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The social lives of paintings in Sixteenth-Century Venice

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Citation

Kessel, E. J. M. van. (2011, December 1). *The social lives of paintings in Sixteenth-Century Venice*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18182>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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A Portrait Defaced

*The Donor Portrait of Broccardo Malchiostro
in the Duomo of Treviso*

When, from 1977 to 1980, the *Annunciation* altarpiece in the Duomo of Treviso was subjected to a restoration, it became clear to what extent the painting had been damaged (fig. 30, colour plate 2).¹ In the early 1960s, an Italian scholar named Giuseppe Liberali had already found about forty lesions in the painted surface, almost all of them in the area running between the Virgin's head, the angel's girdle and the head of the donor figure in the background; partially on the basis of X-ray photographs, he noted, interestingly, that the donor portrait was deviant in the way the paint had been handled (fig. 31).² Liberali's observations were mostly confirmed by the investigations of 1977. As the curators stated, the 'poor and clumsy' style in which the figure of the donor has been painted did not fit the level of quality one would expect from a painter such as Titian – who is generally seen as the author of this work. The rest of the painting, on the contrary, seemed to show only minor ad-

¹ In the catalogue accompanying a small exhibition about this restoration, the curators present the result of the technical examination of the altarpiece as well as their curatorial interventions. See Michele Cordaro and Laura Mora, 'Il restauro dell' "Annunciazione" di Tiziano del Duomo di Treviso' in: 'Pordenone e Tiziano nella Cappella Malchiostro: problemi di restauro/ Mostra didattica', Treviso 1982 (unpublished typescript), pp. 1-6.

² Giuseppe Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano a Treviso: cronologie, interpretazioni ed ambientamenti inediti', *Memorie dell'Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, classe di scienze morali e lettere* 33 (1963), pp. 1-121, here p. 63.

justments.³ The panel was also examined with X-rays, which again showed that the entire figure of the donor was painted in a manner quite different from other parts.⁴ What could this mean?

On the basis of technical examination alone it proved difficult to establish when these damages in the donor figure and other parts of the painting were inflicted. Most likely, the painting had been restored a number of times and indeed, some of the incongruities in paint handling and style observed by Liberali and the later restorers may have been caused during these earlier interventions.⁵ From a document composed in 1642, on the other hand, it may be gathered that the painting was already in a severe condition before the middle of the seventeenth century.⁶ All in all, close examination of the painting suggests that something very serious happened to the painting before this date, more specifically to the figure of the donor. What had been going on?

Certain legal documents demonstrate that as early as 1526 – when, in Venice, people were under the spell of the *Christo portacroce* of San Rocco – the *Annunciation* in the cathedral of Treviso triggered a very negative response. For sometime during the first half of that year, the altarpiece, only three years in place at that moment, was attacked. Apparently aiming for the features of the onlooking donor, the anonymous assailant had thrown pitch and other dirt to the painting, which was damaged so badly that it had to be painted over. The main reason we still know about this attack today is that, not long after it happened, the Episcopal authorities in Treviso started an investigation; for, no less than we do, they wanted to know who had done it. Yet, they do not seem to have identified the perpetrator (and neither have I). A quite precise offender profile can be sketched, however.

More than a goal in itself, this is of course a means to precisely locate the attack in a specific cultural, historical and religious situation; to analyze the attack anthropologically; that is, in terms of agency. Compiling an offender profile means assuming that there was a feeling and thinking person with a

³ ‘... l’evidenza della povera e goffa qualità stilistica...’ Cordaro and Mora, ‘Il restauro dell’ “Annunciazione” di Tiziano’, p. 2.

⁴ Cordaro and Mora, ‘Il restauro dell’ “Annunciazione” di Tiziano’, pp. 4-5.

⁵ Cordaro and Mora, ‘Il restauro dell’ “Annunciazione” di Tiziano’, pp. 2-3.

⁶ ‘Altare Annuntiationis B. M. V. prope sacristiam, quod inventum fuit esse consecratum, iniunctum fuit pala ipsius, ubi corrosa est, quamprimum accomodari.’ Quoted after Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, p. 63.

certain agenda behind this. Violence against images is, at least in the early modern period, not something that simply happens to people; attackers, like worshippers, have an agenda of their own. Like the miraculous image, the image inviting attacks, the obnoxious image, is first and foremost a social phenomenon.

This means I will try a different approach than authors before me have done. Carolyn Smyth, whose article on the altarpiece and the surrounding chapel of 2007 is used extensively in this chapter, mainly saw the attack in art-historical terms; that is, as the almost inevitable outcome, a climax even, of the way the altarpiece and the chapel in which it was (and still is) located, interact.⁷ Giuseppe Liberali, who published the juridical documents pertaining to the attack and thereby saved it from oblivion, mainly used the affair as an illustration of an essentially church-historical point.⁸ In this chapter, however, the attack itself will occupy centre stage, in an attempt to enlarge our understanding of why it is that people in Venice and the Venetian mainland attacked images. As such, my analysis takes part in a wider debate, started in the 1980s by David Freedberg, on iconoclasm and the destruction of art.⁹

When we talk about destruction of or damage done to religious imagery, particularly in this period, the much larger iconoclastic campaigns of the 1520s and 1530s in central and eastern Europe spring to one's mind. At first sight this incidental attack on an individual image in Roman Catholic Italy seems to have nothing to do with what was happening across the Alps, but upon closer inspection, things are not so clear-cut. At the time, it still seemed

⁷ Carolyn Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders: Titian, Pordenone and Broccardo Malchiostro's Chapel in Treviso Cathedral', *Studi Tizianeschi* 5 (2007), pp. 32–75, esp. p. 62 and further.

⁸ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano a Treviso'.

⁹ See David Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and their Motives*, Maarssen 1985; and for a slightly adapted version Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, chapter 14. See further Uwe Fleckner, Maike Steinkamp, and Hendrik Ziegler (eds.), *Der Sturm der Bilder: zerstörte und zerstörende Kunst von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart*, Berlin 2011; Bruno Latour, 'What is Iconoclasm? Or is there a World beyond the Image Wars?' in: idem and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, Karlsruhe and Cambridge, Mass. 2002, pp. 14–37; Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, translated by Jane Marie Todd, Chicago and London 2000; and Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, London 1997. For examples of damage done to images in Venice preceding the sixteenth century, see Crouzet-Pavan, "Sopra le acque salse", p. 623. Crouzet-Pavan describes several cases of violence directed towards sacred street images, all from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See also Molmenti, *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata*, vol. I, p. 132.

very well possible that the notoriously open-minded Venice and its *terraferma* would be won over for the Protestant cause, and seen in this light, the Treviso attack suddenly becomes emblematic for the uncertainties of a whole era. I will come back to this later; let it suffice for now to acknowledge the many questions raised by the attack on the altarpiece in Treviso cathedral. Why were images attacked, and why *this* image in particular? Who did it and with what motive? What was the role of the artist in all of this, if any?

In this chapter, we will study the social life of the *Annunciation* altarpiece: from the beneficent role it was supposed to play in the salvation of its donor to the eventual outcome, when it became a preferred target for the donor's enemies. Thus, this chapter sheds light on the perceived relation between the portrait and the portrayed person or prototype and investigates how the one interacts with the other: for very often, an assault of an image is meant to hurt its prototype. After paying some attention to the chapel where the altarpiece has always been located, we will turn to the painting itself in order to see whether it was something in its form, its style, or iconography that occasioned the attack. Next, our examination will become more historical in character, when we turn to the investigation of the events by the Episcopal authorities and the larger church-historical circumstances. The last part of this chapter will place the events in Treviso in a wider context: not only will we look at similar things which happened in Venice and elsewhere in the region at the time, but we will also answer the question to what extent the destruction of images is related to violence towards real people.

The Cappella dell'Annunziata

Let us first take a look at the chapel and the circumstances of production and commission of the altarpiece in question, before we proceed. The attacked image is the *Annunciation* nowadays still standing on the altar of the Cappella dell'Annunziata, or Chapel of the Virgin Annunciate, in the cathedral of Treviso, a town controlled in the sixteenth century by the Venetian Republic (fig. 32). The altarpiece is generally accepted as a work of Titian.¹⁰ Here as in

¹⁰ See, most recently, Peter Humfrey, *Titian: The Complete Paintings*, Ghent 2007, p. 107; Pedrocco, *Titian*, p. 132. There is a document from 1517 which mentions a contract with Titian for the repainting of the facade of the Scuola del Santissimo in Treviso, which also records an order for a *tavola* from the same master. While Liberali proposed that this *tavola* can

the case of the *Christ* of San Rocco, however, the artist's name cannot be found in contemporary documents pertaining to the chapel or church, nor in the records of the investigation regarding the attack. The altarpiece, like the rest of the chapel's decoration, was commissioned by Broccardo Malchiostro (d. 1529). He was chancellor of the diocese and faithful servant to the bishop, Bernardo de' Rossi (d. 1527). Both men are known as outstanding patrons of the arts.¹¹ It was among Malchiostro's responsibilities to supervise the renewal of the cathedral's eastern end, and especially the Cappella dell'Annunziata in the cathedral's south-east corner, of which he became the principal sponsor. Originally proposed to provide the recently established Scuola dell'Annunziata with a sanctuary, the building and furnishing of the chapel was completely controlled by Malchiostro, who was elected the confraternity's president for life and eventually used the chapel as his burial place.¹² As we will see, the chapel is literally stuffed with references to Malchiostro and bishop De' Rossi, and is, not surprisingly, also popularly referred to as 'Cappella Broccardo'.¹³ While the Scuola, mainly managed by women, was only founded on 25 March, 1519, work on the chapel's construction had started earlier. On 5 May of the same year, the ceremony of the laying of the first stone was celebrated, and, as a plaque in the vestibule leading up to the chapel declares, work was finished in October. Subsequently, the chapel's walls and dome were decorated with frescoes by Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone and his workshop, which seems to have happened mostly in 1520, according to a date in one of the frescoes.¹⁴ That the altar and its relics were personally

be identified with the *Annunciation*, most scholars, including Smyth, have rejected this, favouring a later date for the altarpiece, around 1520-1523. As Smyth explains, two letters record Titian's presence in Treviso in December 1521 and December 1522. Especially the latter may correspond with the artist's supervision of the installation of the altarpiece. See Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', pp. 42-44.

¹¹ See Roberto Binotto, *Personaggi illustri della marca trevigiana: Dizionario bio-bibliografico dalle origini al 1996*, Treviso 1996, s.v. 'Malchiostro Broccardo', p. 357, and 'De' Rossi Bernardo', pp. 487-488. It was Bernardo de' Rossi who had himself famously portrayed by Lorenzo Lotto, a work now in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples.

¹² Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', pp. 37-38.

¹³ Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 43; Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 48.

¹⁴ For Pordenone's frescoes, see Charles Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone: Between Dialect and Language*, 2 vols., Cambridge 1996, pp. 141-156 and cat. no. 32, pp. 572-578.

dedicated by bishop De' Rossi on 1 March, 1523, when he had temporarily returned to Treviso, suggests that by then, also the altarpiece was in place.¹⁵

One approaches the chapel through a remarkably deep vestibule. It is built in a sober, classicistic style and is topped by a cupola resting on a drum. The frescoes on the walls, pendants, drum and dome have suffered heavily from bombings in 1944, especially the upper parts. The lower part, on the other hand, is still reasonably preserved.

On the north wall is depicted the *Adoration of the Magi*; between this scene and the altarpiece is depicted *St Peter* in a fictive niche, holding the keys and watching in the direction of the altar (figs. 33 and 34). On the other side the altar is flanked by *St Andrew*, and on the south wall we see *St Liberale*; the rest of the wall space is occupied by two windows, one real and one fictive. One level up, there is another window in the lunette on the south side; in the lunette on the opposite side the *Visitation* is depicted (fig. 35). The semidome has been seriously damaged, but it is still possible to make out *August and the Tiburtine Sibyl* (fig. 36). From the pendentives the four Latin fathers of the church are looking down and in the drum a fictive balustrade is depicted (but this is largely the result of the post-war restoration). The cupola, finally, is nowadays empty, but used to be filled with a *God the Father with Angels*. The chapel is furthermore decorated with wooden benches inlaid with intarsia panels, showing scenes from the life of Malchiostro's patron saint Broccardo and of that of the Virgin (fig. 45).

Titian's Annunciation

Has it been something in the altarpiece itself that gave rise to the aggression of 1526? In order to answer this question, we will first have to look at it more closely. The painting is enframed in an elegant construction made of several kinds of coloured marble, designed by Lorenzo Bregno, which beautifully suits both the chapel's architecture *all'antica* and the painting kept inside it (fig. 37).¹⁶ When we look at the altarpiece itself, we see three figures against

¹⁵ For further chronology, see Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', who has been the first to synthesize all the available information into one coherent account.

¹⁶ Peter Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven 1993, pp. 311-313; on frames for altarpieces in Venice and the Veneto generally, see *ibid.*, pp. 50-51, and for their design and construction, p. 141 and further. Frames were designed sometimes by the carver

a background that is partly architectural and partly consists of a view on a distant, mountainous landscape. Perhaps the painting's most striking characteristic is its asymmetry. Not only is the most important figure of the scene, the Virgin Mary, located in the foreground on the far left; this side of the panel is also the exclusive *locus* of the scene's architectural backdrop. The foreground on the other side is empty, conversely, with the angel Gabriel only approaching in the middleground, and the background giving us the small figure of the donor, as well as a number of dramatically lighted clouds and eventually the landscape with mountains. In contrast with more traditional Italian interpretations of the Annunciation theme, in which Mary and the angel are depicted more or less on the same level, here the viewer's attention is almost automatically drawn towards the Virgin only, further helped by the bright light in this part of the painting. This effect is enhanced by the strong perspective with its central point around the angel's waist, that is, far to the right, which not only gives further emphasis to the Madonna but also draws the spectator inwards, who has an unobstructed view on the painting even from the cathedral's west end. Yet, as authors before me have noticed as well, the illusion of a real space existing behind the altar is never complete.¹⁷ The actual perspective of the approaching viewer and the perspective in the painting do not fully match; and the illusion created by Pordenone's frescoes is slightly different from that created by Titian in his altarpiece.

The least one can say is that Titian's staging of this Annunciation is unconventional. It is also difficult to grasp. This is not only true for the work as a whole but also, on a smaller scale, for the central figure of the Madonna (fig. 38). Watch the suggestion of movement in her body: the lower part still directed towards Pordenone's *Adoration* fresco, she turns her upper body to the approaching angel. Her prayer book suggests the focus of her attention until only a moment ago, but her breast is fully frontal, and her face is turned almost completely to the right. In fact, Titian seems to be showing us several

himself, sometimes by the painter, and sometimes in collaboration; in any way, it was not necessarily the painter who played the leading role in this. In the case of the *Annunciation*, Humfrey suggests it was Bregno who responded to Pordenone's fresco's; Titian would then have adapted his design to the already developing frame.

¹⁷ Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone*, p. 147; Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 314.

stages of a movement taking place over time, with the Virgin's head having made the most progress towards the winged messenger.

Iconographically, the altarpiece is less disturbing, quite conventional even, and, what is more, it literally forms the centrepiece of the whole chapel. Focusing on Mary's agency in mankind's redemption, the chapel's decorations show the Virgin as the Church.¹⁸ This is particularly clear in the sequence dome – semidome – frame – altarpiece. From the heavenly dome, God the Father (now destroyed) comes down to earth, where, on the altar, the Virgin is receiving Christ in her womb: the incarnation, word made flesh, God becoming man. Mary's reaction is inscribed in the frame: 'ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI', 'behold the handmaid of the Lord'. The scene in the semi-dome provides the chapel with a typological dimension, for here we see the Tiburtine Sibyl prophesying the birth of Christ to the world of the Gentiles, as she is alerting the pagan Roman emperor August to an apparition of the Virgin and Christ Child in the sky.

On the altarpiece itself, then, the central event is depicted. Mary, traditionally grasping her robe and her veil, has already accepted God's plan, humbly receiving the divine sunbeams emanating from the sky and bathing her and the angel in a strong, unearthly light. This is God entering the world of man, with the viewer as witness to this redemptive recreation. This is when the Fall of man, the expulsion from Paradise – to which the landscape in the background may actually refer – is repaired; when Mary, with a curtain behind her, is filled with the sunlight of her Groom.¹⁹ As the chapel's natural lighting comes in from the right, the artist has adapted his composition so that feigned and real light intermingle; the natural light becomes divine as it touches the kneeling Mary, who thus even more so becomes the focal point of the entire picture.²⁰

¹⁸ See Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 40.

¹⁹ Schiller, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. I, pp. 44–63; *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum, vol. IV, Freiburg 1972, s.v. 'Verkündigung an Maria', pp. 422–424.

²⁰ This is probably the reason why Titian, contrary to tradition, has placed the Madonna left and the angel right. On left-right symbolism in art, see James Hall, *The Sinister Side: How Left-Right Symbolism shaped Western Art*, Oxford 2008, esp. p. 36, regarding Fra Angelico's *Annunciation altarpiece* for San Domenico in Fiesole: 'The Annunciation scene itself is orchestrated in relation to the Virgin, as was standard practice. Thus the angel, and the light of the Holy Spirit, come from the Virgin's right (our left) because this is the traditional location of all things Divi-

What, then, is the role of the donor in this context? Although frontally depicted (of which soon more) and quite central – but only if we regard the altarpiece as a two-dimensional field – he is located far in the background, and accordingly quite small (fig. 39). On the verge of the mystical space where the Incarnation takes place, and, moreover, appropriately placed in the shadow (unlike the other, saintly, figures), he is for ever humbly venerating the mystery taking place before his eyes. *In ewige Anbetung*, the donor portrait works as a surrogate for the real Malchiostro and thereby contributes to the latter's spiritual welfare. As Carolyn Smyth has pointed out, the whole ensemble is a display of humility: that of the Gentiles, Jews and Romans, who in Christ recognize their real King, and that of the Virgin, 'handmaid of the Lord'; but no less that of the donor, Broccardo Malchiostro.²¹ There is a number of sources that illustrate this point.

On 17 March, 1519, the communal government of Treviso wrote a letter to the bishop, who resided in Rome, in which they praised the works of Malchiostro in their city's cathedral:

Certainly, your cathedral-church is now much frequented during divine offices, as others perhaps are not, and not only is it honoured for its services, but your Broccardo Malchiostro, reverend canon, has decorated the building out of his own pocket in a marvellous manner. He proclaims everywhere here, although modestly, that the church is his mother, his bride, and everything is derived from her. The man is outstanding and worthy of much praise, and therefore pleasing to the entire community.²²

ne.' See also Chris McManus, *Right Hand, Left Hand. The Origins of Asymmetry in Brains, Bodies, Atoms and Cultures*, London 2002, pp. 29–30 and pp. 329–330, for left–right conventions in christianity in general, and relations between Madonna and Child depictions on the one hand and actual child carrying behaviour of both right- and left-handed mothers on the other. For the iconography of the Annunciation from the right, see Don Denny, *The Annunciation from the Right from Early Christian Times to the Sixteenth Century*, New York and London 1977, and pp. 127–129 for Titian's altarpiece.

Titian's solution has had some echoes, in Netherlandish as well as in Italian art; compare, for example, Maarten van Heemskerck's altar wings of 1546 (Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum), or Lorenzo Lotto's *Annunciation* (Recanati, Pinacoteca Comunale), painted only slightly later than Titian's version.

²¹ Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 68.

²² '... tuam scilicet ecclesiam cathedralem nunc divinis officiis ita celebrari, ut alias fortase nunquam et non solum officiis coli, sed tuo Brochardo Malchiostro canonico reverendo, aere proprio procurante, aedificiis mirum modum illustrari: hic ubique praedicat, modeste tamen,

While earlier interpreted as an example of irony or sarcasm even, this passage may more aptly be read as real praise for Malchiostro.²³ Taken literally, the lines concerning Malchiostro's proclamation form in fact a perfect complement to the *Annunciation* altarpiece. Modestly kneeling and watching the Incarnation of the Virgin, the Madonna becoming the Church, Malchiostro identifies with Christ, son and bridegroom to Mary; indeed, everything is derived from her, including Malchiostro's many offices and benefices. His chapel, then, is an offering to her, as is made explicit by the inscription on the arch leading up to the chapel: 'REVERENDUS BROCARDUS CANONICUS VIRGINI DEIPARAE DEDICAVIT,' and no less by the inscription on the stone in Pordenone's *Adoration* fresco on which baby Jesus is resting, not only an artist's signature but also a document to the patron's involvement (fig. 33): 'BROCARDI. MAL. CANO. TAR. CURA ATQUE SUMPTU IO. ANT S. CORTICELLUS P. MDXX.' And, finally, in a document pertaining to the ceremonial celebration of the laying of the first stone, we can read that 'the reverend d. Broccardo Malchiostro, desiring by his own expense and goods to acquire in heaven treasures incomparable, with his own money and goods has started to build this chapel in honour of the blessed Virgin Mary.'²⁴ Without exception, these sources stress Malchiostro's concern with his own salvation, and his burial chapel, which is also the sanctuary of the Scuola dell'Annunziata, as a means to procure this. But they also show his devotion to Mary and his ambition as a son of the Church. The altarpiece with Malchiostro's donor portrait can be regarded not so much as a reflection of all of this, but rather, I believe, as a visual prayer. It is a most effective tool with which Malchiostro could be ever present in front of the object of his devotion, Maria-Ecclesia – and, of course, in the more earthly realm of Treviso's cathedral.²⁵

ipsam ecclesiam sibi esse matrem, sibi esse sponsam, et ab ea sibi dependere omnia: vir profecto multa laude dignus et, ut dignus, ita toti civitati gratus.' Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXII.

²³ Cf. Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 59: '... the prominent Trevisans are quite sarcastic concerning Bernardo's administrative officer...'; Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 51: '... con una punta di ironia e di polemica...'

²⁴ '... rev. d. Broccardus Malchiostus [...] propriis sumptibus et expensis volens thesaurum incomparabilem sibi in coelis acquirere, de propria pecunia et sumptibus suis eoepit [sic] aedificare capellam in honorem beatae Mariae Virginis...' Quoted after Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 51, n. 163. Translation adapted from Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 59.

²⁵ For tomb monuments, burial chapels, and their functions, see Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo (ed.), *Memory and the Medieval Tomb*, Aldershot 2000; also Wilhelm Maier, Wolfgang Schmid,

Yet, something in the chapel, or, more precisely, in the altarpiece, seems to have struck certain people in Treviso as unacceptable. In the following section, I will examine several qualities of the painting and its immediate surroundings and see to what extent they may have contributed to this sense of unacceptability: firstly, the perhaps too innovative character of the ensemble; next, the many portraits and emblems of Malchiostro and bishop De' Rossi present in the chapel and the altarpiece; and, thirdly, the donor portrait's frontality.

What's New?

One of the most conspicuous features of both the Malchiostro chapel and Titian's altarpiece is artistic innovation. When the chapel was inaugurated in the early 1520s, it stood without a doubt at the forefront of artistic development; the *Annunciation* altarpiece strongly contributed to this. That innovation and modernization are not welcomed by all, is something of all times and places. But let us first look into what was precisely so new about chapel and painting.

As has been shown above, a very striking feature of Titian's altarpiece is its asymmetry. If we compare this dynamic and apparently unbalanced composition with older altarpieces in the Venetian tradition, one easily sees the difference. If one looks a bit longer, though, one gets the impression that what Titian has done is in fact very simple: he has turned the more conventional lay-out for about ninety degrees. When, in our imagination, we turn everything back, the architecture comes out parallel to the picture plane, and fills the middle of the background; the Madonna's face would be frontal; the angel Gabriel would approach her, as is normal, from the side, not from behind; and the donor, finally, would conventionally be shown in profile view.²⁶ It is precisely this dynamic asymmetry, this phenomenon of the apparent ninety degrees shift of the more traditional format, that has made some scholars be-

and Michael Viktor Schwarz (eds.), *Grabmäler: Tendenzen der Forschung an Beispielen aus Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, Berlin 2000.

²⁶ In Netherlandish art of the time – an important inspiration for Venetian artists in this period – it seems to have been more usual to have Gabriel approach Mary from behind, as we can see, for example, in the left wing of Rogier van der Weyden's *Columba Triptych* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), or in Albrecht Dürer's *Annunciation* woodcut in his *Small Passion* series, which can easily have reached Titian.

lieve – mistakenly, in my view – that the *Annunciation* was meant to be looked at from the right-hand side.²⁷ It is also, more importantly, what makes the painting stand out among contemporary altar painting.

This is not to say that Titian's Treviso *Annunciation* is the first work to explore such an asymmetric composition.²⁸ Indeed, already Giovanni Bellini often experimented with this less static and conventional format. Look, for example, at Bellini's *Madonna and Child with Saints Peter and Sebastian* (Paris, Louvre), which shows the group of holy figures, as often in the artist's oeuvre, behind a marble parapet (fig. 40). This time, however, the parapet takes the form of a sarcophagus of which we see not only the front but also part of the side. No longer does Bellini use a frontal composition; three of the four figures are clearly, with body and all, directed towards the viewer's left. At first sight, this gives one the impression that a viewing position far left of the painting would be ideal; and that this is where Bellini wanted the spectator to stand. Yet upon further consideration this seems highly unlikely. Images like these were usually meant for private devotion; their relatively small size made them mobile and flexible. What is more, most of them were not commissioned but painted for the market, and thus not designed for a specific location in a room. Giovanni Bellini is here experimenting with different sight angles and trying to infuse his painting with movement, dynamism and tension.²⁹ This experiment was enthusiastically taken up by other Venetian painters: Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano del Piombo, Giorgione, Pordecone, and, indeed, Titian, all started to try out asymmetrical, dynamic compositions, in which the main figures were placed off-centre, not frontal, or both.

Yet this was cosmopolitan Venice. If we take a closer look at a number of altarpieces Titian was working on around 1520 for the provinces, we get a different impression. His *Madonna and Christ Child in glory with Saints and donor* (Ancona, Museo Civico), also known as the *Gozzi Altarpiece*, is, al-

²⁷ See, most recently, Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders'.

²⁸ On this type of composition in Venetian painting of the later fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, see also Sandro Sponza, 'Treviso, 1500-1540', in: Mauro Lucco (ed.), *La pittura del Veneto: Il Cinquecento*, Vol. I, Milan 1996, pp. 225-280, here p. 255; Anchise Tempestini, *Giovanni Bellini: catalogo completo dei dipinti*, Florence 1992, p. 260; and Christian Hornig, 'Bemerkungen zu drei Altarwerken Tizians', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 45 (1976), pp. 58-62.

²⁹ See Peter Humfrey on Bellini's *Madonna and Child* in the Northampton Collection (Mauro Lucco and Giovanni C.F. Villa (eds.), *Giovanni Bellini*, Milan 2008, p. 264).

though monumental in scale and innovative in its lighting and beautiful landscape setting, quite conventional composition-wise (fig. 41).³⁰ And the *Resurrection Polyptych* (Brescia, SS. Nazario e Celso) is, due to its format of five panels, simply archaic, as far as its composition is concerned (fig. 42). This is probably completely the result of the patron's wishes, however; the artist's contribution is stunning, with all the interaction between the figures in the different panels going on, the figures of Christ and Sebastian based on the recently discovered *Laocoon* and one of Michelangelo's *Slaves*, respectively, and in the background of the central panel the spectacularly coloured sky.³¹ Nevertheless, in both altarpieces the figures of the saints occupy centre-stage; portraits of donors, though present in both works, are relegated to the sides and depicted in modest profile views. In this, the *Annunciation* in Treviso is fundamentally different.³²

This is not to say that the altarpiece was simply too modern for this city; quite the contrary. Treviso had a lively humanist and artistic climate in this period and was intellectually connected with Venice and its academic neighbour Padua.³³ As Treviso lacked native artists of, say, Giovanni Bellini's standing, many patrons ordered paintings from Venetian workshops.³⁴ It was especially through the patronage of Bernardo de' Rossi, Broccardo Malchiostro and De' Rossi's precursor Giovanni Zanetti that artists such as Lorenzo Lotto, the Lombardo family, and, of course, Titian and Pordenone came to work in Treviso. It is therefore too easy to conclude that it was the provinciality of a peripheral town that led to the act of aggression which is the topic of this chapter. If anything, many of the people who saw the altarpiece in its early days were cultured and had full access to the products of artistic renewal that were starting to populate Venetian territory in those days.

³⁰ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 308–310.

³¹ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 310–311.

³² Even in Roman or Tuscan altar painting of the time, we cannot find parallels to Titian's Trevisan invention. Compare, for example, the Caraffa chapel in the Roman church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, decorated by Filippino Lippi. The altarpiece, representing, once more, the Annunciation, indeed contains a donor image, and quite a large one at that, but nevertheless composed in the traditional manner: sideways.

³³ See especially Augusto Serena, *La cultura umanistica a Treviso nel secolo decimoquinto*, Venice 1912.

³⁴ Sarah Blake McHam, 'Padua, Treviso, and Bassano' in: Peter Humfrey (ed.), *Venice and the Veneto*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 207–251, here p. 234; as far as commissions for altarpieces are concerned, see also Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 128–129.

What is more, Pordenone's fresco decorations were no less innovative than Titian's altarpiece. His commission for the Annunciation chapel was in fact the first opportunity to show his work to a larger and more cultured audience; until then, he had only worked in minor centres in the Veneto and in the Friuli, where he came from.³⁵ The frescoes in Treviso are the first expression of his almost aggressive mature style, with its bold foreshortenings, heavy figures and compositional asymmetries. The combination of this style of painting in the frescoes covering walls and dome, and Titian's use of asymmetry and strong perspective in the panel on the altar, provided Treviso with something as yet simply unseen, not in Venice, nor anywhere else.

Innovation as a Problem

That artistic innovation is not always immediately appreciated, not even by the *intendenti* or connoisseurs, is a topic that was widely discussed in sixteenth- and also seventeenth-century literature on Venetian art. But before we take a look at some examples, let us more generally discuss the connection thought to exist between the quality of an image and the impact it has on the beholder. The following poem, composed by the Venetian writer of satirical verse Andrea Michieli (d. 1510), may shed some light on the matter.³⁶ The poem is conceived as a monologue of a speaking image of Christ:

I am a Christ who renounces God,
for I have the form of a devilish man;
senseless Ombrone has painted me here
so that I cannot be pious anymore.

The perspective makes my face wicked,
being badly understood on every side;
he has measured the vanishing point falsely,
so that I do not find any member that is mine.

³⁵ Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 46; Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone*, vol. I, p. 141.

³⁶ For Andrea Michieli, see Vittorio Rossi, 'Il canzoniere inedito di Andrea Michieli detto Squarzòla o Strazzòla', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 26 (1895), pp. 1-91.

Who looks at me laughs and adores me not,
despising my badly formed effigy,
that makes the masses loose every devotion.

As the crowd agonizes me,
so will I agonize him who ignores true art.
“Have mercy on me,” he will say, “Lord,
that I lost time and hour
in talking and not in actions”; all in all, Bellini
will make me much more human and more divine.³⁷

Michieli, also known as ‘Squarzòla’ or ‘Strazzòla’, wrote the poem as part of a series of eight on the rather obscure north-Italian painter Ombrone. A depicted Christ – most likely one hanging on the cross – is addressing himself directly to the public and, by complaining about his ugly appearance, is criticizing and mocking the picture’s maker. Instead of having a beautiful and saintly look, the Christ seems a devil; the rules of perspective are not applied correctly, he cries, so that his body lacks unity (*non trovo membro che sia mio*). The Christ then turns to describe the audience’s response: people laugh about him instead of adoring him. His appearance raises ridicule instead of devotion. In a nice twist at the poem’s end, Michieli has the Christ come off his cross, as the reader imagines, and threaten the failed artist with revenge.

This poem makes a clear and explicit connection between the quality of a religious image and its power to engage the beholder: because of the devilish features of the Christ and the failed perspective construction, viewers are not encouraged to venerate him, but instead only led to ridicule. Interestingly, Michieli specifically speaks about ‘*il vulgo*’, the masses, the ordinary people. They are the victims here, for, as Michieli seems to suggest, the more educated believers do not even need images to direct their minds towards God.

³⁷ ‘Io son un Cristo che rinega Idio,/ avendo forma d’omo indiavolato;/ Ombrone ignoranton qui m’ha pittato/ in modo che non posso esser più pio.// La prospettiva il volto mi fa rio,/ essendo male intesa in ogni lato;/ il punto falsamente ha misurato,/ talché non trovo membro che sia mio.// Che chi mi guarda ride e non mi adora/ sprezzando la mia effigie mal formata,/ che fa perder il vulgo ogni fervore.// Per strazio che di me fa la brigata,/ farò costui che l’arte vera ignora,/ “Miserere, dirà, di me, Signore,/ ch’io persi il tempo e l’ore/ in dir e non in far”; donche il Bellino/ mi farà assai più umano e più divino.’ Quoted after Rossi, ‘Il canzoniere inedito di Andrea Michieli’, p. 53.

Of course, ideas on the relatedness of beauty and God were not new at the time. Medieval philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, and Albertus Magnus stated that every thing in the world, being the result of Creation, participated in God's beautiful Being.³⁸ These ideas in their turn formed the foundation of the flowering of the arts in the early modern era; referring to the visual arts and architecture, humanist thinkers recommended artists to mirror the *varietas* and beauty of the Creation of God, 'that glorious Craftsman of all things.'³⁹

The themes touched upon by Michieli – the effects of bad design upon the viewer, the masses versus the *cognoscenti* – would return in literary discussions of one of Titian's most important early works; the one, incidentally, that possibly also brought him the commission for the Trevisan altar: his *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Frari (1516–1518; fig. 43).⁴⁰ Lodovico Dolce in his *Dialogue on painting* singled out the cool reception of Titian's revolutionary work:

All of which meant that the clumsy artists and dimwit masses, who had seen up till then nothing but the dead and cold creations of Giovanni Bellini, Gentile and Vivarino [...] – works which had no movement and no projection – grossly maligned this same picture. Later the envy cooled off, and the truth, little by little, opened people's eyes, so that they began to marvel at the new style invented in Venice by Titian.⁴¹

³⁸ Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 167.

³⁹ Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 167. The quote is from George of Trebizond, *De suavitate dicendi ad Hieronymum Bragedenum* (1429), in: Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450*, Oxford 1971, p. 95: 'Nam varietas non modo pictoribus, aut poetis, aut istrionibus, sed etiam cum omni in re dum apte fiat, tum maxime in oratoria facultate, et utilitatis et suavitatis videtur habere plurimum, quippe que nam et rem muniat, et delectationes videntibus afferat. [...] Hinc denique nam omnium mirabilis rerum artifex, albis violis nigris variis, ac rubeis, pratarosis ornatissima reddidit.'

⁴⁰ The installation of the *Assumption* was even recorded by Marin Sanudo in his diaries: 'Et eri fu messo la palla granda di l'altar di Santa Maria di Frati Menori suso, depenta per Ticiano, et prima li fu fato attorno una opera grande di marmo a spese di maistro Zerman, ch'è guardian adesso.' Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XXV, p. 418 (20 May 1518).

⁴¹ 'Con tutto cio i Pittori goffi, e lo sciocco volgo, che insino alhora non havevano veduto altro che le cose morte e fredde di Giovanni Bellini, di Gentile, e del Vivarino [...] lequali erano senza movimento, e senza rilievo: dicevano della detta tavola un gran male. Dipoi raffreddandosi la invidia, & aprendo loro a poco a poco la verità gliocchi, cominciarono le genti a

So it took those who were not very knowledgeable about art some time to get to appreciate Titian's monumental altarpiece. It is intriguing that Dolce makes a distinction between, on the one hand, the type of painting from the generation of the Bellini and the Vivarini, which he characterizes as cold and dead, and the new type of painting developed by Titian, which he, in several instances, calls alive and moving.⁴² It seems that it was again the perceived liveliness of Titian's paintings that triggered the strongest viewer responses.

As a social construct, the topos of liveliness was not familiar to all. Ignorance is an important theme in Carlo Ridolfi's, albeit much later, account of the early history of the *Assumption*:

It is said that Titian worked on the painting in the Convent of those same Friars, and that he was molested by their frequent visits, and that Fra Germano, who commissioned the work, complained again and again because he believed the apostles to be of excessive size. It took [Titian] no small trouble to correct their very little understanding, and to make them understand that the figures had to be proportioned according to the vastness of the place where they would be seen, and that from a distance they would seem smaller. Nonetheless, although they could be satisfied by the good effect that he achieved, they showed themselves not completely content – until the Emperor's Ambassador pointed out the Friars' fault (because men do not easily give in to reason, as long as authority does not intervene). For as [the ambassador] believed the Painting to be marvellous, he tried to acquire it with large offerings in order to send it to the Emperor; upon which those Fathers, united in a meeting, agreed upon the opinion of the wisest, to dispose of nothing, because they were in fact aware that this was not their true calling, and that the practice of the Breviary and the understanding of Painting were two very different things.⁴³

stupir della nuova maniera trovata in Vinegia da Titiano.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 186–188.

⁴² For a more elaborate discussion of contemporary praise for Titian's art in terms of liveliness and lifelikeness, see below, Chapter Three; also Chapter One.

⁴³ 'Dicesi, che Titiano lavorasse quella tavola nel Convento de' Frati medesimi, sì che veniva molestato dalla frequenti visite loro, e da Fra Germano curatore dell'opera or spesso represso, che tenesse quegli Apostoli di troppo smisurata grandezza, durando egli non poca fatica a correggere il poco loro intendimento, e dargli ad intendere, che le figure dovevano esser proportionate al luogo vastissimo, ove havevansi a vedere, e che di vantaggio si fariano diminuito: nondimeno, benche dal buon effetto seguito potessero rimaner sodisfatti, non pienamente si

Only when the ambassador, a connoisseur of art, openly showed his interest in the painting the friars got convinced of its genius. Before he came along, they were simply puzzled by the thing Titian was making; for indeed, the figures of the apostles are larger than anything heretofore seen in Venetian art.

So innovations in the art of painting may confuse audiences, especially when they are uneducated in this noblest of disciplines. Yet, difficulties in painting may also give the viewer pleasure, as argues Dolce elsewhere in his *Dialogue*:

And the pleasure in question is not the one which gives sustenance to the eyes of the masses, nor even the one which connoisseurs experience on first encounter, but the one which increases, the more the eye of any sort of man undergoes a renewed exposure. This is what also happens in the case of good poems: the more they are read, the more they give pleasure and further increase, within one's spirit, the desire to re-read the passages in question. Because few people understand foreshortenings, few derive pleasure from them; and even with connoisseurs they prove at times more annoying than pleasing.⁴⁴

While arguing against simple amusement, Dolce is also sensitive to the problems new inventions may provoke: complicated foreshortenings, for example, can be misunderstood and, in that case, distract the viewer from what the painting is about. This is also what Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio (1504–1573), *letterato* and theorist of the theatre, hinted at when he discussed theatre costumes: ‘The newness of the clothes generates admiration and makes the

dimostravano contenti, finche dall’Ambasciator Cesareo non furono tratti d’errore (poiche gli huomini non così facilmente si accomodano alla ragione, se l’autorità non vi si frammette) mentre riputando esso quella Pittura maravigliosa, tentò con larghe offerte di farne acquisto, per mandarla all’Imperadore: sopra di che que’Padri, fatta la loro ragunanza, convennero nel parere de’più prudenti, di non privarsene a niun partito, conoscendo in effetto, ciò non era mestier per loro, et essere molto differente la pratica del Breviario dall’intendersi di Pittura.’ Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell’arte*, pp. 146–147.

⁴⁴ ‘E questo diletto non intendo io quello, che pasce gliocchi del volgo, o anco de gl’intendenti la prima volta, ma quello, che cresce, quanto piu l’occhio di qualunque huomo ritorna a riguardare: come occorre ne’buoni poemi: che quanto piu si leggono, tanto piu diletano, e piu accrescono il desiderio nell’animo altrui di rileggere le cose lette. Gli scorti sono intesi da pocchi. onde a pochi diletano, & anco a gl’intendenti alle volte piu apportano fastidio, che diletatione.’ Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, p. 148–149.

spectator more attentive to the spectacle, which would not be the case if he were to see the actors dressed in clothes that he has continuously in front of his eyes.⁴⁵ And this, it is implied, is a bad thing, for an emphasis on spectacle distracts the audience from the play's topic.

The literary sources that have so far been discussed, should of course be seen within a developing discourse on painting as an art. Both Dolce and Ridolfi make a distinction between those who know and those who know not about the art of painting. The setting of both their texts is the development of connoisseurship and of paintings as collectibles. What does this mean when we connect them to the innovative character of Titian's Treviso *Annunciation*? This altarpiece was, to be sure, not first and foremost meant as a work of art in the modern sense – nor was the Frari *Assumption*, for that matter; both were meant as tools for devotion and revelation, and to teach the masses sacred history (as all religious images in the Western church were, in line with official decrees). The *Annunciation*'s artistically innovative features, although possibly pleasing to such patrons of the arts as bishop De' Rossi, and Broccardo Malchiostro, fell on stony ground with other viewers. Its innovative character misunderstood, it was destined to be laughed at, not adored, to use Andrea Michieli's words.

Donor Portraits

Among specialists of Venetian painting, it is well-known that there was something problematic about donor portraits in Venetian altarpieces. Before 1500, they did in fact hardly occur.⁴⁶ People did commission religious paintings with their portraits in them, so-called votive images, but these were destined for governmental offices or the privacy of the family palace; they were not meant to be placed on altars in churches. Only in very rare cases this rule was broken. Peter Humfrey recounts how the Venetian Doge Agostino Barbarigo (1486-1501) stipulated in his will that his votive image be transferred

⁴⁵ 'Perché la novità degli abiti genera ammirazione, e fa lo spettatore più intento allo spettacolo che non sarebbe se vedesse gli istrioni vestiti degli abiti che egli ha continuamente negli occhi.' Giovanni Battista Giraldo Cinzio, 'Discorso over lettera intorno al comporre delle comedie e delle tragedie' in: idem, *Scritti critici*, ed. Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti, Milan 1973, pp. 169-224, here p. 219.

⁴⁶ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 82-83 and pp. 106-108. I have chosen not to take into account the category of the sculpted altarpiece.

from the family palace to the high altar of S. Maria degli Angeli on Murano, where two of his daughters were nuns, after his death (fig. 44).⁴⁷ And so it happened; but the horizontal format of the painting, Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna and Child with saints, angels and Doge Barbarigo* (nowadays Murano, S. Pietro Martire), made it rather unsuitable for placement on this altar; and we may wonder whether the full-length portrait of the donor pleased the nuns, who, in the middle of the 1530s, asked Titian to provide them with a new altarpiece.⁴⁸

The peculiar situation in Venice has everything to do with the city's social system in which individual self-promotion was considered highly undesirable – especially, as Humfrey explains, 'on the part of patricians who might aspire to excessive power'.⁴⁹ The ideal situation was that of *mediocritas*; a situation in which all would be equal and uniform in order best to serve the common good.⁵⁰ This ideal of *mediocritas* was given shape in sumptuary laws as early as 1299; but it was considered necessary to reinforce these laws after the Venetian defeat at Agnadello, which was perceived as a direct result of moral decline and the general popularity of luxury and pomp.⁵¹ On the Venetian mainland, of which also Treviso was a part, the circumstances may have been different. Especially after the turn of the century, we know of some altarpieces containing conspicuous donor portraits; apart from Titian's *Annunciation*, we may again think of the above-mentioned *Resurrection Polyptych* (Brescia, SS. Nazaro e Celso; 1519–1522). But perhaps it is wiser to connect these exceptions to an open neglect of the *mediocritas* ideal that can also be found in Venice itself.

Despite the austere climate in the years succeeding Agnadello, there were families that rejected the ideal of *mediocritas* and the sumptuary laws connected

⁴⁷ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 83; Goffen, 'Icon and vision', p. 511.

⁴⁸ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 83.

⁴⁹ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 106.

⁵⁰ Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 3 and further. See also Margaret L. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, Princeton 1986, pp. 140–150: *mediocritas* was an important concept in Domenico Morosini's *De bene instituta re publica* (begun 1497), a treatise on the ideal republic with strong resemblance to Venice. As King notes (p. 148), Morosini considers buildings as both real and symbolic monuments of the city's unified strength: 'Just as the citizens are to be all of one mind in the ideal republic, the façades of all the buildings should so harmonize according to one grand plan.'

⁵¹ Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, pp. 6–7.

to it. Tafuri has identified a whole group of families in Venice who deliberately broke with the norm.⁵² Most remarkable is that all these families were in one way or another connected to Rome and the Holy See. This has also come up in Chapter One: introducing Tuscan and Roman influences in the lagoon, they used their disobedience to mark themselves as a cultural avant-garde and to identify as a group, keeping aside from what they regarded as 'the rest'.⁵³ Just as these families, Broccardo Malchiostro decidedly had a good relationship with the Vatican, and it was the Vatican that had his priority, not the Venetian republic, as we will see. For more than one reason it seems likely that the furnishings of the chapel commissioned by this man were inspired by central-Italian rather than Venetian currents.⁵⁴

Let us not forget, however, that Broccardo Malchiostro's donor portrait in the altarpiece is not the only reference to his person he had inserted in the chapel. In fact, references to him and his patron, bishop De' Rossi, are omnipresent. See, for example, both their coats of arms on the screen giving entrance to the chapel, in the corners of the frame around the altarpiece, in the background of the *Adoration* fresco, and on the spandrels of the arch separating the chapel from the vestibule (fig. 37). The text on the arch, which refers to Malchiostro, has already been discussed; his name again appears on his tomb stone, in the inscription in the *Adoration* fresco, in initials on the frame of the altarpiece, and even in the painting itself, directly over the Virgin's right shoulder (fig. 38); the chapel's wooden benches carry his coat of arms and show scenes from the life of his patron saint (fig. 45). More conspicuous even is the terracotta portrait bust of the bishop in a niche in the drum (fig. 46). Generally attributed to Andrea Briosco, called Il Riccio, the bust's original appearance is very much obscured because of damage sustained during a nineteenth-century restoration and during the bombings of World War II.⁵⁵

⁵² Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 7; in fact, the identification of this Roman-minded group within Venetian sixteenth-century society is essential for Tafuri's argument as a whole.

⁵³ Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ According to Humfrey, donor portraits in Venetian altarpieces are not only very rare in comparison with republican Florence, but also in contrast to the courts of Milan and Mantua (Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 106).

⁵⁵ See Luigi Coletti, 'Intorno ad un nuovo ritratto del vescovo Bernardo de' Rossi', *Rassegna d'arte antica e moderna* 8 (1921), pp. 407-420, also for other portraits of Bernardo de' Rossi. Luigi Coletti was the first to identify the portrayed person as Bernardo de' Rossi, whose coat of arms is represented on the bust's pedestal, and not, according to tradition, as Malchiostro.

Its high position does not make the viewing any easier. In fact, the bishop's gaze to his left, rather than downwards, creates the impression that the bust was not designed for this spot; or that the artist did not understand the idea of figures interacting across media as it was conceived by Pordenone and Titian. Even more portraits of the bishop within the boundaries of the chapel have been identified: the Roman Emperor August, depicted in the semidome, allegedly wears his features, and so does at least one of the three kings in the *Adoration*. But the evidence for these portraits is meagre.⁵⁶

Some more insight into contemporary thought on such use of portraiture can be gained from Dolce's *Dialogue on painting*. As becomes clear in this text – and as is of course well known – portraits of contemporaries did not only occur in churches, but also in history paintings displayed in the Venetian *Scuole* and the Palazzo Ducale. Indeed, as we have seen in the Introduction, in Venetian history painting the insertion of portraits was widespread. As Dolce makes clear, in this genre, too, portraits could rouse feelings of resistance. In the following passage, the interlocutors are discussing the portraits inserted in the (now destroyed) wall decorations of the Great Council Hall:

And since the truth ought not to be hushed up, I should not refrain from saying that, as regards historical subject matter, the man who painted in the Sala I mentioned before, next to Titian's battle picture, the history of the excommunication of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa by Pope Alexander, and included in his invention a representation of Rome, exceeded the bounds of propriety in a serious way – in my opinion – when he put in so many Venetian senators, and showed them standing there and looking without any real motivation. For the fact is that there is no likelihood that all of them should have happened to be there simultaneously in quite this way, nor do they have anything to do with the subject. Titian, on the other hand, respected propriety suitably (and divinely too) in the painting which shows the same Federico bowing down and humbling himself before the Pope, whose sacred foot he kisses. He judiciously depicted Bembo, Navagero and Sannazaro as spectators. For although many years had passed since the event in question, the first two

The identification has since not been contested. For more information on the bust's condition, see Pinin Brambilla Barcilon, 'Gli affreschi del Pordenone nella Cappella Malchiostro nel Duomo di Treviso: Relazione di restauro' in: 'Pordenone e Tiziano nella Cappella Malchiostro: problemi di restauro/ Mostra didattica', Treviso 1982 (unpublished typescript), p. 5.

⁵⁶ Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', pp. 39–40.

are represented in their homeland, Venice, and the presence there of the third man represents no great departure from the truth. It was not inappropriate, furthermore, that one of the world's most famous painters should bequeath, in his public works, a record of the appearance of the three leading poets and men of learning of our age. For two of the latter were Venetian noblemen, and the third was so devoted to this city of Venice in all its nobility that in one of his epigrams he even gives it precedence over Rome.⁵⁷

I am aware that this passage is ambiguous and therefore somewhat problematic. Dolce argues that painters should be careful when inserting portraits of their fellow citizens in their history paintings, for they should only depict those elements that are purposeful and meaningful to the story. Yet, Titian's portraits of Pietro Bembo and others deserve praise. Suddenly, Dolce's argument that portrayed onlookers should have something to do with the story, does not count anymore. Is he applying double standards? Although the passage is perhaps principally an expression of the author's admiration for the painter Titian, it also shows us, I believe, that the inclusion of portraits of contemporaries in narrative painting was considered tricky. A few lines after the above quoted passage, Dolce summarizes his point quite clearly: 'One thing is sure: this invention of [Titian's] deserves praise – if on no other grounds – for the nobility of those exceptional lords who appear in it; the fact is, indeed, that representations are often revered because of the effigies they contain, even if they are the work of poor masters.'⁵⁸ It is, thus, the reputa-

⁵⁷ 'Ne debbo tacere, poi che non si dee tacere la verità, che intorno alla historia colui, che dipinse nella sala detta di sopra, appresso il quadro della battaglia dipinta da Titiano, la historia della scomunica, fatta da Papa Alessandro a Federico Barbarossa Imperadore, havendo nella sua inventione rappresentata Roma, uscì al mio parere sconsigliatamente fuori della convenevolezza a farvi dentro que'tanti Senatori Vinitiani, che fuor di proposito stanno a vedere: conciosia cosa, che non ha del verisimile, che essi così tutti a un tempo vi si trovassero: ne hanno punto da far con la historia. Servò bene (e divinamente) all'incontro la convenevolezza Titiano nel quadro, ove il detto Federico s'inchina & humilia inanzi il Papa, baciandogli il santo piede: havendovi dipinto giudiciosamente il Bembo, il Navagero, & il Sannazaro: che riguardano. Percioche quantunque l'avenimento di questa cosa fosse molti anni a dietro, i primi due sono imaginati in Vinegia patria loro; & non è lontano dal vero, che'l terzo vi sia stato. Senza che non era disconvenevole, che uno de'primi Pittori del mondo lasciasse nelle sue publiche opere memoria dell'aspetto de'tre primi Poeti e dotti huomini della nostra età: due de'quali erano gentil-huomini Vinitiani, e l'altro fu tanto affectionato a questa nobilissima Città di Vinegia, che in un suo Epigramma l'antepose a Roma.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 124-126.

⁵⁸ '... che certo, quando quella inventione non meriti laude per altro; sì lo merita ella per la dignità di que' rari Signori, che rappresenta: essendo, che le imagini spesse volte si riveriscono

tion of the people portrayed in a painting that primarily determines the way viewers respond to it. This is an important statement, and one that can easily be adapted to our own case: images may be despised because of the effigies they contain, even if they are painted by the greatest of masters.

More on portraiture in the context of history painting can be learned from Bartolomeo Maranta (1500–1571), a Venetian-born literary theorist, who wrote about the topic in his *Discorso ... in materia di pittura* (c. 1559–1571). In fact, this is one of the first texts that exclusively focuses on a single work of art, Titian's *Annunciation* originally painted for Cosimo Pinelli's chapel in San Domenico Maggiore in Naples (currently Museo di Capodimonte; fig. 47).⁵⁹ It is written as a dialogue between Maranta himself and his friend Scipione Ammirato, the latter not a great admirer of the painting; the *Discorso* is in fact a defence. In a passage on the angel's face – which to Maranta seems perfect – he explains that it took shape in the artist's mind only and was not modelled after that of a living person, contrary to other works by the master, much to their detriment:

... Titian has sometimes [used the features of living people], perhaps to please the one who commissioned the work. But although this is easier, it does not stir much devotion, even in religious paintings. For if we see the face of a man whom we know as a sinner, and perhaps also as having a bad reputation among his fellow men, [when we see this man] dressed up as a saint, his own life still shows through, and in a certain way he makes it look like this saint has led a bad life – it will seem a portrait of hypocrisy really. And it seems that, when we look at him, he gives us reason to wonder whether we have not suddenly been cursed by him.⁶⁰

per la effigie di coloro, che elle contengono, se ben sono di mano di cattivi Maestri...' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, p. 126. It is suggested that the artist Dolce is talking about, here as in the earlier quote, is Jacopo Tintoretto: 'Ora presuppongasi, che questo huomo da bene in cio non sia punto mancato di giudicio [...] mostrò di haver bene havuto poca consideratione alhora, ch'ei dipinse la Santa Margherita a cavallo del Serpente.' The latter should be identified with Tintoretto's *St. George, St. Louis and the Princess* (Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia).

⁵⁹ See Marsel Grosso, *Per la fama di Tiziano nella cultura artistica dell'Italia spagnola: Da Milano al vicereame*, Udine 2010, p. 51 and further; Van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts*, pp. 144–150.

⁶⁰ '... abbia alle volte Tiziano ... fatto ciò forse a compiacenza di chi ha fatta far l'opera, peroché, come questo è più facile, così anco nelle pitture religiose non genera molta devozione; percioché il vedere il volto di uno uomo da noi conosciuto per peccatore e forse anco per

Maranta's remarks on '*il volto di uno uomo da noi conosciuto per peccatore*' make us wonder about the donor figure in Titian's earlier *Annunciation* in Treviso. If it was believed that images of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints could have beneficial, miraculous powers (see Chapter One), what evil power, then, would the image of a wicked man be thought capable of exercising?

Frontality

This problem becomes all the more urgent once we recognize the strange frontality of the donor portrait in the Treviso altarpiece. In the Western tradition, the frontal pose was imbued with a significance that can hardly have been overlooked by contemporary viewers of the painting. Already in the Middle Ages, the distinction between a frontal and a lateral position was loaded with meaning. While a frontal position was usually reserved for sacred beings such as Christ or a ruler, the profile view, in Titian's painting exemplified by the Virgin Mary, was destined for mortals or subjects. Although in depictions of narratives the choice was increasingly made to depict the figures, even the sacred ones, in profile view – for this mode lends itself rather well to the expression of interaction and movement – the distinction as such remained significant.

That images of Christ, his mother and the saints would show them in full view seems natural also, given that this makes contact with them all the easier. Images like these, seemingly following the viewer with their eyes, provide that viewer, as we have also seen in the preceding chapter, with a sense of privilege; artists anticipated this effect in order to create direct communication between the saint and his flock. As Meyer Schapiro explains in a classic essay on the matter, the full-face, turned outwards, may be compared to the

cattivo e segnalato tra gli uomini, vestirsi dell'abito di un santo, ne rappresenta la vita sua et in un certo modo ne fa parere quel santo di mala vita, o vero ne parrà un ritratto della ipocrisia, e par che in guardarlo vi dà cagione di dubitare che d'ora in ora non siata da lui dannificato.' Bartolomeo Maranta, *Discorso all'Ill.mo Sig. Ferrante Carrafa marchese di Santo Lucido in materia di pittura nel quale si difende il quadro della Capella del Sig. Cosmo Pinelli, fatto per Tiziano, da alcune opposizioni fattegli da alcune persone*, ed. Paola Barocchi, *Scritti d'Arte del Cinquecento*, vol. I, Milan 1971, pp. 884–885.

grammatical form of the first person, the 'I', a direct and not-to-neglect address to the viewer, existing in a space virtually continuous with our own.⁶¹

What was perceived as an inappropriate use of the frontal and profile views was considered offensive by some. Schapiro relates how a thirteenth-century Spanish bishop, Luke of Tuy, condemned the new one-eyed, that is profile, image of the Virgin as heretical. Not that he would have objected to the rendering in profile of the Magi, for example; what offended him was rather that the Virgin could apparently appear in the same impersonal profile view of narrative action as the lesser figures.⁶² But also in our period, the sixteenth century, viewers were unpleasantly surprised when unexpectedly confronted with sacred figures in profile. As we can read in Bartolomeo Maranta's defence of Titian's Naples *Annunciation*, '... the other thing for which that painting is reproved is that it does not seem good painterly practice to show of the angel only half the face, while one can also show it so that the whole face appears, in order that it more fully fills the eyes of the onlookers.'⁶³ The problem is, consequently, that, in the eyes of some sixteenth-century beholders, Broccardo Malchiostro had himself depicted as a saint, while Mary was downgraded to the level of the mortals.

On the preceding pages, we have considered several aspects of the altarpiece and the chapel in which it was located, to see if the attack on the painting, sometime in the first half of 1526, may have been provoked by something artistic. We have discussed the painting's innovative character, that, at least in the years immediately following its installation, was only little understood. But there were other innovative artistic ensembles – indeed, Titian's *Assumption* in the Frari is a case in point – that, although being criticized,

⁶¹ Meyer Schapiro, 'Frontal and Profile as Symbolic Forms', in: idem, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, The Hague 1973, pp. 37–49, here pp. 38–39.

⁶² Schapiro, 'Frontal and Profile', p. 43; see also Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 73–74.

⁶³ 'L'altro di che è ripresa quella pittura, è che non par loro cosa da buon pittore l'avere mostrato dell'angelo mezzo volto solo, potendolo fare di modo che tutta la faccia paresse, perciocché così empie molto più gli occhi de' riguardanti.' What follows is a defence of the artist's choices: 'avendo Tiziano voluto mostrar la grandezza del suo ingegno, non volle mostrar dell'angelo se non mezzo il volto, ma di sì bel modo fe' spiccar la bocca in atto di parlare, che in vederne quel mezzo solo vi par vedere anco tutto quello che si nasconde; e parmi portarsi costoro da volgari che non si fidano di penetrare più addentro di quello che il senso li mostra nella superficie...' Maranta, *Discorso ... in materia di pittura*, p. 871.

were not physically attacked. As was also suggested by the result of the painting's technical examination, it was the portrait of Malchiostro in particular that seems to have been the attackers' aim. Its frontality and its position at the very centre of the *pala* made sure the viewer could impossibly neglect it. Looking the beholders in the eyes, frontal and godlike, Malchiostro appeals to them with a power stronger than that of artistic conventions. This is something that can be understood across cultures and times: no matter how aware one is of the materiality of the image, and of the constructedness of Titian's invention, one is struck by the gaze of this man.⁶⁴ These findings are, indeed, confirmed by testimonies of eye-witnesses, to which we shall turn now.

In Search of a Culprit

On 3, 16, and 28 July of the year 1526, Annibale Grisonio, vicar general of the bishop, held inquests in order to find out who was responsible for the damage done to the effigy of the diocese's chancellor, Broccardo Malchiostro. The reports of these inquests, originally belonging to a now lost *Liber Actorum Criminalium*, have been published by Giuseppe Liberali. The first, dated 3 July, relates how the painting was defaced:

... the image of the reverend d. Broccardo Malchiostro, canon of Treviso, that is depicted on the altarpiece of the blessed Virgin, which the aforementioned d. Broccardo had constructed and erected in the cathedral of Treviso, was attacked and disfigured with pitch and other dirt by some sons of iniquity, to the shame and blame of this same reverend d. Broccardo, without any of the usual reverence for the image of the blessed Virgin depicted on that altar.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See, for example, the following description of the figure of Malchiostro, which dates from 1831: 'Aderente ad un pilastro della dipinta navata, e ginocchioni sul pavimento, vedesi una figura, la qual dicesi rappresentare il canonico Malchiostro, benemerito autore di questa capella, ed ordinatore di questa tavola; figura malamente introdotta nel quadro, e che non suol piacere a' riguardanti; ma in onta di questo difettuccio, e forse di qualche altro, questa tavola è certamente cosa preziosa e grande.' *Lettere sulle belle arti trivigiane del Canonico Lorenzo Crico*, Treviso 1833 (letter dated 15 April 1831), p. 29.

⁶⁵ '... immago rev. d. Brocardi Malchiostri can. Tarvisini quae est depicta super palla altaris beatae Virginis quod dictus rev. d. Broccardus erigi seu strui fecit in ecclesia cathedrali tarvisina, per nonnullos iniquitatis filios malitiose et dedita opera fuerat pice et alia immunditia superimposita, deturpata, nulla habita reverentia imagini ipsius beatae Virginis super dicta palla

After this report came the statement of the first witness, a certain Giovanni Florio de Zara, who declared that, when he once during the preceding winter found himself in the sacristy with a number of fellow clerics, he heard one of them, a man named Girolamo da Cesena, say:

When I go to celebrate Mass at the altar of the chapel of *miser* Broccardo and I say the *Memento* and I see the image of this *miser* Broccardo, I am ashamed of myself because one is supposed to revere this figure instead of the image of the Madonna. And when the Bishop was here, he did everything well, except that he should have had removed the afore-mentioned image of that *miser* Broccardo and not keep that same image in the middle of the altarpiece. Whoever pulls it down or defaces it will do a good job.⁶⁶

Asked whether this Girolamo was the one who attacked the painting, De Zara answered that he was not certain, although the incident had happened only shortly after the man had spoken his suspicious words. A second witness, a cleric named Luca Venturelli, told his interrogator that he had been conversing with Giovanni de Zara and another man, Pier Maria de Zara, and heard the latter say something like: ‘Look, *miser* Broccardo is depicted over there,’ whereby the man had pointed to the altarpiece, ‘and one is supposed to revere him as one reveres God.’ He had concluded: ‘One will see him defaced with pleasure.’⁶⁷ When asked how much time had passed between Pier Maria’s words and the actual attack, Venturelli declared that it must have been about a month, and added that he had heard many other priests and clerics say how bad it was that the effigy of Broccardo was painted on this

depictae in infamiam et vituperium, ut creditur, ipsius rev. d. Broccardi.’ Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, doc. XXVII.

⁶⁶ ‘... quando vado a dir messa al altar de la capella de miser Broccardo et che digo Memento et che vedo la immagine de esso miser Broccardo, e me contaminò tuto perchè el se fa reverentia a essa figura et non alla immagine de la Madona; et quando el Vescovo fo qua, fece ben ogni cosa, salvo che questa chel doveve far (tuor) meter da parte dicta immagine de esso miser Broccardo et non far chel stes in mezzo de la palla, et chi la rassasse zò o imbrattasse, faria par ben.’ Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, doc. XXVII.

⁶⁷ “... varda, miser Broccardo he depento là”, – ostendens altare dicti d. Broccardi – “et bisogna farli reverentia come si fa a Dio” et similia – “El vederia volentiera imbratà”. Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, doc. XXVII.

altarpiece.⁶⁸ The third and last witness that we know of was rev. Pier Maria de Jacobetis. He declared to Grisonio to have entered the cathedral only recently, noticing that the image of the Virgin over the altar was covered by a curtain. Wondering why this was so, he turned to the servant of canon Salomone: ‘What does it mean that that altarpiece is covered?’ Upon which the servant, named Lucas, had replied: ‘Because the figure of *miser* Broccardo has been defaced.’⁶⁹ Again, Grisonio asked his witness about the identity of the offender, but again, he remained empty-handed: Jacobetis declared that he did not know.

What is more, Grisonio received the same answer when he asked his first witness about something else. For not only had the portrait of Broccardo Malchiostro been damaged: something had been given in return. On a wall of the newly build *Canonica* or chapter house had been painted ‘vituperative’ and ‘disgraceful’ portraits of him and a fellow canon, Andrea Salomone. The witness, Giovanni de Zara, denied any knowledge of who painted these ridiculous images; yes, he had heard about a couple of friars hanging around, but did not know of what order. Nor had he heard anything else.⁷⁰

It is clear that Grisonio was groping in the dark; unfortunately we do not know whether he ever, after the interrogation of 28 July, continued his examination, nor whether anyone was ever summoned.⁷¹

So what happened here? It is clear that the interrogated clerics, to use an understatement, were not very eager to help Grisonio out. It is also quite clear, however, that a suspect was sought, and could probably have been found, among the Trevisan clergy. That friars had been spotted near the chapter house, but their order could not be identified, not even by members of the clergy itself, sounds extremely implausible: habits demarcated orders.

⁶⁸ ‘Et quod etiam a multis aliis sacerdotibus et clericis audivit dici quod malum est quod effigies dicti d. Broccardi esset depicta super pallam altaris praedicti.’ Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, doc. XXVII.

⁶⁹ “... che vol dir che i tien quella palla coperta?” Tunc dictus Lucas respondit “perchè l’è stà imbratà la figura de miser Broccardo”. Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, doc. XXVII.

⁷⁰ ‘Interrogatus idem testis, si scit qui pinxisset figuras illas super domo capituli quae aedificatur super plathea eccl. Tarvisine in vituperium et obprobrium reverendorum d. Broccardi antedicti et d. Andreae Salomonis: qui respondit se non aliter scire nisi quae dici audivit a nonnullis, a quibus autem non recordari, quod fuerunt certi fratres; tamen se nescire cuius ordinis existant, nec aliter nec alia dixit se scire.’ Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, doc. XXVII; see also p. 59.

⁷¹ Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, p. 59.

So either the witnesses were protecting their colleagues, or afraid to speak out. And what was it that had precisely been done to Malchiostro's image? It had been smeared with pitch 'and other dirt'. Then someone had covered the altarpiece with a curtain. More or less at the same time, figures of Malchiostro and Salomone were painted on the canons' new building. Thus, one image was spoilt while another was created. When exactly all this happened cannot precisely be determined: the interrogations were held in July, but witnesses referred to the preceding winter, and say that some time, or a month had passed between the verbal and actual assaults on the image. If the attack indeed took place in, let's say, late Winter – that it was around Carnival is likely for reasons to which I will return – I do not know why interrogations were held only in July. It seems strange, too, that the third witness, De Jacobetis, would only have heard of it shortly before his interrogation, as he asserts: one imagines that rumour of such a remarkable event would spread rather fast among the clerical community. And then, finally, the *why*. As to the reasons of the clergy's irritations, the documents luckily say quite a lot. It is the image itself which figures prominently here: one was supposed to revere Malchiostro as if he is God (*bisogna farli reverentia come si fa a Dio*), the clerics complain; he instead of the Madonna asked for devotion (*el se fa reverentia a essa figura et non alla immagine de la Madona*). Many clerics apparently thought it a shame that his effigy was depicted over the altar. And it is the bishop who was reprimanded for not taking action when he visited his diocese – probably his visit upon the chapel's consecration, early in 1523, is meant here. De' Rossi, or so Girolamo da Cesana would have said, should not have consented to a portrait of Malchiostro in the middle of the altarpiece (*non far chel stesse in mezzo de la palla*). Thus the image, all seem to agree, deserved its cruel fate.

Before we delve into the wider social and religious contexts of the attack, let us pose a simple question: why Broccardo Malchiostro? For, surely, not every donor portrait in the sixteenth-century Venetian Republic was attacked. That it was Malchiostro's portrait, of all things, which suffered from violence, may therefore have something to do with the reputation of the portrait's prototype. This is based on the hypothesis that, had Malchiostro

been loved among his fellow clergymen, an attack would not have happened.⁷²

What can be said about Malchiostro's reputation? It was not very good. Malchiostro belonged to a group of foreigners – Parmesans, mainly – ‘imported’ into the diocese with the appointment of bishop De’ Rossi (1499).⁷³ The first years of the new century were a difficult period for Treviso, that, like Venice, suffered from wars and the plague.⁷⁴ Immediately from the start of his episcopacy, De’ Rossi was involved in conflicts, and with him was his chancellor Malchiostro.⁷⁵ Indeed, the two of them ruled Treviso with iron hand, and much more than their predecessors, managed to exert control over the goods and money of the diocese.⁷⁶ When, during the war of Cambrai, De’ Rossi's brother Filippo, who was fighting as a *condottiere* on behalf of the Venetian Republic, went over to the imperial side, not only Filippo but also Bernardo was put in jail, the latter being called to Venice and held captive until October 1510. After his release, Bernardo decided to try his luck elsewhere, particularly in Rome, and he therefore delegated most of his Episcopal responsibilities to Malchiostro.⁷⁷

All through De’ Rossi's episcopacy, Malchiostro served as faithful intermediary, which not only meant his involvement in obscure businesses such as

⁷² Thomas Martin, in his study of Alessandro Vittoria's sculptured portrait busts, provides fascinating material for comparison: one Benedetto Manzini, canon of S. Marco in Venice and parish priest of S. Geminiano (on the opposite side of the *piazza*, before its destruction by Napoleon's troops) had a portrait bust of himself (by Vittoria, now Ca' d'Oro) placed in his parish church, and, as Martin convincingly argues, had himself portrayed a second time by Veronese, this time in the guise of St Severus, on the organ shutters in the same church (now Galleria Estense, Modena). Such self-promotion was very uncommon in Venice; and what to think of the location, right opposite S. Marco? Yet, Francesco Sansovino in his earliest guidebook to the city lavishly praised the man for his many qualities, and indeed, Manzini seems to have come off well. See Thomas Martin, *Alessandro Vittoria and the Portrait Bust in Renaissance Venice: Remodelling Antiquity*, Oxford 1998, pp. 57–61 and cat. no. 16, pp. 118–120.

⁷³ Smyth, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’, p. 32 n. 2; Marco Cervellini, *Guida al duomo di Treviso*, Treviso 1994, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Cervellini, *Guida al duomo di Treviso*, p. 12.

⁷⁵ Smyth, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’, pp. 55–62; Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, *passim*; Biscaro, ‘Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso’, *passim*.

⁷⁶ Biscaro, ‘Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso’.

⁷⁷ Liberali, ‘Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano’, *passim*; also Gerolamo Biscaro, ‘Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso e la congiura contro la vita del vescovo’, *Archivio veneto* 7 (1930), pp. 1–53.

De' Rossi's switch to serving the Pope after his brother's betrayal of Venice, or this same brother's wish to marry his mistress; Malchiostro was also responsible for the collection of taxes and donations and the confiscation of goods from debtors – all the more urgent as someone had to pay for De' Rossi's extravagant Roman lifestyle. At the first pastoral visit of the bishop, it was Malchiostro who accompanied him; who inventoried moveable and immovable property in the churches, who passed on irregularities to the Curia, verified benefices, and drew up guidelines for reform. All in all, Malchiostro made sure he was present anywhere financial business was being discussed, which, inflexible and ambitious as he seems to have been, will not have done his reputation in the diocese much good.⁷⁸

We know, furthermore, that Malchiostro was a loyal servant to the Habsburg Emperors and to the Holy See; he was a member of the Sacro Palazzo Lateranense and of the Concistoro and in 1518 received the title of *conte palatino* from Emperor Maximilian I.⁷⁹ During his career he managed to obtain numerous ecclesiastical benefices. And he never forgot where he came from: in his will, drawn up on 31 December 1527, he made sure that after his death, money should be left for the celebration of masses not only in his Cappella dell'Annunziata in Treviso, but also in the church of S. Moderanno in Berceto, near Parma.⁸⁰

Seen in the context of church history, the situation in Treviso seems nothing outside of the ordinary. Indeed, it was quite normal for bishops to take up residence elsewhere, like De' Rossi did; usually in the largest cities of Italy, Venice, Rome or Naples, where they lived as aristocrats rather than pastors.⁸¹ The administration of the episcopacy then became the task of functionaries lower in the hierarchy; in other words, figures such as Malchiostro.

⁷⁸ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 52–4; also Biscaro, 'Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso'.

⁷⁹ Angelo Campagner, *Cronaca capitolare: I Canonici della Cattedrale di Treviso*, Vedelago 1992, p. 480. As Charles Cohen suggests, his new title may have been the instigation for the decoration of his Annunciation chapel (see Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone*, vol. I, p. 144).

⁸⁰ Biblioteca Capitolare della cattedrale di Treviso, *Cathasticum reverendi Capituli ecclesie Tarvisine*, ms. 77, c. 249r.

⁸¹ Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), *Die Geschichte des Christentums. Religion, Politik, Kultur*, vol. VII, Freiburg 1995, pp. 335–336; Hubert Jedin (ed.), *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, vol. IV: *Reformation, Katholische Reform und Gegenreformation*, Freiburg, Basel, and Vienna 1967, p. 460.

For the minority of this group which, in the decades preceding Trent, actually had ambitions towards reform, it proved very difficult if not impossible to get something going: in this time of flowering anticlericalism, reform-minded officials were an easy target. Clerics were busy scoffing at each other anyhow: particularly in sermons, they were insulting their fellow clergymen (as long as they did not belong to their own group), to the extent that, as has been argued, preaching took on the character of spoken caricature.⁸²

It is against this background that the disturbances in Treviso gain relief. As a reform-minded exponent of the absent, worldly-living bishop, the rigid Malchiostro met with huge resistance, not only from the regular clergy but also, and even more strongly, from within; from members of his chapter. It is significant that his own appointment as canon had long been thwarted.⁸³ Following an attack on canon Locatelli, who belonged to the De' Rossi-Malchiostro group, in April 1526, it was a fellow canon, one Alessandro Thealdino, who was mentioned as possible culprit. Together with Girolamo da Cesena, *altarista* at S. Lorenzo, who was also named in the case of the painting, Thealdino would have wanted to prevent Locatelli from participating in the elections for the seminary held the next day.⁸⁴ And indeed, after De' Rossi's and Malchiostro's deaths, it was the faction to which Thealdino belonged that in Treviso assumed power.⁸⁵ For this faction, Malchiostro's donor portrait had been an ideal target.⁸⁶

⁸² Mayeur, *Die Geschichte des Christentums*, vol. VII, pp. 147-151.

⁸³ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 60 and doc. XL; in 1509, the canons voted against his candidacy.

⁸⁴ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 59-60.

⁸⁵ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 60, n. 197.

⁸⁶ There are parallels here with what happened to a certain Don Dionisio of Verona, who, as Philipp Fehl relates, had once been prior of the monastery of S. Lucia in Vicenza. In 1587, the curate of this church denounced Don Dionisio for his allegedly bad life in a letter to the Venetian Holy Office. According to the curate, Don Dionisio not only had two mistresses, who, together with a child of his, lived with him in his quarters, he also had himself portrayed in an altarpiece in the act of adoring a mistress, represented in the guise of S. Lucia or S. Apollonia (which of the two the curate was not sure). Perhaps not surprisingly, the Inquisition decided not to prosecute. Indeed, the surviving documents leave one with the impression that the curate was desperately looking for something he could hurt Dionisio with; the portrait in the altarpiece must have seemed a fine enough opportunity. The altarpiece in question was painted by the local artist Alessandro Maganza (1556-c. 1630/1640), son of the painter-poet Giovanni Battista Maganza (c. 1513-1586), nicknamed Magagnò. It was described by Marco Boschini in his *I gioeli pittoreschi virtuoso ornamento della città di Vicenza* (Venice, 1676), where no portrait of a mistress is mentioned. The painting seems no longer extant. Philipp P. Fehl, *Decorum and Wit:*

Nonetheless, the question remains. Why do people ruin images? Or, to quote David Freedberg, why should an attack on an image seem to be an appropriate mode of making a political point?⁸⁷ So far, we have extensively examined the image itself as an instigator of aggression; our findings in that respect have been confirmed by the relevant documents. We have delved into the historical circumstances of the attack. But the problem needs further analysis from another point of view: that of anthropology.

A very first step would be to acknowledge that an attack on an image is an attack on the image's prototype. Portraits in the early modern period were understood as direct substitutes for their sitters, and this meant that the circulation of portraits could mirror and expand the system of personal patronage – the distribution of personhood, as Alfred Gell would have it.⁸⁸ It is of course this mechanism that Malchiostro tried to exploit in full in his chapel. Yet, the direct connection between image and prototype not always worked to the sitter's advantage: it also made him or her extremely vulnerable to the malevolent. We still recognize this mechanism to day: not surprisingly, in many countries the person portrayed in a photograph is the only rightful claimant to that picture. Having one's portrait exposed was as much as having part of one's body outside the body, not completely under control – as the Treviso attackers understood only too well.

Image Destruction and Pictorial Mockery

Recently, scholars working on iconoclasm have argued that image breaking and image making often coincide.⁸⁹ Damaging images almost always leads to the production of something new; there is a creative side to violence. Treviso was certainly no exception in that sense; but apart from changing Titian's altarpiece in something 'new' when attacking it, the perpetrators also created

The Poetry of Venetian Painting: Essays in the History of the Classical Tradition, Vienna 1992, pp. 246–247.

⁸⁷ Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and their Motives*, p. 11.

⁸⁸ Joanna Woodall, 'Introduction: Facing the Subject', in: idem (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Manchester and New York 1997, pp. 1–25, here p. 3; Gell, *Art and Agency*, p. 96 and further.

⁸⁹ Most importantly, Uwe Fleckner, Maïke Steinkamp, and Hendrik Ziegler, 'Produktive Zerstörung. Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion eines Forschungsgebiets', in: id., *Der Sturm der Bilder*, pp. 1–11.

new images when chalking images of Broccardo Malchiostro and Andrea Salomone on the wall of the nearby chapter house. Consequently we may ask, what exactly were those figures (*figuras illas*), and in what way do they relate to the attack of Malchiostro's effigy on the altarpiece of the *Annunciazione*? These questions are legitimate if only for the way the two affronts were treated by the Trevisan diocese: part of the same case, object of the same interrogations, the one, as people in Treviso seemed to consider it, should be understood in close connection to the other.

Let us first ask what such figures could have looked like. Speaking about early caricature, or what we may rather call 'graffiti' (as opposed to the modern art of caricature, which developed in the circle of the Carracci around 1600), several authors have pointed to stylistic naiveté as an important characteristic.⁹⁰ This is the sort of naiveté simulated by Michelangelo and his friends when they held a contest to see who could best draw a figure without design, as Vasari says, 'similar to those doll-like creatures made by the ignorant who deface (*imbrattano*) the walls of buildings.'⁹¹ Indeed, as Ernst Gombrich explains, what he calls 'infantile modes of behaviour' belong to the most common techniques of humour, and this counts for deliberately primitive images as well.⁹²

In early representations of demonic and other evil figures, the chosen format was often the profile. As Meyer Schapiro argues, this surely had an aesthetic ground: as opposed to the round and ideal closure of the full-face, the profile is asymmetrical and indented and shows a less complete but more characteristic face. It therefore lent itself particularly well to the first caricaturists, who invested the profile with comic accents and exaggerated proportions.⁹³ To be sure, early caricature was not the only genre in which the profile

⁹⁰ Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Introduction', in: idem, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication*, London 1999, p. 8.

⁹¹ 'Nella sua gioventù, sendo con gli amici sua pittori, giucorno una cena a chi faceva una figura che non avessi niente di disegno, che fussi goffa, simile a que' fantocci che fanno coloro che non sanno et imbrattano le mura.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. VI, p. 115; the reference is from Lavin, 'Bernini and the Art of Social Satire', p. 33.

⁹² Gombrich, 'Pleasures of Boredom', in *The Uses of Images*, pp. 212-225, here p. 215.

⁹³ Schapiro, 'Frontal and profile', p. 45. For ancient examples, see Irving Lavin, 'Bernini and the Art of Social Satire', in: idem (ed.), *Drawings by Gianlorenzo Bernini from the Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig, German Democratic Republic*, Princeton 1981, pp. 25-54, here p. 32 and further.

was the preferred view: portraits of emperors and other rulers had a long tradition of showing the sitter's side. We may add that it is the contrast which is meaningful; that both the frontal and the profile view are 'frameworks within which an artist can reinforce a particular quality of the figure, while exploiting an effect latent in that view.'⁹⁴ An illustrative example is the distinction made in the *Christ Carrying the Cross*, discussed in chapter one: the face of Christ in three-quarter view versus the Jewish executioner in a strict, idiosyncratic profile.⁹⁵ While Schapiro suggests that the profile in early caricature, through a certain sense of detachment, may have softened the affront of pictorial mockery, we may ask whether, on the contrary, the view from the side did not further contribute to the depersonalization or objectification of the portrayed person.⁹⁶

We may gain a more thorough understanding of the nature of the graffiti with which we are concerned from the following, Venetian, example. Philipp Fehl and Marilyn Perry have discovered records pertaining to a 'particularly scandalous incident' involving a number of pornographic drawings or graffiti on the *Canonica* of San Marco in Venice.⁹⁷ Discovered late November 1566 by one of the canons and by Gioseffo Zarlino, the famous musician and *Maestro di Cappello* of San Marco, the charcoal drawings represented phalluses, complete with feet and wings, urinating in chalices, devil-like creatures drinking from these chalices and, as Fehl has it, 'further copious suggestions of sacrilege'.⁹⁸ The impact these drawings had on the government is conveyed

⁹⁴ Schapiro, 'Frontal and profile', p. 45.

⁹⁵ For more examples of profile heads of Jews in contrast to full-faced Christians, see Schapiro, 'Frontal and Profile', pp. 62-63, n. 97.

⁹⁶ See the classical essay on profile portraits of women as the expression of women's objectification in the Renaissance: Patricia Simons, 'Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture', *History Workshop Journal* 25 (1988), pp. 4-30, reprinted in: Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds.), *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, Boulder 1992, pp. 38-57. On objectification and caricature see also Woodall, 'Facing the Subject', p. 14.

⁹⁷ For the following, I am relying upon the results of Fehl and Perry's search through the archives of the Inquisition in Venice for documents relating to artists and art: Philipp P. Fehl and Marilyn Perry, 'Painting and the Inquisition at Venice,' in: David Rosand (ed.), *Interpretazioni veneziane: studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Michelangelo Muraro*, Venice 1984, pp. 371-383; republished as appendix II of Fehl's essay 'Veronese and the Inquisition' in idem, *Decorum and Wit*. It seems that much more material of this kind may still be found in the Venetian and Veneto archives. See also the publications of A. Stella, cited in *Decorum and Wit*, p. 392, n. 11.

⁹⁸ Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 245; for full transcriptions see pp. 251-256.

by the Florentine ambassador of that moment, Cosimo Bartoli, who suggests that the attack was directed towards the Inquisition itself, which resided in the *Canonica* during the winter, and who had the impression, due to the extremely high rewards promised to the person who could identify the perpetrator(s), that the Venetian Republic herself felt offended.⁹⁹ Although one of the victims declared the drawings to be made by ‘some sad Lutheran,’ no-one was ever caught.¹⁰⁰

To be sure, such displays of the male member on walls and doors – that is, in liminal places – occur very often and in many cultures, and are not always held to be offensive. Indeed, many people believed sexual emblems on such locations to have an apotropaic effect, marking territory and chasing away demons and evil spirits.¹⁰¹ The famous Venetian writer Pietro Aretino, a true apologist of the sexual, wrote to one of his friends: ‘What is wrong about seeing a man climbing on top of a woman? So animals should be freer than us? It seems to me that nature has given this to us in order to preserve itself, and that one should wear it around one’s neck as a pendant, and on one’s cap as a medal ...’¹⁰² The wings which adorned the phalluses on the *Canonica*’s façade also occur in sexual, apotropaic amulets. Yet the Venetian graffiti seem to have been more than innocent protection from evil forces, if only because the Venetian state took the case so seriously.

Around the time the drawings in Venice were discovered, similar things happened in Arzignano, near Vicenza, where an offensive drawing had been

⁹⁹ ‘Et hier mattina andò un bando horribilissimo perdonando a chi rivelava lo autore di tale eccesso con donativo di 1000 scudi et ... di poter rimettere sbanditi et d’altrj privilegj, molto più spaventevole che se fussi cosa di stato...’ Cosimo Bartoli to the Florentine Medici Duke, Cosimo I, letter dated 7 December 1566 (published in Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 256).

¹⁰⁰ ‘... Cl.mo Signor veda la V.M. che può esser stato altri che qualche Tristo Lutheranano, che habbia fatto queste vergogne in contempto et dispretio della Religione.’ Quoted after Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 253.

¹⁰¹ Jan Baptist Bedaux, ‘Laatmiddeleeuwse sexuele amuletten. Een sociobiologische benadering’, in: idem and Jos Koldeweij (eds.), *Annus quadriga mundi. Opstellen over middeleeuwse kunst opgedragen aan prof. dr. Anna C. Esmeijer*, Zutphen 1989, pp. 16–30.

¹⁰² ‘Che male è il vedere montare un uomo adosso a una donna? Adunque le bestie debbono essere più libere di noi? A me parebbe che il cotale datoci da la natura per conservazione di se stessa, si dovesse portare al collo come pendente, e ne la beretta per medaglia.’ Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, vol. I, Rome 1997, no. 308, pp. 424–426, here p. 425. For a thorough interpretation of the entire letter, see Raymond B. Waddington, *Aretino’s Satyr: Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art*, Toronto 2004, particularly chapter one.

affixed in a public spot. Interestingly, a copy of this drawing survives to this day in the Archivio di Stato in Venice (fig. 48). The primitively drawn image contains two phalluses, one large and one small, which both are urinating in chalices. The largest of the two carries an inscription: '*Questo Cazzo in culo al Vescovo, e l'altro al mag.co Podesta, i quali sono li dui cuionj di questa mag.ca nostra città.*'¹⁰³ And it got worse: for this was not the only picture found. As Fehl relates, offences continued, a drawing of a haloed phallus was discovered in a church, and other drawings of the sort; reports came in of desecrations of the host. At last, a culprit was identified, convicted, beheaded and his corpse was, like that of a heretic, burnt at the stake.¹⁰⁴ It is worth noting how fiercely criminals of this kind were being punished: clearly, satirizing by means of images was usually considered no light offence.

With regard to Malchiostro's case, events like those happening at the Venetian *Canonica* and in Arzignano may further clarify the sort of drawings of which Malchiostro became a victim. More generally, they put the frightful events in Treviso in perspective. Thus, we may wonder whether thinking of it in terms of 'incidents' is actually fruitful; the available material, which uncovers, no doubt, only the tip of the iceberg, suggests that the desecration of religious imagery was in fact a recurring phenomenon. What makes Malchiostro's case stand out is that one of the images involved, namely Titian's altarpiece, was, at the time of the attack, standing at the forefront of artistic development.

For a glimpse of what the images of Malchiostro and Salomono may have looked like, we could also turn to the products of contemporary iconoclasm in the North. Indeed, already during the iconoclastic movements in Byzantium caricatures had been used to mock the enemy, a practice taken up during the iconoclastic upheavals of the Reformation.¹⁰⁵ And this brings us, indeed, to the narrow relation between destruction of images on the one hand, and pictorial mockery on the other. Iconoclasts did not only damage and deform existing images, but, partially through their damaging acts, also made new ones, parodies of standard iconographies, what Joseph Koerner calls a 'succes-

¹⁰³ In English: 'This prick in the arse of the Bishop, and the other one in that of the magnificent *Podestà*, who are the two biggest jerks of our magnificent city.' A.S.V., *Santo Uffizio*, Processi, busta 21. The reference is from Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, pp. 246 and 251 and further.

¹⁰⁴ Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, pp. 245-246.

¹⁰⁵ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 148-149.

sion of image by image'.¹⁰⁶ Rather than two unrelated, or diametrically opposed forms of behaviour, defacement of images and pictorial mockery are thus two aspects of a much broader cultural phenomenon. What connects the two is that they both harm or ridicule the image's prototype.

I would argue that the attack on Malchiostro's effigy in the altarpiece and the elusive images of him and his fellow canon Salomone on the wall of the chapter house, should be considered as two results of a situation perhaps much more wide-ranging than what we can imagine on the basis of the extant documents alone. Though smashing (part of) a religious image, the attackers did not do away with images as such; they needed them as badly as any other, and even produced another image of Malchiostro with which they emphasized their point.

As an aside, it may be noted that bishop Bernardo de' Rossi also became the victim of what may well have been pictorial satire. During the Carnival of 1520 De' Rossi, then Vicelegate and Governor of Romagna and Bologna, met with resistance when he decided to forbid the wearing of masks. Upon his decision, a satire was attached to the doors of the *Studio*. Whether this satire was visual or verbal in character, or both, the sources do not tell; more important is the similarity with what happened in Treviso only a few years later – although we do not know whether Malchiostro would have reacted as fiercely as his bishop, who punished a suspect student from Parma with beheading.¹⁰⁷

Image Destruction and Ritual Violence

Besides the violence inflicted upon his portrait, Broccardo Malchiostro more than once became the victim of actual violence – indeed, the attack on his picture and attacks on his physical body seem to be part of a continuum. The first instance occurred on 29 September, 1503, when, apparently at the very last moment, an assault on the life of the bishop and a number of his trustees was thwarted. That day, a member of the Dominican order was taken captive under suspicion of leading a group of assassins planning to take the lives of

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclasm', in: Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, Karlsruhe / Cambridge, Mass. 2002, pp. 164–213, here p. 183.

¹⁰⁷ Coletti, 'Intorno ad un nuovo ritratto del vescovo Bernardo de' Rossi', p. 412.

the bishop and his most loyal collaborators, the vicar general Francesco Pampano, his notary Francesco Novello, and Broccardo Malchiostro.¹⁰⁸ Twenty years later, Malchiostro himself would become the central target. On 12 May 1523, a Brescian priest named Pietro Averoldi was officially charged for publicly menacing Malchiostro and desecrating church space. For some years Malchiostro had been entangled in a conflict with the man, for Averoldi had helped to spread rumour in Treviso that the Bolognese had torn bishop De' Rossi, at the time governor of Bologna – literally – to parts.¹⁰⁹ But now, as was the accusation, Averoldi had entered the cathedral during the celebration of Mass and in the choir, amidst all the canons, had assailed Malchiostro with an ornamental piece of wood he had removed from the church of S. Giovanni Battista, while shouting insulting cries. Without any regard for the sacred place, for the divine offices that were going on, or for the authorities, he would have exclaimed: 'you lie through your teeth' (*tu menti per la golla*)!¹¹⁰ It seems that, despite several re-hearings and fines imposed on the rebellious priest, in the end the case was not settled to Malchiostro's satisfaction.¹¹¹ And three years later, almost contemporaneous with the attack on the altarpiece, there was a new outburst of violence. As has already been mentioned above, on 30 April 1526 a number of armed men had assailed canon Locatelli when he descended from the house of canon Salomone; and Locatelli himself confirmed to have recognized among the aggressors one of his fellow canons.¹¹² It is clear that the diocese was regularly afflicted by violence; and that the violence shown towards Malchiostro's portrait had a parallel in violence towards members of the chapter, among whom Malchiostro himself.

¹⁰⁸ Biscaro, 'Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso, especially p. 32 and further.

¹⁰⁹ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 54–56. The news even reached Venice, as was reported by Marin Sanudo (12 December 1521): 'Fo divulgato per la terra una nova, qual zà 3 zorni la fo dita, ma par ozi sia stà confirmata, et par vegni per via dil Legato per certo prete venuto di Bologna, come lo episcopo di Rossi, qual è di Treviso, che era Legato dil Papa in Bologna, dove ha fato severa justitia, era stà tagliato a pezi da' bolognesi; per il che sier Alvise Pisani procurator, per la riserva dil Papa l'ha suo fiol cardinal, stete molto ocupato per tuor il possesso; ma inquerito ben la cosa, fo trovato nulla esser con fondamento.' Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. II, p. 229. It seems relevant to mention that bishop De' Rossi's actual death, on 23 June 1527, occurred under suspicious circumstances (Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 34–35).

¹¹⁰ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 56 and doc. XXVI.

¹¹¹ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 57.

¹¹² Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 59–60.

There is a well-known image from a ninth-century eastern manuscript in which the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of his image are juxtaposed (fig. 49). In the crucifixion scene, a soldier has just pierced Christ's side with his lance; another soldier is offering him a sponge soaked in vinegar. It is just such a sponge on just such a long stick with which in the iconoclasm scene an image of Christ is being whitewashed.¹¹³ The message is clear: whoever spoils an image of the Saviour is co-responsible for his death. The image is identified with what it represents; and its destroyers with Christ's murderers. It is interesting, then, that actual behaviour of early modern iconoclasts often mirrored the roles of the villains in contemporary Passion plays.¹¹⁴ It was generally believed that Christ's tormentors and murderers were Jewish, and there was great anxiety that Jews would infiltrate Passion plays, eager as they allegedly were to crucify Christ once more. As Joseph Koerner shows, the extent to which iconoclasts, aiming to unmask the false images of papal religion, relied upon the 'scandal of all scandals,' Christ's murder by his own people, is striking.¹¹⁵

This only becomes understandable once we acknowledge just how deeply imbedded iconoclasm is in the Christian religion. At the heart of the Christian faith is the death of its god; through the death of Christ, son and true likeness of God, mankind is redeemed. One may object that Christ does not really die – or at least, that after three days he is resurrected. Yet, his Holy Wounds remain, as do the scars of the blows brought to images by iconoclasts. As Martin Warnke has shown, blows dealt to images were never arbitrary, and, what is more, led, as it were, to the creation of new images. Where facial features were removed, one could still see where the eyes, ears, nose and mouth once were; damage was consciously displayed – just as the wounds of the resurrected Christ, we might add, in other words (for example, fig. 50).¹¹⁶ As if they were convicted criminals, sacred images were punis-

¹¹³ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 157–158.

¹¹⁴ Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclasm', p. 174.

¹¹⁵ Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclasm', p. 174.

¹¹⁶ For an instructive example, see Cornelius J. de Bruyn Kops, 'De Zeven Werken van Barmhartigheid van de Meester van Alkmaar gerestaureerd', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 23 (1975), pp. 203–226.

hed – their eyes gouged out, their tongues pulled out, their genitals cut off, their limbs removed – but left ‘alive,’ so as to exhibit their shame and serve as warning.¹¹⁷ A paradox therefore underlies both the ontology of the Christian image and its destruction: they are based on resemblance and dissemblance at the same time. In Koerner’s words: ‘In striking the crucifix, iconoclasts at once negate and repeat the likenesses cultivated in their target.’¹¹⁸

When attacking images of Christ as well as of ‘normal’ human beings, destroyers took recourse to, and were motivated by, rituals of violence usually performed upon living people. The punishment of criminals *in effigie* was applied sometimes in addition to, sometimes instead of, actual physical punishment. In *charivari* rituals, or popular rites of judgment and defamation, effigies were often used. *Charivari* rites were usually performed in case of improper sexual or marital behaviour and effigies could for example stand in for someone’s dead spouse at the occasion of a second marriage. But *charivari* effigies were also borrowed for other rituals of shame, ridiculing unpopular figures such as the Pope (in the northern regions of Europe) or opposing religious groups in general by hanging or burning these images.¹¹⁹ As to punishments in effigy, these were usually executed by government order; major artists were hired to paint shameful pictures of the condemned on the facades of public buildings. An impression of what things like these looked like may be gathered from a skilful drawing by the Florentine Andrea del Sarto of two men hanging upside down, one by a rope around his ankle (fig. 51).¹²⁰ Such practices were obviously meant to damage the image’s prototype.

In this context it should be noted that the largest upheavals of image destruction in the early modern period, the campaigns of Protestant iconoclasm, played upon the perceived connections between images and their prototypes, too. While objecting to sacred images and the rituals in which these images played a central part, reformers themselves were inspired by these well-known processes of formal behaviour; for what else did they know? Drawing

¹¹⁷ Martin Warnke, ‘Durchbrochene Geschichte? Die Bilderstürme der Wiedertäufer in Münster 1534/1535’, in: idem (ed.), *Die Zerstörung des Kunstwerks*, Frankfurt am Main 1988, pp. 65–98, here p. 91 and further.

¹¹⁸ Koerner, ‘The Icon as Iconoclasm’, p. 191.

¹¹⁹ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 1997, p. 98 and further.

¹²⁰ Samuel Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance*, Ithaca and London 1985, p. 116. About ridiculizing images, see also Gherardo Ortalli, *La pittura infamante nei secoli XIII–XVI: “... pingatur in Palatio...”*, Rome 1979.

inspiration from the Carnival, itself already a parody on the normal way of things, they travestied official church rite.¹²¹ This meant that sacred images were smeared with blood, dragged through the mud, hung upside-down, paraded down the streets in carnivalesque parades, taken to bathing houses, or decapitated. As Edward Muir argues, characteristic of these rituals of reform was the frequent interchangeability between images and living representatives of the old order. Both groups, the images on the one hand and Roman Catholic priests and monks on the other, were ritually humiliated and degraded, while both served as figures of the old system.¹²² With Koerner one may ask, however, whether the iconoclasts not invested the images, while depersonalizing them, with a personhood they so strongly objected to.¹²³ Prerequisite for these violent reactions to images and priests alike was not their powerlessness; to the contrary, it was the belief in their great powers that made them potentially dangerous and their destruction necessary. Yet, paradoxically, in damaging an image, the iconoclast needed images as much as the iconodules did.¹²⁴

Conclusion: Malchiostro's End

Let us return to Malchiostro's damaged image. Part of an artistically innovative, but badly understood ensemble, placed centrally in the altarpiece, frontally – as we have seen, in the manner of a sacred figure – and, not to forget, the representation of a loathed man, we might say that it was an easy target. Attacked with pitch and other filthy stuff, on the basis of the technical evidence it seems likely that the part of the painting depicting Malchiostro was indeed the most damaged. We can only guess at what it must have looked like immediately after the attack: a splendid altarpiece with Mary and the greeting angel, but with a big black stain in between. Just as nothing can escape a black hole in space, the painting's black hole could have escaped no-one's attention, looming large over the whole ensemble of the chapel; a not-to-neglect display of Malchiostro's depersonalization. In this regard, it is important that no other emblems of Malchiostro in the chapel were destroyed.

¹²¹ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, p. 185 and further; Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclasm', p. 189.

¹²² Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, p. 185 and further.

¹²³ Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclasm', p. 179.

¹²⁴ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*; Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclasm', p. 183.

What happened in Treviso in 1526 does not belong to the category of *damnatio memoriae*; with all but one reference to the donor intact, it was utterly clear who was being defaced here; the survival of coats-of-arms, initials, inscriptions and so forth was vital to the operation's success. It is understandable, then, that the authorities decided to cover it all up and hide the damaged painting behind a curtain – although such a move would inadvertently have only increased the stain's attraction.¹²⁵

When the attack took place, Malchiostro had been ill for a while. Until his death in 1529, he was never to recover.¹²⁶ Was there, then, a perceived connection between the assault on Malchiostro's image on the one hand and his failing health on the other? It cannot be denied that the attack was meant to inflict damage upon the portrait's prototype. But how exactly was this believed to work? Regarding early modern Italian executions in effigy, authors before me have argued that this was not meant to work by some magical procedure, but, rather, by a shameful attack on the convicted person's public persona.¹²⁷ I wonder, however, whether such a clear-cut distinction can be made, in particular for this period.

What could 'magic' mean, in this context? If we could ask the assailants, they would probably have denied the use of something like magic; as members of the clergy, they knew only too well that magic was something for old women, something illicit and dangerous, something for 'them', not for 'us'. Indeed, for the sixteenth-century Italian church, as for many art historians today, 'magic' is a pejorative term, associated with the irrational, the illicit, and the primitive. Yet the mechanisms used by the assailants may be more similar to voodoo or volt sorcery than we would like to think. If we analyze the unfortunate events in terms of agency, we see that the assault had indeed the desired effect: the much hated Malchiostro disappeared from the stage.

¹²⁵ It was altogether common that Venetian and Veneto altarpieces be equipped with curtains; their purpose was to cover the image during the season of Lent. Peter Humfrey mentions some altarpieces retaining their curtain rods on the top of their frames: for example, the anonymous *St Michael triptych*, Sta. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 6 and 51. It seems to me that the Treviso *Annunciation* is one of them, too: the curtain rod is clearly visible just above the polychrome inner frame.

¹²⁶ Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 60.

¹²⁷ Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Magic, Myth and Metaphor: Reflections on Pictorial Satire', in: id., *The Uses of Images*, pp. 184–211, here p. 190 and further; Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, p. 171; Ortalli, *La pittura infamante*, chapter three.

In analyzing cases such as these, we should be aware of the differences between, firstly, elite and popular elements in a given culture, and, secondly, between theory and practice. The assailants, to be sure, were members of a certain elite – they belonged to the higher echelons of a diocese and must have been educated, cultured people, but, as scholars like Peter Burke have shown, this did not prevent them at all from taking part in popular culture, too.¹²⁸ Secondly, no-one was more aware than they were of the Roman Catholic decrees regarding images, involving, most importantly, that a represented person or deity is *not* in some way present in the image; that the deities represented in the image should be venerated, not the image itself. Yet, in assailing Malchiostro's donor portrait, the Trevisan clergymen ignored the theory, and chose for a solution that worked in practice. That this involved a work of what we, together with some of their contemporaries, now call 'art', surely did not matter to them.

¹²⁸ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot 2009, pp. 12–15.

Excursus

‘... *maledetto il saper vostro...* ’

Titian and Poetic Iconoclasm

I have at length discussed the extent to which the design of the chapel, and in particular that of the altarpiece, may have given occasion to the violence inflicted upon Malchiostro's donor image. Regarding the role of the responsible artists, especially Titian, questions remain. As has been noted, Titian's name nor references to any other artist did come up in the relevant documents – the blame was on Malchiostro, so much is clear. He was the one who embodied the chapel, not some painter. Yet, it is an intriguing question how Titian would have responded to the attack, and it seems significant that he never again used a similar composition for his Annunciations, or placed a donor frontally. While art history has long been principally focused on the artist, we have already seen in the first chapter that in the earlier half of the sixteenth century the artist was regarded as a relatively unimportant agent in comparison with the prototype or the patron. However, in the course of the century the perceived role of the artist became more prominent, partially due, I would like to hypothesize, to the efforts of Titian himself.

There is a later instance of a kind of negative response to Titian paintings, in which his role as artist does receive attention. I am thinking of a group of poems written by the *poligrafo* Nicolò Franco against his former master, Pietro Aretino, writer and friend of Titian. These eleven sonnets satirize Aretino's love of having himself portrayed by the major artists of his time. I would like to briefly discuss Franco's 'anti-poems', not only in order to gain further insight into the artist's role in (poetic) iconoclasm, but also to look ahead at the second part of this study, in which poetic responses to painted portraits take centre stage.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Although much has been written on Aretino and Titian, and on Aretino and Franco, this specific group of poems has not yet received much scholarly attention. A very recent treatment of Titian and Franco, which pays some attention to the poems, is Grosso, *Per la fama di Tiziano nella cultura artistica dell'Italia spagnola*, chapter 4. For a reference to the poems in relation to

Before Nicolò Franco (1515–1570) broke with Aretino, he was assisting him with the edition of his letters. It has been argued that their conflict arose over the publication of Franco's *Pistole vulgari* (1539). Other scholars have stressed the immediate outcome of the conflict, with Franco accusing Aretino of blasphemy and also of sodomy – a very serious crime in sixteenth-century Venice.¹³⁰ But it was Franco who came off worst: sometime in 1539, a protégé of Aretino's wounded Franco with a knife in the face, and Franco had to flee Venice. For a period of seven years he retreated to Casale Monferrato in Piedmont where he wrote the *Rime contro Pietro Aretino et de la Priapea*, of which only the third, extended edition published in Basel in 1548 has come down to us.¹³¹ Particularly the *Priapea* is strongly anticlerical in character; both works share a satirizing, often coarse tone, directed against the princes and other powerful men of Italy. In 1559, they were put on the *Index* of forbidden books. Aretino, their main victim, did not live long enough to see that happen, though.

In a way, Pietro Aretino was an easy target. We have already discussed the vulnerability of portrayed people generally. In sixteenth-century Venice, there was hardly, perhaps no other person at all who had himself portrayed as many times, and in such a wide range of media, as Aretino (for example, fig. 52).¹³² Aretino was painted, both in independent portraits and as onlooker or performer in history paintings; he was sculpted, cut in wood, and, if we should believe the man himself, also represented on comb cases, on mirror

Titian's portrait of Aretino in the Frick Collection in New York, see Luba Freedman, *Titian's portraits through Aretino's lens*, University Park 1995, p. 39; also relevant is Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr*, particularly pp. 102–103.

¹³⁰ See D.B.I., vol. L, pp. 202–203, s.v. 'Franco, Nicolò'; for the accusations see Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*, Oxford 2000, pp. 140–141.

¹³¹ See also Roberto L. Bruni, 'Le tre edizioni cinquecentesche delle Rime contro l'Aretino e la Priapea di Nicolò Franco', *Libri tipografi biblioteche. Ricerche storiche dedicate a Luigi Balsamo*, vol. I, Florence 1997, pp. 123–143.

¹³² For a survey of Aretino's portraits, see Lora Anne Palladino, *Pietro Aretino: Orator and Art Theorist*, diss. Yale University 1981, pp. 170–175. For Aretino and Titian, see Freedman, *Titian's portraits through Aretino's lens*. Regarding the printed portraits in books, Christopher Cairns questions Aretino's involvement. Usually presented as part of Aretino's programme of self-celebration, these author portraits (printed in Aretino's and others' publications) were, as Cairns argues, often re-used without Aretino's or the author's knowledge – a practice that continued until well after Aretino's death, into the seventeenth century (Christopher Cairns, 'Pietro Aretino: The Distorted Frame', in: Hendrix and Procaccioli, *Officine del nuovo*, pp. 203–216).

frames, and on majolica plates.¹³³ The scale and sophistication of Aretino's public exposure were heretofore simply unseen; a fact of which he was clearly very fond.¹³⁴ In a sonnet written to accompany a yet to be painted portrait of himself, Aretino exclaimed: 'You who love virtue, look with cheerful face upon the mastery of Titian. And you who have made appalling vice your idol, close your eyes so that you do not see me, because, although I am painted, I speak and understand.'¹³⁵ But it was this same trust in the powers of lifelike portraiture that made Aretino vulnerable to the kind of mockery conceived by Franco. Let us look at one of the poems Nicolò Franco addressed to Titian:

Titian, all those who've looked
at Aretino, painted in your papers,
and who've considered, each of them apart,
that he shows to have spirit and breath,

Have generally cursed the one
who was the author and invented such art,
and have damned your skill to the extent that
you have formed him so lifelike and well.

And don't believe that they insult
your rare and divine genius
for having him portrayed accurately.

¹³³ '... come ho detto piú volte, ritorno a dire che oltre le medaglie di conio, di getto, in oro, in ariento, in rame, in piombo, e in istucco, io tengo il naturale de la effigie ne le facciate dei palazzi; io l'ho improntata ne le casse de i pettini, ne gli ornamenti de gli specchi, ne i piatti di maiolica, al par d'Alessandro, di Cesare, e di Scipio. E piú vi affermo, che a Murano alcune sorti di vasi di cristallo si chiamano gli Aretini. E l'Aretina nominasi la razza de gli ubini in memoria d'una che a me Clemente Papa, e io a Federigo Duca diedi. Il rio de l'Aretino è battezzato quel che bagna un de i lati de la casa ch'io abito sul gran Canale. E per piú crepaggine de i pedagoghi, oltra il dirsi lo stile Aretino, tre mie cameriere e massare, da me partite e signore diventate, si fanno chiamare l'Aretine.' Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. III, no. 229, pp. 214-215, here p. 215.

¹³⁴ As Lora Palladino has it, he 'relished this means of subverting decorum.' Palladino, *Pietro Aretino*, p. 174.

¹³⁵ 'Chi ama la virtù con faccia lieta,/ Di Tizian contempli il magistero.// E quel ch'idol s'ha fatto il vicio orrendo/ Chiudi aper non vedermi gli occhi suoi,/ Ché, anchor ch'io sia dipinto io parlo e intendo.' Pietro Aretino, *Lettere sull'arte*, eds. Ettore Camesasca and Fidenzio Pertile, vol. III-1, p. 212. See also Palladino, *Pietro Aretino*, p. 191 and further.

For the people who hate him so much
would rather see him dead,
and you have made him seem alive.¹³⁶

Franco is playing with the well-known topoi of poetic praise: Titian's portrait of Aretino is seen to have a spirit, it breathes, it is alive. Also, Titian has portrayed the sitter accurately, as he is (*ben formato, accorto*). Yet, the portrait's audience is not happy: they had rather seen the sitter dead. In the case of the much hated Aretino, a living image is not the highest ideal, but something that should be avoided. Anticipating the sitter's actual end, a death *in effigie* is what Titian should have aspired to.

Other poems do not go as far as to wish 'the Scourge of Princes' dead, but instead make use of erotically explicit writing as a satirical tool – and are therefore no less cruel. Let us take a look at the following sonnet:

Titian, you have portrayed Aretino,
and shown that he's the one and only
who in the middle of the Grand Canal keeps a brothel,
and who wrote the Nanna to the baboon;

Who does not know Latin and calls himself Divine,
who signs as 'Scourge of Asses',
who in sonnet-making rivals with Burchiello,
and who practices love-making either way.

Oh, if only you had rendered him
in that attitude which shows his back,
so that he seemed ready for a joust,

I would drop dead
if sometime in your life you'd have made a thing
which was more faithful to nature.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ 'TITIANO, tutti quegli che han guardato/ L'Aretin pinto ne le vostre carte,/ E han considerato a parte a parte/ Ch'egli mostra d'haver lo spirito, e 'l fiato,// Hanno generalmente bestemiato/ Chi fu l'autore che trovo tal arte,/ E maledetto il saper vostro in parte,/ Per voi lhaver sì vivo e ben formato.// Et non crediate che si faccia torto/ Al vostro ingegno pellegrin e divo/ Per esser stato nel ritrarlo accorto.// Per che la gente che l'ha tanto a schivo,/ Havrebbe a caro di vederlo morto,/ E voi pur fate che le paia vivo.' Nicolò Franco, *Delle rime ... contro Pietro Aretino, et de la Priapea ... terza edizione, colla giunta di molti Sonetti nuovi* (Basel, 1548), p. 23r.

This sonnet is surely no exception among the *Rime contra Pietro Aretino* in its being directed to a group of insiders. To fully understand the poem, the reader has to know, for example, about Aretino's dialogues on the sex lives of women, pastiches of the learned sixteenth-century dialogue treatise.¹³⁸ The reader should be versed in contemporary lyrical poetry, to see that Franco is in fact mocking the lyrical praises bestowed on the top painters of the time. A bit easier to grasp, however, is the sonnet's sexual overtone, which centres, as the other sexually explicit parts of Franco's *Rime*, on an accusation of sodomy (*quell'attitudine che mostra/ la schiena*). Framing the sonnet is the portrait Titian did not paint; the master's actual portraits of Aretino are too flattering to be real, the reader may surmise.

In this way, we may conclude, Franco painted lifelike, but threatening images of Aretino with words. Based on the Horatian dictum 'Ut pictura poesis', in more elevated genres it was common to claim that painting was much like poetry and poetry much like painting. Yet the same seems to have counted for the lower genres. So much is at least suggested by Aretino himself, as he revelled, he once wrote, in besmirching paper like others 'take pleasure in defacing (*imbrattar*) the white walls of hostleries.'¹³⁹ This chapter has hopefully made clear that iconoclasm, be it visual or verbal, was not merely symbolic – it had an impact that was very real.

¹³⁷ 'TITIAN, ritratto havendo l'Aretino,/ Mostrato havete, ch'egli e il vero, & quello/ Che in mezzo il Canal grande tien bordello,/ Et che scrisse la Nanna al Babuino,// Che non ha lettere, & chiamasi Divino,/ Che si scrive de gli Asini Flaggello,/ Che in sonettar concorre co'l Brucchiello,/ Et che fa l'arte a dritto, & a mancino.// O s'in quell'attitudine che mostra,/ La schiena havesse volta in guisa tale,/ Che ne paresse in punto per la giostra,// Cader possa in disgratia del male/ Se cosa haveste fatta in vita vostra/ Che havesse havuto piu del naturale.' Franco, *Delle rime contro Pietro Aretino*, p. 23r.

¹³⁸ '... che scrisse la Nanna al Babuino': Aretino dedicated his *Sei giornate*, dialogues with explicitly sexual explicit contents, 'al suo monicchio', an ambiguous phrase which may mean both 'to his monkey' and 'to his mistress'. Babuino was also one of Rome's speaking statues. As the inventor of the literary *Pasquinade*, or poetical utterings of another speaking statue, il Pasquino, Aretino indeed was Babuino's conversation partner.

¹³⁹ '... non so se non aprir la bocca e lasciare cader giuso a caso detti debili e parole inutili, faccendo con gli inchiostrì ne le carte di quei segni che con i carboni fanno ne i muri bianchi de l'osterie colori che hanno piacere d'imbrattargli.' Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. I, no. 153, pp. 226–227, here p. 227. The reference is from Paul F. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian world (1530–1560)*: Anton Francesco Doni, Nicolò Franco & Ortensio Lando, Madison, Wis. 1969, p. 8.