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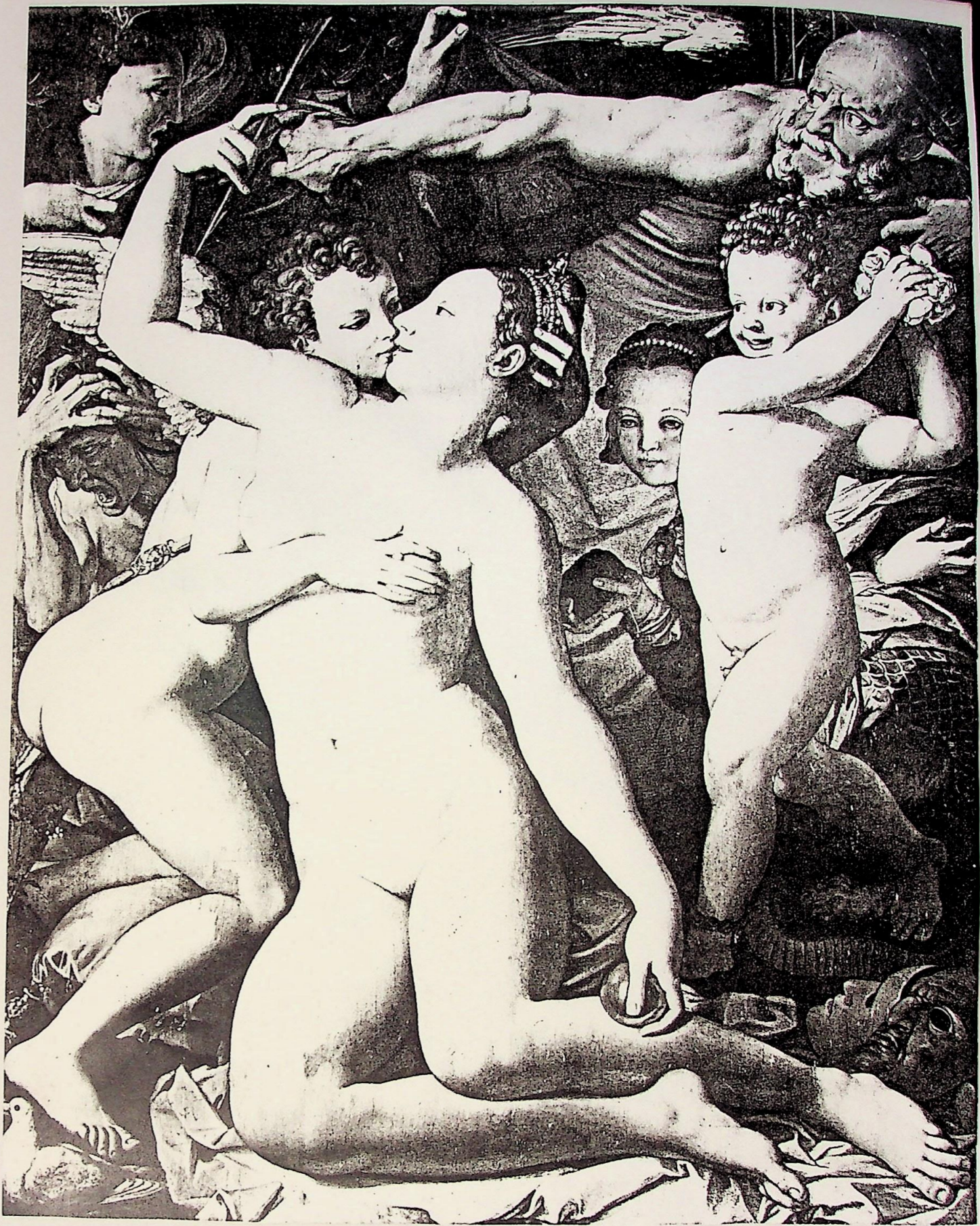
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## Introduction

Due to my interest in Bronzino's Allegory on Venus, Cupid, Time and Folly, I began to look at Mannerism more closely, to discover in it ideas which still have resonance in the twentieth century. For instance, in Mannerism - the Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art, Arnold Hauser sees the Mannerist era as a time when the idea of PARADOX first showed itself effectively as a form of expression. It was during this time also that he detects the first literary examples of TRAGEDY in the modern sense (Shakespearian tragedies such as King Lear and Macbeth), and additionally the primary emergence of HUMOUR. Also he finds much Mannerist imagery as a reaction to and expression of the apparent mood of ALIENATION of its society. In my opinion these particular ideas and attitudes remain important considerations when making art today. There are numerous examples of twentieth century art that deal with or transmit a sense of alienation or a tragic sense of powerlessness to change our situation of fate. How many present-day depictions can we think of that rely on humour or moreover self-reflective parody for its effect? Therefore these are the concepts I intend to discuss in relation to Mannerist imagery and an according, retrospective look at Art made in our own century.

John Shearman in his book on the subject is right when he introduces it with "This book will have at least one feature in common with all those already published on Mannerism; it will appear to describe something quite different from what all the rest describe"<sup>1</sup>. It's true that art historians tend to disagree when evaluating Mannerism. However there are historical facts. For

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<sup>1</sup> John Shearman, Mannerism - Style and Civilisation, p.15

instance, Mannerist tendencies or characteristics in painting were seen to emerge in 1510 and lasted approximately for fifty years. The term itself which has only recently been adopted (during the nineteenth twenties), comes from the Italian word "maneria" which means "style" or "stylish". It could then be suggested that this term was chosen because it possibly describes a time when the style with which a work was characterised became more significant than the message it might be transmitting. The Mannerist "style" succeeded the High Renaissance which was epitomised by the work of Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo and there are many ways of viewing how and why this work may have influenced and paved the way for Mannerism. Trewin Copplestone in his general and brief account of the period proposes that the technique of these masters carries a message in itself, possibly that of an unattainable quality. As a result he suggests that Mannerism is prone to ignore the content of this imagery and thus merely "ape" its manner. For instance, that Mannerist work appropriates Michelangelo's expressive, exaggerated forms, or Leonardo's grace and sophistication, taking these elements further yet denying why they happened in the first place. He goes on to say how the High Renaissance had assimilated and perfected the process and eventual confidence of the Renaissance, leaving artists in succession at a loss as how to follow, let alone surpass it.

Shearman on the other hand argues more positively when he claims the Mannerist period as an advancement of this very "perfection". Moreover he sees its ornate, "more beautiful than beautiful" artificiality as an indication of its confidence, (and confidence) in the assertion of the artist's right to make something that was first and last a work of art. (An assumption, he suggests, primarily gained by the leaders of the High Renaissance.) Shearman accounts for much of the absurd, bizarre nature of Mannerist imagery as the beginnings

of so-to-speak the artist's "poetic licence". It was due therefore, to this new, if not heady, discovery of the artist's freedom and the "absolute work of art", that the Mannerist artist was prone to demonstrating his almost<sup>2</sup> decadent virtuosity.

Shearman is dubious too when historians of this century, such as Hauser, see the period in terms of "tension", "reaction" or "crisis". He suggests that these expressionistic interpretations of Mannerism are nothing more than an<sup>3</sup> invention of an expressionistic age. Certainly he would disagree with Hauser's theory that Mannerism is rife with "Modern" notions and his eventual conclusion that it is the forgotten origin of modern art. Mannerism, according to Shearman, is a confident art that was made purely on the grounds of making something beautiful and that it should then be discussed and enjoyed on its own terms and in terms of its own time. For instance, throughout his book Shearman quotes from the writings of Vasari, the sixteenth century biographer and (Mannerist) painter. Vasari supports the author's theories with his straightforward praise of Mannerist imagery, describing it as free from the "dryness" of its predecessors and full of invention and elegance.

It is difficult to prove which assumptions are correct and it might seem, as Shearman thinks, appropriate to take this first-hand knowledge as truth. However, looking at these paintings which remain elusive and extremely disconcerting, they can't easily be categorised as Shearman's "art for art's sake", nor as Copplestone suggests, an art that has lost its way. I could be accused of enforcing the problems and prejudices of my own time on this sixteenth century era. However, I think discussing the connections that Hauser makes will prove to be worthy of consideration and provocative.

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<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid, pp.171-172

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid, pp.135-136

To begin this discussion, it is necessary to first, briefly, outline the spiritual crisis of the era.

### The Reformation

Although the Reformation is usually associated with the Renaissance, (this is seen for instance, in Anthony Blunt's Artistic Theory in Italy 1450 - 1660), it should be noted that this religious movement occurred towards its end as opposed to its initial development. We could approximate the fifteen-twenties as the time when the Reformation became most effective and therefore from this assume that it was Mannerism which reflected its mood. However it should also be mentioned that the first traces of Mannerist characteristics in painting appeared before this time, with the early work of the Florentine Pontormo and Rosso, for instance. (Although there are differences in spiritual content between this earlier Mannerism and the later, which will be discussed). To add, we could also note that Mannerism could not have been a direct result of the movement, as the Reformation opposed much religious art as being an incitement to idolatry (in Germany, for example, religious art was literally wiped out due to the fact that the Reformation there occurred with greater force). Hauser states that most Mannerist art then, despite its dealings with religious issues, was in fact irreligious (Parmigiannino's Madonna del Collo Lungo is devotional and simultaneously rather pagan, which will be considered in better detail later), and only became not so towards the end of its span with artists such as Tinteretto and El Greco.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to accord these later painters with the attitudes of the Counter-Reformation. What is more, there are also many examples of how the authorities of this counter-movement rejected much of the work made by the earlier Mannerists.

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Hauser, The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art, p.73 Hauser recognises that although the work of the early Mannerists (Pontormo and Rosso) was highly spiritualised, the general impulses behind them were, however, hardly religious, as they were with Michelangelo for example. To add, it was not necessarily these religious and other worldly aspects of Michelangelo which exclusively impressed and influenced the Mannerists.

Therefore what needs to be emphasised here is that possibly the Reformation may have created an atmosphere which influenced the early sixteenth century Mannerist sense of life.

The Reformation professed the idea of the individual as opposed to the Church as being the centre of religious life. It was Erasmus Luther's notion that there should be a direct relationship between the individual and God, that such a relationship did not require a medium such as the Church. More importantly, he proposed a direct connection between faith and salvation. Salvation he saw not as something one could secure merely by doing good works. Better expressed in his own words "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man performs good works"<sup>2</sup>. These ideas led to those assumed by the Protestant doctrine of predestination, which implies the belief that the rule of God, his decisions, his granting of salvation, are completely beyond the range of human understanding or human judgement. Thus man's attempts to be moral, just and pious are of no consequence as these ideas or rules are human ideas and rules and are not binding on God. Moreover, divine grace is not based on merit, deserts, rights or justice. God can grant salvation to someone undeserving and deny it to another who is in our eyes deserving, because this arbitrariness and perhaps injustice belongs to His nature.

These ideas had a profound effect on its listeners. Suddenly the idea of the inevitable after-life and salvation as long as good deeds were done, the idea of man's freedom to choose his own fate had been undermined. Now man was seemingly abandoned, alone with a fixed fate which he was powerless to change.

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<sup>2</sup>

Ibid, p.64

### The Idea of Paradox

It is easy to imagine then how the Mannerist sensibility paralleled these emerging insecurities. Unlike the Renaissance with its humanist foundation based on ideals such as the superiority of man, that with self-discipline and self-control he could raise himself from his human state. In the first half of the sixteenth century Mannerist man was nothing more than a fallen sinner even though he may not have sinned. It was a world faced with a God who had no regard to human standards such as right or wrong, good or evil, reason or unreason.

From this we could assume that Mannerist forms were a reaction to the humanism, order, objectivity and security of the Renaissance. Shearman would disagree entirely. He sees no "crisis" or disintegration of the Renaissance. He finds in Mannerism no "reaction", merely a continuation and elaboration of what had gone before.

Hauser would disagree with both Shearman's theory and the simple explanation of "reaction". He states that it was a reaction, that it was emancipated from norms, that it was irrational and unnaturalistic. (Shearman regards the unnaturalistic elements of Mannerism as evidence of its artists wanting to improve upon nature<sup>1</sup>). More to the point, Hauser goes further to say that Mannerist work contains as many natural elements as well as unnatural, that it introduces as much rationality as it does irrationality. Moreover that

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<sup>1</sup> Shearman, p.174

although it appears unclassical (in that it distorts and exaggerates), it remains to introduce classical forms throughout. A proper understanding of Mannerist art then can only be realised if we see it as a product of the tension between classicism and unclassicism, naturalism and formalism, rationalism and irrationalism, sensualism and spiritualism, traditionalism and innovation, conventionalism and a revolt against conformism. Its effects then come from this fusion of seemingly irreconcilable opposites. From this Hauser suggests that much Mannerist imagery is self-contradictory or more specifically<sup>2</sup> PARADOXICAL. At the same time as it relies on reality it has a tendency also to defy it, obscure it or possibly hint at its ambiguities.

We could presume then that these painters maybe like to play with form and create for us illusions. As Shearman might explain, put on a show of their virtuosity. Hauser however, sees the paradoxical nature of Mannerist work as reflective of the conflicts of life itself. Everything in life could be viewed as ambiguous. It could be said that there is no way of being certain about anything. Nothing exists absolutely and more to the point the opposite of every reality is also real and true. Therefore, maybe it is only when we view both opposites at the same time can we find true meaning and therefore express it. With this paradoxical approach it appears that the Mannerists were not simply negating, condemning or reacting to what went before, but it is more likely that they were attempting to show the truth as being two-sided. Linda Hutcheon supports this in A Theory of Parody when she describes paradox as "two-voiced" and a mixture of praise and blame which makes it a "critical<sup>3</sup> act of reassessment and acclimatisation".

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<sup>2</sup>

Hauser, pp.12-15

<sup>3</sup>

Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, p.2

A good example which illustrates the paradoxical nature of Mannerist painting both with its execution and content is Bronzino's London Allegory (fig. 1.). Bronzino, born in 1503, was one of the chief painters of the second generation of Mannerism in Florence. Charles McCorquodale in his study of the artist<sup>4</sup> offers a clear account of the London Allegory. He begins by contrasting it with Titian's Venus of Urbino painted only a few years previously in 1538. Titian's Venus, he states, is sensuously naked and is posed in such a way that it emphasises a rather vulnerable aspect of female sexuality. On the other hand Bronzino's Venus is not in a sense naked in that she is covered in a hard outer shell which merely simulates flesh and possibly parodies its curves and softness. She becomes almost a precious object and what makes her attractive to us and even seductive is her very unapproachability. Hauser mentions this particular sensuality too, suggesting that it is so characteristic of this late Mannerism, sometimes described as "secret eroticism".<sup>5</sup> This prudishness, as it were, seems connected to the courtly prejudices, rules of etiquette and aristocratic camouflage of the time. Sex is made ritualistic to be further enjoyed and a curtain is being drawn over it, not to hide but to emphasise its existence. Paradoxically (as in Bronzino's portraiture) all concealment draws attention to what is concealed. The inclusion of silk, gold and jewellery against the "flesh" adds to this subtle eroticism.

McCorquodale in discussing the theme of the painting first perceives it as the "triumph of Venus" for she holds the golden apple given to her as a reward for her beauty.<sup>6</sup> It is a triumphant pose but is simultaneously ambiguous. For instance the movement of her head and right arm is quick and dynamic whilst the remainder of the figure is at rest or even lethargic. This can be compared with the contrast between the compact and fast-moving action of "Folly" on the

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<sup>4</sup> Charles McCorquodale, Bronzino, pp.88-89

<sup>5</sup> Hauser, p.201

<sup>6</sup> McCorquodale, p.89

This proposed theme, "Triumph of Venus" was put forward by Michael Levy.

right and Cupid on the left who crouches somewhat indecently with his buttocks to the viewer. The figure on the upper right-hand-side with wings and an hour glass signifies "Time" who is seen to be struggling with "Fraud" (upper left) with his mask and wig, to pull away the curtain. It would be accurate to think that this curtain previously covered "Jealousy" who is tearing out his hair and the monstrous lower body of "Pleasure". "Folly" comes forth bringing rose petals and only reveals to Venus and Cupid the sweet side of "Pleasure" who with an insincere expression offers a honey-comb. It is important also to notice how the light falls on its tail making visible and revealing the truth about "Pleasure" only to the spectator. Venus and Cupid remain ignorant and it is only by the removal of the curtain by "Time" that the moral of the story can be unfolded. The moral being perhaps that behind the apparent sweetness of sensual love hides jealousy and fraud or deceit. The truth about love or sensual love is shown to us then as having a dual nature.

Surrealism clearly demonstrates twentieth century use of paradox. In surrealism it seems that the meaning of everything is fused with its opposite. For instance, the real is fused with the unreal, the rational with the irrational, and the worldly with the unworldly.

Hauser goes on to suggest that this form of expression did exist before Mannerism, yet he states how Mannerist painters expressed themselves most effectively through paradox. Possibly this way of thinking could be aligned with ideas I have already mentioned, for instance, the idea of predestination. Certainly many aspects of the doctrine of predestination are paradoxical in themselves. To quote Luther, "Faith must learn to rely on nothing". Surely

the word "faith" could be defined as trust or belief in something. Luther then in this statement asks of his listeners to learn to have a belief or trust in something that is not necessarily there.

It was not only religious matters that operated paradox. Economically it existed in the worker's alienation from his work (which will be discussed later), and politically it appeared with the "double-standard" of morality, one for the prince and the other for his subjects, (reflected in Machiavelli's The Prince). In sixteenth century literature too, when tragedy (Shakespearian) became a popular theme, with its paradoxical notions of guilt without sin, paradox can be seen also with the discovery of humour which looks at and judges things from two contradictory aspects.

#### The Emergence of Modern Tragedy

Tragedy as a form of expression is more particularly associated with literature. Nonetheless it is necessary to discuss it in this dissertation. First, it seems that the idea of tragedy plays a large part in much contemporary fiction, whether that be literature or cinema. Secondly, to illustrate the Mannerist sense of life further it is probably worth considering the proposition that the birth of modern tragedy parallels the occurrence of Mannerist tendencies in the visual arts.

Hauser primarily differentiates between the ancient and modern concepts of tragedy.<sup>1</sup> His first point stresses that it is the factor of LONELINESS that punctuates most modern tragedy. The hero of ancient tragedy ("Oedipus") is struck by disaster but he remains consoled by the bond between himself and his fellow men. The modern tragic hero (Shakespeare's Lear, Macbeth and Hamlet), on the other hand, descends to his doom alone. More importantly, he is not alone due to his tragedy, it is possible that his tragedy is a result of his loneliness. The suggestion here is that if the modern tragic hero had a companion or friend or was capable of having such, someone who might understand him or understand his deed, there could be a possibility of him escaping eventual downfall.

The idea of fate, too, differs from the one concept of tragedy to the other. For instance, in the modern sense the hero's fate depends upon his character, whereas in ancient tragedy it is determined by the gods. The modern hero's fate then is more or less a result of his failings, his relentless passions, or the excesses of his nature. It is not a drama then which involves any external powers, but is concerned mainly with a constant inner conflict. The leading protagonist is at war with nothing but himself. The story becomes tragic because finally he will discover in himself the reasons why he had done the deed and he will see his inevitable, catastrophic end. Paradoxically, he becomes heroic at this point because although he is lost and doomed, through his soul-searching he will have finally found and understood himself. The hero of ancient tragedy may likewise be driven to the same horror and despair, yet he never looks to himself for the cause of his tragedy. The concept of modern tragedy therefore tends to rely on the idea of continual inner conflict, the problem of responsibility and the question of guilt.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Hauser, p.131

This preoccupation with the self can be seen in Mannerist painting, such as Parmigianino's Madonna with the Rose (fig. 2), painted in 1528 to 1530. This work witnesses the first introduction of such self-absorption or narcissism into religious art. Hauser suggests that the Virgin in this case was originally intended as a Venus which is highly probable with her sensual and seductive appearance. Never before had the Virgin been depicted so with her veil-like dress caressing the curve of her breast. Neither before had she been seen as a figure so self-interested. It is not certain what her gaze is fixed on, yet it is hardly focussed on the young Jesus who in this painting looks more like a pagan adolescent, confronting the viewer with his almost brash exhibitionism.

To add to the "aloneness" expressed in modern tragedy is the role allotted to God. In ancient tragedy the gods were actually involved in the drama in that they played a part. Contrary to this, although there is an awareness of God, in modern tragedy he never intervenes but becomes a mere spectator. Therefore, modern tragedy, it would appear, takes place in a space that has been more or less abandoned by God.

Hauser asserts that it was only during the sixteenth century, and not before it, that the concept of modern tragedy could have evolved. In the Middle Ages, for example, it was not conceivable for many reasons. Primarily this period saw man's soul as instructible, and death as a doorway to the after-life. What is more, for the Christian, the presence of God may not save him from death, suffering or misery, but surely He would not allow him to fall victim to complete solitude and helplessness. Additionally, the values for which the modern tragic hero strives seem to have very little to do with Christian

values. His ambitions, it is true to say, rarely have anything to do with heaven. From this we can assume that modern tragedy sets up a moral system entirely different from that of the Christian. The modern tragic hero's values would have appeared alien to the Christianised Middle Ages because at all times he would have been opposing God. So it is not only the Christian trust in the after-life and salvation which would have made this type of tragedy impossible. Moreover, the Christian could not have conceived an opponent of God as being deserving or heroic. The world of the Middle Ages was one of immortality, with the prospect of salvation, divine help and forgiveness and their tragedies could only have worked on the basis of characters that were good and bad. There couldn't have existed the idea of a hero that was guilty yet innocent at the same time.

Hauser states that tragedy became an important dramatic form during the first half of the sixteenth century because he asserts that tragedy of this kind expressed the fundamental experience of the day, in that it illustrated the sense of ambiguity to all things. Tragedy in this sense does not give simple or straightforward answers or attitudes. Its hero is continually wavering between right and wrong, guilt and innocence, compulsion and the freedom of choice. He is constantly at war with his ambitions on the one hand, and his nostalgia on the other.

An example which demonstrates this inner conflict is The Choice of Hercules<sup>2</sup> by Anibale Carracci in 1595. Here, Hercules stands between two females, wondering whose invitation to follow. One represents pleasure and the other virtue and self-denial. Heracles is the Greek version of Hercules, however, no ancient author speaks of his hesitating between a life of self-indulgence and a life of self-negation.

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Looking into Paintings, pp.62-64

Similarly, the ideas behind modern tragedy are reflected in the "film noir" of the nineteen forties. The main protagonist in these films is usually compelled to commit his or her crimes due to uncontrollable ambition or, more likely, circumstance.

There are of course certain links between modern tragedy and the Protestant doctrine of predestination. It occurs with their similar attitude towards the question of guilt, in that both perhaps view it as irrelevant. The latter implies that salvation is decided in advance without regard to justice or reward, as with the tragic hero whose fate is fixed from the very start regardless of his guilt or innocence. Likewise, if we refer again to Luther when he said "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works" we can relate this to the idea that the tragic hero's bad deeds are possibly irrelevant. He commits a crime that he is compelled to, and cannot help but, commit. It is his character and the strength of that character which makes him what he is. Paradoxical this might seem, and so too is the concluding idea in that paying the price for his crime or deeds he comes to a tragic, yet heroic and victorious end.

#### Humour

"The age of Mannerism", writes Hauser, "was the first to laugh amid the tears",<sup>1</sup> and how before this era, humour as he defines it, was not to be found in western art forms. In literature it raised its head in works like Don Quixote and later, evidence of humour in Mannerist painting will be discussed. Primarily humour must be distinguished from irony. Humour tends to look at things from both sides. It puts things into perspective. Having humour means

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<sup>1</sup>  
Hauser, p.140

considering the good and bad aspects of everything. It is fair and sympathetic. In Hauser's words "Humour can disclose a man's worst failings and nevertheless forgive them; it can make one like him, and even perhaps<sup>2</sup> praise and value him". It is able to see good in evil and absurdity in the great. Irony on the other hand ridicules and searches for weaknesses. Humour like tragedy appears to be a way of dealing with life in an age that had become complicated and rife with contradictions. Although seemingly opposite both forms of expression are similar. For instance, tragedy results from a problematic and incomprehensible world, but they differ where tragedy cannot accept it, whereas humour tends to reconcile itself with it. Just as tragedy, however, has a paradoxical nature, so too does humour. For example, in modern tragedy the hero, as we have considered, can be guilty and innocent at the same time, as is the humorous incident simultaneously serious and absurd.

The Madonna del Collo Lungo (fig. 3), (or the Virgin with the Long Neck), painted in 1535, unifies many contradictory aspects. For instance, here Parmigianino shows the most exaggerated, yet graceful, elongation of forms. The bodies are too slender and the hands too narrow. The face is delicate, almost Raphaelesque, and the throat is most sensitively painted. These figures thus somehow create a cohesive sense of naturalness, yet at the same time considered separately they appear to be rather unnaturalistic. Likewise, the immediate narrative and format of the work seem rational, but yet again its combination of subjects, its proportions and its representation of space are completely irrational. The figures defy the laws of nature and nothing functions as it is supposed to. We could ask ourselves if the Virgin is sitting or standing or possibly leaning against something. Surely the child

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<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid, p.141

is also unsupported and according to the laws of gravity would immediately slip from its mother's lap. Again we cannot assume either if the Virgin looks at her child or is entirely self-absorbed. Where the scene takes place is also uncertain in that we cannot even be sure if it is indoors or outdoors. The columns and the heavy curtain in the background contradict both suggestions. We could also question what the collection of figures on the left-hand side represent. Possibly they are angels, however this isn't specifically signified. At any rate, they come bearing gifts to the Virgin who looks in relation to them rather like, in Hauser's words, "A sublimated, graceful idol". All this suggests that this is certainly a devotional picture, but additionally it has strong pagan undertones. It neither appropriates the Christianity or inner struggles of Michelangelo nor the later orthodoxy of Tintoretto. It appears that Parmigianino's representation is both, as we have considered before, religious and irreligious, and also both serious and absurd.

Pop art of the sixties was serious in its comment on society and its imitation of high art form, whilst simultaneously it used light-hearted low cultural objects and imagery.

#### Alienation and Mannerism

The earlier consideration of the emergence of modern tragedy dealt with the dramatisation of an inner conflict and the main protagonist or hero as not alone due to his tragedy, but his tragedy as a consequence of his loneliness. In this chapter therefore, the idea of alienation in relation to the sixteenth century will be discussed.

Hauser broadly interprets "alienation" as an individual's sense of uprootedness, aimlessness or incapability to harmonise his aspirations, standards and ambitions. He attributes the first valid definition of "alienation" to Hegel, but stresses that its origin certainly does not lie in its discovery and definition. (Nor, however, is it timeless in that it does depend upon historical conditions.) Alienation then, he suggests, has existed ever since modern civilisation developed and man began to tie himself to conventions, traditions and institutions. More specifically alienation grew as man's spiritual world disintegrated and was then replaced by other interests. Although this was a gradual process, it can be assumed that during certain periods, the Middle Ages for instance, it slowed down, whereas in the sixteenth century it accelerated. It was during this time, once the Renaissance had developed its sophisticated civilisation, that the mood of alienation affected all fields of life. For example, as discussed earlier, spiritually men appeared cut-off from familiar notions that had before given their lives meaning and purpose. When mechanical means of production were introduced (which will be seen later), the worker became somewhat estranged from his work. Additionally, due to the birth of "modern" institutions such as those governing the economy, and justice and the new economic pressures of the market, man's former relationship with his master was disrupted if not extinguished.

In effect man had created his own "Frankenstein" of objects, forms and values and instead of being its master he became more or less its slave. He then grew dependent on such yet he is not in control of them and neither can he possess them.

Alienation could be interpreted as the loss of wholeness of man, or as Marx would call it, his "universal nature"<sup>1</sup>. This loss of universality occurs then when ideas and systems become autonomous, independent of and isolated from the unity of life: for example, ideas and systems such as the State, the economy, the sciences and art, which bear no concrete reality, but are almost "abstractions". Marx would place much emphasis on this loss of contact with reality from which he suggests the phenomena of alienation is a result. Hegel on the other hand perceives alienation as an acceptance of this reality as opposed to a departure from it.

Hegel is therefore positive about alienation when he puts forward that man loses himself in his own creations: for instance, works of art, philosophies, religions, sciences and so on and therefore he lives in an alien, spiritually unreal and imaginary world. Each of these belongs to its creator and simultaneously does not. Without this element of alienation he suggests that the mind "would continue in a state of passivity, a form of being for itself alone"<sup>2</sup>. Further, that alienation represents a necessary and indispensable stage in the mind's journey to itself. Just as, for example, the modern tragic hero has to undergo his ultimate loneliness and sense of alienation from the real world and its morals before he can eventually discover the truth about himself.

It could also be mentioned here that Mannerist art, although as Hauser would see it could be interpreted as a protest against or a way of escape from alienation, its imagery more often than not paradoxically succumbs to it. Evidence of this is seen in the way in which its absurdity and high-finish alienates its creator, and is notably demonstrated by the work of the second

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Hauser, p.96

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Ibid, p.96 (Hegel, Phanomenlogie des Geistes)

generation of Mannerist painters, Parmigianino and Bronzino. In contrast, Pontormo and Rosso show the first traces of mannerism in works such as Pontormo's Joseph in Egypt (1515, fig. 4), and Rosso's Descent from the Cross (1521, fig. 5). The former shows us how the painter is no longer bound by the Renaissance concept of perspective, or by the necessity of presenting his subjects in a rational, objective way. Rosso's colour is emphasised and serves its violent and expressive purposes. His drawing is used less as a means of describing form and more as a means of implying ideas or stressing the narrative's drama and emotion. This, the first phase of Florentine Mannerism was characterised by its passion, spiritualism and expressionism. Ten years later than Pontormo and Rosso, Bronzino and Parmigianino were born in the same year, 1503, and with them evolved an art that was certainly calmer in mood. It is true to say that although not impersonal, their art did however lend itself to a rather depersonalised means of expression. For instance, Bronzino's figures are rendered flawless, cold and marble-like (especially his portraits), whilst Parmigianino's art remains decorative and extroverted. Nonetheless it is important to consider here how these later Mannerists reinforce the notion of paradox in that their work had become extroverted and formal yet meanwhile it did not ignore qualities of its predecessors such as introversion and expressionism.

Marx opposes Hegel's concept of the idea with its abstract and timeless generality when he emphasises that alienation is dependent on historical conditions. At this point Hauser proposes that the Mannerist period had seen the beginnings of a technical age. There had been an increasing mechanisation of labour in the areas of, for example, textile manufacture, mining, printing and glass and paper manufacture. With this came the emergence of unskilled workers replacing the skilled or the craftsmen.

There can be parallels drawn between the process that took place during the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century and such that was initiated in the sixteenth century with the development of capitalism. Therefore to a certain extent the Mannerist era can possibly be considered in a similar way as Marx criticised the nineteenth century. Marx suggests then that due to the mechanisation of labour, man's labour becomes labour for others with the sense of alienation being a consequence. To add to this mood, no longer a craftsman, the worker loses any bond he may have had with the product he produces or helped to produce.

It is possible to imagine that the sixteenth century worker, now emancipated from serfdom had a more comfortable situation than those who had gone before him. Obviously the work of the serf was possibly more strenuous and perhaps even soulless. However, with this new age came ideas about the rights of the human personality and ideas about the social classes, which appeared unsteady and changeable. With ideas such as these the worker during this era merely became more aware of his situation.

Also with this age came the concept of commodities. Not only had the worker's time become a commodity, he had come to think of his strength and capability as a saleable object. This has certain implications of loss of personality and individual identity. As has been said earlier man was liberated from serfdom and granted the sense of individual freedom, but at the same time this new mobility offered him merely a different kind of degradation. He was now under the threat of becoming dehumanised and objectified.

In relation to this, Wurtenberger in his book on Mannerism makes an interesting point in the case of Parmigianino's Madonna del Collo Lungo, when he talks about the relationship between the figures and the architecture in Mannerist painting.<sup>3</sup> He suggests that the way in which the Madonna stretches up from her platform and is isolated and positioned, is related to the equally solitary "figure" of the column. He therefore assumes that the spectator is challenged to compare the two impressively isolated images and measure them against each other. Hauser vaguely interprets these columns as possible representations of factory chimneys. Wurtenberger goes on to explain how for example the inclusion of decorative busts and caryatids to some extent forces human bodies to become architectural details. One instance of this can be seen in Bronzino's portrait of Ugolino Martelli (1535) (fig. 6).

This concept of commodities obviously affected the position of the artist of the time. Now the artist was no longer a mere craftsman and was more or less allowed to do as he pleased. Skills and talents that were particular to the artist were recognised and therefore rewarded. Also the Mannerist era saw the birth of the art dealer and collector in the modern sense. Surely from this it could be imagined how the art work began to emerge as a commodity and how the artist was forced into a pressurised atmosphere of competition. This is interesting in respect of Shearman's notion that Mannerist characteristics in art grew out of and revelled in a confidence, if not over-confidence, as a result of this novel licence. Hauser suggests that although works infused with more individuality than ever before were made, it is still important to take into consideration the sense of insecurity as a price to pay for this new independence.

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Franzsepp Wurtenberger, Mannerism - The European Style of The Sixteenth Century, p.68

Comparatively, the town worker is freed from the feudal system; in exchange for this freedom, he too probably suffered from this competitive insecurity.

Likewise, the Protestant who has unleashed himself from the iron fist of the Church is then, in Hauser's words, "Thrown back on himself, full of anxiety and suspicion", with no priest to punish him, or forgive him, let alone save him.

Mannerism also saw the emergence of many important institutions as we know them today. For instance, institutions which govern military organisation, the administration of justice, social organisations and the government itself. Hauser attempts to define characteristics of institutions which have visual parallels in Mannerist imagery.

First, there is the notion that spontaneity is at risk when dealing with institutions; moreover, that institutions possibly have a life of their own, an inner mechanism. With Mannerist art it is easy to find forms which appear as if they have succumbed to a certain type of puppet-like mechanisation. The ambiguity of Venus's pose in Bronzino's Allegory (1545) has already been mentioned. She is on one hand moving dynamically and on the other at rest. Her movement then seems forced and artificial. Also there is evidence of a struggle against this mechanisation with its exaggerated forms (Parmigianino's elongated Madonna). Just as the institution has taken on a life of its own with little bearing on human reality, Mannerist imagery sometimes makes a point of not directly relating to the individual or natural reality. (Bronzino's portraits pay as much attention to costume and jewellery

as they do to the human face.) Another negative facet of the institution is perhaps how its true and original purpose is pushed backstage, in that its administration is carried out purely for the sake of its administrators. Mannerist art relates to this idea in that much of its decorative detail appears to have no function. There also lacks certain relationships in its imagery. One example of this is how the postures and movements of its human figures do not often accord with the assumed spiritual content of the piece (Madonna del Collo Lungo).

It is also necessary to consider how the introduction of modern science led to a disenchanted world, where everything began to be rationalised and demystified. Mannerism however guards its secrets and mysteries closely. This secrecy often occurs alongside a sense of alienation and shows itself most effectively in Mannerist portraiture.

Wurtenberger sees Mannerist portraiture as an accurate way of illustrating the attitudes of the sixteenth century era.<sup>4</sup> Primarily, he points out their possible difficulty with the genre due to, on the one hand the Mannerist tendency to deviate from reality, and on the other the demands of portraiture to show man's inherent and actual appearance. However, he concludes that with their ability to combine the irreconcilable the Mannerists contrived an effective and inventive solution. Mannerism then showed men that were intensified and exaggerated. The forms they take are noticeably upright and narrow which Hauser refers to as the Mannerist characteristic of "verticalism". In portraiture however this verticalism creates a certain tension about the sitter. Their poses are generally cold and formal and in Wurtenberger's words,

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<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid, p.141

"they are not people of flesh and blood" living ordinary lives, yet are more likely forced and cramped into stiff and artificial postures and surroundings. It is as if the figure is not accustomed to letting himself go or being composed or relaxed in his own environment. Furthermore, simultaneously we can detect this reluctance to appear relaxed and natural, and additionally traces of restriction and often melancholy.

Hauser speaks of Bronzino with his correctness of form and perfected technique as a born court painter. He is however still very much a Mannerist in what he reveals about himself and those he portrays. It can be seen in what he holds back and conceals behind the cool reserve of his sitter, by the way in which he separates his subjects from the outside world. Pontormo may have paved the way for these depictions with his portraits which were characteristically expressive and also had an air of neurotic sensibility. It was Bronzino however, who led the way and served as an example for the whole movement to follow.

For Bronzino the face became a mask as opposed to the mirror of the soul. Paradoxically he perceived the portrait as something that conceals as much as it reveals. Now contrary to Renaissance portraitists and sitters who had no objection to depicting and being depicted as they really were, the Mannerists no longer believed in nor aspired to such ideas. Hauser suggests that Mannerism saw a time when the soul was considered to have been as much alienated from its physical shell as it was by any other material medium. In other words the face was perceived as alien to the soul, just as external as a man's clothes, weapons or jewellery. Therefore, often we notice, and possibly find it hard to accept, that Bronzino and other portraitists of the time convey little qualitative difference between the real portrait and its accessories.

Egon Schiele working at the beginning of the twentieth century painted portraits which seem to have similarities to Mannerist portrayals. For example, with their elongation and verticality they create the same degree of tension. Their anxious poses and tracteries of lines like nerves, whilst in one way give us an accute and intense insight into the sitters' personality, their unnaturalistic tendencies also separate the viewer and sitter from his humanity. This is seen, for instance, in his portrait of Arthur Roessler completed in 1910.

Parmigianino's Self-portrait from a Convex Mirror (fig. 7) is interesting in that his over-large hand in the foreground both invites and connects its on-looker to the subject, and also represents a barrier between the sitter and the outside world. Likewise the hands in Bronzino's portraits serve the same purpose. As well as conveying the etiquette and high breeding of the sitter, it could also be thought to put a distance between the subjects and their observer. They are part of the armour that protects and shuts us off from having any direct sense of intimacy with the figures. They may act in the same way as do the accessories of jewellery, architecture, weapons and sculpture, which distract us from having this direct connection.

McCorquodale sees Bronzino's portraits in rather a different light and takes the two drawings Study of a Young Man (fig. 8) and Portrait Study of Pontormo (fig. 9), as examples of when the portraitist's pictorial devices first emerged. In these works McCorquodale finds an urgent sense of the sitter's presence, resulting from the sudden turning of the head. Also, the vertical and three-quarter-length form of Pontormo urges us to concentrate our attention on his hands. He implies, contrary to Hauser's theory, that with

this device Bronzino's depiction of hands not only demands our scrutiny and approval, it also helps to underline pictorial arrangements. Like Hauser he suggests that with their fetishistic concentration they are isolated like the inanimate objects that surround the subject. Further, that rather than distancing the viewer and thus preventing us from engaging with the sitter's personality, he perceives the hands as crystalising that very personality or at least assumed role. For example in Portrait of a Young Man with the Lute (1534) (fig. 10), the left hand could be seen as completing the diamond shape formed by the head, left shoulder and right elbow. Ugolino Martelli's hands are notably and lightly placed on his open book and additionally help to balance the dramatic fall of lines from his head. Bartolomeo Panciatichi's (fig 11) claw-like hands turn inwards to emphasise his rigidly controlled intellect paralleled by the background architecture.

McCorquodale perceives no paradoxes in Bronzino's portraits. On the contrary, he suggests that we are not left with what Vasari saw in Rosso, "A procession  
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of masks, but with perfect externalisations of intangibles, of an inner sense of life. He seems not to find contradictions between this the work's strange rigidity and cool execution.

However, he does suggest that most of the poses in the portraiture do possess a somewhat dual nature. With the example of the Ugolino Martelli portrait (1535-36) he asserts that on the one hand the pose is "natural" (he has stopped reading for a moment, marks the page with his finger and remains pensive), but on the other hand it is highly stylised. This "natural" pose is then full of opposing twists and turns of the body. He finds spatial contradictions too.

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<sup>5</sup>  
McCorquodale, p.50

For instance, the perspectival lines of the table and architecture denote a certain depth whereas the "flatness" of the figure excludes it. McCorquodale has difficulty too with the architectural background of many of these works. This occurs again in the depiction of Martelli, but much more so in the Bartolomeo Panciatichi portrait. Primarily, he finds comparisons between the monumentality of the architecture and the subject's pose. Also we are shown three window frames on the left with perhaps their bizarre architraves, but they are presented in a repetitious and distorted way, urging us to question their function in the piece. He is uncertain too about the large arch in the distance and the half-light coming through it.

Possibly painted in the same year as the Panciatichi portrait is the portrayal of Eleonora of Toledo-Medici with Giovanni de Medici (fig. 12). This portrait illustrates some interesting ideas put forward by Wurtenberger on the treatment of women and children in Mannerist portraiture.<sup>6</sup> First he conceives the female costume as playing an important part in that it is used lavishly and provocatively taking on a value of its own quite apart from the sitter. Its forms were also usually stiff and exaggerated with little relation to the natural forms of the body. The tired and fixed gaze of Eleonora of Toledo-Medici perhaps makes a strong contrast to such rigidity. He goes on to suggest that the modern spectator who might prefer to see the child depicted as looking and behaving naturally, would find it disconcerting to find that Mannerist portrayals do not describe them as spontaneous. They are more likely caught in conventinal poses looking as though they were miniature adults. Even inclusions of them holding up birds or dolls do not release them from such stiff postures.

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<sup>6</sup>  
Wurtenberger, p.208

It is possibly as a result of this apparent sense of alienation that the Mannerist, similar to the expressionist of the nineteen twenties, attempts to have an alienating and startling effect on its audience. Therefore the Mannerist painter not only chooses strange and startling subjects, but also tries to render the most ordinary things in a startling way. Like expressionism, the purpose is not merely to surprise and unsettle, but also to state that it is impossible to feel at home among the things and environment of this world.

### Conclusion

It would be wrong to assume that any art made in the twentieth century is a repetition or undeviated continuation of Mannerism. What has to be looked at, however, are the similarities of the two centuries. For instance both have witnessed the phenomena of social disintegration, the mechanisation of life, the institutionalisation of human relations and the alienation of the individual. This same sense of life leads to similar art forms (for instance, those which work on the basis of paradox, humour, or stem from or confront alienation). More likely then, the intentions of the twentieth century artist are possibly sometimes reminiscent of the intentions of the Mannerist. Therefore considering that the purposes of the art made from both eras could be compared, maybe we can then think about how artistically these intentions are carried out.

In my opinion, it has often been perceivable how painters of the twentieth century have placed more emphasis on the "idea" behind a work and have misplaced (purposefully or not), the question of technique. On the other hand, the Mannerist tends to strike a fine balance between the two, and as a result has expressed his "ideas" more effectively. The best Mannerist works in my opinion

have the capacity to stand up both as "works of art" and as competent and successful vehicles for "ideas", without supportive discussion. It is not my suggestion then to literally imitate Mannerist work. That would be both inappropriate and to no end. I do propose, however, that we take time to focus on the labour-intensive and sophisticated methods of these sixteenth century painters, and take a leaf or two out of their book.

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