DEATH BECOMES US: AN EXAMINATION OF MEMENTO MORI RHETORIC IN THE ART AND LITERATURE OF THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

by

Amanda M. Dutton

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL
May 2019
Copyright 2019 by Amanda M. Dutton
DEATH BECOMES US: AN EXAMINATION OF MEMENTO MORI RHETORIC IN
THE ART AND LITERATURE OF THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

by

Amanda M. Dutton

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Frédéric Conrod, Department of Languages, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Frédéric Conrod, Ph.D.
Dissertation Advisor

Mary E. Faraci, Ph.D.

Thomas L. Martin, Ph.D.

Adam Bradford, Ph.D.
Director, Comparative Studies Program

Michael J. Horswell, Ph.D.
Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

Khaled Sobhan, Ph.D.
Interim Dean, Graduate College

April 19, 2019
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is always difficult to make proper acknowledgements without it being as long or longer than the work itself. I shall make the attempt and beg forgiveness of those who are inadvertently omitted.

Naturally, I am deeply indebted to the guidance and patience of my dissertation committee—Dr. Frédéric Conrod, Dr. Mary E. Faraci, and Dr. Thomas L. Martin. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with such kind, interesting, and truly knowledgeable people. I am humbled that they invested their time and expertise in my work. Indeed, if it were not for these dedicated professors, I would not have come this far. Thank you all for the inspiration, support, and confidence. On that note, I have many, many professors to thank over ten years of higher education, not to mention all of the influential teachers I have ever had in my life. The faculty at Florida Atlantic University have been an integral part of my education and career. I thank them whole-heartedly for changing my life dramatically for the better. There are many who I could name, but I want to particularly thank Dr. Eric Berlatsky, Dr. Steven Blakemore, Dr. Adam Bradford, Dr. Jeffrey Galin, Dr. John Golden, Dr. John Hess, Dr. Wendy Hinshaw, Dr. Michael Horswell, Dr. Warren Kelly, Dr. John Leeds, Dr. Marcella Munson, Dr. Daniel Murtaugh, Dr. Myriam Ruthenberg, Dr. Richard Shusterman, and Dr. Julieann Ulin. I would also like to thank Rebecca Al-Hattab. It is a joy to know and have worked with all of you.
I wish to extend acknowledgement to the following as well:

My dear friends and colleagues from Bachelor’s to Doctorate. We truly are siblings in battle. Some of us may have lost touch, but we will be forever bonded by friendship and experience. Here I will make special mention of the Faracians and the Jupiter campus crew. That was a truly collegiate experience. I have a special place in my heart for you all—3ogh!

Dr. Andrea Gobbi – *mille grazie*! Dr. Gobbi has not only been a supportive friend and colleague, but I am indebted to him for helping me to translate Marino’s poems not just from Italian to English, but from Italian written in original script from 1675. I hope we have many more fun projects together and work on them together in Italia! See you in Roma, *mio amico*.

Professor Robert Farley of Indian River State College. You turned going through the motions into passion.

Mr. bill berry, jr., of *aaduna* for believing in me and supporting me long after my first publication was outdated.

Stefanie Gapinski of WriteRight. Thank you, thank you, thank you to you and your supporting editors for your work on the pesky details of proofing and formatting. I think Word would be the death of me and this project if not for you.

Mrs. Betty Williams. Not many people remember and still have contact with their fifth grade teacher. You are truly unforgettable. I am passing on the torch.

The many, many wonderful people I have met at conferences who gave support and feedback through the years.
This may be a bit unusual, but this project and many more would not be possible without the tireless dedication of all of the scholars and archivists around the world who work diligently to preserve, keep, and digitize ancient and antique manuscripts and make them available on the internet. This would have taken many more years, if not have been impossible, if it were not for this incredible resource. It never ceases to amaze me that I can sit in Florida in my pajamas with a cup of coffee and examine medieval documents and near eastern scrolls from centuries and miles away in high resolution imagery and with context and translation at my fingertips. The potential that this has to accelerate human knowledge is astounding, so long as we fight to keep using technology properly so that it is not, as Tolkien said, “Improved means to deteriorated ends.”

My family is an integral part of everything I do and anything I do is not possible without them. My father, Dan Dutton, never gave up and knew I could do it, even when I had my doubts. He always has, from tying my shoe, to riding a bike, and now to a Ph.D. I am looking forward to many more long and deep conversations with my study-buddy! I also have to send gratitude out to Joe, Jess, and now Jacob Dutton, Connee Sasso, Valerie Silkebakken, and cousin Jen. You are all a huge part of my support network and I love you all for it. My dear friends, Jay and Jo-ann Smith, Rich and Viv Coughtry and the boys, almost Dr. Dyanne Martin (the black half of the black-and-white cookie that is our sisterhood), and almost Dr. Cora Bresciano—thank you all for helping me to keep my sanity or most of it anyway. Cheers to you all!

Finally, but most important, I must give all the gratitude, thanks, and love that I can to Erik Silkebakken. He was there every step of the way—through the doubts, the fears, the tears, the successes, the frustrations, and the sleepless nights. There was many
an evening that he would have only take-away for dinner and the pets for company. Erik, I could not have done any of this without you, nor would it be worth it without you. We did this together to achieve even better things in an already amazing life. Your support is what made this happen. It is as much your accomplishment as mine. I look forward to all the amazing things we have to do together in the future. I love you.
ABSTRACT

Author: Amanda M. Dutton

Title: Death Becomes Us: An Examination of Memento Mori Rhetoric in the Art and Literature of the Counter-Reformation

Institution: Florida Atlantic University

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Frédéric Conrod

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year: 2019

The use of death iconography, especially in the mode of memento mori, was a prevalent and effective means of conveying the Roman Catholic Church’s message of eternal reward through faith to provide hope to those who would follow. This contributed to the success of the Church’s internal reformation in the 16th century. This dissertation will explore a heretofore unexamined shift in the specific artistic mode of memento mori and its rhetorical function in ameliorating the image of the Church during the Counter-Reformation. Specifically, it examines in the mode of sculpture, the works of Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the Ossuary of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini; for the mode of painting, the works of Michelangelo Caravaggio and Pietro da Cortona; and for the mode of literature, the works of Giambattista Marino and Cesare Ripa. The artists and works selected for this study provide salient examples of memento mori of the Italian Baroque and its rhetorical function in the preservation of the Catholic faith. These works mark a distinct shift from the medieval modes of death representation
which also indicates a shift in presentation of teleological theology in the eschatological message of the Church that is at the core of the faith. This change in rhetorical approach had a positive effect on the Church’s image and reputation that would comfort followers and encourage new converts. Close reading is performed on each of the sample works and their embedded rhetoric is examined. Since the fear of death and the hope for eternal life are the driving sentiments that these works evoke, their power to influence people is strong. Naturally, this increased the chances of the message of the Church being recognized, remembered, and spread. The use of transformed death iconography, especially in the mode of memento mori, was a prevalent and effective means of conveying the Church’s message of eternal reward through faith to provide hope to those who would follow. This contributed, in part, to the success of the Roman Catholic Church’s internal reformation at the time of the Protestant Schism in the 16th century.
DEDICATION

To my father and my grandfather who both taught me that little girls can do big things.

Also to my Erik, *ti amo sempre*—you are the *Pepe* to my *Cacio*.
DEATH BECOMES US: AN EXAMINATION OF *MEMENTO MORI* RHETORIC IN THE ART AND LITERATURE OF THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... xiv

INTRODUCTION AND THESIS STATEMENT ................................................................. 1

Methodology and Theoretical Framework ................................................................. 5

Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 7

Contemporary Religious Environment ........................................................................ 7

Shifting View of Existence ......................................................................................... 8

Counter-Reformation ................................................................................................. 8

Medieval Precedents .................................................................................................... 9

Materials of Study and Discussion Here .................................................................... 10

CHAPTER 1. MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE PREDECESSORS .............................. 13

Ancient Precedents ...................................................................................................... 13

Bilgames ..................................................................................................................... 13

Lararia .......................................................................................................................... 15

Early Christians .......................................................................................................... 17

Roman Catacombs ..................................................................................................... 18

The Black Plague 1348-1350 .................................................................................. 21

Dominant Motifs ......................................................................................................... 22

The Book of the Revelation of John .......................................................................... 22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reform Within and Without</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach / Printing</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing View of the Universe</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary People in the Ordinary World</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecclesiastical Schism</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Spanish Influence in Rome</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Council of Trent</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutherans, Calvinists, and Papists</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 4. SCULPTURE</strong>—BERNINI AND THE CAPUCHIN CHAPEL</td>
<td>131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernini and the Monument to Pope Alexander VII</td>
<td>131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bone Chapel of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappucini</td>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 5. PAINTING</strong>—CARAVAGGIO AND CORTONA</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravaggio—St. Jerome Writing</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibonacci and Numerology</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cortona—Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 6. LITERATURE</strong>—RIPA AND MARINO</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giambattista Marino—Poetry</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Apré l’uomo infelice, allor che nasce</em></td>
<td>167</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In morte di Michelagnolo de Caravaggio</em></td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cesare Ripa—<em>Iconologia</em></td>
<td>172</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION. THE CONTINUING RHETORICAL POWER OF ART IN

ROMAN CATHOLICISM ........................................................................................................ 176

Grottoes of St. Peter’s ........................................................................................................ 177

Popes in State ..................................................................................................................... 178

Michelangelo’s Pieta ......................................................................................................... 180

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................... 186
LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. Household lararia with statuettes, House of Menander, Pompeii, Italy ............ 16

Fig. 2. Three-dimensional temple-style lararia, House of Menander, Pompeii, Italy ... 17

Fig. 3. A cubiculum, which served as a family chapel, Catacombs of Priscilla, Rome............................................................................................................................................................................ 19

Fig. 4. Cubiculum of Bottai, Roman Catacombs, Rome ........................................... 20

Fig. 5. *The Triumph of Death*, 1446, fresco, Regional Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo ................................................................................................................................................................ 23

Fig. 6. Simone II Baschenis, *Danse Macabre*, 1539, detail 1 of fresco of the outside decoration of San Vigilio church, Pinzolo, province of Trento, Italy......................................................................................................................................................... 24

Fig. 7. Simone II Baschenis, *Danse Macabre*, 1539, detail 2 of fresco of the outside decoration of San Vigilio church, Pinzolo, province of Trento, Italy......................................................................................................................................................... 25

Fig. 8. Simone II Baschenis, *Danse Macabre*, 1539, detail 3 of fresco of the outside decoration of San Vigilio church, Pinzolo, province of Trento, Italy......................................................................................................................................................... 25

Fig. 9. *The Three Living and the Three Dead* is an illumination in the Psalter of Robert de Lisle, 1310-1320, London, British Library, Arundel 83 II .......... 27

Fig. 10. *Tomb of Guillaume de Harcigny*, 1393, Museum of Laon, France......... 30
Fig. 11. Tomb of Cardinal Jean de Lagrange situated in the choir of the Church of Saint-Martial in Avignon (France), 1403

Fig. 12. Tomb of Alexander VII by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1678. St. Peter’s Cathedral, Vatican City, Rome

Fig. 13. Details of Tomb of Alexander VII by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1678. St. Peter’s Cathedral, Vatican City, Rome

Fig. 14. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome

Fig. 15. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome

Fig. 16. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome

Fig. 17. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome

Fig. 18. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Saint Jerome Writing, 1605-1606, Galleria Borghese, Rome

Fig. 19. Figure 18 with Fibonacci spiral superimposed

Fig. 20. Fresco by Pietro da Cortona, Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power, 1633-1639, Palazzo Barberini, Rome

Fig. 21. Detail of fresco by Pietro da Cortona, Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power, 1633-1639, Palazzo Barberini, Rome

Fig. 22. Peter Paul Rubens, Saturn, Jupiter’s father, devours one of his sons, 1636-1638, Mueso Nacional del Prado, Madrid

Fig. 23. Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, Chronos and his child, 1625-1650, National Museum in Warsaw

Fig. 24. Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, Pietà, 1498-1499, St. Peter’s Cathedral, Vatican City, Italy
INTRODUCTION AND THESIS STATEMENT

... rhetoric may be the common denominator students of the different baroque arts have been eagerly seeking. — Mirollo, *The Poet of the Marvelous*

As anyone who has been to Rome can attest, the city is replete with cathedrals and churches from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. A small, plain façade sandwiched between *palazzos* and *ristorantes* belies astonishing treasures within. The grey stone face of any church becomes a portal through time as one steps into the living Baroque when entering its doors. The interior is full of the breath of god, no matter if one believes in the divine or not. It would be no surprise to go back out through the door and find oneself surrounded by carriages, elaborate wigs, and embroidered coats. Time has stopped within these sacred chambers, hence their continued rhetorical power as a holy place. In Rome, there seems to be a church on nearly every corner of the roughly 1,200 square kilometers of the collective *municipi* of the city. Each edifice is a masterpiece of art and religious rhetoric housing individual masterpieces of the same nature. Naturally, it is the afterlife which is the teleological concern, but each work is a powerful message of how one should live their life, to be and to do good as the Church Founders and Fathers urged followers of Christianity to do, and to recognize and acknowledge death without fear of it. One of Rome’s epithets is The City of Life, and as such, it is also a city devoted to death and overcoming the fear of it.

Most, if not every, image within these Roman churches—from sprawling St. Peter’s to the smallest church in nearby Trastevere—have death as a main theme. Every
building is full of relics, paintings, monuments, statues, and sarcophagi. Each one has an homage to leaders in politics, art, or religion that have been continuously created through the centuries. These figures are present in some form to remind us that death comes to all and our greatest hope is for a “good” death and the reward of a heavenly afterlife. Those selected for places of honor are usually, though not always, examples for the viewer to follow in their devotion to the Church, either as one who gave their life for the faith, literally or figuratively, or were fiscally or politically generous in their support. Each of the churches has a relic of some sort at the altar of the church and sometimes in the surrounding chapels as well. The church may identify these relics to be a piece of the Cross of Jesus; wood from the table of the Last Supper; the chains of Saint Peter; a bone or bones of a saint, martyr, or apostle; or, as in San Giovanni in Laterano, the Holy Umbilical Cord. Whether these objects are real or not does not matter in the world of mythology and sacred belief—what matters is that it exists for the viewer to focus upon and to meditate on questions of life and death as a Christian at any point in time. The tangible aspect of these relics is an example of this since it is a form of symbolic proof to believers that the event happened, and the immortality of the person is assured in heaven and on earth because the object does still exist. It reinforces faith and gives one renewed resolve to live the life of a good Christian, no matter the challenges that one may encounter. As the ultimate example, the birth of Jesus points to the theological narrative that the Christian god sacrificed his only son and a third part of himself for the sake of Man. Relics of the Nativity, the Judgment of Christ, the Last Supper, and the Crucifixion of Christ all remind the believer of the sacrifice that was made for their sake. This is the same for the martyrs who were willing to suffer and die for their faith, as any true
Christian follower would and should do according to doctrine. It leads the faithful to question if they would make similar sacrifices in order to test their commitment to their faith, to their community, and to themselves. The underlying message is, of course, that if one is able to overcome their fear of death and make the sacrifice of life, that a better afterlife will be their reward. If one willingly meets death, especially for the sake of the faith, a more glorious existence awaits in reward, and there will be no need to fear death when it comes—which it surely will.

*Memento mori* and other related modes of death iconography were not unfamiliar in the Baroque era. In fact, they had been in existence in Western culture through the Middle Ages, late antiquity, and previously. The rhetorical function of these images in ameliorating the image of the Roman Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation of the Italian Baroque era, however, was something new. As one of the main tenets of Christianity is concerned with teleological theology, this seemingly subtle change in artistic iconography has significant implications for the adaptive shift in the way that the Church conveyed its message to believers. *Memento mori* change from a predominant presentation of autonomous personifications or heaps of skulls and bones, as they are frequently portrayed in the medieval era, to become a gentle reminder in the presence of Catholic icons. In this context, the emblems and symbols of death no longer portray or induce the visceral terror of mortality. This calm acceptance, the encouragement of internal contemplation, and the attitude of having victory over death is a message that the Church cultivated in its followers in order to re-fortify their belief in the religion and the Church that represented it. A shift in the use and presentation of *memento mori* in Catholic painting, sculpture, and literature of the Italian Baroque played a key role in
enabling the Church to adapt and survive the challenges brought by the period of
Reformation. What we will find in examining this is that memento mori in Roman
Catholic art forms of the Italian Baroque serve as a way for Man to grapple with His own
mortality and to overcome the fear of it through the tenets of the Catholic faith which are
reinforced in art of the time. This art, especially in situ, creates a spiritual and corporeal
identity for the faithful that allow them to come to peace with the terror of the certainty of
death. The creation and consumption of this art is a method of catharsis of this anxiety
individually and collectively as a society, especially in the community of the Roman
Catholic Church, which in turn strengthened and allowed the continued survival of the
institution.

Death is not just on the surface of Rome; it resides underneath Rome as well. It is
figuratively and literally at its roots. There is a long history that begins beyond what we
traditionally identify as “Western” culture in which there is a distinct focus upon the
relationship of humanity with the event of death and what messages may be gleaned from
it. The most common, of course, points to the idea that as one is in life, such will be
reflected in an afterlife. The degree of positivity or negativity in this post-mortem
condition varies according to time and culture, of course, and eschatological visions do
become more specific and intense in time through the Roman Catholic tradition, but the
foundational narrative is the same. Mythologies and their related narratives primarily
serve etiological and eschatological functions. In the West, the ancient forms naturally
evolved into ecclesiastical and then secular narratives that serve the same purpose, just in
different ways. This project itself is a continuation of the same. It must be distinguished
that mythology here is not about whether it is literally true or not. The importance is with
its function as a way of understanding our world and ourselves and the wisdom contained within its narratives and symbols which are perpetuated across time and cultures. When the veneer of culture is carefully dusted away from these myths, their core and their essence is similar, if not the same, as they were thousands of years and miles away from us no matter when or where we are.

Joseph Campbell’s “The Masks of God” and “The Hero with a Thousand Faces” are useful metaphors in the comprehension of comparative mythology.¹ This is not to say that every myth is the same or that the history of world mythology can be reduced to a single or a few mythologems as Jung and Kerényi identified (3+), but there are motifs and archetypes which appear again and again as the foundations for human mythology. The consideration of these similarities and why they appear is at the core of an entire field of academic study. We need not venture into its details here, but the reader should be aware that it is not possible to trace a myth or myths in a consistent lineage to one core culture or social group. Mythology is a complex tapestry with many threads and images and though it brings great joy to trace them and connect them, to pick it apart would unravel it. Just as a tapestry by itself provides warmth and comfort and its images convey delight and wisdom, let us look at the thanatological mythology of Christian Rome as serving the same purpose to us and those who have created and preserved it.

**Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This analysis will largely be conducted through close reading and comparative analysis among the three genres of sculpture, painting, and literature. As noted above, the specific artists and works named have been selected given their popularity in their time,

---

¹ Also the titles of two of his most famous works.
which supports their rhetorical value, and their longevity, and shows continued effect on their audience. Close reading will be performed on each of the sample works and their embedded messages will be identified and discussed. The rhetorical effects of these works with their iconology and symbology will also be examined for reconstruction of meaning. Since the fear of death and the hope for eternal life are the driving sentiments that these works evoke, their power to influence people is strong. Identification of these elements will confirm the message of the Catholic Church that is contained in these works and perpetuated by them. Repetition produces conviction. The more people see and hear the same messages, the more these messages have the appearance of veracity, whether it is literally true or not. Repeated tropes and themes, size and placement, and great numbers of works all worked together to convince people of the universality, and supreme power, claimed by the Catholic Church during the challenging time of the Counter-Reformation.

In addition to these traditional techniques of literary and artistic analysis, this project benefits from the incorporation of memetic theory as well. Meme theory was first presented by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, published in 1976. Dawkins identifies a meme as “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” and refers to ideas that are passed on from person to person much in the same way that genes are in biology (Dawkins 192). Ideas can be seen as memes as the audience has the potential to “inherit” this idea at their discretion. The current usage of the word “meme” has degenerated its original meaning, however, as the term is used today to refer to images with brief statements that are circulated on internet and social media platforms. The true use of the idea of a meme, however, does carry deeper signification and is a referent to an
ideological social structure and which contains an unstated, though implied, narrative. A true meme is culturally significant and can be “inherited” from other people who have chosen to adopt it as part of their personal ideology. This metaphorical concept will be utilized as a way of illustrating how visual and literary rhetoric functions in tandem with ideology and culture.

**Literature Review**

**Contemporary Religious Environment**

At the root of the observable change in Catholic art and literature of the Counter-Reformation are the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent that was held from 1545 to 1563. The text of relevance to this project is taken from The Twenty-Fifth Session, edited and translated by J. Waterworth in 1848. The decree of influence to this subject is that On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images, which established more reserved parameters for the composition of religious art. This will establish a view of the contrast of changes within the Catholic Church. From without the Catholic Church, Bridget Heal’s essay, “Better Papist than Calvinist: Art and Identity in Later Lutheran Germany” illustrates the battle over the role, presentation, meaning, and importance of iconography in the Protestant sects of the time. Heal’s discussion clarifies that Catholics implemented reservation in comparison to previous practices but refrained from the amount of change of the Lutherans and certainly did not even consider the iconoclasm of the Calvinists. This establishment of contemporary contrast, added to that of historical precedents, clarifies the actions of the Catholic Church with regard to artistic and literary works and will lead us to understand and appreciate the works selected here for examination.
Shifting View of Existence

One salient catalyst of the drive for reformation within and without the Catholic Church is explored philosophically and theologically in *Religion and the Modern Mind* by W.T. Stace. This book, in part, discusses the impact of scientific discoveries of the Renaissance and how they caused the perception of God to shift from a close and surrounding presence over the Earth, as in the geocentric model of the universe, to that of the heliocentric universe which expanded the realm of the heavens to a much farther distance. It was difficult to reconcile a literal understanding of Scripture and the Biblical view of ontology with one that could now conceive of the great distances between the Earth and the ends of the solar system. Again, the forced shift from literalism to that of a faith that trusted the benevolence and protection of their god through that faith became a salient element of Catholic belief. It is also a key component in the return to the focus on the internal spirituality of the individual, as the works selected here illustrate, and is a crucial component in reaching and securing the Catholic faithful at the time.

Counter-Reformation

The complexities of the Counter-Reformation, indeed the entire zeitgeist of Christian Europe at the time, is concisely analyzed and discussed in *The Counter-Reformation: Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Martin D.W. Jones. Jones makes it clear that perspectives of the wave of reform were actually a series of waves, not of action and reaction of one belief structure against another, but different manifestations of the same movement of reform played out in different ways. Jones presents a new attitude and understanding of the Reformation/Counter-Reformation which does not see the Catholic Church in a period of nearly-terminal decline (2). Nor
does he understand the Reformation as a specific, clearly delineated period of time isolated to the 16th century, but one that can be traced into the 18th century (3). This clarity of cultural and historical context is an important foundational concept for this project. If we view the Catholics as acting only in reaction to Protestant attack, rather than also being pro-active in response to a mutual catalyst, the logic of the argument at hand will be muddled. Jones’s work will be used in tandem with A.G. Dickens’s book *The Counter-Reformation*, which also reinforces the complexities of the Reformation/Counter-Reformation and the simultaneous actions of the Catholic Church to both defend itself and to act against those who attacked it. Dickens also depends on clarity of context with review of cultural, social, and religious conditions which led to the Protestant Revolt and eventual Schism. Additionally, Marvin R. O’Connell’s book *The Counter-Reformation 1559-1610* lends insight into these same influential factors, the struggle of the Church to reform and how it was to do so, and the political ramifications that would change the shape and structure of Western Europe forever.

**Medieval Precedents**

There are quite a number of texts that when discussed together will establish a clear pattern of precedent in death iconography during the Middle Ages. The predominant motifs include that of the *Danse Macabre*, *memento mori*, The Three Dead Kings (and variations thereof), and practices in mortuary art. In the study of tomb art, *Tomb Sculpture: Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* by Erwin Panofsky is a thorough and much-referenced text which travels through time and cultures examining human expression in tomb art and the many ways it is understood. It will be the cornerstone of discussion here which establishes the history of mortuary art that
influenced that of the Baroque. Panofsky’s analysis includes examination of the artistic thanatological practices of the diverse cultures which have influenced Western culture and the meanings embedded in their associated images. Where Panofsky leaves off with Bernini, this project picks up the thread and seeks to advance the examination through the Baroque with particular focus on the expressions and meanings of mortuary art in the Reformed Catholic Church. Another text which will enable us to focus what is learned from Panofsky is a work by Pamela King, *Contexts of the Cadaver Tomb in Fifteenth Century England*. This work is King’s dissertation, completed in 1987, and is referenced in a number of sources on the subject. Though King’s analysis segment branches into a divergent topic from this project, the impressive and thorough literature and disciplinary review which precedes it renders any independent review of the materials available to that time superfluous.

**Materials of Study and Discussion Here**

Once the foundation is laid of the history and precedents of mortuary art that influenced the Italian Baroque era, we can more clearly see the contrasts that appear and the reasons for the changes. As stated above, this dissertation will look at the three artistic and expressive modes of sculpture, painting, and literature which employ the motif of *memento mori* during the Italian Baroque. The specific artists and works included have been selected given their popularity in their time, which supports their rhetorical value, and their longevity, which shows continued effect and affect on their audience. In sculpture, the first example that I have selected for this discussion is the monument to Pope Alexander VII in St. Peter’s Cathedral by Bernini. The other is known as the Bone Chapel of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini in Rome. These two examples
have been selected for their force of rhetorical impact on their viewers. They are both more than works to observe; they are experienced. Even today, centuries after their creation, they still have this effect—and affect—on those that view them, and their memento mori message is still clear, even for those who may not know what memento mori is. For painting, the work of Caravaggio, specifically St. Jerome Writing, has been selected for its use of combined modes of memento mori, chiaroscuro, and the subject matter of a saint who is one of the models of exemplary behavior in Catholic culture and iconography. The second example selected for painting is a fresco by Pietro da Cortona and is titled Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power. In contrast to the sculpted works, this fresco was selected to illustrate that memento mori do not have to be the dominant or overwhelming image of a work to convey the message memento mori. Though the memento mori is subdued in this work, largely overwhelmed by the imagery portraying the glory of the Barberini family, it is still there and perhaps more powerful for its inconspicuous placement.

The writings selected for the literary examination in this project come from the work of Giambattista Marino and Cesare Ripa. Marino’s work in poetic elegies certainly draw on the same iconography and symbolism as the visual arts of the time. They, too, remind the reader of the swift and inevitable approach of death. The implication being, as with the rest, that one must always be prepared and in good standing with God—as according to the Catholic Church. Ripa’s Iconologia was a popular resource at the time for depictions and descriptions of allegorical figures. Death and Time certainly appear and reinforce the same symbols and tropes as the other works examined here. A thorough examination and interpretation of these works in consideration of their rhetorical power
as *memento mori* will illustrate how the shift in death iconography from the medieval period into the Baroque has an ameliorating effect on the perception of death by believers and reinforces it as something not to be feared, but that has been defeated through faith and adherence to the Roman Catholic Church.
CHAPTER 1. MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE PREDECESSORS

Ancient Precedents

Bilgames

To fully understand the death iconography of the Italian Baroque, and especially the intertwined ideological narratives it signifies, a brief look at the history of Western death symbology is in order. Rome’s thanatological tradition is part of a long history that is rooted in pre-Christian Greco-Roman culture and, of course, predates the Greeks themselves. The influence of Mesopotamian cultures on that of the Mycenaenians, and hence the Greeks, is well-documented. One brief example to illustrate the memetic qualities of such eschatological narratives is the Babylonian tale of “Bilgames and the Netherworld,” which is estimated to date back to around 2,750 B.C.E. In this myth, we find an ancient form of the motifs of the “good” death and also that of an existence which reflects how the person lived in life according to the values of the culture in which the myth was composed. In Andrew George’s translation of the story, Bilgames’s friend, Enkidu, ventures to the Netherworld to retrieve objects which were lost to a crack in the earth. He is captured and comes to Bilgames in a dream. Bilgames inquires after specific persons and how they fare in the Netherworld. The structure of this segment is clearly organized for the rhetorical effect of reinforcing social ideologies which include the favoring of large families, the avoidance of illness or disfiguration, the heroism of

2 Cf. Webster, Parkes, Dalley, George, Baring and Cashford, and Warner.
warriors, and the idea of what a “good” death is. For example, Bilgames asks after men who have had one, two, three, etc. sons. As the number increases, so does the quality of life of the deceased: “Did you see the man with two sons?” ‘I saw him.’ ‘How does he fare?’ / ‘Seated on two bricks he eats a bread-loaf.’” Later on, “‘Did you see the man with seven sons?’ ‘I saw him.’ ‘How does he fare?’ / ‘Among the junior deities he sits on a throne and listens to the proceedings.’” The man with no heir eats bread that is “like a kiln-fired brick.” A woman who bore no children is cast aside “like a defective pot” (George 187-188; lines 257-59, 267-70, 273-75).³ Similarly, those who suffered illness or disfigurement as the cause of death are in a similar state in the afterlife (George 188; lines 287-307). Enkidu did not see the man who burned to death: “His ghost was not there, his smoke went up to the heavens” (George 189; line 303). The overall effect of this report from Enkidu prompts Bilgames to perform memorial rites for his parents so that they will not suffer in the Netherworld. As Bilgames is King and leader of his people, the citizens of Uruk follow his example and an ancient precedent for communing with and learning from the dead is established and its necessity is reinforced (George 178, 190; UET VI 58, 60; lines 1-19). In addition to reinforcing the value of honoring ancestors is the confirmation that there is an existence after life. Again, if one lives a life that is proper and good, according to cultural ideals, then one will be rewarded in the next life. This further alleviates the worry over one’s mortality and the unknown condition beyond and the anxiety that can accompany it. The narrative of Bilgames and the Netherworld is one of a number in ancient literature in which there is communion with the dead and which establishes lessons for leading a good life so that one may hope for eternal reward in the

³ Sigla are retained as in the original text. Square brackets indicate restorations, parentheses indicate interpolations, and ellipses indicate lacunae (Pritchard xvi; George liv-lv).
life after. Another important aspect of the Bilgames tale is that of ancestor worship or at least reverence given to those who have gone before, particularly those who have done great things and set examples for the rest of us.

**Lararia**

There is a tradition in Greco-Roman culture of having a *lararium* in the home, which is a shrine to household spirits that protect the home and ensure the success of the family. As with similar practices today of having pictures or objects of deceased loved ones, it alleviates the trauma of parting with the deceased. There was the additional belief in Roman culture that respected, protective, and successful family matri-patriarchs would continue to protect and guide the family even after death. For those of the older generations, especially those that spent their lives building wealth and power, it reassured them that all that they had worked for would still be under their influence and that loved ones would be protected—or still under their control. For the younger generations, this belief confirms the impression of existence after the event of death and will cause them to continue family business as under the deceased founder, or the belief can give one confidence that the protection offered by that person or persons continues after they are gone. Part of the *lararia* tradition includes honoring family ancestors in that small statues depicting deceased family members can be found inhabiting the household shrines. Though not in Rome specifically, a wonderful example of Roman *lararia* can be seen in the House of Menander in Pompeii. One *lararium* in the House of Menander is in an alcove of the home, and it still has the statuettes depicting the visages of ancestors (fig. 1).
Another lararia in this home is of the three-dimensional temple style and sits in a corner (fig. 2). Despite the tragedy of Pompeii with the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E., the everyday lives of its citizens have been preserved so that we may learn of them in more detail. The example of lararia is evidence of a continuation of ancestor veneration, honor, and daily ritual which relates to death and the afterlife, which was a common practice in Rome itself at the time as well.
Fig. 2. Three-dimensional temple-style lararia, House of Menander, Pompeii, Italy. Photo by Amanda Dutton, June 2017.

**Early Christians**

We can follow the veneration of the dead in time and scale from the household lararia to the next stage in which the homes of early Christians became the centers of worship for the young religion. There are those who like to paint the history of the early Roman Church with stories of Christians hiding in caves to piously practice their faith while avoiding being thrown to the lions in the Colosseum. As with most historical-religious myths, this is not the case, exactly. The danger that the pagan Romans saw with Christianity wasn’t that it was practiced, but that it did not honor the traditional, national gods (Freeman 151). Christians were free to practice their religion as long as they also...
worshipped the gods of Rome. This ensured the protection of the city by the gods. If the
gods were unhappy or slighted in any way, disaster would befall the city and its
inhabitants. Naturally, as Christianity is severely monotheistic, there were those who did
not compromise, which led to confrontation and, in some cases, execution (151). The
catacombs, where the Christian dead were laid to rest, were outside of the city walls. Use
of the catacombs varied through the centuries, but after the collapse of the Empire in the
fifth century, it was too dangerous and of no benefit to venture so far beyond the city.
The Catacombs fell out of use and largely out of memory. When they were rediscovered
in the 1600s, early Christian art on the walls in cubicula as well as areas that had served
as household churches gave support to the myth of the early Christians being persecuted
and forced to meet in caves. This is not to say that they did not suffer persecution, did not
meet in secret, or did not use the catacombs to hide from authorities; it is simply that the
level and nature of persecution changed over the years and that the full historical and
archaeological record has been misunderstood in the past.

**Roman Catacombs**

Among the treasures hidden in the expansive labyrinth of the Roman catacombs,
one is of particular note for this discussion. It is in the area of the catacombs known as
the Region of Velata. This area of the catacombs is dated from the late third to early
fourth centuries. Today, this specific part of the complex is identified as the Catacombs
of Priscilla. On one end of the large, central vaulted chamber is a cubiculum that was
used by a family residing in a home above as their personal chapel to practice
Christianity (fig. 3).
A tomb on the opposite end is known as the *cubiculum* of Bottai: “a square plan room with a barrel vault decorated with the Good Shepherd in the center and surrounded by scenes of Jonah’s cycle, Noah in the ark[,] and [veiled figures in prayer]” (Giuliani 20). The *cubiculum* is off-limits to visitors in order to protect it, but a view from the entrance into the well-lighted areas gives one a good sense of the beauty within (fig. 4).
On the walls of the tomb there are scenes depicting the deceased’s life and occupation as a wine merchant. This is not uncommon in Roman tombs as “[a person’s] job could lead to the eternal bliss, if it was lived in a Christian way” (22). The art on the walls of this tomb is a form of performance which creates and confirms the reality of the pious nature of the life of the deceased. It should be noted that it is in service to the community and not in self-oriented individual worship or a life spent in monastic devotion to the religion as would come later in the hierarchy of Christian piousness.\footnote{The sacred narratives from the scriptural sources (not yet officially canonized at that point, it must be noted), at the highest point in the tomb of course, are made real by their portrayal and the life of the deceased is woven into the truth and performance of the sacred}

\footnote{Cf. Freeman 133+}
narratives by proximity. The life of the deceased becomes part of the holy narrative and therefore the soul of the deceased becomes part of the holy ethereal. The deceased is thus assured of an afterlife of blessing and happiness. This is not unlike the practice of tomb painting in many other cultures, not the least being that of the creation of scenes of the afterlife in the tombs of the Pharaohs in Egypt—a practice which dates back at least to the third millennium B.C.E. The art captures the reality of what is in the ethereal (similar to the idea of Plato’s Forms). Its existence in art confirms its reality in the realm of the divine. The trauma and anxiety suffered by the loss of the loved one is assuaged in artistic grandeur as the life lost is captured and kept in perpetuity in the art of their tomb. Just as their body is not lost in the keeping of it in a sacred tomb, so their spirit is kept—captured in the artistic narrative that adorns the walls of the space between death and life, heaven and earth that is the tomb within the catacombs.

**The Black Plague 1348-1350**

All of these practices established a number of ritual and representational precedents that Roman culture would carry forward through the next millennium. The next major change in cultural iconography, particularly in representing death, comes from a highly traumatic collective event that changed and affects death imagery to this day. The prevalent image of Death that precedes the Baroque era comes from the terror of the plague, especially the Black Plague that manifested intermittently with its greatest impact in Western Europe being in 1348-1349. Though there are always variations, the dominant representation of Death at the time was usually skeletal or as a severely emaciated corpse. This was the form of death that people were most familiar with in the late Middle Ages. This was not only from the Plague as the impression was enforced by war and famine as
well. People wasted away until there was little difference between person and corpse but animation, and often little at that. Images of Death itself at that time are reminiscent of people in that liminal stage. The most horrifying part of these images is that Death was injudicious in whom it affected and took away. The image of a skeletal reaper, still utilized and recognized today, permeated the art and writing of Western Europe. Death at that time was particularly mysterious and terrifying as some people contracted the disease and did not die, and others did not contract the disease at all. People looked to ideas of good and evil, right and wrong, to try to make some—any—sense of the carnage around them, but only found that the good died with the evil and the righteous with the corrupt. Faith in God and allowing His will was the narrative that these people could cling to—that and the belief that an afterlife of bliss or torture awaited. It was not the death that would separate the wheat from the chaff, but what happened to them after. It was not for the living to see nor to judge. Death comes to all. It is the afterlife that we do have control over.

**Dominant Motifs**

**The Book of the Revelation of John**

The examples of personifications of Death examined in research for this project from Western Europe and Italy in the Middle Ages thus far are consistent in presenting a skeletal or corpse-like figure in a majority of their representations. At times, there are presentations of the accoutrements of a cloak or shroud, an hourglass, and-or a scythe. This form of representation remains consistent through the Early Modern period and into modern times. In the practice of reviving ancient mythology during the Renaissance forward, we also see portrayals which include Death riding a pale or skeletal horse which
is a direct import from the Book of Revelation in the Christian Bible (The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Rev. 6:8). One example is The Triumph of Death, dated to 1446, artist unknown, which is a Gothic fresco in the Regional Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo, southern Italy (fig. 5).


This work of the late Middle Ages shows an image directly reflective of the verse in the Revelation of St. John in that the established trope—the skeleton—is astride a pale horse. The image clearly shows Death riding down a gathering of nobles, including a clergyman, firing his arrows upon those whom his horse does not trample. Those whom
Death has passed look after in shock and fear, while those whom he has not reached seem oblivious to his swift approach. It is hard to miss the social, political, and religious implications in this message. It is a *memento mori* to the rich and powerful, perhaps created in response to growing tension brought on by the abuse and corruption of the Church which would finally spawn the Protestant Revolution.

**The Danse Macabre**

An artistic theme known as the *Danse Macabre* (The Dance of Death) was also prevalent through Western Europe at the time. Of the many examples of this style of expression, one from Italy is the 16th century fresco by Simone Il Baschenis in the Church of San Vigilio in Pinzolo, Trentino-Alto Adige (figs. 6-8).

![Fig. 6. Simone Il Baschenis, Danse Macabre, 1539, detail 1 of fresco of the outside decoration of San Vigilio church, Pinzolo, province of Trento, Italy. Photo by Laurom. Wikimedia, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simone_Baschenis_Danza_Macabra_00A_Pinzolo.jpg](image-url)
Again, the figures interacting with Death are leaders of the Church, royalty, and nobility. Each of these mortals has a corpse-like skeleton beside them and an arrow embedded in their bodies. The archer, toward the left side of the mural, is another Death
figure. He stands between the Pope (recognized by the three-tiered tiara) and Christ on the Cross, who also has an arrow in his heart. On the other side of Christ, three more skeletal figures play wind instruments, creating the music for the dance. The death figure interacting with the Pope grasps him by the right hand, facing away, and leading the Pope toward Christ. Perhaps this suggests that the message in this is that the only way to unite with Christ is through death, no matter who you are, even the Pope. It need not be explained that the way to accomplish this is, of course, true faith in the Church and humble obedience—including and perhaps especially if you are part of its hierarchy.

The Three Dead Kings

In keeping with this trend in the visual arts, literature of the Middle Ages also tended to portray memento mori in the same way. A dominant example is that of “The Three Dead Kings,” a cautionary tale that was widespread in literary culture by the thirteenth century, “known in the Mediterranean and especially in Italy, where it appears to have been the only significant theme of the macabre” (Binski 135). Today, we are aware of some sixty or so versions through Western Europe (for example, Lisle, fig. 9). As the memetic strength of this tale grew, the more popular versions came from France and England, and later “attained popularity as a pictorial conceit” (Binski 135). This shift in dominant presentation from literary to pictorial emphasizes the importance of this story and its meaning. As we will see in our analysis of later painting and sculpture in following chapters, the visual arts are crucial in conveying and preserving messages given that literacy is not required for them to be understood.
The literary version of “The Three Dead Kings” selected here is housed in the Bodleian library in Oxford, England. Written in the Shropshire-Staffordshire dialect of Middle English, it has been dated to the early fifteenth century and is currently attributed to John the Blind Audelay (Audelay). Another common title for this tale is *Dit des trois morts et des trois vifs*, or Legend of The Three Dead and The Three Quick. In Audelay’s version of the tale, three kings are out hunting when they come across three horrible, living corpses in the forest. The horrified mortals immediately summon God’s protection: “Bot oche king apon Crist cryde, / With crossing and karping o Crede”⁵ (Audelay, lines 5 “but each King upon Christ cried, / with crossing and carping of [the] Creed” (translation mine).
51-52). After the mortals’ individual reactions, the first dead king says, “‘Nay, are we no fyndus,’ quod furst, ‘that ye before you fynden; / We wer your faders of fold that fayre youe have fonden’”\(^6\) (92-93). The dead kings then call attention to their individual states, with worms in their belly (98), their bare and blackened bones (106), and their corpse-like bodies with lean loins and legs like leeks wrapped in linen (118-119). Each then admonishes the living kings, warning them of the consequences of their vain, frivolous, and un-Christian behavior. The first king points to a direct violation of the Commandment in the Decalogue to honor one’s mother and father (103-104; see also \textit{New Oxford, Exod. 20:12}). In this case, it is in memorial Mass, which was a prevalent practice in the Middle Ages and will be discussed at length ahead. The second dead king warns of the lies of the flesh and worldly ways, which they can leave behind if “ye leven upon Crist and on his lore lere”\(^7\) (Audelay 111). The last dead king warns them, “Makis your merour be me!”\(^8\) (120), and tells them how he ruled arrogantly, abusing his subjects for pride. Now, as he says, no one will go near him, “Bot yif he be cappid or kyme”\(^9\) (127). He then tells the living kings that they have no more time to warn them of their impending fate (the word used is \textit{dome}, which carries connotations of doom and divine Judgment), but that they need to turn away from “tryvyls,” or “trifles” as the Bodleian translation notes, as soon as they can (125-130). The story ends by telling of the good and holy deeds of the three living kings after having this encounter. They establish a ministry and are kinder to their subjects, ever holding Doomsday in mind (135-139). The common

\(^6\) “Nay, we are not fiends,” quoth the first, “that you find before you; / We were your fathers of old that you have fairly found” (translation mine). Note that there is uncertainty in the translation of \textit{fold}. It could also mean “of earth.” See Audelay, note 94 vs. textual note 93.

\(^7\) “you believe upon Christ and learn his lore [teaching]” (translation Bodleian).

\(^8\) “Make me your mirror!” (translation mine).

\(^9\) “except if he is insane or a fool” (translation mine with Bodleian notes).
moral associated with this story, no matter its version, is “As we are, so shall you become.” In Audelay’s version, it is spoken by the second dead king, and reads, “Thagh ye be never so fayre, this schul ye fare!” (110). As the Bodleian footnote reads, “The second Dead typically issues this kind of warning to the Living about their inevitable future conditions: ‘as I am now, so shall you be’” (note 110). The translation of the same message from a French version of this story in Binski’s book reads, “The truth is that death / Had made us such as we are / And you will rot as we are now” (Binski 136). It is certain that the unknown artist of the Chapel drew on this tradition when he designed the Capuchin Bone Chapel (discussed at length below), was drawn directly from this tradition and carries it forward.

This is but a brief example of the memento mori traditions in place during the Middle Ages that influenced artists of the Italian Baroque. It is well established that this is a common motif with high memetic viability. Though the specific methods of embodiment and delivery in art and literature changed from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance and then the Baroque, the message is clearly the same and supports the dominant narrative of the Catholic Church that is meant to attract and retain followers. In the Baroque, the Catholic Church was in a time of change and needed to rely on this method of ideological strengthening and dispersal in order to preserve itself for the centuries to come.

Transi Tombs

History

Interestingly enough, in order to find sculpted examples of death in high and late
medieval mortuary art, we must venture beyond Catholic Italy to Catholic Europe. The leading example of this art form is that of the cadaver tomb, or transi tomb. Kathleen Cohen identifies that this style of tomb started to appear in Northern Europe in the fourteenth century: “On the tombs the traditional idealized portrayal of the deceased was replaced by a gruesome depiction of the physical ravages of death” (Cohen 1). The oldest extant example of this curious and graphic practice is the tomb of Guillaume de Harcigny, deceased in 1393 (P. King 25) (fig. 10).

![Fig. 10. Tomb of Guillaume de Harcigny, 1393, Museum of Laon, France. Wikimedia, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gisant_Guillaume_de_Harcigny_Mus%C3%A9e_de_Laon_280208_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gisant_Guillaume_de_Harcigny_Mus%C3%A9e_de_Laon_280208_1.jpg)

The antecedent, mosaic tomb slabs, fell out of fashion and were gradually no longer seen, including in Italy, after 1300: “The *sculptured tomb slab*, … made its first appearance in the eleventh century and achieved a dominant status during the High Romanesque and Gothic periods” (Panofsky 51). At the end of the fourteenth century, however, there was a dramatic shift in tomb sculpture even in comparison to pre-existing
effigies: “Instead of a recumbent figure in a peaceful and deep sleep, or as a resurrected body looking toward the gates of Heaven, transi or cadaver tombs bore the representation of a deceased as an unsightly naked corpse, already affected by the grip of decay” (Đorđević 2) (for example, fig. 11).

Fig. 11. Tomb of Cardinal Jean de Lagrange situated in the choir of the Church of Saint-Martial in Avignon (France), 1403. Wikimedia, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_de_la_Grange_1403_Mus%C3%A9e_du_Petit_Palais_Avignon.jpg

These macabre works are simultaneously aesthetically and morbidly beautiful. Even to those who view them as a scholar of art and history, they have not lost their rhetorical shock value over the centuries. Their impression upon a contemporary audience was potentially even more potent. Though images of Death are not rare in art of any age, these particular objects take the motif to an extreme state since they are not a general representation or personification of Death, but retain their connection to the deceased individual, making the reality of death even more poignant. These objects certainly have psycho-emotional power and are impressively effective at message conveyance, but scholars differ as to what that message might be.
Interpretations

There have been many interpretations, or attempted interpretations, of transi tombs by scholars. Cohen states that “the view held by many modern critics is that the transi tombs were intended as memento mori for the living” (3), but some scholars claim that it is not always clearly delineated as to whether the figure represents the deceased person, a personification of Death itself, or a trope from the popular Dance of Death. Đorđević argues that “the waning figure on the transi tomb cannot be perceived as a mere personification of death, because none of the mentioned prophylactic elements would have had any meaning unless they were placed beside the image of remains of the deceased individual” (Đorđević 8), stating earlier that “The meaning of an image does not depend only upon the intentions of its patron or creator, but also on the cultural background of its viewer” (2). In addition to the complexities of identification of the individual to which the tomb is associated with the cadaver image, there is the added factor that inscriptions on the tombs could also reflect popular literature of the time, such as “The Three Living and The Three Dead” (discussed above) (Cohen 3) or the Danse Macabre motif. Cohen summarizes the complexities in the study of transi tombs, saying:

Transi tombs were, in fact, the result of a number of complex interrelated factors. These included traditional moralistic writings, the influence of the Black Death, contemporary memento mori imagery, contemporary funerary customs, the climate of anxiety generated by the conflict between the traditional ascetic demands of the church and the emergence of nationalism and the accumulation of great wealth, the attempt to humiliate the body in order to gain salvation, the desperate desire for prayers for the
soul, the interest in alchemical symbolism, the contemporary representation of dead bodies, such as that of Adam, in connection with resurrection symbolism, and the influence of Neo-Platonic symbolic thought. (4)

Cohen further makes it clear that she rejects the sole purpose of these tombs as being simple *memento mori* based on these factors (Cohen 4). This claim may be a little confusing as she does name *memento mori* imagery as an influence. However, Sophie Oosterwijk suggests a clarification that:

… a crucial difference between the cadaver monument and what has been perhaps somewhat loosely discussed here as danse macabre imagery. The former looks ahead at the state of the body well after death, when the image of its putrefying state should exhort the beholder to consider both the transitoriness of all earthly things, the immortality of the soul and ultimately the resurrection. The danse macabre, on the other hand, focusses on the moment of death. Admittedly, the horrifying appearance of Death is in itself a forewarning of bodily corruption and the dying often look back longingly at what they must leave behind, but it is the prospect of dying and the very moment of dying—the sudden stroke of Death—that the danse addresses, far more than the hereafter which is usually implied at best. (77)

Regardless of the possibilities of classification of these works and their function, the impetus for creating such figures in relation to tombs is commonly attributed, though not by all scholars, to the outbreak of the Black Death in the middle of the 14th century.
Philippa Tristram sees “fear of death as the root of the obsession” and “ascribes the intensification in the appearance of such motifs to the Black Death, using the cadaver tomb as contextual material in her study of the development of the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead and of the Dance of Death. Such literary material is, in turn, generally presented as a context for the tombs” (qtd. in P. King 33). *Sum quod eris* is often found on cadaver monuments and in relation to “The Three Living and The Three Dead,” but the motto is much older (Oosterwijk 69). Additionally, “The ‘psychological shock’ which Helen Roe attributed to the Black Death, introduces a further type of explanation for the cadaver tomb phenomenon. Some commentators … [chose] to see the evolution of the corpse iconography as a manifestation of a particular development in the corporate psyche of a culture” (P. King 31). This is naturally understandable given the many sources of anxiety in medieval life, which is also exacerbated by the horrors of the Plague. Brian Kemp states that the Black Death of the 14th c. “may have turned men’s minds to meditate on the need to prepare for sudden death, till it developed into a morbid obsession. Intense preoccupation with the latter end of a man’s human existence would lead on quite naturally to a custom of setting up a person’s funeral monument during his lifetime to serve as a constant reminder of the final outcome of all human strivings” (qtd. in P. King 28). Opposed to the typical function of funerary monuments, it was clear that the figures associated with the tombs were not to be admired or emulated: “As opposed to vanitas portraits, where portrayed people proclaimed their virtuous nature almost as exemplary models, cadaver effigies stressed the humility of the dead, never striving to turn them into models for imitation” (Đorđević 10). The focus is not on the person who is being memorialized—the viewed—rather, it is meant to reflect attention back to the
viewer, reinforcing the message that people derived from the plague overall—\textit{memento mori}.

As noted by Cohen, one of the contributing factors of anxiety carried forward from medieval to Renaissance life came from the expectations of the Church, which were difficult to reconcile with funerary honors befitting the aristocracy. It is suggested that those who commissioned the first transi tombs were trying to find a balance between honorable commemoration and religious humility (Cohen 7; P. King 17, 45). The gruesome motif was, apparently, a compromise since it did not glorify the person and also perpetuated Christian messages of mortality, humility, salvation, and hope. There is a continued theme in Christian art from the early period, which is not surprisingly, “Deliverance from death (\textit{vivas in domino}), deliverance from sin and the misery thereof (\textit{in pace})” (Morey, qtd. in Panofsky 39). To create the impression of humility, transi tombs clearly showed their subject in the basest form of human existence, reinforcing among many messages that of \textit{memento mori}. P. King identifies that “Sarah Lawson suggested that the cadaver effigy was offered as an ‘anti-portrait’, a ‘future portrait’ of the deceased. The idealized \textit{gisant} was, in these terms, a present or even past portrait, whereas the cadaver was an imaginative composition in portraying the deceased as he or she was bound to become.” P. King further quotes Lawson, saying, “It is a little as though the sculptor wanted to reach forward to any future observer of the tomb and execute a portrait that would be relevant to any time” (19, 20). This timelessness, or eternal representation of a timeless message is of direct relevance to the same artistic and literary behavior in the Baroque. It is rooted in the trauma of the Black Plague and Middle Ages,
but the simplicity of the form of the message, paired with the power of the message itself, served the same function for different reasons during the Reformation.

_Florence_

Returning to Italy, we find a somewhat different circumstance with regard to transi tombs and cadaver effigies on tombs. P. King states that:

> Despite the fact that there had been many plagues and epidemics before the Black Death and that _memento mori_ material had been in circulation since the middle of the twelfth century at least, ... The fact that the most vivid accounts of the Black Death derive from Italy, a country in which the cadaver tomb is conspicuous by its absence, does not affect the frequency or the confidence with which the two phenomena are connected. In the absence of any clear investigation of the transmission of the iconography of the corpse, the approach usually adopted has been to treat the phenomenon on a pan-European scale [due to the Black Death] (29).

T.S.R. Boase notes that “there was generally much less interest in the corpse motif south than north of the Alps with the exception of a fresco in Santa Maria Novella in Florence” (qtd. in P. King 37). Personifications of death are not as rare in Italy as effigies of the decaying dead (37) and Panofsky makes distinctions between the two (66). Đorđević discusses the rarity of the cadaver tomb in Italy, saying:

> Looking from a geographical point of view, this type of funeral monument is a phenomenon belonging to Europe north of the Alps. Yet, one can still find in Florence the sole existing example that contradicts the imaginary
barrier which divides Apennine Peninsula from the northern European regions. The remarkable and curious tomb slab of Antonio Amati, doctor of law, strongly stands out among contemporary Florentine sepulchral art, for it bears the only known representation of the dead with the cadaverous face in Italy. (8-9)

It should be noted that this example was excluded from Cohen’s study because by her criteria “true” transi tombs portray a naked corpse. This one includes his garments of office: “Thus, the tomb slab of Antonio Amati is even more surprising, not simply because of its geographical placement, but because the late doctor of law was represented as a fully clothed man with death’s head instead of a face” (9). Though clearly not part of local practice and tradition, Amati’s tomb suggests a cross-fertilization of iconographic messaging and utilization of cultural narratives which were common across the Alps: “Truly, cadaver tombs were not part of the experience of Trecento and Quattrocento. However, the macabre notion was well known to Italy through numerous depictions of the tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead, the theme of Triumph of Death, and the images of Adam’s skull” (9). Though Amati’s tomb is a rare example in Italy, it achieves a level of rhetoric that is similar to, and perhaps goes beyond, its northern medieval cousins. For those familiar with Amati’s identity as a living person, the deceased remains more humanized in that his specific identity remains with him even in the state of being a decayed corpse, which is often dissociated with individuality as distinguishing features are no longer present. Đorđević explains, stating:

… in order to become ‘an immediate image of the self’, representation on Antonio Amati’s slab had to replicate the supposed look of the deceased
from the funeral, i.e. the moment when bonds between body and soul (self) were restored. If he had been represented as a naked corpse, he might not have been perceived as the image of an individual in need that was crying for help, which transi effigies successfully managed to do in the North. Even the upper part of Amati’s slab stressed the existence of a connection between body and soul further through the emblem made out of putto (soul) that is holding coat of arms (identity) and skull (dead body), keeping them all assembled as a true psychosomatic unity. … On the other hand, a Florentine viewer was able to comprehend the same meaning that was offered to the Northerners by their own cadaver monuments thanks to the academic gown. It helped in creating the notion in the beholder’s mind that the body and soul were still connected, just as in funeral ritual, thus testifying that the humble state of the former in earth resembled the penitent state of the later in Purgatory. (13, 15)

Thus, we can see the connections between northern Europe and Italy as well as those between the medieval era and the following Renaissance. Naturally, this carries forward into the Baroque as well, as we will see ahead. Whether or not transi tombs and other mortuary art were deliberately designed as memento mori is a debate to be continued by scholars of the history and practice. Let it suffice to say here that these images and their associated narratives certainly have the effect of producing the message of memento mori in the mind of the audience. It is inevitable that such longevity in a practice, though the specifics are variable and changes are implemented over time, should prompt our curiosity as to the reason for such memetic viability, especially over so large a
geographical space and through multiple, separately recognizable eras. This is worth another side-step in order to lay a foundation of possible interpretation that will inform our examination of mortuary art in the Baroque and its function in reinforcing the Catholic faith.

**Trauma Studies**

In her discussion on the context of cadaver tombs in the 15th century, P. King identifies “a morbid indulgence in disgust [in the 15th c.] which answered some need now hard to understand” (14). She also states that, “Deficiencies there are, however, in all existing studies of the development of the medieval cadaver tomb, above all because no-one has yet satisfactorily explained its dissemination” (55). It is not clear, however, if she is referring to the means of dissemination or purpose of dissemination. For the latter, I wish to propose an analytic perspective for consideration. Cohen observes that “The general familiarity with the physical facts of death brought about by the plague was of some importance in the genesis of transi tombs. Of much greater significance, however, was the pervading sense of anxiety of the period, to which the plague was but one contributing factor” (Cohen 4-5; P. King 44). This anxiety, rooted in the fear of death, was paired with the paranoia generated by the rigid asceticism demanded by the church for salvation, which few could live up to (P. King 51). This catch-22 situation, along with the other factors previously listed by Cohen, created the need identified by King. I would like to suggest that the modern discipline of trauma studies lends some insight into this anxiety and the cathartic role of the art form of memento mori and reciprocal orisons. To date, Trauma Studies focuses mainly on the horrors of war in the 20th and 21st centuries,
particularly the Holocaust and 9/11. Its methodology, however, can be applied to human thought, behavior, and expression at any time.

Though the devastating disease was not unusual through history, the Black Plague of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century was particularly devastating as it made its way west from Asia. A highly informative article published by C. J. Duncan and S. Scott in 2005 offers concise explanation and analysis of specific pathogens that were or may have been at the root of the Black Plague. They challenge the traditional view that the Plague of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century was caused by the bacterium \textit{Yersenia Pestis} (commonly called Bubonic Plague): “We believe that the Black Death was caused by a disease that was completely different from bubonic plague and, to avoid confusion, have named it haemorrhagic plague. Case mortality was 100\% and the disease was directly infectious” (317). Though the specifics of the pathology of the diseases currently attributed to the Plague are fascinating, the exact cause is less important than the result here. That result being the horrible symptoms suffered by those who contracted the disease, the swift onset of death once the symptoms manifested (or more terrifyingly if there were no symptoms [Platt 3]), and the high mortality rate of those who contracted the illness. In some cases, the mortality rate of affected areas in Europe is estimated to be around 30\%, with some estimates in certain specific locations being as high as 50\% or more (Binksi 127; Gottfried xiii; Horrox 3).

In human psychology, coping mechanisms for times of great distress typically fall under the “fight or flight” response. This can be taken literally, but there is a psycho-behavioral “fight or flight” response in times of trauma. In the case of the transi tombs, I suggest that it is a psychological fight response. If we are made to face and confront our worst fears, it allows us to learn how to accept and cope with the situation. In this case,
seeing a decomposing body reminds people of their frangible existence, but at the same time that such an existence and inevitable end (by disease or natural death) is not what should be fixated upon. It is the redemption after, the Christian triumph over death, that one must always remember no matter how horrid and terrifying the state of death might be. There was a cathartic need for horror and disgust, but then there was desensitization with its continued use over time (P. King 14). The double transi tombs, which preserve the dead in effigy with a cadaver below, renew the contrast and therefore the shock that delivers the message, *memento mori*. The shock is confronted in a situation in which the observer has time to process and come to terms with the inevitable, thereby alleviating the trauma experienced when it happens in reality. Death comes to all, as the double transi tombs illustrate, no matter a person’s wealth, power, or station in life, but there is hope for all as well. “The ‘psychological shock’ which Helen Roe attributed to the Black Death, introduces a further type of explanation for the cadaver tomb phenomenon. Some commentators … [choose] to see the evolution of the corpse iconography as a manifestation of a particular development in the corporate psyche of a culture” (31).

Memetic theory explains the dissemination of ideas and behaviors as analogous to genetic perpetuation (Dawkins 192+). Ideas that resonate strongly with a population will be passed on, developed, and have varying success at “survival.” Europe’s population was collectively traumatized over many years by a number of situations and events which challenge the human psyche and its security. One way of coping with this collective trauma was through expression and confrontation in funerary death iconography, as shown by its proliferation and continuation through the culture. Though this specific
anxiety eased in the rise of the Renaissance, the iconography remained, yet to serve a similar cultural need.

**The Living Dead**

An important social factor and function of funerary objects and art in the Middle Ages should be discussed to further clarify the mindset of the audience of this art form as it carries forward into the later centuries. In addition to *memento mori* functions, reinforced with reflection of popular literary motifs of “The Three Dead Kings” and the *Danse Macabre*, it is important to be aware that the dead had place with the living in the medieval mind. Comparable to the *lararia* of Roman culture, in Europe, “Medieval society was made out of bonds between its members, and the dead were actively participating in it, demanding their share” (Đorđević 15). A prevalent example of this that was carried forward into the Baroque is the Bone Chapel of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini, discussed at length below. It is one of many examples of the continued tradition that “In medieval society the dead were an active part of the community, and the best evidence of this were the ossuaries placed within the church walls in such manner that skulls were directed toward the altar in order to be able to follow the celebration of the Mass together with the living” (6). Although this behavior is strongly rooted in global human religion and mythology, the belief behind it was refined in the early centuries of Christianity. An exhaustive study of these ancient theological writings, though rewarding, would be superfluous here. Suffice it to say that in Christianity, “According to high scholastic teachings, especially those of Thomas Aquinas, the body became ‘the external manifestation of the spiritual fulfilment’, and, thus, the lifelike sepulchral images expressed inner spiritual achievements, i.e. holiness of
the dead” (11). This idea certainly helped to reinforce the concept of hope in the afterlife, which was then reflected in funerary art.

Effigy tombs, but transi tombs in particular, were vivid visual embodiments of this theology: “The corpse on the tomb offered a statement about one’s fate in the afterlife. Bonds between body and soul became so intertwined in the later Middle Ages that the body could stand as a symbol for the soul. These bonds were present in both theological discussions and popular beliefs” (Đorđević 3, emphasis mine). This idea is rooted in the Middle Ages and exemplified by enormous contributions to the Church by the wealthy upon their demise so that funerary masses could be held in their honor. In a more direct benefit to the deceased, the living could request and pay for Masses to be performed in honor of the dead to give them some extra assistance to the positive on St. Peter’s ledger. By the late Middle Ages, “patrons could ask in their wills for a thousand funeral Masses, and these could, in lavish cases, be said or sung concurrently in a church with many altars” (Jupp and Gittings 54). The idea being that the more prayers they received, the less time they would spend in Purgatory (Binski 54, 115; Platt 102). Though the extravagance of these arrangements waned over time, the belief in direct interaction and visible signs of the lingering connection between the dead and life persisted. One curious belief was that “the sufferings that the soul experienced in Purgatory were envisioned as somatic torments which could sometimes even be seen on the corpse of the dead, as attested in a number of stories” (Đorđević 3). The visual proof of this was the decomposition of the body. Hence, the gruesome images of the cadaver tombs served to reinforce the veracity not just of the natural process of decomposition, but to reinforce belief in Purgatory: “The beholder was invited by the horrifying image to aid the dead
individual because his prayer had the power to accelerate this process. Verminous
effigies particularly carried the capturing strength to engage the viewer into the salvific
performance of helping the dead” (4; also see Oosterwijk 71). The belief was that when
the skeleton was clean, the purgation was finished, and the soul continued to heaven.
Therefore, swift decomposition indicated a purer soul or powerful intervention (Đorđević
3).10,11 Naturally, there were many platforms which delivered, organized, and reinforced
the concept of the Purgatorial waystation of the afterlife, the most famous still today
being Dante Alighieri’s Commedia. The imaginative sensory detail of Dante’s journey is
what makes an impression even today in our world of CGI and immersive media. Its
rhetorical power lies in poetic metaphor and the extensive description of the sufferings of
those in the Inferno which could be compared to St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual
Exercises. Dante’s work certainly contributed to the creation and continuation of
Christian afterlife narratives and ideas, and in turn, perpetuated the concern a believer
would have with regard to their own fate. Luckily, according to doctrine, God structured
the afterlife to accommodate those who weren’t perfect. In Purgatory, one would purge
their sins and, after a certain amount of penance, could proceed on to heaven. Part of the
vision of Purgatory is as a liminal place between heaven and life. As such, it was believed
that the living could intercede on behalf of the dead to lessen their torment.

10 Also see this passage in Đorđević for beliefs regarding the miracle of accelerated decomposition, thought
to be achieved when a person was buried in soil from the Holy Land. The Bone Chapel discussed below
has a plot of such earth for the same purpose. This clearly shows that this belief of “putrefy to purify”
continued into the Baroque.
11 This must not be confused with the Miracle of Incorruptibility in which the bodies of particularly holy
people who qualify to be Saints have delayed or little decomposition or that do not decompose at all.
As we have seen, the motif of the *memento mori* was well established in European art and literature well before the Renaissance and Baroque. The purpose behind it seems to have remained consistent over the centuries as well:

The image of Death as the aggressor has a long history in western art: the allegorical representation of the actual moment of death evidently served as a salutary reminder to the beholder. Even if examples of such iconography on tomb monuments cannot always be safely traced back to the *danse macabre* proper, it will be evident that the *danse* was at least one of the themes that patrons and designers turned to for inspiration as it contained both dialogue and visual models for the encounter between Death and the living. The combined dramatic impact from text and image thus offered the perfect means to draw the viewer’s attention to such ‘macabre’ memorials. (Oosterwijk 82-83)

Naturally, this motif has existed from antiquity (P. King 34, 36), and though it remains consistent, Johan Huizinga notes that “it is only towards the end of the fourteenth century that pictoral art … seizes upon the motif. To render the horrible details of decomposition, a realistic force of expression was required, to which painting and sculpture only attained towards 1400” (139). As a continuation of the medieval perception of the dead remaining active in the lives of the living, these tombs “encouraged unique performative experiences in interaction with the beholders. … a trait common and essential to all transi tombs—their power to express identity of the dead buried beneath by turning the corpse into a ‘portrait’ of the deceased instead of an emblem of death” (Đorđević 2). The rhetorical value of these images was realized not only to ask the audience of their pious
participation in the afterlife of the deceased and to remind them of their own mortality but were a visual narrative of Christian theology of the afterlife.

This was not a one-way exchange, however. In frescoes, in stories, and in tomb art, the dead maintained a constant and persistent narrative that they communicated to the living. “The cadaverous gisants were meant to provoke live interaction, a discussion even, between the viewer and the image. This encounter is usually summarized by a famous Latin motto *memento mori* (remember that you must die)” (Đorđević 15). This was not a horrible or haunting manifestation of the dead, though. The active messages of the dead were welcome: “Early depictions of ‘The Three Living and the Three Dead,’ e.g. in the well-known miniature of c.1310 in the psalter of Robert de Lisle, show the latter in a polite debate with the former. … The same is true of earlier depictions of the danse macabre, which show the corpse figures either debating, playing music, or attempting to dance with their victims” (Oosterwijk 78-79). Though the images of the *Danse Macabre* and the tale of “The Three Living” give one a certain chill, “as Jean-Claude Schmitt stated, ‘in Christian society a dead person could provide no greater service than to invite a living person to prepare for death’. The warning was the gift” (Đorđević 17). This concept would certainly be present in the mind of the contemporary viewer of the transi tomb. As explained previously, the gift to the living was the reminder of their death and to remain humble; the gift that could be returned was in the form of orisons for the dead to accelerate their progress to heaven. Đorđević summarizes the exchange, saying:

The living corpse on a cadaver monument was supposed to be perceived, through the performative interaction with the beholder, as a ghost from
Purgatory or a good revenant who was passing through the purgatorial pains by bodily decomposition. The bond between them was established in the moment of the viewer’s identification with the deceased, when he learned about his own mortality and future fate. However, though he was seeing himself in the image of the cadaver, he was also aware that the representation before him belonged to the particular departed individual. The same was true for the tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead.

(16)

The warning wasn’t just in relation to the fate of the deceased in relation to heaven or hell alone. The hope of Purgatory was often on the mind of the medieval Catholic. The visual and literary narratives of the time not only reminded them of the inevitability of death, but that the gates of heaven would not necessarily be closed to them despite their inability to maintain a perfect ideal of a Christian life.

**Renaissance to Reformation**

The above is but a brief example of the *memento mori* traditions in place during the Middle Ages that influenced artists through the Renaissance and into the Italian Baroque. It is well established that this is a common motif with high memetic viability. Though the specific methods of embodiment and delivery in art and literature changed from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance and then the Baroque, the message is clearly the same and supports the dominant narrative of the Catholic Church that is meant to attract and retain followers. In the Baroque, the Catholic Church was in a time of change and needed to rely on this method of ideological strengthening and dispersal in order to preserve itself for the centuries to come. There was a shift in iconography in the 16th
century, as could be expected with the shift of all aspects of existence in the Renaissance, and the anxieties of the Middle Ages waned:

Of particular importance for the transi tombs was the gradual spread northward from Italy of the new learning, the new artistic styles, and the concept of the glorification of individuals … The new ideas not only modified attitudes toward life during the sixteenth century, but as Panofsky has shown, they also radically affected attitudes toward death and the commemoration of the dead. (Cohen 7, 8)

The specific example of the tombs of French monarchs are used by Cohen to state that the anxiety of the earlier period eased “to express the greater security of the period” in the sixteenth century: “The form of the transi remained while its context changed, and the changed context in turn influenced the meaning of the transi” (8). Though the form of the source of the anxiety changed, anxiety still remained. Death anxiety is ever-present, but now instead of its main source being plague, anxiety came from the revolutionary changes in the world and, more importantly, what was known about it. These changes did not cause a threat to life as plague and the other dominant concerns of the Middle Ages did; rather, it was a threat to their understanding of their eternal life. Naturally, this was even more terrifying than any threat to corporeal existence. Again, this is not to say that it is the only source of anxiety and was likely not a conscious awareness for the most part.

The source of social and psychological order and security, the Church, came under pressure as the tension between doctrine and discovery increased and they became irreconcilable should the Church maintain its medieval structure. “Rules set in the later Middle Ages concerning execution of transi tombs endured in some parts of Europe well
into the early modern period. Usually, this was the case with places that dealt with currents of Reformation and Counter-Reformation in their own manner, negotiating new tendencies with old ways” (Đorđević 18). Art and iconography began to reflect this shift and related conceptions and attitudes in the earliest years when culture was undergoing the shift from medieval to Renaissance.

Tomb images became more toned down in comparison to the more aggressive and violent depictions of death from the 14th century and became the calmer, recumbent cadaver figures (Oosterwijk 62). Đorđević points out the change in rhetorical structure, function, and meaning as memento mori art shifted focus from the collective population to that of the individual. It was less a message in the context of We Shall Die, usually en masse, to Remember that You Shall Die:

During the late decades of the fifteenth century true memento mori objects started to develop, anticipating notions and attitudes toward death characteristic for theologians of the Reformation. They were often designed in such manner that their message would not be apparent at the first glance. Through the game of revealing concealed layers, as in the case of interactive engravings, or discovering hidden images seen only from particular angles, as was usual with jewellery decorations, a person was introduced to the hard truth of earthly transience, but in an amusing way. These objects distracted attention from the dead in need and concentrated only upon the fate of the beholder. Motto memento mori broke the bonds between the living and the dead, subtly implying that every person was responsible for his or her own death. There were no
‘you’ and ‘I’ and the salvific help between the worlds—a notion distant and strange to the medieval transi tombs. Cadaver effigies were meant to make the living become aware of their own mortality, but at the same time they were emphasizing that the represented deceased were the particular departed individuals in need of help. Therefore, remembering one’s death was always followed by remembering the dead. (18)

And so, though direct sources of death anxiety changed, and the focus shifted overall, the rhetorical power of death iconography remained just as potent and relevant as it had in previous centuries. Despite the changes that overtook Catholic Europe in the Renaissance, death iconography was not left in the past or seen as a relic. It remained a fully active and integrated mode of artistic expression. Its presentation, however, and its interpretation did evolve with the times and remained just as influential as ever.
Upon consideration, it could be possible to hold the view that society is still being rocked by the waves of the Protestant Revolution and ensuing Counter-Reformation and Enlightenment following. Indeed, the technology age and subsequent information age produce knowledge and new information at such a rate that it is difficult to keep up with the most recent discoveries and perspective-shattering observations. Yet this is not anything that is new in the experience of humanity and certainly not in the Catholic Church. If we step back far enough, we can entertain the possibility that religious history itself is one long spiritual narrative that changes and evolves not just over centuries or decades, but over years or in days to maximize memetic efficacy and dispersal.

An understanding of the dependence of religion on human psychology and the dependence of human psychology on religion are of crucial importance to understanding the rhetorical structures, mechanisms, and significance of the topic at hand. Integrated with this is the metaphorical system of memetic theory, mentioned above. If we apply this method of understanding to religious memes (individual units, so to speak) or to the entire memeplex (complex and developed systems composted of inter-related memes) of religion itself it will help us to see the symbiosis and competitive tension that ebbs and flows through the interactive elements of individuals themselves up to the social mega-structure of what we identify as a religion and its practitioners. Again, if we look at a religion as a memeplex that “behaves” in certain ways, we can see through myriad
examples of cultural, regional, local, familial, and individual adaptations to see the fluidity and adaptability of the individual memes of a belief system and the overall memeplex itself. Naturally, however, changes to the memeplex are much more difficult to achieve than small, local adjustments to singular or a small group of memes.

Examples of this are as numerous and differentiated as the individuals that participate in the memetically reflective behavior of the overall memeplex. A small example, however, would be the many ways in which the Christian Cross has been and is portrayed. From the simple to the ornate, those who have been exposed to the semiotic language of this image understand its meaning in its basic form. In a personal display of adherence to the meme/plex, a person may wear a true Crucifix with the corpus portrayed, or they may wear a simple Cross with no additional ornamentation. Regardless, this identifies them, overall, as Christian. The variant denomination is not of relevance at that point. That occurs when individual or local preferences are disparate enough to create a semiotic rift; that is, when variant adjustments or breaks are made in the symbols and the persons who wear them as representation of their religious Self. For instance, a plain Cross as described above will most likely be worn by a Christian who adheres to the Protestant variant of the Christian memeplex. One who wears a full Crucifix is likely of the Roman Catholic variant. Naturally, this example is highly simplified as the complexities multiply as we trace the scions that spring from these two particular branches, let alone the Jewish, Greek, Egyptian, Ethiopian, and other variants rooted deeply in the early history of Christianity.

What this illustrates, however, is that the overall memeplex (Christianity) is perpetuated and survives by allowing variations in specific memes (e.g. the wearing of a
Cross) to allow adaptation in individual host colonies and individuals themselves. Since personal identity is so crucial to human psychology, it allows for the individuals to personalize something that is simultaneously indicative of their individuality and also their participation with, and therefore belonging to, a group. This is where the balance must be struck, however, since too much variation can create something new and different that becomes separate from the original memeplex, just as in genetics. When this happens, in order to preserve the structural integrity of the memeplex, as it defines itself, a corrective action must be made. This is where humans will struggle and fight, sometimes literally to the death, for the protection of what they have determined to be the true memetic structure of the memeplex that they have tied their personal identity to. This also includes their social identity as “belonging” to a group being balanced with individual identity. Of course, the level at which a person feels or enacts their own individuality is as variant as their integration with a social group. Suffice it to say that a majority of humans strive for and maintain a personally acceptable balance between these two aspects of human existence.

The problem is that establishing the definition of the memeplex, even among individuals who represent and enact it most similarly to one another, still has variation. Through history, humans have tried to correct the variations by establishing rigid rules for acceptable behavior and thought that the majority must follow in order to be considered as part of the group. It is not always as rigid as, say, the example of monastic life, but whenever delineation is established in order to create a clear definition of acceptable and unacceptable, the variations naturally resist since, by their own definition, it is and should be part of the acceptable definition(s) within the memeplex. If we
consider all the ways and reasons for ex-communication just in Roman Catholicism, we can see this behavior in action. Add the additional, incredibly complex memeplexes of politics, culture, language, socio-economic hierarchy, and other religions, we will then have the players and script for the drama of history that has been playing out for millennia.

Over-correction of variation turns into rigid dogma and asceticism which stifles the individual aspect of the balance. Eventually, this can devolve into fascism, fundamentalism, and extremism. Often, this can only be corrected in turn by an equally forceful resistance. Into this already complex structure, we must add the additional factor of corruption. Rather than envisioning a dichotomy between conservative and liberal practice, we must widen it to a graph in which the Y-plane is added which addresses degrees of freedom and oppression. If religion and spirituality are allowed to be personal, it returns to a more natural condition. It becomes a primarily psychological state rather than that of being a predominantly socio-cultural entity and recovers its viability, so long as it does not go too far the other way, of course. It returns to being life wisdom, not rules. Spirituality becomes organic and innate in individuals, rather than coming from a power figure or structure. Thoughts and acts of devotion and generosity come from the internal person, not from fear of punishment, social ostracization, or eternal condemnation. That approach from the Middle Ages caused many of the problems that built up and instigated the corrective in the form of the Protestant Revolution. In the continual ebb and flow of Christianity between these cyclical points, it can be noted that it continually returns to the central focus being on the individual, and when the Church lets that happen, it seems to work more effectively. Examples would be the early Jesus
Movement versus Pauline Christianity, the Orthodox structure versus Gnosticism, the reign of Popes John Paul II and Francis versus that of Pope Benedict in modern times, and of course, the Protestant Reformation versus the previous structure of the Church. Rather than dominating and subjecting followers, the effective Church focuses on the flock, offering wisdom, personal safety, and protection. The effective Church takes the approach that its function is that it can lead people to find that wisdom and safety, but they have to get there on their own (O’Connell 108, 111; Ignatius, trans. Puhl 1-12; O’Malley 14, 18, 19-20). When this happens, the Church has creative, beautiful, ingenious ways to assist the one who seeks the wisdom and knowledge. One of which is that they work with the fear of death, rather than abuse it. When this approach is taken, the memetic system has a greater chance of stabilizing and surviving.

Allegory, Metaphors, and Symbols

To understand how the memetic process functions in the arts, we have to go past the symbology and iconography of one belief system and explore the common mechanisms of more deeply embedded messages and Truths (in the Greek sense) that religion and spirituality point to. We have to go beyond art and literature, and particularly the concept of the “high” arts or the idea that one form more developed or advanced than another. Though technique and presentation can be observed from this perspective, at the core no matter how fancy an artwork looks or reads, the messages beneath are simple and recursive. Mythologically speaking, personifications, metaphors, and allegories have consistently existed from the oldest extant narratives that we know of, which of course, are religio-spiritual. It is normal human expressive behavior and cognitive practice to create analogies and metaphors. This technique enhances understanding and
communication of abstract concepts. The history of this practice is a complicated web as history, people, and all of the other related factors get involved in the weaving as well, but all are crucial and important and make a mythology a mythology rather than just a story.

Attaching meaning to objects and images is a very ancient and deeply human practice. It is embedded in our basic psychology, it seems, and can be observed in even the most ancient evidence of human existence and behavior.\(^{12}\) It allows us to convey more complex ideas in ways that are relatable or more comprehensible when they are given a visible form (either literally in art or through description in words). Naturally, this mechanism has become quite complex and varied over the millennia. The ways in which images are created, how they are structured, and how they are understood and interpreted can change across time and through cultures. Often an existing figure is adopted by a culture other than its native culture and is appropriated in new ways, either consciously through a new utilization or through misunderstanding or re-appropriation of the signs and symbols attached to it. In order to attempt to address these nuances to gain more insight as to the meaning they are intended to convey, we must have a clearer understanding of figuration in art and literature and how it is identified. Since these images are representational of an abstract concept, it is necessary for there to be a discussion here that determines the foundational terms and definitions with regard to

\(^{12}\) I refrain from detailed elaboration here, but I will point readers to the cursory and limited example of ancient mortuary practices in both modern man (see Higham) and Neanderthals (see Pettitt), as well as recent dating of cave-wall art, some of which is estimated to be 40,000 or more years of age (see Conard). Although the specifics of what meaning was attached to these artistic and ceremonial practices and how elaborate it was is open to debate, the brief examples are evidence of advanced cognition in early humans which deals in the abstract of objects and behaviors that are conceived to bear more than their inherent function or value.
these forms in art and literature. Many times, the terms that are to be utilized here are conflated with one another or, worse, misunderstood entirely. Therefore, it is worth a few moments of discussion in order to clearly delineate between the terms and establish what is meant by each so that confusion will be avoided ahead.

Definitions

**Allegory: History**

The first term to be defined clearly is “allegory”; the reason for this being that allegory is an ancient device which embodies complex and abstract concepts in visual and narrative art. Much of what we see and continue to practice in the arts is a continuation of this tradition of some form or another. Even if a work is not an allegory or meant to be one, allegory can often be discerned in its structure. Defining “allegory,” however, is not as easy as one might think. Clarifying this term is not as simple as providing a dictionary definition and moving on. Such an attempt quickly blossoms into the addition of many more nuanced terms, such as “symbol,” “metaphor,” and “myth,” as well as an overview of the entirety of Western literary criticism, and one quickly finds oneself at the edge of what seems to be a vast and deep sea of an entire discipline known as allegorical studies. A number of scholarly texts on the subject of allegory and personification attempt to define these concepts, but the attempt quickly branches into discussion of additional sub-categories, exceptions, and conflations that can be found through literature and art. This segment will illustrate the diversity of definitions in these texts and also organize their complications in a way that will allow the reader to understand them and to utilize them as the rest of the project unfolds. It seems clear that scholars in the discipline have difficulty in creating a concise definition of their terms (if
they even make the attempt) as the history of allegory is as much a part of it as what it is.

For instance, in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, Copeland and Struck state, “The definition of allegory is found in understanding its history. The subject of allegory is vast, comprising many different practices of writing, interpreting, and representing. It is bound up with developments not only in literature and art, but also in mythology, religion, rhetoric, and intellectual culture over the centuries” (1). Additionally, John MacQueen states, “the definition of ‘allegory’ fluctuates radically in both historical and conceptual terms” (xii). Not only are the history and many forms of allegory relevant to understanding it, but we must also know in what sense we mean: “Post-classical criticism has applied the term ‘allegory’ to denote a range of practices and habits of thought. … In its most common usage it refers to two related procedures, a manner of composing and a method of interpreting” (Copeland and Struck 2). Additionally, meaning and methods of interpretation shift through time, as will be seen. From the beginning, however, there seems to be a bit of the chicken-and-egg conundrum when determining if the allegory as a form came first or the interpretation and understanding of a narrative or image as an allegory came first.

It seems to be standard practice to begin discussion of the systematic formation of allegorical tradition with the Greeks, and Plato in particular (cf. MacQueen 7). Allegory as a narrative form, however, is much older and its beginnings currently untraceable. Though mythology is in the background of discussions of the nascent state of allegory, MacQueen begins his book with discussing the mythological roots of allegory. He explains myth as “a narrative, that is to say, or a series of narratives which serves to explain those universal facts which most intimately affect the believer” and states that “it
is reasonable to assume that from prehistoric times onwards myth and interpretation went hand in hand” (1). Naturally, the topic of mythology flows directly into a discussion of Greek culture from its earliest times and leads us up to Plato. As will be seen ahead, art is highly dependent upon, and is rooted in, mythology. Indeed, it could be argued that without mythology we would not have art as we know it and if we did not have art, we would have long ago forgotten the ancient mythologies at the root of our history and culture. Although Copeland and Struck do not elaborate on mythology or pre-Classical narrative, they do point out that “Allegorical interpretation is in fact the older of these two procedures [allegorical writing and allegorical interpretation], or at least the first to leave observable traces of itself as a systematic practice” (2). If we understand the term “allegorical writing” to refer to not just writing, but composition in general, the tie to mythology becomes direct. Here it must suffice to say that the connection is made in that myth narratives involve humanized forms of natural phenomena (e.g. when Zeus is portrayed as a storm-god or Demeter as the goddess of the corn), and that the narratives that include them are an enactment of their role in the natural cycles of existence. The function of such figures and their related narratives is complex and varied, but most often they serve an etiological purpose or sometimes as moral exempla, as we will see with the use of memento mori.

As noted above, the Greeks began to identify what was meant by allegory and how the term was understood. The Greek roots of the word “allegory” reflect its inherent representative qualities. Copeland and Struck present the etymology in Greek: “allos (other) and agoreuein (to speak in public), produce the sense of ‘other-speaking’” (2). From the outset, allegory is a form of communication in which one thing is said, but the
meaning of what is said is not obvious or on the surface. Whitman elaborates on the concept and states that “the very notion of allēgoria—a disparity between the apparent sense of speaking (Greek agoreuein) and some ‘other’ sense (Greek allos)—has long implied a certain dissonance, even for those who have endorsed it” (7). Likewise, Stephen Barney offers that “The word ‘allegory,’ ‘other-speech,’ alieniloquium, suggests that allegories present one thing by a customary route, and another thing more deviously” (16) and later clarifies that “Allegory, in its referential aspect, pretends to name, not things, but whatever lies under things—substances, relations, intentions, faculties, categories, powers, ideas” (22). The Greek audience would be aware of hidden meaning in these narratives and figures and so understand the layers of the narrative and how to identify them. We will see the same in the works of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The Greek reader of allegory “is attuned to the poem as a rich and powerful source of insight into the gods, the world, and the place of humans in it” (Copeland and Struck 17). Allegory, then, is a way to convey the complex and abstract concepts that explain the workings of our world and the metaphysical world beyond as it was conceived and understood at different times.

True to form, Roman culture developed with this Greek practice embedded within it. With the evolution of Latin, however, variations in language development created a shift in understanding:

In Roman times, the Greek term allēgoria came to substitute for the term hyponoia, that is, ‘other-speaking’ for ‘under-meaning.’ […] But the conceptual shift from ‘meaning’ (hyponoia) to ‘speaking’ (allēgoria) also paved the way for the reception of the Greek term in Latin, where its
emphasis on the text as ‘speaking’ rather than merely ‘meaning’ allowed
the Latin term *allegoria* to gravitate into the orbit of the rhetoricians. The
Latin rhetoricians treated it as a trope akin either to metaphor or to irony.
(Copeland and Struck 4)

This “overlapping of two cultural meanings at the site of one word” (Copeland and
Struck 5) was further complicated by the rise of Christianity and the development of
Scriptural exegesis. This naturally carried forward in the art and literature of the religion
into the Baroque and forward. *Allegoria* as used by Latin church fathers refers to the
spiritual (rather than the literal, for instance) sense of Scripture. Cassian “gave final
stamp” to the four-fold method of Biblical interpretation in which there is a literal,
allegorical, moral, and eschatological meaning to be derived from each passage of
Scripture (Copeland and Struck 4-5; see also “Medieval” 184; Whitman 10; Lubac vol. I,
16-17; MacQueen 49). Through the Church fathers, Henri de Lubac illustrates that
allegorical reading, of Scripture in this case, is a deeper spiritual understanding, one
meant to explore the mysteries under the surface (Lubac vol. II, 83; Copeland and Struck
4-5; MacQueen 18, 23). He explains this method of interpretation and understanding,
saying, “The text acts only as a spokesman to lead to the historical realities; the latter are
themselves the figures, they themselves contain the mysteries that the exercise of allegory
is supposed to extract from them …” (Lubac vol. II, 86). This practice is continued in
numerous ways throughout the Middle Ages by a great number of Christian theologians
(Lubac vol. II, 87; see also Bleiberg 183; Piehler 7; MacQueen 47, 59). This does
continue the Greek tradition and original method of allegory in that deeper mysteries of
the universe and human existence are embodied through allegorical figures and their
actions. The change in understanding, however, established the conception that the persons and events described in narratives were also historically factual rather than just being representatives of concepts and abstractions. Naturally, there is historical information contained in Scriptures, just as there are spiritual mysteries to be discovered. The true spirit of allegory, as it was in the Greek sense, was misunderstood and misapplied in some cases during this time of fervent biblical exegesis.

The confusion compounded in the following centuries and allegory became even more confused with other forms of literary representation. Rosemond Tuve observes a change in our understanding of allegory since the Renaissance. She states that “The risk we run is that we may be understood to confuse allegory with ‘a discussion of ideas carried on by having some concrete equivalent stand for each one.’ This is a confusion met everywhere in commentary. It describes some allegory in English, but later than Spenser’s” (28-29). Looking past the Baroque era to understand our concept of allegory in contrast to that of a contemporary audience of the Baroque, Gay Clifford posits that the post-Romantic poets misunderstood allegory, stating that they “judge it in competition with symbolism and as a result misunderstand many of its features, and, more seriously, deny the effects which it can achieve” (4). Barney also draws a line of difference at pre- and post-Enlightenment allegorical interpretation and composition (15). These confusions were compounded as literary studies and critical theory tried to establish their own boundaries and definitions. This trend has continued through the twentieth century as Tuve notes:

The number of words spent defining and delimiting allegory in this decade [1960s] could never have been foretold two generations ago, and yet
certain well-inculcated nineteenth-century assumptions about interpretation cloud the language of theory, and rebellions against them cloud the theory itself. It is well to let the medieval works do their own defining [of allegory]. Of the first trouble, the most persistent case is the Coleridgean definition of allegory (and symbol), born of nineteenth-century German critical theory, not mediaeval usage. (3)

And so we move even further away from earlier concepts and understandings of what allegory is and how to recognize it as we begin the twenty-first century. Being aware of and recognizing the understanding of allegory that we have inherited will be an important perspective if we are to understand the art of the Counter-Reformation as it was received and intended to be received in its own time.

**Allegory: Definition**

Although we have a generally agreed-upon, basic definition of allegory, definitions of its nuances, purpose, and function are varied. For instance, “Jane K. Brown defines allegory as ‘a mode of representation which renders the supernatural visible’” (Copeland and Struck 5). Michael Murrin refers to allegory as “veiled communication” (ix). Paul Piehler states that “allegory is not so much a genre itself as something that happens to other forms of literature. … in allegory we find a deliberate attempt, dependent on both the intuitive and the rational operations of the mind, to reinvest the external world with this lost internal dimension, in order to gain access to and participate in the acquisition of important spiritual truths” (10). Similarly, many authors rely on describing allegory, what it looks like, or how it behaves as a means of defining it rather than providing a clear definition. For instance, Barney states that familiarity and inter-
textual reference are the first indication of allegory and that “A second often remarked
signal of the presence of allegory has to do with disruption of the reader’s expectations.
One definition of the term ‘form’ calls it that quality in a work which draws from the
reader a certain expectation about what he will experience in reading” (17). He refuses a
hard-lined definition, especially considering the nature of the beast: “Descriptions tend to
mechanize a subject, but in my experience good allegories refuse to submit to a scheme”
(15). Rather than differentiate allegory from other forms, Colin Turbayne groups them
together, stating that “The fable, the parable, the allegory, and the myth are, like the
model, extended or sustained metaphors” (19). Clifford references Angus Fletcher, who
sees it as a “‘symbolic mode’ apparent in varying degrees not only in literary works of all
periods but in all art forms and media” (5). She further adds that “It is possible to claim
that allegory may take many forms, without weakening the definition to the point of
saying that it can take any form” and reflects Barney’s refusal to make a clear definition:
“Certain features of allegory could be seen as generic; the extended and extensive use of
personification and personified abstractions and, especially, the incorporation of
commentary and interpretation into the action. But essentially, allegory is, like irony, a
mode, and capable of subsuming many different genres and forms” (5). There are more,
but we will end with an overview given by Northrop Frye, who notes the effects of
modern criticism, saying that:

… it has deposited a large terminal moraine of confusion in modern
criticism, largely because the term allegory is very loosely employed for a
great variety of literary phenomena. We have actual allegory when a poet
explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and
precepts, and so tries to indicate how a commentary on him should proceed. A writer is being allegorical whenever it is clear that he is saying “by this I also (allos) mean that.” If this seems to be done continuously, we may say, cautiously, that what he is writing “is” an allegory. ("Archetypes" 90)

With Frye, we then return to a sense of the original word “allegory,” but given the long and complex history with its variations of understanding and utilization, we end with the author having to signal his construction of allegory rather than it being inherently understood by the audience. Yet we must bear in mind that this is in the context of modern times. We have to place ourselves at the time that Tuve discusses when we consider the art and literature of the Baroque and the modes employed to convey meaning.

This lengthy overview of allegory serves to give the reader a comprehension of the terms utilized in the study to come. There are times when we will be dealing with allegory and others when we will not and still more in which there is room for debate in which the example is neither fish nor fowl, or perhaps some of both. It also serves to show why a citation of a lexical authority is helpful, but still lacking when one has an understanding of the depths of meaning that the word has. That being said, we can now offer the definitions that The Oxford English Dictionary provides for allegory. The extensive etymology given refers to its history from Greek and Latin through to Anglo-Norman and Middle French in which descriptions include “narrative which has a hidden or ulterior meaning,” “figurative or metaphorical language,” and “speaking otherwise than one seems to speak.” The OED has three definitions for allegory: “The use of
symbols in a story, picture, etc., to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; symbolic representation. Also: the interpretation of this”; “A story, picture, etc. which uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; a symbolic representation; an extended or continued metaphor”; and “A character or figure that symbolically represents someone or something else; an emblem, a symbol” (“allegory,” n. 1-3). Here we can see that “metaphor,” “symbol,” and “representation” are used relatively synonymously with the term, “allegory.” In many ways this is true and, as we saw, they are used freely to define or describe allegory. What this does not capture, however, is the behavior of the figure which is a definitive aspect that makes something an allegory; otherwise, it need not be named as something other than “symbol” or “metaphor.” There would be no need for a separate term.

**Metaphor and Symbol: Definitions**

We should clarify what is meant by these other terms before we begin our analysis so that we may distinguish between them and better identify our object of study. For this, no long history is necessary, and the *OED* will suffice for making our distinctions. According to the etymology given, “metaphor” is a word formed from borrowings from French and Latin which came into English in the sixteenth century, with its Latin and French predecessors appearing in the late Middle Ages. Its two definitions are: “A figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable; an instance of this, a metaphorical expression” and “Something regarded as representative or suggestive of something else, esp. as a material emblem of an abstract quality, condition, notion, etc.; a symbol, a token” (“metaphor,” n. 1 and 2). The *OED*
uses “symbol” as part of its definition for metaphor. It defines a symbol as “Something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation); esp. a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality, or condition; a representative or typical figure, sign, or token; †occas. a type (of some quality)”; “An object representing something sacred”; and “A written character or mark used to represent something; a letter, figure, or sign conventionally standing for some object, process, etc.” (“symbol,” n. 2 a and b, 3). Symbol in this sense of its definition appears in the time of the Renaissance. The other definitions are with reference to Christian symbolism but are not directly applicable here as they reference creed (def. 1.a.) or the eucharist (def. 2.b.).

Discussion

As with metaphor, death imagery can be characterized as a symbol or symbols given that the image or figure represents or stands for the event or condition noted above. Note in particular that it is not always an exact resemblance, but “by some accidental or conventional relation.” This kind of relation is particularly pertinent to an analysis of memento mori and other death symbology. The metaphors, symbols, or perhaps metaphorical symbols which we will look at ahead will be immediately recognizable by a Western audience. A skeleton, for instance, does not necessarily represent the event or condition of death inherently on its own. It could appear in the context of an anatomy lesson. When we see it placed in specific contexts, for instance astride a white horse in the midst of a battlefield, we understand this figure to be representative, a symbol, of the event and condition of death specifically because we have inherited a tradition of
understanding this image as such in these contexts: “The [allegorical] images are based firmly on physical and psychological experience, often known individually, but chiefly known and made important by centuries of vicarious experience passed on to us through earlier literature; hence such images work at a deep associative level, and we are conscious of not being the first to whom they have reiterated their burden of more meant than is seen” (Tuve 30-31). Those not conditioned by Western convention may not understand a specific figure of death as such or will find it to be exotic or strange if it is not similar to his own culturally recognized figure or symbol of death. As Whitman notes, “Acts of interpretive allegory are transactions between fluctuating critical communities and formative texts” (6). There is a symbiotic and constant evolution of works that utilize allegorical figures and images and the audience which receives and also forms the meanings associated with them: “Any mode that survives over a long period is likely to take on very different shapes under pressure of the needs and expectations of different generations. With allegory the transformations are more than usually extensive because its formal features are usually subordinated to didactic purpose or to the preconceived intellectual structures the author wants to convey” (Clifford 6). For example, the personified figure of Death in Greek art, Thanatos, could easily be overlooked or misunderstood by many Western observers today. It is no longer a part of our cultural agreement that this, a bearded man with wings, represents the event and condition of death. Symbols and metaphors, therefore, are culturally conditioned and agreed upon for their meaning to be conveyed.

To summarize the definitions given above, allegory involves the use of symbols along with action. The symbol that allegory utilizes, however, “conveys a hidden or
ulterior meaning” that in some cases is moral. There is also the added aspect of allegory in that the term can be used to describe either a narrative or an individual image. In the case of an image, there are additional distinctions. An image can be identified as personification allegory, which is when “characters personify abstractions … but these characters have no existence in the real world and do not ‘symbolize’ anything more than their name implies,” or as symbol allegory in which “the characters are real people who exist, or once existed in the real world, who ‘stand for’ or symbolize something beyond themselves” (“Medieval” 184). An example of the former would be the death symbol of the Grim Reaper. An example of the latter would be Dracula, assigned as an immortal figure of death, based on vampire stories associated with, as legend has it, the historical figure of Vlad the Impaler. Most times, however, the word allegory is used to suffice to identify both narrative and image regardless of any sub-divisions. That being said, whether it is an entire narrative or an image that has a narrative associated with it or both, allegory uses narrative and image to convey the hidden meaning. It is not just a metaphor, but a continued one. Again, it is not enough to present the picture, but some action or indication of it is involved. The last OED definition specifies that an allegory is “a character or figure that represents something else.” In must be kept in mind, however, that distinction between these terms is not as simple as the chain of identification just offered. That is presented simply as a means by which we can orient ourselves before we navigate the deeper and more complex distinctions and identifications involved (such as when inanimate things speak, it is called prosopopoeia, but what if the inanimate thing is a standing skeleton with an arrow, as in the danse macabre?). The presence of personification is usually an indication that allegory may be present since it is utilized to
create the conveyance of meaning by action through the realistic image of a human form.

Barney states, “We recognize allegory, then, not in opposition to realism, the kind of fiction which seems to represent, as a historian represents, real life; rather, a certain amount of realism is necessary to allegory. From this point of view, we can see why personification so distinctively signals the presence of allegory” (Barney 20). It is not just the personified figure, however, that makes what we are observing an allegory. There is an element of craft and composition which adds to its qualities: “Allegory proper pleases by the appropriateness, ingenuity and wit displayed in the translation of the basic material into allegorical form. Allegory in this sense is to be distinguished from symbolism, whose ancient and profound images are less readily interpretable in rational terms” (Piehler 10-11). In this way, audience reaction, and especially important, interpretation, are what characterize an allegory. Tuve explains, “If personification of abstractions is not a defining or causative element in allegory, there is no doubt that it is a most natural form of it” (Tuve 26). This meaning, of course, is the moralizing factor described above which is a key distinguishing characteristic of allegory (11-12). We now come to consider how and why allegory, with all of its aspects, is used and the purpose that it fulfills.

As with metaphor, symbol, and the like, allegory is directing the reader through the process of association and interpretation to realize a concept that is more complicated than what is on the surface: “instead of personality giving the abstractions life, the figure often works the other way around; the excitement comes when we ‘conceive’ the idea, the person suddenly than becoming charged with meaning is of very great depth and extension” (Tuve 26). This sudden comprehension in figuring out the puzzle of the allegory is what makes it and its intended meaning memorable, rather than just writing or
preaching the message: “While the fable is the appropriate subject or replacement of moral discourses—‘we yawn at sermons’—the parable and the allegory may appropriately adjoin or replace theo-moral discourses” (Turbayne 20). Rhetorically speaking, allegory is a very effective pedagogical and mnemonic device, and this has led to the development of further distinctions of allegory. As Tuve explains, “moral allegory makes us read about how we should act, while allegory more strictly so-called brings us to the view of what we ought to believe” (15), but the intent and function of allegory, specifically moral or not, has an impact on our concepts of right and wrong and also how we can and should behave accordingly. In a reflection of the effectiveness of the Socratic method, the reader comes to realize the conclusions on his own through suggestive direction embedded in the understood signs and symbols portrayed by the allegorical figure and its actions: “It simply does not matter where the parallels are fetched from in allegory; what counts is whether a metaphorically understood relation is used to take off into areas where a similitude can point to valuable human action, or to matters of spiritual import. These last two phrases concerning human action and spiritual import describe, respectively, moral allegory and allegory strictly so-called” (Tuve 13). This distinction, also noted above, is important to remember so that we can see how a selected figure is behaving, whether it is an allegory or a moral allegory, and then determine much of its related time and culture from that determination. Determining the function and importance of an allegory in this manner allows us to see the message that it conveys, but this also conveys much about the human condition within an allegory’s generative culture and time. Tuve states:
… we read still more of the whole complex of ideas and feelings the figure [in an allegorical narrative] tries to speak of. It may not have power upon us, but it has profundity and subtlety in itself. Most images that undeniably require or allow allegorical reading convey in this manner, through public figures and symbols, the needed concepts which trigger thought. The thoughts are not only judgments or evaluations on moral matters, but are ideas concerning ultimate destiny, divine beings, supernatural forces. These seem to need a surer and richer language than any private or contrived symbolism, since the interpretation of the literal with the metaphysical, as well as the moral, meanings, is an element we persistently find in mediaeval allegory. (21)

Tuve is speaking specifically of medieval allegory, but the deeper meanings that are conveyed directly and indirectly can be found in any figure that is acting in this way.

Death symbology very much fulfills all of these complicated roles in any number of these forms. As we progress through our analysis ahead, we will examine each of the ways that death is portrayed according to these terms and also identify characteristics and portrayals that are unique to specific times and places as well as those characteristics which remain constant throughout. What this endeavor will show is the importance of being able to visualize the event and condition of death as an acting agent of existence, used as a cautionary figure in life, and how we view what it is as said event and condition. In this way, these figurations show changing attitudes toward death and the many ways that we attempt to cope with it. In addition to the information that can be
ascertained from the forms and appearance of death icons is the information that can be derived from when and how often it is portrayed in art and literature.

As far as we can tell, humans have been telling themselves and each other stories to explain the world around them, to pass on wisdom, important events, influential people, learned wisdom, and established social structures. Scholars squabble over such fine details as the truth or not of a particular mythologem—that is, if it really happened in history or not, but whether or not the people telling the story literally believed in it or not is also irrelevant as literal reality is not the same as Truth. Some myth theorists, anthropologists, and other scholars hold the stance that the humans who originally composed myths and related narratives had no imagination or intelligence comparable to modern humans. This position has become outdated given that it is shockingly ignorant of humans and also assumes the superiority of modern Man. Scholars in the field of human cognitive evolution generally cite the time period between 100,000 to 75,000 years ago as the era in which there was a major change in human cognition that led to the development of semiosis, technological developments, and socio-communicative developments that lead us to define those early ancestors as “human” (Heyes 2092; Iliopoulos 111; Indiana University). An extended exploration of current scholarship in human cognitive evolution in relation to the specific topic of mythogenesis would be rewarding yet shall be left for future consideration. Rather, we shall view this topic from the scholarship of myth theory which is informed by scholars’ multi- and interdisciplinary approaches. What this extended discussion aims to accomplish is clarification and definition of the psychological, rhetorical, semiotic, and socio-cultural mechanisms at work in the artworks that will be discussed in this project so that a
complete understanding of the full process and its results will be comprehended. To do so, we must begin with a clear, objective understanding of what myth is in this context as the works we will examine are entirely dependent upon myth, its structures, and its most basic functions.

**Mythology**

Scholars of literature are familiar with the adage that there is nothing new under the sun. The phrase itself is an example of its own idea as it is attributed to numerous authors through the millennia of the history of the written word. The oldest extant source of the phrase is purported to be the book of Ecclesiastes, but we can never really be sure as the certainty of origins is lost in the thick and tangled foliage of the Tree of Tales, as Tolkien called it (Flieger 39). This obscurity, paired with a simultaneous certainty on the part of those who adhere to claims of its origin, brings us to myth. Myth is a prime example of the “thing” in “nothing” new under the sun. In all that does change in the human experience and manifestation of existence, myth—in its basic form—remains a constant. It exists from today to as far back as we can see in history, which is not very far in actuality, and pan-globally at any point in that known history. Where there are humans, there is myth.

**Myth Theory**

In English, we have inherited the word “myth” from the Greek *mythos*, which simply means a traditional tale or story. There is usually also the added implication that this story involves supernatural beings and is concerned with the time of the beginning,
which Mircea Eliade identifies as *in illo tempore* (4). These tales also usually, but not always, serve an etiological function with regard to the natural order of existence regarding either Man’s biological existence or His social existence. We must bear in mind that not all myths are structured the same way and so there are exceptions to these defining qualifications. Many stories could be identified as myth but also as history, or folk-tale, or legend. Our discussion will remain in consideration of those narratives which fit the traditional definition above. Because of the etiological function that many of these myths serve, scholars who brought about the scholarly discipline of comparative religion and mythology in the mid-nineteenth century saw myth as primitive science. E.B. Tylor’s work is still referenced in consideration of this position. This could be paired with Max Müller’s Solar Myth argument that myths are allegories of nature which explain natural phenomena and order. The argument for these concepts then continues that as Man either developed higher levels of cognitive ability or gained more knowledge of the world (the intellectual capabilities of early Man is a matter of debate in some circles) that the more logical and empirical methods of science took over and so science replaces myth as a method for explaining the universe and our existence. Naturally, however, reason and logic did not suddenly appear with the Greeks, nor did myth fade with the development of scientific knowledge. There is the suggestion in a similar sense that myth is primitive philosophy and was the best way that Man with either limited cognition or limited knowledge could explain the workings of the universe. Some myth scholars such as Robert Graves take the Euhemeristic view of mythology and see it as apotheosized

---

13 *In illo tempore* is a phrase used by Eliade that references the age of myth, the beginning of creation, and the time when mythical events occurred: “in those days.” This is not to be taken literally as it is a mythical-spiritual reference (Eliade 4).
history of figures and events that had a particular impact on a society. Another view suggests that mythology is an expression of early Man’s spiritual and religious experiences. There is debate over this as well in regard to the role of myth and ritual and which came first. James Frazer, for instance, would assert that myths are remnants of ancient ritual that are no longer practiced and have been long forgotten. Other theorists support the idea of myth being a religion in itself and that myths are an inspired embodiment of human spirituality and that it continues to be so to this day, though it is sometimes forgotten as such. Joseph Campbell was a strong supporter of this approach, as was J.R.R. Tolkien. Theorists that consider the role of linguistics, such as Ernst Cassirer and Colin Turbayne, also align with this view and point out the role of metaphor to try to communicate deep and abstract concepts that cannot be captured by language. Psychologists such as Karl Jung and Sigmund Freud use science to explain myth, seeing myth as a manifestation of the deepest unconscious. There are many more debates and claims that are made by scholars of comparative religion and mythology. This, however, presents some of the more dominant theories and also shows that myth is something more complex and significant to humanity than just being old stories that serve no current purpose and are passed on simply for the sake of nostalgia, tradition, or to perpetuate a religion. Myth is present and active in our daily lives even when we don’t recognize it as such. Here, then, is the relationship between the broad subject of mythology and the specific subject of rhetoric in Counter-Reformation art. The art relies heavily on tropes and archetypes that the artists and their audience were quite aware of but contain complex psycho-social functions and coding they were likely not aware of. Our ability to look at
these works with this expanded awareness and knowledge allows us to understand how these works appealed to and influenced the audience of their time and since.

To develop our understanding further, we will keep with the idea of “nothing new,” and ask the questions of How and Why myth came about and functions, which is not a new project. The amount of thought, writing, and discussion that exists in regard to myth can be overwhelming—and that is only the material that we know of. Given the history of myth and thought that we do have, one can be fairly certain in believing that for as long as myth has existed, which can also be confidently assumed is long before written record, discussion about myth has also existed. Certainly, it has not always existed in the complex form of theory and criticism as we find in Western civilization since the nineteenth century, but on the level of discussion, explanation, and interaction it was there. Myths exist in many forms and they affect us at many different levels. They drive and modify our behavior. They help us to build and change our worldview. Some are concise and simplistic, and others involve a lifetime of study, contemplation, and integration. Some coax us to sleep as children and though we laugh at them as adults, we tell them to our own children with great joy. Some teach us how to become better people. Some make no sense but are powerful enough to alter our behavior at an instinctual level (step on a crack …). Some have the simultaneous power to unite us across barriers of culture, distance, and language or divide us to the point of violence and irreconcilable hatred. This diverse and pervasive power is what makes myth so interesting and also why it is important to keep discussing and thinking about myth despite the extent of discussion and thought that is already been put into it. This not only allows us to learn about other people across time and distance but about ourselves as well. A study of myth, especially
in light of a chronological consideration of the development and evolution of a specific myth, can suggest any number of possibilities with regard to our understanding of myth and the human condition in general. By doing so, we can see and consider the constants that exist over millennia and contemplate why they persist. The loyal perpetuation of myths suggests value and importance. The differences also come forth and can reveal changing values and moments of evolution in cultures, their ideologies, their history, and their worldview. Myths tell us about each other and they tell us about ourselves.

What this seeks to show is how much can be learned just a little knowledge about the history and development of a specific myth. The myth that has been selected for this analysis is signified and represented through memento mori and similar mortuary imagery. There are certainly topics that are more specific than that of death, but there are few things, if any, in human experience that hold more significance to us than the phenomenon of dying. The visual arts are just as necessary as, if not more than, the written narratives we have to try to form a complete picture of the concepts we are considering. One explains the other and their symbiotic existence necessitates that they not be viewed as separate entities. The visual and lingual (oral and written) narrative arts are critical to the existence and perpetuation of a myth. One influences and instigates development of the other. They are an inseparable binary. Use of the word “narrative” will apply to both visual and language arts here as language can paint a picture and art can tell a story, especially when the subject matter is myth.

For as many authors and theorists as there are who write about myth, there are as many definitions of myth. Since the nineteenth century, authors within the discipline of myth theory and related studies have tried to compose a satisfying yet pithy phrase to
encompass this broad and ancient phenomenon. Naturally, composed definitions tend to reflect the needs and interests of the person composing the definition and there are those who define whether a narrative is a myth or not by those criteria. Unfortunately, this tends to end in a cul-de-sac in which some narratives are sort of myth and sort of legend, or sort of legend and sort of folk-tale, or a little of all three. This means of determination not only fails to serve as a means of definition, but it seems to only add to the confusion, and one is left with less of a definition of these terms than before.

To clarify the matter, we start with amending our current understanding and use of the term “myth.” Most people are familiar with the sense of the word “myth” as it applies to religious or fantastic stories that are related to organized belief systems. The definition of myth is not limited to mythologists or philologists. Experts from a diverse array of disciplines have chimed in with their own theories, based in their own specialties, which further add to the complication of the overall task. For instance, in anthropology Claude Levi-Strauss writes that “myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech” (“Structural” 430). In psychology, Carl Jung states that “Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of psychical processes” (qtd. in Segal Jung 1). There is even variation of focus in the definition of myth when theorists build upon the work of others. Philosopher Ernst Cassirer cites philologist Max Müller, who said that “Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity.” Cassirer then parts company with Müller and redirects the definition toward religion: “the science of myth, or the science of the forms of religious conception” (5, 15). One could
exhaust pages in compiling all of the definitions of myth offered in the texts within the brief bibliography of this chapter alone. Some definitions focus on content while others focus on function. There are those which focus on myth’s origins and place in pre-scientific history exclusively while others take into account its perpetual existence into modern times. Suffice it to say, there is likely a different definition of myth for everyone who has added their voice to the conversation about it.

**OED Myth**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the use of the specific word “myth” back to *The Westminster Review* in 1830 in an essay by Edward Upham titled, “The History and Doctrine of Buddhism, popularly illustrated; with notices of the Kapooism, or Demon Worship, and of the Bali, or Planetary Incantations of Ceylon.” In this essay, Upham compares Jewish and Arabian etiological narratives concerning the advent of idol worship and states, “These two stories are very good illustrations of the origin of myths, by means of which, even the most natural sentiment is traced to its cause in the circumstances of fabulous history” (44). The *OED* lists five definitions of “myth.” The first definition is: 1a. “A traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon”; and 1b. “As a mass noun: such stories collectively or as a genre”; as well as 2b. “A person or thing held in awe or generally referred to with near reverential admiration on the basis of popularly repeated stories (whether real or fictitious).” The other two definitions make reference to falsity or disbelief: 1b. “A widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief; a widely held misconception; a misrepresentation of the
truth. Also: something existing only in myth; a fictitious or imaginary person or thing”;
and 2c. “A popular conception of a person or thing which exaggerates or idealizes the
truth” (“myth”). Two of the definitions (1a and 2b) have notes indicating the close
relationship to “legend.” In many cases, these definitions collectively suffice to convey
the concept of myth as it is popularly utilized. Yet these definitions are somewhat
unsatisfactory not only in their reference to veracity, historicity, and the religious, but
also because of the complexity of multiple definitions. Myths overall need not necessarily
be etiological, historical, supernatural, exaggerated, or idealized and in many cases literal
truth or belief is irrelevant.

Given all of this, there is one definition of myth to which I consistently return and
have found myself using in discussions and considerations of mythology. I have found
that it often satisfies a broad application of the word “myth” without necessitating an
assignation of absolute truth or belief, the religious or supernatural, or historical and
cultural placement. The origination of this definition seems to be with Alan Dundes and
is found in the Introduction of Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth. There
he states very simply and directly that myth is “a sacred narrative explaining how the
world and man came to be in their present form” (1). The potential in this definition is
realized when the two-word definition of “sacred narrative” is left to speak for itself with
no further elaboration. The etiological function that Dundes offers serves only to restrict
the idea of myth to certain functions that are part of what myth serves to do, but limits its
full potential and existence as do other definitions. That function can be subsumed under the word “sacred,” as will be explained below, and avoids the limitation of etiology being the only or primary function of myth, as this particular definition insists. Instead of struggling with various and sometimes contradictory definitions of myth, we should perhaps take our cue from the Greeks and other cultures that made no such distinction between what we would term to be myth, legend, and folk-tale and return to the simplicity of the idea of “mythos.” At first glance, the simple phrase “sacred narrative” to define myth may seem too broad and simplified, but it is that scope and brevity which captures the essence of myth in the multifarious ways it exists.

As with the definition of myth above, we do not need a formal and specific definition for “sacred.” For something to be sacred, it does not necessarily have to have ties to the religious, although the sentiments involved are similar. The sacred is something that is consecrated, dedicated, esteemed dear, and set apart. The sacred need not necessarily be an object, either. It can be an idea as well, which is crucial to the sacred. Ideas associated with it will endow meaning upon the object and that meaning to that person or group of people is what makes the object sacred. It does not need to be a socially shared attribution of meaning, nor does it necessarily have to be related to the religious or to gods. And there’s the rub: Sacredness is completely subjective. A stone may be sacred to an enormous amount of people, such as the Hajarul Aswad (Black Stone) of the Kaaba in Mecca which is at the core of the religion of Islam, but not everyone would behold the stone with awe and trembling as if in the presence of God. To

---

14 The essays in Sacred Narrative are all of interest and use in attempting to define “myth” and purport ideas similar to what is being presented here. They do not, however, satisfy the necessity of being broad enough to encompass the corpus of narratives that could potentially be classified as myth, and they typically also assign value-determination that contain biases which construct additional limitations.
some, it is just another stone in which it so happens that a group has decided to focus their metaphysical attentions upon. Another stone may mean nothing at all to anyone else in the world, but a person may keep it in their pocket because they consider it to be good luck.

The primary vehicle for conveying the sacred is narrative. As mentioned above, a narrative can be visual or lingual (oral and written), and these narrative arts are critical to the existence and perpetuation of a myth, as we will see in analysis below. They are the medium in which an idea is embedded in order to convey that idea to other people. Images construct their own form of narrative and convey ideas just as the lingual media do. This is what necessitates the idea of visual narrative to be included with the lingual as a manifestation of myth. One explains the other and their symbiotic existence necessitates that they not be viewed as separate entities. For the most part, the dimension of time is what differentiates literary from visual narrative. Literary narrative unfolds over a period of time and necessitates a certain elapse of time for the whole to be perceived. The duration is simply as long as it takes to tell the story. This duration could be from a few seconds to a thousand and one nights. Visual art needs only the duration of time for the image to be perceived by the mind. The entire narrative is before us once our eyes take in the image. It may take some time to work out the details of the attached narrative and to put it into words, but that would fall under literary narrative and analysis which we will see with the discussion ahead. For instance, a cave painting could convey the image of a successful hunt. We don’t have the specific details that a literary narrative would provide of such a hunt, but the idea of the event and what transpired is conveyed in the image of animals, humans with spears, and one animal with a spear or spears embedded in it.
Although there are some works of art that require familiarity with spoken or written narratives for the full concept to be conveyed, a story can still be perceived in observation.

Roland Barthes

In order to perceive myth in its broadest and most complete spectrum, it is perhaps best to explain myth in the non-familiar sense so that the full range of this expanded concept of myth can be more fully comprehended. For this, we turn to the French Structuralist/Post-Structuralist Roland Barthes and his text, *Mythologies*. Barthes defines myth as “a type of speech,” but not just any type of speech as “language needs special conditions in order to become a myth. … Myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form.” As asserted here, “everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters its message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘substantial’ ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions.” He uses an example to illustrate that the object of myth is “adapted to a certain type of consumption” and that there is “a type of social usage which is added to pure matter” (109). The infinite possibilities of the substance of myth and its specific form of usage or consumption are a characteristic of myth. The aspect that connects Barthes’s modern perspective of mythology with the traditional under the definition of “sacred narrative” is the common attribute that these myths contain and convey ideology. The idea that myth forms a world-view and also forms a basis of behavior and social structure (which is part of world-view) is one of the core concepts of myth, and it can be subsumed under the word “sacred,” as specified
above. Again, an ideology can be held by an individual or an entire culture. When one studies mythology, one finds that ideology is inextricable from myths, and ideology is also the key characteristic that can help to distinguish myth from other forms of literature. Myth is the medium in which ideology is embodied and conveyed. Although Barthes focuses entirely on modern consumer culture myths in his text, there is consideration for application of his ideas to myth in the traditional sense as well. This is especially true when myth is viewed primarily as a vehicle for ideology: “What is characteristic of myth? To transform a meaning into form. … Nothing can be safe from myth, myth can develop its second-order schema from any meaning” (Barthes 131, emphasis mine). Barthes, then, allows us to conceive of myth in a much broader sense than it is traditionally understood. Using this perspective, we can see that myth in form and function is still quite active and relevant to today’s world. It also illustrates how modern ideological convictions take form and are perpetuated in the same manner. Hence, the broadened definition of myth as a “sacred narrative” serves to include modern manifestations of myth along with the traditional.

In modern thinking, we have relegated creativity to the realm of lies and falsehoods. This is, I would argue, a symptom of the injury to myth and religion suffered in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, namely the polarized view of existence as consisting of ideas that are either true or not, the determination being dependent upon factual, empirically demonstrable evidence and support. If something is not factual and empirically supportable, the assumption is that the entirety of the narrative is not true and therefore has little or no value. The issue is that we have forgotten that Myth is something that behaves outside of those empirical rules and the perspective that only provable
events or theories are capable of being Truth. Myth, however, is the dark matter of the humanities disciplines. As God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Exod. 3:14). As soon as you label, categorize, taxonomize Myth, it loses its magic, its essence, and its efficacy. The life goes out of it, just as the Golden Goose—if you dissect something to see how it works, you kill it. We have to remember and actually move forward our perception of metaphors and remember that they are not, and never were, meant to be taken literally. They point to the “higher Truth” we seek in our deeper ruminations, theories, and philosophies. Their importance is much greater than literalisms, depending on subject of course. Each discipline—science, religion, philosophy, the arts—has its own language, yet they all point to the same Truths. Myth and science are not opposing terms.

**Religion, Science, and Epistemology**

We must keep this in mind in our consideration of the art and literature of the Counter-Reformation so that we can be mindful of the epistemological context of the time. There is a common modern perception that myth and science are disparate terms. They were not always seen as such in the Western mind. It was not until the rise of Empiricism in the Enlightenment that these two ways of understanding our world and existence were separated and deemed to be incompatible. Yet this division between myth and science is based on a misunderstanding of both. Myth and its relationship with religion became conflated and confused and when human understanding did make considerable advances through scientific method and caused the perception that the two epistemologies were mutually exclusive. If we consider what myth and science are, how they function both historically and presently, and realize what their structural
commonalities are, we can see they are two different ways of understanding the same existence. Typically, science is presented in opposition to myth and religion. We return to W.T. Stace, who points to the Enlightenment as the dividing point between the two in Western history. Science is defined in terms of knowledge that is gained through empirical experience rather than through subjective belief. This modern sense of the term relies heavily on the emphasis on the empirical aspect and the term is also used in reference almost exclusively to what are known as the “hard” or physical sciences. Naturally, there is a web of political, social, and biological factors that contribute to the mental shift in Western civilization from the late Middle Ages through to the Enlightenment, but the new ideology of the physical structure and order of Man’s world had an enormous impact on His view of the spiritual world.

This change in perspective also gave rise to the concept of science and religion existing in a tense dichotomy, if not a polemical one at that. Stace observes that “It is very important to realize that, in the whole history of the seventeenth century scientific revolution, no single discovery was made, no idea was put forward which, from the point of view of logic, should have had the slightest effect in the way of destroying belief in God. And yet the scientific revolution actually did have such an effect” (Stace 90). This eventually evolved into a specific, though not universally held, belief that science attacks and discredits religion, and the concept that myth and science are incompatible entered the Western consciousness. This, however, is a collective misunderstanding. Naturally, the traditional stories and narratives of the Christian religion are the very foundations of Western culture. Commonly, myths are directly related to the rituals that are an essential part of the spiritual teachings and devotional behavior of organized religions. There is a
bit of the chicken-and-egg debate when it comes to myth and ritual. As noted in the previous discussion of myth theory, the two are so inter-related that it is hard to tell which may have come first. Regardless, if a religious system does not have its myths, its rituals become an empty series of gestures that have no meaning or purpose. What happened in the Western Church was that people made the mistake of conflating myth with religion. It is easy enough to do. Although myth is important in a religion, it is not religion. A religion is an organized social structure based on dogma, creeds, hierarchy, and the other structures which make it a social entity. Although religions utilize myths, one does not need a religion to incorporate myths into one’s life. Regardless of the actual source or sources of myth named above, we can see how all of them are relevant to belief systems and we can also see how they relate to one another. For instance, religious and spiritual expression is very much also an expression of the unconscious. We can see how people and events in our everyday life are exempla of what we perceive as a higher order of nature or moral behavior. We see and create metaphor without even realizing it many times in our everyday language.

The concept of myth as metaphor is important to understanding how it is structured, how it is conveyed, and also how myth came to be opposed to science in Western thought. Colin Turbayne notes that metaphors have a life-span and they will eventually deteriorate. This has happened to religious myths overall. When a metaphor is first created, it is most impactful as there is a conceptual tension between the two things that are being compared, i.e. “Man is a Wolf.” In the next stage, it becomes common knowledge that the two are compared to illustrate a higher idea. In the next stage, it is difficult to explain one or both of the metaphorical elements without its counterpart, i.e.
“Sound is a wave.” In the last stage, the metaphor becomes literal (Turbayne 24-26). This is what happened to the ancient myths that were woven into numerous cultures through time to emerge as Christian mythology. In its developmental centuries, people understood the mythology of the Hebrew tribes of the Bronze Age and prior to be absolutely and inarguably literal and so had the vision of the geo-centric Earth with the plane of Heaven literally above and the underworld literally below. Naturally, there were variations and fluctuations regarding this perspective, especially in consideration of the Protestants, but this was generally accepted as a Truth. What the findings of the Enlightenment did was to shatter this perfect sphere for believers. In many minds, if the mythology was not literally true, then perhaps none of it was true. They made the eternal and spiritual dependent upon the literal and physical. As Campbell would say, the people got stuck in the metaphor (Moyers). When the literal was shown to be otherwise, they did not adjust their spiritual perspective to accommodate it. This literal understanding of the metaphor of myth created the schism between science and religion.

Of course, there are many approaches to religion and spirituality that have come about since which do make accommodations for our modern understanding of the universe, but there is still a general perspective that the two are still largely incompatible. There is an interesting trend in recent decades, however, in which current scholarship shows a desire to attempt to rescue myth and science from the dualistic view that keeps them separated. Earl MacCormac argues in Metaphor and Myth in Science and Religion that both science and religion are philosophy. We do not see them as such, and so we miss the point. He states that “scientific language employ[s] metaphors in a manner similar to the religious uses of metaphor, so that to object to religion because it is
nonliteral language failed to meet a philosophical criterion for meaning such as falsifiability, without also faulting science for the same reason, commits an act of the greatest hypocrisy” (vii). He further clarifies his overall thesis that “science and religion use language in a similar manner; both employ metaphors to suggest new hypotheses, both seem to confirm their hypotheses in human experience, and both often create myth by forgetting the hypothetical character of their metaphors” (xviii). Much discussion in myth theory and in scholarly discussion of metaphors and symbols supports this important aspect of human systems of ontology or, at the least, illustrate it with discussion and exempla. MacCormac offers the concise conclusion that:

Mythical thinking is a symbolic activity in which men try to represent the meaning of the world verbally [and I would add visually]. Myths are real in the sense that they have meaning for those who believe them. To assail myths as superstitious and unreal confuses their function. They are not intended in this view to be explanations of how the world operates, but rather express the meaning and significance of it. These objective myths contain recurring symbols called archetypes around which man organizes his life. Without such archetypal symbols, man will find life to be meaningless. Archetypal symbols include the concept of a central place about which life can be organized, and the cycle of life, death and regeneration. … Men who form such myths want to express the meaningful existence that they find in such archetypal symbols. A different dimension of human existence is revealed in mythology; here
man finds purpose and emotional fulfillment that are not available in rational scientific activity” (113).

Myth is a traditional story, as noted above, that seeks to explain meaning in our world and the questions that we have about it. Science also is a narrative that seeks to explain our world and the questions that we have. Myth uses the language of poetry to create metaphors of figures and actions. Science uses the metaphorical language of mathematics and empirical comparison to create metaphors to reflect logic and natural law. Both science and myth are epistemologies. We use them to understand complex concepts about existence. Science is the system of understanding used to explain the physical and temporal world. Myth is the system of understanding used to explain the spiritual and eternal world.

If we approach our understanding of myth and science with a new and more developed conceit of what they are and what they do, we will see that they are not opposing terms or ideas. They are the yin-yang of epistemology, each with a little of the other within them which together make a perfect whole that reflects the entirety of universe. If we see the two as such, then perhaps we can consider taking up the more ancient perspective of myth and science to see how one explains the other and how both seek to explain the mystery of existence. This will enhance our understanding of the elements at work in the art of the Counter-Reformation that we will discuss and how it is a crucial part of the rhetorical structure of religious art. With this broad understanding of myth, its forms, and its ways of functioning, we can return to the discussion of the rhetorical function of Catholic art during the Counter-Reformation with a greater
appreciation for the deep socio-cultural and psychological mechanisms in play at the time and how and why they worked.
CHAPTER 3. THE REFORMATION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Reform Within and Without

Although the medieval trials of plague, famine, and war continued into the Renaissance, the increase of wealth, knowledge, and culture of the time gave people more confidence and security. Naturally, the situation as it unfolded is much more complex than a few short pages can convey. Suffice it to say, however, that the predominant impression that we have of the time is that the rise in wealth, power, and resources also corrupted many, most certainly including those in charge of Rome and the Catholic Church. This is the reason given for the rise of the Protestant Revolution: the endangered Church had a fight on its hands and fight it did. With momentum given to the Catholic Counter-Reformation by the Jesuits, the Church held its ground and sought to keep its flock in the fold. Yet the real history of the Christian religion in Western Europe is more nuanced and complex than that.

Modern scholarship has altered the perspective that corruption alone led to Reformation. Instead, “Now, all would agree that ‘the age was one of astonishing religious creativity’ (Rice, 1970) and current historians judge the church’s condition to have been ‘reasonably healthy’ (Chaunu, 1989) … Further, most accept that the Reformation was a rebellion over theology, not abuses. Reform was high on the agenda throughout the 15th century and was under way well before Luther …” (Jones 28). Jones further cautions that “We must be careful. Doctrine, not abuses, was the real issue between Protestants and Catholics” (4). There was a need and desire for Reform at the
time, but it was not the all-or-nothing situation we commonly perceive. “[W]hile there had been heresies and schisms before the Reformation, the sheer range of doctrines disputed represented an unprecedented threat” (Pelikan qtd. in Jones 69). This is not to say that there wasn’t corruption and abuse. Jones is careful to point out that the received narrative of corruption and immorality in the power structure of the Church did play a part in the call for Reform, but that they were symptoms of a larger problem: “The root cause [of the call for Reformation] was a lack of vocation for the priestly office; commitment to the spiritual and moral welfare of a congregation was rare” (33). He confirms that “Traditional explanations of papal worldliness and corruption, indifference and inertia, are all valid” (44). In centuries past, people would remain relatively oblivious to issues and concerns that affected other congregations, and much of those that affected the Church as a whole. However, the end of the Middle Ages is marked by an end to this lack of awareness and, more importantly, lack of direct familiarity with doctrine and sacred texts. During the time of the Reformation, the range of doctrines and common knowledge of them was more widespread than ever before because of one of the most significant—if not the most significant—invention of the late Middle Ages: the printing press.

**Outreach / Printing**

It is tempting to entertain the thought that the media battle of the Reformation was also the first large-scale media campaign ever and perhaps, therefore, another barometric mark of modernity. Carl F. Kaestle states that “Print had a bridging, unifying effect in science, but it had a divisive, fragmenting effect in religion, making possible pamphlet wars and doctrinal polarization. Within religion print fostered both modern criticism and
resistant fundamentalism” (Kaestle 19). Print, and the literacy necessary to utilize it, was a revolution in itself that led to others in Europe, most certainly including the Protestant Revolution. A. G. Dickens notes the importance of the proliferation of printing presses “gave the Reformers a weapon hitherto unknown in Christian schisms, and one raise to a new potency by the literary genius of Luther.” This caused Protestant publications to greatly outnumber Catholic defense publications in the 1520s: “By the time Catholic publicists recaptured an adequate sector of the press their cause had sustained some incurable wounds” (35). Similarly, Kaestle writes that “Although the Counter-Reformation had placed Catholics in support of schooling and vernacular Bible reading, the effort lacked the intensity of Protestant concern for lay reading” (22). The effects of literacy were a major contributing factor to the rise of the demand for reformation in the Catholic Church and they were a powerful factor in leading people to dissent with the Catholic Church to the point of separation. In 1600, the combined urban and rural literacy rate in Western Europe was around 35-40%. From then forward, mass literacy began to develop, significantly raising those percentages ever since (20, 21). This had profound effects in Europe as there grew to be a north-south bias, as Kaestle describes it, in which literacy rates tended to be higher in Protestant countries than in Catholic ones (22). The power of the printing press, combined with the rise of literacy that was supported in the Protestant lay population, put the Catholics at a disadvantage. The power that literacy grants us unquestionable. As we well know in the modern age, however, that power is not always rightly used, whether intentional or not. The results of such campaigns are almost entirely dependent upon the efficacy with which literature is wielded. Jones mentions that it seemed that “consumer demand, it seemed, would determine the outcome [of the
schism in the Church]” (53)—arguably, another indication of modernity. Catholic supporters had a difficult time since “They printed, and preached, far too little. Targeted very narrowly at the clergy, princes and councilors, their works were too scholarly, too defensive, and far too rarely tried to show why Protestantism was wrong” (54).

Essentially, the two sides were waging war on two different battlegrounds. The Catholics maintained the thousand-year-old tradition of the Church hierarchy, debating and initiating ecclesiastical changes. It was kept in the esoteric circles of the official Church. The Protestants’ campaign, not having such a rigid structure of hierarchy and command, waged battle in the hearts and minds of the laypeople. The growth of the movement is attributable to a high level of memetic potency paired with this new means of proliferation. It caused the consideration of reformation to become a full-blown crisis for the Church. It seems that the urgency was needed, however, if anything was going to happen—another reason for the vivacity of the Protestant movement. Jones identifies the indifference of ecclesiastical leadership for nearly a century in the preceding years: “From the death of Pius II in 1464, popes were conspicuous for their lack of commitment to reformation” (44), and “Only with Julius III (elected 1550) did [popes] begin once again to act as if they possessed the universal spiritual leadership they claimed” (79). The time in-between was time lost for the prevention of what was to come.

Though the Church was making motions of reform starting as early as the beginning of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century (Jones 4), the change did not occur in time to prevent schism. It was the inaction of Catholic leaders, rather than any of their actions, which drove people to initiate reform on their own: “Indeed, most people despaired of papal-led reform—hence the patchwork of individual, localized initiatives …” (44). These
independent, unsanctioned movements—along with the momentum that the printing press gave to the Protestant movement—put pressure on the Church to act faster than it was ready to. The Church found itself still in need of internal reform, but now was pressed by the emergence of Protestantism and the many off-shoots that formed because of it (57).

“The shock of Protestant dissent and revolt proved the catalyst which made reform more earnest, more urgent. The rapid spread of Protestantism altered the pace and direction of change” (4). It was a shocking development, but it would be an error to think that the Catholic Church was cornered. They were still very much a dominant and powerful organization, and they knew it. O'Connell writes:

… that revival of Catholicism which usually goes by the name Counter Reformation cannot be adequately explained as a frightened response to the Protestant record of success, impressive as that record may have been. … But, as Professor Evennett has written, “The Counter Reformation could hardly have occurred had it been no more than the hastily improvised defense of the vested interests of an ecclesiastical corporation bereft of contemporary or future spiritual significance.” (29)

The Protestant movement, however, did lend an impetus toward Catholic action: “The general fear of social and religious chaos helped Catholicism far more than it helped Luther and Calvin” (Dickens 33). Jones agrees, saying, “The shock of Protestant dissent and revolt proved the catalyst which made reform more earnest, more urgent” (Jones 4).

O’Connell discusses issues specifically in the Polish-Lithuanian Catholic Church but notes that those internal problems were the same as elsewhere: “political bishops, ignorant priests, venal monks, pluralism, concubinage, superstition, religious foundations
falling into ruin, morale wrecked apparently beyond remedy. It was little wonder that Protestantism should achieve striking gains among a people so badly served” (O’Connell 213). As discussed above, there was consumer—or perhaps, believer—demand. It was only a matter of time before it had to be met one way or another.

Catholicism needed to make an adaptive shift to maintain its high level of memetic fecundity. This is nothing new as belief systems must constantly adapt to the needs of its followers. If it does not, it becomes irrelevant, stagnates, and is replaced or at least blended with other more viable or relevant practices and beliefs, all of which did happen at the time. Along with the internal press for change, the external world was changing in a way that would force the Church to respond as well. After a thousand-year or more reign over knowledge and information in the Western world and, most importantly, the power to interpret what it meant according to subjective Truth of Christian doctrine, the Church was finding new evidence and discoveries harder to weave into its meta-narrative. The first sign of doubt or hesitation after adamant authoritarianism was, to some eyes, a sign of weakness and one uncertainty was enough to topple the entire edifice. The Renaissance and periods after saw the rise of empiricism and the beginnings of what would lead to the Enlightenment, which some claim to be the death-nail in the coffin made of the Reformation of the Catholic Church. For others, it was an opportunity to prove the resilience and adaptability of the Universal Church.

**Changing View of the Universe**

One major indicator of the advent of the modern world was the role of science in the shift in perspective of popular ontological philosophy. Innovations in observational technology, paired with the recovery of ancient Greek and Moslem manuscripts that had
been lost to that point, combined to present alternative and irrefutable knowledge which countered the meta-narrative of reality that had been purported by the Church for centuries. Through history, it had been easier for the Church to suppress and sometimes eradicate outside knowledge that would challenge the way people viewed and interacted with existence. When Galileo, for instance, looked through the lenses of his newly created telescope, it became visibly clear that the planets were entire worlds and that they were very, very far away. Jones quotes Scarre, who speaks of the enormous consequences of this knowledge:

The revelations of Galileo (d. 1642) and Newton (d. 1727) on the machine-like working of the universe according to fixed laws elbowed out supernatural answers to mysterious events. While some would eventually apply Descartes and Newton to doubt the existence of God, the ‘clockwork universe’ immediately cut the ground from under demons and, at an intellectual level, destroyed rational belief in witchcraft. (qtd. in Jones 124)

Along with witchcraft, the negative pole of the spiritual and metaphysical, there came similar questioning of the positive pole, the Church. Though the debate has continued since, the thinkers and theologians starting in the Renaissance created and realized ways in which their God could be compatible with these new findings about the universe and its workings. Though knowledge had changed, their God was still behind it and its workings. Jones mentions the revival of Thomism in the 16th century: “Thomism asserted that the universe operated according to divinely created natural laws, which people could comprehend by reason. Further, it denied any distinction between the natural and the
supernatural for everything operated according to divine authority under those universal natural laws” (125). Philosophies such as Thomism created a compromise between what would seem to be two incompatible theories of existence, just as discussed by MacCormac and Stace above. This, of course, prompted more evolutions in the Church as a whole and its doctrines and teachings.

One of these major changes was humanity’s view of itself and its role in existence. An ancient debate in theology is that over free will and destiny. The natural-divine law compromise, paired with the results of the proceedings of the Council of Trent held from 1545 to 1563, established new orientations by which to see and understand the workings of the world and the increased role of the individual within it. Rather than being casualties in the supernatural war between God and the devil, Man now had some role to play in his own fate (Scarre qtd. in Jones 125). This carried forward through the centuries and was brought to the theological forefront when we realized that God was literally further from us than we had originally thought. Historically, this was not always the case as in the ancient and medieval world; knowledge of the spirit and knowledge of the world were not mutually exclusive. Science traditionally did not seek to discredit religion or the existence of the Christian God but sought to understand God and the world that had been made. Science did not suddenly begin with the Enlightenment. There is a history through the late Middle Ages as alchemy became chemistry and the scientific discoveries and mathematical developments of the Islamic East worked their way into the knowledge base of the scholars of the West. Although the natural scientists of these centuries did not set out to create a division between their scientific work and their assumed spiritual axioms, what their work discovered had that effect. W. T. Stace explains that a good deal
of the mental shift of the time is due to astronomical discoveries and realizations. Most
important was that of the heliocentric universe. With this discovery, man was no longer at
the center of existence. Stace explains that as these astronomical theories were developed,
theories that were proposed that kept an active and omnipresent God in the everyday
workings of the universe were continually explained through natural causes (91-92). God
was distanced not just in the minds of Western people, but there came to be an actual
physical distance as He was pushed to the outer reaches of the solar system spatially and
to in illo tempore, again in the sense of Eliade, temporally (94, 95). We must be careful
lest we fall into the popular assumption that these men of observation and exploration
(now called “scientists”) were working to bring down the Church. Quite the contrary.
There is much to support the firm belief and religious nature of many of these men. In
fact, the Catholic Church has been and still is a major player in the field of science and
discovery. This change in the knowledge of the universe and its operations, however, did
have a role in contributing to the momentum behind the calls for reformation and the
results thereof.

Ordinary People in the Ordinary World

For those people of the time who were not part of the hallowed halls of
metaphysical and spiritual thought, having the correct view and approach to existence
was the main concern. One impetus for the drive for change in the Church from the
laypeople was the impossibility of the achievement of perfection as it was defined by the
Church (Cohen 4, 5). “Anxious fears for the soul’s fate, of indeterminate punishment in
purgatory and the eternal flames of hell troubled many a mind” (Jones 7). Justification,
that is being acceptable to God, was achieved through grace granted by God, but that
purifying grace could always be undermined by sin (10), and so people—uneducated and always in fear of the terrors of everyday life—also lived in constant anxiety of their eternal status as well. “Whether or not Christianity was a mere veneer, while priests talked of sin and the hope of heaven, people seem to have thought more immediately of survival, looking to safeguard their family and community against the problems and misfortunes of life in an enchanted but dangerous universe: ‘Popular religion was primarily functional, not devotional’ (Monter, 1983)” (Jones 119). With the example of the Calvinists in Germany: “their conversion pointed more toward an assertion of independence of a Catholic king than toward a depth of personal conviction” (O’Connell 213). Regardless of individuals’ reasons for their participation or devotion to the Church, fear and uncertainty surrounded them from all sides.

As we know from basic human psychology, fortified with the lens of trauma studies, discussed previously, this could be quite mentally and emotionally burdensome, if not traumatizing.\(^\text{15}\) It seems that this issue was in the midst of being addressed when the need for Reform came to a head: “In the 15\(^{\text{th}}\) century priests increasingly counselled and guided, examined consciences and used guilt to reform behaviour. The emphasis was shifting more and more to the pastoral rather than the disciplinary” (Jones 17). Even so, it was not enough to counter the swell of separatist reform. “The appeal of primitive Protestantism lay in its simplicity; with a stroke it swept away the tangle of theory and practice which over a thousand years had grown up within the Western church, and so it freed the believer to seek out the one thing necessary. The Protestant movement was a real revolution because it effected a radical change in the view people had of their

\(^{15}\) It should be noted here that Jones contests the “burden thesis,” claiming that it has little to no scholarly support (19). Further discussion in his text seems to contradict this claim (30, 37, 49).
relationship to God …” (O’Connell 28-29). When a believer has a close, personal relationship with God, the uncertainty of approval, as determined by a third-party, the clergy, was alleviated. People could understand the theoretical workings of salvation in its clarified form and could also act personally in order to seek forgiveness if they erred. “Luther had found a non-medieval solution that assuaged those medieval anxieties and made redundant the church’s sacramental system: justification by faith. In that therapeutic power of Protestant theology to liberate people from fear lay the greater threat [to Catholicism]” (Jones 49). This is a telling observation as it reinforces that the greater power on human minds lies in fear rather than hope. Hope can be realized and become a catalyst for behavior, but the fear must be confronted and alleviated first.

**Ecclesiastical Schism**

In 1536, Pope Paul III convoked a council which produced the *Consilium de emendanda ecclesia*. It is:

… a ‘warts and all’ report on the state of the church and the means of regeneration. That the Consilium confined its eyes to Italy reveals how myopic still was the view from the papal heights. Germany and Protestants did not figure in their thinking. That in itself, however, serves to remind us once again that the agenda of reform was not set and dictated by the Reformation. (Jones 44-45)

Though Reform was a salient topic through the decades, the Colloquy of Regensburg in 1541, which was meant to mend the rifts in Christianity, only made it clear that though Catholics and Protestants “agreed on all essentials of Christianity and disagreed only on issues that were *adiaphora* (irrelevant to salvation)” (61), the rift arose from “the conflict
between two different ways of understanding Catholicism itself’ (Idigoras qtd. in Jones 61). Despite the impasses and lack of reconciliation over the years, this should not be seen as the Catholic Church digging in its heels and refusing to change. Jones argues that “Calls for reform could provide evidence that the late medieval church was not only alive but adaptable, busily maintaining its relevance and membership in the fast-shifting sands of an era of unprecedented cultural, social, economic, and political change” (28). The change demanded by the Protestant Reformers, however, was beyond the pale of what would be considered to be “adaptability” by the Church leaders.

Despite the many efforts at reconciliation and shared agreement on a number of doctrines, the differences were enough to cause separation. The final effort at complete reconciliation, the Colloquy of Regensburg, ended in deadlock (Jones 61). Following, it was shared general opinion that a Council would eventually heal the rift, yet Popes Leo X and Clement VII feared that their power would be curtailed during such a gathering. Pope Paul III and Emperor Charles of Rome both recognized that a Council was needed to resolve the issue, though they differed in their opinions as to what needed to be accomplished in said Council (65-66). When the attempt at a Reform Council was made in 1545, the Council of Trent convened. Jones writes that those in attendance were still largely unaware of the true nature of the Protestant movement: “Until a significant French contingent arrived in 1562, almost none had any first-hand experience of the Reformation crisis. … Inadequate in representations and ignorant of Reformation realities, [the Council] never tried to comprehend the heretics” (Jones 68; Dickens 109). The Council instead organized its case against the Protestants and secured their own position: “the Roman church affirmed its teaching authority and declared itself the only
infallible judge” (Jones 69), yet this was not merely a meeting to form an organized attack against Protestantism. The Council had “a capacity for self-criticism then rare in ecclesiastical assemblies, a passionate desire to reform and to save the Holy Catholic Church” (Dickens 112). The priority became the salvation of the Church itself for those who adhered to it, rather than trying to mend the schism with the Protestant movement. Protestants were offered the opportunity to declare fealty to the Church given the results of the Council, but ultimately still found it to be disagreeable to their ideological convictions. In the end, in the December of 1563, the Council of Trent adjourned, successful in uniting the Catholic Church internally: “Trent was far more than a declaration of war upon Protestant heresies. It was also a victory of some Catholic tendencies over other tendencies …” (132). The determinations of the Council of Trent created a reformed Catholic Church—one that today we would recognize as “modern.”

The details of this Council and the events leading up to it are complicated, intricate, and detailed. It would require the reading of quite a number of related texts to fully comprehend the events and repercussions of the Council. Rather than diving into these details, we shall leave the Reformation here for the purposes of this study and reiterate that this was a time of unprecedented upheaval socially, culturally, politically, religiously, and spiritually. As with the time of the Black Death, there was no sense that retribution was clearly and fairly dispersed as per the specifics of Catholic doctrine. The Protestants had successfully defied and rejected the Mother Church without retribution—from what could be determined at the time. The question then remained in the mind of the common person, who was right, then? The fact that people, and a large segment of them, had defied and separated from the Church went against all that was deemed to be
“right” in the world. Ex-communication was the worst punishment a soul could suffer, wasn’t it? The turmoil and complexities of this time are mind-boggling even for a professionally-trained scholar of the modern age, let alone a poor layperson of the sixteenth century. Overwhelming circumstances are often the catalyst for us, of any time, to step back and take stock of what is most important. As complicated as the politics of church and state become, the layperson need only be concerned with what these events mean for him and his loved ones. In this case, the political and spiritual instability of the Reformation would cause people to focus on that which would directly affect them, rather than the intrigues of Kings and Popes and Courtesans. The concern would be focused on the question of what can I do, to preserve my immortal soul and guarantee my entrance into heaven? The answer comes when one enters a sacred place of the Baroque. Everywhere one looks seemingly, memento mori: do what you must to protect your eternal soul; the rest you have no power over, nor does it have power over you. Surely, members of the clergy, politicians, aristocrats, and others of social importance felt the upheaval of the Reformation and the Protestant movement. As it tends to do, the art and literature of the period helped their audience to ground and focus themselves. Memento mori: the others are responsible for themselves; you are responsible for you. This message, proliferated through the art and literature of the Baroque, was a comfort and a way of centering one’s thoughts to reduce the anxiety created by the events of the overall period of social, political, and religious upheaval.

The Spanish Influence in Rome

This study would be remiss if it overlooked a crucial factor in the development of
what we now consider to be the art and literature of the Counter-Reformation: the influence of Spain. In his book, *Spanish Rome*, Dr. Thomas Dandelet reinforces the role that Spain played in Baroque Rome which, the author claims, is typically overlooked; at least, it is worthy of more attention (13). Spain was the unofficial monarchy of Rome at the beginning of the 16th century. This occurred through a kind of passive invasion through culture known as “informal imperialism” (13). This idea reinforces the workings under investigation here of political rhetoric embedded in art and literature used to influence the world-view and convictions of its common audience. The alliance of Papal Rome with the Spanish monarchy (represented by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella) was a mutually beneficial relationship. Each had strengthening qualities that the other lacked. By integrating themselves, they established a powerful partnership in the time of the rise of global imperialism:

Papal Rome was rich in religious authority, the artistic and intellectual trappings of imperial power, and historical memory; Spain in the New World, gold, a large navy, and Europe’s best soldiers. Each had treasures the other needed and wanted … [Rome] was also the center of Spanish imperial religion. The Spanish monarchs relied upon the papacy to support their ecclesiastical agenda throughout the empire. In turn they fashioned themselves as faithful defenders of papal authority. Spanish absolutism and papal absolutism went hand in hand, and the Catholic Reformation … took on a distinctly Spanish face. (5-6)

A crucial part of this “invasion” is the fact that it was not achieved through military domination on either side. These leaders instead used the power of religion and defense
of a common ideology as the means of integration and establishment of their hegemony, religion being the best means of conquest and control of a population. Its rhetoric directly benefits the power structures that are tied in with it, especially if those power structures claim (whether truthfully or not) that their actions are in defense of the common religion.

Visual and literary works go hand-in-hand with creating and maintaining the meta-narrative shared by a population as to their cultural and historical identity. It works quite well when the introduced culture is slowly integrated into existing structures and practices of the culture they merge with. Dandelet states that “In anthropological terms, the Spanish proved themselves masters of turning traditional religious structures or social ‘texts’ such as processions, ritualized charity, and saint-making into a Spanish text.” He further notes how the Spanish assimilated into Roman culture and made a Spanish version of it: “This was done not only by the force of literary constructions or ritualized claims to the city but also by the political and economic coercion common to most empires” (Dandelet 11). As this suggests, informal imperialism is a complex and multi-faceted process that goes beyond the study of political economy, politics, history, or any other single discipline. Dandelet stresses this, stating that the study of informal imperialism defies a single or unified theoretical approach and is informed by inter- and multi-disciplinary study (13). Understanding the history of Spanish Rome is important for understanding “development of national and religious identity, and the Catholic Reformation,” but it has remained unwritten (14). As discussion here thus far has shown, this is quite true and it is worth the effort of considering not just the informal imperialism of Spain in Rome in this manner, but to broaden the analysis in order to make connections and reveal the possibilities of this phenomena on the Reformation of the
Catholic Church and its withstanding of the Protestant Revolution. A myth or constructed historical or cultural narrative has much more memetic potency if it is integrated rather than commanded. Presence and repetition create the reality, and this is what the leaders of Spanish Rome at the time accomplished through their artists whether knowingly or not. This was not to the detriment or abuse of the artists or the population, however.

The relationship between Spain and Rome was, again, mutually beneficial and not just for those in power. “While the Roman humanists, musicians, and theologians dedicated their works to the Spanish monarch, the king sent increasing amounts of Spanish gold to help rebuild churches, such as the new Saint Peter’s, Santa Maria Maggiore, San Pietro in Montorio, and many more” (Dandelet 8-9). Eventually, there was a conflation of Renaissance Spain and Rome and its effects on “the Spanish imperial imagination and mentality” toward Rome. Spanish artists of the time “helped create and reflect a distinctly Spanish idea of Rome” (7). Rome’s history and culture thus became part of Spain’s history and culture, and vice-versa. It is quite likely that if it were not for the influx of Spanish power, money, and culture, driven by that connection to serving the Church, perhaps Rome would not have experienced the opulence of the Baroque era and, in turn, the success of the Counter-Reformation. “In short, Spanish imperialism and the Spanish hegemony in Rome after 1559 was a largely beneficent imperialism that helped build the city into the center of Catholic Reformation Europe.” Additionally, there is a “transformation of Roman Catholicism during the Catholic Reformation to a Catholicism with a Spanish face, a transformation that is largely unexamined but that had a decisive influence on the city of Rome and Roman Catholicism” during the Baroque (8, 12). This is crucial to understanding this project because if the efforts of the Church to create and
implement the Reformation were limited to Rome and did not have the financial and political support of the era’s mega-power, the changes likely would not have spread and could well have reduced the Catholic Church to a regional Italian religion. Rome’s presence through Europe, inherited from the Middle Ages and the Roman Empire, actually served it in a time of need and decline. The center of the religion needed buttressing, and it came from the regions of its former conquests from Empirical times. The myth of the power of the Church protected it—not to mention the enactment of that meta-narrative for 1,000 years. Spain could have simply invaded and taken over but did not. Because of its long history and dominant role within the great Roman Empire, the Church was held as sacred and respected by the Spanish. Because of this, they did not engage in a hostile, military takeover. It was a cultural assimilation in which the Spanish side became dominant. If Spain had not taken the tact of informal imperialism, we would likely be writing of the Spanish Catholic Church rather than the Roman Catholic Church, or perhaps not at all.

**St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits**

Among the attendees at the Council of Trent was a group, initiated by a Spaniard, that was relatively new to the Catholic organization but that was another important factor in the Reformation of the Catholic Church: The Jesuits. The founder of this order, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and his supporting companions who formed the Society of Jesus were officially approved of by Pope Paul III in 1540 and quickly gained a popular following. As John O’Malley asserts in his book *The First Jesuits*, we must be sure not to believe that the Jesuits were formed and approved by the Pope for the sole purpose of combatting the Protestant Revolution. Their primary purpose and goal, “to help souls” (18), was their
main concern, though their method of reaching and helping those souls has important implications in the reformed image and practices of the Catholic Church. Their practices contributed to a new ethos in the Church and among its followers which was in turn reinforced by art and literature of the time.

As noted, a general objection of the Protestant movement was that the Church had gone astray from the central tenets of the faith and that a return to the original teachings of Jesus and the apostles was in order. They also called for new or alternative interpretations of the Scriptures to seek their true meaning without the lens of a social and political power structure. These concepts were, to an extent, reflected in the central ideologies adopted by the Society of Jesus as well, but with continued obedience and loyalty to the Catholic Church. The success of the Protestant secession outside of the Church and the rapidity with which Ignatius and his practices were accepted within the Roman Catholic Church and the general populace that remained faithful to it suggests that this reclamation philosophy of Christianity met a social and spiritual need of the time. The reader will recall discussion above which illustrates the shift in focus from collective concerns and behavior to the rise of the role and importance of the individual during the Renaissance. It is worth repeating here that “The natural-divine law compromise, paired with the results of the proceedings of the Council of Trent held from 1545 to 1563, established new orientations by which to see and understand the workings of the world and the increased role of the individual within it. Rather than being casualties in the supernatural war between God and the devil, Man now had some role to play in his own fate” (Scarre qtd. in Jones 125). The reader will also recall that this change in perspective was reflected in the common interpretation of memento mori in art.
This change of focus onto the importance of the individual and the responsibility of the individual coincides with the most important writing of Ignatius, which is perhaps one of the most important writings in modern Catholicism.

St. Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* is the central text of the Jesuit Order and is a manual for personal spiritual development. The *Exercises* allows for the self-development and spiritual meditation of certain religious orders without demanding that the exercitant adopt an ecclesiastical existence for the duration of their life. Through Ignatius’s *Exercises*, the common person was able to have a stronger connection to the spiritual without sacrificing their earthly lifestyle. Although Ignatius was faithful to the Catholic organization and his *Spiritual Exercises* reflects Catholic beliefs and narratives, it was a new approach in spiritual development for the time in that it encouraged an intimate, personal relationship with God—as the Protestants desired also. Naturally, the entire situation was much more complex than addressing this one issue; however, what it points to is a strong need at the time that was being demanded by the Protestants and, given Ignatius’s success with the *Exercises*, desired by Catholics as well. Although a number of texts had an influence on Ignatius during his own spiritual development, the end result of his own program of development was unique at the time: “There can be no doubt that the governing ideas to which [Ignatius] gives expression in a way most original, had long been present in his mind—the conquest of the self for God, and our fellow-men to Jesus” (Barry 15). Spiritual development and the conquest of man’s sinful nature are central ideas to Catholic Christianity, but it was the approach and the detailed instruction for individuals to make a connection to without demanding that they devote

16 See Barry 13-15 and O’Malley 24-25.
themselves to a religious order that was developed fully by Ignatius. This development of internal reflection and personal responsibility in the laity would have direct effects on the creation and consumption of *memento mori* art of the time.

The limited period of retreat in order to perform Ignatius’s *Exercises* is a way for the exercitant to experience the re-centering benefits of isolated and devoted worship, but then return to society as a spiritually stronger individual within that community. In this way, it functions as monasticism does, but again, does not require the extended commitment of the exercitant. Ignatius’s *Exercises* is an instruction manual, not for the exercitant, but for the guide (O’Malley 37; Barthes 41), which allows for the exercitant to be free of any interference or distraction from his internal spiritual development. The exercitant need not try to comprehend the text, but it is transmitted to him so that he can focus on achieving its purpose. The Exercises are given under “conditions of retirement, silence, prayer, and self-denial; and in view of resolutions to be founded on Christian good sense with supernatural aid” (Barry 15). Though there is a guide, the most important aspect is that the Exercises are performed in isolation to enable inward focus and reflection that also enables the divine to work within that person as well. It creates an environment in which the exercitant can commune with God with no other interference in order to know His wisdom and guidance. The text of the *Spiritual Exercises* outlines a self-oriented program to be completed in the course of four weeks with a rigorous schedule of exercises that make up the entirety of each day (O’Malley 37). Despite its specific nature, it could be adjusted to fit the needs of the individual in consideration of the circumstances that caused the exercitant to wish to complete the Exercises: “Ignatius believed and inculcated that the Exercises could be expanded and contracted according to
the situation and needs of various individuals” (39, emphasis mine). It also took into consideration their personal lives and did not demand exclusivity: “For those who could not disengage themselves from their affairs to devote an entire week or month exclusively to the Exercises, the text also provides for simply setting aside an hour and a half daily for a number of days or weeks. The range of persons and situations the Exercises could accommodate was wide” (38). The needs of the individual were the focus of Ignatius’s program; it did not matter how the person achieved spiritual growth or the timeframe in which it was achieved. What was important was that it was completed: “If the purpose of that [First] Week was successfully achieved, the individual had found a new and happier orientation at the very core of their being and were thus set more firmly than before on the path to salvation” (Ignatius, Mullan 40). It was not the ritual itself that was of primary importance, but that it helped the individual to achieve an internal and spiritual change that created a positive influence that reoriented their life from the inside out.

The focus on the development of the individual is indicated from the very beginning of the Spiritual Exercises in the preamble of the Annotations, which states that its purpose is “To give some understanding of the spiritual exercises which follow, and to enable him who is to give and him who is to receive them to help themselves” (Ignatius, Mullan). In this statement, there are two subjects, the one who is to give and the one who is to receive. It is important to note that there are only two active agents working together in this wording. It is clear that the one who is to receive is the exercitant who engages in these exercises for spiritual development and enlightenment. It is through the actions of the exercitant, the individual, that spiritual growth is attained. The Spiritual Exercises are
meant to be a guide for that person, but it is not in itself a means to attain the goal. That accomplishment is up to the individual. It is assumed that the one who gives is someone of the Jesuit order who has been trained in administering the Exercises and who has undergone them himself. There is no wording, however, that makes this a requirement. There is also no mention of a specific authority of any sort of institutional organization who is involved. In fact, if one wished, one could interpret the meaning of the referent of the one who is to give as God himself. O’Malley states that “The purpose of the Exercises and the precondition for their successful outcome at every stage is to find oneself under the inspiration of God, … As was Ignatius himself at Manresa, the person making the retreat was to be ‘taught by God’” (O’Malley 42-43). A more direct example is in the Fifteenth Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises: “the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise, and disposing it for the way in which it will be better able to serve Him in the future” (Ignatius, Mullan). It also directs the guide to refrain from influencing the recipient in order to “leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord” (Ignatius, Mullan). This exemplifies the approach and philosophy of the Exercises as a personal endeavor that is between the individual and the divine.

This theology of developing, knowing, and keeping the divine within oneself through individual meditation and spiritual exercise was not new at the time. In fact, it would be hard to trace when this was a new idea as it precedes Christianity and is common to a great number of spiritual belief systems (O’Malley 46-47; Duling 130; Pagels xxx). It was very much present at the time of the formation of early Christianity and during the development of what would become the Roman Catholic Church. It is
possible that it was a more prevalent mode of spiritual existence preceding and at the
time that the founders of the Pauline orthodox structure of Christianity were fighting for
dominance in the religion (Pagels xxii). The Church founders did their best to eradicate
alternate, so-called heretical, forms of worship and spiritual practice and very nearly
succeeded. The texts associated with heretical worship were burned or at best not copied
at the time (Pagels xviii-xix; K. King 12). This would include any which preserved or
perpetuated the ideals of Gnosticism, which is founded on a personal, unmediated
relationship with God. Barthes states that “the theophany [Ignatius] is methodically
seeking is in fact a semiophany, what he is striving to obtain is more of the sign of God
than knowledge of Him or His presence” (Barthes 53), which is true. What this aims to
illustrate, however, is that this religious philosophy seeks to attain its purpose through the
actions and experiences of the individual. The wisdom that the person seeks is gained
through self-development which enables them to be a recipient of divine knowledge. In a
way, Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* are the method by which one can prepare and develop
oneself to connect to the divine as the ancient Gnostics sought to achieve, whether that
connection was the sign of God for “the management of one’s life for the salvation of the
soul” (Ignatius, First Annotation) or to achieve perfect peace by recognizing the divine
within (K. King 14).

In particular, Ignatius text refers to the development of the spirit within the
individual by the individual in order to overcome sin and to acquire peace. This is not to
say that Catholicism prior to Ignatius excludes the idea of a relationship between the
divine and followers of the faith. There is, however, quite a complicated order of
hierarchy that is perceived in Catholicism that includes a certain dependence on the status
of the clergy to act on behalf of the masses, as well as the idea that one should pray to the Saints in order to intercede and to present their prayers to the highest divinity. Ignatius does not contradict or undermine this structure, of course. When he does offer, however, is the opportunity for the individual to develop themselves spiritually and to improve their standing in this extensive hierarchy by developing a spiritual, mental, and emotional awareness of the divine and create a purified vessel for the divine to work in and through. This purification is achieved not just through confession, but through conscious meditation upon one’s transgressions, recognition of them, and a development of behavior modification in order to keep one from repeating those sins (Ignatius, Mullan, “Particular and Daily Examen and The General Examen of Conscience, First Week”). Sin is not something that is external, it is internal (K. King 13, BG 3 1-4). When one has control over this part of oneself, peace can be attained. The association that one should become content at heart and should acquire peace within also places the responsibility and development of this peace and contentment within the person who seeks it (K. King 14, BG 3:12, 4:2, 4:5-7). There are twelve mentions of peace in the Spiritual Exercises. Those of interest to this examination involve Peace in confession (Act of General Confession), finding peace in God (Second Week, Fourth Day, First Prelude), securing eternal salvation and peace (Note after Rules for Making Sound Selection), as part of consolation of the soul as it finds peace in its Creator and Lord (Third Rule regarding Different Movements which are Caused in the Soul), and cautioning against peace being taken away by the presence of an evil spirit that is allowed through faltering in diligence (Fifth Rule regarding the Greater Discernment of Spirits). It also appears within numerous quotes and sayings of Jesus that are given in the Exercises. This additionally
enforces the importance and goal of peace in the life of the exercitant, it being a result of having completed the program and maintaining its benefits. The *Exercises* indicate that peace is a reward for one who has undergone the spiritual development and mastery according to the program that is outlined in the text. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the freedom from sin and the peace that comes from it is something that is felt and achieved by the spirit of the individual. This concept of finding, developing, and nurturing internal peace is one which ties directly to and is reinforced through death iconography and *memento mori* imagery in the Baroque.

Although the spirit of the individual is of primary importance in Ignatius’s approaches, the significance of the mind and emotions is not neglected. As has been seen, the *Spiritual Exercises* guide one in controlling one’s thoughts and therefore behavior in order to align oneself with purity and the divine. Because the transformation begins with this concept, it is clear that Ignatius recognized the power of the mind and utilized it in order to assist exercitants in their spiritual development. In a number of the Exercises, the imagination is engaged at full capacity in order to create an understanding of the spiritual realm and the history of the presence of the divine in our earthly existence. Sensory engagement, either real and physical or through the activated imagination, naturally induces emotional responses. This is something also recognized and utilized by artists and writers of the Counter-Reformation. These emotional responses are the way for Ignatius’s exercitant to develop a spiritual understanding and calm, peaceful mastery of oneself. Barthes notes that the visions that are induced in the imagination of the exercitant are “‘scenes’ the exercitant is called upon to live out, as in a psychodrama … The exercitant is in fact called upon to invest himself in the narrative as well is in the
repetition. He is to repeat what depresses, consoles, *traumatizes*, enraptures him in each narrative; he is to live the anecdote by identifying himself with Christ” (Barthes 61, emphasis mine). This, then, returns back to the mind and creates understanding and knowledge. The reader will recall the discussion above in which a way of purging death anxiety and trauma is to confront it. Ignatius’s *Exercises* rely on this same method for helping individuals to find and maintain internal peace. Indeed, the third Prelude of the first day of the second week guides the exercitant to ask for what he wants, “it will be to ask for interior knowledge of the Lord” (Ignatius, Mullan). Note that this is not just knowledge as in information, nor is it blind faith, but internal knowledge, intuitive knowledge—personal knowledge, which brings peace and comfort amidst a world of chaos and uncertainty.

With the engagement of the mental, the simultaneous stimulation of the imagination is worth a moment of discussion in this analysis. It is important to note that the *Spiritual Exercises* are very brief in their instruction and do not give very many details as to what the exercitant should imagine in order to create the mental-emotional-spiritual developmental reaction noted above. It will be seen ahead that art and literature of the time relies on this same minimalism and ambiguity in order to encourage the audience to develop and find meaning within themselves, just as Ignatius’s program does. Often, Ignatius’s text simply notes a few sentences in most cases that offer a specific moment or concept familiar to readers of the Scriptures and then instructs them to contemplate upon it in order to derive meaning and benefit. It could be as brief as instruction number three under the first point of the first contemplation of the first day of the second week which instructs the exercitant to “see Our Lady, and the Angel who is
saluting her, and to reflect in order to get profit from such a sight” (Ignatius, Mullan). It could also be more developed, such as in the Exercise in which the exercitant goes through the full sensory engagement of experiencing Hell in the First Prelude of the Fifth Exercise in the First Week. It instructs the exercitant “to see with the sight of the imagination the length, breadth and depth of hell” (Ignatius, Mullan). That is quite a lot to imagine, yet the experience comes from within the exercitant by necessity. It is not forced upon them in detail from without either by text or through clergy. They are there merely to stimulate the mind and the senses, particularly in the following Exercises in the Meditation on Hell in which hearing, smell, taste, and touch are also provoked to heighten the imaginary experience. The guide and the Exercises present the subject upon which the exercitant will meditate, but then the experience and knowledge of it must be developed from within. In this way, the message behind such visions becomes internalized and personal. The emotions are invoked, and the message carries more meaning than it could otherwise:

… as voluntary action, speech energy, production of a formal system of signs, the Ignatian imagination thus can and must have an apotropaic function; it is first and foremost the power of repulsing foreign images; like the structural rules of a language—which are not normative rules—it forms an *ars obligatoria* that determines less what has to be imagined than what it is not possible to imagine—or what it is impossible not to imagine.

(Barthes 51)

As in scenes of films of romance or horror in which the screen fades to black at the moment of climax, what happens next is left up to each individual in the audience, and
therefore is all the more romantic or horrifying. Only an individual can incite images that garner the epitome of emotions that they can experience in imagined situations. Whether those visions come from the mind, the heart, a divine being, or perhaps all three, it becomes an intimate and personal experience and therefore more meaningful because it is experienced internally. This internal discovery and development is, again, at the heart of the rhetorical strategies employed by artists and writers at the time. The draw of their works is to come before them or enter into them willingly with an open mind and heart to try to discover the meaning and the deeper messages embedded within. This appeals to the spirit of individualism that was being developed at the time and gives the audience a sense of agency and control in their spiritual and personal development, rather than the messages being forced upon them with no room for interpretation.

**The Council of Trent**

Returning to our overall discussion, sacred relics and remains are not the only means by which the audience of the Church is reminded of their mortality and their duty as Christians. Naturally, there is a prevalence of *memento mori* in the painted and sculpted artworks of the Roman Catholic Church as well. One does not behold a painting in which the fragility and brevity of life is not in plain view to those who can read the paintings, and even more importantly, to those who cannot. The Church recognized the vital importance of reaching the people and clearly established their position in the Council of Trent, which established and codified the practices of the reformed Catholic Church.

The decree that is of importance to discussion here specifically occurred during the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent in December of 1563. The specific decree
is On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images. The
decree, translated by J. Waterworth, reads in part:

And the bishops shall carefully teach this, that, by means of the histories
of the mysteries of our Redemption, portrayed by paintings or other
representations, the people is instructed, and confirmed in (the habit of)
remembering, and continually revolving in mind the articles of faith; as
also that great profit is derived from all sacred images, not only because
the people are thereby admonished of the benefits and gifts bestowed upon
them by Christ, but also because the miracles which God has performed
by means of the saints, and their salutary examples, are set before the eyes
of the faithful; that so they may give God thanks for those things; may
order their own lives and manners in imitation of the saints; and may be
excited to adore and love God, and to cultivate piety. But if any one shall
 teach, or entertain sentiments, contrary to these decrees; let him be
anathema. … And if at times, when expedient for the unlettered people; it
happens that the facts and narratives of sacred Scripture are portrayed and
represented; the people shall be taught, that not thereby is the Divinity
represented, as though it could be seen by the eyes of the body, or be
portrayed by colours or figures. … Moreover, in the invocation of saints,
the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, every superstition
shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished; finally, all lasciviousness
be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a
beauty exciting to lust; nor the celebration of the saints, and the visitation
of relics be by any perverted into revellings and drunkenness; as if
festivals are celebrated to the honour of the saints by luxury and
wantonness. … (235, 236)

In this excerpt, the key element to extract for this analysis is the recognition that works of
art cause people to introspect and meditate, “revolving in mind;” that is, internally the
lessons and messages of the mythologies embedded in the images—the mythologies that
help us to remember the wisdom they contain. The art causes people to ruminate and be
grateful, steering the mind toward the positive and to expel fear and uncertainty. The
faithful are given responsibility in this decree, “order[ing] their own lives,” and garnering
faith, piety, and love within themselves based on the received messages from the didactic
imagery. The importance of this was recognized and understood to the point that the
Council members made sure to assert that “great profit is derived from all sacred things.”

Lutherans, Calvinists, and Papists

The declaration in the decree on Sacred Images asserting with finality that profit
is derived from sacred things is a double-pronged statement. Not only was it reinforcing
the importance of rhetorical art, objects, and writing, but this segment of the decree was
defending such art and objects in direct reaction to Protestant iconoclasm. This was
another major factor that influenced the Catholic Reformers and their approach to art,
image, and poetic vision. Catholic leaders recognized the validity in the reaction to the
Protestant decrees regarding the excesses of art, but they were not willing to go so far as
the Protestants did in their policies regarding what was acceptable in imagery, and most
certainly would not go so far as the iconoclasm of Calvinism. Bridget Heal’s article,
“‘Better Papist than Calvinist’: Art and Identity in Later Lutheran Germany” explains the
struggle that Protestants had not just with Catholics regarding imagery, but also among themselves. An understanding of the environment that contributed to the construction of Protestant regulations of imagery will provide a contrast by which we can see the reason for the important changes we see in Catholic art of the time and the finesse by which it was tempered, yet still retained its Catholic essence.

Heal explains that “At the start of the Reformation, scripture and images appeared to be in conflict with one another. With sola scriptura as their rallying cry, many of the early evangelical reformers attacked religious art in a bid to eliminate superstition and idolatry” (584). Martin Luther himself was not opposed to images, but he did argue for temperance in their presentation: “But even while [Luther] affirmed their commemorative and didactic value, he reduced their spiritual significance” (584). As we have seen above, memetic corrections of this strength often cause the metaphorical pendulum to swing far to the opposite side before settling into balance. Release from oppression or the temperance of excess will cause those in favor of the movement to over-indulge, as it were, and over-correct in their attempt to seize upon and protect what was denied before. This occurred in the branch of Protestantism that came to be known as Calvinism. This was the extreme counter-active response to Catholicism when resistance became so prolific that it was no longer a direct danger to individuals or groups. Heal argues in her article overall that “the threat of Calvinism played a key role in embedding not only rituals but also images in Lutheran ecclesiastical life” (587). The Lutherans were caught between the rejected Roman Catholicism and the extreme pole of Calvinist Protestantism. They were trying to find the balance between the two and struggled to find their place. Heal illustrates the internal struggle of Lutherans in the chaos of revolution and the
impossibility of seeing something as complex as religion as being able to, or better *only* able to, exist in an all-or-nothing dichotomy. A large part of the conundrum they faced centered on images. They were caught between the two poles: “For Lutheran theologians, it was as wrong to compel images’ removal as it was to compel their worship. Once again, this conviction dated back to the early years of the Reformation—to Luther’s response to Karlstadt’s iconoclasm—but it was given extra urgency in the later sixteenth century by the Calvinists’ actions” (593). Although Lutheranism issued a call to a return to simpler Christianity cleansed of complexities, excess, and rigid dogma, it was not meant to be a complete rejection of Catholicism. It was a call for reform that eventually became a rift due to irreconcilable differences, as discussed above. With regard to imagery specifically:

> Although Luther would initially have preferred to see religious images fall from favour, he quickly realized their value not only as teaching aids but also as marks of confessional identity: the survival of traditional images, and the installation of new ones, distinguished Lutheran churches from those of the so-called ‘enthusiasts’, proponents of more radical reform.

(588)

Even with this intention, the Lutheran movement still sought to clearly separate itself from Catholicism with regard to images. Rather than omit images completely, “the immediate post-Reformation [Lutheran] trend towards relatively simple images, adorned with frequent inscriptions and concerned more with clarity than illusion, is undeniable”
This was the original path that Lutheranism sought, but it struggled against resistance within leadership, as well as resistance from its followers, when they tried to decide where to place the movement in the middle of Catholicism and Calvinism. It might have placed itself contently if the Calvinists had not adhered to the all-or-nothing ideal that is can be a characteristic of Abrahamic religion in its most conservative forms. The Calvinists could not tolerate the Catholic Church, nor any organization which resembled it—and that would be any organization that was not part of their own ideological structure: “the advance of Calvinism, with its ‘sacramentarian’ attacks on traditional liturgy and images, was perceived as an immediate threat to the Lutheran faith” (591). In response, Lutheran leadership began to refine their definitions of acceptable art in a way that echoes statements made in the Decree of the Council of Trent quoted above.

A Lutheran provost, Simon Gedicke, wrote in 1615 in defense of images, saying that they should be preserved because “The simple folk understand the Word better if it is not only preached to the ears but also painted for the eyes” and that “their memory will be helped and they will remember the spoken Word when they look at the painted stories” (qtd. in Heal 593). Similarly, Heal points out that Johann Arndt saw images as having didactic and commemorative value. In his writing *Ikonographia*, written in 1596, Arndt “looked for a new theology and practice of image devotion, emphasizing in particular the correspondence between outer (physical) and inner (spiritual) images: ‘what you see externally will be represented in your heart by the Holy Spirit’. An image’s

---

17 Ironically, Heal discusses later that 200 years later, Lutheranism returned to elaborate décor. This came from, Heal suggests, “During the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries … encounters with Calvinism played an especially important role in deepening Lutherans’ attachment to images” (587).
role was much more than merely didactic; it carried religious feeling and truth” (595).

This is a recognition of affect, in the sense of Spinoza who was writing at the time, created by art and how it serves a positive function for religion. It does more than instruct or just pass on stories, it incites emotion that allows the viewer to access the mythological Truths the stories and images hold. It was too powerful and important a means of access to the divine to dismiss it completely: “While the direct impact of the Ikonographia was probably limited, the broader emphasis on inner spirituality and on mystical union with Christ promulgated by Arndt and his successors (and eventually taken up by the Pietist movement) undoubtedly had great appeal, and perhaps goes some way towards explaining the iconographic simplicity and emotionalism of much later Lutheran art, …” (595, emphasis mine). We have seen this inner spirituality and mystical union in Catholic innovation at the time in the discussion of Ignatius’s The Spiritual Exercises. This shows that there was a need in human spirituality and religious identity that was no longer being met by the Catholic Church and which was one of the causes of the movement for Reformation. Again, Lutherans sided more with Catholicism and used a modified form of the Catholic imagery to suit their ideological goals: “The Lutheran desire to appropriate Catholic visual forms … certainly indicates a readiness to use images not just as pedagogical aids but also as instruments of spiritual awakening. … Many of the artists working for Lutheran patrons looked to great baroque masters such as Gianlorenzo Bernini and Peter Paul Rubens for inspiration” (607). This again shows that Lutheranism was not a complete rejection of Catholicism, but an attempt at the reform that was needed to prevent the faith from fragmenting completely.
Religious leaders were not the only ones to determine levels of acceptability in the changes that were being enacted. One of the corrections that was needed in the Church was the return to the importance of the faithful. This not only included internal spiritual responsibility and development, as mentioned above, but their direct participation and voice in establishment of the new religious order. Again, the power of artistic affect was not lost on those who were structuring their ideal religious structure:

Gedicke and Taurer agreed: iconoclasm would ‘annoy the simple folk without reason’ (Gedicke); images should be allowed to remain ‘so that the simple people will not be made angry and scared away from the true service of God [Gottesdienst]’ (Taurer). Finally, the belief that images had an affective role, that they could engage the hearts of the faithful, was of increasing significance. ‘What someone sees with his own eyes’, wrote Gedicke in his Calviniana Religio, ‘goes deep into his heart and moves him’. Of course, agency in this process was ascribed not to the image itself but to the Holy Spirit. A man’s heart would be stirred, argued Taurer, when he contemplated images of Christ or other Biblical stories ‘through the movement of the Holy Spirit’. The affective role ascribed to images gained particular currency against the backdrop of the movement for the renewal of piety … (Heal 594)

Heal describes a number of examples in her writing of rebellion by the followers of Lutheranism when the question of the removal of imagery was faced. The people strongly resisted it, to the point of violence if it was too extreme, as in the case in the debate over the Wolgemut altarpiece in Zwickau (590). The laypeople played a key role in buffering
over-correction in the adjustment and development period of the Protestant Reformation. These strong reactions show the personal investment that they had in the process and also shows the internal connection they had with their religion that they sought to develop, not to surrender again to a new form of extremism. Heal notes that “the fact that popular resistance coalesced around the attempted reform of liturgy … and iconoclasm suggests that for many Lutherans it was above all their day-to-day religious life that was at stake” (596). This personal connection was strongly rooted in the art and imagery that was interwoven with their spiritual and religious life. To take that away would be to take away their religion and their connection to their god. This was recognized as a necessary part of the structure of religion by Lutherans and so it remained. Heal clarifies that:

The elaborate altarpieces and other furnishings that adorned not only court chapels but also numerous parish churches should not be understood, despite their affinities with contemporary Catholic visual culture, as a blurring of the confessional boundary between Lutheran and Catholic. Rather, they expressed the true, evangelical church’s continued confidence in its ability to tread a proper path between iconophobia and idolatry.

(609)

The ordinary people are the key element in understanding the struggle experienced by all Christians during this tumultuous time. They looked to, and demanded of, their spiritual leaders to cultivate their personal, inner relationship with God. This is true of Catholics as well as Lutherans. Taking the time to understand the experience of the Lutheran Reformation illustrates the desires of followers and one aspect, though critical, of their demands and expectations for reform. As we have seen, the Catholic Church responded
in the Council of Trent and did not disappoint their followers in their revised approach to art and imagery.

**Relevance**

A foundation has now been laid which will allow us to come before some of the great works of spiritual and political rhetoric of the Counter-Reformation ourselves. Now that we have an appreciation for the adjustments that were made to the Roman Catholic approach to art in the Reformation and how drastic they were, we can take a close look at specific examples in art that most clearly show this adaptive shift. With our expanded awareness of the myriad forces at work during the time and the dominant institutions that influenced and allowed the creation of these masterpieces, we can see beyond the surface and not just comprehend the embedded messages but understand their function in the greater narrative of history, politics, economics, culture, religion, spirituality, and overall, humanity.
CHAPTER 4. SCULPTURE—BERNINI AND THE CAPUCHIN CHAPEL

The Baroque went after you with all the arts at once …. (Januszczak 13:21-13:34).

Bernini and the Monument to Pope Alexander VII

We will pick up the conversation of tomb sculpture where Panofsky leaves off—with Bernini. The tomb of Alexander VII, executed between 1671 and 1678, is Bernini’s last and arguably greatest work. It is exemplary of tomb sculpture moving from the Renaissance of Michelangelo to the Baroque with Bernini. Panofsky credits the magnificence of Michelangelo’s work as the reason for a paucity of exemplary tomb monuments until the time of Bernini. It seems that artists, with some exceptions of course, were largely intimidated by the Master’s work and did not hope to come close to his achievements. Panofsky states that they were “confronted with the hopeless choice between either trying to rival Michelangelo, … or by-passing him” (93). Whatever the reason for the lack of success in others, Bernini picks up the reins in true Baroque style. Panofsky identifies that he not only “accomplished a fusion of painting and sculpture,” as Bernini’s own son claimed, but Panofsky adds that “in addition to abolishing the borderline between two different media, Bernini defied a number of other even more essential barriers: the barriers between empirical time and metaphysical time (or eternity); the barriers between pleasure and pain; and, ultimately, the barriers between life and death” (93). This observation most certainly reinforces the rhetorical power of Bernini’s work, whether specifically intended or not. Even today, Bernini’s work inspires
awe and wonder. How is it possible that solid marble can be made to look like living flesh, flowing textiles, and fragile, gauzy veils? The inability to immediately identify and define what we are seeing lends an other-worldly patina to the works. It transcends art and crosses into the sublime, which is also indicative of the eternal. Panofsky discusses the example of a memoria in San Lorenzo in Lucina by Bernini, saying that it “seems to cross the borderline between life on earth and life in heaven by way of an inward rather than an outward miracle—a visionary experience in the flesh rather than an apotheosis in effigy” (93). Panofsky also speaks of a memoria to Alessandro Valtrini, explaining that “in Bernini’s world the very power that puts an end to life bestows immortality, not only in a spiritual but even in a temporal sense” (94). Indeed, these perspectives can clearly be applied to the monument to Alexander VII as well. They are not hidden within Bernini’s work; they are clear and present, striking the observer with this impression whether they be a scholar of the arts or the simplest paisan. This is rhetoric in continuous action over centuries.

We shall join and continue the conversation that Panofsky presents, focusing with the iconographic interpretation of the monument to Alexander VII. The monument to Pope Alexander the VII, who died in 1667, is in the left transept of the Cathedral of St. Peter’s (fig. 12). This immense sculpture has the Pope in prayer as the central figure. Surrounding him on four corners are personifications of the Virtues embodied in the
Pope—Charity, Truth, Prudence, and Justice. Below these figures, coming up through a shroud of red marbled Sicilian jasper is a bronze figure. It is a winged skeleton raising an hourglass in its right hand (fig. 13). The face is obscured by the marble shroud, but its left hand is in the act of pushing the shroud away, only a moment from revealing its face to the Pope to claim him and enact his role as the Pope’s guide to the afterlife.


---

18 It should be noted that Prudence, by G. Cartari, and Justice, by L. Balestri who are behind, were added later. Arranged En carreau (Panofsky 94), Bernini himself had a hand, at least, in the statue of the Pope: “He probably put the finishing touches to the face. Charity was carried out by Giuseppe Mazzuoli between May 1673 and November 1675; Truth first by Lazzaro Morelli between November 1673 and December 1674, when the figure was handed over to Giulio Cartari, Bernini's favourite, who finished it between April and November 1675. Michele Maglia, a Romanized Frenchmaan, was responsible for the figure of the Pope” (Wittkower 295-96).
Fig. 13. Details of Tomb of Alexander VII by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1678, St. Peter’s Cathedral, Vatican City, Rome. Photo by Amanda Dutton, June 2016.

Panofsky interprets this figure as a destroyer (95), yet I would argue that its position and partial obscurity suggest a different message, especially in light of the question of this study. It can be seen that this personification of Death is not a destroyer, but a psychopomp proper. He is the messenger. Death ushers the living into the afterlife, merely facilitating the process, not creating it. If Death were a destroyer, the image would be more threatening and visible—above the Pope or at least overshadowing him menacingly, as in medieval predecessors. Here he is subsumed. I wish to suggest additional possibilities of interpretation to elaborate upon and, in some cases, contrast
Panofsky. This is not to overturn or replace his and other interpretations, but to suggest additional rhetorical workings and meaning that the work contains. The reader will be reminded of the lengthy discussion above which clarifies the specific definitions and working of allegory and its relationship to metaphor and symbolism. This work exemplifies all of these rhetorical devices.

With that in mind, the entire allegory is created by the individual personifications portrayed. In addition to seeing the figure of Death as a destroyer, Panofsky also adds that Death plays an indirect, yet conspicuous part “in a task of glorification and vindication the overt part of which has devolved upon the shoulders of one of the four personifications” (95). Panofsky further states that the personification in question, Truth, as shocking to 17th c. moralists. This figure does not belong to the others, says Panofsky, as the others are Virtues. Truth, he says, “was hardly ever considered to be a Virtue,” and that it does not personify “a maxim of commendable conduct.” Rather, she personifies the object and aim of a virtue (94-95). Of course, if Truth was “hardly ever” portrayed in this manner, it indicates exceptions, which this example may be one. It is reasonable to consider that Truth was a salient concern at the time, considering the political and religious environment of the time given the Protestant Revolution. One of the basic tenets of Christianity as a monotheistic religious system claims that there is only one God, one Truth, and one true religion (The New Oxford Annotated Bible, John 14:6; Exod. 20:1-11). This religion, seen as being united for the past thousand years, was suddenly split in an unprecedented way, so the question of Truth—which side was true Christianity and which had gone astray—was of great concern at the time. In relation to this, Panofsky discusses the representation of Time with the hourglass that Death holds as symbolizing
the triumph of Truth over Time as the sun in Truth’s arm is on the same level with
Death’s hourglass (95). As we saw in the above discussion of allegory and metaphor, the
multiple personifications combined with surrounding symbolic objects create a narrative
that points to Truth that is more than the sum of the individual parts. The globe of the
Earth is held and steadied under the foot of Truth, another clear metaphorical message
told in symbolic terms. All of this would be reassuring to a Catholic audience. With Faith
being the core of Christian belief, this imagery encourages followers to have Faith, which
with Time, will be rewarded with the revelation of Truth. The Church was facing a
tremendous challenge at the time, but as with all things, the True Church, founded on the
rock of the true Apostle, would prevail. Additionally, as noted above, the aesthetic and
natural space in this monument is blurred as the sarcophagus is through the door that is
below Death. Naturally, this is continuing the visual and spatial concept of the
underworld and afterlife, although the soul in Christianity ascends to Heaven. As Jesus
himself experienced, we must be laid low in Death before we can ascend to eternal life.
That is the end that we can perceive in the temporal world, but Bernini again visually
temper the power of Death in the monument in that “the two personifications in front
[Death and Truth] so vigorously overlap the lateral boundaries of the niche that they seem
to belong quite literally, in two worlds” (94). The impression reflects and proves the
reality in a believer’s mind.

Panofsky identifies a change in previous mortuary sculpture of the time in that the
figure of Pope is not standing as previous effigies do. Instead, Alexander VII is on his
knees in prayer—a priant, as such figures are identified in tomb sculpture. There is also a
difference in that he is presented in a frontal view, not in profile, “as if praying for the
whole of Christianity” as per Wittkower, quoted in Panofsky (94). As stated above, I would like to suggest the following iconological interpretation to present an alternative or additional interpretation that is embedded in the symbology and iconography of the Monument. The standard skeleton cannot represent anything else but Death, especially with his wings (reduced, by the way) and, of course, the hourglass showing Alexander that his time is up. This is very much a memento mori, but there is hope in viewing the image as the Pope is not concerned about the figure that is emerging below him. He is looking forward, literally and symbolically, to the place he will go in symbolic terms. As Death is beneath him (also literally and figuratively), one can even wonder if the Pope will see the figure since his gaze is so piously fixated forward to the glory of God that he is about to experience. The shrouding of Death’s face has an ameliorating effect as well.

Panofsky counters Bernini’s biographer who claimed that Death hides his face from shame “of having deprived the world of so admirable a pope” (95). Panofsky reads, rather, that Death is forced into obscurity “by a power transcending that of even a Virtue: the sun of Truth” (95). This being the more ideological or metaphysical interpretation, it is more agreeable, and I would say more likely, than that of the propagandistic version. That is certainly possible in the immediate time of the work, but the message for posterity is much deeper. I wish to add that Death’s face is for the Pope alone to see since it is not our time to see him. There is no fear in it and no horror. There is just enough that we see of it that we understand what is happening, but it is not the focus of the work and, of course, the other figures of the Virtues hold a more central place in the work.

Prudence and Justice are looking out and away—they will continue on even after our passing if we have them as part of our lives. Charity is looking up in admiration of
the Pope to reinforce her importance as a Virtue in the lives of the holy. Of the four figures, only Truth looks down upon the figure rising through the shroud. Indeed, Truth is possibly one of only few who can look upon Death so realistically. It is the truth that all will eventually die and we need to acknowledge that truth. It is inevitable, but we needn’t be afraid of it. The moment in which the figure of Death is captured holds significance and meaning that can be interpreted in at least two ways. The first is that we are viewing the Pope in the last moment of his life and, as a good Christian and leader of the religion, he is spending that moment in pious prayer, surrounded by his capital Virtues, including Truth. We know that he will go to meet his god with a clean and pure soul, seated on the right hand, with all the honors due to one who served as Christ on Earth. His is a symbolized image of a Good Death. Another way to read the image is that Death cannot show its face in this holiest of places. The entire basilica is devoted to the comfort and hope of its followers, reassuring them that death is not to be feared and that its moment in our lives is brief. The position of Death, its hidden face, and that the Pope and the Virtues are not looking at it nor responding to it illustrates the “softening” of Death iconography. These figures have complete faith in God and so Death holds no fear for them with the message being that it is the same for all who do likewise. Rather than scaring people into the faith, they were persuaded by reassurance and hope of eternal happiness.

**The Bone Chapel of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappucini**

Contrasting the reduced image of death in the Monument of Alexander VII is the surrounding presence of death in a Roman ossuary adjacent to a modern, chic hotel that bears Bernini’s name and the *piazza* that is named for his patron family, the Barberinis. One of the more bizarre, macabre, and yet beautiful sculptural tributes to death in
Baroque Roman-Catholic art is the Bone Chapel that is part of the Capuchin Order in the church of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini. In this living monument to the dead, the bones of deceased monks have been used to decorate the walls and vaulted ceilings of four of the five chapels of the church’s main floor catacombs (masses are still actively performed in one). Though this particular work does focus largely on skeletal representation, this is not a dark, dank, underground world of fear. It is very much a part of the living world and its operations. The underworld is present, however, in that the remains of deceased brothers have been carefully and artfully nailed to the walls and ceiling of each chapel, creating a work of art in each one. They are not threatening the viewer or anyone around them; they are quiet, but quite real, reminders that death will always come, but it can be beautiful. The reader will recall the discussion of the living dead in the mind of medieval culture. They are highly present, but still reduced in their horrific impact once the viewer recovers from the initial shock of being surrounded by skeletal remains. The brothers remain to serve the brotherhood here on earth, and so they are in perpetual bliss, serving their god in heaven and also serving his followers on earth in death. One can only hope to share a small part of this reward by leading a good Christian life. Death is not the end—for us or for those we care about.

The Capuchin chapels are in one long row, joined by a hall that runs one side of their length. A visitor is struck by the clean, white arches, well-lit by crown-glass windows on the walls opposite the chapels. This monument is very much a part of the living world and its operations. Some chapels have the whole skeletons of monks lying in state, surrounded by walls decorated with femurs, thighs, and arms, among other skeletal anatomy. In another, the brothers stand respectfully to the side, still in their robes, their
grinning skulls bowed humbly in prayer as they attend the newly dead who are laid to rest in the soil on the floor (fig. 14).

Fig. 14. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome. Wikimedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capuchin_Crypt

If the story is true, the soil on the floor in which the once-newly dead were interred is from the holy land of Palestine, some perhaps from Jerusalem itself (Cordovani 143), so the dead have that honor credited to them to give more to the positive side of the eternal ledger, so to speak. Traditionally, older remains were exhumed and added to the carefully-laid piles of bones in the rooms while newly-deceased brothers were buried in the soil until a much later time when their remains could join the others’ in the artistic structure of the rooms. The bones were utilized with no regard for keeping individuals’ corpses together, excepting those that do remain
whole. It is the type of bone that creates the artwork—femurs and thighs make floral patterns framed with spinal vertebrae, sacrum create ornate arches over bowed figures, and ribs form delicate loops and circles around other patterns (fig. 15).

Fig. 15. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome. Wikimedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capuchin_Crypt

All have a distinctly Baroque feel to their design and it is judged that the ossuary became a work of art sometime in the 18th century (The Capuchin Museum 145). The ornamentation in each chapel is designed to enhance and draw the eye to a central work in each. In one, there is a likeness of the angel of death on the ceiling. It is the skeleton of a child turned into what we would recognize as the Grim Reaper as it holds a scythe. In lieu of an hourglass are scales with which to assess the dead. This particular figure acts as a memento mori and a reminder that one must be judged before entering one’s eternal existence. Just below is a scene with another three small skeletons. On each side of them

---

19 This subject is of interest to pursue elsewhere given the Laterine dogma of the resurrection of the dead and the scriptures and exegesis in which it is declared that the actual physical body will be restored.
are hourglasses with wings, utilizing the familiar thanatological iconography to remind us that time is swift (figs. 16 and 17).

Fig. 16. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome. Wikimedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capuchin_Crypt

Fig. 17. Capuchin Museum, Bone Chapel of the Capuchins, 1331 ff. Rome. Wikimedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capuchin_Crypt
Unfortunately, the records concerning the principal artist behind this unusual homage to life and death were lost. The lack of definitive knowledge elevates this sacred place even more into the realm of the sacred and mythological as one must simply see and believe that it was for a very noble reason. The brothers who devoted their lives to the service of the church continue their service in death and so are given a tangible, visible purpose and agency that is still active in their brotherhood despite the fact that the state of their physical existence has changed. Since they remain to serve the brotherhood here on earth, surely their reward in heaven is commensurate. One can only hope to share a small part of this reward by leading a good Christian life. The trauma of the loss of these brothers is alleviated by their continued service to their god and the church itself despite their death. The living also serve and honor them by attending to their posthumous state, rather than burying and forgetting them. This confers the additional benefit of humility by active recognition that “Quello che voi siete noi eravamo; quello che noi siamo voi sarete …”\textsuperscript{20} as the placard in the Crypt of the Three Skeletons (recall “The Three Living and The Three Dead”) declares. The pain of parting and the fear of one’s own mortality is alleviated when one can see that death is not really the end if you believe as the Catholics do.

\textsuperscript{20} Translation: “What you are now we used to be; what we are now you will be …"
CHAPTER 5. PAINTING—CARAVAGGIO AND CORTONA

Caravaggio—St. Jerome Writing

The artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) made waves in more ways than one in his time. In “Baroque: From St. Peter’s to St. Paul’s,” Waldemar Januszczak defends the artist from his contemporary slanderers and their stories of sexual deviancy and scandal, saying that Caravaggio has been misunderstood: “What rubbish has been spouted about Caravaggio … Th[e] demonic image of Caravaggio annoys me like nothing else in the Baroque world, … We are starting to see him again for what he was—the most important religious painter of the Counter-Reformation” (12:58-13:15).

Caravaggio’s artistic style differed from his predecessors’ in that he brought the sacred and ethereal into the mortal and contemporary. Religious scenes were portrayed with realistic people, the faces of the day, in the clothes and surroundings of the day. It made the religious not only accessible, but showed it in action, alive in the here and now, not in some ancient holy time and place that is no longer accessible. Januszczak states that before Caravaggio, religious art was “out there.” With Caravaggio, it shifted to exist in “the right now; close enough to touch” (13:41-13:59). The Caravaggio Foundation concurs, stating that “intense realism or naturalism” is what Caravaggio is now most famous for:

He preferred to paint his subjects as the eye sees them, with all their natural flaws and defects instead of as idealised creations. This allowed a full display of Caravaggio's virtuosic talents. This shift from accepted
standard practice and the classical idealism of Michelangelo [Buonarrotti] was very controversial at the time. Not only was his realism a noteworthy feature of his paintings during this period, he turned away from the lengthy preparations traditional in central Italy at the time. Instead, he preferred the Venetian practice of working in oils directly from the subject - half-length figures and still life. (“Biography of Caravaggio”)

This is a focal point for our analysis of *memento mori* specifically. The realistic portrayal of the abstract pulled iconography from the complex allegorical back into the calmer realm of the metaphorical, even when images were allegorical, as we will see with Cortona below. This softening of imagery in the art of the time is exactly the mechanism under study here and is reflective of similar changes in doctrine achieved during the Tridentine Council. Caravaggio “did everything the Council of Trent demanded of its artists. He created a vivid new religious art that spoke to the people in a language they could effortlessly understand. A language that moved them and changed them, …” (Januszczak 13:21-13:34). As we have seen, the Church leaders who participated in the Tridentine Council were well aware of the importance of art and literature in the conveyance and preservation of their religious ideals. The rhetorical accessibility that they decreed was a deliberate move. It is the memetic corrective discussed above, though they would not identify it as such, and was intended to ameliorate the image of the Church and to gently influence the minds and hearts of the people; most importantly, as noted, whether they were “lettered” or not. The rhetorical brilliance in this new approach to artistic portrayal lies in the fact that one need only know that a figure, based on surrounding iconography of writing utensils, a desk, a book, and a halo is St. Jerome,
thoughtful and pensive with a skull on the table, as in Caravaggio’s *St. Jerome Writing* (fig. 18).


This is not to say that previous art did not employ semiology in surroundings of course, but again, the presentation became less abstract and placed such imagery in a realistic setting. The Saint diligently at work is a clear message that whatever one does that mortality will always catch up and that one must be right with God when one’s end comes—soon and unexpectedly as is most often the case. One cannot be distracted by earthly pursuits, nor think that they will be overlooked by Death. Diligence and
Constance are virtues that one must hold in order to outlive death when it comes and, of course, one must have devotion to the Church, obedience, and fiscal support of it as well.

Jerome’s importance in history lies in his scholarly work, as can be deduced by most representations of the saint. His work includes a Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible in 383 C.E. based on the Septuagint Greek versions being used at the time (“Vulgate”). Along with indicating the end of life and the end of work, the closed book in the painting could indicate the loss of his library in Bethlehem when it was sacked in 416 C.E. but reinforces that his work and memory would still survive, as God would ensure of any holy work. We are not sure how much time Jerome has left in this painting, but death is creeping up long before his work is done, it seems. There is no clothing on Jerome but the shroud, perhaps indicating that we go out as we came in—swaddled or shrouded, so it reminds us of the futility of earthly possessions and titles. The leather spine of the closed book is worn, but the pages of the open books are clean. Similarly, his quill is worn, the rachis of the feather splintered, the barbs all gone but for a few that are so beaten that they are hard to discern. This indicates the great amount of time that he has dedicated to his work, but also shows diligence and thoroughness in his work. It will be noted that the books pictured are in contemporary format as they are printed and bound, rather than in scroll form or sewn vellum tomes. It will be recalled that this is a feature of Caravaggio’s art that was ground-breaking for the time. Though the technology is modern, the ancient word is still the same and still relevant.

St. Jerome himself, particularly his face and mouth, is shadowed and unclear. Most illuminated is his bald head which is an artistic indication of wisdom that reinforces the illumination of his mind. The tone of the skin of his head seems healthier compared to
his main body, which is pale. The viewer’s focus is drawn to areas of strength—literally and figuratively—which are his hand (writing) and head (thinking). We can see that his umbilicus is nearly undiscernible, which may be another sign of age, but also draws a parallel to the First Man, Adam, and his telluric creation, indicating closeness to God. Jerome holds the book up to read closely, showing how deeply he is going into the subject matter. He is reading and thinking closely, ruminating on the word of God to ensure that it is conveyed accurately. There is close proximity of his head to his hand and the book. This is a structure of the Fibonacci sequence, discussed at length below, but on the surface, there is a visual link of thought, knowledge, and wisdom to printed books.

The intense gaze of Jerome and his furrowed brow create a sense of urgency as he works. Again, death is closer than he may realize, but even as his body (hand) is drawn to or inclines toward death, his hand not at rest, and hangs on a balance point. Jerome is closer than he realizes to Death—his right hand is very close, but he is still quite focused on life, on the right side of the painting which he inhabits, with death inhabiting the left side. It seems that if his hand gets to and touches the skull, Jerome will rest his head on his book from his stooped position and pass into eternal life. Yet it also looks as though it could pull back at the last second when he finds something to mark or write. His work keeps him alive. His beard, bald pate, and the state of his physical body show him at an advanced age, but his concentration and the muscle definition that we see show that he is still strong. Though death may be near, he will work diligently for God and the Church until he no longer can—just as all good Christians should. Jerome’s thumbs point in the same direction, in the same position but reversed. A line drawn through them goes straight to the vacuous and ominous gaze of the skull and Death, here only slightly
personified and represented more symbolically than in full personification. Along with his arm and right hand, the pen that Jerome holds is pointed toward the closed book, which may be another indication that his time is almost done, though his work will survive. There is a sequential line from death (left) to pen to book to life (right), reinforcing the idea that writing bridges life and death. Our good works and words of wisdom can survive death even if we cannot. It should be noted that there is no source of light that can be seen by which Jerome is reading. This is typical of Caravaggio’s work, as there is not a single candle in any of his paintings. The left side of the painting’s background is backlit, which creates chiaroscuro effect that Baroque art is known for. This technique further reinforces the dichotomy between life and death, but the addition of any additional objects, no matter how reasonable, would upset the mathematical perfection of this work.

**Fibonacci and Numerology**

As with most, if not all, great works of the Renaissance and Baroque, there is much more complexity to the composition of *St. Jerome Writing* than appears at first glance. It is worth an extended reading to extract as much as we might from this painting, and it is worth delving deeper into a reading of the painting to suggest the possibilities and to illustrate the genius of Caravaggio’s work. When first viewing the painting, the viewer’s attention is immediately taken by the bright segments of the painting to the left, right, and to a red triangle with a peak just above the very center of the painting made by the red shroud. It is composed of three triangles itself, one dark right triangle (or apparently so to the naked eye) in the center of the triangle, a red right triangle on the left, and one obtuse triangle on the right. It achieves balance despite the differences in shape.
and angles. Triangles, of course, are indicative of completeness, especially in relationship to the theology of the Trinity—three parts make a complete whole. This can be seen in the overall triangle that the three triangles make as well as in the three sides in each of the individual triangles. There is a suggestion of infinity in the repetition of shape and angle to create a bigger version of the same and in particular with the center triangle being black. This is also accomplished in the component of the Fibonacci sequence, discussed below. The triangles in the cloth that are right angles contrast black and red; the red (life) on the left toward death, the dark (death) on the right toward Jerome. This transposition of representative symbology creates additional contrast and can also be seen as indicating a message similar to that of yin-yang—there is life in death and death in life. Both are needed to achieve balance. Once we recognize this pattern, closer study of the image will lead one to notice a reflective triangle made by the spine of the open book. If a mirror is held to the bottom edge of the red triangle of cloth, the reflection overlays and matches another triangle in the same angle and shape formed by the book below. The point of Jerome’s quill is at the point of another triangle made of shadow and formed by the edges of the books just below death’s gaze. The quill is the only strong vertical angle on that side, contrasting the horizontals of death with a vertical of life and activity. The significance of these shapes and angles, however, can only be appreciated fully when we also have an understanding of the use of the Fibonacci sequence and how it is employed in this painting.

The mathematical pattern we now call the Fibonacci sequence (also known as the Golden Ratio, the Golden Section, the Golden Mean, or the divine proportion) long precedes the 12th century mathematician from Pisa for whom it is named. Fibonacci
himself developed it among many inspirations that came to him after his exposure to the advanced learning of the Near East in his time which can be traced back to the Greeks. Fibonacci’s work was revived in the 15th century by Luca Pacioli, which in turn influenced Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Durer, and became a component of art composition used to this day (Knott). St. Jerome Writing is structured around a horizontal Fibonacci sequence spiraling counter-clockwise, with the cynosure being on Jerome’s left hand where it grasps the book (fig. 19).

Fig. 19. Figure 18 with Fibonacci spiral superimposed.

It also has a distinct feel of space front-to-back, with the subject matter being largely to the front. The chiaroscuro effect used creates more oppositional contrast, the dark being on the left side and behind. The light element is predominantly to the right and forward. In-between these two spaces, in light but on the left side, the skull is straddling the two spaces. Again, we can read this and see an additional contrast, established by the others, that life is on the right and death is on the left. In the current moment of the
picture, life and work crowds the right side of the painting. Death—stark, minimal, and severe—is on the left. The skull, the central death figure and *memento mori* icon, seems to be creeping toward the right and forward from the shadows. It is peripheral to the figure of the saint. It is not salient to him, but persistent. The gaze of the skull is toward Jerome and not off to the side, but a straight line (at an angle to the Fibonacci pattern) can be made between its eyes and those of Jerome. The books form a chain into eternity if we continue to read the painting in this manner. The book that is “living” or present is open, being read, and—as the quill suggests—being worked with. It is an active part of life. If we read time in this painting, going from right to left—coincidentally perhaps to the reading of Hebrew, or perhaps not—the books remain unchanged going forward, but the skull is what Jerome has in his future. There is a red shroud in the life/present side of the painting and a white one in the death/future side. Colors can hold multiple meanings in art, of course. In Christian art, and in this context, the red symbolizes sin as in the sins of Man which is upon Jerome simply by having been born. He is in a sinful state in this image, thus he is enrobed in it symbolically. Interestingly, red can also symbolize power and authority, which is more of a symbolic mechanism in depictions of Greco-Roman figures, but it does apply here in that it reinforces Jerome’s sainthood and his authority as a scholar. The white shroud lies on the death/future side of the painting may seem out of place at first in this reading, however it rather reinforces the *memento mori* function of the painting. White usually indicates innocence and the ethereal. Placing the white shroud on the left side of the painting, rather than having a black shroud of death, is an unexpected opposite that also points to the opposite expectation in the meaning of the painting. Since Jerome is dedicating his life to holy work, though he is shrouded in the
sin of humanity, it will be forgiven him as he is doing God’s work. When his existence aligns with the death side of existence, the left side of the painting, he will become innocent by God’s grace through his good works and faith. Jerome is touching the red shroud as it is wrapped around him, except for his hands. Those are touching a quill and a book, signifying action and life, but that life is flowing toward the future (again, a straight line can be drawn over them which goes straight into the face of the skull). The books and quill (recorded wisdom) are being pulled into the future. They will survive the death of the man now holding them—a hint at a message of life beyond death and reward for being the good Christian he is. The gaze of the skull goes through the quill, up the arm, and to Jerome’s eyes. If the lines of the gazes of the two figures are traced (skull to Jerome, Jerome to the book/hand, book/hand to the skull), an isosceles triangle, or delta, is formed. The triangle is a common and ancient symbol for eternity, balance, unity, and transformation of consciousness, with the number three being a holy number in medieval (and previous) spiritualism and alchemy. Two books are open, and one is closed. The closed book is topped by an open book and the skull—again, going from present to future. This could be interpreted as a way of conveying the idea that works may be forgotten for a while or lost, but they will be discovered, opened, again in the future, especially since Jerome was sainted.

There is stark visual simplicity in this painting, but it conceals incredible mathematical and philosophical complexity. There are ten objects total—three books, two cloths or shrouds, one table, one quill, one man, one skull, and one halo. We can consider the dark, empty space behind and around the central imagery, essentially surrounding the subject and which is the portrayal of eternity and the afterlife, as the null value—the void,
afterlife, eternity where time does not exist. Coincidentally, the books and cloths add to five, as do the remainder of objects. These are all consistent with the mathematical construction in Fibonacci formulae. Additionally, a reading of this painting with Medieval Numerology in tandem with the Fibonacci sequence indicates additional embedded meaning in this work. In Medieval Numerology, the numbers enacted in this painting symbolize, in part, the following:

One—God, Unity, Creation;
Two—the two-fold nature of Christ as human and divine;
Three—the Trinity, “the three elements in man (body, reason, spirit), three elements of faith (knowledge, assent, confidence), three elements of repentance (contrition, confession, and satisfaction/absolution), [and] the three Theological or Christian virtues (faith, hope, and charity)”;
Five—the flesh and the senses;
Ten—Perfection and completion, Order. (“Numerology”)

Separately, the single items of the table, quill, man, skull (Death), and halo may not seem to connect to mean anything in relation to God, unity, or creation, at least not with any deeper meaning. Taken together, however, they are all part of God’s creation and when they are unified, they can create something greater than the sum of their parts, as the painting intends to show. As noted before, these items add to five, which is representative of the flesh and the senses. All of these items are part of the fleshly state, whether as literal or metaphorical objects, which can be employed for the glory of God, as Jerome

---

21 The Fibonacci sequence begins with 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5… “the tenth Fibonacci number is Fib(10) = 55. The sum of its digits is 5+5 or 10 and that is also the index number of 55 (10-th in the list of Fibonacci numbers). So the index number of Fib(10) is equal to its digit sum” (Knott).
exemplifies. The three books are indicative of the power of the written word to transcend their physical state and to induce Man to do the same. Books and the words within outlive the many lives of men and are a way for sacred wisdom to be conveyed and preserved. In specific application to the painting itself, the three books indicate the holiness of Jerome’s work as his writing captures and records the virtues and lessons that the number three can symbolize. The duality that the shrouds indicate do remind us that Christ is Man and deity, but also points to Man’s dual nature as well. We can be innocent or sinful, holy or profane, good or evil, and of course, dead or alive—physically or spiritually. The two shrouds remind us of that and that we have a choice between them. It also reminds us that though we are born in a state of sin, according to Catholic dogma, we can transcend it and become holy just as Christ. Again, the books and shrouds add to five, also pointing to our fleshly condition and the way in which we can overcome it. Altogether, with the addition of the null value of eternity, we have the complete number of Order and perfection—ten. The cynosure of the painting can be seen in the center of an extended delta—with the red shroud as the peak and the table as base—which creates an intersection of all of the elements in the image. It is the space in which they all meet and add to the holy ten. This is perfection and completion, found in the center, showing balance not only in the painting and its message, but with a possible subliminal message that we can find these things in our own center within.\(^22\) There is nothing more nor less in

\(^{22}\) Coincidentally, or perhaps not, this is also the location of the Sacred Heart in a later painting (after 1670 with the visions of Sister Mary Margaret); but also from Gertrude the Great, a 13\(^{\text{th}}\) c. Benedictine Nun associated with early devotion to the Sacred Heart. The Sacred Heart is symbolic of the love and compassion of God and Christ and salvation. It is part of early Catholic mysticism and moved into asceticism in the 16\(^{\text{th}}\) c. (Jenkins).
this painting and its message is no less simple, though we can take complicated paths to unravel its secrets if we choose. If we do not, or cannot, it is still accessible.

Naturally, most of the contemporary audience of Caravaggio’s St. Jerome Writing would not have such a complex reading of the work. Whether or not the reader would dive into the intricacies of the image and symbolism, even a simple surface reading conveys the same basic message of mindfulness and good work. Complex or simple, the painting conveys the Church’s message in a manner that is calm, meditative, and peaceful, just as they determined at the Council of Trent. However the painting is read, it assures viewers that in whatever one does that mortality will always catch up and that one must be right with God when one’s end comes—soon and unexpectedly as is most often the case.

**Cortona—Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power**

In opposition to the humble piety and intellectual complexity of the image of St. Jerome, the lavish support of the Church by the Barberini family is eternally honored in a ceiling fresco in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome. It is titled *Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power* painted by Pietro da Cortona between 1633 and 1639 (fig. 20).
Before examining the painting, it is important to recall that an important aspect of life as a devout Christian involves one’s support of the Church. Such devotion could earn a person a place among the venerated dead, earning them recognition in heaven and a bit of earthly immortality of their own with the venerated saints and apostles, as discussed previously. If one was not quite up to the challenge or call of martyrdom, other sacrifices could be made. Naturally, there were those that were made with beneficent purposes in heart, but there were others which were not primarily benevolent. Devotion to monastic
orders, offerings to the poor or monks, attendance at worship, or service as an official in
the church, were acceptable displays of piety and devotion, yet even this was not to the
liking of some followers, or not possible given their place in life. In these cases, the
sacrifices made became fiscal. In the early centuries of the Church in Rome, “While it
was the emperors who initiated the massive patronage required to build [the] churches, it
soon became a badge of faith for wealthy Christians to contribute” (Freeman 135, 209).
Though these donations were largely a display of religious, personal, and civic pride, it
became part of the theology of Christianity that the more support one offered the Church
in the form of finance or property, the higher or more secure was one’s place in the
afterlife. In the Middle Ages, “Monasteries in effect assumed society’s role of caring for
the dead and could offer to equally significant lay people, especially those who founded,
built and patronized monastic houses, incomparably spiritual benefits” (Jupp and Gittings
32). In its original intent, this was not the primary reason for making financial offerings,
of course, but it was a reward for it. Whether someone made contributions for the pious
sacrifice or the heavenly reward is debatable on a case-by-case basis. Though some
motives behind these perpetual memorials may be questioned, the underlying symbolism
of sacrifice remains the same. One sacrifices commodities of the earthly world to escape
death and to secure a good life in the everlasting realm.

Although Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power is mainly religio-
political propaganda, there is a subtle reminder in an interior corner of the work that the
grandeur still will not exempt one from the process of life and God’s will. A man is
depicted, winged and holding a scythe, with the arm of a cherub in his mouth. Painted
between 1633-1639 by Pietro da Cortona, this work continues an iconographic image that
can be found in examples of Classicism of the Renaissance and also Cortana’s contemporaries (fig. 21). Specifically, Peter Paul Rubens’s (1577-1640) *Saturn, Jupiter's father, Devours One of His Sons* (fig. 22), and Romanelli’s (1610-1662) *Cronos and His Child* (fig. 23).

Fig. 22. Peter Paul Rubens, *Saturn, Jupiter’s father, devours one of his sons*, 1636-1638, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. *Wikimedia*, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubens_saturn.jpg
The conflation of Death with Time is a mythological trope inherited from the most ancient narratives of the Greeks. This accounts for the centuries-long tradition of presenting both Death and Time with a scythe and hourglass, as we will see ahead in part with Ripa. In devouring his children, it is a *memento mori* that we will eventually be devoured by Time which spawned us. Our good works, especially those that support the Catholic Church, makes death a minor footnote amid the glories that will last for eternity. The brevity of the examination of this segment of the work is quite stark compared to that of Caravaggio above. The same is true for the analyses below as well. What this is meant to illustrate is the range of semiotic structure and technique that can be employed by the artists of the Baroque. Simplicity in the work may belie a range of embedded elements,
all of which convey and reinforce meaning as with Caravaggio, or the simplicity of a work may be just that, as according to the wishes of the Council of Trent and also to be sure that the message is clear to the audience. A work need not necessarily have complex layers, symbology, and allusion to do the job just as well.
CHAPTER 6. LITERATURE—RIPA AND MARINO

Giambattista Marino—Poetry

The association of complex or deep meaning with simplicity in presentation continues as this analysis moves to the examination of the literary works selected for this project. Just as it was with the Greeks, and perhaps before, the purpose and function of poesy continued to be discussed in the Baroque. Literary debate in the *cinquecento* centered around the purpose of poetry being mainly marvelous and a cathartic pleasure as opposed to it having a didactic function: “It remained for Tasso to decide that the ideal solution was the Christian epic, in which the orthodox *mirabile* could satisfy at the same time the demands of the marvelous and of truth. Thus it was possible to defend poetry on the grounds that it taught *through* the pleasures of the marvelous” (Mirollo 169), which is a claim applicable to the visual arts as well. He did not settle the argument in all minds once and for all as there was still a resistance to the marvelous in art and poetry: “… there was the moral atmosphere of post-Tridentine Italy to contend with. Any sanction for the marvelous means a continued support for the suspect fables of pagan mythology” (169). Poets defended the tradition, however, pointing to the power of metaphor in the mythological stories and images and lauding the spiritual and intellectual fruits of their use. Giulio Cortese, a model for and friend of Marino, made arguments to support the idea that “… since the conceit is the soul of poetry, the real test of a poem is its ability to engender conceits in the mind of the reader” (171). Whether this was by the structure of
the plot and unfolding of the poem or an effect of its actual language was a matter of additional debate among critics at the time.

Regardless of how contemporary debates fell out, the effects of the arts and their rhetorical significance could not be disputed. The extensive creative cross-pollination of the time completes the inter-relationships of the visual and literary arts to create a supportive net for the Catholic Church of the Counter-Reformation. “The poetic of the marvelous, with its emphasis on wit and rhetoric, was a literary phenomenon that drew much of its nourishment from the other arts” (Mirollo 276). What these artists drew from one another were the techniques and methods by which messages were or could be conveyed to the audience. Again, their concern is mainly the clever construction of the puzzle the audience must unravel on its own and, once they do, they are proud of their cleverness and with the joy of discovery are more apt to remember not just the work, but its message. Mirollo complements the work of Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, stating that in his work, Praz:

… demonstrated the importance of emblems and devices, witty symbolic representations in which the visual and literary arts are blended. Since the visual element (the ‘body’) was always accompanied by epigrammatic comments or interpretations (the ‘soul’), these devices participated in the general surge towards the poetry of wit and point. … they supplied descriptive detail that enriched a poet’s repertoire. Praz has also emphasized that this widely popular habit of Marino’s day provided a useful method of teaching pleasingly, especially in the hands of Jesuits. And here we have a link with the poetry of the marvelous. When Tesauro,
in his *Cannochiale* treated these devices, along with poetry, as *argutezze*, he revealed that the poetry of the marvelous had at last found its *utile*, its didactic purpose, in the doctrine of correspondence. For Tesauro, the whole world is filled with wisdom, cunningly conceived by the Supreme Wit; through analogy, the basis of metaphor, the poet discovers truth, apprehends reality, then offers it to his reader, sugar-coated, as the marvelous. (203-04)

The connection with continuation of the Horatian dicta (*utile et dulce*) is not a coincidence. It should be made clear that for Marino, “his knowledge of witty emblems and devices provided him with descriptive details, not a didactic theory of art” (204), yet it could be didactic for the reader despite what the intent of the author might have been. Through shared use of icon, motif, and style, artists of various media stimulated the same intellect, senses and spirits of their audience. The same messages repeated in various forms have a reinforcing effect. Mirollo writes that:

> But although [painting] is said to be silent and convey understanding through the senses, [poetry is] eloquent and convey[s] feelings through the understanding, Marino does not in practice stress the intellectual power of poetry. He asserts vigorously in the preface to *La Galeria* the independence of poetry from painting, and we have already noted his insistence on its superiority to music; his poetry remains nevertheless a testament to the blending rather than the distinguishing of the arts. Following the principle of interpenetration, he writes poetry that competes with painting on its own terms of marvelous paradox and sensuous
immediacy; the aim is no so much to stir the ‘understanding’ as to arouse the pleasure afforded by the “miracol de l’Arte!” (201-02)

In response to this, I will again point to the later concept of affect. We are more receptive to messages in media which arouse our interest and pleasure. Just as Socratic practice leads the student to come to conclusions and to realize ideas seemingly on their own, so art does the same by stimulating our emotions and provoking us into contemplation of what it “means.” The discernment of the puzzle—literary, visual, musical, or otherwise—before us and the subsequent epiphany that we experience ingrains the work and its message(s) in our minds, hearts, and identity. It is, therefore, more didactic because of its marvelous, sensual, and intellectually stimulating properties.

As Caravaggio, Marino bridges the Renaissance to the Baroque, combining not only the arts, but the old to the new in his work. Mirollo states that “[Marino’s] works are more representative of various late Renaissance forces than is commonly supposed. For we find in him the poetry of wit, [and] the ornate prose style of the Spanish sermon, … he is a Counter-Reformation artist in his religious verse and a student and interpreter of painting and sculpture in his iconic poems. And all of there were translated, adapted, and imitated” (Mirollo 274). Additionally, Mirollo notes that “Marino’s style exemplifies ideally the extent to which the arts may interpenetrate each other” and that he is “regarded by many scholars as one of [the Baroque’s] ideal literary representatives” (275, 277). Not only this, but he certainly is an artist of the Counter-Reformation given that his work supports the ideals of the Catholic Church of the time. In his life, Marino worked in the service of Cardinal Aldobrandino starting in 1604 and also wrote panegyrics, one for the queen of England, “written at a time when there were high Catholic hopes for James
I” and one for Pope Leo XI (21). He was studious of foundational Christian religious writings and was made a knight in the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus in 1609 (23, 24). Marino wrote *La sferza, invettiva a quattro ministry della iniquità* dedicated to the king: “this polemical essay is a learned defense of Catholic doctrine” published in 1625 (44). The reader will recall the influence of Spain on Baroque Rome and recognize the levity of the praise of Spanish poet Lope de Vega, who wrote the line: “Marino, gran pintor de los oidos / Y Rubens, gran poeta de los ojos” (qtd. in Mirollo 38). Additionally, de Vega dedicated one of his comedies to Marino (49). This relationship also illustrates the Spanish influence that was such an important part of the creation of Italian art and literature during the Counter-Reformation.

*Apre l’uomo infelice, allor che nasce*

Marino contemplates the brevity of life and the swift inevitability of death in two particular poems selected as exempla here. The first is simply known as *Apre l’uomo infelice allor che nasce* for the first line of the poem, and the second is *In Morte di Michelagnolo da Caravaggio* in memoriam of his painter friend upon the event of his death. The legend associated with the *Apre l’uomo* poem, which Mirollo is quick to point out is more than likely a romantic fabrication, is that “Marino surprised a gathering of the literati [in Venice] by suddenly appearing among them to recite the sonnet … then leaving without a word to his stunned audience” (Mirollo 18). True or not, the poem itself inspired other poets to create works in the same manner. This is indicative that the poem “strikes a chord” with people and is worthy of duplication and dispersal.

The poem reads as follows:

*Apre l’uomo infelice, allor che nasce*
In questa vita di miserie piena,
Pria ch’al Sol, gli occhi al pianto, e, nato a pena,
Va progionier far le naci fasce.

Fanciullo, poi, che non piú latte il pasce,
Sotto rigida sferza I giorni mena;
Indi, in età più serena,
Tra Fortuna ed Amor more e rinasce.

Quante poscia sostien, tristo e mendico,
Fatiche e morti, infin che curvo e lasso
Appoggia a debil legno il fianco antico?

Chiude alfin le sue spoglie angusto sasso,
Ratto cosí, che sospirando io dico:
—Da la cuna a la tomba è un breve passo! (Poesie varie, p. 358).

(qtd. in Mirollo 18)

Mirollo’s translation is as follows:

Hardly born into this misery-filled life, unhappy man opens his eyes to see tears before he sees the sun, and, born to suffering, is already a prisoner in his tight swaddling clothes. Then, a boy who no longer feeds on milk, he leads his days under severe restriction; later, at a more mature and serene age, he lives and dies between Fortune and Love. How much toil and death can he then sustain, sad and mendicant, before bent and weary he leans his tired body on a weak stick? At last, a narrow tomb encloses his
remains, so quickly indeed that I say, with a sigh, “From the cradle to the tomb is but a short step!” (19)

Though this poem does not directly mention the Church, God, salvation, or any of the other religious attributes, it is a *memento mori* as a lament. It is in the form of a Petrarchan Sonnet, which has fourteen lines total, divided into an octave and a sestet following the pattern of ABBAABBA and CDCDCD, respectively. Though there is a distinct pattern of CDCD in the last stanza, if it is minimalized, another pattern takes shape in that all of the lines end in *o*. One might entertain the notion that the pattern is based on the *o* ending of each line, as is usual, but also the vowel at the end of the word, or that is the word, preceding the terminal *o* word. In this case, the pattern would be CCDDDC. This break with the expected pattern, be it the former or CCCCCC, could very well create the same sense of imbalance that life itself does with its struggles and trials (as per the pessimistic mood of the poem) without deviating from the poetic convention.

Additionally, the indentations of lines which usually indicate stanzas create three stanzas rather than two in this printing. As with the three states of man, as noted in the discussion of numerology, there are also the three stages of life—infancy, adulthood, and old age. This structure, though deviant from the two-stanza structure of the Petrarchian sonnet, reflects more the theme of the poem, reinforcing a sense of reflective completeness, just as the number three itself. Though this is not directly referential to the Trinity or the other symbols discussed above in relation to the interpretation of
Caravaggio’s work, it still creates a sense of wholeness.\textsuperscript{23} Though not cheerful and happy in its closure, the poem still completes the cycle, just as it follows the Petrarchan Sonnet pattern while still also deviating from it. Even so, the way that it ends is not satisfactory. It is strong and as expected in the infancy and adulthood, but old age is disappointing. The third stage, if we read it with the repetitive $o$ ending regardless of the full phoneme, blurs into monotony in which entire stanza is based, creating a sense of infinity, on the $oooo$ groan of mourning and despair at the futility of life and its loss even before it has truly ended. \textit{Memento mori.}

\textbf{In morte di Michelagnolo de Caravaggio}

The second poem of Marino’s that will be discussed here is also a lament. It is more personal and specific, but no less a reminder that death comes to all and that it is, to our eyes, unfair and senseless. This is particularly poignant in that the poem was written about Michelangelo de Caravaggio, the painter discussed above, and his untimely death from illness or poisoning. Caravaggio and Marino not only knew each other, but they were good friends and were influential in each other’s work, as it was with other artists and poets of the day. Marino was painted by Caravaggio, and in turn, Marino wrote of the painter’s “Head of Medusa” in \textit{La Galeria} (Mirollo 49, 202). Though, as we have seen, Caravaggio was a refined and brilliant artist, he was not immune to the pride and gallance of his day. It is recorded that the artist did commit a murder in 1606 and later, in 1608 attacked Fra Giovanni Rodomonte Roero, a knight of the Order of St. John in Malta. Though arrested, Caravaggio escaped: “According to Andrew Graham-Dixon's

\textsuperscript{23} This poem is also mentioned and quoted in full in vol. 15 of \textit{The Academy}, published May 10, 1879. In that printing, it is divided into four stanzas of 4-4-3-3 with a pattern of ABBC CBBA CCC CCC. Given the date of the material, however, and that the printing was in response to a mis-attribution of the poem to Petrarch himself, the Mirollo structure is given precedence and most likelihood of fidelity.
research, Roero did not put the attack behind him. In 1609, he followed Caravaggio to Naples and assaulted the painter outside a tavern, disfiguring his face” (“Caravaggio Biography”). Caravaggio was traveling to Rome to beg a pardon from the Pope, but during the journey, he became ill and died. A friend gave the date of his death as July 18, 1610 (“Biography of Caravaggio”).

The original Caravaggio poem, titled In morte di Michelagnolo de Caravaggio reads:

Fecer crudel congiura,
Michele, a' danni tui Morte, e Natura,
Questa restar temea
Da la tua mano in ogni imagin vinta,
Ch'era da te create, e non dipinta.
Quella di sdegno ardea,
Perche con larga usura,
Quante la falce sua genti struggea,
Tante il pennello tuo ne rifacea. (Marino 210)

In this work, the poet laments a “cruelly wrought conspiracy” involving Death and Nature. It speaks of the “feared rest” and creations not painted. As with a number of the other works discussed here, there is also the hope of living on. In this case, at the least in memory through art and literature. As with the previous Marino poem, there is still, however, a predominantly pessimistic and mournful tone overall. The poem ends with crediting Caravaggio with preserving the memory of people in his paintings, thus helping them to escape the Reaper in a way: “how many [with] the sickle [the] people are
consumed, / that many [with] the pennello you remake” (Pirilli 253, translation mine). As was discussed previously in medieval precedents of the Baroque era, this continues the implication that we can save and be saved through art, which is what the members of the Council of Trent realized and sought to enact. This lament from a highly influential poet of the Baroque reminds us yet again that no one is exempt from death, even the most talented of us, and we never know when it will come.

**Cesare Ripa—Iconologia**

In turn, Pietro da Cortona’s work, also discussed above, was inspired by the *Iconologia* of Cesare Ripa. This multi-volume work, first published with illustration in 1603 is, as the subtitle says, “A collection of emblematical figures; containing four hundred and twenty-four remarkable subjects, moral and instructive; in which are displayed the beauty of virtue and deformity of vice.” It continues to state that Ripa draws from historical art and mythology “as represented by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Modern Italians.” Glancing through the pages of the collection which have the figures, the re-incorporation of the Greco-Roman iconological traditions becomes quite clear. This is as was seen with Cortona above. The personifications are all humanized images with no other contextual indications than their accoutrements. So, for instance, the exaggerated animality of Kronos in Ruben’s painting, mentioned above, does not appear in these plates. As shall be seen ahead, Time is subdued in its allegorical personification by Ripa. The most exaggerated non-human element is that of those figures which have wings. A closer reading is required to identify these antiquated figures correctly. One must not make quick assumptions as a number of the symbolic accoutrements appear in multiple places. With these subdued, humanized allegories, the
accoutrements are of more symbolic importance than the personification that bears them. The difference is which accoutrements appear together around the figure. One icon cannot be taken alone as the identifier of the allegorical figure.

For instance, plate 19 of Volume I of Ripa’s *Iconologia* shows a winged figure holding a scythe. A reader must not automatically assume that a scythe immediately implies Death. Indeed, the reason Death has a scythe is primarily to convey the idea of harvest. So, too, with this figure. The additional clues are stacks of hay in the background, a basket of fruit beside him, and the garland the figure is holding in his right hand, which has in its center an image of two embracing figures. This, of course, is the horoscopic icon of Gemini, the twins, who are dominant in the end of the month of May into June. This figure represents the month of May. Ripa writes, “This pleasant month is represented by a young man dressed in green, … In his right hand he holds the sign of Gemini, adorned with white and red roses, and in the other a scythe, alluding to the mowing of the hay” (14). Therefore, although a scythe is present in this imagery, one must keep in mind that images and icons can be fluid in Baroque art. A modern reader might assume that the image of a scythe indicates Death alone, since that is most often the context in which we see it in modern times. Not so for the still non-mechanized, agriculturally-driven culture of the 17th century.

In Ripa’s *Iconologia*, images for both Death and Time are older men holding a scythe. There is nothing horrid, ghastly, or frightening about either image. Both are fully-fleshed, healthy human figures. The symbology of the additional accoutrements alone distinguishes the two from each other. Time has an hourglass at his feet and an ouroboros—signifying eternity and cyclical rebirth—in his hand. Ripa describes this
figure, saying that Time “is allegorically expressed by the figure of an old man, with large wings at his shoulders, resembling Saturn, who was the God of Time amongst the ancients. … The wings point out the velocity of Time; the scythe is the emblem of destruction and denotes the cutting down and impairment of all things” (vol. II, 7). Again, we see the use of the symbol of the scythe in this antiquated context for a figure that is not Death. Time, however, is closely associated with Death, of course. The scythe bears the same meaning as it does with Death, mass destruction, but does not symbolize Death itself. It is part of it, but not the key symbol.

Naturally, Death has the scythe, but the confirming accompaniment is a hook in the hand opposite that holding the scythe. The hook, as Ripa explains in the figure’s description, “alludes to pulling down the fruit from the highest trees, signifying that death indiscriminately levels the greatest monarchs with the meanest subjects” (vol. II, 96). A memento mori for all. A modern reader might interpret the robes that Death is wearing as an indication since they fall to the ground, whereas those of Time stop at the knee. In Ripa’s description, Death is “characterized by the figure of a mean-looking man, of a pale and grim countenance, dressed in black robes” (96). Given the limitations of woodcuts and the printing press at the time, it is reasonable to see that the corresponding image plate cannot actually be in black, but shading does give an indication. It is not the full-body shroud or cloak as we saw in some medieval representations, and the predominant form of today. It does not fully cover the figure and is arranged more in the Classical style of the toga. It is, therefore, a clue, but not an absolute indication. The description that Ripa gives clarifies what could not be conveyed in the image: “The pale and grim countenance of this figure, denotes disease to be the forerunner of Death and dissolution.
The black robes are emblematical of mournful occasions and point out that darkness is expressive of Sleep and Death [also a common pairing from ancient times into modern].” The figure’s wings and garland “denote his empire, powerful influence and universal sway over all the human species” (96). Although the *memento mori* function of this figure is not as obvious as in some of our previous examples, it is there nonetheless, even if one does not immediately recognize this figure. It should be pointed out that the hourglass is another icon that has fluid meaning at this time. It often, though not always, appeared with Death in medieval imagery, and becomes more prevalent in modern depictions, but not necessarily in the Baroque. There is no hourglass with Death here; it is with Time, as mentioned above. This makes sense as Ripa needed something that directly paralleled Time as a metaphor. The hourglass served its purpose better with that personification. As we have seen with the passage of time, however, the personification of Time has lost its memetic viability in modern iconography and the hourglass again became more directly associated with Death as the two were yet again conflated with the wane of Neo-Classicism.
CONCLUSION. THE CONTINUING RHETORICAL POWER OF ART IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In response to the crisis of the Protestant Revolution that started in the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church turned to the rhetorical value of the arts to preserve their religion. The Church created sacred spaces meant to overwhelm the senses, and any doubts, in order to preserve the authority and integrity of the institution. This continued with increasing opulence through the Baroque and created some of the greatest works of art and literature in Western culture, if not the world. The use of the specific mode of *memento mori* was a prevalent and effective means of conveying the Church’s message of eternal reward through faith to provide hope to those who would follow. This is enhanced by the subtle, yet undeniable, thanatological images incorporated into creative works that clearly remind the viewer or reader that death is inevitable. The additional message is that it is best to be right with the Creator and Judge of the universe, and the only way to Him is through the Catholic Church. Many strategies were employed to further this ideology, of course, but the arts were a method by which messages could be conveyed nearly instantly and with minimal literacy. Naturally, this increased the chances of the message of the Church being recognized, remembered, and spread. Given the fact that these works have the ability to convince, or at least draw respect from, the most doubtful of Thomases, it follows that these works had a large, if not dominant, role in ensuring the survival of the Roman Catholic Church not only in the 16th century, but to today, four centuries later.
Religion relies on rhetoric for survival and perpetuation. Every element of a religious or spiritual experience or encounter is designed to impress the mind and heart of the witness. This is true for the most elaborate ceremony and ritual to the most insignificant-seeming splinter of wood in a corner of a Church. The Catholic faith is arguably one of the most, if not the most, efficacious in its portrayal, composition, and presentation of rhetorical religious material. This practice did not start and end with the Counter-Reformation of the 16th century, of course. Now that we are familiar with the *modus operandi* of the specific motif of *memento mori*, we can explore the possibilities that continued research on mortuary rhetoric in the Catholic Church will offer. We can place the specifics given in the examples above into a larger context to illustrate how religious rhetoric operates and to see how crucial it is to the survival and perpetuation of organized belief systems. Now that we have seen the specifics of death iconography used by the Catholic Church and also comprehend the underlying rhetorical power behind what at first look might seem macabre and fatalistic, we can broaden our view to look at the Roman Church again as a whole. We may find that the brilliance and value of the Church in the entirety of its existence is that of being a *memento mori* that offers eternal hope as well.

**Grottoes of St. Peter’s**

We will begin at the nascent point for organized Christianity in the form in which it has survived: St. Peter’s grave in Vatican City. Some of the more poignant memorials of the veneration of the dead to influence the living in the Roman Catholic Church are, of course, in St. Peter’s Basilica. Below the main church of St. Peter’s, there are the Grottoes made from the former level of the main church before the current Cathedral was
constructed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One can still see the stairs the infamous Borgia family would descend to the altar—directly above St. Peter’s grave. The Grottoes are a clean, bright, somber chamber of white arches and walls in which the remains of a number of Popes are kept. In total, there are over 130 sarcophagi in St. Peter’s. It is a cathedral to the dead who held the most exalted position in Christendom and who were the embodiment of Christ on earth during their time as Pope. It is a chain of lineage which proves the constancy of the Church and its legitimacy. If Christ was the living embodiment of the Alpha and Omega, this building is his structural manifestation. It is The House of the Lord in every way. All of Christian time, history, and humanity is encapsulated in this place, no matter how long time goes for and no matter how many Popes or believers there are. It will always be here. The believer is safe in that knowledge and that nothing is outside the control of their god. Even the worst tragedies are part of the divine plan and followers must trust and obey. They will be rewarded with victory over death, just as Christ was, according to the theological history of the Church.

**Popes in State**

The dead are not hidden away, however. They are part of the continuing, everyday functioning of the Church, just as in medieval practice. In the active main basilica of St. Peter’s, three former Popes lie in visible state on the current main floor of the Cathedral—Pope John XXIII (d. 1963), Pius X (d. 1914), and Innocent XI (d. 1689)—as of 2017. The reader will recall the transi tombs of the Middle Ages. The practice of displaying the actual body of the person is, I would like to suggest, a continuation of the same tradition, though in following with the presentation of the figure as a *gisant* rather than the gruesome cadaver in the midst of decay. They do, however,
present the same rhetorical display with the same embedded message: All die, yet you may hold hope despite it. These venerable figures are now seated by the right hand of God, but they also continue to incite reverence and faith here in the world of the living. Pope John XXIII is of particular interest to our discussion here as there is an oral tradition that when his body was exhumed, it had not deteriorated, and it was therefore a miracle as it showed him as “incorruptible” Reasonable sources, however, state that this condition is due to embalming practices and then a wax mask that was placed over the face—an event fully acknowledged and supported officially by the Church. Yet again, however, literal truth is not of greatest consequence in the realm of sacred narrative and the higher Truth that it points to is what is the reason for its existence. In this case, the message is that good Christians will be remembered, honored, and in some cases, experience a miracle to confirm to believers that death is temporary and is merely a change of state rather than a permanent condition. Another popular Pope from modern times, Pope John Paul II, though not on visual display, is present in humble seclusion on the main floor of St. Peter’s to receive the prayers of devotees and pilgrims. Though he has passed on, just knowing that something of him is there in respectful honor gives believers comfort that his benefices are still available and that now he can make even more direct intercession with the divine. Just as with other relics, the leader that was can still work just by there being a tangible connection in the form of his body or an object important to the narrative for both the living and those in the next world to use as a connection to one another. This provides continued comfort to devotees of the spiritual leader, alleviating any separation or abandonment anxiety that death might otherwise cause. The grandeur of the surroundings, enhanced by the immensity of its perpetuity from the nascent moment of
Christianity with the burial of Peter on the very spot below Bernini’s canopy and the high altar, is a declaration of victory over death and a testimony to the veracity of the entire religious system. The being and essence of St. Peter’s is a nearly 2,000-year-old tradition of defiance and hope to combat this most visceral of human fears and anxieties. As we have seen, these monuments are yet another implementation of the ancient practices to provide a very clear message to the viewer regardless of their familiarity with Christianity or Baroque art.

**Michelangelo’s Pieta**

Next to Pope John Paul II in St. Peter’s is one of the more powerful images of mortality and sacrifice in Christian art, Michelangelo’s *Pieta* (fig. 24).

![Michelangelo’s Pieta](image)

Fig. 24. Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *Pietà*, 1498-1499, St. Peter’s Cathedral, Vatican City, Italy. Photo by Amanda Dutton, June 2016.

This statue is not only an awe-inspiring work of Renaissance art, but the subject matter is, of course, the ultimate sacrifice—to willingly meet death for the sake of others
and for a mother to offer her son for the sake of the world then and ever. Though not a memento mori properly defined, the Pieta is a powerful image that reminds us that the epitome of human fear and anxiety—death—becomes the epitome of sacrifice and love as well. This parallels a consistent trope through ancient mythology, which is a precursor to the later, more sophisticated concept of memento mori. It is not so much a reminder that we must die, but more of a symbol of hope and resurrection that takes the sting out of death. This archetype is of that of the great goddess and her son/lover, the fertility god. The shared narrative is of the mother’s sacrifice of her son to ensure that life will return and the dying time of winter is denied. The incestuous taboo of the son/lover has been dropped in the narrative of the Catholic Church, but the great love that transcends the physical remains. Warner agrees with this connection, made by James Frazer earlier, by stating that:

Jesus is the first of the ‘son-lovers’ whose voice we hear, or at least whose voice has come down to us. He is the first actually to teach the meaning of his sacrifice, and the first to take that sacrifice upon himself willingly. In the tradition that clothed him, the son-lovers of earlier times were not drawn as consenting to their death or understanding it. If that is a valid comparison, then from any perspective this represents a crucial movement of consciousness to a higher level. (597)

This is an important step in the evolution of sacred mythology in Western culture. The influence of Greco-Roman and Hellenistic thought took the ancient Hebrew religion to a new metaphysical place and gave it deeper, more ethereal meaning, just as Ignatius’s

Spiritual Exercises did during the Counter-Reformation. This includes ideas regarding the physical experience and state of death. Death is an illusion when the dying-resurrected god and eternal life is part of one’s ideology and natural theology. Death comes and all does look bleak, as in the infertile time of winter, but there will always be re-birth. From death comes life; it is a necessary sacrifice. The sacrifice of Mary and Jesus was a ready event to apply to an existing existential Truth already well-established in religious tradition since ancient times. It was not a perfect, clean inheritance and transition from culture and age to those following, of course; many controversies arose in the centuries in which Christianity developed, but the strength of this archetype is a testament to its accessibility and necessity in the minds and hearts of devotees of the religion. Again, these mythological figures serve as role models for the rest of us to accept and come to terms with the inevitability of death.

During the Counter-Reformation, when the Roman Catholic Church was rethinking its entire structure, the art of the period responded in kind. Particularly, as we have seen in detail above, there was an ameliorative effect to death iconography. Subtle representations of a skull alone or a full human with symbolic accoutrements, became predominant in the style of the period. In keeping with the Decree of the Council of Trent, this had an effect of softening of the terror of death with a maintenance or added emphasis of victory over death for the faithful to the Church. Images create a sense of peaceful acceptance of death rather than visceral horror. There was more aesthetic beauty to the works, though still often macabre, as in the Capuchin Chapel. Even in those that remain skeletal, such as Bernini’s monument to Alexander VII, the power has been stripped of the image in its portrayal. The softening of death iconography from the
personified horror to the symbolic representation of *memento mori* was a reminder that was meant to promote contemplation and meditation, as in *Saint Jerome Writing*. Even in the most grand of hubristic self-acknowledgement, there is a corner for the reminder of humility, as was included in *Allegory of Divine Providence and Barberini Power*. Leaving behind the terror of the medieval world, the creators of the Counter-Reformation returned to their Classical predecessors and found a less viscerally charged, though still rhetorically powerful, means of promoting the ideology of the Catholic Church. The personified representations of Ripa provided a foundation from which others drew, as Marino did in his poetry. This common language of rhetorical representation in visual and literary works created a combined initiative in Catholic art that ameliorated the image of the Church and assisted it in the success of its reformation. This shift in portrayal of imagery had and still has an effect on its audience that offers comfort and hope. Naturally, one can have that comfort and hope, if and only if the message is, they adhere to the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. The detail, beauty, size, and prevalence of such paintings throughout Italy repeated the message of faith to the Catholic Church constantly to its people. Enough people responded in turn with fidelity to the Catholic Church that it survived the crisis of the Protestant Revolution and its own Reformation.

Lest anyone’s favorite work be missing from this study, it will be noted that there are an immense number of works in Rome itself, let alone the Empire, which would be fitting for examination here. It would be a project of many years and volumes and would be worth the attempt, but the works mentioned here are enough to present the argument at hand for consideration and more exploration. As it is with just about any object of study,
Baroque Italy has what seems to be a nearly endless supply of material for observation and enjoyment. If not for the protection of the establishment of the Church, it is likely that most of these works would have been destroyed, lost, or hidden in private collections. The Roman Church is one of the world’s crowning achievements of religious propaganda. This is not to detract from its beauty or the good that comes of it, but such excess and materiality is not entirely beneficent in its origins. Ironically, these monuments to Christian piety, life, death, the Christian God, Christianity itself, and the Italian Baroque were created during one of the most corrupt and extravagant times in European history. Even though the intentions were not always the purest, the masterpieces of creativity that came of this period have survived their origins and are now some of the greatest treasures of human artistic achievement. Today’s Roman Catholic Church sees itself as a keeper of the Christian treasures of the world that belong to all humanity. Whether noble in its acquisition or not, the Church is happy to share it with the world and those of any and all faiths, or those of none at all. Just as in the times and circumstances in which they were created, these works are still active and relevant in the Church and collective culture of today’s world. The messages are still clear and applicable. They give the living hope for those who have died and for their own anxiety over their mortality. They offer models for being a good person or an exemplary Christian. Though the art structures of the Roman Church can be up to a millennium old or more, they still hold their persuasive power upon the mind and heart of the believer—be they a devotee of the faith, the art, or the history. Whether or not the audience believes in the afterlife or not, the message is still clear—death comes swiftly and definitely. In
Rome, do as the Romans do—*carpe diem*, be a good Catholic as you do so, and death will hold no fear for you.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Baschenis, Simone Il. *Danse Macabre*. 1539. *Wikimedia Commons*,

commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tomb_of_Alexander_VII_-_panoramio.jpg


*EBSCOhost,*


*EBSCOhost,*

uthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=cat06361a&AN=fau.021171395&site=eds-
live&scope=site


Marino, Giambattista. *La Galeria*. 1675. Venetia Presso, digitized version from U of
Michigan, archive.org/details/lagaleriadelcav00marigoog/page/n7.


“metaphor, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, December 2018,


Moyers, Bill. “Ep. 2: Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth—‘The Message of the
Myth.’” 1988. *Bill Moyers*, billmoyers.com/content/ep-2-joseph-campbell-and-

Müller, F. Max (Friedrich Max). *Chips from a German Workshop*. 1823-1900. Charles
Scribner, digitized version from U of Michigan,

quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/AKA6773.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext

Murrin, Michael. *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes toward a Theory of Allegorical


*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha,


Romanelli, Giovanni Francesco. Cronos and his child. 1625-1650, est. Wikimedia Commons,
commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Romanelli_Cronos_and_his_child.jpg.

Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubens_saturn.jpg.


Simoni, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti, Pietà. 1498-1499, St. Peter’s Cathedral, Vatican City, Italy.

Spinoza, Benedict de. Ethics. 1677. Digitized e-text version from Project Gutenberg,
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm


Tomb of Cardinal Jean de Lagrange, Church of Saint-Martial in Avignon, France. 1403.
Wikimedia,
commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_de_la_Grange_1403_Mus%C3%A9e_du_Petit_Palais_Avignon.jpg.
Tomb of Guillaume de Harcigny, 1393. Museum of Laon, France. Wikimedia, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gisant_Guillaume_de_Harcigny_Mus%C3%A9e_de_Laon_280208_1.jpg.


