

Bartolomeo Maranta's 'Discourse' on Titian's *Annunciation* in Naples: translation

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Note on the state and language of the manuscript

The prose of Maranta's 'Discourse' sustains the vividness and immediacy of oral delivery. Maranta gives his opinion on Titian's painting and often addresses Ferrante Carafa ('Your Lordship' or 'Signor Marquis'), appealing to his sophisticated sense of life and art. The oration contains arguments for and against the painting, and raises questions that, on the one hand, express amazement at the witlessness of the outspoken critics of the painting whom he overheard in the Pinelli chapel, and, on the other hand, offer for consideration new approaches to, and salient aspects of, Titian's *Annunciation*. The formulation of these questions attests to Maranta's initial education as a lawyer and reflects the language of his father's treatises on jurisprudence concerning libels at court.¹

The style is often unpolished, to the point of containing sentences that start with a long subordinate clause and continue without producing a main clause. Yet, the logic of Maranta's exposition is such that these plaited sentences do not prevent understanding the text. By way of example here is one such problematic passage:

But since man has not been permitted to see a more beautiful appearance than the one he has himself, and (knowing that angels are exceedingly beautiful) has, in depicting them, made them similar to the most beautiful things that have ever been seen in the world and so has given them a human aspect, connoting by their wings not only speed and a ready willingness to serve with all celerity, but also the Angels' nature, by virtue of which, being free from all corporeal weight and having no such admixture as the earthly body has, they, who are far from this inferior part, climb ever up the path of celestial life towards that high and sublime seat where the Creator of all things dwells.²

This passage reflects Maranta's frequent structure of concatenating long clauses without a main clause and weaving one descriptive clause with another. The syntax also indicates a desire to persuade the reader or listener that by looking at the represented Angel, one should go beyond

¹ Meyer, *Roman Inquisition*, 165. See also Andrea Marchisello, 'Il principio del processo: osservazioni sull'origine del *judicium* nello *Speculum aureum* di Roberto Maranta (1476–1534?)', *Historia et ius: rivista di storia giuridica dell'età medievale e moderna*, 1, 2012, 1-16.

² Barocchi, ed., *Scritti*, 1:867-8: 'Ma perché all'uomo non è stato concesso di veder più bella vesta di quella dell'uomo istesso, e sapendo che li angeli sono bellissimi, gli hanno nel dipignerli rassembrati alle più belle cose che nel mondo si siano vedute e così gli hanno dato figura umana, denotando per le ali non solo la velocità e la prontezza del voler con ogni celerità servire, ma eziandio la natura loro, la quale è che, liberi da ogni corporal peso e senza mescolanza di terrena salma, lontani da questa nostra inferior parte s'inalzino sempre per lo camino della celeste vita a quell'alta e sublime sede, nella quale il creator del tutto dimora'.

the visible surface to the theological discussion of angelic nature and thus grasp the meaning of the beautiful human features and the wings as auxiliary to the ladder that leads to the higher, celestial realms. For Maranta, Titian's painting could be perceived as theological doctrine on the subject of the Annunciation made visible – the doctrine to which the Pinelli chapel was dedicated. Maranta's vocabulary in the description of the painting was intended for the reader and listener to understand the excellence of Titian's transmission of the mystery so significant for Cosimo Pinelli, the patron of the chapel. Hence, the prose resembles a sermon when Maranta translates the visual image into the theological message. This is why the effort was made to respect the author's phrasing, his lexicon, his syntax, his complexity, even his stylistic flaws, as much as possible.

The text contains blank spaces. These lacunae have their own consistency: they relate to the lack of precise information about some works and their location. There are three such lacunae. Two relate to Michelangelo's allegorical statues *Night* and *Day*, as the sculptor actually called them,³ wrongly named by Maranta *Sleep* and *Night*. Saying that both are in the shape of masculine figures, he reveals that he is unfamiliar with the visual aspect of these statues in the Medici chapel. The third lacuna relates to the chapel of the Magi in the abbey of Monteoliveto. In this case Maranta fails to record the name of the chapel's owner, Antonio Phiodo.⁴ Nor does he mention Girolamo Marchesi da Cotignola, who painted the altarpiece c. 1515 and who was also patronized by Tommaso Cambi.⁵ The placement of the lacunae in the text indicates that at the time of composing his 'Discourse', he hoped to fill them in at some future date. Notwithstanding the blank spaces, there is no reason to suspect that Maranta left the text unfinished, as the last page of the manuscript contains the calligraphic triangle turned with the upper angle towards the bottom of the page, marking the end of his 'Discourse'.

Its language is Tuscan Italian set in accordance with the standards established by Pietro Bembo,⁶ similar to Dolce's in *Dialogo della pittura intitolato l' Aretino*, with Latin quotations from Jerome's Bible and Horace's *Ars poetica*. Rarely was a sixteenth-century treatise on visual art composed in Latin. In his dialogue on painting, Pino notes that Gaurico wrote his book on sculpture in Latin,⁷ but it was composed c. 1500. Dolce recommends Alberti's book, noting that it was translated from Latin into Italian by Lodovico Domenichini (in 1547),⁸ typical of the vernacular trend of writing treatises on visual art. Latin was the language of serious scientific, philosophical or literary treatises; hence Maranta wrote the book on botany and the hefty volume on Virgil in the poet's native language. His Italian book on antidotes was translated into Latin in 1577 by Stigliola precisely because his authority came under question, not least because

³ Charles De Tolnay, *The Medici Chapel*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948, 138 and 134.

⁴ Barocchi, ed., *Scritti*, 1:885n4.

⁵ Vasari, *Opere*, 5:184.

⁶ See Carafa's poem dedicated to the memory of Bembo in Lodovico Dolce, *Rime di diversi illustri signori napoletani: e d'altri nobiliss. intelletti: nuovamente raccolte et non piv stampate*, Venice: Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari, 1552, 70. Maranta, *Lucullianae quaestiones*, 32, cites Bembo as the authority on the subject of language, as he claims that the vernacular style should match in excellence the Latin.

⁷ Barocchi, ed., *Trattati*, 1:136. Barocchi, ed., *Scritti*, 894n1.

⁸ Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino'*, 159. Alberti has the text in Italian, dated 1436, but the manuscripts were poorly circulated versus manuscripts of the Latin text, on which he worked till 1460.

of his choice of the vernacular for a scientific study.⁹ Nonetheless, it is not clear why Maranta wrote the 'Discourse' in Italian, though he also delivered lectures on Horace in Italian. It may well have been that Carafa, an ardent Petrarchist, set the style in Naples by writing poetry only in Italian.¹⁰ Also, although Gian Vincenzo was an expert in ancient languages, the language he chose for his correspondence, at least in his surviving letters, is Italian.¹¹ Maranta could then have been expected by his upper class patients and patrons to write on Titian's *Annunciation* in Italian. The 'Discourse' is a pleasure to read, because it reflects various tones: it is solemn when Maranta discusses the religious mystery represented in the painting, humorous when he writes on the power of love and on contemporary mores, ironic when he comments on the results of hasty judgement, furious when he attacks the attitude of the witless mob, elated when he discusses the Angel's sanguine temperament and the gesture of his speaking hand.

Maranta is consistent in using certain Italian words in different contexts to indicate, for example, nuances of beauty: *bellezza* (beauty), *venustà* (loveliness), *leggiadria* (elegance) and *vaghezza* (charm),¹² while some other words, like *grazia* (grace) and *aria* (aura), designate nuances of grace, with the second visible only in faces. He adheres to the meaning of some other words, among them, *ingegno* (ingenuity), *meraviglia* (wonder), *quadro* (picture), *variare* (vary) and *volgo* (mob). As much as possible, this consistency has been kept in the English text.

On the whole, the effort was made to preserve Maranta's voice faithfully, while at the same time to phrase his thoughts in English. The author's lexicon has been respected as much as possible, but not to the detriment of the meaning in the translation, which is deliberately literal. Some liberty, however, is inevitable in rendering important nuances. Although the language of the translation is modern English, attempts have been made to avoid anachronistic words like 'genre' and 'model'. Because the translation is largely based on Barocchi's printed transcription, the page numbers from her edition are kept to help the reader navigate between the original manuscript and the translated text. Digital scans are now obtainable for study upon request from the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples (Ms. Branc. II C 5, cc. 260r-70v).

⁹ Cassady McTighe, 'New light', 123-4 and 252. José Ricardo Sánchez Baudoin, 'The methods of natural inquiry during the sixteenth century: Bartolomeo Maranta and Ferrante Imperato', PhD dissertation, Università degli Studi di Padova, 2013, 121.

¹⁰ See Minturno, *Arte poetica*, 282-451, for the fourth book which discusses Tuscan poetry with Carafa. See Maranta, *Lucullianae quaestiones*, 31, on Bembo as the authority on Petrarch.

¹¹ See remarks by William McCuaig in his review of Anna Maria Raugei, ed., Gian Vincenzo Pinelli and Claude Dupuy, *Une correspondance entre deux humanistes, Renaissance Quarterly*, 56, 2003, 819 at 818-20.

¹² The synonyms for beauty can be found in Agnolo Firenzuola's *Discorsi delle bellezze delle donne*, Florence: Bernardo di Giunta, 1548, but Maranta's interpretation of them deviates from Firenzuola's.

A DISCOURSE OF BARTOLOMEO MARANTA TO THE MOST ILL. SIG. FERRANTE CARRAFA, MARQUIS OF SANTO LUCIDO, ON THE SUBJECT OF PAINTING. IN WHICH THE PICTURE, MADE BY TITIAN FOR THE CHAPEL OF SIG. COSMO PINELLI, IS DEFENDED AGAINST SOME OPPOSING COMMENTS MADE BY SOME PERSONS.¹³

It so happened, my most illustrious Lord, that the day before yesterday, while I was with Signor Scipione Ammirato at San Domenico's to hear Mass, we found ourselves in the chapel of Signor Cosimo Pinelli. Having embellished it with most precious marbles and most exquisite works¹⁴ and other ornaments of that kind, he decided to heighten its grace and decoration with a painting that, owing to his special devotion, was to represent the wonderful and amazing mystery of the Virgin Mary receiving the Angel's annunciation, which should be made by the hand of Titian, whose name and fame are so well known to everybody that there is no need for me to elaborate on them. And discoursing on that painting and debating various things about it (as so often happens), we found ourselves to be of opposite opinions on some points, for he could not endorse with a serene mind the highest praise that I bestowed on that painting, and he more than just mildly showed his disapproval of it, invoking in his support, to invigorate his arguments, Your Lordship's authority and opinion, which he claimed to be like his own. On hearing this, I remained silent for a good while, yet in the end I regained my courage and, being

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convinced for certain that he had proposed the shield of your authority in his defence, not so much because he was telling the truth, but rather because he wanted to get the better of me at all costs (to laugh with me afterwards about it), I said to him: 'My dear Ammirato, be careful from now on about what you say, since I do not know that it is a good thing to attribute such a strange opinion to the Signor Marquis merely to give more importance to your words. However, should it by chance be as you say, I would quite gladly listen to the reasons motivating His Lordship to say that either error or defect may be attributed to that painting. And if no others are found in addition to those you have reported, this would give me the heart to answer his arguments in full'.

Two days later, the two of us having come to visit Your Lordship, who in consequence of a serious catarrh had taken to your bed, I found, having re-opened the discussion on that painting, that what Ammirato had told me was true. And since Your Lordship, now rallying me, now favouring me with a genial smile, mentioned many things about that painting, I, who would not leave off my first opinion, was firmly convinced and am still glad to believe even now that whatever you said was meant rather to provoke the opinions of others and above all to jest with me (and this to express your favour towards me as is your wont) than because you yourself did so reason. And of this I was quite convinced on learning that one of the main defects attributed to that painting was the Angel Gabriel's excessive plumpness; if this must be

¹³ Ms. Branc. II C 5, c. 260r: 'DISCORSO DI BARTOLOMEO MARANTA ALL'ILL^{mo} SIG. FERRANTE Carrafa Marchese di Santo Lucido in materia di pittura. Nel quale si difende il quadro della cappella del sig. Cosmo Pinelli fatto per TITIANO, da alcune opposizioni fattegli da alcune persone'. Translation by Viviana Tonon, edited by Luba Freedman and Kathleen M. Ward.

¹⁴ The dull phrase 'most exquisite works' stands for 'finissimi lavori' meaning all kinds of works done in the process of the chapel construction.

deemed unsightly, I feel truly sorry for your Federico,¹⁵ because I am sure you would never say that he is not plump and full in countenance. But it is quite hard for me to believe that both of you, who are so competent and sensible, should think unsightly of a child who by all the most esteemed gentlemen and wise ladies of this city is unanimously considered to be the most beautiful creature of all persons of such a tender age to be seen in Naples today. Unless it was the stimulus of modesty that induced you to this, to show that you were not like those who, misled and mystified by paternal love, overpraise their own offspring, whatever they may be, and take immoderate pleasure in them. In fact, were you to praise

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the Angel's fullness, you would tacitly praise your Federico, who is actually plump. But, if it is true that his grace and loveliness are greater than they would be if he were not so full, and this, about which anyone who sees him even just once marvels and raves, is due to his having no irregularity in any of his features, I know that you will agree not to consider plumpness in angels as an ugly thing and, at the same time, you will avoid attracting the censure of all the nobility of this city, who greatly admire this earthly angel of yours.

And I will most contentedly accept the pleasantries on this subject that Your Lordship has addressed to me, construing them as special marks of your favour. But since I have also heard this, not in jest but seriously, from some other people who, it seems to me, speak about it more from a certain habit than from true and firm reasoning, I have decided on this occasion, speaking more to them than to Your Lordship (who on the contrary, as I very well know, always talks so honourably both about that painting and about Titian, as Ammirato, who feels the same way, has since testified), to say all that I think in defence of Titian. And though the judging of painting has never been my profession, I am not completely without hope (since I am speaking with persons who are no better experts than I am) that, by putting the truth in front of their eyes, it will be easy for me to undo the tangles they have made.

And, in the first place, I am displeased that these people do not have any regard for what the wisest men did know: namely that what might appear to us to be an error, must not, in men of great talent, be so easily faulted or dismissed, for the fact that we do not understand it might proceed from our ignorance. And since Titian's fame is bruited not only throughout Italy, but throughout the world, we, who are not so learned in his art, must not find fault with him if at first we do not make the most accurate study and subject our doubts to people who are competent in this matter, thereby avoiding being told what Apelles said to the cobbler: that he had no business making comments above the shoe. And whoever accurately considers the wonderful craftsmanship of that painting and the special, extremely subtle, care evident in even the most minute of its details, will unquestionably judge that it was for some good reason that Titian

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¹⁵ Federico, named after his grandfather, who died on 11 October 1558, was born from Ferrante's marriage to Beatrice della Marra (his previous wife, Beatrice di Loffredo, died childless in October 1554). See Aldimari, *Historia*, 340. The year of Federico's birth is not mentioned in any text, but it is suggested here on the basis of the tradition of naming the firstborn male children in honour of paternal grandfather.

chose to portray the Angel with such a full face, since he could have decided to make it just middling or thin. And if we are incapable of finding this reason, we would do better to attempt to find it rather than criticize the work and the diligence of the maker. This is also what happened in the miraculous representation of the Last Judgment painted by Michelangelo in the Vatican, in which Christ, as the judge of the virtuous and the wicked, has much younger looks than would be appropriate for His age of thirty-three years, and no other famous painter, nor he himself, had ever portrayed Him like this. Though this thing seemed strange not only to various people, but also to almost all the painters who heard about it, nonetheless no one rose up to say that that was a mistake, since in the rest he had filled everybody's eyes with infinite wonders. And there is little likelihood that he should have accorded to the most prominent figure in the work less consideration than to the others. Famous painters very often do this sort of thing to provoke people's thought and because painting in which more is to be understood than is made explicit (though much is indeed explicit) has always won the highest praise. And just as in poetry there are similes, metaphors, figures and allegories, so are these same things present in painting, though here in a silent, mute way, while in poetry there is speech and action.

And it is already perfectly clear to everyone that poetry and painting, despite the speaking nature of the one and the mute exterior of the other, are one and the same thing, and that what is said of the one may be applied to the other. The plumpness of that Angel and the youth of Michelangelo's Christ

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are, then, two mute allegories of painting, which no one has yet been able to decipher. However, one could possibly say that Michelagnolo did what he did because in that way he wanted to express a glorified body and make it appear somewhat different from the body as it was when it lived among us in hardship, making that transformation into a kind of metaphor, or should we say allegory, tacitly identifying perpetual youth with the force of glory and grace. For, if he had painted Him with the same aspect he had when He was suffering, then he would have easily reduced Him, in people's minds, to someone who was still suffering, which was not his intention. With reference to this comparison we could try to find the solution to the other contrivance, that of Titian's, and we could say that, by it, he meant to affirm figuratively that those who, according to the prophet, enjoy the abundance of the house of God must be plump and full, and also to make it clear to the people that this Angel was one of Our Lord's most precious, showing forth in his face the abundance of heavenly food; that is to say, of love, grace, splendour and the other supreme gifts in which others participate in greater or lesser measure. However, if this solution were not accepted, still there is no good reason why we should blame the artist, but we are in good conscience bound to consider whether we can find something better than this to explain the mind of Titian.

Painting, like poetry, consists of imitation, and we can imitate only the things that we have seen. And since no painter can be found who can say he has seen an angel, it follows that no one can paint angels as they look, since they are not corporeal, except in the measure they use the body, when they assume one. But since man has not been permitted to see a more beautiful appearance than the one he has himself, and (knowing that angels are exceedingly beautiful) has, in depicting them, made them similar to the most beautiful things that have ever

been seen in the world and so has given them a human aspect, connoting by their wings not only speed and a ready willingness to serve with all celerity, but also the angels' nature, by virtue of which, being free from all corporeal weight and having no such admixture as the earthly body has, they, who are far from this inferior part, climb ever up the

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path of celestial life towards that high and sublime seat where the Creator of all things dwells. They have childlike faces, not only because it is more beautiful that way, but also to highlight the angels' purity and obedience, which qualities make them agreeable to God. For these and other similar reasons it has been accepted by everybody that angels should be portrayed in this way.

This portrayal will not be a true imitation, but an invented one, which will however be accepted as true because it is not possible to do better. An example of this is the image of War, or should we say the 'idea' of War: a very ferocious man with his arms tied behind his back. When Virgil described it, he added a bloody mouth and a hundred chains, which held the hands behind with a hundred knots, and he made it most terrible and fierce, and sat it upon many offensive weapons. Aristides was the first to paint the soul and the five senses, something very difficult both to imagine and to do, but I have not found it written anywhere how he actually made this. And, if someone else should wish to make this attempt, he could surely do so in his own way and produce a new invented representation, since a previously accepted one is not available. Michel' Angelo sculpted Sleep and Night in marble (...)

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but he made them in the image of man, so that the one may be said to be a sleeping man and the other (...), but this is how they were originally accepted, as is the description of the Fame, which, as Virgil says, was a huge, horrible winged monster with a body full of numberless feathers, numberless open eyes, numberless mouths, tongues and ears. And as many other similar characters that can be seen in Virgil's *Inferno*,

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like the Fame and the Poverty, so clearly that, if one thinks well about it, he will find that this is almost a *prosopopoeia*¹⁶ in painting.

I have decided to say all this so that we know where the painter has the licence to vary as he likes best and where he does not; we will thereby be able to see the extent to which Titian has erred. In this case poetry can serve as an example: in it (as Aristotle teaches) errors pertaining to craftsmanship are those that lessen the poet's reputation, while others, the consequence of accident, are passed over. And just as a poet cannot alter or vary a universally accepted story (for example the killing of Laius by his son Oedipus) yet may vary the episodes (for instance, the manner in which this death occurred) similarly the painter cannot depict the Angel in a way that is not already accepted by everyone. However, he may vary the manner, as this is analogous to episodes in poetry. He may, in fact, choose to show the Announcing Angel still suspended in the air, or he may make the Angel's feet rest on the floor of the room; he may change his figure and make it either full, or gaunt or middling or some other way; and these features, because of their variety, differ from painter to painter, as do the episodes from poet to

¹⁶ personification

poet. And when someone errs in these things, the error is accidental and does not spoil the substance of the invention. So that we will not say that Titian erred by setting this mystery in a loggia or by depicting an edifice much more superb than one suitable to the low condition of Mary, since both the poet and the painter can vary and change these things as they wish.

Likewise, Apelles presented the image of War, adding to it a triumphant Alexander in his chariot, without pinning War's arms under it; but not for this reason was Virgil any different from him, except in the manner of his representation. So we shall say that Titian cannot be reproved for painting that Angel with a full face: first because,

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not having himself invented the form, he was free to vary all that was accidental; next because, even if that were an error (which however I do not admit), still it would be of the kind one concedes to painters, the kind of error that Horace meant when he said: 'Sunt delicta tamen quibus ignovisse velimus'.

The other point on which some people criticize this painting is that in their opinion a good painter should not have shown only half of the Angel's face, when he could have made him in such a way that the full face were visible, thereby filling the eyes of the viewers much more. But from this Your Lordship can see to what extent these people proceed gropingly in their reasoning (like those who dwell in darkness). And certainly the fact that sometimes much is conceded by others, depriving them of a great part of the proper judgement – which is what possibly happened to them in giving such opinions, so that they baptize as errors what ought to be highly praised. Therefore Titian, wishing to show the greatness of his talent, chose to show only half of the Angel's face, but in such a beautiful way did he emphasize the mouth in the act of speaking that, even if we see just that half, it causes us to see also all that is hidden. And it seems to me that those who do not venture to penetrate more deeply into what their senses show to them on the surface comport themselves vulgarly, entirely similar to those who, like sissies,¹⁷ ask for a music full of consonance and prefer a song suited to the sensibilities of an ignorant priestling because it fills the ears rather than a composition of a talented man, like Filippo di Monte, for example, or Nolano or Lando or Pietro Vinci, who with the charm of their fugues (and, at times, their rejection of cadences) or with the making discords in overly sweet consonance (which, like fatty morsels, is cloying from the outset) and with the waiting and re-entering of voices in tempo, and with matching the tune to the quality of the words, as well as with an infinite number of other beautiful variations best satisfy those who are connoisseurs in the art of music and, however much they hear, still feel a desire for more. And if at times they, themselves, yield to consonance, putting their artifice aside,

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they do so to satisfy the crowd, as they see that those who enjoy real craftsmanship are few indeed. For this reason I very much like the style of those who, indifferent to pleasing the mob, make all their compositions in accordance with the dictates of art, since without question, such works will be more durable and eternal. And Aristotle blames the poets who compose their verse according to the taste of the mob; he even disliked this trait in Homer, who in his *Odyssey*

¹⁷ When Maranta characterizes these listeners as 'i quali a guisa di femine', he thinks least of all about women, as he juxtaposes them and priestlings. See, however, Larson, 'Unaccompanied madrigal', 261, who thinks the opposite.

mixed the illustrious and the base, a practice that is alien to the real art of tragedy and epic. In depicting Hercules, Apelles showed only the back of his head, but he made it so perfectly that those who looked at it felt as if they saw the full face as well, and that which was not appreciated by the crowd roused the greatest wonder in the most famous painters of that century. Likewise, an extremely rare thing and a beautiful subject was Timanthes's Iphigenia poised for sacrifice; in it the artist, who had painted all the surrounding characters with different mournful faces, chose to express a greater sorrow in the father by showing him with a veiled face, as he wanted his moan to be heard rather than seen. Therefore, those who in all their paintings strive to show the entire face reveal their lack of courage and, being afraid of stumbling, they protect themselves only by refraining from erring. But the fact that they avoid censure does not make them worthy of praise. This was always the attitude of il Pistoia, a painter of our time, who was esteemed a great man by the mob merely because he had a certain charm

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in his colours. But in his paintings nothing was understood more than what was shown, and they could be judged both by artists and the mob; and once seen, his works did not leave the viewer with any desire to see them again, just as it happens with those who, having stuffed themselves to the gills on a certain food, hold it long afterwards in abomination. And it was indeed great artistry in Ariosto to finish his cantos by always leaving the reader with a desire to go on reading. But anyone who has been in love (as I believe Your Lordship has) will not find it strange not to see in a painting all that could be seen; lovers, in fact, know only too well how, just by seeing some of the parts that are revealed, they can, in spite of the clothes, go with their thoughts into those parts that are hidden, which gives them greater pleasure and feeds the flames of love more than if they could see all the parts. Because, just as a long abstinence from the things of the spirit does not come without some suffering, so every noble mind loathes and shuns satiation with beautiful things. Therefore, I do not see how one can blame the fullness and fleshiness of that Angel's face, or the position that shows only half of it, since a very cautious artist made all this with so much care.

But something that might possibly be blamed in it is the fact that Titian does not seem to have correctly understood the proportion of the Angel's whole body: from the knee to the foot there is, in fact, so little distance in comparison with the whole body that this seems something quite unnatural. And if proportion must be respected in other subjects, so much the more necessary is it to respect it in angels, who are absolutely beautiful and closer to the likeness of God than any other visible or invisible thing. And a well-proportioned body, as I am certain that Your Illustrious Lordship knows very well, is divided

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among many other divisions, into four equal parts: one, from the top of the head to the middle of the breast; another, down to the lowest part of the pubis, or rather, should we say, to the joint of the thigh and the hip; the third one extends from this place to the bottom of the knee under the patella, and the last one goes to the extreme end of the heel. Then, if the distance between the lower part of the knee to the bottom of the foot must be equal to the distance from the same spot in the knee to the connection of the thigh, on close observation one does not find this correspondence in that Angel: it even seems that the distance between the pubis and the knee

may be a little less than twice as long as the distance from knee to heel. Now, supposing we were willing to think that this distance is indeed well-proportioned (since the figure is clothed and we imagine the spot of the thigh-joint only conjecturally), then another disproportion emerges: in fact, the space from this thigh-joint to the back of the Angel, there where he bends, is much wider than it ought to be. This same flaw seems to be present in the Madonna, on whom little more than nothing, apart from the knee, is left to give an indication of the length of her leg; moreover she appears to be in great discomfort, in consequence of her kneeling on the edge of the stool, and no one could maintain this posture for long without feeling extreme pain. This is not so important, however, since if a woman is rapt by the Spirit and is in a certain way out of herself, it is no wonder that she is unaware that she is kneeling and she does not feel any pain, though there may be a good reason for it. The right arm, from the elbow to the end of the hand, seems faulty by being too long, since three of those elbows would surpass the length of her body from the head to the knee, as the length of the elbow should be equal to one of the divisions mentioned above, each of which is the fourth part of the whole body. However, it is not our intention to discuss the Madonna, but only the Angel. Therefore I will not elaborate upon her, though I reserve the option to give an answer to all these doubts at the end of my discourse.

Now, returning to the Angel, if painting is one of those things that are lauded with the epithet 'beautiful', let's see how many things are required to make up beauty, so that we may know whether they are present in that Angel. In order to be perfect, human beauty (for this is what we are talking about) requires proper proportion, proper

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quantity and appropriate vividness of colour, and [in addition to] that certain grace in these three things, which, by another name, we are also used to calling 'elegance'. The kind of painting that imitates this beauty must have itself all four of these things and also, separately, posture, which, though it is present in living bodies where it is required for the accomplishment of beauty, is nonetheless included in the fourth thing, which is grace and loveliness. In painting, however, it is considered a separate quality; in fact, since grace consists in actions and in the movements of the limbs, painting cannot show more than one of them, and this one will be sufficient to give a beautiful air to painting and make it look wonderful. But in human beings elegance results more from actions and movements, because, if one who were beautiful in everything made only a single action with grace, and showed grace only in that one action and in no other, this would not be enough to let him be numbered among the graceful, but rather among the clumsy, and the reason is that a single beautiful thing in a subject who is potentially capable of producing an infinity of them would be something that we would not wish to see very frequently. But if one is capable of producing only one beautiful thing, when this reaches its perfection, he is seen by everyone many times with great pleasure and is admired. And this is one of the main reasons why painting, like poetry, is required to have extreme perfection, and mediocrity in them is nowise acceptable, as it usually is in the other sciences and professions, and, in the words of my compatriot, 'Si paulum summo discessit, vergit ad imum'. In fact, since painting is to show only one action of a tale or a story and poetry only one action of a tale and no more, if it is not excellent and free from even the smallest flaw, it does not function, nor is it

regarded as good. And this is even more expected in painting, since in representing actions it is much simpler than poetry. Alberto Durero, for example,

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wanting to depict all the mysteries of Our Lord's Passion, was forced to make seventeen different paintings in order to show as many actions, since one picture could show only one action.

Therefore, in painting we will add posture as a fifth condition, distinct from the fourth, and by it we will mean the placement, or the position or the attitude of the body in which the artist has shown the man he has depicted. This, more than anything else, when done with art and grace, earns the painter the highest praise. Accordingly, we shall say that Michelagnolo, in his painting of the Judgment, among all its other wonders, saw to it that every figure had a different placement and posture, and the latter is part of grace, which contains much more, as it will be clear from what we shall say below.

Returning then to what we were saying, since we mentioned all that might seem perplexing about the proportion of that Angel, we shall now speak about the other conditions of beauty. And to start with, we shall discuss quantity, which in all things (as Aristotle warns) must neither be so large and outsized that one cannot at the first sight of it see both the beginning and the end, nor so small that its parts are barely discernible and it is impossible to make a proper comment about them. And this is true not only regarding the visible quantity, but also regarding what we may covertly perceive, as I shall say hereafter. And I shall say how at first glance the Angel in that painting shows to have that quality, as his body is neither very large nor extremely small, although the comments that can be made about that size may raise some doubts. One of these doubts will be that, since the Angel was depicted with a childlike aspect (as we said above) in order to denote his purity, among other things, we should focus on that part of childlikeness that cannot cause the viewer's mind to imagine any impurity, as this Angel's body is a certain pictorial metaphor of something that

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we are unable to express realistically in painting; that is, his nature and his being. But whoever considers the age that the Angel seems to be will judge that he is more or less seventeen, an age at which a man can be impure and dishonest. To remove this impression from the viewers' minds, it would possibly have been more appropriate to give the Angel an age of fourteen or younger – an age at which self-confidence and simplicity are most evident without the slightest suspicion of dishonesty. We can easily give an answer to this doubt, conceding that this is what should always be done unless something of greater importance causes one to act to the contrary, as was the case for this invention.¹⁸ Since, having to show the supreme and glorious God's ambassador, who was commissioned to reveal the greatest mystery that ever was in the world, it did not seem true to decorum according to which he should be given an age that is not endowed with mature judgement, that is unstable, fickle and careless, and that could make the Lord hesitate about the Angel's capability to perform his task in precisely the way he was commissioned to do it. And for this reason, when the ancient theologians chose Mercury as the ambassador of the gods, they attributed to him a mature age and made him the father of

¹⁸ The word 'invention' stands for 'disegno'.

wisdom and eloquence. Our theologians, on the contrary, as the ones who were better informed about heavenly things, chose the age of childhood both because we read in Scripture that God sent the angels on the earth in the form of a childlike or pubescent creature and also because this age represents most clearly the inclination to obedience of Heaven's inhabitants, which is shown mainly to serve as a teaching for us, so that, by using them as a mirror for us, we may imitate them and, like them, be the obedient servants of God. But the pubescent age is more appropriate for another reason: its being more stable denotes, in fact, the constancy and perpetuity of the vital virtue that in a being must endure eternally. This is what the divine Dionysius the Aeropagite teaches and what we pointed out above with reference to the Christ in Michelagnolo's Judgment. Additionally, in this way

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their spiritual and incorporeal nature is more openly evident, so that the soul, whether it was that of an old man or of a bearded youth or of a beardless one, was painted by almost everyone in a childlike form, and not only for the reasons I have mentioned, but also to make us understand that after death there is no difference between one person and another, as we are all equal without exception. This is how they were depicted by Michelagnolo when he made his Judgment and by all those who show the Angel Michael weighing the souls on a balance or on a steel yardstick. And if in Michelagnolo's Judgment some (very few) are depicted with a beard, they are portrayed like this for other reasons that pushed him to do so, as is the case of the portrait of that Bishop who, being bothersome to Michelagnolo, found himself put in Hell, almost without being aware of it.

Of the size of the Madonna, I do not want to speak at length. But, since some say that her person is too small, I will only respond that this so much better represents her humility, which was always lauded by Our Lord above every other virtue. And since He chose to be born not in Rome or in some other superb and celebrated place, but in low and humble Judea, it is also to be believed that His preference would be for a humble virginal vessel, indicated by the small size, which, however, is not extremely small, since in her it indicates an age of fourteen or a little older. Moreover women, because of their sex, are generally much smaller than men are, not to mention the fact that the way in which she is positioned makes her seem much smaller than she would be were she not so bent over in order to humble

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herself to the Divine Will. And this will probably be the full answer to the doubt that, above, we have left unresolved regarding the size of the Madonna.

But let us return to the Angel, and since we have said enough about two of the conditions necessary to painting, i.e. proportion and quantity, let us speak of the others. The third thing was the appropriate vividness of colour. We see that lights and shadows are applied so aptly in this Angel that they give a wonderful vivacity to the work, thanks to the resemblance of the bare parts to human flesh and, equally, of the vestments to natural clothing, to such an extent that one seems to see not mere colours or a painted canvas, but true and living human features and the most real and natural clothing. And that which few others are capable of achieving are the vibrant and vivid colours, which however are not so glossy as to offend the eye. In his day, only Apelles could boast this achievement, he who, after finishing each of his works, gently covered it with a certain black glaze to soften excessively shiny colours and

enliven the muted ones, besides protecting them from dust. In this he was so successful that no one has ever been able to imitate him. And to come to particulars, the Angel's hair is of such a beautiful colour and represented with such great art and so charmingly arranged that it seems as if the head were emerging from the picture and one could actually touch the hair with one's hand; moreover, by making it thick and

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abundant, he wanted to show its charm to be artless and undyed. The face, then, he has coloured with a mixture that expresses neither lasciviousness nor effeminacy (as we shall soon say at greater length, when we discuss the physiognomy), but rather veneration and respect; he has in fact coloured the whole of it with the kind of blush that is wont to appear on the face of one who has walked or run for a goodly distance with great urgency. This is to convey the great velocity that very likely the Angel used to accomplish the mandate of the eternal God as swiftly as possible. And whoever studies this face will be reminded of one who has just wiped off his sweat. Not because angels are fatigued by a journey or are grieved, but to express by means of these human accidents the particularities of the mystery. But if we want to penetrate more deeply into the profundity of divine things, we will find that this blush represents nothing other than the fire that theologians figuratively attribute to angels. The thrones and the seraphim are rather often said to be of fire, and to them are assigned the same properties that fire has, and they in this way want to let us know that the visage of a celestial spirit is illuminated in the guise of fire by the refulgence of the face of God. In fact (as the Areopagite teaches us), in order to make the humans' minds capable of understanding, those who have spoken about God in the holiest way have used the various guises of fire to portray His eternal and immaterial substance, which has no form or figure, because fire contains in itself many likenesses and images of God's properties, if we are allowed to speak in this way. As, for example, fire is extremely luminous, simple and unmixable, and what it touches is transformed into its nature. It always rises upwards very swiftly, it embraces all and cannot be embraced, it can give its substance to all without diminishing itself, and it possesses an infinity of other properties similar to the divine actions. As for human features, it is licit to liken them to those. Celestial spirits, then, show that they are of fire so we may understand that their divine nature does nothing but imitate (insofar as they are capable of doing so) the holy and eternal God, who is appropriately likened to fire; and for this same reason it is usual to choose a luminous, red colour to make the robes of the angels that are shown wearing clothes, which Titian,

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mindful of what was appropriate, has very well observed, and in the clothing he has mixed the white with the red in such a manner that the light does not seem to come from the outside, but rather to be born from within and from the Angel's illuminated person, which light, reflected also in the wings, originates that variety of hues in his feathers, yellow, blue, green and red, and iridescent, like those of the celestial rainbow, whose array of colours is created by the same cause. And those colours in the wings produce a certain wonder, since we have never seen the like in any flying animal; and this is quite fitting, as the poets imagine Iris to be the daughter of Thaumas, whose name, as Plato says, means precisely 'wonder'.

About the other parts of the Angel and the Madonna, as to what concerns the charm of the colours, I have chosen to say nothing, both to avoid the length of such a speech and because

it is clearly apparent to everyone in what an excellent way it was achieved. And now, coming to the fourth condition, which is grace, I will say that, as in giving charm to colours, though he does not surpass anyone, he is not surpassed by anyone, so in this one thing, as in all his works, Titian, according to all those whom I have heard reasoning on this, is awarded the palm in our day. This is especially apparent in his portraits from life (of which, more than any other, he made a particular profession). To these portraits, besides making their features extremely similar to the living person, he then imparts an aura in such a beautiful way that one seems to be within the spirit. Other painters make the nose look like the nose, the mouth like the mouth, the eyes like the eyes of the living person, and, in short, each feature considered by itself bears a resemblance to life. But then, looking at the whole composition with all its features, from which it originates and gets a varied aspect, I do not know how, but it does not seem to be the same, it seems something quite different, it is like the case of one who, on seeing a friend he has not seen for ten years, is undecided whether this is he, yes or no, and does not dare to talk to him. So, although it does indeed seem to him that he has the same features and the same marks that

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he bore, nonetheless, since he does not see in him the same aura that he once had (which, however, usually changes with the passing of the years), he is unsure whether to call him and embrace him. Precisely this aura is the very thing that is alternatively called 'elegance', which in beautiful bodies produces more beauty, and sometimes in a body we can see all the three conditions that I have mentioned earlier, i.e. the quantity and proportion of the features and the charming quality of the colours, but, because this fourth (i.e. elegance and loveliness) is not present, the body seems in some way insipid and the sight of it is cloying to us right away. And this is the thing that is lost or damaged in consequence of the slightest accident, such as sickness, melancholy, cholera or some other unbalance that may usually occur, but most of all in consequence of age. Thus, that woman who might have looked very beautiful a year ago now appears to us quite different, though neither the quantity nor the correspondence of her limbs nor the colour have changed or altered at all. I have wanted to say this to make it clear what I mean by grace or loveliness in the painting,¹⁹ which the Platonists say is an influx that comes directly from the face of God and spreads over human faces, to some more, to some less, and we do not know what it is like and which is its principal site; we only experience it in the faces of others and the eye, more than any other thing, rejoices at its presence and looks at it with the greatest satisfaction of the soul and admires it, and it does indeed seem that it can proceed from nothing else but God. Thus this divine part hidden in the face of an ordinary woman of humble origin forces the hearts of kings and emperors not only to love her, but also to revere and worship her as if she were a holy thing. We very often see this happen in true and courtly lovers.

Then, just as this grace, which is different in each person and which we call 'aura', is a gift from God and only from God flows into us, not unlike the soul which gives it form and being, without nature having any role in it as it has in the other three parts mentioned above, which result from an optimal natural mixture, so it is necessary that the divine spirit be a quality of that painter who in his works will then be able to reveal grace in the appropriate way,

¹⁹ Maranta clearly refers to the *Annunciation* painting in the Pinelli chapel.

imitating in this one thing the mastery that God alone (also excepting Nature) has the right to have. This elegance is either depicted by looking at a living person, in which case the painter has the obligation to make the portrait resemble

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that person in particulars, or it is represented at the artist's pleasure in those figures that he has made to give shape deliberately to an idea formed in his mind. And in this he shows greater talent, since in that case he must make many more considerations in bringing out the personality of the one he depicts according to the mystery, the tale or the story that the place and time require, and in showing persuasion or dissuasion, acceptance or rejection, and these with either anger or sympathy, gentleness or rigidity, joyfulness or sadness, and so on, or showing two or more of these things at the same time. These things must be made apparent not only in the face, but also in all the other parts of the body. And human beings may talk with grace, walk with grace, or with grace they may look, laugh, eat, drink, sleep and die; in short, any movement can be accomplished with a certain elegance that mellows the eye of the viewer. And this is of such a great importance that from it alone Apelles derived special renown and triumphed over all the other most famous painters, an achievement of which he used to boast, saying that the works of those famous contemporary painters might well deserve great admiration and praise, but they lacked that appeal and that grace of [which] we have been speaking, and in this he vaunted that he had no peer, although he admitted that in the other aspects he was equalled and even, perhaps, surpassed. Indeed, he yielded to Amphion in posture, to Asclepiodorus in proportion and to Protogenes in diligence, whom however he blamed for an excess in that diligence, which, he said, prevented him from ever taking his hand off his work.

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And if I wanted to compare Titian to one of the ancients, I would not know who better to compare him to than to Apelles, as both of them were excellent in portraying living persons from life.²⁰ And this is so true in the case of Apelles that Alexander the Great decreed that none other else should paint a portrait of him by a public edict, even though in those days there were many excellent painters around, such as Protogenes, Asclepiodorus, Amphion and Aristides, from whom, we read, King Attalus purchased a picture in which Father Liber was depicted at the price of six thousand sesterces. There were also others, against whom he placed himself in competition for painting a horse, and his was so wonderful that before it alone the horses neighed. But that Titian today excels in portraiture is known to everybody; both the one and the other are excellent in the use of colours, and both have surpassed all the painters of their times as regards grace and loveliness. And if I were not afraid of offending someone who thinks himself famous,²¹ I would mention some other similarities that might exist between these two.

We now see how this elegance and this aura shine in the Angel, and I believe that this face was not painted from a living person, but took shape in the mind of the painter, who then put it on the canvas, though Titian has at times done that (so have I heard from others),²²

²⁰ The phrase 'in portraying living persons from life' stands for 'nel ritrarre dal naturale i viventi'.

²¹ Maranta's reference remains unclear.

²² The word 'that' refers to the widespread practice of using a real person as a model for a figure in a painting of a sacred story.

perhaps to please him who ordered the work, but, although this is easier, in religious paintings it does not inspire great devotion. In fact, when we see that the face of a man whom we know to be a sinner and maybe even a very evil sinner, marked out as such among men, is wearing the robes of a saint, as a matter of fact he is representing his own life, and in a certain way he makes that saint appear as a bad man himself, and he will seem a portrait of hypocrisy, so that in looking at him we have a good reason to fear that he might any moment bring about our damnation. And for this reason the reverend fathers of Monte Oliveto removed

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from the main altar that picture of the Circumcision in which Barattuccio was portrayed in the guise of Simeon; this happened at the time when he, being tax attorney, meted out such punishments as the rope, the fire, the stocks and other kinds of torture. He ordered flogging, dragging, hanging and other types of punishments, and even though he had a venerable appearance (owing to his large, hoary beard), yet he was held to be a cruel man, not a merciful one, as was actually required by the grandeur of the mystery. So those good fathers removed it from the main altar and commissioned Giorgino di Arezzo to make the one that stands there now. In the same place there is the chapel of (...) of the Magi, where all the figures are painted from living men, portrayed from life; among them, the one who offers the gold is the image of the good Conte di Oppido, God rest his soul.

The Angel, then, will occasion more devotion since he was formed only by an idea in his mind. We can realize this from the fact that

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he has such an aura and such grace, as well as many other features that do not seem possible to find in a living body. This is why his expression is between joy and astonishment: joy for the good message he was delivering, awaited for thousands of years by all of mankind and especially by Mary herself; astonishment and bewilderment for the importance of the wonderful mystery, almost suddenly revealed to him and commissioned to reveal to Mary. His face shows not only the greatest obedience in fulfilling the commands of God, but also no small reverence while he delivers his message. And even, whoever looks carefully will see his great concern not to forget or change in any way all that he was to say, and together with this concern a confident certainty that it would be impossible for him to stumble in his speech; this explains his furrowed brow and the reluctance of his eye to open wide, countering the movement of the eyelid which, dropping down, causes it to half close, a feature common to all those who are speaking about something of great moment. And while he is in the process of saying 'Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te' and that which follows (because he has been depicted in the act of saying these words, as we shall say below) he seems to be wondering whether there is not something else he must add. Moreover, there is in his aspect a certain divinity that words cannot very well express; only the eye of someone who observes him intently will perceive it and in a certain obscure way will pass it on to the thought;²³ because, in addition to humility and reverence, one sees also a certain majesty and an image of authority that inspire awe and reverence in the viewer. And it seems as if inside him a certain spirit is born that reveals his natural, innate divinity and his voluntary, artificial (so to speak) humility, which can both

²³ Maranta refers to the viewer's mind.

appear together so well, since artifice can in no way cover over what is natural. A similar effect can be seen in the countenance of the blessed late Don Pedro of Toledo, in whom, as festive and cheerful as he

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might be, it was impossible to ignore totally a certain frightfulness that forced those who looked at him to lower their eyes. This disproves the opinion of those who thought that the face of the Angel should be all cheerful and smiling, and reprimanded Titian for choosing not to paint him that way, because the presence of cheerfulness does not, by itself, prove the loftiness of the mystery. Indeed, I will add that even if it were not at all necessary to worry about intimating astonishment and wonder, and if the whole mystery were to be signified with cheerfulness only, even in that case it would not have been appropriate to make the Angel fully cheerful and with a smiling face, as the servant is not supposed to laugh about anything together with his master, since in that way he would display arrogance and bad manners, seeming to want to treat him with familiarity and to show off a fraternizing attitude, which is an absolutely abominable thing in the eyes of all masters and of other friends from a higher class. And if Mary had formerly been inferior to the angels, in the way that mortals are inferior to immortals, nevertheless, at the very moment when the Angel started speaking in greeting her, she became the vessel for and receiver of Him who rules over all the angels and all the world, and for this reason she deserved not only to divest herself of the inferiority she had, but also to become in fact far superior. It was then on purpose that the Angel was not made all that cheerful.

Now there is one more point to consider: that is, the artifice used by Titian in the Angel's posture, which is the fifth and last condition of painting, and above we have shown at length what posture is. He has made him with the left foot forward, in the shape of a man who is walking with his right hand held out in order to accompany his speech with this gesture; he is quite bent forward at the waist and his head appears to be slightly tilted backwards. He is in the act of moving forward, since it is possible that, having arrived from that side towards which the Madonna was turning her back, he was going to meet her from the other side, towards which she was facing. But she, having heard the noise, left off her prayer and turned towards the side whence the Angel was coming. He, finding himself in that way face to face with her, stopped in that place and greeted her, and, once he had heard the expected answer (which was 'Quomodo fiet istud' and all that follows) he was about to say 'Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te' and so forth; and while the Angel was saying this, the Madonna, having assumed that posture of humility that was appropriate for

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the words she was to say ('Ecce ancilla Domini') with all the rest, waited until the Angel had finished his speech, keeping her arms in front of her in the shape of a cross and bending as deeply as in that posture, so unexpectedly and almost hastily assumed, allowed her to do. So in this painting Mary does not speak and for this reason she is shown with her mouth closed. The Angel stands with his mouth open, and from the gesture of his hand and from the posture of Mary, as well as from the looks on both of their faces, as we said above, it is easy to understand that he is saying 'Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te' etc. In fact, if he were saying 'Ave gratia plena', there would be no reason for his arm to be stretched out in the way it usually is when one says something of great importance. Since the greeting in itself has neither little [nor] great

importance, and the pronouncing of it requires no motion whatsoever of the hand or, if any, one that would express greater pleasantness. One knows this, as I have said, also from the placement or posture of Mary; because, since the Angel had spoken twice and so had Mary, each of the two times necessitated in both of them a different motion, and, as Mary's first response, full of wonder and astonishment, when she said 'Quomodo fiet istud' etc., it required another gesture for the hands and the arms and the posture of the whole body to be different from the posture she has, as everyone can understand for himself. Because, when you are wondering, you press both your arms to your body and open the palms towards the direction in which you are looking, you keep your torso erect, lower your eyelids, close your mouth tightly and wrinkle your brow. Since there is no sign of wonderment in her, it follows that she is preparing to make her second response; and if that is so (as it truly is), one inevitably concludes that the Angel is himself speaking his second proposal.

From this, those who do not like to think that the Virgin is not making either of her responses can realize their error; in fact, they ask the impossible of the painting, since, though it can only show one single action (as we explained at greater length above), they would want it to show two. And even though it is true that in this mystery the Angel spoke and Mary also spoke, nonetheless it was not appropriate to show both of them in the act of speaking, for in that way both of them would have appeared to be speaking at the same time. But since it is more rational that while one speaks, the other is quiet and listens,

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inevitably, having introduced the Angel in the act of speaking, the Virgin was to be shown in the act of listening. But the greatness of Titian's ingenuity, undoubtedly wonderful in this particular case, is that, even though the Virgin remains quiet, it was nonetheless apparent from her posture not only that it would soon be her turn to respond, but also what she would respond, as soon as the Angel left off speaking. Now, turning back to the Angel, I will say that he is shown with his foot forward for the reason that I mentioned above, and also we see a reverence made rather artlessly with the right foot, because he found himself in that posture as the Virgin turned round, and because he wanted to point out that showing the intention of avoiding art is just as good an artifice as art itself. Now let us speak about the hand, which is so important to the action that not without great labour and ingenuity can it be placed in the required gesture to accompany with it the kind of speech and voice appropriate to the situation. And this stems from the variety of gestures that can be made with it; and where there is a great number of options, it is difficult to choose the one that is suitable in that particular case. Since, even though it is a usual practice to accompany speech with the movements of the other parts of the body, there is no limb, if not the hand, capable of adapting its gestures to all the variety of statements (which is infinite), so that we can, in a certain sense, say that the hands actually do speak. This can be seen in mute persons, who clearly express every concept by the use of their hands. And I remember having read that someone (I do not know who) said that more could, in a certain sense, be attributed to the hands than to the words, because words are so different from language to language that one cannot understand the other. The hand, on the contrary, uses a language common to all tongues, and with it any barbarous nation could make itself understood by the Greeks and the Latins, and the latter by the former. It is then so difficult to select the appropriate gesture for the hand that even famous orators and actors, who to this

aspect devote greater study than to any other, often fail in their choice. Now, how much more difficult will it be for a painter to find it with precision and care? And so much the more difficult because it is not enough to choose a good position for the hand and the arm, if there is no correspondence between the way they are placed and

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the rest of the body. But if we bear in mind the words that are coming from the Angel's mouth, with all that has been said about grace and aura above, we will know that it would have been impossible for the arm and the hand to be positioned in any other way than in this one. In fact, since the Angel had already announced to the Virgin that she would become pregnant with the Lord of the world, compared to what this implied, knowledge of the way in which she would become pregnant created very little wonder. When he revealed her the reason for this, it was then necessary to choose that disposition of the hand that could accompany explicit speech about the greatest wonder of all wonders, past, present and future. And this is what the thrusting forward of the right arm signifies – the right, not the left, since the left is weaker, and in it one cannot show the force and the vehemence of speech that are evident in the other one. Similarly, the thumb, joined with the index finger of the hand that is slightly raised towards the external part of the arm, accompanies this same action, and in precisely this configuration the Angel has placed his right arm, while leaving his left one in a role of little importance, that of holding the lily; and for this reason he [Titian] has not taken the trouble to show it entirely. The right arm, then, is shown bare from slightly above the elbow down to the back of the hand, and the long bone that extends from the elbow joint to the first part of the hand, to which the anatomists have assigned the name of 'elbow bone', remains face down, towards the ground and is quite visible in this arm, as this bone is not covered over by any muscle, but only by the skin, and since Titian wanted to show it this way, one can see a certain firmness in this part, just as there is softness in the other, where muscles are required, while the other bone, which lies above this one and is almost the same length, the one that the anatomists call 'radius', remains in the part that faces upwards towards the sky. If this bone, which is covered by one single muscle, prevents the arm from being as firm in this part as it is in the elbow, nonetheless it preserves a medium softness in comparison with the rest of the arm. And since the stretching of the four fingers (I am not counting the thumb) is produced by the largest of the three muscles that originate from the external part of the bone called 'humerus' or 'arm bone', which joins with the upper part of the 'elbow bone', and since this muscle is on top and covers almost the whole half occupied lengthwise by the ulna,

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and is then divided into four tendons, each of which raises its respective finger, it was necessary that this muscle should be apparent, as in the Angel's hand the four fingers are extended and, so to speak, re-supinated. And because of this we see a muscle flexing mildly in the middle of that arm from the beginning of the elbow, but becoming more evident as it reaches closer to the hand and bulging markedly towards the part occupied by the radius. So, having let the index finger droop clearly down, a motion that is produced by one of the inner muscles of the ulna in order to join the thumb with the index finger, as those who have something very important to discuss are wont to do, it inevitably happened that a greater concavity was shown in the place towards which this finger moved down. And since the muscle that moves the thumb obliquely

and joins it to the index finger (because it originates at the very top part of the elbow bone) passes obliquely under the other muscle we have already mentioned, it generates a greater concavity and division towards the body, and for this reason we see in this arm that more apparent obliqueness of the muscle. And in this there are two wonders performed by Titian: the first is that with this arrangement of the muscles he puts before the eyes that which the painting hides, i.e. the joining of the thumb with the index finger, although of the thumb there is not the slightest trace. The other wonder is that the joining of these two fingers might show in them some sort of ugliness, which he judged a good thing not to display, but he chose to give only the intuition of such a movement of the hand: from which we see again quite clearly that sometimes there is greater artistry in hiding a limb rather than in showing it. This is something Apelles invented, to hide the ugliness and defects of a person or a gesture, because he made a live portrait of King Antigonus, who was missing an eye. He depicted him in profile, as one does in a medal, and only showed the side with the healthy eye, hiding the blind one, so that it seemed as if the one that was missing, due to a defect of the real person, was hidden because of the demands of the painting. In the arm, then, only those muscles are shown that were needed to make that extension of the five fingers in the manner we have described, and it was not necessary to show them all, which is done when the hand is using greater force and making an effort. And even though there are the others that raise the articulation of the whole hand, or we could say of the metacarpus, nonetheless, because they are not so superficial

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and the motion is not forced and the Angel is plump, they are not visibly shown, but they can be recognized only because of a certain aspect and by the eye of an expert in anatomy.

Nor shall I omit to mention another beautiful expedient used in that small bare portion of the arm visible above the elbow: since he had to show the extension of the arm in the bending of it, which motion is made by two of the four muscles that are capable of flexing and extending this articulation, which two take their origin in the humerus and, crossing obliquely, anchor the elbow bone, he chose to show only a part of them, and precisely those ends that fit into this joint, so that from the process going on in this small part one could think of the other part, and they are so appropriately and correctly placed that an expert anatomist would be satisfied with them. And since we have said that, if the motif and posture of the arm is not accompanied by that of the whole body, there is nothing contrived in it at all. I say only this: that in order to show greater humility it was not necessary for the Angel to bend more than he does, because great bows, which immoderately bend half of the body forward, inevitably cause an immoderate jutting out of the parts behind also. But then the act of raising oneself up again is much uglier, since, if one wants to recover the uprightness of the standing posture, he must use remarkable force to make a movement no less inappropriate than the first one. This is why, my dear Signor Marquis, I would like these manners which are now common in Naples among gentlemen and gallants (especially in this class and among women) to be more moderate and less impetuous, knowing for certain that no error can possibly be committed when one imitates angels.

On the position of the neck and the head I would like to say many things, but I realize that the greatness of the work has led me to say many things that I did not think I would, and therefore I will touch only lightly on these aspects; and, leaving aside the question of the

muscles, what is worthy of both consideration and admiration is seeing the head emerge so much from the neck that one has the impression that the voice is issuing forth, clear and round, without any impediment whatsoever. Now, if the head had been more bent over, the voice would have been much more strangled, as happens with some people who make their voices come from the throat rather than from the mouth, a most irritating thing to have to hear,

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or with those other people who sound as if they were threatening you. And if the head were held more highly, with a twisting of the neck, then the voice would come out as it does from those who make it so thin and piercing that it has the effect of the point of a needle penetrating into the brain; or it would be broken, uneven, obscure and effeminate. It seems, on the contrary, that in that position this voice may issue forth easily and be then articulated with firmness by the mouth, which does not give it too wide a hiatus and opening, so that one seems to hear a melodious sound, nor is the mouth so closed that the words will be reverberated back to their point of origin, or (as we see in many cases) that the last syllables will remain unheard: instead his speaking is shown to be even, uniform and fluent: his lips do not move too much, but (as decorum demands) the mouth seems to assume the office of speech more than the lips, which are even and undistorted, and do not let the teeth be seen. In sum, it seems as if a living being were speaking from some distance away and, because of that distance, his voice could not be heard; and his breathing seems to be easy and effortless. And in his neck whoever looks attentively will sort of see that gentle vibration of the skin that occurs on the surface with the reverberation of the voice, which is undoubtedly almost impossible to imagine, much less actually to depict.

Shall I also talk of the configuration of the nose? of the eye? of the ear? of the hair? of the forehead? of the feet? of the wings? of the clothes? of the other hand and of another thousand things? In truth, Signor Marquis, this is a subject for which, however easy it was to find the beginning, I cannot see where I would ever find the end. For, hardly have I finished saying one thing, when a thousand others come to assail me, so that I feel as if I were myself between two evils, one of which I will never, perforce, be able to avoid: in fact, if I say about this everything I can, I will be so long that not without enormous nuisance will Your Lordship succeed in getting through; on the other hand, if I do not speak about it, I feel that, having embarked on this enterprise,²⁴ I am doing wrong to Titian by leaving it imperfect. But I will force myself, by taking a middle course, partly to avoid both the one and the other. And among the many things that come to my mind, I will choose one, which I will try to treat less than in full, and that thing is physiognomy, of whose rules Titian seems quite curiously to have availed himself in this painting to show through the traits of the face and the complexion, and also the whole bodies of the Angel and the Madonna,

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that their habits and soul were in no way discordant with what we have said above.

And to speak of the complexion – or should we not rather say the 'temperament' – that the Angel shows he has, the first aspect worth considering is the fact that it is unlike an excellent artist to put marks on the face or the body by which one can know the depth of a soul

²⁴ The phrase 'having embarked on this enterprise' stands for 'pigliata questa impresa'.

without accompanying them also with the corresponding marks of the temperament, because the former originate in the latter, and according to the variation in the latter, which can be infinite, so do the former vary. Physicians, who do not care much about physiognomy, with their knowledge of the complexion only, can speculate, if not quite so minutely, at least to a good extent, about a person's character. In describing an important person, illustrious poets made use now of the one type of marks, now of the other, so that the movements and the actions assigned to their personage were more credible. At times they had recourse only to physiognomic signs, considering them as capable of revealing all the minutiae of the soul, while they completely disregarded the other type. This is what Homer did when he described Thersites as being lame in one foot and having a squinting eye, sparse hair on the top of his long, pointed head, narrow shoulders and an almost concave chest. Therefore it is no wonder that, whenever he is mentioned in the poem, he is then represented as a man who talks very much but knows very little, who is dirty, quarrelsome and disrespectful. These actions correspond, in fact, to those signs, as anyone who understands physiognomy can conclude. But Titian, who no less than the poets needed this kind of observation, being not content with just the signs of the Angel's physiognomy, has also shown those that can be found in the complexion, and has done so in such a beautiful way that the latter manifest the former, and the former correspond felicitously with the latter, in such a manner that we cannot see any discordance at all. For, if we look at the complexion as it is depicted, we shall recognize it as the one that, in consequence of the dominance of blood, is called 'sanguine', and is warm and moist. As physicians have it,

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this temperament causes men to be of a middling constitution or rather inclined to fleshiness, and that fullness does not come from excessive fat but from excessive flesh. The colour of the whole body is between white and red, yet a little more red than white; the hair is thick and blonde, with a medium curliness. This complexion produces a prompt and bold temperament, which is irascible but not furious. Now, if one observes the Angel carefully, will he not see all these signs? And if we want to talk about the influence that the planets have over the human body, we shall find that the Angel is under the planet of Jove, from whose name his nature is called 'jovial'. As regards this type, physiognomists say that his flesh is between firmness and softness, that he has handsome and pleasing looks, a white skin, thick hair, charming and cheerful eyes, that in fact his entire person is cheerful and festive, clean and neat – which traits, without my having to say more, anyone can easily notice in the Angel, whose nature and complexion Titian had in his mind while he was painting him. And, furthermore, to speak of the nature in which these signs are present, a man of this type is said to have a great and wandering spirit, to be exceedingly generous beyond his limits, eager to rule, intolerant of mediocrity, extremely polite, honest, hungry for glory and fame, faithful, a true friend without fraudulence, peaceful, in general a lover of wisdom, eloquent and of great counsel, and, in short, a very diligent imitator of all good things. Now, see if Titian were to choose this nature and no other to suggest it in an angel. And returning to that doubt that we have already solved earlier from some other angles, who would want the Angel to appear more joyous than he has been shown, and who would prefer him to be less ruddy and less full? Does he not know that many of these virtues cannot be implied? In fact, being totally white, without any ruddiness,

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and excessively cheerful and smiling is only appropriate for those who, being under the dominion of Venus, are therefore called 'venereal'. So, had he depicted him in this way, two errors would have resulted: first of all, he would have created a mixture of two natures subjected to two planets, which would produce confusion and obscurity; secondly, since those signs are referred to the nature of the venereal type (who is very much dedicated to games and balls and all sorts of vanities and deceits), he would have shown the Angel's nature to have these traits. Now, how much graver would the error have been if he had shown a leaner angel, implying in this way the malignant nature and tardiness in actions that come from the influence of Saturn, or the garrulous and untruthful character deriving from Mercury – even if, in this case, he would have shown in him eloquence and a versatile ingenuity – or the cruelty of Mars, or the instability and indolence of the Moon! And who would not then have imagined (penetrating even deeper with his thought) that, while the Angel was speaking, his voice, since he was jovial, was to be inevitably sonorous, clear, light and even – worthy indeed of an angel – whereas from Venus it would have been effeminate, soft, enervated and lacking in vigour, and likewise would it have been from Mercury and from the Sun? And that from Saturn it would have been sluggish and similar to the hoarse and obstreperous voice of a goose? And that from Mars it would have been shrill and boring? Now, shall I have to go into the physiognomy of each part individually? And if I venture into this other field, which is so vast, when shall I find the ford to come out? It will be better, then, to say nothing on those aspects, since I am more than sure that this can suffice not only for knowledgeable men, but also for minds of a coarse and material stuff.

Now let those come forward who, without pondering more deeply, say: 'I do not like this painting. That colour is too dull; that face is not shown entirely; the proportion of that Angel is not right', and other things said more at random than with suitable reasoning. And since,

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if Your Lordship will remember, we left some doubts unresolved concerning the proportions of the Angel and the Virgin, it would be enough to say, for those who cannot fully grasp the reasons: 'Since in that painting Titian has shown such and so much subtlety, it is not to be believed that the proportion is not good, and Titian's authority, rather than some other reason, should be enough to satisfy them'. But not to give the impression that this is a way of fleeing an examination of the doubts, I will say that the placement of the belt quite above the middle of the Angel's body deceives the sight and causes the part below the belt to appear much longer than probably would seem appropriate, and therefore the distance from the foot to the knee does not appear to be equal to that from the knee to the joint of the thigh. But he who wants to see all this clearly will find, measuring stick in hand, that adding three more segments as long as the one from the knee to the foot he will reach the top of the head with only so much in excess as the bending forward could plausibly hide. As for the Virgin's elbow, which seems to be too long, I will say that this doubt results from not paying enough attention to her posture. In fact, as she is bent almost entirely on to the right humerus: with the left one almost totally folded upwards, so that the right part is very much thrust forward: the arm's length is emphasized by this posture. So, the right elbow is visible in its entirety and the left one only partially, and even if it seems

that this triple-sized elbow exceeds the length of the body from the knees upwards, this is due to the fact that she is very much bent, but should we imagine her upright, any good judgement will find that her proportions are correct.

I shall also respond to those who say that her legs do not appear to be as long as they ought to be. And what blind person does not see that in such a posture they obviously cannot be shown completely, since, her body being turned with the front part outwards, most of the rest of it must necessarily be behind the table? This part, occupied and covered by her body, is hidden to the sight of one who looks. Besides, this also happens because we do not imagine in her any artificial tallness added by slippers or clogs, like those that married women are used to showing when they are quite small, since for us this could represent an image of vanity. And these, rather than the doubts of a man with some reasoning faculty, are certainly childish doubts, such as is the comment of one who says that a certain

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large pleat, which is in the lower part of the Angel's robe, is not properly made, nor does it accord with the placement of the feet, and this is the one that starts at the right foot, at the bottom, and rises across and upwards towards the left foot. As if the Angel had had no other thought than to see what kind of pleat his robe would form as he was speaking to the Virgin! And he does not realize that everything is done with great art on purpose, to show the attention that the Angel had to pay to what was really important, which can in a certain sense be quite well alluded to by the peculiarity of the pleats.

But leaving aside the reasons, which have already exhausted me, without yet satisfying me, let us see how this is really judged by competent people. And I would not know what better judgement I could choose in Naples than the one of Master Giovan Bernardo Lami, a man of the requisite profession, who, besides painting most wonderfully anything that he likes and having no equal in portraiture from life, as will be attested by most ladies and gentlemen of this city,²⁵ who have wanted their portraits to be made by him and by none other, is also an exquisite copper engraver, whose prints will appear very shortly, and he sculpts in clay and plaster in a new way that is absolutely astonishing to people, nor can we find anyone capable of equalling him as a miniaturist, if he is not felicitously versed in anatomy and perspective, and in the other special skills pertaining to painting. And Signor Cosimo Pinelli, who has no other aim than doing all his things in the most perfect way so that they can nowise be improved upon, has willed that the ceiling of this chapel as well as the other parts that could be appropriately covered by paintings should all be made by his hand. And anyone who has a healthy judgement will realize, on seeing it, how well he has succeeded in his work. Not only does he heap praise upon this painting, but is never tired of admiring it and being amazed by it, acknowledging and asserting unrestrainedly in the loudest voice that nothing can be added to it or taken away from it. And do I leave aside the judgement of Signor Giovan Vincenzo Pinelli, son of Signor Cosimo? His rare qualities, already well-known to men, can never be enough praised by every noble spirit. He, who

²⁵ Maranta means Naples.

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had the thought of having this picture made, while he was studying in Padua, where his great worthiness made him distinguished and wonderful in everybody's eyes, and who is learned and competent no less in painting than in philosophy, law and other sciences, says and confirms that he likes the invention and the art and all that can be considered in this painting immensely. Neither can I ignore Signor Alfonso Cambi, who since his youngest years has been profitably versed in all sorts of humanities.²⁶ But it is he who was particularly competent to give an opinion of this painting, since he is a gentleman of that city wherein more than in any other this art has always flourished.²⁷ He, no less than the others mentioned above, praises this work to the skies and gives a detailed reasoning about it, highlighting quite minutely each single aspect on which the artist has focussed.

Let us conclude, then, that they who speak of it less than honourably will be deeply mistaken. As for myself, I will always say that Titian was (like a poet when he writes) completely transformed in this painting; as they, when seized by the poetic *furor*, forget themselves while they write, so he, inspired by God rather than helped by his own forces, has made this mystery into such a supreme perfection that it seems impossible for human industry to imitate. Now, what would have happened if I had wanted to broach the rules of perspective, which Titian has so well observed that he has fully proved himself to be a highly learned master in that science? But I do not want to speak of them, both to avoid going on to a great length and because these things, requiring great mental abstraction, would be most tedious to be heard at the end of such a lengthy discourse. Actually, about many more things I could say much more than

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what I have said, especially if I wanted to enter into the details of the Madonna. About whom, more in consequence of my speaking so long than from a deliberate decision, I have mentioned only few things, so that I judge it more appropriate now to remain silent than to trouble you more than I have done with my long chatter. It will be enough for me if, with what I have said about the Angel, I have responded, insofar as I was capable, to the opinions of those who aim at no other price, no other payment except the chance of criticizing things that are good. And would to God that they, repenting of their boldness and coming to their senses, may start confirming the truth, once they have given up all the vanities that they have in such great, infinite abundance that they dispense and distribute them in every square in a large, capacious measure.

Will Your Lordship, who has benevolently taken the trouble for such a long time to joke with me in order to test the strength of my ingenuity, please temper the tedium of this lesson with the good will I showed to favour the truth, which you pursue and love to the highest degree in everything, leaving me secure in the conviction that, just as in poetry you have taste as everybody knows, so, having the same, purified and excellent, in painting, you can only commend my good intention and blame, on the contrary, the simplicity and limited knowledge of those who, while discussing that painting with all their intellect, did not even know what a

²⁶ The phrase 'in all sorts of humanities' stands for 'in ogni sorte di lettere'.

²⁷ Maranta means Florence.

paintbrush was. So Titian's fame will last with you preserving the reputation that he and his talent acquired many years ago, and I, seeing that you grant me your favour with such sweet and elegant manners, will be able to make it clear to myself and to the world that I am one of your dearest. This is what I have, for many years, above all else desired.

Appendix: Maranta's note on the margin

'So, as in Tragedies not all the events take place on the stage but between one act and the other, one sometimes imagines much more than what can be done in an act; and this makes the poem more solemn and dense; likewise in painting the highest minds always considered it a greatly desirable thing that many things should be hidden, but in such a way that they might be understood easily and with wonder. And if sometimes it happens that in painting a certain thing is obscure, this is so in order that it may eventually speak as poetry does'.

In Italian:

'Percioche come nelle Tragedie non tutto cio che si fa si produce in scena ma tra l'uno atto et l'altro, vi si presuppone alle volte molto più di quello che in uno atto si può fare; et questo rende il poema più grave et più pieno; così nella pittura di grande auspicio fu sempre tra svegliati ingegni molte cose nascondere: ma in guisa che facilmente et con meraviglia si possano comprendere. Et se alle volte avviene che alcuna cosa sia oscura nella pittura, è che ella riesca parlar come la poesia'.

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