INTRODUCTION

DECORUM, THE CLASSICAL IDEAL OF FITNESS TO PURPOSE, was central to Renaissance theories of comportment, literature, and art.[1] Not only a matter of intellectual debate, it also formed the basis of an emotional reaction to a work of art. Renaissance viewers must have felt comfort, boredom, or possibly even contempt for impeccably decorous works of art and surprise, pleasure, or disgust at works that challenged the accepted limits. We cannot reconstruct all of these private reactions, but decorum was such a pervasive concept in the Renaissance that the abundantly available art, poetry, narratives, letters, dialogues, satires, commentaries, sermons, and theoretical treatises of the period offer a textured picture of the shifting limits of decorum. Studying decorum and the transgression of its boundaries does not lead to one stable interpretation of a work of art, but rather to the range of ways in which art functioned in times of cultural tensions, rupture, and occasionally violent change.

Titian painted highly successful religious works during the volatile atmosphere of the movements for Catholic reform and the beginning of the Counter-Reformation.[2] The problem of the relationship between Titian's art and the religious changes of his time is one of decorum: how did Titian create imagery that was so successful in both the tolerant mood of the first quarter of the century and the newly restrictive climate of the early Counter-Reformation? Although we have little or no direct evidence for Titian's own views about matters of faith, a rich trove of sources survives to document the complex debates about decorum in Titian's immediate circle. Venice experienced a printing boom in the sixteenth century, and both local and foreign writers settled there. Some of these writers, the *poligrafi*, did not depend on patronage for their livelihood, but instead made money by writing books and so were extraordinarily prolific, publishing dozens of works in many genres.[3] Titian cultivated friendships with a large group of writers – more than sixty over the course of his career.[4] Therefore, it is possible to study not merely generalized period poetics, but also the particular concerns of his immediate associates. The readership for the books that these authors published was broad. (Many were published in several editions.)

These books, mostly written in the *volgare*, appealed to the same type of elite, but not necessarily classically learned audience that patronized Titian's paintings.

Word and Image

Many scholars who have studied the relationship between word and image in Renaissance Venice have focused on iconography or reception.[5] I have not studied how Titian read specific texts. I do take reception into account, but it is not the primary focus of this study. Rather, this book examines how both writers and painters solved the same artistic problems peculiar to Christian imagery. Decorum governs the consonance (or disjunction) between form and content in both art and literature. Therefore, a study of decorum addresses both Titian's iconography and his shifting styles of painting as factors that are inextricably bound together. Likewise, I examine not just what was said in the works of Titian's writer-friends, but also how they said it. The literary conventions that govern the writings of Titian's friends are revealing of the ideals and assumptions of their authors. Their writings are works of artifice, often meant for a public readership, and, as such, offer parallels to Titian's art. I am indebted to the sophisticated explorations of aesthetics and poetics by Michael Baxandall, Patricia Fortini Brown, Elizabeth Cropper, Creighton Gilbert, Philip Sohm, and David Summers.[6] David Rosand, in particular, has illuminated ways in which sixteenth-century Venetian painting relates to the literary culture of the time.[7] John Shearman's studies of pictorial rhetoric have also been foundational for my work.[8]

Titian solved problems of decorum with such consummate skill that we are left with little trace of his deliberations. By studying the often less felicitous works of his literary colleagues and how they dealt with the same issues in a climate of rising censorship, I explore Titian's use of decorum. In this regard, I am following Alexander Nagel's study of Michelangelo's "reform of art," which examines how Michelangelo reacted to the changing artistic and religious climate of the cinquecento in his images of the dead Christ.[9] I have focused on debates about style; on tensions or contradictions between form and content, theory and practice, and word and image; and on passages in which authors struggled to articulate the indescribable *non so che*.[10] Criticism by colleagues and clerics and expurgated editions also demonstrate which issues were most pressing in Titian's circle. Although decorum can vary for different media and audiences, the problematic passages in the writings of Titian's friends offer clues to the issues that challenged Titian in his creation of a new religious imagery in such tumultuous times.

The Counter-Reformation in Venice

During Titian's long life, the religious atmosphere in Venice changed drastically. Early in the century, Venice, which boasted a republican government, autonomy

from the papacy, and a relatively free press, was known for harboring freethinkers.[11] Writers fleeing Rome (before and after the sack) and those who had offended the powerful in Medicean Florence took refuge in Venice.[12] Others came to study in nearby Padua.[13] Many of these writers met Titian, came to dinner at his house, had him paint their portraits, and wrote praise of his art.[14] Venice was also a center in these years for religious thought. Thinkers as diverse as Gasparo Contarini and Gian Pietro Carafa took part in wide-ranging debates about ecclesiastical reform.[15] Some worried that Venice had become a hotbed of heresy, the door through which Protestantism would enter Italy.[16] Venetian intellectuals had many contacts with Protestants before such relations were considered dangerous.[17] In this early period, the boundaries were still fluid, and those who would be identified as heretics were indistinguishable from those who would later support the Inquisition and the Council of Trent.[18]

The situation became much more divisive in the 1540s, with the failure of attempts to reunite Christianity, the establishment of the Holy Roman Inquisition, the convocation of the Council of Trent, and the apostasy of Bernardino Ochino and Pier Paolo Vergerio.[19] Many of Titian's friends admired Ochino, and Titian knew Vergerio personally.[20] Most of the writers in Titian's circle were directly involved in these events, as either inquisitors or accused heretics. Some of his literary friends were pathetic, even tragic failures at accommodating the decorum of their writings to the changing situation. The Inquisition banned many books by writers Titian knew.[21] Niccolò Franco, who had written in praise of Titian, was executed as a heretic.[22] Some seem to have had genuine Protestant convictions, whereas others were not astute enough to realize that times had changed, that it was no longer within the bounds of orthodoxy to praise Erasmus, for example.[23] A few of Titian's friends supported the findings of the Council of Trent by writing anti-Protestant polemics and acting as inquisitors.[24] Giovanni della Casa, who had written poetry almost as bawdy as Aretino's in his youth, became an inquisitor, ordered book burnings, and pressed the Venetian government to allow the execution of heretics.[25] Pietro Aretino, Titian's close friend and publicist for many years, suffered a sort of *damnatio memoriae* after his death. Not only were all of his books swiftly banned, but also his name – only a few years before so feared and admired – disappeared from the works of his erstwhile friends.[26] Titian, who lived through all of this, must have been acutely aware of the changing times.

Titian's Decorum

Unlike many of his literary friends, Titian was enormously successful at negotiating decorum in his religious works.[27] His contemporaries praised his religious paintings as the best examples of his work, and sophisticated patrons coveted his altarpieces for their private collections.[28] Although many of his close associates were

censored for indecorum in their religious writings, Titian's paintings were never so criticized, but rather lauded and imitated. His paintings, however, could hardly be called cautious. Building on the innovations of Giorgione, Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael, he gave his Christian paintings a new heroism, a startling violence, and an unparalleled sensuality. Titian's innovative religious paintings continued to be praised, collected, and imitated after his death, during the height of the Counter-Reformation, usually conceived as a period of restriction or regimentation in matters of decorum.

Despite the success of Titian's religious works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since the nineteenth century, scholars have accused him of indecorum and even impiety in his religious images.[29] The early Madonnas sitting in landscapes seem too earthy and humble, the Mary Magdalenes too sensual, the scenes of martyrdom and the Passion too full of violent human suffering. In this view, Titian's master, Giovanni Bellini, has such a different sense of decorum – so much quieter, more dignified, less violent. His spiritual piety seems a foil for Titian's preoccupation with all things human. We can avoid such anachronistic interpretations of Titian's art by reading these paintings as aesthetic or even poetic works without passing moral judgment on them, but this would be to underestimate the importance of decorum as a moral quality in cinquecento religious art. A study of period ideas of decorum allows us to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of ahistorical moral judgments and equally ahistorical moral relativism. The writings by authors in Titian's circle do not vindicate a Victorian prudery about Titian's religious art. They do, however, demonstrate that modern concerns about the decorum of his imagery are not wholly anachronistic.

Augusto Gentili has suggested that Titian was a heretic who expressed his heterodox ideas covertly in his paintings.[30] Gentili argues that Titian's religious views can be surmised from his connections with heretics. Nearly every member of the Venetian elite, however, knew someone who would later be accused of heresy. The standards of the 1570s should not be applied retroactively to the 1530s.[31] There is no evidence that Titian had any contact with known heretics after they had declared heretical beliefs.[32] The exception to this is Titian's tenant, the writer Andrea di Ugoni, who admitted to various heretical beliefs before the Venetian Inquisition in 1565. The Inquisition apparently felt that Titian was beyond suspicion, as they never questioned him, and when they released Ugoni, they allowed him to return to Titian's house, with the condition that he was required to inform the Inquisition if he moved.[33] Titian knew both those who would later be deemed heretics and those who became inquisitors, those whose books were banned and those who banned books, those who composed anticlerical works and those who were Catholic polemicists. We have no way of determining Titian's private religious sentiments either from his paintings, made for public or semipublic contexts, or from the published works of his many

and diverse literary friends. However, the public success of Titian's religious images, both during his lifetime and later in the height of the Counter-Reformation, can be studied in relation to the religious polemics of his day.

Titian and Writers

Titian knew a large number of writers, about sixty. (A catalogue, included in the Appendix, documents Titian's relationships with these writers and offers biographical and bibliographical information on them.) No one author's religious point of view or style can be identified with Titian's art. They wrote both elevated Petrarchan poetry and bawdy, anti-Petrarchan satire.[34] Titian painted portraits of many of these writers, and the variety of ways in which he depicted them suggests something of the heterogeneity of his intellectual circles (e.g., Figs. 1, 2). Aretino was famous for his denigration of scholarly pedantry, but many of the writers in Titian's circle were learned in classical languages.[35] Some were patricians, independently wealthy dilettantes; others were children of artisans who worked for editors and searched for patrons to make a living.[36] Valeksa Von Rosen has focused on dialogues by a few writers in Titian's circle and argued that Titian's art should be understood in relation to this dialogic culture.[37] The dialogue is a mode suggestive of the climate of debate that surrounded Titian, but it was not the only or primary literary form used by his many friends, who wrote, for example, more commentaries on Dante and Petrarch than they did dialogues. Even the work of one author is hard to characterize. Aretino wrote lewd satire, Petrarchan poetry, plays, letters, and religious prose.[38] Similarly, Giovanni della Casa was known for his obscene poetry, his courtly dialogues on language and manners, and his index of prohibited books.[39] Such versatility was not a vice but a virtue for a writer trying to make a living by publishing his works.

Although authors in Titian's circle rarely agreed about matters of religion or poetics, their contentious writings demonstrate which issues were central at the time. Renaissance writers argued over the same issues that worry modern scholars: questions about the mixing of the sacred and profane, high and low, sensual and saintly, and suffering and hope. Titian's literary friends treated religious issues in satirical and serious poems, dialogues, orations, narratives, and letters. They were united in their concern for the *volgare*.[40] These writers published almost exclusively in Italian (Tuscan, actually). Their works of literary theory include many references to the visual arts and to specific painters. Similarly, texts about art refer to poetic and rhetorical theory.[41] Renaissance writings on art and literature share the same terminology, use the same examples, and are modeled on the same ancient texts.[42] Writers dealt with the issues of imitation, invention, and decorum that must have been of concern to Titian. When commenting on Dante and Petrarch, they argued over questions of Christian poetics.[43]

1. Titian, *Portrait of Pietro Aretino*, 1545, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

Charles Hope has argued that there was little interaction between art and literature in the Renaissance and that paintings depended more on a purely visual tradition than on any complex literary or philosophical concepts.[44] Others have noted that Titian was not terribly learned or literary.[45] Although Titian was never treated as a mere craftsman, it also does not seem that he was considered to be an equal participant in literary debates. He seems to have known little Latin and was certainly not a writer like Cellini, Michelangelo, or Vasari. For example, whereas Vasari and Michelangelo wrote their own letters to literary men, Titian most often sent his greetings to writers through other writers.[46] He came from a family of lawyers and officials in which a moderate amount of education was the norm.[47] All of his letters except the simplest ones seem to have been written for him.[48] Although Titian was often praised in dialogues, he was only once an interlocutor in a dialogue about a technical subject, the optical effect of a rainbow, in which his role was confined to that of asking questions.[49] This is in contrast again to Michelangelo, who appeared as the central authority in a dialogue about Dante.[50]

Ridolfi, Vasari, and Dolce attest to Titian's affable manner and pleasant conversation.[51] He emerges in these accounts not as learned, but as fit company for learned men.[52] Titian had intellectual pretensions. He had letters full of rhetorical flourish sent in his name to the rulers of Europe and must have been pleased with the praise he received from writers. By 1562, he had his own Virgilian *impresa*.[53] In

2. Titian, *Portrait of Pietro Bembo*, 1540, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Samuel H. Kress Collection. Photo: © 2003 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

sixteenth-century Italy, an artist who wished to compete with the likes of Giorgione, Raphael, and Michelangelo would have to appear to be cultured in literature. We have little information on contact between artists and writers in Venice before Titian, although Giovanni Bellini was a friend of the writer Pietro Bembo, who later became a friend and patron of Titian.[54] Giorgione's sophisticated art suggests that he, too, had connections to intellectuals. Titian, who was acutely aware of Raphael's innovations as an artist, must have realized that Raphael's literary circle was also something to emulate. Indeed, many of the same writers who had been in Raphael's circle in Rome later joined Titian's circle in Venice.[55] Similarly, writers who had close contact with Michelangelo also came to dine with and wrote in praise of Titian.[56] After Correggio gave his son the unusual and distinctively literary name Pomponio, Titian chose the same name for his son.[57] Titian, like his friend Jacopo Sansovino, also intended to give his sons more of an education than he had been given.[58] He knew several artists who were also writers (including Michelangelo, of course) and must have felt that a first-class artist of his time needed to associate with literary men.[59] These writers, many of whom were involved in the printing industry, acted

as publicists for Titian's art.[60] Studying the literature of his friends is thus necessary for an understanding of Titian's public image and the public success of his religious works.

Writers and artists in sixteenth-century Venice actively competed with each other for patronage and fame. Titian's close associate Dolce wrote twice that Raphael's paintings compete with poems.[61] Writers and artists contended for patronage and argued over which medium could better portray physical and spiritual realities, the word or the image.[62] Some authors praised Aretino's powers of mimesis by saying that he had exceeded even Titian's brush; others bemoaned their inability to match their words to Titian's paintings.[63] Giulio Camillo recommended that artists read his treatise on literary imitation, and Dolce wrote that writers should read his treatise on art.[64] Indeed, Titian called his late mythological paintings *poesie*, perhaps to claim a poetic license for them.[65] Scholars have focused on the relationship between word and image in these secular works.[66] This book explores instead the poetics of Titian's religious inventions. It is not a survey of Titian's religious works but an investigation of issues of decorum in Titian's religious paintings.

The Decorum of Genre

One of the issues of decorum that most occupied writers in Titian's circle was the question of genre. As Fredric Jameson has noted, genres are "social contracts" by which authors attempt to regulate the reception of their work, an impossible task.[67] The problem of controlling the range of interpretations of religious art became more and more crucial during Titian's lifetime. The primary models for cinquecento treatises on literary theory were Horace's *Ars poetica* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, both of which are largely concerned with decorum as a function of genre.[68] How could ancient theories and models of genre be adapted to the Christian story, which seemed to evade any such categorization? The lives of Christ and the saints combine high and low, the pastoral, epic, lyric, tragic, and comic. Each of the following chapters deals with a different genre (with the exception of Chapter 2, which addresses similar issues of decorum and the reconciliation of ancient models with Christian subjects). I do not mean to imply that Titian thought of some or all of his paintings as belonging to a literary genre. He did, however, use a different decorum for large or small images or to depict violent or amorous subjects, indoors or out in a landscape. His works are of different genres, whether or not he intended them to be. The theory of genres was not articulated in a comprehensive way until the end of the sixteenth century.[69] During Titian's lifetime, genre was a matter for fertile debate, much like religion. An examination of the works of Titian's literary colleagues in various genres and on the issue of genre clarifies how Titian negotiated problems of decorum in his Christian *poesie*.

1
Christian Pastoral

TITIAN WAS PARTICULARLY FAMOUS IN HIS LIFETIME for his depiction of landscape.[1] His trees offer dappled shade and move in the wind, gently framing a quiet scene or tossed by the rage of a terrible drama. Whereas some of these paintings are heroic in subject and scale, others are explicitly pastoral, in that they depict shepherds and nymphs in an idyllic bower of the Golden Age. Titian also painted a number of religious images that are pastoral in subject and in style. In these works, the landscape is not a mere background, but affects the meaning of the scene. Titian exploited the lyric and elegiac potential of the pastoral tradition in order to create religious works that have a particularly intimate, quiet, and sometimes mournful tone. There was a tradition of religious pastoral poetry, but it is potentially problematic to treat pious subjects in a pastoral mode, as the pastoral usually consists of erotic poetry, written in a style that is self-consciously humble and low (if, of course, carried out with great elegance and artifice). To explore how Titian balanced the high and low, the pagan and Christian, intimacy and distance, humility and artifice, and the erotic and the mournful in his religious pastoral paintings, I first discuss briefly the conventions of secular pastoral poetry and Titian's secular pastoral paintings, before exploring how Titian and others used the same motifs in Christian pastoral works.

1. Renaissance Pastoral Poetry

The Greek poet Theocritus invented pastoral poetry.[2] Virgil's Latin *Eclogues*, which expanded on Theocritus's poems, were famous for their purportedly simple evocation of a Golden Age of leisure, abundance, and music, which was thought to be the rustic origin of poetry.[3] Virgil's Arcadia was not completely idyllic, however, as his shepherds sang bitterly about death, tribulations in love, and the corruption of the world.[4] Pastoral was revived in the trecento and, by the cinquecento, there was a long tradition of pastoral poetry in both Latin and the *volgare* on secular and religious subjects. In Titian's time, pastoral literature was identified almost exclusively with

the writings of the Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazaro.[5] It is not clear whether Titian ever met Sannazaro, but he certainly must have heard of him.[6] Sannazaro was one of the most widely admired poets of the sixteenth century and a friend of Bembo and Navagero.[7] His works were published in Venice and avidly discussed there, according to contemporary sources.[8]

Sannazaro's work exemplifies the great range of pastoral literature. His *Arcadia* consists of alternating passages of poetry and prose, which include the traditional motifs of pastoral, such as descriptions of an ideally fertile landscape and shepherds' love songs and laments.[9] Sannazaro also added epic moments to the story, most notably a descent to the underworld.[10] The work is in Italian, and so accessible to a wider audience, but dense with classical allusion – not only to Virgil, but also to a host of other ancient authors.[11] Sannazaro also wrote a religious poem that includes many pastoral elements, the *De Partu virginis*, which is discussed further later.[12] Sannazaro's work demonstrated that the pastoral mode was flexible and could be used to express a variety of moods for both secular and sacred purposes.

2. Titian's Secular Pastoral Paintings

Titian's pastoral paintings are similarly varied. A brief survey of Titian's secular pastoral works is necessary to demonstrate how he incorporated the same motifs into his religious paintings. The question is complicated by problems in the attribution of a number of paintings, which are considered to be by Giorgione, the young Titian, or another painter in their circle, including – most famously – the *Concert Champêtre* (Fig. 3).[13] As most scholars now seem to agree, the brushstrokes and drawing of the figures exhibit the vigor of the young Titian. The painting could also be by another, less well-known painter working in the same circles. Regardless of the attribution, the *Concert Champêtre* demonstrates the interest in pastoral imagery in Venice in the early cinquecento. The subject is debated but obviously pastoral, with shepherds, nymphs, reed pipes, and a shady moment of repose.[14] If it is a Titian, the very closeness in style to Giorgione nevertheless demonstrates how much Titian's vision of pastoral harmony depended on Giorgione's way of painting languorous figures absorbed in a shady landscape.[15]

There are a number of paintings, prints, and drawings securely attributed to Titian that are pastoral in subject. The Edinburgh *Three Ages of Man* (Fig. 4) shows a wild-haired and naked youth in landscape, with a woman wearing a leafy crown, who is about to play the pipes rather suggestively.[16] There are no sheep, but the setting, the nudity of the youth, the wreath of the maiden, and particularly the simple oaten flutes identify this painting as pastoral. The depiction of lovemaking, as well as the reference to mortality (in the form of an old man holding skulls), are both appropriate in the pastoral mode, which often encompasses the lyric and the elegiac.