

# Pontormo's Capponi Chapel\*

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Pontormo's work in the Capponi Chapel in Santa Felicità, Florence, began in 1525 with the decoration of its hemispherical dome, a fresco of God the Father surrounded by four patriarchs. The fresco was followed by four circular panels for the pendentives with bust portraits of the evangelists, partly Bronzino's work,<sup>1</sup> and by the great altarpiece, variously called *Descent from the Cross* (or *Deposition*), *Pietà*, or *Entombment* (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The final work, datable in 1528, was the fresco of the *Annunciation* on the window wall. This last, the four tondi, and the altarpiece in its rich period frame are intact. The cupola decoration was lost when the original dome was destroyed to make way for the present shallower vault; nor do we know whether this occurred in the sixteenth or the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In fact, no clue to the dome decoration emerged until 1914 when F. M. Clapp cited a drawing at the Uffizi (Fig. 12) as "probably a study for one of the Patriarchs."<sup>4</sup>

Fifty years later Janet Cox-Rearick identified no less than seven Pontormo drawings for the destroyed cupola (Figs. 4–5, 9–13).<sup>5</sup> Her comprehensive study remains the prerequisite for any consideration of the lost fresco, and hence for every attempt to reconceive Pontormo's design for the chapel in its original unity.

John Shearman took the next step. In his recent Charlton Lecture he argued that Pontormo's altarpiece had been "studied too much in isolation," that it belongs to "a larger whole." He reads the representation as a sequential action:

\* My thanks go to two friends for their timely assistance: to Professor Virginia Bush who listened to the initial idea as it emerged and helped it grow; and to my colleague at Hunter College, the Pontormo scholar Professor Janet Cox-Rearick, who read an early draft, made welcome suggestions, and handed over to me a wealth of photographic material.

<sup>1</sup> For a summary of conflicting attributions, see Berti, 101f. (A bibliography of frequently cited sources follows the Appendix.)

<sup>2</sup> *Deposizione* is the traditional designation (Vasari, Richa, Becherucci, Cox-Rearick, Freedberg, and others). Fontana explicitly calls it a *Kreuzabnahme*; Hauser, a *Descent from the Cross*. In Clapp it appears both as a *Deposition*, which is a narrative moment, and as a *Pietà*, which is a devotional image. Berenson's "Pietà" of the *Florentine Drawings* (1903) becomes "Deposition" in his *Lists* of 1932. Voss, 168, calls it a *Grabtragung*. Forster credits Doris Wild (*Strzygowski Festschrift*, 1932, 184f.) with first recognizing that the picture does not represent a Deposition but a *Grabtragung* with compositional roots in Meleager sarcophagi. Paatz, 67, calls it *Grablegung*, the distinction between *Tragung* and *Legung* being blurred in the English "Entombment." Hartt, 507, and Shearman, 10, see it as an *Entombment*, the latter complaining that Pontormo scholars "with peculiar tenacity . . . continue to call [it] a Deposition." But confusion in scholarship usually indicates some real enigma within the work. In the present case it points to a conception that escapes conventional categories.

<sup>3</sup> Pontormo scholarship vacillates between three dates – 1589, 1736, and 1766. The earliest date would connect the destruction of the original vault with the building of Vasari's corridor linking the Uffizi with the Palazzo Pitti. The corridor grazed the exterior façade of Santa Felicità and may have occasioned changes inside its entrance wall where the

as "Christ is taken away from His Mother, towards the tomb . . . the Virgin's gesture . . . becomes one of farewell." Meanwhile, on the vault surface directly opposite, the figure of God the Father (known to us from the Uffizi drawings, Figs. 4–5) extends his right hand in "a gesture of sublime compassion and benediction directed across the Chapel to the dead Christ." "The fusion by gesture and emotion of dome and altarpiece has the effect that the subject-matter of the parts also becomes one, and that an action takes place across the space of the chapel."<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, I will have to quarrel with almost every detail of Shearman's analysis. But my disagreements, instead of invalidating, will, I believe, confirm his essential intuition.

## I. The Vacant Center

To begin with the two main characters in the altarpiece. Shearman sees the Virgin as "swooning backwards." A moment before, she had held Christ's left hand, "which she now releases, and it is taken instead by one of the two women who will go with the body to the tomb."<sup>7</sup>

But we are given no indication that the Virgin is swooning. It was indeed during these very years that the propriety of the Virgin's swoon – *lo spasimo* – was subjected to theological scrutiny. The official position is set forth in an important epistle of July 17, 1506 (republished 1529), written by Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, and entitled

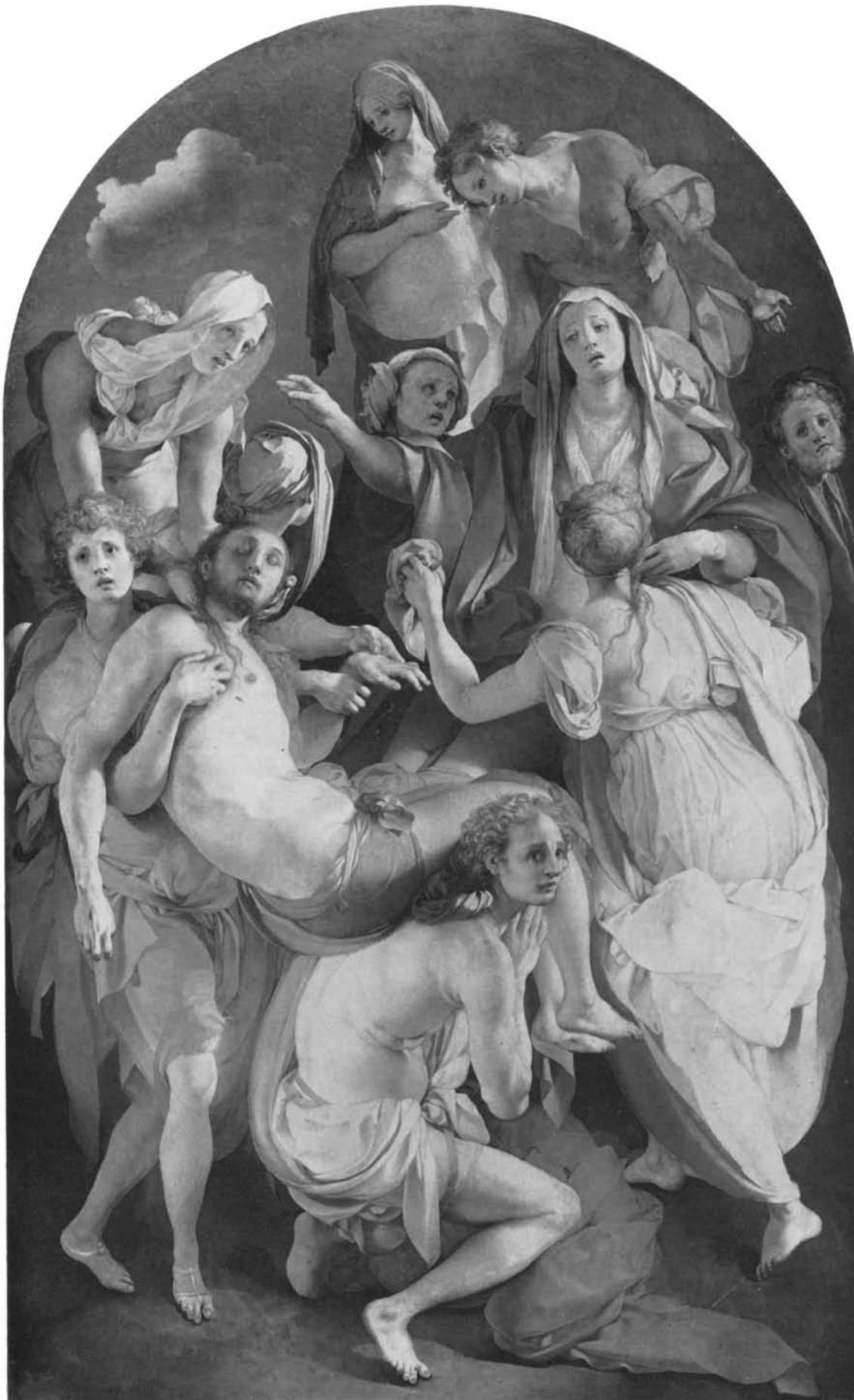
Capponi Chapel (originally the Barbadori Chapel, designed by Brunelleschi) was located. "Die Vermutung liegt nahe," writes P. Fontana (page 367), "dass in jener Zeit die Kapelle Brunelleschis ihre Kuppel einbüsste; doch ist wahrscheinlicher, dass die Abtragung erst durch Ferdinando Ruggieri geschah, der im Jahre 1736 beauftragt wurde, den gesamten Innenraum der Kirche neu zu gestalten." Most Pontormo scholars (excepting Shearman who writes "1589") now tend to accept the 1736 date. Milanesi, however, wrote 1766 (vi, page 271), and was followed by Clapp (page 46n. and pages 123, 257) who connected the destruction of the vault with a remodelling of the organ loft in that year; an argument repeated by Berti, page 101. (But there is no indication that an organ ever occupied the west end.) It is unfortunate that Richa's ten-volume work on Florentine churches, which appeared from 1754 to 1762, remains inconclusive on this point. Richa refers to the dome in a single sentence (page 312): "Il medesimo Pontormo quivi dipinse la Cupola, eccetto uno de' quattro Evangelisti, che è del Bronzino suo discepolo." This could mean either that in his concern with the distinction of hands, he singled out only that portion of the dome complex which was Bronzino's work; or else that he mentioned the Evangelists in the pendentives because they alone had survived the remodelling.

<sup>4</sup> Clapp, 1914, 186: "la pose des bras et de la tête et le fait que la figure est évidemment plafonnante me font croire que notre pièce est probablement une étude pour un des *Patriarches*, aujourd'hui détruits, de la coupole de la chapelle Capponi."

<sup>5</sup> Cox-Rearick, 1956, 17f. and, more fully, her Cat. Nos. 259–266.

<sup>6</sup> Shearman, 3, 10, 11, 17, and 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



1 Pontormo, Santa Felicita Altarpiece. Florence, Santa Felicita, Capponi Chapel

*De spasmo B. Mariae.* The Cardinal reasoned that since the Virgin was cooperant in Christ's sacrifice and participant in its every phase with full decision and knowledge, she could not have swooned as the painters had pictured her.<sup>8</sup> His closely argued decision did not proceed with the force of law – witness the recurrence of the Madonna's swoon in sixteenth-century painting, from Raphael to Carracci. But it did help to promote an alternative to a tradition established since Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Thus, in the light of the Cardinal's ruling, the Santa Felicita Altarpiece is both modern and orthodox in that the Madonna shows no signs of fainting. Though three or four figures stand by to comfort her, she sits unsupported and elevated, immense in scale, open-eyed, her head high, the wave of her hand wholly volitional.<sup>9</sup>

A bare-headed woman – probably Mary Magdalen – moves in from the right, and the bend of her naked arm crosses and accents the Virgin's lap. But the Virgin's closed thighs reappear sharply delineated under the Magdalen's arm – their deep blue brightening at the knees where they make a last contact with Christ. And the arc of Christ's body still curves about the Madonna. The two bodies are separated as by a stretching cord. It is as though the dead Christ had slipped from his mother's knees or, more accurately, had just been lifted from them by the two youthful attendants. "Das sonderbar leere Zentrum des Bildes," to which Kurt Forster's sensitive paraphrase of the picture reverts again and again<sup>10</sup> – that voided middle about which all revolves – is the Virgin's untenanted lap, the widowed center of the design. The prelude to the moment depicted, its implied precondition, emerges for us as a familiar icon, a devotional image in which mourner and mourned overlap and enfold one another; and we recall that with Capponi's acquisition of the Chapel in 1525, its dedication was transferred from the Virgin Annunciate to the Pietà.<sup>11</sup>

The allusion made in the altarpiece is precise and specific: Pontormo was evoking Michelangelo's marble group at Saint Peter's (Fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> Only Michelangelo's Christ figure anticipates the crescent swerve of Pontormo's Christ. The sinuous arabesque which the dead body describes in Michelangelo's marble is, like Pontormo's, a three-dimensional curve, flexed both at groin and waist and, at the same time, bent to encompass the Virgin, so that the right, the wounded side, is arched to the full. Pontormo, then, re-envisioned the Roman *Pietà*, but as a dissolving unit.<sup>13</sup>

The hidden presence of the Michelangelo image in the Capponi Altarpiece is more than a stylistic resource. It enables Pontormo to direct our vision beyond what is shown and to intensify the bereavement. As a disrupted *Pietà*, the depicted moment posits a compact norm against which to measure the separation. For the more indissoluble the implied original union, the more grievous the severance. Pontormo's picture stages the breaking up of a revered symbolic form, the sundering of the familiar communion of Mother and Son, with the Virgin, cognizant and acquiescent, letting go.<sup>14</sup>

One significant detail in the preparatory drawing at Christ Church, Oxford (Fig. 3), confirms Pontormo's conception of the picture as a durational sequence. In its upper left corner a cleft in the composition is filled by a ladder whose diagonal path descends directly upon the Madonna's lap. Implied is the antecedent descent from the Cross – and that the Virgin's lap, having received the dead body, is now again yielding it up. We are given a threefold moment: Deposition – *Pietà* – Separation.<sup>15</sup>

The topical reference to Golgotha, which the ladder conveyed, did not survive in the painting. The ladder was replaced by a cloud – a single crisp cumulus under a preternatural light. The cloud is lightstruck from the left, that is, the east, unlike every other depicted form in the

<sup>8</sup> "De spasmo gloriosissime virginis mariae matris dei," in *Opuscula: Quaestiones et Quolibeta*, Modena, 1529, 52–54. I am grateful to Father Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., Ph.D., of the Institute of Religion, Houston, Texas, for drawing my attention to Cajetan's text and for his English translation of it. For further references to the Virgin's swoon see Otto von Simson, "Compassio and Co-Redemptio in Roger van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*," *Art Bulletin*, xxxv, 1953, 13, nn. 24, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Clapp's description of the Virgin (page 48) – "His young mother seated by the roadside, reaches out her hand, uncomprehending" – offends cinquecento theology and belies Pontormo's rendering.

<sup>10</sup> Forster, page 59. See his analysis of the composition, as a "um ein leeres Zentrum angeordnete Gruppe." And again (page 65, quoting from Goethe's *Farbenlehre*): "Die leere Mitte schlägt in ein kühles, verschattetes Blau um, das als Farbe 'auf der negativen Seite der Farb-polarität steht, dort 'wo Beraubung, Schatten, Dunkel, Schwäche, Kälte, Ferne . . . zu finden ist.'"

<sup>11</sup> See Richa, page 312, for the commemorative inscription citing the change of dedication; also Forster, page 58, and Shearman, page 8.

<sup>12</sup> Cox-Rearick, page 62, observes that in the Santa Felicita drawings a "new richness of surface often suggests precedents in sculpture," and cites a "relation to Michelangelo's early *Pietà*." Cf. Linda Murray: "The forms of the dead Christ depend ultimately on Michelangelo's *Pietà* in St. Peter's, but this work was now so well known that it is no evidence for Pontormo's having visited Rome" (*The Late Renaissance and Mannerism*, New York, 1967, 47).

<sup>13</sup> Pontormo's debt to Michelangelo tends to be seen too exclusively in stylistic terms. Freedberg, page 535, discussing Pontormo's maturity in the Felicita period, notes "a profoundly meaningful relation of Jacopo's

art to that of Michelangelo. Then, the component in Pontormo's Mannerism that depends on Michelangelo serves mostly as a classicizing counterweight to its component of unclassical innovation."

<sup>14</sup> Shearman (page 11) believes that Pontormo's altarpiece owes its "principal inspiration" to Raphael's *Entombment* of 1507 – "a fissured composition that still bothers some of [Raphael's] admirers." But, he continues, Raphael's figure group "falls apart in a way that directly expresses the action. The bearers with the body of Christ move to the left, while the group around the Virgin, who sinks back to the right, is separated by a diagonal caesura, . . . This idea is essentially repeated by Pontormo. In his picture too the two groups around Christ and the Virgin fall apart." It should be pointed out that the source of this "caesura" motif, known both to Raphael and Pontormo, was Mantegna's *Entombment* engraving (B. 3). Its ultimate development, where the very landscape is "fissured," is Carracci's *Entombment* in the Galleria Doria, Rome.

<sup>15</sup> Pontormo's conception lingers on in a "Deposition" completed in 1565 by his pupil Bronzino (Uffizi, No. 3491). The picture restages the three-phase motif. Against a *Descent from the Cross* in the background sits the Madonna, attended by two pious women. She is the Virgin of the *Pietà* in the moment of separation. At her feet Christ's dead body appears for a second time – released both by her own relaxing hold and by the Magdalen at the right letting go of his hand. The half-nude figure at left who takes up the body – his fingers touching Christ's wound – is clearly an angel, as must be the two lowermost figures at left and right. The "separation" motif probably signifies the birth of Christ's mystical body. But whatever the theological argument, the sequence visualized, here as in Pontormo's design, encompasses Deposition, *Pietà*, and Severance.



2a Michelangelo, *Pietà*. Rome, Saint Peter's 2b Pontormo, *Santa Felicità* Altarpiece (detail)

Chapel, illuminated as if by the western light of the real window. Pontormo must have had a good reason for suppressing the direct reference to the foregoing moment on Calvary. And the reason must lie in the evolution of the overall concept. In his final realization, he would still symbolize a three-phased event, but with a thematic shift that puts the removal of the dead body not at the end stage, but at the midpoint of the action.

## II. The Destination of Christ's Body

Vasari describes the altarpiece as though it comprised a temporal sequence: "Un Christo morto deposto di croce, il quale è portato alla sepoltura." Recent Pontormo scholars have been more careful in specifying the precise moment depicted – not a Deposition from the Cross, but a *Grabtragung*. Shearman too follows the revised reading: "The body is being carried and lowered forward . . . towards the tomb." He adds: "It is curious, however, that the stained-glass window of the Capponi Chapel duplicates the subject of the Altarpiece."<sup>16</sup> Since the window was made in 1526 as part of the general program, its "duplication" of the Entombment scene is indeed strange enough to make one wonder whether the now accepted interpretation of the action can be correct; whether it is in fact a specific *historical* moment that the altarpiece represents.

Doubt is aroused at once by the disturbing allure of the adolescent Christ-bearers – "two completely unidentifiable youths," says Hartt.<sup>17</sup> Lithe, silken, androgenous, they are clearly not the Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea of the scriptural narrative. But this is as it should be, for as the *Pietà* image itself is ahistorical, so must be those agents who alone may lift the divine body from Mary's lap. They must therefore be angels – as they are in Michelangelo's *Pietà* for Vittoria Colonna, or in Luca Penni's design for the *Pietà* engraved by Jean Mignon (Z. 30), or in Bronzino's *Deposition* at the Uffizi.<sup>18</sup> But angels, though they may attend Christ in his tomb as Man of Sorrows, though they may assist at the miracle of Resurrection, do not engage in entombing the body. If then, Pontormo's Christ-bearers are angels, separating the divine son from Mary's lap, what ulterior function can they perform?

<sup>16</sup> Shearman, 11; reproduced in his fig. 4, center. For bibliography on Guillaume de Marcillat, the designer of the window, see Shearman, n. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Hartt, 507.

<sup>18</sup> See note 15, above for the Bronzino *Deposition*.

In the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* by the Pseudo-Bonaventura (eds. I. Ragusa and R. Green, Princeton, 1961, 344) the *Pietà* is woven into the historical narrative. But even here, despite the abundant detail, the actual transition from Mary's lap to the bearing away of the body remains impressionistic. In the narrative sequence that follows the "My Son, I hold you in my lap dead," Mary resigns herself to the inevitable, stays her lament and, lastly, makes ready the body. This final preparation for actual burial occurs presumably when the body is laid out on the ground, so that it is from the ground, not directly from Mary's knees, that the body is lifted to be conveyed to the tomb.



3 Pontormo, study for Santa Felicita Altarpiece. Oxford, Christ Church

Can we be sure that Christ's body is being "lowered?" This indeed follows from the presumption of imminent burial, but it does not follow from what we see. The visual data seem to allow contradictory readings. For one modern

A remarkable exception to the rule that only angels may separate the dead Son from the Mother is Rosso's *Pietà d'Ecouen* in the Louvre, painted in the 1530's. Christ's body, sustained by Mary Magdalen and St. John, lies close to, but no longer on, the Madonna's lap – though his right arm still rests on her knee. Since the group's framing background is the opening of the tomb, the image must be understood as a "severed Pietà," a stage midway between Pietà and Entombment. The recent Fontainebleau exhibition catalogue (*L'Ecole de Fontainebleau*, Paris, 1972, No. 200) rightly observes that Rosso's picture does not conform to the Gospel accounts, offering rather "une version originale d'un thème intermédiaire entre la *Déposition* et la *Mise au tombeau*." The description is inaccurate only in seeking to attach the *historical* Entombment to the equally historical moment of the Deposition – of which, however, the picture shows no sign.

The idea of a "severed Pietà" recurs in Luca Penni's *Entombment*

scholar (Hartt) "the figures ascend in the mysterious space like a fountain in a Renaissance garden"; for another (Forster), "Pontormo's *Entombment* weighs and sinks downward."<sup>19</sup> Yet the Christ-bearing youth at the left seems unbowed by his load: his inoperant hands touch a weightless burden, and his buoyant feet take no pressure. But the question of destination can be referred to more objective criteria since, in the conventions of Renaissance narrative, load-bearing figures tend to signal their course: their intended motion is normally indicated by the tilt of the head. And it is noteworthy that in Pontormo's picture not one of the figures in touch with the corpse drops his gaze; none lowers his head in anticipation of a descent. The light-footed youth at left advances with head erect. His crouching comrade strains to keep his head lifted. And the young woman beneath the cloud not only looks skyward, but so cradles the head of Christ in her hands that it too faces up. It is surely remarkable that this mourner, upholding the precious head, does not gaze down upon it. She presents it as one would an offering.

The poignant motif of the cradled head was not new. It occurs in Perugino's *Lamentation* (Pitti) and again in Botticelli's *Lamentation* in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum, Milan. But inevitably, in both pictures, the woman involved gazes down; and in the Botticelli, the head of Christ aims at the sepulcher in the upper zone of the composition. It is a directional sign. As in Raphael's Borghese *Entombment*, as in Michelangelo's *Entombment* at the London National Gallery, as in Naldini's *Deposition* at Santa Maria Novella, the head foretells where the body will go. Could the head of Pontormo's Christ be predictive in the same way?

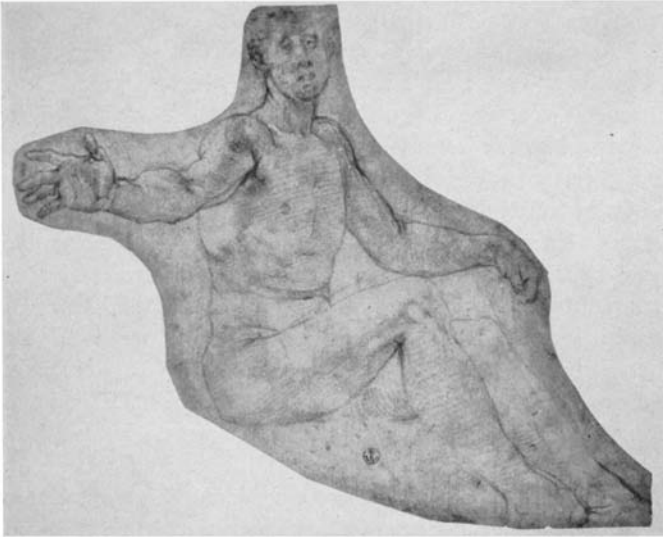
The alternative is not supported by visual evidence. As an "Entombment," Pontormo's staging of the event is unique in neglecting to furnish the least indication of cave or sepulcher. Scholars have always been conscious of this omission and have met the problem in one of two ways: either by declaring the image too abstract to permit specification of time and place; or by suggesting, as Shearman does, that the body, "carried and lowered forward as if out of the frame . . . is being lowered, in the first place, to the altar" – the altar here symbolizing the tomb of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

(drawing at Windsor, *L'Ecole de Fontainebleau*, Cat. No. 136), where again an antecedent Pietà is visually implied, even as the corpse is being lowered into the sarcophagus. Cf. further No. 81 in the same catalogue – a *Deposition* panel, now attributed to the Rosso follower Charles Dorigny: the seated Madonna has just relinquished the corpse which is being readied for burial. In all these instances the aim is to integrate the Pietà with the historical narrative, to lengthen the temporal sequence, and to heighten the poignancy of the event by implying the separation. But Rosso's image seems unique in suggesting that the body is actually being taken from the Madonna's lap and in assigning that action to historical characters rather than to angels.

<sup>19</sup> Forster, 60: "Schwer beginnt die linke Gruppe zu sinken." And again, 63: "Pontormos Grabtragung lastet und sinkt nach unten."

<sup>20</sup> Shearman, 22.





4 Pontormo, study for *God the Father*. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe 6686F



5 Pontormo, study for *God the Father*. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe 8966S

This is an interesting proposition, but the logic of Pontormo's choreography will not allow it; for the lowering of a body upon a slab parallel to the picture calls for a totally different action – somewhat as in Luini's *Burial of St. Catherine* at the Brera, where the corpse is neatly aligned with the tomb. What makes the transport of the corpse in our altarpiece so distinctive is its apparent rotation, confirmed by the differentiation of its two bearers – one in procession, the other at rest. The youth at center – immobilized by his crouch while his companion proceeds towards us – acts as

<sup>21</sup> Shearman believes that Christ's body is being given an orthogonal axis "not only to bring the body forward to the Father's benediction from the cupola, but also to bring it forward and down to the altar-tomb where it will be present in the Eucharist at every Mass" (page 22). This seems to conflict with his other notion that the picture shows two "women who will go with the body to the tomb" (page 14). If the tomb to which the body is being lowered is the slab of the altar, where

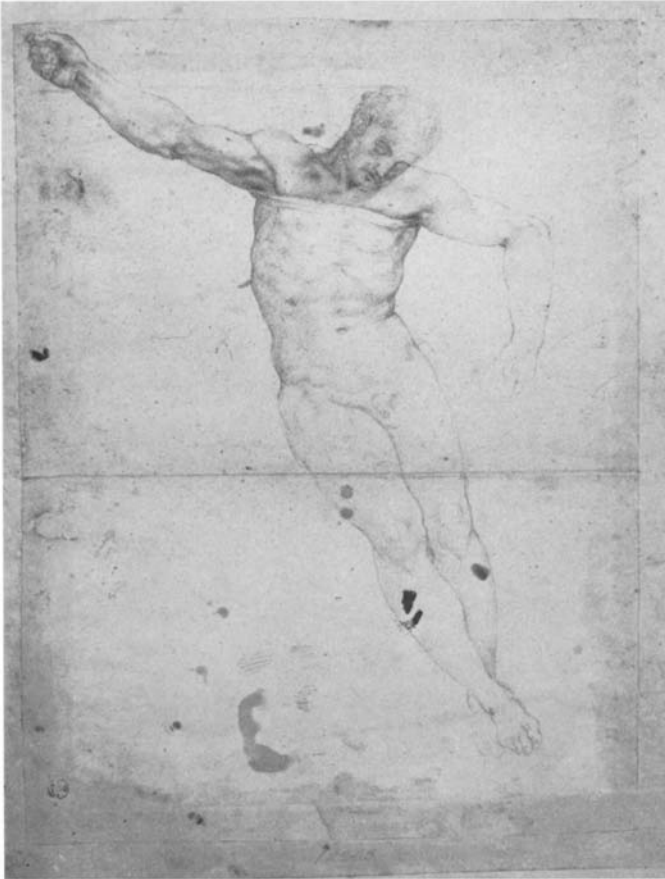


6 Dürer, *Gnadenstuhl*, woodcut, 1511 (B. 122)

the fixed foot of a compass. And the woman at the upper left, presenting Christ's head, ensures that the head will not be read ambiguously as falling backward, but as urged forward in our direction. The result is what Shearman correctly calls "the rotational effect" of the composition: "As the body of Christ is lowered forward it also pivots on the crouching figure in the center beneath the knees." This pivoting movement is not only crucial to Pontormo's design, it is essentially the depicted event: Christ's upper body is at this moment revolving through ninety degrees, as if to back "out of the frame" on an orthogonal axis. Such an event cannot be written off as a formal artifice; what is done to Christ's body cannot be void of meaning.

The imminent redirection of the body of Christ is not compatible with the notion of a recipient altar. One suspects that the suggested altar-as-tomb on this side of the picture plane is a conceptual expedient, designed to explain the absence of any alternative goal for a body supposedly borne to its grave.<sup>21</sup> The idea is contradicted by that

would these women be going? Shearman also cites Rosso's *Dead Christ surrounded by Angels* (Boston) as a parallel instance of the tomb-altar equation. But Rosso's picture, as Shearman observes elsewhere, depicts the moment before Resurrection – not an Entombment. Pontormo's altarpiece, then, seems to offer no appropriate context for the tomb-altar interpretation.



7 Alessandro Allori, study for Santa Croce *Descent from the Cross*. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, 10263F

“rotation” which shows the body preparing to issue from its pictorial space – head and back first. If Pontormo’s representation symbolizes an ongoing process, and if, in that process, the pivoting of Christ’s body has any meaning at all, then the altar, placed parallel with the picture plane, cannot be the body’s immediate destination. I suggest that its destination is God.

### III. The Padre Eterno

The figure of God the Father (Figs. 4–5) – in the dome, facing the altarpiece – is bestowing more than a blessing. Shearman reminds us that Raphael’s Borghese *Entombment*, too, was originally surmounted by a bust figure of God the Father with his hands raised in blessing (now in the Pinacoteca, Perugia), but the comparison sharpens the difference between the two works. As the Raphael indicates, and as Pontormo’s own *benedicenti* confirm, a blessing is given with the index and middle finger of a raised hand, and the giver usually turns his body so as to face the receiver. The



8 Alessandro Allori, *Trinity*. Florence, Santissima Annunziata, Cappella di San Luca.

gesture of Pontormo’s God figure exhibits none of these traits; the arm is not ceremoniously raised, but thrust out; the fingers are splayed, not uplifted; and the shoulders are still half averted, an offhand position incompatible with the priestly posture of benediction.<sup>22</sup> It seems rather that the figure is reaching out and turning to face what it seeks. Its attitude is transitional, like the movement of the figures below. We recall Leonardo’s advice that a person, having his attention aroused, should be shown turning to his objective first with the eyes and head, then with the trunk, and only

<sup>22</sup> That Pontormo labored over the precise action of the Father’s extended hand is apparent from Fig. 4 and from its studied repetitions in Fig. 5. For authentic gestures of divine benediction in Pontormo’s work, see the vault fresco of God the Father blessing in the Cappella dei Papi, Santa Maria Novella, ca. 1515, Freedberg, fig. 641; the resurrected

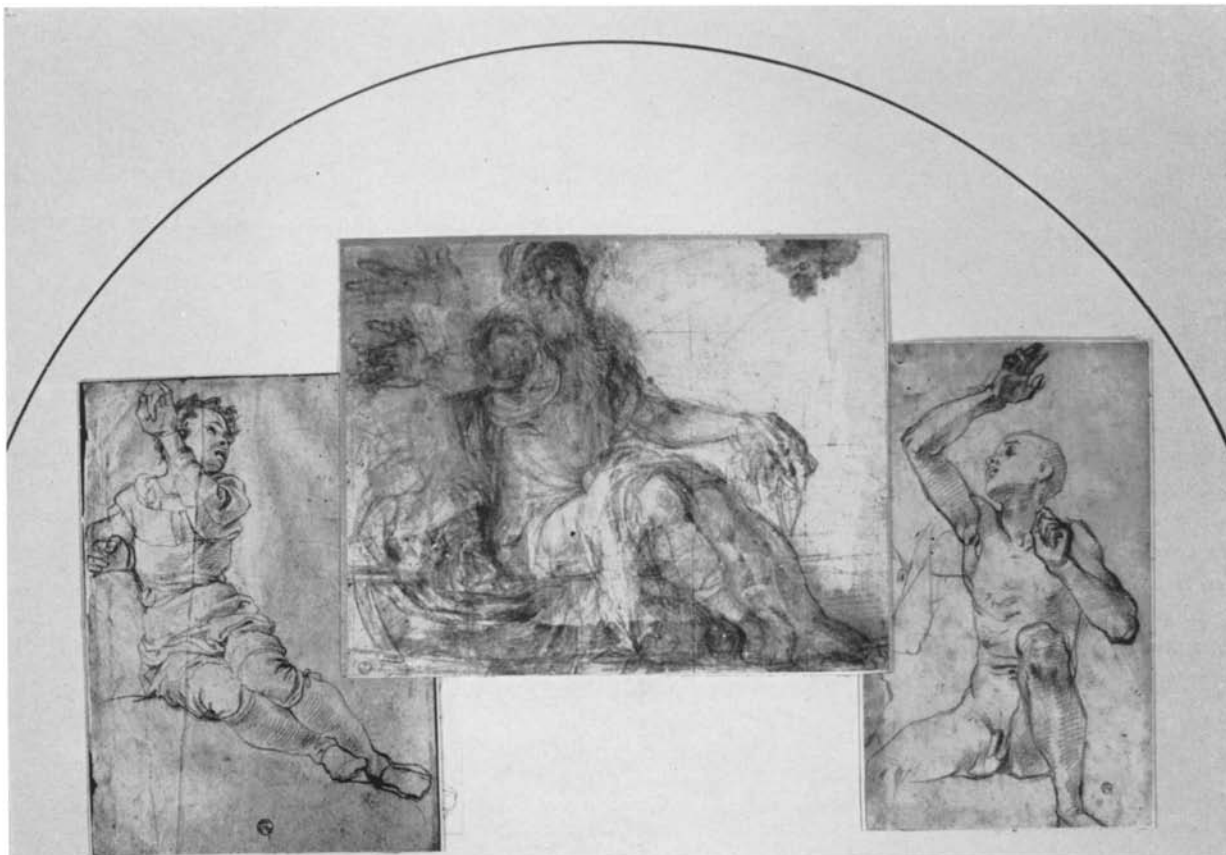
Christ in the Certosa del Galluzzo; the Christchild in the *Madonna and Child with St. John* in the Galleria Corsini, Florence; and the figures of God the Father and Christ in the drawings for the choir decoration of San Lorenzo, Cox-Rearick, pls. 345 and 347.



9 Pontormo, study for *Patriarch*. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, 6632F



10 Pontormo, study for *Patriarch*. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, 6513F

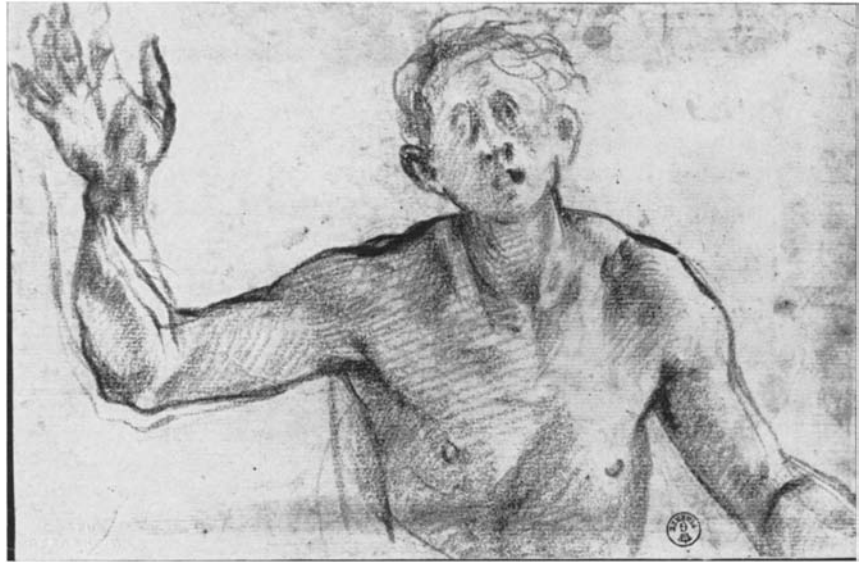


11 Reconstructed grouping of figures in the dome of the Capponi Chapel





12 Pontormo, study for *Patriarch*. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, 6613F



13 Pontormo, study for *Patriarch*. Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, 6519F

last with the feet.<sup>23</sup> Pontormo's Father figure is conceived as just such an alerted presence, a figure rotating as it responds to an appeal. The arm steers the trunk toward frontality, so that we see the Father in process of pivoting, pivoting like the Son, but in a reciprocal, clockwise direction.<sup>24</sup> His present action will be fulfilled when his lower limbs have caught up with the impulse of his upper body. Then, in the imminent sequel, he will present himself frontally, and in this posture receive the Son who even now turns to rejoin the Father enskied in the dome. The respective motions of the two divine figures are both transitional, but they are so intentioned, and so charged with promise, that we foresee a consummation in which both figures jointly come to face us. We, having witnessed the severing of the Pietà, are about to witness the assembly of another devotional emblem, the Trinity, *Gnadenstuhl*, Throne of Grace.

It may be that here too, as in his reference to the Pietà, Pontormo had a specific image in mind – Dürer's *Gnadenstuhl* woodcut of 1511 (Fig. 6). Except for the reverse tilt of the shoulders, the Christ in his altarpiece shows considerable similarity to Dürer's in the disposition of head and arms, in the solicitude bestowed on the left hand and wrist. And we observe that Dürer's *Gottvater* sustains the Crucified with veiled hands, and that Pontormo's *Padre Eterno*, with much surplus drapery across his knees, holds one end

readied in his left hand, while the rest billows under his right.

It was suggested before that none but angels may lift the dead Christ from his Mother's knees. Let us add that if a painter ever considered by what means the lifeless body (as opposed to the vivified body of the Ascension) reached the heavenly lap of the Father, he must have decided upon angels as the appropriate agents.

This functional logic is clearly embodied in a *Trinity* fresco (Fig. 8) commissioned in 1567 from Pontormo's disciple Bronzino and executed in 1571 by Bronzino's adopted son Alessandro Allori. In the fresco the divine pair appear oddly unstable for their iconic role. The Man of Sorrows, with limbs dispersed and aflutter, seems all too nimble. But the reason for this extravagant posture emerges from a comparison with Allori's own *Descent from the Cross*, produced in 1560 for Santa Croce, Florence. In this earlier work, the Christ figure, for which we have several drawings (Fig. 7), is severely constrained, its attitude of oblique descent sanctioned by long tradition. But in his 1571 *Trinity* fresco, Allori undertook the more recondite task of combining the *Gnadenstuhl* image with the conceit of a corpse soaring. And his chosen procedure, almost naively mechanical, was to invert the action of his earlier Christ limb by limb, gesture by gesture. On the Christ of the *Descent* the head slumps to the left; a hand still impaled keeps one

<sup>23</sup> "When you would represent a man who, for some reason, has to turn backward or to the side, you should not make him move his feet and all the parts of his body on that side on which he moves his head, but you will work by dividing that turning among four articulations [Pedretti translates: "Rather you will have the action shown according to the four sets of joints"] that is, those of the feet, the knees, the hips, and the neck . . . Always use the figure in such a way that wherever the head is turned, the chest is not turned in the same direction, since, for our convenience, nature has made the neck so that it can easily serve us by turning in different directions, wherever the eye wishes to turn, and the other joints are in part obedient to it [Pedretti translates: ". . . since nature has for our convenience so formed the neck that it can easily serve the different occasions on which the eye desires to turn in various directions; and to the same organ the other joints are in part responsive."]. If you

depict the man seated, and if his arms sometimes are occupied horizontally with something, make the upper body turn above the joint of the hip." A. P. McMahon, *Leonardo da Vinci, Treatise on Painting*, Princeton, 1956, I, No. 383; for the Italian text see II, fol. 114–114v.; Cf., E. MacCurdy, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. New York, 1939, Chapter: "Precepts of the Painter: Of the Arrangement of the Limbs." The translation in J. P. Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, London, 1883, I, par. 595, is unintelligible. I wish to thank Professor Carlo Pedretti for showing me the proofs of his long-awaited *Commentary* to Richter (Phaidon Press, 1973, but delayed).

<sup>24</sup> Pontormo's figure recalls – and was probably meant to recall – Michelangelo's God the Father in the Sistine fresco of the *Creation of Sun and Moon*. In its double appearance, that figure too suggests a body moving in clockwise rotation.

arm rigid, while the other, released and bent at right angles, hangs down; a linen band tightens about the chest; the torso is flexed against the left waist and the lower body deflected towards crossed ankles. Now, in the *Trinity*, the body's ascent would be indicated by exactly reversing whatever had formerly expressed its descent. Every term is inverted, while three wingless angels, exuberant as pagan putti hanging a garland, put the dead Christ in position. The aim is to reconceive the traditional Trinity group as a nascent event, as if the Son were just being delivered into the Father's arms.

The fresco was painted on the altar wall of the artists' chapel at the monastery of the Servites, where Pontormo's body had recently been re-interred – the first artist to lie in the sepulcher of the newly founded Florentine Accademia del Disegno. Within a year of the fresco's completion Bronzino died, and Allori returned to the work to make two additions *a secco*. On its flanking pedestals he painted the portraits of Pontormo and Bronzino – both now effaced but identified by their surviving initials. This tribute to the two deceased masters was aptly placed: it completed a fresco whose conception of the Trinity as a moment of dramatic reunion recalled Pontormo's masterpiece, the Capponi Chapel in whose decoration Bronzino had taken part.<sup>25</sup>

Dome and altarpiece in the Capponi Chapel are indeed one – not because God the Father bestows a remote blessing on the entombing of Christ, but because God turns to receive the body turning to enter his arms. And this vision of divine receptivity is surely prefigured in the outstanding precedent for the fusion of dome and altarpiece – Raphael's Chigi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, begun ca. 1513. "In the original project," writes Shearman, "the altarpiece was to represent the Assumption; drawings show the Virgin looking up and outwards as she rises in the direction of the dome where God the Father stands *ready to receive her*" (my italics).<sup>26</sup> There are differences, of course. The Virgin's Assumption and her reception in Heaven are canonic iconographical themes which Raphael, thinking as

painter and architect, re-imagined diffused through – or in a region beyond – the given space; whereas Pontormo, in the present hypothesis, would have bonded two mystic symbols. Every reference to Calvary that would have held the depicted Christ to a known narrative sequence, with the Descent into Hell as the next act, is banished. Pontormo's image is visionary and ahistorical; the event shown in the altarpiece is a translation from throne to throne, a passage from Pietà to seat of mercy.

Capponi acquired and endowed his chapel as a family mausoleum. Before he was buried under the altar step, a tablet was sunk in the chapel floor stating that Lodovico Capponi had it placed there while still living but in anticipation of death.<sup>27</sup> It was he who commissioned Pontormo, with whom he presumably discussed the full chapel program – a grandiose pre-vision of the Throne of Grace.

Consider the meaning of the Throne of Grace.<sup>28</sup> It is the personal vision of the worshipper in expectation of death and judgment; literally, the foreknowledge, through faith, that God's justice for sinning man will be tempered by fatherly pity, the *passio patris*. In the Father's acceptance of the Son stigmatized by human suffering lies the promise of human salvation. What Pontormo visualized in the Capponi Chapel was the eternal presentiment of redemption.<sup>29</sup>

Much that is troubling and strange in Pontormo's conception seems clarified in this interpretation. We avoid the perplexing duplication of the entombment theme in stained-glass window and altarpiece. And the *Annunciation* fresco becomes an integral part of the whole. For if the altarpiece represents Mary's surrender of the sacrificed Son to the Father, then its subject closes a cycle that begins with God's gift to her at the Incarnation. Thus the fresco on the west wall – sometimes described as "in no way related to the program" of the other paintings (Shearman) – becomes less of an "afterthought."

The ties between dome and altarpiece become more insistent. The Virgin's adieu is met by God's outstretched hand – farewell and welcome in apposition, while the

<sup>25</sup> For the history of the Allori *Trinity* see Umberto Baldini in *The Great Age of Fresco, Giotto to Pontormo*, exh. cat., New York, 1968, 228.

<sup>26</sup> Shearman, 20. An earlier attempt by Pontormo to integrate dome and altarpiece occurred in his chapel decoration at San Ruffillo, painted before 1515. Its famous *Madonna and Saints* was transferred in 1823 to the St. Luke Chapel of the Santissima Annunziata. But before the destruction of San Ruffillo, the altarpiece was surmounted by a lunette figure of God the Father surrounded by seraphim, and it is surely to this theophany that the ecstatic gaze of the kneeling saint nearest the Child is directed. (Thus M. Meiss, *The Great Age of Fresco*, New York, 1970, 200: "the saint . . . peers upward, in the direction of God the Father who originally appeared in a lunette above the fresco.") Only with the divine focus removed, or left unconsidered, does the Saint become "consumed by violent and unbeautiful ecstasy, lost in private rapture . . . without concern for measure or decorum in her relation with her fellows or with us" (Freedberg, 247). For further examples of cross-relations between dome and altarpiece during the second and third decades of the cinquecento, see Juergen Schulz, "Pordenone's Cupolas," in *Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Art presented to Anthony Blunt*, London, 1967, 44–50.

<sup>27</sup> LVDOVICVS DE CAPPONIBVS ADHVC IN HVMANIS/AGENS ET FVTVRAE MORTIS HAVD IMMEMOR SIBI/POSTERISQVE POSVIT. All the inscriptions in the Chapel are transcribed

by Richa, 312f.

<sup>28</sup> On the Throne of Grace see Otto von Simson, "Über die Bedeutung von Masaccios Trinitätsfresko in S. Maria Novella," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, VIII, 1966, especially 125ff.; and Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. J. Seligman, II, Greenwich, Conn., 1972, 122ff.

<sup>29</sup> In the later 16th century the Italian type of the Trinity image is deliberately assimilated to the Pietà – the dead Christ between the knees of the Father, his yoked arms hung over the Father's thighs. In such works as Cigoli's *Trinity* of 1584 (Santa Croce Refectory), or Federico Zuccaro's *Trinity* at the Trinità dei Monti, completed 1589, God the Father becomes the visual equivalent of the more familiar Madonna of the Pietà. The interchangeability of the parent figures is strikingly demonstrated in two reliefs by Hans Morinck, a *Pietà* and a *Trinity*, both of ca. 1600 (Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum; reproduced in G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, II, fig. 639 and *Le Triomphe du Maniérisme Européen*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1955, fig. 77). A conceptually related motif of the later 16th century shows the dead Christ (that is, not the Resurrected Christ) conveyed into the heavens by angels (for example, El Greco's *Trinity* of 1577 in the Prado, or Federico Zuccaro's drawing, *Dead Christ with Angels*, Yale University Art Gallery). Pontormo's image, in our interpretation, represents the opening stage of the journey.

sacrificed Son, hung between ground and sky, is returned to the Father.<sup>30</sup>

Even the naked exposure of feelings displayed in the altarpiece gains in structure and clarity. A correspondence emerges between the anguished look of the weeper above the Madonna's right arm and that of the crouching youth. Both lend the agony of compassion to a parent bereaved.<sup>31</sup> The distraught glances of the two Christ-bearers become less "hallucinated," less "Mannerist," when one reflects that they are not staring at us. Taking the corpse of the only-begotten Son back to their King – how else should they look? And those other two upturned faces – the woman with Christ's cheek in her palm and the bearded portrait at the right edge – their meaning deepens if their gaze is fixed upon God in the act of assuming the posture of grace. Theirs is the emotion of St. Paul's recommended approach (Heb. 4: 14–16). "We have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens . . . Let us therefore come boldly (*cum fiducia*) unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" – which is to say, in the hour of death.

#### IV. The Dome Fresco

It remains to discuss the probable disposition in the dome of those five frescoed figures that were destroyed. Vasari described the work in a single sentence: "Nel cielo della volta fece un Dio Padre, che ha intorno quattro patriarchi molto belli." Later references, such as Borghini's, offer no further clues, and it was not until Cox-Rearick's work in identifying the drawings (Figs. 4, 5, 9–13) that Pontormo's arrangement became imaginable again. "Pontormo's drawings," she wrote, referring to Nos. 259–266 in her Catalogue, "verify the descriptions of the destroyed work and give us a clear impression of a scheme in which God the Father was seated in the center of the vault with the four Patriarchs sitting below and looking up at him."<sup>32</sup>

To this statement, which appears to follow Vasari's account, Shearman raised several objections. First, that "the viewpoint of all the figures in the drawings is the same, that is from a little below the knees." Secondly, that the figure of God the Father "is gesturing outwards, and however we orientate such a figure in the center of a dome its gesture will be directed senselessly to the floor of the chapel." Thirdly, that the bench or low wall on which the figure is seated "is unimaginable traversing the apex of the dome." Shearman therefore concluded that "all the figures for which we have drawings were . . . seated on the same level . . . on a parapet or attic notionally erected on the ring of

the dome." To "assist our visualization" of the effect, Shearman cites several instances of dome decoration that suggest "how the gestures of Pontormo's five figures might have been woven into a decorative and unified pattern around an open center." For the dome's center he proposed a Dove of the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

But his arrangement presents greater difficulties than the rejected Cox-Rearick construction. First, if God the Father consorted with the four patriarchs on the same parapet, it is hard to see why Vasari would have singled him out as "nel cielo." Secondly, it is unlikely that the position of God the Father was hierarchically undistinguished from that of the patriarchs. Thirdly, at least two of the patriarchs look up in astonishment – more probably caused by God's sudden gesture than by the wingspan of the Dove. Lastly, every parallel cited to help visualize the scheme of the Capponi cupola involves four (or eight) figures, but never five. And a quincuncial arrangement of five isocephalous figures on the ring of the dome would have put them out of phase with the evangelists in the pendentives.

A fresh look at the surviving drawings suggests a way to ease the dilemma, a way of reconciling the Cox-Rearick and Shearman constructions, and both with Vasari's text. It is true that all five figures (Figs. 5, 9, 10, 12) share the same height of support – a running bench or step, about one foot above ground; whence Shearman concluded that all five were perched on the same level. However, one of the patriarch drawings indicates that Pontormo had not one but at least two steps in mind, since this figure (Fig. 9) rests its right elbow on a horizontal support at chest level. We must suppose that this upper level, this higher, recessed second tier – was also continuous, though not necessarily around the dome's full circumference. We should then have not a simple annular step, but a stepped parapet offering seats of different height to the figures. The result would be similar to the two-tier effect Pontormo devised for the lunette at Poggio a Caiano. Accordingly, it becomes possible to visualize God the Father, still squatting low, but on higher ground. His position on a recessed upper wall would have withdrawn him to a deeper zone, so that his place in the Chapel's main axis, at the opposite pole from the altarpiece, would not have interfered with the orderly seating of the patriarchs over the four pendentives. We would expect the scale of his figure to exceed theirs – as the Madonna in the altarpiece outscales her companions. And his forward reach, emerging from greater depth and abetted (as in Byzantine decoration) by the curve of the vault, would have seemed more encompassing and more urgent. The

<sup>30</sup> It is not within our competence to decide whether a personal trauma underlies the artist's conception: Pontormo became fatherless at five; he lost his mother when he was ten.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the awesome study for the croucher's head, Cox-Rearick, pl. 262. Earlier Pontormo scholars read such physiognomic expressions not as appropriate to the subject but as evidence of Mannerist style and psychological stress. Luisa Becherucci, 19, speaks of "la torbida ansia acutizzata nel suo spirito . . . Essa vibra ancora, nell' allucinato sguardo della figura inginocchiata."

<sup>32</sup> Cox-Rearick, 253. In addition to the six drawings here reproduced, Cox-Rearick cites the fragmentary, unreproducible verso of Uffizi 6686F, which she identifies as a study for God the Father. In her 1956 article,

figure 16, she reproduces a drawing in the Victor Bloch Collection, London, identified as a copy, possibly by Jacopo da Empoli, after a lost Pontormo drawing for one of the Patriarchs (cf. her Cat. A217). I suggest that the copyist reversed an original study for the "south-east" patriarch discussed below, our Fig. 13. One final drawing, Cox-Rearick, Cat. 266, pl. 252, seems more problematic: a nude study for a male figure, seated on the same low-step support as the other dome figures. The drawing is carefully finished and the sheet squared up; yet it is difficult to place since its sovereign posture is appropriate only for God the Father, for which it may have been an early, rejected thought.

<sup>33</sup> Shearman, 17f.

patriarchs, meanwhile, would rest on what becomes in effect the Lord's footstool, with a low screen behind them, so that little more than their heads and shoulders would be silhouetted against the sky. Whereas God the Father would loom almost entirely against open sky, his head rising high enough towards the zenith to have justified Vasari's "nel cielo." The summit of the dome, now directly over the crown of his head, may well have carried the Dove.

The drawings identified by Cox-Rearick permit us to visualize the disposition of the Father in relation to the patriarchs on his right and left. In both surviving studies for God the Father (Figs. 4–5) the figure is lit from the left, implying a necessary location with respect to the chapel's west window. As Shearman has pointed out, the lighting locates the figure over the chapel entrance (north), fronting the altarpiece. Among the drawings for the patriarchs, two more (Figs. 9–10) are similarly lit from the left, and these pair themselves as flanking retainers, both facing inward. Our reconstruction (Fig. 11) suggests that their contours dovetailed with those of the Father: the recoiling figure at left makes way for the thrust of God's arm; the hollow formed by the figure at right frames God's feet. The fact that both figures look up, while God the Father appears to look down, confirms the necessity to seat God on higher ground; higher and at the same time deeper in space, for both patriarchal figures look backward over their shoulders.

The two remaining patriarchs, lit from the opposite side, fall easily into place. One of these (Fig. 12) would have surmounted the southwest pendentive – over the altarpiece on our right, as if gazing down on the dead Christ. The identification of the fourth patriarch – the preserved study showing a bust figure only – is somewhat less certain, except on stylistic grounds that connect it with other drawings made for the chapel (Fig. 13); but his wide stare, his gestulation, and his response to the light give him a fitting place over the southeast pendentive, whence he would hail the theophany directly across the vault.

The success of the overall program, the inescapable unity of its elements, must have owed much to the compact scale of the chapel and to its openness on two sides. The visitor, turning right from the church entrance so as to face the altar through the north arch, would have seen the altarpiece surmounted by paired evangelists and patriarchs – one in each pair sending his glance upward into the dome. Approaching through the east arch (originally about 1.20m wider than now), the visitor would have beheld, above the *Annunciation* fresco, the right hand of God reaching from the cupola towards the offered Christ. The entire chapel, from altar to dome, dramatized a supreme liturgical moment – the prayer for the acceptance of the sacrifice "borne aloft by the hands of thy holy angels," and the granting of the petition.<sup>34</sup>

And what, finally, causes the perturbation of spirit in the four patriarchs? No divine gesture of benediction accounts for their shock. But their exaltation is justified if, being raised under the Law, they now behold the world order

changing, witnessing how the Passion of the self-sacrificed Son, daily renewed in the work of the Eucharist, begets that compassion which converts godhead from Justice to Grace.

This I believe to be the mystery of Pontormo's program for the Capponi Chapel. That his altarpiece continually stirred our spirits without much of this being known is the greater mystery of his art.

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## Appendix

The foregoing argument posits a complex relationship between Pontormo's imagery and its visual sources. It is suggested that Pontormo rethinks a Michelangelo sculpture, or a Dürer woodcut, as an episodic event, imaginable in a later or earlier moment; that his figures of Mother and Son, in referring to Michelangelo's marble group at Saint Peter's, re-enact the Pietà as a dissolving group. Such classic quotations would not surprise us in the Baroque period. They are normal for Rubens, as when he makes the Three Graces (at the Dulwich Gallery) break rank and scatter. But is such a principle of imitation compatible with the artistic thought of the 1520's? Are there parallel instances?

I believe that Raphael's approach to the "copying" of Michelangelo offers a significant precedent. As Raphael recasts a borrowed figure from a different angle, so on another occasion, he rethinks a given pose from a different point in time. The best-known example of his shifting vantage in space is the reference to the *Doni Tondo* Madonna in the *Borghese Entombment* of 1507: Michelangelo's hard-edged design is re-imagined as though it had real existence in space.<sup>1</sup>

In another instance, where the Michelangelo model is itself three-dimensional, the figure is deployed as though developed in time, that is to say, from the viewpoint of a subsequent moment. I have in mind Raphael's thoughtful preoccupation with the image of the Christchild in the *Bruges Madonna* (Fig. 14).

The *Bruges Madonna* is a tragic conception; not only because the Virgin's foreboding is heavier than what such adolescent beauty should bear, but because the chosen moment, though it unfolds in a solid block, represents an ominous parting. Issuing from between her maternal limbs, the Child is about to go forth, to set foot on earth. The Virgin's right hand closes the book which contains the plan of the Passion. As if by accident, the Child's left arm is hung over the Mother's thigh, as in a Pietà.<sup>2</sup> And the unbelievably complex interlace of the other hands – his right and her left – conveys conflict and shared reluctance; whether to go or stay, to release or restrain. The ambivalence is sustained in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also the two Raphael sheets at the Vatican (Fischel Nos. 135 and 137), which visualize one Holy Family group from successive viewpoints.

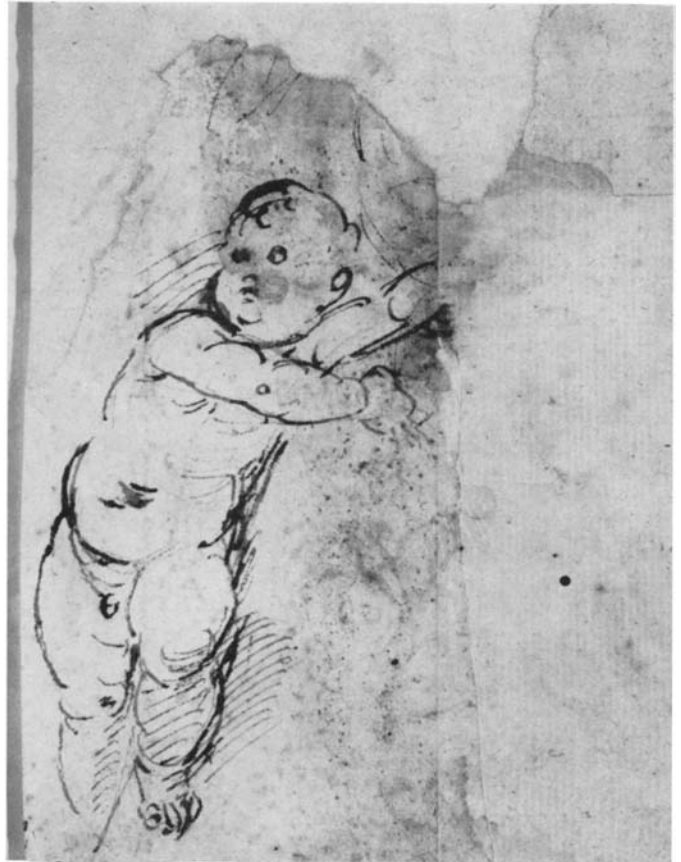
<sup>2</sup> One or both arms yoked over the parent's thigh is a characteristic posture of the dead Christ in 16th-century Lamentations and *Gnadenstuhl* representations. Among the earliest instances known to me are Bramantino's *Pietà* from San Sepolcro, Milan, in the Ambrosiana, and Dürer's pen-drawing of 1509–10 in Berlin (Winkler, II, 474, there catalogued as "Christ and the Magdalen"; but a pair of knees, which must be the Virgin's, appears under the armpits of the dead Christ). A striking instance of the single "yoked arm" is the *Pietà* over Michelangelo's tomb at Santa Croce, painted by Pontormo's pupil, Naldini. It is surely in prophetic anticipation of the body's tragic return to the parent that the sleeping Christchild hangs his arm over the Mother's thigh in a Venetian relief of about 1500 from Pyrgoteles' shop (Leo Planiscig, *Venezianische Bildhauer der Renaissance*, Vienna, 1921, fig. 197).

In the 17th century the "yoked arm" can serve typologically for the child Isaac at Abraham's thigh: thus in the several versions of *Abraham Leading Isaac to the Sacrifice*, attributed to Leonhard Kern, ca. 1615–20 (*Burlington Magazine*, March 1968, figs. 43ff.) and possibly in Rembrandt's etching of ca. 1637, *Abraham Caressing Isaac*, Hind, 148.

<sup>34</sup> For the liturgy and theology of the *Supplices* in the Canon of the Roman Mass, see Joseph Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, New York, etc., 1955, II, 231ff.



14 Michelangelo, *Bruges Madonna*. Bruges, Notre-Dame



15 Raphael, study for Christchild. Rome, Vatican



16 Raphael, study for *La Belle Jardinière*. Holkham Hall, Earl of Leicester



17 Marcantonio Raimondi, *Crouching Venus*, engraving, B. 313



Child's motion, the twist of the shoulders that belies the course set by his head and feet.

Raphael knew this group and, while he rejected the precocious gravity of the Mother, he adopted the Child. The Bruges Child appears closely copied in a Vatican drawing (Fischel No. 138, Fig. 15) and thereafter, progressively modified, in several studies for *La Belle Jardinière* (Fig. 16).<sup>3</sup>

But Raphael's borrowing is not morphological only. He copies more than the lucid outline, the shining belly and sweep of hip, the clear bone-and-muscle articulation of the straight knee, the amazing largesse of the infant anatomy. He senses the Child's intended step and the imminent unclasping of hands. He sees what the Michelangelo image foretells, lets it happen, completes the action – and discovers a different denouement. In the *Bruges Madonna* the joy radiating from the health of the Child is curtailed in sorrow; in *La Belle Jardinière* the Child is the same, but with all conflict resolved and the threat of parting dispelled. The grievous left arm that hung proleptically over the Virgin's thigh now slides caressed through her hand; the head turns not away, but towards; and the action of stepping down ends happily for both parties. Finding his feet and released from her grasp, the boy turns freely back to his mother. We are invited to share – not the premonition of suffering – but the pleasure of Incarnation. The Child in *La Belle Jardinière* is unmistakably still the Child of the *Bruges Madonna*, but pursued in time – as Raphael would have us interpret the sequel.

Pontormo must have been well aware of how his great predecessors related to one another. Borrowing a Raphael or a Michelangelo figure was no challenge. But he was willing to enlarge upon Raphael's way of developing a Michelangelo model when, in his altarpiece, he projected the Christ–Mary relation as an afterimage of Michelangelo's Roman *Pietà*.

Parallels exist also for that other mode of imitation which our hypothesis imputes to Pontormo: the picture conceived as an anticipation, a situation that precipitates and necessitates some more familiar image – a prior episode by which the finality of a known pattern is dramatically explained.

Rubens again furnishes evidence of such practice. In his *Holy Family* in Chicago (1615; one of several versions) the lively activity of the Mother and Child visualizes the moment that precedes the fixed action of Michelangelo's *Madonna Medici*. But we are better served by an instance contemporary with Pontormo – Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving of the *Crouching Venus* (Fig. 17; B. xiv, 313).

The version (or versions) of the *Venus accroupi* available to Marcantonio must have shown – as do several surviving replicas – a child's hand pressed against the goddess's back. The original was evidently a two-figure group, with a Cupid included,<sup>4</sup> and the task of the Renaissance master was to reconstruct, or re-invent, the missing child figure. Marcantonio solves the problem by asking how that clinging hand would have arrived on that famous back. Accordingly, he introduces his air-borne Cupid alighting on a convenient pedestal and reaching down as if he intended to rouse the love goddess with a pat on her back.<sup>5</sup> The hand in the engraving is still inches away, so that we are shown the *Venus accroupi* group in the process of being assembled. The foreknown image, in this case a famous statue, becomes the conclusion to an invented transitional situation. Direct imitation is stretched into narrative. And though this extension takes place on a trivial scale, and in the realm of light-hearted allegory, the operational principle is one of enormous potential. It is the principle put to work by Pontormo when he depicts the process which is the functional prerequisite of the Throne of Grace.

<sup>3</sup> The cartoon for *La Belle Jardinière* is preserved at Holkham Hall (Fischel No. 123). For the Christchild alone, cf. the drawing at Oxford (K. T. Parker, *Catalogue of the Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum*, II, Oxford, 1956, No. 521). "Probably the lower part [of the Ashmolean drawing] was made from the marble group," writes Pope-Hennessy (*Raphael*, London, 1971, 200). Raphael evidently saw the *Bruges Madonna* in Florence shortly before August, 1506 when it was shipped to Flanders. I suspect that Raphael's earliest surviving drawing for the Child, and the one most likely to have been drawn directly from the original marble, is the fragmentary sheet in the Vatican (Fischel No. 138; Fig. 15) in which the head is turned as in the original. But a significant change occurs even in this rapid sketch: the "yoked arm" straightens out as the weight of the Child's body comes down on the right foot. As a result, the bending left leg, instead of hanging back, initiates a new action – back towards Mary. In the Ashmolean drawing this return is fulfilled by re-directing the head as well.

The concept of the child figure – leaning back between Mary's knees, arm crossing the chest, left knee bent, right leg extended towards the ground – still echoes in the Windsor drawing for the Canigiani *Holy Family*, and in Marcantonio's engraving, *Virgin and Child on Clouds* (B. xiv, 47). The Bruges Child appears, unexpectedly, in a Fontainebleau

School engraving by the Master I.V.B. after Primaticcio (*Apelles Painting Campaspe*, B.xvi.2, Herbet, 5).

<sup>4</sup> For a full study of the *Crouching Venus*, an inventory of its many replicas, and the arguments for its original two-figure state, see R. Lullies, *Die kauende Aphrodite*, Munich, 1954.

<sup>5</sup> While earlier scholars believed that the *Venus accroupi* was crouching to receive a shower of water, or that the Cupid behind her was soaping her down, and while Lullies has more convincingly argued that the Cupid was holding up a mirror for her, I do not believe that Renaissance artists and Humanists entertained such practical interpretations. Their *Crouching Venus* is rather a woman folded in on herself, ready to bud, about to be awakened by love and to love – as in Rubens's *Shivering Venus* in Antwerp. Marcantonio's Cupid is surely meant to perform a gesture of rousing or waking. (Cf. Botticelli's London *Nativity*, where an angel, with a similar gesture, awakens the sleeping Joseph. An interesting parallel is offered by a Holbein design for a medallion on the subject of Hagar and Ishmael in the desert: the mother, posed unmistakably like the *Crouching Venus*, is being roused from despair by an angel descending upon her from behind. See *Old Master Drawings from Chatsworth*, exh. cat., Washington, D.C., etc., 1962–1963, pl. 107.)

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