in reverie and a certain state of transfiguration, but not in ecstasy like Titian's Virgin in his version of the *Assumption* in Santa Maria dei Frari (fig. 23). El Greco's Virgin holds her arms widely spread. The fingers of her right hand are all held together and on the left one the middle and ring finger are slightly bent.(fig.24) This presentation of the hands gives the whole figure an expression of calmness, in contrary to Titian's Virgin where almost all fingers are spread apart and ecstasy is transmitted (fig. 25). But El Greco does not only paint the fingers cupped together, he also opened the position of the arms, thus giving the figure a calm rather than a nervous curve.

Possibly the open position of the arms and the cup-like form of her hand is meant to express the receiving of Grace. Only through receiving this could she be assumed into heaven. In Montano's text we find under the title MANUS the already cited passage about the lifted up hands as well as the following description:

gloss

Oratio. Petitio:

Palmarum in sublime expansio, habitus est

²³³Mann, *Patrons*.;op.cit., p.37.

eorum, qui, petentes orant Deum, s.s.e...²³⁴

Exod.9.29.: (and Moses said unto him, as soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the Lord; and the thunder shall cease,...)

This description of the gesture of the Virgin is perhaps best summarised by Bulwer:

Gestus II, **Oro**

To raise the hand conjoined or spread out towards heaven is the habit of *devotion*, in a natural and universal form of prayer practised by those who... *give public thanks and praise to the most high*...this gesture is an outward help unto *devotion*, appointed by the ordinance of nature to express the *holy fervor of our affections*.²³⁵

It is the antique *orans* gesture which is used by El Greco to express Mary's emotional state.

Mary's body language transmits to the spectator that while she is being assumed into heaven she is already thanking God the Father for this miracle and for the Grace she is receiving.²³⁶

The Virgin's right arm and left leg are in the front and the left arm and right leg are set back, giving the figure a *contrapposto*. The toes of her right foot are visible. In the whole position of the legs, the floating above the clouds and stepping into them (or the crescent moon) El Greco takes up Raphael's Sistine Madonna, although in reverse.

²³⁴ Montano, *op.cit.*, p.12," The spreading out of the palms upwards is the posture of those who, making a request, pray to God."

²³⁵Bulwer, *op. cit.*, p.23; plate A, illu. B.

²³⁶ see also the description of the gesture by Bonifacio, quoted on p. 76.

The angel in the left foreground, dressed in a bluish garment with yellow and red reflections, kneels in adoration and holds his hands in a praying gesture. He seems to look behind the Virgin or inside himself, having an inner vision. The expression of his face is dreamy and this mood is reinforced by the shadow over his eyes.

The two angels behind the praying one, dressed in red and green, have the same expression of reverie as the first one. The outspread arm of the one in green echoes the effect of Mary's arm, stressing its importance and leads the spectator's eye to it, almost underlining it. In the background left are two more angels, with their heads closely placed together who nearly merge into the background. Next to the Virgin's right knee the upper part of another angel is visible. He looks directly at the spectator and is not painted in an angelic mode. He has dark straight hair, whereas all the other angels have curly hair, and an individualistic expression and he is also much younger than the other angels. It might be a portrait. He also differs from the other angel who is looking at the spectator. The angel dressed in red at the right side of the painting whose face is only visible between Mary's left arm and her robe, is also looking at the spectator. But he looks down to us, whereas the other much younger angel looks straight at us. He holds Mary's veil with his right hand, floating at her left side. With these two direct views the Gloria is brought into a close relationship with the spectator. None of the Apostles is looking at the spectator, it is only in the heavenly sphere that a contact is established. Through the different viewpoints of the angels towards the spectator something like a vault emerges. This impression is supported

by the gesture of Mary, the angel dressed in green, the arrangement of the angels and the clouds, and the way the light is arranged in the painting.

Next to the angel dressed in red there is another angel in the background who has his hands crossed on his breast, another gesture which expresses devotion.²³⁷ He looks upwards with a *heavenward gaze*, not at the Virgin, but higher, following the direction of the Virgin's gaze. Around Mary's head there are painted cherubim and the brightest light. There are also cherubim to the right of the Virgin's leg.

The source from which a very bright light emanates, as we can see reflected on the body of the cherubim, seems to be behind the Virgin, but it does not reach the face of the young angel, looking at the spectator, who is at the same height as the cherubim, but at the other side. The source is not verifiable and is not a single one.

El Greco finds a subtle balance between adoration and devotion in the arrangement of the Gloria. He had to promote Mary's holiness, which was more than a 'simple' holiness because she was thought to be free from Original Sin. He does this by painting her with the symbol of the Immaculate Conception, by conferring on her an intercessional character with the gesture of praying, by the fact that angels adore her. By omitting the figure of God the Father within the painting (in contrast to e.g. Titian's version in Santa Maria dei Frari, fig. 23), El Greco gives Mary more weight and her intercessional function is underlined, because only she can see the Father. Even the Apostles are not able to see more than her Assumption. Through Mary's view and her devotional gesture the spectator knows that above Mary

²³⁷Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p.31.

is God the Father. The devotional character of her gesture serves as a example for the pious beholder.

In the overall arrangement of the retable the *Trinity* (fig.26) would have been placed above the Assumption, thus reminding the spectator why Mary is in her position and recalling her position as an intercessor.

1.1.1 Titian's Assumption reflected - Mary's intercession

In the overall composition of the painting El Greco seemed to have followed Titian's famous painting in Santa Maria dei Frari.(fig 23)²³⁸ especially in projecting the upper and lower levels from different viewpoints. But as we have seen he totally changed the emotional expression . The ecstatic mood of the Titian is changed to a calm rapture, with a devotional connotation. Thus we can follow Camón Aznar who states: "...hay que resaltar que las diferencias tecnicas y sobre todo expresivas con la Asunta del Tiziano son absolutas."²³⁹

Furthermore he not only changes the emotional expression, but also places strong emphasis on the intercessional implication and theological meaning.

As Santo Domingo was intended to be the burial chapel for Don Diego de Castilla and Doña María de Silva, the choice of the iconography of the Assumption was clearly to support the salvation of their souls. The Virgin in heaven, supporting by intercession to Christ the reception of the patrons.

El Greco emphasised this task of the Virgin by his pictorial language. The elevated hands of the apostle are leading the spectator into the picture and into its central happening. No excitement is mediated but transfiguration. In

²³⁸Cossio, Manuel B.; *El Greco*, Madrid, 1908, pp.133f.

contrast to Titian's *Assumption* where all the Apostles are ecstatically watching the Assumption, in El Greco's, only a few are able to recognise it. Thus El Greco painted different stages of recognition within the group of Apostles demonstrating to the beholder how he could comprehend the holy event. The first step would be to mourn the Virgin's death, the second to consider the possible assumption. The third step would then mirror the highest state of recognition, the one which the Apostles who see the actual happening have attained. They help the beholder to turn to the Virgin with her plea for intercession. El Greco's pictorial language supports the theological theme.

Mann states that:

El Greco also sought to visualise the metaphoric description of Mary as the tabernacle of the Lord found in contemporary devotional literature. This term was applied to Mary because she conceived Christ and literally sheltered him within her womb in much the same way that the tabernacle contains the consecrated Host.²⁴⁰

This may be the case in devotional literature and may also apply to other paintings, but I can not agree with it for El Greco's *Assumption*, although Mann explains his hypothesis at length with the arrangement of the painting: [it stood] "directly on the altar table, the tabernacle stood directly in front of it,"²⁴¹ etc. and also makes a connection also to the *Trinity* above the *Assumption*;

The expression and pose of the Virgin in the Assumption indicate that she is contemplating the death of the Son, represented in the Trinity,

²³⁹Camón Aznar, José; Domenico Greco, Madrid, 1970, pp.270-273.

²⁴⁰Ibidem, p. 39.

²⁴¹Ibidem, p. 40f.

which would have originally been located immediately above, in the attic of the main retable.²⁴²

The close analysis of the language of gesture of the whole painting has shown us that the expression of the Virgin is one of rapture and devotion, but even if she is contemplating her Son's death (why not her Son's Ascension?), El Greco would not have intended "to visualise the metaphoric description of Mary as the tabernacle of the Lord"²⁴³. Furthermore in the painting of the Trinity the dead Christ lies in the lap of his Father. Therefore the supposed analogy of Mary's womb seems to be a meaningless doubling.

²⁴²Ibidem, p. 41.

²⁴³Ibidem, p.39.

1.2 The Trinity

The painting of the *Trinity* (fig.26), was originally placed above the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Santo Domingo el Antiguo retable (fig.14).

Its analysis will allow us to understand more closely El Greco's intentions in the whole retable.

God the Father holds his dead Son in his arms. Above them is the dove of the Holy Spirit, and they are surrounded by angels. Christ's body is vigorously distorted. His legs are bent and crossed, so that his left foot can be seen from the front whereas the right one is covered by it. This position recalls the position on the cross. The knees are bent to the left and the hip is in line with the feet, so the legs form a zigzag line. The torso is turned to the right so that the left side of his chest is more visible than his right which lies in shadow and is therefore nearly obscured. The right arm is turned outwards, so that the beholder can see the palm which is lying on his thigh. The right hand of God the Father is visible under Christ's right arm, and as a result Christ's shoulder is lifted up, supporting his head which is bent to the left. Christ's left arm is resting on the left knee of the Father, who is holding him with his left hand at the height of the navel. A *figura serpentinata* is created through this arrangement.²⁴⁴ Over Christ's hips and down to his right leg, there falls a white cloth, which seems to merge with the robe of God the Father. The wounds of Christ are visible, the one in his side placed very

²⁴⁴ It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with the problem of the *figura serpentinata*, see Summers, David; 'Contraposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art', *Art Bulletin*, 59, 1977, pp.335-361.

centrally in the painting. The white skin around it is one of the most illuminated spots of the painting, reflecting an almost white light. The contrast of the red blood and the white skin gives what is actually a small wound more emphasis. The head of Christ is quite dark as if lying in shadow, although the dove of the Holy Spirit floats above him radiating bright light. His skin is quite grey.

God the Father is wearing a wide white garment and a golden-yellow cape, lined in blue. In the folds of God's cape are cherubs, one on the left and one on the right, and there are also cherubs around Christ's feet. God looks very calmly down at his Son, and on his head he wears the mitre of an ancient Jewish high priest²⁴⁵- an astonishing fact in anti-Jewish Spain. But as Don Diego de Castilla was one of the most important opponents of the statute of pure lineage it seems possible that he wished it to be painted. An engraving opposite the title page of the first edition of Alonso de Orozco's very popular *Libro de la suavidad de Dios* (Salamanca, 1576) is a likely visual source for the representation of the Father with cherubs under his cape and wearing the distinctive mitre of ancient Jewish high priests on his head.²⁴⁶

However, we can not be sure if El Greco knew this print, but it seems likely that Don Diego de Castilla may have introduced it to him. El Greco used the same motif in a supposedly late painting, in the *Betrothal of the Virgin*,²⁴⁷ where the priest wears the same headgear.

Mann connected these iconographic additions to the Throne of Mercy:

²⁴⁵Mann, *Patrons*, *op.cit.*, p.34.

²⁴⁶*Ibidem*, p.34.

²⁴⁷Oil on canvas, 110x83 cm, Bucharest, National Museum of Romania.

By incorporating cherubs' heads into folds of the cape on both sides of the Father's shoulders, El Greco indicated that God himself constituted the Throne of Mercy, where the ultimate sacrifice was presented. This important iconographic point was reinforced by the gold colour of the outer side of the cape, which accords with the direction that the Throne of Mercy was to be covered with pure gold (Exodus 25:17). The identification of the Father with the Throne of Mercy was based directly on the Epistles of Paul. In such passages as Hebrews 9:1-26.²⁴⁸

There are two angels on the right side of the painting. The one in the foreground dressed in an expressive red seems to support God's arm. He looks down at Christ. The other angel, more in the background, behind and higher than the other touches the shoulder of God with his right hand. He looks up to the dove with an expression of deep grief.

On the left of the central group are four other angels. One stands at the same level as Christ and the other three are situated two heads higher and more in the background, all on one level. The one who is on the same level as Christ is seen from the back; he is turning right and seems to touch Christ with his right hand, or is he also supporting God's arm? Anyhow he is looking down in the same direction and he also expresses calmness, like his companion on the right. The three angels behind him are clearly in another stage of recognition, like the one in the right background. The angel who stands at the right of this group, dressed in blue, has nearly the same facial expression as the angel on the right and he expresses grief and pain. His muscular right arm reaches in the direction of the Father, but is partly

²⁴⁸ Mann, *Patrons*, *op.cit.*, p.34.

covered by the cape. The angel who stands in the middle of this group, dressed in yellow, looks down, maybe following with his view the arm of the one in blue. The angel situated at the left border folds his hands and looks up to the dove. The angels are not only mourning but also praying and supporting.

Behind the angels on the left and on the right are dark clouds, contrasting with the bright yellow light floating from the dove. The clouds are illuminated even from the back, clearly recognisable through their bright yellow borders. The light is floating in rays over the angels, God and Christ. The whole group is standing on a pillow of clouds, seen from above. Blue sky is visible in the left and right lower corners of the painting.

1.2.1 Dürer and Michelangelo - Visual Sources

The most obvious visual source for this painting, as far as the whole composition is concerned, is Dürer's woodcut *Gnadenstuhl*.²⁴⁹ For the body of Christ, Michelangelo's sculptures of the *Pietà* (fig. 27)²⁵⁰ and his painting *Entombment* (fig. 28)²⁵¹, as well as a drawing for Vittoria Colonna, are clearly recognisable sources. Using such famous and well known models which had their distinctive meanings and their expressions, El Greco had to incorporate these meanings into his painting. He takes the overall composition from the Dürer with the innovation that God looks directly at his Son, expressing a close relationship between them. In the Dürer God was

²⁴⁹ Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 35.

²⁵⁰ Joannides, *op.cit.*, p.205f., especially means the *Pietà* now in de Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence; and: Camón Aznar, José; *op. cit.* p.291.

looking at the spectator, now, through the change of the direction of his gaze and a sorrowing expression, an intimate atmosphere is created. El Greco takes this element, giving his painting the same intrinsic expression of inwardness as the Dürer. He even intensified the intimate character of the Dürer in his painting. In contrast to Dürer's God and also to the women in Michelangelo's *Pietà* (Florence, Museo dell' Opera del Duomo) El Greco's God touches his Son's skin directly. There is no cloth or veil between his hands and his Son's dead body. He bends down his head, looking into his Son's face.

El Greco omitted to take over the 'Arma Christi' His painting is more focused on the relationship between God and his Son and their intimate, silent conversation.

Michelangelo's Christ, from the *Pietà* and the *Entombment* served as a source for El Greco. They both express death and peacefulness. Christ's dead body seems heavy like the earth, though relaxed. A strange balance is expressed; on the one hand the body seems to be very heavy, pulling itself down to the ground but on the other hand it seems to hold itself up. El Greco succeeds in taking over this expression. The agony of death is taken from Christ, he is back in his Father's lap. Christ's right arm has another Michelangelo sculpture as its source, *the Lorenzo de Medici* sculpture from the Medici-Chapel in Florence.²⁵²

El Greco's whole composition is more compact than Dürer's and his figures are more monumental, certainly influenced by his michelangelesque sources.

²⁵¹Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p.92, n. 127.

²⁵² Trapier, Elizabeth Gué; 'El Greco, Early Years at Toledo', *Notes Hispanic*, New York, 1943, p.8; Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 35.

As other possible sources, Taddeo Zuccaro's *Dead Christ Surrounded by Angels Bearing Torches* in the Borghese Palace, Rome and the *Dead Christ Surrounded by Angels* (fig.29) in the Villa Albani have been mentioned.²⁵³ It is very likely that El Greco knew these pictures, but as a base for his painting Dürer's Woodcut and the works of Michelangelo mentioned above seem to be the most relevant.

1.3 Conjunction of the Assumption and the Trinity

If the paintings of the *Trinity*(fig.26) and the *Assumption of the Virgin*(fig.15) are considered together we can find an intercessional character in the whole iconographic programme. The Virgin who ascends to heaven towards the Holy Trinity begs redemption for sinners. For this intercession different steps are manifest in the retable. As the priest celebrated Mass he would stand directly in front of the painting of the *Assumption*, below the apostles, being another figure seen from the back, in front of the tomb and the altar which would echo the tomb, although the tabernacle would be placed centrally partly obstructing the view of the tomb. The priest would look up to the Virgin, and

After the consecration and elevation of the Host and Chalice, the priest bowed down over the altar and prayed thus: 'Humbly we beseech thee,

²⁵³Camón Aznar,*op.cit.*: "El modelo de este cuadro, según Willumsen, se encuentra en Taddeo Zuccaro, en sus obras *Cristo muerto rodeado de angeles*, de la Villa Albani, ..."; p. 291.

Almighty God, to command that by the hands of thy holy Angel, this our Sacrifice be uplifted to thine Altar on high.²⁵⁴

The Virgin who is ascending to heaven, to the Holy Trinity, would thus be taking her place in heaven and fulfilling her task of pleading for mercy for the souls of the sinners. This action would have been visualised by all the pious spectators in the church with help of the two paintings combined.

Another aspect worth considering has been mentioned by Davies. He interprets the ascending Virgin as the *sponsa*, who will be reunited with her mystical bridegroom. He connects this and other considerations to the writings of St. Bernard. As Santo Domingo el Antiguo was a Bernadine convent and there were even some of his letters and sermons preserved in the Library of Toledo Cathedral this seems a plausible argument. He further relates St. Jerome and St. Ildefonsus, who appear in the side altar-pieces .

The presence of St. Ildefonsus is appropriate because he was a Benedictine and had based his treatise against Joviniano, Helvidio and the Jews on that of St. Jerome. In addition, as a corollary to his defence of the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary, he has included a defence of the divinity of Christ, which presumably explains his inclusion in the Resurrection.²⁵⁵

This interrelation of the lateral altarpieces to the High-Altar, and interrelation of the High- Altar in itself, reveals how El Greco was drafting an overall programme.

²⁵⁴ Davies, David; 'Roman Rite', *op.cit.*, p.226.

1.4. The Adoration of the Shepherds altarpiece on the Gospel side

The picture of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (fig.30) is situated on the Gospel side in the Church of St. Domingo el Antiguo. In its overall composition it is divided into four different levels. The centre of the painting is formed by the genre-like scene of the Christ Child in the middle surrounded by Mary and Joseph and a group of shepherds, all adoring the child. In the left background we can see the ass and the ox. At the left side in the background are two other figures. From their posture they seem to be discussing something or the one on the left is inviting the other to join him to go to the Child. His right arm points directly, although partly covered by Joseph, to the Child. In the right hand corner foreground St. Jerome is depicted holding a candle and a book. Above the whole scene are four angels floating in a Gloria. They are holding a banderole on which a psalm from Luke 2, 14 is inscribed: "Gloria in Excelsis Deo, In Terram Pax,..."²⁵⁶ Very bright light radiates from the centre of the Gloria.

St. Jerome looks out of the picture at the spectator and in his right hand he holds an illuminated candle and an open book.(fig. 31) With his left hand he is also holding the book, which presumably is the Vulgate.²⁵⁷ The legend of St. Jerome tells that he had lived in the cave where Christ was born, and that he was working on translating the Bible there.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Davies, David, 'El Greco of Toledo', *Burlington Magazine*, August 1982, pp 530-535, here p.531.

²⁵⁶ Cossio, *op.cit.*, p.153.

²⁵⁷ following the above mentioned article of Davies, 'El Greco of Toledo', *op.cit.*, it is also possible that St. Jerome holds his treatise on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin in his hands.

²⁵⁸Lexikon für christliche Ikonographie, (further quoted as LCI) vol.6, p.519.

As he is painted in front of the holy event, not involved in the actual happening, but holding the Vulgate, illuminating the pages, he takes on something like a relay function. By showing St. Jerome as an eyewitness of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, the credibility of the Vulgate is being emphasised. El Greco stresses the fact that the Vulgate is the access to the event, the gate to the central happening.

The Vulgate was one of the main subjects which had to be defended in the Counter - Reformation (beside Justification by faith and good work, and the Eucharist) as it was not only criticised by Protestants but also by Catholics as the *Polyglot Bible* of Montano shows us, to mention only one new Latin translation. El Greco paints St. Jerome as an eyewitness, therefore his translation would certainly recount the truth. With such prominent propaganda for the Vulgate, El Greco was surely advertising his correct understanding of the Counter - Reformation and recommending himself to his patron. Don Diego had wanted the incorporation of St. Jerome into the picture but the pictorial language, the light on the book, the prominent position of St. Jerome, his intense look towards the beholder is clearly El Greco's invention.

The main group of the picture shows three shepherds who are adoring the child. They are all looking at Him. The one in the foreground is shown from the side and back, we can only just see his profile. He is the oldest one and kneels in front of the Child. His hands are joined together in front of his chest. In connection with the Assumption this gesture was simply analysed as a gesture of prayer, Bonifacio widens the significance of the gesture:

Mani giunte dinanzi al petto

Giungere le palme delle mani insieme tenendole dinanzi al petto
è gesto d'humilmente, e devotamente supplicare misericordia, &
accennad'esser come un Reo à cui siano legate le mani per
condurle al meritano supplico.²⁵⁹

The shepherd bows in front of the Child, his gesture expresses humility and deep devotion as he entreats His aid.

Next to the old shepherd, who is quite well dressed , with red breeches and a dark green doublet with slashed sleeves and a white shirt, there is another shepherd, much more simply dressed with his knee bent on a stone. His arms are crossed in front of his chest in a pose of deep devotion. Bulwer describes this gesture in connection with the gesture of praying:

At this day the common habit of praying in the church is, as pertaining to the hands, TO JOIN THE HANDS; MODERATELY LIFT THEM UP, or religiously cup them by ten parts into the form of the letter X, *holding them in that manner before the breast*, which manner of prayer Cresollius calls.²⁶⁰

Bonifacio explains the same:

incrocicchiare le braccia sopra il proprio petto...

è atto supplichevole, e di chieder pietà e misericordia.²⁶¹

The expression of his face also reflects devotion. His body is slightly bent to the right. The whole figure expresses gentleness. This gentleness is

²⁵⁹ Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, p.277.

²⁶⁰ Bulwer. *op.cit.*, p.31, italics mine; Ludovico Cresollius; is a French Jesuit who had written the *Vacationes autumnuales sive de perfecta oratoris actiones et pronuntiatione libri III*, Paris, 1620, a instructive preaching manual for young Jesuits.

²⁶¹ Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, p. 259. That this was a common gesture in the Renaissance and the Baroque have demonstrated already: G. Weise; G. Otto; 'Die religiösen Ausdrucksgebärden de Barock und ihre Vorbereitungen durch die italienische Kunst der Renaissance', in: *Schriften und Vorträge der Württembergischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, Stuttgart, 1938, pp.28-47.

repeated and thus made more visible, by the Virgin, who makes the same gesture.

Behind this shepherd stands a younger shepherd boy. Both his arms are stretched out, following the body downwards, the palm of his left hand is illuminated by the light which floats from the child. His gesture expresses astonishment and the expression of his face shows reverence for the Child. He seems best to demonstrate how frightened the shepherds had been at first when the angels came to announce the birth of the Christ Child. The passage from Luke which is written on the banderole of the angels corresponds to the passage of the Annunciation to the shepherds, and not to the actual adoration, although it is usually quoted in this context. The two shepherds in the background, behind Mary, are also still involved in the preceding scene, they are coming from the fields and are rushing into the scene. The one who is furthest back in the pictorial space, points to the right, into the dark. Maybe he is telling the other one about what happened in the fields.

Mary kneels nearly in the middle of the painting, looking down at Jesus, with her hands are crossed on her breast as mentioned above. She is dressed in her traditional blue and red garments. The centre of the devotion, the Christ Child, lies on a white cloth.(fig. 33) He looks at the shepherd who makes the same gesture as his mother. The Christ Child's right hand is open as if in greeting, giving or even blessing. His left hand is lying at the side of his body. His legs are bent and the right foot is crossed over the left, possibly already alluding to his death on the cross. Christ's legs in the *Trinity* (fig.26), which the spectator the could compare just by turning his head, are crossed in the same manner. St Joseph kneels next to the Christ Child, showing his

back and right profile, with his crook in his right hand and his left hand clutching his robe. He also looks down at the Child and is depicted sitting down. The shepherds, Mary and Joseph form a semi-circle around the child. The other half of the circle makes it possible for the beholder to take part, but the "gate" is opened by St. Jerome and the Vulgate.

At the right border of the painting, two figures are depicted. Above them shines the crescent moon. As mentioned above, the one who is pointing at the Child seems to invite the other to join him in going to the Child.²⁶²

Therefore we can state that the painting of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* consists of different time layers. In the centre of the panel the spectator sees the actual happening with the adoration. Behind and above it he sees an allusion to the scene which had happened just before, the annunciation to the shepherds.

This picture includes a definite allusion to the Eucharist. When the priest celebrated Mass before it, in the part where he lifts up the host, or "elevatio", the host would draw attention to the Christ Child, presented on a white linen cloth, alluding to the corporale. This allusion is intensified in latter versions of the same theme.

²⁶² The assumption that these two figures are two maidservants, as for example in the Dijon Altarpiece from the Master of Flemalle/Robert Campin, is not very probable, the right arm is too muscular to belong to a feminine figure, and the just visible naked left leg of the same figure excludes this assumption.

1.5 The Resurrection altarpiece on the Epistle side

The painting of the *Resurrection* (fig.34) is placed on the Epistle side. The composition of the *Resurrection* is, like the *Assumption of the Virgin* and the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, bifocal. In the lower part are the soldiers and St. Ildefonsus (fig. 35); in the upper part, floating above the guards is the Resurrected One (fig.36).

St Ildefonsus stands in the lower left corner. He is shown half-length, in profile and dressed very prominently in white Easter Vestments, most likely alluding to the episode in his legend when Mary presented the Vestments to him.²⁶³ His right hand is parallel with the picture frame, making a gesture of invitation and offering,²⁶⁴ an invitation to the beholder to contemplate the picture. It is also a gesture of pointing to the priest, who is celebrating the Mass. As the priest would be on the same level as St. Ildefonsus, who is painted life-size, the Saint would create a direct link communicating with the priest. This communication would include the priest in St. Ildefonsus' vision.

With his left hand he points to himself with all his fingers laid on his chest.²⁶⁵ He looks up at the Risen Christ. Behind St. Ildefonsus, presumably standing on the stone which covered the tomb, stands a guard. The stone is disposed obliquely as if just cast off from the tomb. The shadow of the guard's left leg indicates the inclination of the stone. He looks up to Christ

²⁶³ LCI, *op.cit*, vol. 6, p.582.

²⁶⁴ see the discussion of the same gesture made by Christ in the same altarpiece.

over his left shoulder. It seems as if he is trying to keep his balance. In his stretched right hand pointing to the ground, he holds a lance, his left hand, also outstretched reaches to the left, away from Christ, nearly seems to touch the border of the painting. All his body demonstrates movement, his left foot is on tiptoe, he is moving to the left, away from the Resurrected.²⁶⁶ This figure derives from Titian's famous picture *Death of Peter Martyr* (fig. 9) where it is figure of the servant who flees in the face of the danger, although El Greco's figure misses Titian's hyperbole.

Behind this guard two other guards are still sleeping. One is lying on a green cloak, with his arms crossed and his head resting on them. He is situated just underneath the Resurrected. The other sleeping guard, further back in space, is resting his head on his right hand.(fig. 37) Actually his sleep is so profound that he sleeps through one of the most important event of Christianity. It was believed, as far as we know from the description given by Bonifacio, that the depth of sleep depends on the side we are sleeping on:

dormir sopra gli orecchi

il dormire sopra il destro, ò sopra il sinistro orecchio è atto di stare con piu, o meno sicurezza, perciò che per consiglio de' Medici il primo sonno ch' è piu profundo dobbiamo dormire in dexteram aurem& il secondo, che suol esser leggiero in sinistram.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ It is a similar gesture as described in the Assumption, although here it is the left hand and not the right, but this is due to a compositional problem.

²⁶⁶ The painting only survived in an engraving by Martino Rota (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

²⁶⁷ Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, p.246.

Be it a coincidence or not, El Greco paints the guard sleeping deeply resting on his right hand, in contrast to the same figure in the Prado *Resurrection* (fig. 70), who rests his head on the left hand.

In the foreground to the right stands a further soldier who, like the first guard described, is shown in great movement. His left foot rests on a rock, on tiptoe, indicating his vigorous movement. In his right hand he holds his sword, and his left hand is in the movement of shielding him from the light. The two standing guards are shown one from the front, the other from the back, engaged in nearly the same movements, like one figure, but folded up, only their weapons and the pose of their left arms vary. The figure at the right side leans back, the other figure at the left leans forward, these movements of the bodies opens the space for the risen Christ. This shows El Greco's skill in composing figures according to Italian Renaissance principles. He certainly also wanted to demonstrate his ability to paint, showing a figure from the back and from the front, as a reference to the *Paragone* between sculpture and painting. The sleeping figure in the right corner would fit into this scheme as well. In the strong foreshortening El Greco could demonstrate perfectly his abilities as a painter, therefore this figure is painted as the only nude in the painting. This figure also alludes in the bearing of the head and torso, to the antique sculpture of the *Ariadne*²⁶⁸, another sign which refers to the *Paragone* between the modern and the antique. Behind the naked sleeping youth is another guard standing up. He, as well as the other two guards who are awake, is looking towards Christ.

²⁶⁸ for a discussion of this gesture see the chapter about the 'Purification of the Temple'.

Christ is painted with a large red cloak, held together by a small belt crossed over his chest. He raises in his left hand the Salvator's flag. His loins are covered by a cloth. His wounds are only visible as small points on his left hand and right foot, and as a small cut in his side. His right hand is elevated towards heaven. Davies suggested that the gesture of Christ's right hand is repeated in a sculpture El Greco made for the Hospital of San Juan Bautista in Toledo (fig.38)²⁶⁹, which Mann identified with a gesture used in Roman and later art for offering and libation.²⁷⁰

In any case, the indicator of Christ's right hand is pointing slightly up, while his other fingers are brought into the palm. By bending the wrist just a little bit forward, the gesture becomes ambiguous. It is not only a gesture of pointing, nor of offering, both actions are included. As Christ looks down to earth, the ambiguity of this gesture is stressed. Christ refers to heaven, to his Father, but also looks down, seeing mankind, the reason for his sacrifice. Through this arrangement of his pose, an allusion to Christ's intercession with God the Father is made.

To identify this gesture another painting of El Greco can help, the *Martyrdom of St. Maurice*; (fig.66)²⁷¹ which was painted slightly later. The figure which stands left of St. Maurice, makes the same gesture, alluding to the Gloria above. Together with the gesture of his left hand, it is clear that he brings into the consideration of the group the aspect of divine Grace which

²⁶⁹ Davies, 'Roman Rite', *op.cit.*, p. 229 (footnote).

²⁷⁰ Mann, Richard; 'The Altarpieces for the Hospital of Saint John the Baptist, Outside the Walls', Toledo, in: *Studies in the History of Art*, (ed) by Brown, Jonathan, vol.11, (1982), p.61.

²⁷¹ Oil on Canvas, 448x301 cm, dated 1580-82, Museo El Escorial, signed on cartellino which is carried by serpent.

they will all receive through their martyrdom.²⁷² Thus we can state that the gesture of Christ also alludes to the invisible God, his Father and his divine Grace. On another level this gesture can be read as an *adlocutio* gesture, the antique gesture a commander used to indicate to his soldiers that he wanted to speak to them. If one reads Christ's gesture in the sense of address, the intercessional character is emphasised.

The white banner of Christ's flag is wound once around the pole, and then falls down, pointing towards the standing guard at the right. It is by no means a usual "Salvator's banner", as in the tradition this is normally a small pennant. El Greco needed the large white surface as a compositional compensation for the brilliant white vestments of St. Ildefonsus.

Simultaneously he points out an intrinsic link between Christ and St. Ildefonsus. Around Christ light reflexes create a kind of aureole. From his feet up to his head the light gets brighter and above his head is the brightest and warmest light, ascending upwards. At Christ's left foot a white brush stroke, forms a bow of light around it, which ends underneath Christ's right foot. This creates a kind of mist, which also covers the head of the sleeping guard who lies underneath Christ. It seems as if Christ is floating above this cloudy haze. Through this white 'misty' brushstroke El Greco lends a more dynamic appearance to Christ ; it is a spiral upward movement so often noticeable in his work .Without vigorously turning Christ he produces a vivid movement. Besides this, he indicates that Christ is located before the sleeping guards in pictorial space. Considering the pictorial space, we can already notice that it is split up into various levels, a habit El Greco will

²⁷² See part II chapter 4 about this painting in detail.

frequently use later in his career. There is not only a notable difference between Christ's and the soldiers' space but also between the "real" space of the soldiers. What stands out is that the difference in scale, where the deeper in pictorial space a subject is, the smaller it should appear, is not followed. We can state the same for the handling of light as there are various light sources in the picture. To examine the meaning of this splitting up of space and light in El Greco's pictures unfortunately lies outside the scope of this study.

1.5.1 Sacramental Allusions

The prominent figure of St Ildefonsus, painted life-size and at the same height as the 'real priest' "mirrors the priest who would officiate at the altar."²⁷³ The Saint's view would be mirrored by the celebrant priest who also looks up, while he elevates the Host. Thus during the 'elevatio' of the Host the Resurrected Christ would mirror the Host, manifesting the 'Real Presence' before the spectators' eyes.

El Greco had taken up this theme of reference to the 'Real Presence' once again, making it more apparent in his late *Resurrection*. (fig.70)

The saint serves as a stepping-stone for the beholder, as a mediator in the classical albertian sense which allows a further interpretation of the picture as realised by Davies: "the saint acts as an intercessor, and provides a stepping stone from the physical to the Divine, making the real priest a

²⁷³ Davies, 'Roman Rite', *op.cit.*, p.229.

witness to the triumph of Christ.”²⁷⁴ This intercessional aspect moves the picture closer to the Counter-Reformation, as not only the intercession of the Virgin but also of Saints were a point of critique by Protestantism.

The connection between Christ and St. Ildefonsus created by the white vestment of the latter and the white banner of the former, holds another sense besides the compositional balance. It combines their two levels of reality which is evident if we take into consideration their line of sight. Through this connection they seem to form their own reality, Christ's Resurrection is seen in a vision of St. Ildefonsus. This thesis is supported by the language of gesture that link the two figures.

The allusion to the Eucharist is not only limited to the *Resurrection*, it also appears in the *Adoration of the Shepherds*:

In the *Adoration of the Shepherds* the attention is directed to the naked Christ Child. ..With this version of the scene, emphasising the Body of Christ, which was entirely usual in the art of the Counter- Reformation, the spectator is reminded of the words spoken in the Mass during the elevation of the Host: This is the true Body of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary. ²⁷⁵

The pointing index finger of St. John the Evangelist, as already mentioned, directs the spectators' view to the tabernacle located at the centre of the altar,

²⁷⁴ Davies, 'The Ascent of the Mind to God: El Greco's Religious Imagery and Spiritual Reform in Spain', in: Exhib. Cat.: *El Greco; Identity and Transformation*, (ed) Alvarez Lopera, José, Madrid, 1999, p.208.

²⁷⁵Brown, Jonathan, 'El Greco and Toledo', *op.cit.*, p.99; "In der Anbetung der Hirten wird die Aufmerksamkeit auf das nackte Christus Kind gelenkt, ...Mit dieser, in der Kunst der Gegenreformation durchaus üblichen Version der Szene, in der der Körper Christi betont wird wollte man den Betrachter an die Worte erinnern, die während er Messe gesprochen werden , wenn die hostie gezeigt wird: Dies ist der wahre Leib Christi, geboren von der Jungfrau Maria."

underneath the *Assumption*. Thus there is another emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist.

1.6. The relation of the Altarretable to the functions of the Chapel

By analysing El Greco's major paintings of the Santo Domingo Chapel, we can see how strongly he had incorporated the different stations of the Mass into this altarpiece.²⁷⁶

But seemingly more important is the fact that he transmits through his pictorial language the theological programme of the chapel. The support for the Decrees of the Council of Trent, the reaffirmation of the Assumption of the Virgin, the Virgin's ability to intercede, the demonstration that the Vulgate was divinely inspired and the allusion to the Real Presence, through pictorial methods, are part of a pictorial concept. Davies comments:

In varying degrees of collaboration with his patrons, he [El Greco] eschews narrative schemes in favour of distinct devotional images.

These combine to effect a more direct theological statement. In conformity to this pattern, he dispenses with a literal interpretation and seizes the spiritual significance of an subject in relation to the economy of man's redemption and salvation. His altarpieces are hymns to charity in which the redemptive and salvific role of Christ

²⁷⁶ See Davies' article about the connection with the Roman Rite, 'Roman Rite', op.cit.

and the intercession, faith and deeds of the Virgin and Saints are extolled.²⁷⁷

The paintings of St. Domingo el Antiguo are generally strongly influenced by Italian Art. The composition of figures, the handling of light and colour, the allusions to the Paragone, are all derived from Italian Renaissance principles as one might expect, as they were painted soon after El Greco's arrival in Spain.

²⁷⁷Ibidem, pp. 218f.

2. Poetry and Painting

-the narrative structure of the Aragón Altarpiece

”Mit großer Bewußtheit hat er sich die Freiheit
des Poeten genommen, das Wahre mit dem Möglichen
und Wahrscheinlichen zu verbinden.”²⁷⁸

This statement aimed at Raphael by Preimesberger can easily be transferred to El Greco's work. El Greco, like Raphael or Titian had influential and ingenious friends. Luis de Gongora and Fray Hortensio Paravicino, friends of El Greco²⁷⁹ can be compared to personalities like Pietro Bembo, Baltasare Castiglione, Pietro Aretino or Ludovico Dolce. The principles of 'equivoco' and 'obscuritas'²⁸⁰ is at the base of Gongora's literary concept, to which Paravicino was devoted likewise. 'Equivoco' signifies nothing other than ambiguity. 'Obscuritas', darkness, serves as well as 'equivoco' to animate the listener, because he has to search for the truth.²⁸¹ One can detect the element of 'equivoco' in some of El Greco's paintings; the multiple layers of meaning and the use of ambiguities at least lead us to suspect this.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Preimesberger, *op.cit.*, p.96. "Very consciously he took the poetic licence to connect the truth with the possible and the probable." Translation mine.

²⁷⁹ Davies, *El Greco*, Oxford - London, 1976, pp.3f.

²⁸⁰ Die Anfänge der Maniera Moderna, *op.cit.*, Glossar, Oscurità.

²⁸¹ Baader, Horst, 'El equívoco- die Uneindeutigkeit als Stil- und Strukturprinzip der spanischen Literatur im Goldenen Zeitalter'; in: *Spanische Literatur im Goldenen Zeitalter, Festschrift für Fritz Schalk zum 70. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt, 1973, p.17, quoting Gongora states that the obscuritas of the 'soledades' is useful because it "arivar el ingenio" and highly enjoyable because "searching for hidden truth satisfies the mind."p.17

²⁸² see Lafuente, Enrique; 'El Greco: Some recent Discoveries', *Burlington Magazine*, 87, no.513, dec.45, pp. 293-300, p.300. Lafuente points out the parallel in the art of Gongora and Greco.

Poetry has the advantage of being successive like the action it wants to describe, as opposed to painting where the most significant moment of a story has to be chosen: a moment which contains the whole plot, the turning point of a story. In choosing the turning point the painter was able to depict the story through painting emotional reactions or passions, which are called affects. Leonardo da Vinci wrote that painting is superior to poetry, because a deaf man would understand through the depicted passions the content of a painting, whereas a blind man would not understand something that poetry would explain²⁸³. "...and if you have the effects of the representation [poet], we have the representation of the effects."²⁸⁴

In one of the most important writings about poetry in the ancient world, in Aristotle's *Poetics* the term *Peripetie* summarises a probable and necessary succession of actions, which reaches its never expected turning point. He calls the process *Recognition* if ignorance turns into knowledge.²⁸⁵ A good *Peripetie* happens if the turning point of a story comes together with recognition. He emphasises the fact that the poet is not a historian, because the historian is writing about things which really happened, whereas the poet writes about things that "could" happen, about events that are probable or possible.²⁸⁶ It is important for a good *Peripetie* that an action is a result of the preceding action, not only following it.²⁸⁷ This concept of narration, if transferred to painting, allows the painter to make allusions which are essential for the *storia*. The painter adapts the possibilities of the

²⁸³Leonardo- Richter, *op.cit.*, vol.1, pp 326-329.

²⁸⁴ Ibidem, p.328.

²⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Poetica*, ed and transl. by Manfred Fuhrmann, Stuttgart 1982, XI, vgl. X, XVI, XVIII.

²⁸⁶ Ibidem, p.29, §9.

²⁸⁷Ibidem, p.35, §10.

poet, by ‘narrating’ like a poet and in addition he does this on a visual level, therefore the process of recognition and the emotional effect is doubled. The transfer of a poetic concept to painting follows Horace’s ‘ut pictura poesis’.

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Kurt Badt as well as Preimesberger, already pointed out a transfer of the antique concept of action in a tragedy, as it was developed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, to painting. Both of them discovered this concept in some of Raphael’s late paintings.²⁸⁹ Recognition combined with the turning point for the story is for example recognisable in the Fresco of the *Incendio del Borgo* in the Stanza dell’Incendio in the Vatican. The women in the background recognise that only the benediction of the Pope will stop the fire, therefore they are calling for him. This motif is an invention by Raphael, which does not appear in the literary source he used for painting the event, the ‘*Liber Pontificalis*’.²⁹⁰

In the Santo Domingo *Assumption of the Virgin*, (fig.15) the turning point would be for example the moment when the Apostles, still mourning the Virgin’s death, realise her ascension. This sudden change would be expressed through affects as shown in the third chapter.

If and how El Greco applied the Aristotelian concept of *Peripetie* and *Recognition* in some of his paintings, will be the subject of this chapter.

²⁸⁸Horace, *De arte poetica*, in: ders., *Sämtliche Werke*, (ed) by H. Färber and W. Schöne, Zürich a.o. 1960, p. 250, verse 361.

²⁸⁹KurtBadt, ‘Raphael’s *Incendio del Borgo*’, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 22, 1959, pp. 35ff.; Preimesberger *op.cit.*, pp.104-106 and pp. 110-115.

²⁹⁰Preimesberger, *op.cit.*, p. 103 and pp. 110f.

Anyhow, it is assumed that he had a copy of Aristotle's *Poetics* in his library.²⁹¹

The reconstruction of the Aragón ensemble is much discussed. In the latest congress²⁹², which united six paintings, which are assumed to belong to the retable, in the Prado Museum, the polemic between researchers who reconstruct the ensemble as containing seven or six canvases with a maximum height of 25m²⁹³ and others who consider only four or three canvases continued.²⁹⁴ Most researchers only agree about the inclusion of three paintings, the *Incarnation*(fig. 39), the *Baptism*(fig.53) and the *Adoration of the Shepherds*(fig.44), and their collocation in the lower storey. The inclusion of the *Crucifixion* (fig. 55, found to be round on the top in the newest restoration²⁹⁵) as well as the *Resurrection*(fig.70) and the *Pentecost*(fig.75), forming the upper storey of the retable is still much in doubt and can not be proved by the architectural investigations carried out by Pita Andrade²⁹⁶ or Bustamante²⁹⁷. As no document exists where the iconography of the paintings is mentioned and literary comments about the retable do not reveal any significant clue, the reconstruction of this mayor work El Greco's will remain unsolved. In the following the unity of the *Incarnation, Adoration of the Shepherds* and the *Baptism* will be

²⁹¹Marías and Bustamante: *op.cit.* p.51.

²⁹² see: Actas del Congreso sobre el retablo del Colegio de doña Maria de Aragón del Greco, Madrid, 2000.

²⁹³ Pita Andrade, José Manuel and Almagro Gorbea, Antonio; 'Sobre la reconstrucción del retablo del Colegio de doña Maria de Aragón', in: Actas, 2000, op.cit., p.79.

²⁹⁴see for a summary of the history of the reconstruction: Alvarez Lopera, José; 'El retablo del Colegio de doña Maria de Aragón. Estado de la cuestión', in: Actas 2000, op.cit., pp.33-36.

²⁹⁵ Alonso Alonso, Rafael; 'La restauración de las pinturas del retablo del Colegio de doña Maria de Aragón', in: Actas 2000, op.cit., p.130.

²⁹⁶ Pita Andrade, José Manuel and Almagro Gorbea, Antonio, in: Actas 2000 op.cit., pp. 75-88.

²⁹⁷ Bustamante García, Agustín; 'Fundación y enterramiento de doña Maria de Aragón,' in: Actas 2000, op.cit., pp.41-56.

demonstrated, showing that they are connected by an educational programme, made for a seminary, although the allusion to the three major vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience which are represented in the paintings will not be subject of investigation as Mann has already treated the subject at length.²⁹⁸

2.1 The Incarnation

In the reconstruction of one of El Greco's greatest commissions, the High-Altar of the Colegio de la Encarnación (commonly also called after its founder the Colegio de Doña María de Aragon), it is assumed that the painting of the *Incarnation* (fig.39)²⁹⁹ frequently called *Annunciation* had occupied the central position.

It is again a bifocal composition. Mary and the angel Gabriel are situated in the lower part, angels making celestial music are in the upper storey.

Between the two levels is the dove of the Holy Spirit, floating down accompanied by cherubim. Mary is situated at the left side, on the lower level of the painting, kneeling upon a prie-dieu. Between her and the angel is a burning bush and a basket with white linen, which stands on a base. An interesting fact is that the Virgin kneels on another base as the bush and the basket. Her prie-dieu stands on the other base, which ends at the right side, leaving space for a cloud which Gabriel stands upon. Thus Mary, Gabriel and the symbols are all depicted as standing on different levels. At the

²⁹⁸ Mann, *Patrons*, op.cit., p.78 and in the chapters about the Aragon paintings.

Virgin's right side is the upper part of her prie-dieu, forming the left border of the painting, with a book lying on it. From the position of the pages and the cover, with the right cover standing up, the illusion is given that the pages are still turning. The written lines do not help to identify the book, but we can presume that it is the Holy Bible, because passages are written alternately red and black as it was often the case.

Mary is turned around completely, looking up to the dove. Her dark blue cape falls from her head, covering the back of it, down to her shoulders over her right arm to her knee and to the base. Her red underdress falls nearly straight down to the base, where it lays in many folds, covering the feet of the Virgin completely and overlapping the prie-dieu reaching, into the foreground of the picture.

The posture of the Virgin shows different stations of the Incarnation.(fig.40) In unifying various aspects of the Incarnation El Greco gives a complex overall account of the holy event.

Baxandall has demonstrated that in the 15th century the Annunciation was subdivided into five stations:

1. Conturbatio - Disquiet
2. Cogitatio - Reflection
3. Interrogatio - Inquiry
4. Humiliatio - Submission
5. Meritatio - Merit³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Oil on canvas, 315x174 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado.

³⁰⁰ Baxandall, Michael, *Painting and Experience in fifteenth Century Italy*, Oxford, 1972, p.51.

He concludes that at the beginning of the 16th century painters were attracted more by depicting *Conturbatio* than with one of the other conditions.³⁰¹ El Greco, a century later, tries in this painting of the *Incarnation* to merge some of these known conditions. From the above it becomes clear that not only the whole structure of the painting is complex, but that El Greco recalls in the figure of the Virgin different levels of the event, that is to say all of her movements have to be analysed carefully recognising the various conditions.

Mary's right hand is raised to breast level, from the spectator's perspective and placed in the middle of her chest, her palm is foreshortened, but fully visible, actually emphasised by the bright light that it reflects. Only the ring finger is bent a little. This gesture can be identified as greeting.³⁰² Simultaneously, the drawn back shoulder creates the impression that the Virgin shrinks back, she greets the angel but is astonished at his annunciation. Therefore already in the gesture of the right hand one notes an ambiguity between greeting and shying away. Thus El Greco summarised in this single gesture already two different stations of the Annunciation. The first is the moment when the angel appears, and an astonished Mary greets him. These two states, shrinking back and greeting are included in the condition of *conturbatio*. Secondly, at the same moment as the angel greets her, the Virgin is already thinking about the strange salutation: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in

³⁰¹ Ibidem, p. 55.

³⁰² This gesture was already common in Greek art: Neumann, Gerhard; Gesten und Gebärden in der griechischen Kunst, Berlin, 1965, p.41.

her mind what manner of salutation this should be.”³⁰³This would demonstrate the second stage: *Cogitatio*

The left hand of the Virgin also fulfils a double function: it refers to the preconditions Mary had to meet, as it leads the view of the spectator to the burning bush and the sewing basket, and it is an acceptance and confirmation of the Incarnation - therefore standing for the condition of *Humiliatio*. Bulwer’s Gestus LXIV, can serve as an aid or confirmation: **Benedico**, (fig.11)

The imposition of the Hand is a natural gesture significantly used in condemnation, absolution, pardon, and forgiveness, benediction, adoption, initiation, *confirmation*, consecration, ordination, sanation and in gracing our meal.³⁰⁴

Although the Virgin is not blessing, the movement of the hand is similar to the illustration and Bulwer lists confirmation as one of the meanings of this gesture. The Virgin is confirming her willingness; she submits herself to the Father’s will by stretching out her left arm downwards and elevating her gaze upwards. The meaning of the gesture is easier to understand seen together with the gaze. Mary’s eyes fixed on the dove above already shows the moment of conception. As she sees the dove, the incarnation takes place. It is the moment when Mary accepts the words of Gabriel: “And the Angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come unto thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:...”³⁰⁵”And Mary said, Behold

³⁰³ St. Luke, 1, 28-29.

³⁰⁴ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p.107, plate B, ill. Z.

³⁰⁵ St. Luke, 1, 35.

the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word.”³⁰⁶ This gesture is similar to the one described in the introduction (Christ’s gesture in the *Agony in the Garden*), and like Christ, the Virgin submits herself to the Father’s will. El Greco does not choose the condition of *Meritatio* as in the 15th century but referring to the name of the Colegio he paints the condition of submission and therefore the moment of the Incarnation.

Through Mary’s left hand the spectator is also led to the burning bush and the sewing-basket. Although it is not directly the subject of this thesis the significance of at least the burning bush should be explained, because it helps to understand the complex meaning of the painting, and as already remarked the examination of a language of gesture is not strictly limited to gestures.

In the typology of the Middle Ages the burning bush was the symbol of Mary’s Virginité.³⁰⁷ Further Enriqueta Harris Frankfort states in her article about ‘Mary in the Burning Bush’ that “Literary analogies of the ‘Burning Bush’ with the Immaculate Conception are already frequent in the works of the Church Fathers”³⁰⁸ Thus the burning bush does not only refer to her lasting Virginité, but to her conception, and to the fact that she already had been conceived without original sin.

The burning bush first appeared to Moses: “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he

³⁰⁶ St. Luke, 1, 38.

³⁰⁷ LCI, vol. 2, p. 90.

³⁰⁸ Harris, Enriqueta; ‘Mary in the Burning Bush’, in: Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 1937-8, p. 281.

looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”³⁰⁹

The fact that the bush was not consumed by the fire, led in connection with the Virginité of Mary to the conclusion that she was not tainted with original sin. Saint Thomas de Villanueva, the teacher of Alonso de Orozco who became the founder of the Colegio de la Encarnación, used the burning bush as a symbol of Christ’s Incarnation.³¹⁰ The analogy between the burning bush which was not consumed by fire, and the Virginité of Mary, which was not consumed by the conception of Christ, was a familiar one in Catholic doctrine and liturgy.³¹¹ It appears with this significance in, for example, the liturgy of the Octave of the Birth of Our Lord in the Roman Breviary: *Rubum quem viderat Moyses incombustum, conservatam agnovimus tuam laudabilem virginitatem.*³¹²

In any case, the depiction of the burning bush in El Greco’s painting *can* be traced to the writings of Alonso de Orozco, who connected the Incarnation of Christ to the Burning Bush in the *Sermón Tercero* of his treatise *Las siete palabras de la Virgen*, where he writes :

...la zarza de Moyses ardia, sin quemarse, siendo nuestra Señora Madre, y justamente Virgen. Todos estos misterios se obraron antes

³⁰⁹ Exodus, 3, 2.

³¹⁰ Mann, *Patrons*, *op.cit.*, pp.84f.

³¹¹ see the article from Cruz Valdovinos, José Manuel; ‘De Zarzas Toledanas (Correa, El Greco, Maíno)’, in: *Archivo Español de Arte*, vol. 282, 1998, pp.113-124, who discovered various errors in Mann’s study about El Greco’s *Patrons* concerning Catholic doctrine and liturgy.

³¹² Also in byzantine iconography one can find the Virgin in the Burning Bush, see: Hadermann-Misguich, Lydie; ‘Permanence d’une tradition byzantine dans l’oeuvre espagnole du Greco’ in *El Greco of Crete*, *op.cit.*, pp.397-407.

que el ángel se partiese de allí y se fuese a los cielos a dar las nuevas gozosas a los otros espíritus sus hermanos³¹³

Its representation should emphasize the Virginity and the Chastity of the Virgin, as they were preconditions for her election but also continues the traditional analogy of the Immaculate Conception following the Church Fathers.

Beside the textual sources it is most probable that El Greco knew of the *Annunciation* by Titian (fig. 41, 1560-65, San Salvatore, Venice).

Antonio Cornovì della Vecchia, commissioned in his testament of 7 May 1559 “una pala della *Incarnation* de nostro Signor”³¹⁴ from Titian, which includes the Burning Bush and an inscription: *IGNIS ARDENS NON / CONBURENS*³¹⁵ which refers to the symbolic meaning of the bush.

Significantly the testament refers to the Incarnation and not to the Annunciation. The integration of the motif of the burning bush therefore not only derives from a textual source, but was also possibly a visual adoption, with the implicit religious meaning. To assume Titian’s painting as a model seems even clearer when we know that in another Annunciation/Incarnation by El Greco, which is now in Budapest, the references are more obvious. One also finds Annunciations by Titian where a sewing-basket is painted. This similarity leads to suppose that El Greco did have a collection of prints or drawings, that he possessed an extraordinary visual memory and that he was not as isolated in Spain as was assumed earlier.

³¹³ Alonso de Orozco, *Tratado de las siete palabras de Maria Santisima*, (ed) Herran, Laurentino, Madrid, 1966, p.120.

³¹⁴ Cruz Valdovinos, *op.cit.*, p.119, italics mine.

³¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

Mann in his study about the relationship of El Greco's paintings for the Colegio of the Incarnation and the writings of Alonso the Orozco insists that these were most important for El Greco's paintings, and analysed quite closely the different allusions made by El Greco to the writings.³¹⁶ He suggested that they played an important part in forming the iconography of the paintings. Mann connects them in a few points to Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite's *Celestial Hierarchy*:

In accord with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Alonso maintained that the Annunciation to Mary involved the entire celestial hierarchy. As both Dionysius and Alonso explained angels of the highest ranks – seraphim and cherubim- communicate directly with God and hold responsibility for informing the lower ranks of the divine will and for stimulating their devotion. Therefore, God entrusted his announcement to a cherub, who supervised its passage down through the ranks until Gabriel was informed of his duty to present it to Mary.³¹⁷

Mann conceals the fact that El Greco himself was concerned with the Pseudo Dionysian concept of celestial hierarchies and had this book in his library.³¹⁸

As Wittkower wrote in his article, El Greco also used the concept of the transmitting of messages through the hierarchies (via a specific gesture!) in the late *Baptism of Christ* (fig.42) which he painted for the Hospital of San Juan Bautista in Toledo.³¹⁹ Admittedly the Baptism is much later in date, as well as the *View and Plan of Toledo* for which Davies proved the Pseudo-

³¹⁶ See for a profound critique of this concept: Alvarez Lopera, José; El Retablo del Colegio de Doña Maria de Aragon, Madrid, 2000, especially pp.85-107.

³¹⁷ Mann, Patrons op.cit.,p.79.

³¹⁸ Marías and Bustamante; op.cit.,p.52 and Wittkower, op.cit., p. 53, who was the first who recognised the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings on El Greco's paintings.

Dionysian influence³²⁰. Thus this influence could have had its starting point in the contact with the writings of Alonso. But Davies assumes that El Greco, at least since the 1580s, had expressed Christian doctrine according to the concepts of Neoplatonism³²¹ and the *Celestial Hierarchy* was one of the most influential neoplatonic sources. Further Moffit pointed out the importance of the *Celestial Hierarchy* already for the *Burial of the Conde Orgaz* painting,³²² which is earlier in date than the Aragon paintings. Thus we can assume that El Greco at least used the *Celestial Hierarchy* as a source of inspiration for his paintings as early as 1586. Therefore we should not overvalue the influence of Alonso de Orozco as Mann does, but only bear it in mind. As Davies states in his recent study about the possible influence of Alonso on El Greco: "...one should not imagine El Greco painting these pictures with a text in one hand and a paintbrush in the other."³²³ For example, Mann in the following case clearly over-interprets Alonso's influence. The Archangel Gabriel, standing at the right side of the painting, has his arms crossed in front of his chest. Mann states:

According to Alonso, Gabriel crossed his arms in front of his chest and gazed at Mary in wonder after she had accepted the divine commission. The representation of the Archangel in this attitude, rather than in the conventional pose of the Annunciation in which his

³¹⁹Wittkower, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

³²⁰ Davies, David, 'The influence of Christian Neoplatonism on the Art of El Greco', in: *Cat. El Greco of Crete*, Iraklion, 1990, pp.33-35.

³²¹ Davies, David; *El Greco, op.cit.*, p.6. and 'The influence of philosophical and theological ideas on the art of El Greco', *op.cit.*, pp.243-249.

³²² Moffit, John; 'El Greco's Gloria', in: *Gazette de Beaux Art*, vol.130, Nov. 1997, p.143f.

³²³ Davies, David; 'Fray Alonso de Orozco: a source of spiritual inspiration for El Greco?' in: *Actas 2000, op.cit.*, pp. 89-99.

arm is extended toward the Virgin, clearly established that the moment of Christ's conception is shown.³²⁴

The famous *Annunciation* by Fra Angelico in the corridor of San Marco in Florence is one of various examples where the angel was depicted in a similar pose, as well as in the already mentioned painting of Titian.(fig. 41) This gesture is a sign of devotion and of prayer.³²⁵ Clearly the gesture does not refer to the first moments of the Annunciation, when the angel was greeting Mary, but to the moment of the conception as Mann states, but it is not as unconventional as Mann wants it to be and an allusion to Alonso is not at all necessary. A short look at El Greco's own paintings reveals that he used this gesture frequently, for instance in the *Dream of Philip II*³²⁶ (angels and earthly figures) or in the *Adoration of the Shepherds*(fig30) for St. Domingo el Antiguo (Mary herself and a shepherd). Furthermore, Gabriel is not looking in wonder at the Virgin, but looking down in devotion (this of course can only be seen in the original).

The cloud on which Gabriel stands is shown to be in front of the prie-dieu. His lower body, from the feet to the hip are shown from the front, his upper body is turned to his right towards the Virgin. His position in pictorial space is close to the beholder, nearly coming out of the picture. He forms something like a stepping stone into the picture through his turning movement. If we look at him, our look is led to the Virgin. His wings are also leading the view. The right wing, pointing upwards leads to the celestial orchestra, and the left one points down to the bush and basket. Although

³²⁴ Mann, *Patrons*, *op.cit.*, p.83.

³²⁵ See about this gesture chapter 1.1 of the second part of this thesis–The Assumption of the Virgin.

³²⁶ Oil on canvas, 165x134 cm, El Escorial.

Gabriel stands higher up than the Virgin his whole bodily comportment expresses devotion before the future mother of the Saviour.

The handling of space reveals that El Greco concentrates more on the religious event, on the actual holy happening than on depicting a 'real' scene. Apart from the prie-dieu he neglects any other allusion to Mary's chamber, omitting a realistic setting. Davies referring to this fact concludes:

El Greco has not described literally the scene of the Incarnation.

Instead, he has attempted to evoke, in paint, its spiritual or mystical significance, that is, the Divine Mystery of the conception of the

Redeemer and Saviour of mankind.³²⁷

El Greco narrates not only the event, a subject-matter with which the students of the seminary would be more than familiar, but he also creates, appropriately for the context, a painting which alludes to a broader spiritual background.

The celestial orchestra which celebrates the conception shows a large variety of musical instruments. In Venetian painting music played an important role and as Venice was one of the leading musical cities of the Renaissance, it was often the case that new instruments were depicted in painting, or that paintings mirrored new combinations of instruments, which could express more harmony. It is also reported that El Greco liked to listen to music while he was working. Unfortunately there is not space in this study to analyse the structure of El Greco's celestial orchestras, but it seems at first sight that he paints always the same instruments: flute, harp, cello, lute and a singing angel, combining them according to the space he has. In, for

³²⁷ Davies, 'Fray Alonso de Orozco', *op.cit.*, p.96.

example, the late *Annunciation* for the Hospital de San Juan Bautista (the upper part of this painting, with the celestial orchestra, is now in the National Museum, Athens, fig. 43), he used the same combination as for the Aragon *Annunciation*.

That the moment of Conception or the Incarnation is depicted is stressed also by the way the dove of the Holy Spirit is shown. It floats down, from the clouds above, which are reflecting the brightest light of the painting, as it comes from God. This Light radiates from the dove on to Mary, illustrating the words "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee". Cherubim flank the rays of light at each side attending the holy event, accompanying the incarnation of Jesus.

2.1.1 Concept of Narration

It can be established that this painting indicates different stations of the Incarnation of Jesus. El Greco unfolds before the eyes of the beholder the mysterious incarnation of the Son of God. The Virgin alludes with her posture to various states of this process: the first step, the salutation, is commemorated in the gesture of the right hand, the left hand leads the view to the allusions to the preconditions, Immaculate Conception, Virginity, and Chastity. Finally and most significant, her view as well as the gesture of her left hand are indicating the moment of conception, supported by the gesture of the angel and the way in which the dove is depicted.

El Greco summarises, through his arrangement, not only the most important points of the narrative, but transmits to the beholder the values of Virginity and Chastity. The Aristotelian notion implies that for a 'recognition' to be possible it had to be preceded by the necessary preconditions. This notion is realised in the painting of the *Incarnation*. A process of recognition and of fulfilment is presented. The preconditions lead to the possibility that Mary could shelter in her womb the Son of God. At the moment when the angel appears and tells Mary that she is the chosen one, all the preceding happenings make sense. Because El Greco depicted the symbols for Mary's Immaculate Conception and stressed her Virginity he pointed out the fact that the preceding happenings were the condition for her task as Christ's mother. The high point of the plot is shown with the moment of conception, the Incarnation of Jesus. The spectator recognises that the highpoint only becomes possible by means of the preconditions. This process of recognition is a *classical peripetie*, although it is not connected with a visible recognition of the protagonist (the Virgin), recognition is transferred to the beholder. In Christian thinking a similar act of self-recognition would damage the image of modesty and virtuous life of the Virgin, therefore El Greco mediated the recognition through the beholder, creating a *good peripetie*. By shifting the act of recognition to the beholder El Greco involves him directly in the event. The beholder becomes an active element in the narrative strategy.

2.2 The Adoration of the Shepherds

The *Adoration of the Shepherds*³²⁸,(fig.44) today in the collection of the National Museum of Art of Romania in Bucharest, is thought to have occupied the left side panel of the high altar of the Aragon retable. In the lower part of the painting, under ruins, lies the Christ Child and around Him are grouped the Virgin, an angel, St. Joseph and a shepherd. In the background are two other figures, with the ass on their left and the ox on their right. In the upper part there is a Gloria with two angels and four cherubs. The two angels are holding a banderole, inscribed: GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO ET ..N TERA PAX HOM... VOLUN...from Luke, 2,14. On a cartolino at the bottom left stands 'Doménikos Theotokópoulos e'poiei.

Dressed in a red tunic, the Virgin kneels at the left side of the picture looking down at the Child.(fig. 45) The Christ Child is turned to his mother, looking at her and light emanates from him. A white veil covers her head and with both hands she holds another similar veil which the Child is lying on. The red colour of her dress shows through the veil at Mary's left thigh. She holds the veil only with the thumb and index finger lifting it up, as if she wants to display it. The presentation of the veil in this expressive manner alludes to the shroud. After Christ's death he was wrapped in fine linen, and after his Resurrection this shroud was found empty, lying in the tomb:

...And he stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went

³²⁸ Oil on canvas, 346x137 cm.

into the sepulchre and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.³²⁹

Besides the allusion to the shroud, the veil refers to the 'corporale' the cloth which covers the Host during Mass. Another possible interpretation, connecting the veil to the Mass is the possible allusion to the altar cloth on which the Host and Chalice were placed during the mass. In any case the veil forms a strong link with the Eucharist. The Christ Child is so obviously displayed on the veil evoking comparisons to the Host. Supporting the allusions to the sacrifice of the Mass, and the vision of the Child in the host, is the lamb which is displayed below the child.

At the start of the Mass, the priest mounted the altar steps and moved to the centre of the altar to recite the hymn 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo' in which praise is given to both God the Father and the 'Lamb of God, Son of the Father. Thou who takest away the sins of the world.'³³⁰

These words are said by John the Baptist, the day after he had baptised Christ.³³¹ In the overall view of the altar retable, a painting with the iconographic theme of the *Baptism* (fig.53) is assumed to have been placed in the lower storey at the right hand side of the *Incarnation*. Thus the members of the congregation would have seen in front of them a reinforcement of the words of the Mass, through the appearance of the lamb with its allusions to the sacrifice of Christ at the left side, and the Baptism of Christ, the appearance of the spirit (epi-phany) at the right side. Both

³²⁹ St. John, 20, 5-7.

³³⁰ Davies, 'Roman rite', *op.cit.*, p.219.

³³¹ St. John, 1, 29.

paintings were connected visually through the Incarnation - with all its implicit meanings- and audibly through the mass 'performed' by the priest. The logical coronation of this programme would have been a Crucifixion, agreed by most scholars today.

The lamb in the *Adoration*, a common prefiguration of the Passion, represented on the veil, and also a common prefiguration of the Passion, animates the beholder to contemplate Christ's sacrifice and reminds him of the 'real' nature of the Eucharist. As Brown remarked:

The central placement of the naked body of the Christ Child on an altar-like manger, around with the Virgin....The conspicuous representation of the unclad body of Christ was a standard reference to the mystery of the Eucharist, and thus, both the biblical event and its liturgical translations are communicated to the viewer.³³²

The interaction of the paintings with the Mass, as a mirroring of its actions, lead to a stronger experience of the sacramental happening. At the right and next to Mary stands an Angel, looking devotionally down to the child, his arms crossed in front of his chest, a devotional gesture. He is welcoming the child on earth. His face reflects the light which emanates from the Child.

This adoring Angel does not appear in any of El Greco's various versions of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* known to us today.³³³ Mann thinks the angel is another link to the writings of Alonso de Orozco: "It seems most probable that the artist included this figure to illustrate Alonso's belief that celestial

³³² Brown, Jonathan, *The Golden Age of Painting in Spain*, New Haven and London, 1991, pp. 77f. Although Brown refers here to the Santo Domingo Adoration we can apply it to the Aragon Adoration.

³³³ Already Mann, *Patrons*, *op.cit.* referred to this angel, p. 90. Only the small copy of the Aragon painting, now in Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, shows the angel as well.

beings knelt with the shepherds to worship the Child.”³³⁴ Although it is remarkable that this angel does not appear in any of the other *Adorations*, I would rather link it to El Greco’s engagement in studying the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius, which I assume at its peak in this time, than only to Alonso. The integration of the angel into the composition seems to reflect Dionysius’ belief that angels are responsible for the communication between the divine and the human.

At the right border of the painting next to the angel, stands another figure dressed in a blue garment and a yellow cloak.(fig. 46) This cloak falls over his right shoulder down his back and than reaches into the foreground of the painting. It seems as if it is blown or moved by a sudden gesture. Its movement is clearly not ‘natural’, but expresses a certain stage of inner movement and indicates an ongoing outer movement. The material seems to be flowing down in a bow. The left hand makes a slight upward movement. The right hand is positioned at the height of the shoulder and drawn back, it is only just visible. The whole figure seems to move back. Leaving space for the angel to his right, it also seems as if he wants to lean forward, to express his devotion to the child. Because of the yellow cloak we do not know if this man had already worshipped the Child and now is shying away from the appearance of the angel or if he had just arrived, and wants to bow over the child to worship Him. This figure expresses with its ambiguity of gestures, shying away/ greeting tentatively – back away or leaning forward, an extraordinary richness of possible movements. El Greco’s ambivalent figures demonstrate his relationship to concepts which are concerned with

³³⁴ Mann, *Patrons, op.cit.*, p.90.

ambivalence. On many occasions we discover him toying ambivalent messages. This interest is also manifest in the relation to the concepts of his late literary friends, Paravicino and Gongora, whose metaphoric and ambivalent language lead to a century long misunderstanding of their works.³³⁵

In the foreground of the painting, next to the lamb and a crook, there kneels a shepherd. He is depicted as a three-quarter back figure. Over a white shirt, with rolled up sleeves he wears a green cloak, and red breeches. As far as his gesture can be seen, he also has his arms crossed over his chest, mirroring the angel who is positioned deeper in space but on the same vertical line. Between the shepherd's left leg and his left arm, another corner of the yellow cloth is visible. This part of his robes makes the movement of the other shepherd clearer. As it is very near the child, he could have already venerated the child. This is reinforced by the piece of blue material, belonging to the same figure, that can also be seen between the legs of the kneeling shepherd. Thus at the moment when the angel approaches, the shepherd stands up, drawing himself back, leaving space for the angel. Although the movement of this figure becomes clearer by realising this detail an ambiguity remains. This reveals once more that by observing a painting closely more and more details are perceived, helping to find the right or the closest answer. In any case, the shepherd with the green cloak is a figure who mirrors not only the gesture of the angel, but animates the spectator to do the

³³⁵ About "Gongorismo": Aguirre, Jose Luis; *Gongora, su tiempo y su obra*, Madrid, 1960; Zarate Ruiz, *op.cit.*; Kane, Elisha Ken; *Gongorism and the Golden Age*, Durham, 1928. Kane makes some interesting comparisons, although he is not able to understand the late style neither of Gongora nor of Greco.

same. The spectator should mirror him, as he mirrors the angel; venerating the Child.

The two men behind the Virgin are exchanging glances, communicating with each other about the scene in front of them. The one at the right, with the grey hair and beard is dressed differently as the other figures in the painting. He wears a long coat with padded shoulders.(fig. 47) The head seems to be the same one we can see in the *Pentecost* (fig. 75) looking out at the spectator,³³⁶ which might be a self-portrait. This indicates that the pictures must have been painted around the same time, between 1596 and 1600, but it does not seem likely to me that it is proof that the paintings belonged to the same altarpiece; on the contrary I suggest it would have been quite odd of El Greco to have depicted the same person twice in one single altarpiece.

However, the person points with his left hand directly to the child. The arm is shown foreshortened with the hand at the same level as the angel's shoulder, though the man stands quite far in the background. This emphasises the hand, as well as the fact that it is in the centre of the painting, just above the Child. The conjuring gesture of the right hand reflects the light which emanates from the Child. He is looking at the figure to his right, with whom he is conversing. Mann identifies the pointing figure with St. Joseph, again connecting it with Alonso, but he is not aware of the fact that "St.

³³⁶ Pita Andrade, J.M., 'Adoración de las Pastores', in: Exhib. Cat. *El Greco and Toledo*, *op.cit.*, p. 399. Even for a self-conscious man like El Greco it seems odd to paint his self-portrait twice in one altarpiece.

Joseph” is dressed in a very fashionable way, certainly not reflecting the
”poverty of Christ’s birthplace”³³⁷ which he claims following Alonso.

The shepherd dressed in yellow has his right hand elevated nearly touching
the other one’s hand while at the same time watching it closely. The spotlight
on the hands draws the attention of the beholder to them. The only
descriptions matching the gesture of the pointer’s right hand can be found in
Bulwer:

Gestus XIV: **Protego** (fig.32)

To extend out the right hand by the arm foreright is the natural habit
wherein we sometimes allure, invite, speak to, cry after, call, or warn
to come...³³⁸

Obviously the ”description” is not very illuminating, but at least we can
circumscribe the gesture now as implying an invitation, a reference to
speech. Thus, the figure is inviting the other to take part in the holy event,
introducing him into the scene. His pointing hand takes over in combination
with the other the function of clarifying the happening to the other. This
explanation scene in the background, with the clear pointing to the Christ
Child demonstrates the miracle of the Holy Birth even more strongly to the
beholder .

The setting of the Adoration of the Shepherds is a ruin, under high
vaults which are repeated in the background. El Greco takes up the
iconography of the ruins as an allusion to Amos, 9:11 and Acts, 15:16: “In
that Day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the
breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it a in the days

³³⁷ Mann, Patrons, op.cit., p.87.

of old.” The ruins therefore stand for the old law, the broken house of David, that should be renewed and restored.

The ox on the left side of the painting looks up to a bright light which seems to be another group of angels celebrating Christ’s birth. Light from this group is also reflected by the roof of the vault in the background. It is interesting to note that Mann negates the ox even though it is clearly visible.

He wrote that:

The representation of only one of the animals[the ass] may reflect the current political climate of Spain and Alonso’s fanatic advocacy of the idea that the government should execute anyone suspected of being Jewish.³³⁹

This remark demonstrates how reception can be obstructed if we are too close to a text, interpreting a picture as a kind of illustration.

The angels in the Gloria are strongly foreshortened. The cherubim are arranged obliquely, from left to right, holding hands. Behind them is bright yellow light. The angel on the left, who holds the banderole, looks down at the Child; the other one on the right looks up to heaven. These angels are hovering weightless above the earthly scene.

The comparison with the Santo Domingo Adoration (fig. 30) will show us some fundamental changes in El Greco’s style and mode of narration. The Santo Domingo Adoration was painted in the late 70s when El Greco had just arrived from Italy. In contrast to the paintings of the High Altar the colours of the lateral altars of the Santo Domingo paintings use the Venetian colour range. Of course both are night scenes and the colours are

³³⁸ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p.42, and plate A, ill.O.

naturally muted, but it seems as if El Greco was also concerned to show his patrons in Toledo that he was able to paint in the two most popular styles, the Venetian and the new Roman manieristic.

However, in the 1590s El Greco was in another situation, and his handling of colour already shows influences from the pseudo-dionysian text : *The Celestial Hierarchy*. It is as if he had tried to combine bright colours and clear light with a night scene. In fact the measurements play a fundamental role in the arrangement of figures and in the proportions of the figures themselves. It is known that El Greco got the commission for the whole altarpiece, including painting, sculpture and architecture for the Seminary of the Incarnation and for the Santo Domingo altarpiece.³⁴⁰ The increase in height from the Santo Domingo Altarpiece to the Aragon one is considerable. Even if we consider that the church of the Seminary was bigger, and therefore needed a taller retable, the proportions of the retable are quite extreme. El Greco only added 9 cm in width, but 136cm in height. Regrettably we do not know the measurements of the seminary church³⁴¹ and side panels tend to be narrower, but not necessarily higher. The measurements of the painting support El Greco's stylistic development. The extreme rectangular format emphasises the slight elongation of the forms that are to be realised, especially in the figure of the Virgin.

Not only the handling of colour, light and proportion changed, but also the way how El Greco 'narrates'. Certainly we have to take into account that the altarpieces had different purposes, just as they had different

³³⁹ Mann, *Patrons*, op.cit., p.91.

³⁴⁰ Ibidem, p.2.

³⁴¹ see for recent estimations: Pita Andrade and Almagro Gorbea, in: *Actas 2000* op.cit

spectators.(St. Domingo was a nuns' convent and the Colegio de la Incarnacion an Augustinian seminary), and different patrons (Luis de Castilla as executor of Doña Maria de Silva's will and Fray Hernando de Rojas and Jerónimo Oraá de Chiriboga as executors for Doña Maria de Aragón), which makes a direct comparison difficult. Although there are these obvious distinctions, it might be interesting to find out how El Greco changed the structure of his narrative to express these differences.

In the Santo Domingo *Adoration* El Greco had put together two successive scenes, and propagated the Vulgate. Through the text of the banderole, and the discussing figures at the right, the scene anterior to the adoration of the shepherds is evoked in the spectator's mind, in his imagination, i.e. the annunciation of Christ's birth by the angels to the shepherds. In a later painting of the *Adoration* (fig. 48, Colegio de Patriarca, Valencia, 1600-05) El Greco actually added this scene to the composition.³⁴² The actual event of the adoration occupies the main space of the narration, but the figure of St. Jerome reminded the spectators, who were Bernadines following the Cistercian Benedictine reform,³⁴³ that not only was the Vulgate infallible, but of course also that this infallibility was contested by the Protestants.

In the seminary's *Adoration* we do not find any symbol of precondition for Christ's birth, but the allusion to His death and to the Eucharist is evoked through the accentuation (and lifting up) of the veil the Child is lying on. Thus in this painting a stronger connection to the Mass can

³⁴² for a catalogue of the different kinds of *Adoration of the Shepherds* painted by El Greco see: Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. II, p. 25-28.

³⁴³ Wethey, *op.cit.*, II, p.4.

be seen. The opening of the Mass with the words written on the banderole in connection with the 'Agnus Dei', as well as the 'corporale' and 'shroud' allusions tie the painting into interaction with the Mass.

2.2.1 Comparing different versions of the Adoration of the Shepherds

Wethey names altogether six different versions of the Adoration of the Shepherds. In the following the difference of conception between four versions, namely the already mentioned St. Domingo and Aragon paintings as well as the Valencia (fig.48) and the Prado (fig. 51) ones, will be examined.

The Valencia version, presumably painted in the years 1600-1605³⁴⁴, shows three main changes. The first is a simple modification: the Virgin has changed side and is now located at the right of the composition. The second is an inclusion of the scene of the annunciation to the shepherds. The significance of including this scene, not only by alluding to it, but by actually depicting it will be subject of consideration. The third change is the inclusion of a rather enigmatic figure who will be the first point of investigation.

The figure at the left of the painting, dressed in a white garment and with elevated arms is confusing in character.(fig. 49) Wethey writes in his classification of the paintings of the Adoration of the Shepherds, describing the Valencia painting: "In type IV alone an angel appears at the upper left

³⁴⁴ Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. II, p. 27, oil on canvas, 141x111cm.

with arms lifted in a gesture of exaltation.”³⁴⁵ In the description of the painting however he states:

The shepherd at the left wears green drapery over orange-red breeches, *while the youths at the upper left appear, from left to right, the first in white garments, the second in blue breeches and yellow jacket, the third in a blue tunic and yellow-green drapery.*³⁴⁶

While in the first quote Wethey identifies the figure with an angel in exaltation, in the second quote he counts him to among the young shepherds.

In any case, the gesture of this figure expresses exaltation or exclamation.³⁴⁷

The gaze of this figure is directed to the cherubs above, directing the attention of the beholder to the Gloria. By means of this exalted gesture, the beholder is animated and brought into the right mood, and so looks at the Gloria. It is notable that this is the only version in which El Greco, having painted the group of cherubs - Gloria, depicts the banderole without an inscription. The quote from the gospel of St. Luke 2.14 which in the other paintings is an abstract allusion to the anterior scene of the annunciation of the angel to the shepherds is actually painted here. In this scene from the gospel a multitude of heavenly beings announces: “Gloria in Excelsis Deo, In Terram Pax” the words El Greco paints in the other versions on the banderole. Now this ‘scene’ (the exclamatory figure and the Gloria) is opposed or mirrored by the scene which in the other versions was included in an abstract way by the words written on the banderole. On the right side in the background one can see a single figure with elevated arms and above him

³⁴⁵ Ibidem, p.26.

³⁴⁶ Ibidem, p.27, italics mine.

bright light, obviously the apparition of heavenly beings.(In the Aragon *Adoration* this light also appears, but not the scene underneath.)

The gesture of the elevated arms is quite similar to the one of the Virgin in the St. Domingo *Assumption*³⁴⁸, only that the arms are lifted up higher and the position of the fingers is less important. The figure at the left side, the angel or youth, has the palm of his hand turned up indicating to the cherubs. Montano describes this emotional state very well:

Gratulatio:

Manus tolluntur etiam ad publicam gratulationem

Deo praestandam, atque ad laudem,:::349

Not only an exclamation but also praise of God is depicted, and as the gesture represents an interaction, the receiving of light is also meant. It is important to note that as this is a common gesture in the work of El Greco(with two or one hands) it has an interactive character; it is never only indication or praising, but always receiving.

The gesture of St. Joseph in the right foreground of the painting is a slight but very important variation.(fig. 50) His palm is not turned towards heaven, but towards the Christ Child, venerating Him. The gesture of St. Joseph therefore expresses veneration and astonishment about the miracle of Christ's incarnation. The reception of divine light is directly visualised representing the source of the light, namely the Christ Child. One can also

³⁴⁷ Compare this gesture with the one of the angel in the Aragon Baptism, next chapter, on which Wittkower wrote: "an exclamatory gesture charged with emotion", *op.cit.*, p.53.

³⁴⁸ see the *oratio* gesture of Montano and the *oro* gesture by Bulwer, both p. 99.

³⁴⁹ Montano, *op.cit.*, p.12, Thanksgiving: The hands are raised also for presenting public thanks and also praise to God:

realise, as a kind of confirmation, the reflection on St. Joseph's hands of the bright light which emanates from the Child.

This relatively small painting (141x111, compared to St. Domingo: 210x128, Aragon: 346x137, or the Prado painting: 320x180) is almost square, a rare format for El Greco's altar paintings. It has to remain a subject of speculation for which patron it was made; (although it is mentioned in an inventory made at the death of Beato Ribera in 1611, it is not known if it was painted for him.³⁵⁰) but from the handling of the subject-matter, comparing it to the other Adorations it has an exalting character. Exalting because of the exaggerate gestured of St. Joseph, the white figure and also the shepherd dressed with in yellow with blue breeches, who joins his hands in a preaching gesture and whose comportment is ecstatic. This figure is not listening to his neighbour but lost in admiration. He is placed in opposition to Joseph, who makes a contrary movement with a similar expression and both gestures embody the two extremes of ecstatic admiration. We can establish that the Valencia version is a painting with a much higher ecstatic character than for example the Santo Domingo version with its tranquil atmosphere.

Comparing it to the late *Adoration of the Shepherds*,(fig.51, ca. 1612-14) assumed to be made entirely by El Greco for his burial Chapel will reveal how El Greco returns to a more intimate version. The covering vaults are reduced to shadowy ruins in the background and instead of it there are angels in a Gloria floating directly above the holy scene. The two larger angels are arranged in such a way that they substitute the covering vault. Thus a direct contact with the scene underneath is created and the angels take

³⁵⁰ Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. II, p. 27.

over the covering function. There is no scene or group of figures apart from the main event. All is concentrated on the veneration of the Child. The Virgin again lifts the veil, which the rather small Child lies upon. Next to her at on her right stands St. Joseph in a similar pose to the Valencia and Aragon paintings; the only gesture in the painting which indicates a more extrovert movement. On the right side of the painting, there are three kneeling shepherds arranged in a half circle. Two of them make already familiar gestures, devotionally adoring the Child. The shepherd next to Mary makes a gesture which can also be found, slightly varied, in other paintings of El Greco,³⁵¹ but here it is depicted in its clearest form. Both hands are elevated to shoulder height and the palms are turned towards the object of his veneration.(fig.52) A very similar gesture can be detected in the paintings of the *Purification of the Temple*,³⁵² and identified with the aid of Bulwer as ‘excreatione repellit’(fig.21), in this painting although it is nearer to the Canon XLV:

Both palms held adverse before the breast denote commiseration.³⁵³

This reminds us that we have to be careful with categories; El Greco did not follow a fixed pattern and the emotional surrounding of the gestures has always to be considered. In this case the gesture is a very intimate gesture of commiseration and adoration, not combined with exaltation, like in many other painting of El Greco. El Greco painted in this last known version an intimate and intense atmosphere, in great contrast to the Valencia painting.

It is interesting to note how Bulwer continues the section quoted above:

³⁵¹ See for example the painting of the *Pentecost*, discussed in chapter 5 in the second part of this thesis.

³⁵² see chapter 6 in the second part of this thesis.

This action with this signification, I have observed in some ancient painted tables, the hands of cunning motists. And verily, without the knowledge of the natural and artificial properties of the hand, ..., it is impossible for any painter, or carver, or plastic to give right motions to his works or hand; for as the history runs and ascribes passions to the hand, gestures and motions must come with their accommodation. The notions (therefore) of this hand may be of good use for the advancement of those curious arts. (sic)³⁵⁴

Bulwer in this section clearly addresses the artist to use his advise. He even claims that it will be helpful to increase the quality of works of art. Therefore it can be stated that Bulwer was aware of the utility of his study to artist, and that he had connection to fine art.

2.3 The Baptism of Christ

The painting of the *Baptism of Christ* (fig. 53) for the Aragon retable, placed on the lower storey at the right side, next to the *Incarnation*, is also a bifocal composition. In the upper part we can see God the Father surrounded by angels and cherubs and in the lower part Christ being baptised by John the Baptist, both flanked by angels. In between the two scenes, connecting them, we can see the dove of the Holy Spirit. On the central axis, there is God the Father, the dove of the Holy Spirit, the baptising hand of St. John and the head of Christ. Christ kneels with his left knee on a rock, his right foot on

³⁵³ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p.189, plate D, ill. W.

lower ground in the water and with his hands joined together in a devotional praying gesture³⁵⁵. He is wearing only a loincloth and his gaze is drawn inwards, not directed towards the outside world but seeing the epi-phany. (the appearance of the Spirit of Christ)

The praying gesture of Christ is derived from Luke, 3.21: "Now when all the people were baptised, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptised, *and praying*, the heaven was opened."³⁵⁶ John the Baptist, is dressed in a garment of camel's hair, his traditional garb. He is extremely thin and like the figure of Christ, elongated. John stands on a rock and holds a sea shell in his right hand, pouring water out over Christ's head. John's head is slightly bend forward to Christ.; his gaze seems to follow the water, but his eye is sunk into the dark eye socket, as if he as well sees how heaven is opening, as described in John, 1, 32: "And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it abode upon him."

Between the two of them there stands an angel dressed in green, throwing his left arm up, with the palm turned upwards as well.(fig. 54) This figure is described by Wittkower as an 'iconographical freak'.³⁵⁷ He explains this gesture with the help of the late *Baptism of Christ* (fig. 42) for the Hospital of San Juan Bautista in Toledo. Although in this painting the position of the angel has changed and both his arms are visible, his gesture allows us to draw conclusions for the earlier one. In the *Aragon Baptism* only an early stage of the complex interwoven meanings which are transmitted by this gesture in the later painting is developed. This is to suggest from the

³⁵⁴ Ibidem,

³⁵⁵ see the Bulwer quote of the 'oro' gesture, p. 99.

³⁵⁶ italics mine.

demonstration of the wing of this angel, which is supporting the movement of the hand, that the gesture is "an exclamatory gesture charged with emotion".³⁵⁸ In Bulwer's *Chironomia* the canon VII gives the same explanation for the gesture:

Canon VII:

The hand put forth and raised aloft is an action of *congratulatory exclamation* and *amplification of joy*.

This is drawn from nature into the schools and disciplines of rhetoricians who prescribe this free and liberal motion of the hand as a fit *periphrasis* of gesture upon such occasions, and most consonant to the intention of nature.(sic)³⁵⁹

Therefore it can be established that the elevated hand, palm upwards, is a gesture expressing joy.

Wittkower deciphers this gesture on a second level, as a gesture of rapture to the divine, and states: "...in the earlier *Baptism in the Prado* the angel emphatically announces thorough his gesture spiritual rebirth by means of the Sacrament of Baptism."³⁶⁰ Complementing this description is the *Gestus XXX* of the *Chirologia*:

Praeclara aggredior (I attempt to perform great deeds)

³⁵⁷ Wittkower, *op.cit.*, p.49.

³⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p.53, meaning this gesture, but describing it in the later painting.

³⁵⁹ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p. 177. Quoting Ludovico Cresollius, *op.cit.*

³⁶⁰ Wittkower, *op.cit.*,p.53.

To exalt or lift up the stretched out hand is the habit of attempting to do and take some famous exploit in hand and is a natural posture of an exalted and victorious power.³⁶¹

The angel performs his deed in announcing the “great deed”, i.e. the baptism of Christ.

In the *Baptism* for the Hospital of St. John the Baptist in Toledo, the gesture is developed in a sense that it reveals an astonishing dogmatic concept; that the angel becomes the mediator between Christ's and the celestial world. This concept is derived from Pseudo Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy*. “It is through the agency of angels”, Dionysius maintains, “that I see Jesus subordinating Himself to the command of His Father.”³⁶² Thus by painting this gesture El Greco expressed the belief that celestial beings transmit messages through the hierarchies. This example reveals once again how intensely El Greco was involved in creating complex theological programmes. In the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* by Pseudo Dionysius the raising of the hands heavenwards serves in connection with Baptism “to enter into compact with Christ”³⁶³. If this meaning is taken into consideration, and bearing in mind that it is Christ's own Baptism which is depicted, the gesture can only be read as to alluding to the ‘compact’ made between Son and Father, which is initiated by Baptism. The angel therefore on the one hand transmits the fulfilment of the Baptism, of the ‘epiphany’ of

³⁶¹ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p.61.

³⁶² Wittkower, *op.cit.*, p 53.

³⁶³ Davies, David, ‘El Greco and the Spiritual Reform Movements in Spain’, in: *El Greco: Italy and Spain*; (eds) Brown, Jonathan; Pita Andrade, José Manuel, Washington, 1984, (Studies in the History of Art, vol. 13), p.65; and Pseudo Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in: *The complete Works*, New York, 1987, p.203 (chap.2, 6).

Christ to God the Father and on the other hand alludes to the compact between Son and Father.³⁶⁴

The axe which appears at knee height , between the angel and St John and the rocks, may allude to a sermon of John which is quoted in Matthew, 3.10 and Luke, 3.9:

...and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

As if it were not enough to be ‘Sons of Abraham’ the Catholic Church stressed the fact that one could, even though baptised ‘lose grace’. The sixth Canon concerning Baptism formulated at the Council of Trent, reads as follows: ”If anyone says that one baptised cannot, even if he wishes, lose grace, however much he may sin, unless he is unwilling to believe, let him be anathema.”³⁶⁵ This canon was clearly formulated against the Lutheran verdict that every man was able to reach forgiveness of his sins through his own belief. This very subtle allusion to a central theme of the Counter-Reformation shows how closely aware El Greco was of the Council of Trent Decrees and how strongly he was committed to mediate the main Counter-Reformation subjects in this retable. By mediating this canon through his

³⁶⁴ see for a further interpretation of this gesture the chapter about the *Purification of the Temple*.

³⁶⁵ Canon and Decrees, *op.cit*, p.53.

painting to the students of the seminary El Greco was reminding them of it and therefore also of the Protestant position towards baptism.³⁶⁶

Behind the keeling Christ stands an angel, dressed in blue, holding a long red cloth. This motif, of an angel assisting, and holding new garments for Christ is a common motif since the 6th century.³⁶⁷ The cloth, held in the angel's left hand nearly touches Christ's head. It falls down behind the angel dressed in green, spreading out between his head and his elevated left arm. The other end falls over the blue angels right shoulder, held by his right hand, nearly down to the ground at the left border of the painting. The red cloth is like a ribbon that separates the actual baptism scene from the assisting angels at the left side and the Gloria above. It serves as an aid to intensification and by it the contemplative mood evoked by Christ's inward look is made more intense. Through the way El Greco paints this cloth, surrounding Christ's head, he evokes a concentrated mood which is to be transferred to the beholder. He uses an iconographic motif as an aid to increasing tension. He nearly isolates Christ's head, only the baptising water and the hand of one of the angels are around it.

Above the red cloth heads of three other angels are visible, all of them looking in different directions: one towards the Gloria, one at his companion and another at the dove. If the beholder follows their gazes he is directed to either Christ, God the Father or the Dove. The Dove of the Holy Spirit is floating over John's hand, surrounded by yellow and bluish light, and cherubim, who are floating around God's feet.

³⁶⁶ Anyhow the axe is a basic element in post byzantine painting as stated by Alvarez Lopera, 2000, *op.cit.*, p.99.

³⁶⁷ LCI, vol.4, p.248f.

In the middle of the Gloria sits God the Father, dressed entirely in white. His right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing, his thumb and middle finger touching each other, the index finger straight and the other fingers bent into the palm. His left hand is not visible but covered with a transparent globe. This transparent globe symbolises the cosmos and in the hand of God on it his reign over it. It is partly covered by an angel, who seems to touch the aureole of light that emanates from God. Several other angels are grouped around God, devotionally adoring Him.

The *Baptism* once more demonstrates how deeply involved El Greco's thinking was with theological preoccupations and how close he was to the neoplatonic thinking of Dionysius the Areopagite. Though painting two separate spheres, El Greco connects them by two means. The vertical line linking God, the Dove and John's hand with the shell and the water, is a direct connection, initiating the act of baptism. It occupies the central axis and is the main act, whose fulfilment is transmitted by angels towards heaven, connecting the earthly with the heavenly.

2.4 Crucifixion

The painting of the Crucifixion (fig. 55), assumed to have been situated on a second storey, above the Incarnation, shows Christ on the cross. St Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross wipes away the blood, together with an angel, and at the right side of the cross stands St. John the Evangelist and at the left side the Virgin Mary. In addition there are two angels floating

underneath Christ's arms, collecting His blood in their open palms. Above Christ's head is a plate on which is written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin:

“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”

Marías has demonstrated without any doubt that the main visual sources for this painting were various prints/ woodcuts by Dürer³⁶⁸ and not the writings of Fray Alonso de Orozco³⁶⁹. The gesture of the Virgin (although it is not the Virgin who makes the same gesture in the Dürer woodcut *Crucifixion* (fig. 56, ca. 1496) the position of Christ's feet, with the left foot nailed over the right one, and not the reverse as was common and the clearly separated trickles of water and blood running out of Christ's side, are all elements found in Dürer (fig 57). In any case there are strange elements to be found in this painting, such as the fact that the angels are not collecting Christ's blood in chalices, but in their hands, or also that Mary Magdalene can be found crouching at the foot of the cross,³⁷⁰ although not wiping up Christ's blood. Davies had pointed out that the collection of the blood in the hands could be inspired by the missal:

After the consecration and elevation of the Host and Chalice, the priest bowed down over the altar and prayed thus: ‘Humbly we beseech thee, Almighty God, to command that by the hands of thy holy Angel, this our Sacrifice be uplifted to thine Altar on high.’³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ Marías, Fernando; ‘El Greco en el Colegio de doña Maria de Aragón: reconstruyendo un retablo en su contexto’, in : *Actas, 2000, op.cit.*, pp.57-74, pp.66-69.ss s

³⁶⁹ Mann, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-106.

³⁷⁰ For example in a print made after an invention by Giorgio Giulio Clovio, a friend of El Greco, see: Marías, *Actas 2000, op.cit.*, p.69.

³⁷¹ Davies, ‘Roman rite’, *op.cit.*, pp. 224-226.

This connection is even more plausible as the whole painting demonstrates a strong relation to the Mass, or particularly to the Eucharist.³⁷²

The gesture of the Virgin, wringing her hands, is a common gesture of “grief and sorrow”.³⁷³ The expression of her face mediates “sadness” and “an emotion of pain” (fig.58)³⁷⁴ Much more difficult to interpret is St. John’s gesture.(fig. 59) His right hand is raised to shoulder height, with his palm fully visible, turned towards Christ and the beholder. His gaze is directed towards Christ and his eye is shining with tears. To analyse the expression of his face Le Brun’s *Method* gives significant hints. From his descriptions of the emotions admiration, veneration and ecstasy ³⁷⁵we can extrapolate the passions reflected in St John’s face. In contrast to the Virgin’s face, which is pale and contorted with pain, his face seems to be lost in reverie. The elevated right hand might signify adoration, or could be meant as an approaching gesture, in the sense of a tentative attempt by St John, trying to understand the event. Even more difficult to understand is the strange contortion of his left hand. It is stressed by the bow his red robe makes around it. John stands on a sloping surface, so that his left foot offsets the eye movement. Mann had already drawn attention to the fact that the Virgin in the Illescas Annunciation³⁷⁶ (fig.60) makes the same strange gesture.

Like Mary in the Incarnation, St John is shown raising his right hand in the frontal gesture of adoration. Except for the Prado Crucifixion, El Greco used this gesture only in scenes of the Incarnation. In the

³⁷² Alvarez-Lopera; ‘El Retablo’, *op.cit.*, p.103.

³⁷³ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, p.187, canon XXXVII; plate d, fig. Y.

³⁷⁴ Le Brun, p.40 and fig 37.

³⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, pp.24, 26, 28.

³⁷⁶ Oil on canvas, Ø 128 cm, 1603/05, Hospital de la Caridad, Relic chamber.

Crucifixion, St John's use of this gesture may indicate that his devotion remained unaffected even though Christ was humiliated and scorned by others.³⁷⁷

Unfortunately Mann does not give any source for his assumption that the gesture signifies adoration, and he also considers only the right hand and forgets about the left. In addition Mann does not asked why El Greco might have applied this strange gesture in these two, very different paintings. In general it is assumed that the Illescas Annunciation was made in the years 1603/5 and the Crucifixion in 1590/1600. Bearing in mind the similarities of these two figures it seems most probable that their dates are not too far apart.³⁷⁸

Not only is the position of the hands similar but also the folds of the robe are nearly identical. As a matter of fact the subject-matter of the painting could hardly be more diverse. Mary receives from the angel the message that she will become the mother of the Son of God; John in contrast sees his beloved master dying on the cross. Mary receives the message and the Holy Ghost ; John tentatively understands the death of Christ. Alvarez-Lopera identifies the gesture as an acceptance of Divine Providence³⁷⁹, but like Mann does not verify it with any visual or written source.

As a medium to approach an understanding of this painting, it is most important to see the overall composition. In this case it becomes clear how tremendously important it is not to digress into detailed descriptions but to

³⁷⁷ Mann, *op.cit.*,p.106.

³⁷⁸ Although Greco uses some gestures over a long period of time reusing and varying them often, this is not the case with this gesture which can only be found in these two paintings. Therefore I suggest dates of origin close together.

³⁷⁹ Alvarez Lopera, *El Retablo*, *op.cit.*, p.105.

draw into consideration elements of an overall concept of composition. The contracted, painful gesture of the Virgin is contradicted by the open, tentative gesture of John. Both these contemplative gestures are contrasted with the busy movement of Mary Magdalene. St John's open, elevated right hand also stands in relationship to the open hand of the angel above him, who is collecting Christ's blood in it.

Altogether the painting is extraordinary in the work of El Greco for two reasons: first it is the only Crucifixion he painted in Spain that shows Christ as already dead, and secondly because of its dense atmosphere. The scenery around is reduced to a minimum. Only a small strip of brown earth without any vegetation is visible and a dark, cloudy sky. The mood is totally concentrated on the protagonists and no distracting detail diverts the attention of the beholder. An extreme elongation of nearly all the figures intensifies the already dense mood. In this painting El Greco uses two means of hyperbole, elongation and reduction of scenery to create this intense mood, to grip the attention and emotion of the beholder. He does not involve the beholder into a theological, theoretical dispute, as in the other painting for the seminary, but he creates a much more emotional painting.

2.5. Context of the Paintings in the Seminary

It has to be taken into account that these pictures were studied by pious seminarians at every Mass, therefore only even very subtle allusions would appear to them after a while, they would interpret every single sign in it and analyse it. As they were studying the different sacraments they would

certainly look at the different paintings more closely, examining them for any hint of theological manifesto. The patrons must have been aware of the allusions, supporting the development of the pictorial programme. El Greco was likewise interested in complex theological contents, with his knowledge of the Councils, Canons and Decrees, and counting many clerics among his friends would have been able to invent a complex interwoven program of theological meanings. Furthermore, as he was in contact with people like Gongora and possibly already with Paravicino at this time, and anyhow interested in poetics³⁸⁰ he created a poetic narrative style, designing paintings not only with a theological layer but a poetical one as well.

³⁸⁰ see inventory of his library, Mariás and Bustamante, op.cit. Apéndice I and II, pp. 221-223.

3. The *Espolio*- a rare subject- matter

Precisely the rarity of the subject matter, allows us to point out how El Greco's process for finding the appropriate strategy of narration took place, which then had to be transmitted by the suitable gestures.

The earliest document preserved relating El Greco to Spain is the receipt for a first payment made to him from the Cathedral of Toledo, for the painting of the *Espolio* (fig.61). The receipt dates from the 2 July 1577, therefore a slightly earlier date can be assumed for the contract, now lost.³⁸¹ El Greco was commissioned to paint a "Disrobing of Christ" for the vestry, a suitable theme for that place. On one hand, the "Disrobing of Christ" is a rare theme, as Wethey already commented³⁸² but on the other hand, the presence of a very valuable relic in the Cathedral of Toledo, a piece of the purple tunic Christ wore during the Passion, makes it an attractive theme, stressing the importance of the relic and bringing it before the priest's eye, while he robes himself for the Mass.³⁸³

The event of the disrobing of Christ during the Passion, is not mentioned in one of the canonical gospels, it is only mentioned very shortly in the apocryphal Nicodemus-Gospel: "And Jesus left the Praetorium and with him were the two thieves. And as they came to the place, they disrobed Him and put on Him a linen loincloth."³⁸⁴ To this report another possible

³⁸¹ For the documentation see; Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. II, p.52f. and Mariás, *op.cit.*, p.126.

³⁸² Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. II, pp.51f.

³⁸³ Davies, 'Roman Rite', *op.cit.*, p. 219, note 58.

³⁸⁴ Nicodemus-Apokryph, X; quoted after: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* in german translation, (ed.) E. Hennecke, W. Schneemelcher, Tübingen, 1959,p 340; translation mine. This source is mentioned by

literary source can be added, as had been suggested by Azcárate.³⁸⁵ He draws attention to St. Bonaventure's Meditations on the Passion of Christ. The three Marys, a contentious issue between the Cathedral and El Greco³⁸⁶, concerning the orthodoxy of the painting, are mentioned in these Meditations, but as Brigitte Quack has shown in her study of El Greco, the differences between the text and the painting are much greater than this coincidence.³⁸⁷ Besides this, Wethey had already found it rare that the authority of St. Bonaventure did not have any weight in making the case for El Greco against the Cathedral, if it had been if it was El Greco's main source. Wethey blames the orthodox mood of Counter-Reformation which predominated in the Cathedral Chapter for the rejection.³⁸⁸

In any case, the subject matter of the painting was a real challenge for El Greco, firstly it was one of his first (if not the first) large commission in his career and secondly because of its rarity. The famous models he could rely on in the St. Domingo paintings did not exist. He had to clarify the characters he would include in the picture, searching for figures which would fit into his narrative. He had to choose which moment of the event he would show, which attributes he would include, etc.

Halldor Soehner, in: Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen. Alte Pinakothek München. Bestandskatalog Spanische Meister, 2 vols, München 1963, Vol. I, p. 80 and José Camón Aznar, Dominico Greco, 2 vols, Madrid 1950, vol. I, p. 290.

³⁸⁵ Azcárate, Jose; 'La iconografía de "El Espolio" del Greco', in: *Archivo español de arte*, 28, 1955, pp.189-197.

³⁸⁶ Zarco del Valle, *op.cit.*, pp 591-613, mainly p. 598, or more recent, Marías, *op.cit.*, pp129-136.

³⁸⁷ Quack, Brigitte; Studien zur Zeitgestalt, Farbe und Helldunkel im Werk El Grecos, Saarbrücken, 1997, pp.88-90.

³⁸⁸ Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. II, p.52.

One of his assumed main sources, is Dürer's series of woodcuts of the *Small Passion*³⁸⁹. Such a prominent figure as for example the young man who bores a hole into the cross in the Woodcut of the *Crucifixion of Christ* (fig. 62) may have served as an inspiration for the young man executing the same movement in the *Espolio*.

El Greco places the event of the disrobing on ground sloping slightly up, reminding the spectator that Golgotha was a hill. The sloping ground of course allows him to develop his narration in a more elaborate way, giving him more place for figures, and in fact without this gradient he could not have painted the mob around Christ, the mob who serves to create such a dramatic density. (The fact that the heads of the mob were above Christ's was another cause of complaint on the part of the Cathedral!)

In the centre of the picture the actual happening, the disrobing of Christ, takes place. Christ's brilliant red tunic covers the whole centre of the picture, its brightness catches the spectator's eye at first sight. Obviously El Greco chose this instant of the narration to heighten the dramatic effect by the large red surface. By choosing this moment, showing Christ still clothed, in contrast to the nakedness of the Crucifixion, the next station of the Passion, the activity of the Priest dressing himself in vestments suitable to celebrate the Mass, which is the re-enacting of the sacrifice of Christ in the Crucifixion, is compared with Christ's action. Just as Christ prepares himself for the last station of the Passion, the priest prepares himself by getting dressed, contemplating the picture before his eyes. Thus not only was the iconography of the painting as we have already mentioned a theme suitable for the vestry ,

³⁸⁹ Xydis, Alexander G; 'El Greco's Iconographical Sources', in: *El Greco of Crete, op.cit*, p.152, note

but also, and this very prominently, the way of representation was preparing the priest to celebrate the Mass.

Behind Christ can be seen the mob that followed Him on his way. Lances and halberds are sticking up in the background. Close to Christ, are the two thieves who were crucified with Him. On His right there is a soldier in shining armour, which reflects the red of Christ's robe. On Christ's left side there is a henchman, dressed in green, which contrasts with the red of Christ's robe. This henchman holds a rope in his left hand, which is bound around Christ's right hand. The fist of his other hand is situated on the left of Christ's neck. Below this figure in the right lower corner of the painting a young man is busy boring a hole in the cross. His activity contrasts with the three Marys in the lower left corner of the painting, who are watching him.

(fig. 63)

The three Marys are situated in the very front of the painting, below the others at the foot of the hill, where they seem to occupy their own pictorial space. Their intense attention to the preparation of the cross, not paying attention to Christ, emphasises that they have their own "level" in the narration. By watching them, how they watch, the spectator, who was familiar with the stations of the Passion would imagine the coming steps in the story. As the three Marys were initiating an imagination of the Crucifixion they were an irreplaceable element in the effect of the painting. They demonstrate further for the spectator how he could 'see' the event in detailed imagination. Detailed, because the marginal activity of the young man boring the hole in the cross appears to be so important that all their

attention is occupied by this action, because besides the disrobing it is the other essential preparation for the crucifixion in this painting. In St. John's Gospel, the only one where the three Marys appear (19, 25) under the cross, they are with St. John, or the "disciple whom he loved". Peculiar then that El Greco did not include St. John among the persons in his painting, while including all other mentioned figures who witnessed the Crucifixion.

The figure in shining armour, identified traditionally with Longinus and the good Centurion³⁹⁰, merging the two figures into one, was recently considered as only being the "good Centurion".(fig. 64)³⁹¹ Von Rosen, in her study about the *Espolio*, stresses that both men were converted to Christendom under the cross and that this fact may have led to the circumstance that they are confused or simply merged into one person. But, as she further explains:

"El Greco seems to mean only the Centurion, since he wears armour and holds no lance."³⁹² In fact El Greco depicted in an much earlier painting, in the *Crucifixion* from the Ferraresian Triptychon (Tempera on wood, 21, 6 x 15, 5 cm; ca. 1567; Ferrara, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Ferrara) both figures, Longinus and the Centurion.³⁹³ This indicates that El Greco was conscious of the fact that there existed two figures, usually confused, or moulded together. In the *Espolio* he does indeed also depict both figures; the figure in shining armour is the centurion and a figure in the background right, dressed in yellow and bearing a yellow helmet holding a lance in his right hand, is a representation of Longinus. He looks up, in the same direction as

³⁹⁰ Wethey *op.cit.*, vol. II, p. 52.

³⁹¹ von Rosen, Valeska, 'Painterly Eloquence in El Greco's "El Espolio"', pp. 5-7, in print.

³⁹² *Ibidem*, p.6.

Christ, having a vision about the happening to come, namely the crucifixion, and maybe already foreseeing his conversion.

The Centurion's thoughtful gaze, although directed towards the spectator, expresses an introspective view. His expression transmits concentration and contemplation. "The Centurion already lives through the process of recognition, which however only later, namely in the moment of Christ's death, would turn into admitted certainty."³⁹⁴ Both figures, the Centurion and Longinus are inviting the spectator (the priest preparing for the Mass), to contemplate the forthcoming event, stirring up his imagination by instigating a reflection about their visions and thoughts. This adds another dimension to the picture: not only a physical event is represented and a story is told, but encouragement to meditate upon the Passion is given. This powerful inclusion of the Crucifixion, as the last station of the Passion, was already recognisable in the representation of the three Marys and the direction of their view. Another artful allusion to the reflections evoked in the Centurion as well as in the spectator, is the reflection of Christ in the shining armour of the Centurion. Just as the armour reflects Christ, so does the Centurion and with him the spectator. It is a subtle visualisation of the inner reflective emotions of the Centurion.

Besides this increased complexity von Rosen makes out the poetic concept of an Aristotelian *Peripetie* in the representation of the Centurion when she states that:

In terms of poetics in the painting the centurion is at the depicted moment experiencing his peripeteia – a peripeteia corresponding to his

³⁹³ Ibidem.

inspiration. The most important ancient theory of poetics – that of Aristotle – defines this *peripeteia* of action as the model of a real *peripeteia*, which only then is able to evoke the desired effect, to create a sense of pity and fear in the mind of the Beholder.³⁹⁵

For the Centurion a never expected happening becomes true, his conversion to Christendom and the turning point of his life and this *peripetie* is connected with recognition which therefore makes it a *good peripetie* in the aristotelian sense as remarked earlier.

The figure of Christ, occupying the centre of the picture, brings together very differentiated messages. His left hand is situated above the young man, who prepares the cross. This gesture reappears, in a very similar way in various of El Greco's paintings, for example in later versions of the *Purification of the Temple*³⁹⁶ Davies suggested interpreting it as the "general" expression of Christ's forgiveness: "He raises his eyes to heaven and appears to protect or forgive the executioner. This evokes the words which he uttered on the cross: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23, 34)"³⁹⁷ The gesture of his left hand certainly support this interpretation. In the same way in the *Purification of the Temple* the one underneath Christ's hand is protected. The gesture expresses something like care, which seems at first sight absurd, in view of the situation, but it reminds of the fact that Christ's great characteristic was forgiveness, and that his death was a sacrifice, a sacrifice repeated in every Mass. Maybe this all too strong relation to

³⁹⁴ Ibidem.

³⁹⁵ Ibidem, p.7.

³⁹⁶ see my chapter about this series of paintings, as well as the one about the *Martyrdom of St. Maurice*.

³⁹⁷ Davies, David; 'Roman rite', *op.cit.*, p.219.

forgiveness strengthened the opposition to the picture, although not officially mentioned. Was not Counter-Reformatory Spain, with its Inquisition, one of the strongest advocates of a complete unyielding towards Jews and fallacy in general? Maybe the gesture of forgiveness towards his own executioner was to much of forgiveness for the orthodox Chapter of the cathedral. In any case, although the gesture of Christ's left hand provoked such discussions, it had a famous model, the *Marcus Aurelius* equestrian statue in Rome, where there is a similar gesture of the left hand. Originally there was a prisoner underneath this hand and the hoof of the horse, and the gesture is not only an expression of the victor about the non victorious but means that the prisoners were now under the protection of the emperor. The loser was, with this gesture, put under the protection of the Roman Empire.

With the gesture of his right hand, lying on his chest, Jesus commends himself to his Father, stressed by the gaze heavenwards. (fig.65) The gesture evokes in the imagination of the beholder the words: "not what I will, but what thou wilt."³⁹⁸ Christ, therefore, does not expose himself to the executioner but to the will of his Father, being the obedient son. Bulwer describes the gesture "To lay the hand open to our heart" as a movement by which we "call God to witness a truth."(fig. 11)³⁹⁹ Together with the rope which is tied around Christ's right hand an association with Christ as the Lamb of God arises in the imagination of the learned beholder, another allusion to the sacrifice of Christ. The violent gesture with which the

³⁹⁸ Matt: 26,39; Mark: 14, 36,Luke: 22, 42. Von Rosen remarks that Karl August Wirth states, that one seems to know Christ's gesture from Paintings of the Oration in the Garden; see von Rosen, *Eloquence*, *op.cit.*, p.6, note 22, and there as source: *Entkleidung Christi*, in: *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, Vol 7, München 1981, p. 785.

³⁹⁹ Bulwer, *op.cit.*, Gestus LII, Conscienter affirmo, p.74.

henchmen holds the rope provokes the opinion that he wants to bring Christ under his “will”, but Christ is, without any visible effort, even without noticing the rope, making the gesture of commending Himself to His Father.

There is also a rope around the thief at Christ’s left side. His compassionate look identifies him as the thief who, crucified at Christ’s side recognises him as the Lord saying: “Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” And Christ, answering him: “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”(sic)⁴⁰⁰ The figure of the thief is the third figure in the painting related to recognition. The Centurion, Longinus and the good Thief are all represented indicating their later conversion, illustrating their later recognition. As they are all persons with “bad” lives El Greco, alludes to their “turning-point”, depicting not only the station of the passion that immediately preceded the Crucifixion, but including already the “fruits” of the sacrifice of Christ, namely the conversion of the Centurion, Longinus and the good Thief.

El Greco again follows in his narrative strategy the Aristotelian concept of a “fable”, representing the three figures in a process of recognition. As the spectator knows the preceding action he can include it through his imagination. Although the *Peripetie* has not yet happened, it is included in the narrative strategy and the recognition takes place in our imagination. The sudden change of what was intended by the action, into its opposite⁴⁰¹ is shown by El Greco. The crucifixion of Christ was intended by his enemies to end his power, to destroy the community of his followers, but as is well

⁴⁰⁰St. Luke, 23, 42-43.

⁴⁰¹ Aristotle, *op.cit.*,p.35, §11.

known the opposite happened, Christ overcomes his enemies (as well as death) and Christendom was born.

The use of the aristotelian concept of telling a story and the application of the poetic strategy of narration in this early painting reveals El Greco's interest in poetic and philosophical concepts. It again underpins his lively occupation in finding a mode of narration derived from literary concepts, but adapted to painting.

Next to the three figures who will be converted the three Marys, as mentioned above, occupy their own pictorial space, their own narrative sequence. They are the ones who are watching the physical preparations for the crucifixion. It is not in a vision or by contemplation that they foresee the coming event, but by watching the preparation of the cross. Their perception includes another level in the picture's representation. Their physical approach reminds the priest of the fact that he should recall the Passion in as lively and "physical" a way as he can in his imagination.

It has been demonstrated how intensely El Greco designs different elements in the painting which should serve the priest as a preparation for the mass. Not only the physical undressing is put in front of his eyes, but also spiritual aspects are touched, parallels to the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice in the Mass are kindled in his imagination. Different approaches to how to prepare for the Mass are pointed out for example through the Centurion, Longinus and the good Thief. The gestures of Christ evoke several allusions; the reading of the individual gestures of the right hand together with his gaze, signifies his submission to the Father. The gesture of his left hand was identified as a gesture of forgiveness towards his

executioner. Both gestures read together recall in the mind of the beholder the words Christ spoke on the cross, pleading with his Father: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”⁴⁰² Thus El Greco painted a complex and dense painting, referring to various different aspects of the Crucifixion and the ways of preparing it. Just as the priest is preparing for the Mass by the physical action of dressing himself, Christ was preparing himself for the crucifixion by undressing. Christ in undressing though is accompanied by an inner preparation of his sacrifice. As Christ prepares himself so also should the priest, and be stimulated to do so by contemplating the painting.

⁴⁰² Lk, 23, 34.

4. Too Rhetorical to be a Sacred Painting?

- The Martyrdom of St. Maurice

After his success with the St. Domingo el Antiguo altarpiece, and after Philip II had visited Toledo in the summer of 1579, El Greco received his second royal commission in 1580,⁴⁰³ to paint the Martyrdom of St. Maurice and his Legion.(fig. 66) The painting was intended to occupy one of the lateral altars in one of the side chapels of the church of the Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial

The *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine describes the event of the Martyrdom of St. Maurice and his Legion in three successive episodes. In the first sequence the emperor Maximian gives orders to behead every tenth soldier if they refuse to offer a sacrifice to the Gods. After a first decimation of his legion, St. Maurice speaks to his remaining soldiers about the sacrifice which those already dead had made for their faith, quoting St. Peter “Put your sword into its sheath!”⁴⁰⁴ he reminds them of peace, and sends the Caesar a message: “We are your soldiers, Emperor, and we have taken arms to defend the commonwealth. There is no treason in us, no fear; but we will not betray the faith of Christ.”⁴⁰⁵ Caesar, on receiving this message, orders another decimation of the legion. St. Exuperius, one of the standard bearers of St. Maurice, now speaks again to his comrades about their martyrdom.

⁴⁰³ The first one is thought to be the *Allegory of the Holy League*, see for this painting: Blunt, Antony; ‘El Greco’s “Dream of Philip II” an Allegory of the Holy League’, in: Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 3, 1939-40, pp.58-69.

⁴⁰⁴John, 18, 11.

Finally the Emperor commands all the remaining soldiers of the Thebian legion to be killed.

In El Greco's painting all three sequences reappear. In the background the first sequence is represented and in the foreground the two monologues of St. Maurice and St. Exuperius are merged into a single scene. In the upper left part of the painting Heaven opens and angels are playing music and flowing down to deliver the palm of martyrdom in El Greco's "first vision of a heavenly realm".⁴⁰⁶

St. Maurice is the focus of the foreground, surrounded by soldiers.(fig.67) He is dressed very fashionably, wearing a blue breastplate over a red tunic. A red ribbon, set with elaborate jewellery, crosses his breast, holding his sword and his green and yellow cloak arranged around his shoulders is held by a red brooch. Making a pointing gesture with his right hand, he indicates the martyrdom, pointing to heaven towards the waiting angels. This gesture can also be read as the classical 'adlocutio' gesture, made by antique commanders addressing their army.⁴⁰⁷ His gaze follows the direction of his hand, to a soldier who is seen from the rear. This soldier, dressed in blue and white rests his left hand on his hip and with his right hand makes the 'speaking gesture' already found in Quintilian and mentioned above. This gesture is directed at St. Maurice, whom he is looking at. Obviously they are exchanging arguments. This is underlined by the reappearance of this gesture in the figure of the standard-bearer, known to be St. Exuperius, at the right.

The figure seen from the back presents his argument more forcefully than the

⁴⁰⁵ De Voragine, Jacobus; The Golden Legend, transl. by William Granger Ryan in two vol, Princeton, 1993, vol. II, p.140.

⁴⁰⁶ Wethey, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 40f.

others as not only St. Maurice but also the little boy, his helmet-bearer, are looking at him. St. Exuperius, like all the other main figures in the foreground, stands in a *contrapposto*, arguing with his right hand, and holding the flagstaff with his left. Prominence is given to his elaborate sword. The movements of the braids falling down from the breastplates of all the soldiers are striking. Their movement shows an overall agitation, underlining the emotional state of the martyrs. The use of dress to mediate movement, or rather an emotional state, indicates that El Greco was following the same conviction as Lomazzo and Bonifacio, namely that dress as well as hair can be used as signs.⁴⁰⁸

Between St. Maurice and the figure dressed in blue, another soldier completes the quartet discussing in the foreground. The gesture of his right hand, already discussed in relation to the gesture of the risen Christ in the St. Domingo el Antiguo *Resurrection*, (fig.34) alludes to the Gloria above and therefore to divine grace. The gesture of his left hand seems to demand an interruption of the discussion between the other three protagonists, giving them to think about the consequence of their death, the obtaining of divine grace.

Between St. Maurice and St. Exuperius the faces of five other soldiers are visible, as well as four halberds. We can see the armour of only one of these soldiers, a contemporary uniform, beside the naked legs of the bearer. This legs seem not to match with the upper body. His face and the one next to him are assumed to represent the portraits of some contemporaries.⁴⁰⁹ The soldier

⁴⁰⁷ Brilliant, Richard; *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art*; New Haven, 1963.

⁴⁰⁸ Lomazzo, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-90; Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-90; 470ff.

⁴⁰⁹ For a short summary see: *El Greco Identidad y transformación, op.cit.*, p.369.

who is placed deepest in the pictorial space already sees the open heaven and his transfigured gaze is directed towards the Gloria. In this small group of soldiers, behind the main group itself, two states of mind are recognisable. The earthly heads, that appear to be portraits, are in the foreground, one of them looking directly out of the picture into the beholder's eyes and another looking at St. Exuperius; they still belong to an earthly sphere. In contrast to them stands the one who already perceives a kind of transfiguration.

The foreground of the painting shows a highly rhetorical sequence. The gestures used by the protagonists are derived from antique rhetoric, and were obviously in use in El Greco's time. El Greco paints a scene of conversation and evaluation and he focuses his narration here on the process of decision. In the text of the *Legenda aurea* this process is illustrated through the different sequences in which the saints again and again reaffirm their belief, answering the emperor. El Greco gathers together the monologues of the text into a contemporary way of representation in painting; into a kind of 'sacra conversazione'.

Fray José de Sigüenza wrote about the rejection of the painting in his History of El Escorial:

De un Dominico Greco, que ahora vive y hace cosas excelentes en Toledo, quedó aquí un quadro de San Mauricio y sus soldados, que le hizo para el propio altar de estos santos; no le contentó a Su Majestad (no es mucho), porque contenta a pocos, aunque dicen es de mucho arte y que su autor sabe mucho, y se ven cosas excelentes de su mano....Y tras esto-como decia, en su manera de hablar, nuestro Mudo- los santos se han de pintar de manera que no quiten la gana de

rezaar en ellos, antes pongan devoción, pues el principal efecto y fin de la pintura ha de ser esta.⁴¹⁰

The placing of the “main” subject matter, the actual martyrdom of the saints, in the background of the picture and the rhetorical representation of the protagonists in the foreground were surely a reason for this judgement.

What was disapproved was not only that the martyrdom was relegated to the background, on a considerably smaller scale (the foreground figures are just under life-size), but the martyrdom shown is not that of the main saint, St. Maurice, but of an anonymous figure. The painting which was installed instead of the El Greco, a mediocre painting from Romulo Cincinnato, (fig.68) in contrast ‘corrects’ the ‘faults’ of its predecessor, representing the death of the principal saint in the foreground. Interestingly enough, El Greco got much better paid for his work than Cincinnato, a sign that his art was recognised and highly valued, but regarded as inappropriate for its intended site.

Why did El Greco show the death of a comrade and not of St. Maurice? The answer must lie in the representation of the Saint himself, and the message he had to transmit. St. Maurice stands again in a contrapposto, next to the comrade who is to be executed next. (fig. 69) This figure kneels, immersed in prayer, visualised through his gesture of praying. He is the main focus of a ray of light, which emerges from the Gloria above. St. Maurice

⁴¹⁰ Fray José de Sigüenza; Fundación del Monasterio del Escorial, Madrid, 1963, p.385. “From a certain Dominico Greco, who now lives and makes excellent things in Toledo, there remains here a painting, of St. Maurice and his soldiers, which he did for the altar of the same saints; it did not please His Majesty (which means little), because it pleases very few, although they say it is very artful and its author knows much, and excellent things can be seen by his hand...And besides this- as our Mudo [Navarrete el Mudo] said in his way of speaking - saints have to be painted in such a way that they do not take away the joy of praying to them, but they should animate devotion, because the principal and final aim of painting has to be this.” Translation mine.

looks down at his companion but the gesture of his hands is very difficult to read. It was frequently identified as a gesture of catching: is St. Maurice ready to catch the chopped off head?⁴¹¹ We should not be too literal, but if El Greco had intended to paint the hands catching, he would have painted their gesture much more clearly. The gesture of St. Maurice is indeed a very complex one: On his right hands the ring and little finger are bent; on the left hand only the ring finger; a rather strange gesture for catching something! We have to assume that this particular position of the fingers had a particular meaning which is no longer decipherable today. Although we can not decipher the meaning of the finger position any more, and therefore the specific meaning of St. Maurice's expression, we can think about the narrative strategy which lay behind the fact that it is not St. Maurice's martyrdom that is shown, but rather the Saint attending the martyrdom of one of his soldiers. The element of comforting his comrades appears stronger if we consider the gesture of his left hand in the foreground section. This gesture can be identified with a gesture of protection. As already mentioned in the description of this gesture in the *Espolio* painting it derives from antiquity as the example of the equestrian monument of *Marcus Aurelius* in Rome demonstrates. Whereas in *Marcus Aurelius* it is a prominent gesture, El Greco reduces it considerably, but by placing a group of soldiers directly behind this gesture, as if they are hiding behind St. Maurice's shoulder, which is turned to them, El Greco increases the protective character of the gesture. Therefore El Greco does not paint the martyrs in their martyrdom, but the commander who protects the faith of his soldiers and assist them in death, an

⁴¹¹lately: El Greco, Identidad y Transformación, op.cit., p.368.

analogue with the text of the *Legenda aurea*, and most importantly also analogous with the Good Shepherd.

El Greco depicts exactly the opposite of a good *peripetie*. The action makes no unexpected turn, but is foreseeable: the soldiers are steadfastly refusing to adore an idol and for this they receive death. This simple and straightforward plot, is only enriched by the fact that the protagonists are going to this inevitable fate with the knowledge or recognition that for this deed of martyrdom they will reach heaven. By his arrangement of the scenes El Greco stresses Recognition and therefore offers an intellectual access to the painting. This pictorial strategy was not acceptable for the location of El Escorial at that time. Instead of stirring up the religious emotions of the beholder, animating his devotion, he supports intellectual thinking about the nature of martyrdom.

This reconstruction of the narrative strategy, demonstrates the literary - rhetorical character of this painting made for a learned King who did not want a painting animating his intellectual abilities but rather one that would evoke devotion in the court.

The accumulation of antique rhetorical gestures suggests once more how El Greco tried to make a name for himself as an intellectual artist, but it was one of the main reasons the painting was rejected. That he learned by this failure is certain, as he was to become *the* mystic, religious painter for centuries.

5. Mirroring the Mass - The Prado *Resurrection* and *Pentecost**

All through this study we can appreciate the strong relationship El Greco's Altarpieces have with the actual event of the Mass. This chapter is dedicated to reveal more intensely this interrelation which El Greco obviously intended. Neither the patron, nor the original location of the two paintings analysed are known, but both pictures, the *Resurrection*(fig. 70) and the *Pentecost* (fig.75), are today in the possession of the Prado Museum, Madrid. They have exactly the same measurements, 2,75m x 1,27m and are both round at the top. They are mostly mentioned in relation with the reconstruction of the retablo from the Colegio de Doña Maria de Aragón.⁴¹² Discussions of them have assumed that they to belong to the retablo⁴¹³ or alternatively stand as an independent work. As a consequence of this debate, in which they also have been seen as independent from each other⁴¹⁴, the view of the pictures themselves has been lost.

A close analysis of the language of gesture and the pictorial language El Greco used will reveal the concept of interrelation between the paintings and the Mass and will clarify the unity of the two pictures and their independence from the Doña Maria de Aragón retablo.

*This chapter was slightly modified presented on a congress in Crete, 1999 and will be published in the proceedings of the same.

⁴¹² See for the newest research results: *Actas 2000, op.cit.*

⁴¹³ Alfonso Pérez Sánchez, 'Las series dispersas del Greco, in': Jonathan Brown (ed), *El Greco de Toledo, op.cit.*, pp.156-163 and Álvarez Lopera, José; 'El retablo del Colegio de doña Maria de Aragón. Estado de Cuestión,' in: *Actas 2000 op.cit.*, pp.25-40, especially pp. 33-36 and Pita Andrade, José Manuel and Almagro Gorbea, Antonio; 'Sobre la reconstrucción del retablo del Colegio de doña María de Aragón,' in: *Actas 2000, op.cit.*, pp75-88.

El Greco's Prado painting of the *Resurrection* is divided into two main parts; in the upper part the resurrected Christ is depicted, (fig. 71) floating over the soldiers who are situated in the lower part.(fig.72) Only very few elements break through this vertical division, for example, the Saviour's flagstaff reaches down from the upper part into the lower section of the painting. Apart from one soldier who is asleep, all the others are in action: standing, reaching upwards, standing up and falling down.

In the foreground of the painting, almost entirely occupying it, there is a soldier, falling backwards. This figure seems to be conceived as an antipode of Christ. As Christ is ascending, in a floating movement, the soldier is in the act of falling, thus creating a contradictory movement. Only his elbows are already touching the ground. Through this upward and downward movement a vertical dynamism is created that stresses the extremely elongated rectangle of the painting. The lower end of the flagstaff nearly touches the foot of this soldier. The foot is extremely elevated, the whole body is represented in a perspective as if the soldier is falling down from somewhere above. The foreshortening is much less extreme than for example in the body to the left of him. So not only is the movement of this soldier make him the antipode of Christ, but also his visual appearance, as his right leg is mirroring Christ's legs. Christ is ascending, upright and radiant, while the soldier falls down, bent, and helplessly drawing his sword. It is clear how the soldier was surprised by the Resurrection, drawing his sword out of the sheath, which is in his left hand, but instead of being able to

⁴¹⁴Herold Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol.II , pp.9f. and most recently Marías, Fernando; Actas, 2000, *op.cit.* pp57-74.' El Greco en el Colegio de doña Maria de Aragón: reconstruyendo un retablo en su contexto', in: Actas, 2000,*op.cit.*, pp.57-74.

confront Christ, he is overthrown by His power, Christ is untouched and the soldier falls down.

Christ's gesture is the same one El Greco had already used in the *Santo Domingo Resurrection*. The most important change is that Christ is not looking down, but at the beholder.(fig. 71) The direct addressing of the spectator strongly implies his involvement. It is not the anonymous soldier who is addressed as in the *Santo Domingo* painting, but the individual spectator.

El Greco in this painting uses gestures to demonstrate different stages in the event and to accentuate the steps of recognition. The remarkable gesture of the man standing in the foreground on the right hand side, who is stretching himself, finds a variant in the left background, thereby creating an interesting shift in meaning. It is a frequent gesture in El Greco's work and one already discussed in this study, that reveals his knowledge of the *Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy*. The figure in the background is "illuminated" by the happening of the Resurrection. His face is plunged into the light that emerges from the Resurrected. On the contrary there is only a small strip of light on the face of the soldier in the foreground. He is more involved in activity than the other who appears to represent devotional quietude. The active soldier in the foreground stretches himself, takes a step, not to get closer to the spectator, but to get higher. He longs for the divine light. Therefore, his step can be interpreted symbolically as a step on the way to recognition. The longing for recognition is expressed through this gesture, but also the exaltation of it. The slight variation of this gesture adds another notation to its basic meaning, which was analysed by Wittkower as being

“exaltation” and expressing a connection with the divine.⁴¹⁵ This short analysis shows that not only the singular isolated gesture has to be drawn into consideration but also the whole body, its all-over movement and the different presentations (light-shade, colour, etc.). It reveals that Wittkower’s statement that for El Greco gestures “were signs with an unalterable meaning”, should be revised.

In any case, Wittkower remarks in his article that the three figures on the left (fig.) "show three stages of recognition." (fig. 73)⁴¹⁶ Thus through a succession of gestures a spiritual development is shown. The one dressed in green still lies on the ground, dazzled by the light emanating from the Resurrected. He is the sleeper, who wards off the light in an "automatic" gesture.⁴¹⁷ The orange one crouches, but already dares to look. He is the semi-conscious, "lost in wonderment."⁴¹⁸ The one dressed in blue "knows the meaning of the mystic event."⁴¹⁹

The bodily motion of warding off the light, that both the lower figures are performing, can already be found in paintings by Raphael, for example in *The Liberation of Peter* at the Stanza d’Eliodoro and in drawings for a Resurrection. (fig. 74)⁴²⁰ In El Greco's own work it is also a recurring movement, which indicates that it had a codified meaning. In all versions of

⁴¹⁵ Wittkower, *op.cit.*, pp. 49-53.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁰ see: *Raphael - Die Zeichnungen*, Eckhard Knab (ed.), Stuttgart, 1983, no. 357, p 470 at the right side, 476-478, 482, as well as in the engraving "Resurrection" from Guilo Bonasone (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid) where elements from Michelangelo as well as from Raphael are adapted. The prints from Bonasone were widespread and El Greco may have known them well as he used them in other compositions- see; Enriqueta Harris Frankfort; 'El Greco's Holy Family with the sleeping Christ Child and the Infant Baptist: an Image of Silence and Mystery', in: *Hortus Imaginum, essays in Western Art*, (ed.) Robert Enggass and Marilyn Stokstad, Lawrence, 1974, pp. 103-111.

the *Purification of the Temple*, there is at least one figure protecting itself from the strokes of the scourge in a similar movement. Bonifacio described the function of the gesture as follows:

coprirsi con le braccia

il gesto di tener le braccia elevate, & incurvate, in atto di coprirsi, e di difender alcuno, è di clemenza, e di *protettione*, secondo quel detto del profeta:...⁴²¹

The action has a protective character, only the subject varies. In this painting it is a protection from divine light, and in the painting of the *Purification of the Temple* it is the protection from (divine) strokes. In this way the meaning of this gesture becomes more emotionally or psychologically loaded in later versions of the *Purification of the Temple*, where El Greco enriched its meaning. El Greco continued to represent the same gestures, but enlarging or varying their meaning; not completely changing it, but making them suitable for the theme represented and for his developing approach. This example demonstrates that El Greco was deeply aware of his visual sources and varied them by giving them different layers of meaning. Another possible visual source for the recumbent figure is the antique sculpture of the *Ariadne*⁴²², which explains the ambiguity of the figure, who is not only protecting but exposing herself. With all these visual sources in mind, and with their connotations, we find revealed what must have been a complex process of finding the right gesture for creating the whole composition of the painting.

⁴²¹ Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, p.257, quoting as examples: Psal.35, 62, Matth. 23; italics mine.

The guard in the middle ground, who rests his head on his hand, is either asleep or contemplating in a melancholic pose. He is the only figure in the painting who is not in movement. He is also the only one who wears a helmet, decorated with an eye-catching tuft of feathers. This figure could serve to illustrate "the belief that some people are unable to comprehend the meaning of the Resurrection because they are entirely unilluminated by the Holy Spirit."⁴²³ Already in the *Santo Domingo Resurrection* El Greco had painted a guard who was sleeping, his head resting on his hand.⁴²⁴

The pictorial space in the painting is developed by a circle which El Greco creates through the figures of the guards around Christ. Several levels of space overlap each other and different depths of view are shown. The two figures in the right and left background reach into the upper part of the painting, with the sword of the left hand figure nearly touching Christ's thigh. This is an essential element for the illusion of space. His body reaches the middle of the "room" inside the depth of the picture. The soldier at Christ's right side who looks at Him is the thinnest figure apart from Christ, and his contours nearly fuse with the background. He is the one who is the furthest away in the depth of the pictorial space. The border of the pictorial space in the foreground is, at first glance, marked by the head of the falling soldier. Thus the depth of the picture is fixed by these two figures, the falling one in the foreground and the one with the sword in the background.

⁴²²I am grateful to Barry Wind who made me aware of this fact. See also: Yasunari Kitaura; 'El Greco. La Antigüedad encontrada a través del Renacimiento Italiano' in :El Greco in Italy and Italian Art, op.cit., p. 262.

⁴²³Mann, *Patrons*, op.cit., p. 31.

⁴²⁴ See p.118f.

The spectator has direct eye-contact with Christ. The falling guard likewise looks directly at Christ, but he has to be imagined reaching much further into the spectator's space. His direct view towards Christ folds up the space, and suddenly the picture takes on an unexpected three-dimensional aspect. The spectator has the task of reconstructing the space and through this balancing the extreme height of the painting. This effect is accentuated by the different proportions of the figures. If Christ appears nearly incorporeal, light and bright, elongated in proportions, the falling one looks heavy, dark and compact. The figure dressed in blue in the right foreground also seems compact and even closer to the spectator. Therefore, these two figures, the falling one and the blue one, constitute the spatial border towards the spectator.

In a semi- circle the spectator's view is led through the three figures at the left, into the middle ground. If we try to follow the spatial development and to incorporate the figure of Christ into this, we suddenly realise that Christ is not bound into it. Not even the "illuminated" figure stands on the same spatial level as Christ. The figure of Christ exceeds a defined position in space. By the suspension of a static space, the setting aside of "logically" pictorial space, which one could "walk" through, Christ not only seems to be floating, in the sense of being above the ground, but beyond (spatial) reality. This is stressed by avoiding any indication of location. Even the normally obligatory tomb that would help us to define space is missing.

Christ appears in an aureole of light, framed by hands, which allows an association with the Host. This association opens new interpretative dimensions of the picture. The upper part of the painting, with the circle is

not only presenting one of the central themes of Christianity, the Resurrection, but Christ in the Host. The sacrament of the Eucharist is one of the most fundamental issues of the Catholic Church. If the painting had stood directly on the Altarmensa⁴²⁵, the Resurrected Christ would appear above the Priest, which would have created a special effect during the "elevatio". The Resurrected Christ in his aureole would have mirrored the Host. This mirroring would have been more than a mere allusion to the Host, as it means for the beholder today in the museum, but would have created a strong *affect* in the pious participant in the Mass. Here the painting would not only provide a stepping stone to the divine, as for example in the St. Domingo *Resurrection*, but it would make Christ appear in the Host at every Mass, therefore stressing his "Real Presence". A minor detail in this arrangement would be that the actual altar would replace the pictorial tomb. This possibility shows how closely considered this painting is in its interaction between the Mass and its actual location.⁴²⁶

As stated, the picture represents one of the fundamental ideas of Counter - Reformation, namely the confirmation and affirmation of the belief in the "Real Presence"⁴²⁷. The Protestants were against this belief as they denied that the wine and bread are transubstantiated during Mass into the body and blood of Christ.⁴²⁸ El Greco paints therefore, not only a bodily resurrected Christ, but also a bodily present Christ in the Host. In promoting

⁴²⁵The altar was approximately 1m high.

⁴²⁶For some other painting this interaction was shown by David Davies, 'Roman rite'. *op.cit.*

⁴²⁷ Canon and Degrees *op.cit.*, XIII. Session, chap. 1, p.73.

⁴²⁸Documents of the Christian Church, selected and ed by H. Bettenson,, Oxford, 1967, p.197-8.

the "Real Presence" he is also close to the Catholic Spiritual Reformers, who had a special adoration for the Eucharist.⁴²⁹

The hypothesis that the picture is not only presenting the Resurrection but the "Real Presence" can be confirmed by one detail. Christ's feet are crossed, which alludes to the crucifixion, but he has no wounds, which may point to the fact that He is above the earthly, that His body is uninjured but corporeal.⁴³⁰

The Council of Trent confirmed the dogma that Christ's Resurrection was not only his personal victory over evil, death and sin, but also opened this possibility to his followers. Therefore, resurrection was the basis for the salvation of the soul through the Church.

Whitsuntide complements the supposition of the Church as the one which presents the only true belief, not only through the confirmation of the Apostles by the Holy Spirit, but also by the empowerment of their followers, namely the Holy Catholic Church.

If we look again at the gesture we talked about at the beginning, the raised open hand, we can state that in the *Resurrection*, this gesture expresses an approach to the contact with the divine and exaltation, the receiving of light or in its variation it demonstrates the longing for recognition. In El Greco's painting of the *Pentecost* (fig. 75) this gesture does not express the receiving of light, but of the Holy Spirit. Not fear but wonderment at the light and the happening is depicted. El Greco's pictorial language mediates the adoration and astonishment of the apostles.

⁴²⁹David Davies, 'Roman rite', *op.cit.*, p.216.

The two figures who are standing with their back to the viewer lead into the picture. They are standing on the lowest step of a kind of pedestal. From the colours of their robes and their appearance we can identify them as St. Peter on the right and St. John on the left. In between them and on top of the pedestal sits a youthful Mary with joined hands. Beside her and on the same level, are seven male and two female figures, with only the heads visible of some of them. Below this row of figures and to the right are two further figures and to the left one more. Above all their heads is the tongue of fire of the Holy Spirit. In the arched top of the painting above everything, floats the dove of the Holy Spirit.

Mary's bearing of the head(fig. 76), if we take into consideration Charles Le Brun, can be identified with "ravishment/ecstasy" (fig.77):

But if Admiration be caused by an object above the knowledge of the soul, as power and greatness of GOD, then the emotion of Admiration and of Veneration will be different from the preceding; for the Head will incline towards the Heart, and both the Eye-brows with the Pupils, will be lifted up.

The Declination of the Head seems to denote the extreme lowliness and submission of the soul.

For this reason also the Eyes and the Eye-brows do not draw towards the Gland, but are lifted up towards heaven, where they seem fixed to discover the mysteries which the soul cannot attain to. The mouth

⁴³⁰. This is a difference from the Iconography of the Mass of Saint Gregory

being half open, and the corners a little raising, intimate a kind of Ecstasy and Transport. (sic)⁴³¹

The head of the Virgin fulfils all the described qualities. Both heads, El Greco's and Le Brun's, had their model in the head of the *Santa Cecilia* (fig. 78) by Raphael. El Greco was well aware of Vasari's comment⁴³² about the *Santa Cecilia* and therefore it can be assumed that he consciously choose it as a model. This is another example of a conscious overtaking of a famous model, which was clearly codified in the meaning of its expression of the soul..

The Virgin represents *the* embodiment of pious reception which is formed through the expression of ravishment. Together with the gesture of her hands, the "Mani giunte dinanzi al petto"⁴³³ which signifies humility and devotion, she is the personification of the pious servant - the personification of the faithful who become ecstatic and inspired.

St. Peter is the one who is shown to be overwhelmed by the event. He lays his head back, and has to support himself with his right arm on the balustrade to preventing himself from falling backwards. His left foot is almost off the ground, his left arm sinks down in a gesture of overwhelmed exhaustion. One has the impression that he is moving forward with his chest to receive light, which represents the Holy Spirit, but in the next sequence he will sink down totally exhausted.

St. John in contrary stands or kneels, and is already more settled, he looks up to the Dove, both hands lifted up. The left hand is fully opened, the

⁴³¹ Charles Le Brun, *op.cit.*, p.28, fig. 7, see the slightly different translation by Stoichita, *op. cit.*, p.169

⁴³²See first part chapter 4.5 Lomazzo, and the book from Salas and Mariás, *op.cit.*

right one is slightly closed, with the index finger suggesting a pointing gesture, directing the view upwards. In Bulwer's *Chirologia*, the raised hands can be seen as the rhetoric-gestical expression of "Admiration".

Bulwer describes this gesture as follows:

Admiror (fig.32)

To throw up the hands to heaven is an expression of *admiration*, *amazement*, and *astonishment*...The first time that this expression appeared in the hand of man, was certainly upon occasion of some new unexpected accident for which they gave thanks to God who had so apparently manifested the act of his beneficence.(sic)⁴³⁴

This gesture of adoration can be found several times in the painting, for example the apostle dressed in yellow above St. John makes the same movement. His gesture is underlined by his facial expression. To identify the facial expression we can again look at Le Brun, (fig. 79) who wrote:

Admiration is the chief and most temperate of all the Passions, wherein the Heart feels the least Emotion.

So all the Parts of the face are also receive very little change. If there be any, 'tis only in the elevation of the Eye-brow; But both Ends will be even, and the Eye rather more opened than ordinary; the Pupil in the center between the two Eye-lids. Without motion, and fixed upon the object admired. The mouth also will be somewhat open, but without alteration, any more than the other parts of the face. All the effect of this Passion in an entire suspension of motion to give the Soul Time to

⁴³³ Bonifacio, *op.cit.*, p.277, already quote p. 114.

deliberate upon what she has to do, and attentively consider the object that presents itself to her; which if uncommon and extraordinary, what was but, at first, a simple emotion of Admiration, then becomes Esteem.(sic)⁴³⁵

The raised eyebrow and the widened pupil can be found in the face of the Apostle, but not the slightly opened mouth. Only Mary's mouth is clearly opened. This is a surprising circumstance-because it is written in the Acts: "And they were all filled with the holy Ghost, and began to speake with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance"⁴³⁶

The unequivocal fact that Mary's mouth is opened, emphasises the contrast between her and the closed mouths of all the other figures: their mouths are only depicted as a dark line or they are even invisible. With this emphasis El Greco stresses Mary's position, her humility, her adoration and her power of speech and he recommends her as a mediator.

The right hand of the yellow apostle mirrors the gesture of the one who stands behind him. The expression of this gesture is the same as in the Resurrection and is the gesture found so often in El Greco's paintings. Once again it states the connection with the divine and reveals exaltation. It is the intensification and enrichment of the simple 'admiror' gesture.

The figure standing at the right border of the painting looks at the dove and leans the upper part of his body to the beholder. With his left arm he stretches downwards framing the face of the one standing below him. If the one dressed in yellow looks at Mary in astonishment, this one looks with

⁴³⁴ Bulwer, *op.cit*, p. 33, plate A, ill. D.

⁴³⁵ Le Brun, *op.cit*, p.24, fig.3.

⁴³⁶ Acts, 2, 4.

the same expression at the dove: “All the effect of this Passion is an entire suspension of motion, to give the Soul Time to deliberate upon what she has to do, and attentively consider the object that presents itself to her;...”.⁴³⁷

The second apostle on the right is the only one who seeks direct eye contact with the spectator. He looks seriously and sternly out of the painting, seemingly untouched, his function appears to be the one of an admonisher.⁴³⁸ The apostle next to him, dressed in green, seems to mirror the one in yellow, but his expression is also very serious and controlled.

Gestures are not purely transmitting expressions but are directing the view of the spectator and helping to construct space. The hand of the apostle dressed in white points at St. Peter, St. Peter's hand points at St. John and his indicator leads our view to the figures at the left, who are indicating the three possible focus points of focus of the painting: towards Mary, the Dove or the spectator.

St. John, as stated above, performs the gesture of adoration, the main gesture of the picture. He also leads the view with his left hand further upwards.. His figure acts as a relay not only in the picture itself but also as an introduction into it.

The apostle in the middle of the left hand group lays his arm over his head. If we consider the position of his head to find out the direction of his view, we can state that he is not looking at Mary, or at the dove. Maybe he represents the one who realises most slowly what is happening and who is frightened before he can be astonished. If so, El Greco would also have given

⁴³⁷ Le Brun, *op.cit.*, p.24

⁴³⁸ This seems to be the other a self-portrait of El Greco, that would be the second in the ensemble of the Aragon Retable.

expression to initial non-understanding and there would be a connection with the *Resurrection*.

El Greco constructs space in the *Pentecost* in a similar and yet contrary way to the *Resurrection*. The Dove floats in the middle above the circle of the Apostles, with its "location" defined by their gaze. (At this point he is near the spatial construction of in the *Resurrection*, with the difference that here he is defining the space of the dove rather than of Christ in the *Resurrection*) The pictorial space on the one hand is formed through the pedestal - (in the *Resurrection* the grave that could have served as a similar constructor of space is missing!) and an echelon formation, but on the other hand through a framing of looks. Mainly through Mary's and John's gaze, but also because of the gazes of both apostles standing at the border of the picture left and right, a pictorial space is built, which allows the position of the dove to be fixed. The reflections of light on Mary's knees and John's neck allows us to reconstruct the source of light as the dove who floats in the middle of the circle formed by the Apostles.

Even if it was not possible in the *Resurrection* to localise the figure of Christ in the pictorial space, as if it was El Greco's intention to let Christ float in space to demonstrate His conquest of the earthly and corporeal, the possible localisation of the dove in the *Pentecost* shows that El Greco uses a different spatial strategy. In contrast to the Resurrected the Dove is represented as really present, whereas Christ is represented through his "Real Presence"

If the painting had stood directly upon the altar, the figures of St. John and St. Peter would have worked like an elevation of the priest, doubling him. Therefore the priest could be seen as another figure in the

painting. Entering the picture in this way the priest would represent the pious congregation, attending the Mass, incorporating it into the community of Apostles, emphasising his importance and authority. He would look towards Mary, who would be the central figure of the picture not only pictorially, but also in meaning. Her role as mediator would be stressed again.

In the painting of the *Pentecost* many examples are shown of how to encounter the miracle of the Pouring out of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, this opens up the possibilities of a wide possible spectrum of individual modes of reception, and on the other hand the biblical event of "speaking in thousands of tongues" finds its pictorial equivalent, an allusion which the "literati" would also certainly have approved of. El Greco does not only paint albertian *varietà*, but a step by step approximation to the holy object of the event, by which an understanding of the happening can take place.

As in the *Resurrection*, elements of the Counter-Reformation can also be found in the *Pentecost*. Two essential beliefs of the Catholic Church are represented: the promotion of Mary as Intercessor and the authorisation of the commission of the Catholic Church.

The analysis of the language of gesture and the examination of the pictorial strategies leads to a complex theological program, which allows the assumption that the two pictures formed part of one retable. The program differs from the retable of the college of Doña María de Aragón, which has been shown by Mann to be dependent on the writings of Beato Alonso de Orozco⁴³⁹ which can not be said of these two paintings.

⁴³⁹ Mann, *Patrons op.cit.*, pp.47-110.

Excursus: The series of the Purification of the Temple

El Greco painted, as far as we know today, at least six different versions of the *Purification of the Temple*. The first known version was painted between 1560-70⁴⁴⁰ during El Greco's Italian period. Today it is referred to as the Washington version (fig. 80, 65x83 cm, signed in Greek capital letters "Domineers Theotokopoulos kres"). The latest known version was painted c.1610-14, and is on display in the church of San Gines, Cofradia del Santissimo Sacramento in Madrid (fig. 87). It has been assumed that El Greco was only responsible for the new design and that his son, Jorge Manuel, executed the painting.⁴⁴¹ In the latest restoration though, a signature was found and the subtle handling of colour and light reveals that it is entirely by El Greco's hand.⁴⁴²

In the paintings of the *Purification of the Temple* El Greco developed a single subject matter over 40 or maybe 50 years. It is a comparatively rare subject matter which only came into favour in the second half of the 16th century, in connection with Counter-Reformation. Before the Reformation the scene of the Purification of the Temple sometimes formed part of the scenes of the life of Christ or the Passion, but after the Reformation it took on a new importance; "Protestants compared it with their own reforming activities; and to the Catholics of the Counter-Reformation it symbolised the

⁴⁴⁰ Wethey, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 66, I mainly follow the dating of Wethey concerning the other versions.

⁴⁴¹ Wethey, *op.cit.*, II, p.70.

⁴⁴² Alvarez Lopera, José; catalogue remark, in: *Identidad y Transformación, op.cit.*, p.424.

purging of the Church of heresy.”⁴⁴³ Three Popes had this subject-matter cast on one side of one of their medals.⁴⁴⁴ Whether El Greco chose the theme mainly because of this preference is not known, but he continued painting it throughout his working life. The fact that four versions appear in the inventories made after his death⁴⁴⁵ demonstrate that they were not primarily for sale, but that El Greco undertook some sort of personal examination with this subject-matter and most interestingly varied the composition.⁴⁴⁶ This variation at first sight seems marginal, but a closer examination reveals how El Greco’s approach develops.

The biblical source of the theme is St. John, II, 14-16, where the Purification takes place on the first Passover feast, after Christ’s first miracle in Cana; and St. Matthew XXI, 12-13, it is on Palm Sunday after Christ’s glorious entry into Jerusalem. St. John’s version is the more detailed one:

And he found in the Temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold the doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise.⁴⁴⁷

What is fundamentally different in the two versions is not only the placement in time, but the discussion which follows. In the gospel according to St. John,

⁴⁴³ Harris, Enriqueta; El Greco. The Purification of the Temple, London, 1944, p.11f.

⁴⁴⁴ Wethey, op.cit., vol. II, p.66.

⁴⁴⁵ Wethey, op.cit., vol. II, p.67.

⁴⁴⁶ I am aware of the fact that El Greco repeated some subject matter more often, for example St. Francis, or St. Peter in Penitence, or Mary Magdalen in Penitence, but firstly these are not large compositions, consisting only of one or two figures (St. Francis and Friar Leo), and secondly there was a market for these pictures. As we know of only 6 or 7 existing versions (counting the workshop replica) of the “Purification” the four in the inventories seems on consideration quite a high number.

the priests ask Christ what sign he might give them to demonstrate the rightness of his deeds. What follows is a prediction of the Resurrection, the statement that he is able to rebuild the Temple in three days. St. Matthew in contrast describes how the blind and lame came to him, and how He healed them. He continues describing the envy of the priests and the praise of the children singing 'Hosanna!'

All of El Greco's versions have in common that the figure of Christ is placed in the centre of the composition.⁴⁴⁸ The two early versions tend to the left, with nearly all the figures on the left side of the painting and a comparatively large open space on the right. This only changes in the later Spanish versions, where the figures have grown and the open space on the right is diminished.

In the Washington version (fig. 80) the scene takes place in the vestibule of the Temple; through an archway in the middle ground, various buildings reminiscent of Venetian palaces can be seen. The main scene, with Christ driving out the people from the Temple, is placed left and centre. A space or passage to another room in the background opens up at the right side. In this background room two other figures are discussing. The floor tiles in this part of the building have the typical chequerboard pattern used in the Renaissance to indicate perspective more clearly and this floor is also the highest in the painting. There are in total three different levels: Christ and most of the other figures are standing on the middle one. Only two figures in the foreground, an old man and a young woman are situated on the lowest

⁴⁴⁷ St. John, 2, 14-16

level of the picture, sitting on the step which Christ is standing on. At the left there is another step, connecting the upper floor and the main floor. This staggered arrangement is primarily an aid to creating 'real' space, but also differentiates between the violent scene on the left and the much more structured space on the right, which allows a view into the inner temple. Significantly the floor also creates a border between the sinners and the redeemed, created by the black and white tiles at the foreground.

The young woman in the foreground left, covers in a gesture of shame her naked breast with her left hand and her right arm rests on a wicker cage with pigeons. Her shoulders as well as her right leg are uncovered. She looks directly at Christ. As Davies has remarked, this figure as well as the other half-naked women, are probably alluding to a paragraph in the text *The Virgin's Profession* by St. Jerome:

Jesus entered into the temple and cast out those things which were not of the temple. For God is jealous, and He does not allow His Father's house to be made a den of robbers. Where money is counted, where there are pens of doves for sale, where simplicity is slain, where a virgin's breast is disturbed by thoughts of worldly business...⁴⁴⁹

St. Jerome merged the two passages in the gospels of St. John and St. Matthew, and El Greco painted nearly an illustration of it. Only some symbolical references are included in the overall composition which enriches its narrative.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ About the possible influence of Michelangelo, or Marcello Venusti, see, Wethey, *op.cit.*, II, p.66. There are a lot of different sources for nearly all figures in the pictures, but I will not cite all.. Please see mainly Wethey, *op.cit.*, p. 66-70 and Harris, Purification of the Temple, *op.cit.*, p.7.

⁴⁴⁹ Davies, David, 'El Greco and the Spiritual Reform Movements in Spain', *op.cit.*, p.63

⁴⁵⁰ *ibidem.*

Behind the woman with the cage of doves, lies another woman, who covers her head with her arm. An identification of this gesture is possible by consulting Bonifacio who wrote:

coprirsi la testa con le mani, o con la veste;

è gesto di timore, quasi che si voglia difender la testa da qualche percossa.⁴⁵¹

I have already mention this figure and the ambiguity of her gesture in connection with the Prado Resurrection. It is a protective gesture performed while fainting. Above this fainting figure and directly confronting Christ, stands a young man who is about to cover his head or face as well. He will get to taste the scourge in the next moment, and he is about to cover his head although the lash is directed towards his trunk, but his vigorous movement stands in relation to the powerful movement of Christ. The movement of the drapery of this figure emphasises the dynamic, dramatic movement particularly because it is more an abstract form than a real falling of drapery.

On the left of this figure stands another young man who also covers his head, though he uses both arms.⁴⁵² It seems as if these two figures are completing one movement. First, the spectator's view is drawn to the one confronted with Christ, but a sideways glance adds the missing instance, when the young man would have completed his movement and covered his head. By seeing the movement completed next to him, we get the suggestion of how to replenish the movement of the former. The significance of this movement is unambiguous; it is a physical protection out of fear and evoked by physical violence. It is a spontaneous gesture, as it is a reaction to Christ's

⁴⁵¹ Bonifacio, op.cit., p. 25ff.

movement. Behind these figures and to the left we see some more heads of people mostly looking down or back clutching their belongings and fleeing the temple.

Next to Christ, still on his right side, two older men are visible. One is dressed in blue, the same blue as Christ's robe, and the outlines of their robes actually melt into each other. This old man, whose head is also covered with his robe, has both his hands elevated at shoulder height. The palm of his left hand and the back of his right hand are visible. In the later versions the palm of his right hand will also be visible and through this slight turn the gesture becomes clearer although it is an ambiguous movement as well. As it is depicted in this version it can be read as a gesture of shrinking back, but also expresses the intention to conciliate or repel the strokes. One can quite well imagine the inner conflict of the old man, wavering between fear and the intention of stopping Christ. This gesture becomes much clearer in the later versions.

Christ stands slightly to the left of centre in the picture and thus the space where the crowd is punished is smaller than the space for the unpunished.(fig. 81) Christ puts his weight on his left foot with the right one slightly lifted up. In the later version the right foot is more visible and completely in the air. Through his lifted foot Christ's movement is given a dynamic, almost violent expression. He is balancing to put all his weight into his strokes. His upper body is strongly twisted: whereas his pelvis is seen nearly frontally, his shoulders are turned almost into profile. His right hand with the lash is drawn back, his fist raised to the height of his left shoulder.

⁴⁵² See quote on p. 19 where the protection with both arms is mentioned by Bonifacio

The left hand only serves to balance him, only in the later version a clear gesture is developed. The vigorous twist was certainly a reference to Michelangelo's *figura serpentinata*, and maybe it was also a reaction to Quintilian's remark about the Discobolos of Myron:

The body when hold bold upright has but little grace, for the face looks straight forward, the arms hang by the side, the feet are joined and the whole is stiff from top to toe. But that curve, I might almost call it motion, with which we are so familiar, gives an impression of action and animation.⁴⁵³

The twist of the body and therefore its expression, is additionally stressed through the blue robe. One length of material falls over the left shoulder down to the right thigh and another flows down the left shoulder to the left hand, ending in a parallel movement to the former length. The dynamic movement of Christ and, as a reaction to it, the movement of the crowd, vividly depicts the scene. With this dynamism El Greco achieves the expression of the biblical event in a dramatic element, involving the beholder and catching his attention.

On Christ's left side in the background there stands a group of six followers or disciples. It is clear through their movements that they do not belong to the mob of the other side, fleeing the temple, and that they are not the subject of Christ's actions. A young man, shown in profile and dressed in blue, lays his hand on his chest, a gesture of self-reference which reappears very often in El Greco's work.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵³ Quintilian, *op.cit.*, Bk. II, XII, 9-11.

⁴⁵⁴ See the description of this gesture in the second part, chapter 3.

An odd scene is taking place on Christ's left, immediately next to him. Two old men are involved in a conversation, untouched by the violent scene in front of them. The one sitting in the foreground on a step leans on his basket. In a rather protective gesture he is holding the handle of his basket, resting his head on his right hand. He looks up at the other one, who is standing behind and above him, listening to his arguments. Their faces are quite near each other, expression of their intense conversation and of the noise around them. The gesture of the one standing indicates that he is trying to explain what is happening and necessity of it to the other.

The two nude children in the open space at the right, one holding his mother's hand, the other lying at the ground, may refer to the passage in Matthew 21, 16 following the purification of the temple, where the children recognise Christ as the Redeemer, singing 'Hosanna!'. It is significant that El Greco eliminates this whole scene in the later versions, being aware that it is not powerfully expressed and that it makes the composition uneven. One further detail of interest is the trussed lamb in the right foreground. It is a familiar symbol but not mentioned in the cited biblical texts. El Greco might have wanted to stress the difference between the two "pictures": Christ in violent action and Christ as the Lamb of God. He also stressed the salvationist character of Christ, who evoked through this provocative action the hatred of the high priests and Pharisees. To sum up, then, it is noticeable that El Greco's assumed first version of the subject-matter is a quite literal illustration of the event and in its representation is deeply dependent on Italian Renaissance tradition.

The second known version which today is in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts is dated ca. 1570-75 and measures 117x150 cm (fig.82). In contrast to the Washington version it is painted in oil on canvas. It is signed in Greek capital letters: *Domenikos Theotokopoulos kres, e'poiei* on the step below Christ. The most striking difference from the first version, is that in the lower right corner; there is now no longer a bound lamb lying on the floor, but instead four portraits can be seen. They are usually identified as (from left to right) Titian, Michelangelo, Giulio Clovio, and Raphael(?).⁴⁵⁵. Apart from this “Homage” and minor details in the architecture (the two sculptures, that were located in niches in the background of the temple, left and right of Christ, in the Washington version are replaced by columns), the composition remains the same and the movements of the figures are almost unchanged.(fig. 83)

The next version in the Frick Collection, New York, dated between 1595-1600, is much smaller, only 42 x 63 cm. Wethey assumed it to be a sketch for a larger composition, namely the London National Gallery version.⁴⁵⁶

The London National Gallery version is dated 1600-1605 and measures 106x130cm (fig.84). In general the figures have become larger and the open space at the right has been eliminated. The many heads in the background , as they were unnecessary for the dynamic of the painting, are

⁴⁵⁵ For the identification of the last portrait see: Edgar Wind; A self-portrait of El Greco, in Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, III, 1939-40, pp. 141-142 and Wethey, op.cit., II, p. 68f.

⁴⁵⁶ Wethey, op.cit., p.69.

omitted and the whole composition is much more compact. The recumbent female figure in the left foreground has been replaced by a young man who picks up a heavy wooden chest; obviously he is a moneychanger, trying to save his proceeds.⁴⁵⁷ Through the enlarged scale of the figures the scene becomes much clearer and the dynamism of the earlier versions is much intensified with the gestures and their expressions much more clearly readable. On the left side only four protagonists of the early versions are conserved. The fainting woman, the figure standing above her, confronted with Christ, the old man in between them and the one at the left side carrying a basket on his head. This figure had only covered his head with his arms in the earlier versions, now as he carries a basket his nakedness is much more emphasised.

The gesture of the old man with the cowl, who stands next to Christ, is now clearly readable.(fig. 85) A comparison with one of the apostle of Leonardo's *Last Supper* (the third apostle from left) helps to identify the meaning; Bulwers **Canon XXXV**, with an illustration (fig. 21) is clearly is dependent on Leonardo as a model: "Both hands objected with the palms adverse is a fore-right adjunct of pronunciation fit to help the utterance of words coming out in detestation, despite, and exprobatation" (sic)⁴⁵⁸. The disciple in the Last Supper rejects the just spoken words from Christ that one of them will betray him. El Greco now takes the gesture of rejection to express how the old man tries to repel Christ's anger.

⁴⁵⁷ This figure has its model in a figure of Raphael, in the painting of the 'Lapidation of St. Stephan', this figure picks up a stone; see Alvarez Lopera, José, El Retablo del Colegio de doña Maria de Aragon, Madrid, 2000, p.29f.

⁴⁵⁸ Bulwer, op.cit., p.187, Plate D; *Execratione repellit*, W.

Behind Christ and to his right there is another sinner visible who covers his head with both arms. El Greco picks up the gesture of covering the head, but varies its meaning, for where in the earlier versions, the covering was more a reaction to the physical action radiated by Christ, now it is more an expression of pain, illustrating the fact that divine grace has been changed into divine anger. Montano describes this gesture in his 'liber ieremiae':

Dolor gravissimus animi:

Idem etiam manus super caput, significant,
dolorem videlicet, & moerorem animique impatientiam,
s.s.e.⁴⁵⁹

As usual Montano gives an example from the Bible, quoting a passage which describes the action and its emotional expression. It is exactly the withdrawal of divine grace which creates the 'dolor gravissimus animi' that is expressed in this particular gesture. The gesture therefore changed from a physical, protective gesture caused by an action, to a gesture that expresses a despairing inner state of mind.

On the right side of the painting even more modifications have been made. The two old men in the foreground remain, but one who was leaning on his basket is replaced by a kneeling figure, seemingly an apostle, presumably St. Peter.⁴⁶⁰ Behind, the young apostle pointing with his open hand to his breast is still there, but now with a counterpart, presumably another apostle, who points to Christ and looks at his younger colleague. Behind them are some other figures, only recognisable as a group. In the right background, the half naked woman with the child in the earlier

⁴⁵⁹ Montano, *op.cit.*, p.12.

versions is replaced by a young woman carrying a basket on her head.

Depicted in a contemplative manner, she is counting on her fingers, as if counting her day's takings, therefore she has to be counted among the merchants and the sinners, and not among the redeemed, although she is on the apostles' side.⁴⁶¹

All the figures are not as compact as in the earlier versions, but slightly elongated, and this elongation is particularly noticeable in the figure of Christ.(fig. 86) Christ is now not so vigorously twisted, and he seems to hover over the floor. The most significant change in his figure is the gesture of his left hand. In the National Gallery version it is the first time that this gesture is comparable with the gesture in the *Espolio* which Davies interprets as a "general" expression of Christ's forgiveness.⁴⁶² Significantly El Greco also employed this gesture in his various versions of the *Agony in the Garden* (fig. 1) as mentioned in the introduction

The reliefs in the background, on the left the *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise* and on the right the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, two events in the old Testament, which were often represented as the prototypes of the Purification and Crucifixion, are an expression, as was realised by Harris, of El Greco's intensified preoccupation with symbolical meanings. Harris works out in her study that each relief is related to the group of people underneath them: the unredeemed are situated underneath Adam and Eve and

⁴⁶⁰ Harris, *Purification*, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁴⁶¹ Although Davies in his article, 'Spiritual Reform Movements', *op.cit.*, p.64, counts this maid to the redeemed I can not follow his interpretation, because in my view the gesture of the figure is unambiguous: she counts on her fingers. Even if one would argue that she might count arguments, as the counting of arguments on fingers was an antique rhetorical gesture, this counting of arguments would not fit into the narrative as Christ is not arguing but in action, besides that it would be quite inappropriate for a woman to make this gesture.

⁴⁶² Davies; 'Roman rite', *op.cit.*, p.219.

the Redeemed underneath Isaac.⁴⁶³ To this symbolic meaning another aspect can be added, as the action of Gabriel can be paralleled with the action of Christ, expelling the unworthy from the temple/ Paradise. One of the figures in the relief is covering his head, carrying out a similar movement to one of the figures in the temple. The elevated right hand of Christ is also reflected in the movement of Abraham, sacrificing Isaac. Although the parallel is not the sacrifice (as this would be, as mentioned above, the Crucifixion⁴⁶⁴), but the obedience, the doing of God's will. Just as Abraham obeyed, so Christ is cleansing the house of His Father to reinstate what was written: "It is written My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."(sic).⁴⁶⁵ Davies worked out that behind this allusions a clear didactic function can be detected, namely the "need for every individual in the Church to purge his conscience and to perform good works, notably prayer".⁴⁶⁶ Thus to the spectator the similarity of movements conveys that the purification of the temple is also meant in relation to his soul.⁴⁶⁷

As Harris stated, the National Gallery version reveals El Greco's much more intense preoccupation with symbolical elements. In the earlier versions we can detect that he seems more preoccupied in his struggle with the narrative elements . If we compare the Washington version with the London one, we can state that both are predominated by a dramatic movement, suitable for the theme. The confusing abundance of the earlier versions gives way to a much more structured, but no less dramatic composition. The

⁴⁶³ Harris, Purification, *op.cit.*, p.12.

⁴⁶⁴ Davies, 'Spiritual Reform Movements', *op.cit.*, p.64.

⁴⁶⁵ St. Matthew, 21, 13.

⁴⁶⁶ Davies, 'Spiritual Reform Movements', *op.cit.*, p.64.

increased scale of the figures is one of the main reasons why it achieves a certain clarity and much better readability. Although in the early versions the main focus is on the narrative, or on the concept of narration, it is more difficult to read, because of its many minor details, and because El Greco does not apply any means of emphasis. In the London version a lot of people are still visible, but their movements are more accentuated and more easily readable; no minor details distract the attention of the spectator. Thus El Greco applies a method of eliminating all extraneous detail to concentrate the action, he simplifies and therefore clarifies the composition.⁴⁶⁸

The fifth version, today in the collection Várez Fisa in Madrid, painted around 1610-1614, repeats almost exactly the London version.

The last known version dated around 1610-14, situated today in the church of St. Gines, Madrid, shows some significant variations. It is the only version El Greco painted in a horizontal format (126x98,5cm, fig. 87). The scene does not take place in the vestibule but in the interior of the temple, in the sanctuary. Behind Christ the arch which gives a view of Venetian palaces is replaced by a niche which is based on El Greco's altarpiece in the Hospital de la Caridad in Illescas.⁴⁶⁹ Within this niche is an obelisk and a chest, alluding to the tabernacle.⁴⁷⁰ The architectural background is increased in scale, occupying the upper half of the picture (by comparison: 1/3 in the

⁴⁶⁷ See for further sources of the analogy of temple and soul: Davies, 'Spiritual Reform Movements', *op.cit.*, p.64.

⁴⁶⁸ See Harris, Purification, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁴⁶⁹ Wethey, *op.cit.*, vol. II, p.70.

early versions and ¼ in the London version), thus the figures which reached a certain monumentality in the London version are reduced, which also evokes a reduction of expressiveness. El Greco applies a totally different means to emphasise his figures; instead of his usual habit of reducing space, only indicating outlines and setting monumental figures within this scene, he indicates a large open church space with an elaborate three coloured floor, and sets rather small figures into this space. These figures are smaller but more elongated than in the London version, but their expressiveness is intensified by the contrast of the huge open space above them. The compression of the actual dynamic group intensifies the effect of the dramatic scene.

The relief with the sacrifice of Isaac has vanished and a male nude figure stands above the relief of the Expulsion from Paradise.(fig. 88) This nude figure makes, as already stated by Davies, a protective gesture sheltering the unredeemed.⁴⁷¹ It is the same gesture, already mentioned above, that Christ applies to shelter his disciples. Just as Christ protects his followers, so the idol protects his. As Davies had already elucidate, the appearance of this male nude figure evokes the question, referring to St. Paul: “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? ” and following this question: “ for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”(sic)⁴⁷² The beholder who contemplates the picture, is reminded of this passage and therefore to the analogy made by St. Paul

⁴⁷⁰See for a detailed description of the altar niche and its allusions, Davies, ‘Spiritual Reform Movements’, *op. cit.*, p.65 and from the same author: ‘The Ascent of the Mind’, *op.cit.* ,p. 199f.

⁴⁷¹ Davies, ‘Spiritual Reform Movements’, *op.cit.*, p.65.

between the temple and the soul. By this reminder, he is animated to draw a parallel with the purification of the temple and to purge himself and his own soul.

Below the relief of the Expulsion from Paradise the only new figure is added, dressed in a red tunic. The gesture of the right arm, with the hand bent backwards, palm upwards, is the gesture Wittkower defined as expressing “the enthusiastic acknowledgement of divine revelation or ... the union with the divine in a state of rapture”⁴⁷³ already mentioned in connection with the Aragon *Baptism*. The same gesture also reappears in the presumably contemporary painting, the enigmatic *Opening of the Fifth Seal*.⁴⁷⁴ In all there are four figures in this painting which are executing this exclamatory gesture. If Wittkower was right in assuming that for El Greco gestures “were signs with an unalterable meaning”⁴⁷⁵ and his identification of this gesture is also right, the figure at the left side in the *Purification of the Temple* expresses by its gesture a state of rapture and exaltation. With the aid of Montano’s *liber ieremiae* it can be realised that this gesture was frequently quoted in the Bible in connection with praying:

Oratio: Manus in altum sublatae, orantis & miseriam suam
profitentis habitus est, s.s.e. ⁴⁷⁶

with examples from:

psal. 28.2; 76.2; 87.10.

⁴⁷² 2 Corinthians, 6:16.

⁴⁷³ Wittkower, *op.cit.*, p.53.

⁴⁷⁴ Mann, Richard G. ‘The Altarpiece for the Hospital of Saint John the Baptist, Outside the Walls, Toledo’, in: *Figures of Thought: El Greco as Interpreter of History, Tradition and Ideas*, (ed) Brown, Jonathan, Washington, 1982, (Studies in the History of Art, vol. 11), pp. 57-76.

⁴⁷⁵ Wittkower, *op.cit.*, p.46.

⁴⁷⁶ Already quoted in the Montano chapter.

and:

Oratio. Petitio: Palmarum in sublime expansio, habitus est eorum,
qui, petentes orant Deum, s.s.e.⁴⁷⁷

with an example from:

Exod.9.29.

Davies refers to three other passages from the Old Testament (1 Kings 8: 22: psal. 134:2) and the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:8) which are also describing this gesture in connection with prayer. He further states that this gesture was alluded to by Pseudo Dionysius as mentioned above, as well as by St. Basil, whose *Homilies* were in El Greco's library, in connection with baptism.⁴⁷⁸

Supported by these sources the gesture can be read, in addition to the interpretation of Wittkower, as a gesture used when wishing to express that a relation with the divine is sought (in prayer and rite of baptism) or already established (in rapture, exaltation, transmitting of messages). The figure who executes this movement, is walking, against the main movement of the left group, towards the middle of the painting. As she stands directly underneath the relief and the idol her gesture can be readable as an expression of repenting. She repents her misled belief, and goes in the opposite direction from Adam and Eve, towards Christ. The two merchants at the left border, both clutching their possessions, are directing their looks towards this figure, paying more attention to her.

The counterpart of this figure is the female figure on the right side of the painting, who already appeared in the London version.(fig. 89)

Apparently totally untouched by the scene in front of her, only involved in

⁴⁷⁷ Already quoted in connection with the Assumption of the Virgin, Santo Domingo el Antiguo.

counting her day's takings, she seems to personify the unredeemed sinner. Thus on both sides, which at the first sight seemed divided into the good and the bad, there is situated a figure which breaks this pattern.

The study of the series of paintings of the *Purification of the Temple* gives an overview of El Greco's development from his Italian years to his later years in Toledo. They demonstrate not only his change in style but also how the focus of his artistic work shifted, from a more literal concept of narration, based on the gospel story, to something more symbolic, or as Davies remarked: "In accord with the precepts of Neo-Platonism, he rejected literal and allegorical approaches and embraced that of the mystical. However this does not imply that El Greco was a mystic."⁴⁷⁹ This shift from a more literal transcription of the text of the gospel implies a personal appeal to purge oneself. The paintings become more didactic in character which reveal his contacts with reformers within the Catholic Church.⁴⁸⁰ While in the first version the gestures are violent but not yet ruled, in the last version they are still expressive and powerful but arranged in a very controlled manner. The chaotic impression of the first version, the overwhelming drama developed before our eyes, is now given a clearly staged character. All extraneous details are abandoned in favour of a clear language which transmits to the beholder not only the drama of the occurrence, but which animates his own conscience. Thus through a better structuring of the composition and a reduction in the number of figures, now on a larger scale, the language of

⁴⁷⁸ Davies, 'Spiritual Reform Movements', *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁴⁷⁹ Davies, 'The Ascent of the Mind to God', *op.cit.*, p.214.

⁴⁸⁰ Davies, 'Spiritual Reform Movements', *op.cit.*

gestures becomes more easily readable and the drama developed through the interaction of gestures becomes plainly presented before the spectators' eyes.

Conclusion

In this thesis various paintings by El Greco, from his early Spanish altarpieces to his late works, have been subject of investigation. The applied language of gesture and their expressiveness has been explored; how El Greco created space by gestures and how his narrative structure is dependent on his gestural canon has been analysed. Thus it can be established that the medium 'gesture' bears a wide range of possibilities for El Greco. Some elements in his style, which often had been commented on as rare, mystic, extravagant or perhaps 'mad' have been discovered to be elements enriching his expressive range and the readability of his work. His profound knowledge of theological as well as philosophical texts and his friendship with leading personalities of the cultural life of the time demonstrate that he was able to construct complex pictorial programmes.

It can be established that the gestures in El Greco's work have a certain degree of stability in their meaning, Wittkower's thesis that gestures had an "unalterable meaning" for El Greco must, however, be corrected. Instead of an unalterable meaning, El Greco enriched the meaning of certain gestures that are frequent in his work and these therefore can be seen as a corpus of gestures he was preoccupied with. Preoccupied in the sense of exploring their possibilities, developing their range of expression and linking together emotional, rhetorical and symbolical meanings into complex signs. El Greco was engaged or concerned with the possible levels of meaning a gesture could transmit. El Greco mostly did not seek a single meaning, a

single expression in a gesture, (if so the gesture stands out), but a development of the expressiveness of a gesture, how he could enrich a gesture, not fading out the primary meaning, but incorporating and developing it into a specific, desired direction. A result of this enrichment is that the gesture is endowed with meaning and becomes a complex sign, often very difficult to read. We can infer that his preference for these complex gestures in his late paintings, whereby they lost readability, was one reason for the rejection of his late style. He began to move outside a broadly conventional readability.

It could be said that El Greco had different approaches towards gestures. He adopts gestures already enriched with meaning, like for example that of Raphael's *Santa Cecilia*, leaving their strong expression unaltered, playing with the allusions to the famous model. Or he takes a model and adds another level of meaning, developing it further in various paintings. This differentiated handling of gestures and their various levels of meanings stresses the importance of research into the language of gestures in general, and specifically in the work of El Greco, because it opens new fields of recognition for the art-historian as well as for the lay viewer.

In the first chapter of the second part of this thesis we have shown how El Greco, following the conditions set by his patrons, created highly persuasive paintings. That he was familiar with rhetorical concepts becomes clear not only in this context, but also in relation to the painting of the Martyrdom of St. Maurice. Here it became clear that El Greco, not aware of the fact that he was to create a painting 'animating to prayer' misjudged the persuasive power it required, and therefore painted a highly rhetorical painting, but not a

'pious' one, as Philip II preferred for this particular location. This misunderstanding enables us to learn about El Greco's familiarity with rhetorical gestures, derived from antique sources like Quintilian. Further it demonstrated how El Greco always endeavoured to create paintings which would impress his patron, as well as showing his abilities.

That El Greco's concern with the persuasive power of his paintings did not exclude complex theological programmes has been established. He achieved both aims, by means of an elaborate language of gesture.

El Greco's poetic concept of narration, which can also be manifested in his fragmentation of space, was demonstrated as the description of the Aragón paintings and the *Espolio* has shown. That he followed the antique concept of *Peripetie*, derived from Aristotle has been established for at least some of his paintings. The fragmentation of space urges the spectator to see the depicted events from different angles, a concept El Greco had already developed in the Santo Domingo Altarpieces.

We have established that concentration i.e. the subtraction of extraneous detail, elongation and overemphasised gestures were means of hyperbole to reach a higher degree of readability, and that in fact in some of his later works the use of these means has the contrary effect.

El Greco's intensive occupation, not only with art theoretical, but also with theological themes became evident in our demonstration of the interaction he intended for his paintings with the stations of the Mass. This integration of his paintings into their context was an preoccupation of El Greco developed not only in his late works, like the Prado *Resurrection*, but earlier in the Santo Domingo Altarpieces.

El Greco's ability to introduce themes of the Counter-Reformation became clear in the chapter about the Prado *Resurrection and Pentecost*. Although in some basic concepts near to the neo-platonic thoughts of Pseudo Dionysius Areopagite, he was able to promote fundamental ideas of the Counter-Reformation as the elaborate and complex programme of the Aragón paintings demonstrates.

A seminal aspect of this thesis is to connect Montano's *liber ieremiae* to that area of research into the history of art which is concerned with gestures and body-language in connection with religious paintings. A more intensive examination of its contents in connection with other painters would in the opinion of the author be desirable. The *liber ieremiae*, with its strongly structured content is certainly a source for further studies.

In the following, summarising different types of gestures, all already mentioned and analysed in the text, in the context of their paintings, will be compared. The development of the enrichment of meaning will be examined. El Greco's treatment of various types of gestures should be made clear by this concluding analysis.

The first gesture analysed is the so-called "adlocutio" gesture. It is a gesture taken over by El Greco from antique sources. In El Greco it is found for example in the painting of the *Martyrdom of St. Maurice*, where it fulfils clearly its antique meaning: it signals the will to speak and indicates this to the addressed. On another level, more simply, this gesture leads the view of the beholder to the Gloria of angels above, indicating the future of the group, namely martyrdom. Thus it does not express the future or martyrdom, but leads the beholder to the recognition of the future. The gesture itself does not

express this meaning, but it is the mediator for this important message. Therefore El Greco applied an antique gesture with its recorded meaning, a simple sign, but he places it in a drama, creating a narrative. It is not only a descriptive gesture as Wittkower would define, but an 'enriched' rhetorical gesture. The gesture does not only transmit a sign, but creates in the imagination of the beholder the end of the narrative. Two levels of meaning are in this simple gesture, the traditional sign of speaking and the dynamic element of instigating an imagined recognition.

The gesture of having the hands lifted up to approximately the height of the shoulders, palms turned away from the body, used by Leonardo in his *Last Supper*, expresses in this painting the astonishment of the disciple and his state of bewilderment, as well as the rejection of Christ's words, refuting as impossible the prediction just made by Christ, that one of his disciples will betray Him. Thus two emotional states are already expressed in this "model-gesture", astonishment combined with rejection. In connection with the Purification series, this gesture was analysed with the aid of Bulwer's *Chirologia*, as "excreatione repellit" In El Greco's work this gesture is quite frequent, and astonishingly rich in its interpretation. Significantly it already appears as early as the Washington version of the *Purification of the Temple*. The old man, dressed in blue at Christ's right side, makes a similar gesture to the disciple in Leonardo's *Last Supper*. In comparison with the St. Gines version, assumed to be the latest, this first gesture is much more ambiguous. In the St. Gines version El Greco seems to go back to Leonardo, almost exactly copying him. Apparently in the first version the function of the gesture is not yet clear, or rather its expression is more ambiguous. Besides

the expression of astonishment at the fact that ‘somebody’ dares to chase out the traders, and of rejection of the action, in both these backward movements, an element of conciliation, of staying Christ’s arm, can also be detected.

In the Prado’s *Adoration of the Shepherds*, intended for his burial chapel, El Greco applied the same gesture but with another meaning! Here it is an intimate gesture of adoration, only a light element of astonishment is discernible and can remind of the other meaning of the gesture. El Greco loads this gesture with an strong intimate tension. He fades out the explosive atmosphere, and transforms its power to intimacy.

A gesture already examined by Wittkower, most important in El Greco’s work and difficult to differentiate and analyse, is the “exclamatory gesture”. Two main differences can be established: whether the hands are only elevated to the height of the shoulders, or above them. If the hand is clearly elevated above the shoulder, as for example in the Prado’s *Resurrection*, the *Opening of the fifth Seal*, the *Aragon Baptism*, or the Valencia’s *Adoration of the Shepherds* (where, though executed with both hands, it has the same meaning) it is the gesture mentioned by Wittkower or Wethey, meaning “exaltation” and establishing a connection with the divine in the sense of the Pseudo - ¹ Dionysian *Celestial Hierarchy*. The other ‘category’, elevating hands at shoulder height, is more differentiated. In an early painting like in the *Assumption of the Virgin*, the arms are opened widely and the palms turned heavenwards, a gesture of praying, praise and thanks. No exaltation is transmitted but instead calm, tranquil praise and a reception of grace is expressed. Like the ‘exclamatory gesture’ this variation

is also interactive. In the Valencia *Adoration of the Shepherds* and in the Prado version the figure of St. Joseph, in the *Pentecost*, St. John and the apostle dressed in yellow, are making a variation of the gesture that is in between the other mentioned meanings. It expresses adoration and astonishment.

The gesture of warding off the light, found in paintings like the early *Resurrection* in Santo Domingo, as well as in the late Prado *Resurrection*, or in the paintings of the *Purification of the Temple* also develops significantly. From a simple physical gesture, with a protective meaning it is developed into a gesture expressing mental pain.

These few examples demonstrate how El Greco was searching for gestures varying and 'enriching' their significance.

It can be established that by analysing the language of gesture an artist applied in his works, we can reach a deeper understanding of his narrative strategies, of his construction of pictorial space, and of the underlying theoretical programmes. Therefore the analysis of a language of gesture forms an important approach for the art historian.

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**The Language of Gestures in some of El Greco's
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**in two Volumes
Volume II**

by

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