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Sublime Truth and the Senses: Titian's "Poesie" for King Philip II of Spain.

Marie Tanner.

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Sublime Truth and the Senses explores six of Titian's mythological paintings, created between 1554 and 1562—*Danaë*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Diana and Callisto*, *Diana and*

Actaeon, Europa, and Perseus and Andromeda—as evolving from the humanistic and artistic genre of the Loves of the Gods. The works' sensual and often erotic content is contextualized within Habsburg dynastic and religious aspirations, based upon Renaissance scientific theories of cosmology promoting their divine right to rule. Tanner gives credit to Titian's intellect and a mature understanding of courtly statecraft in developing his *Poesie*; in this she follows and expands upon earlier iconographic interpretations by Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, and Francis Yates.

The text is divided into three parts. Part 1 provides a brief background of the imperial continuity envisioned by the Holy Roman emperor Charles V and his son Phillip II, king of Spain. If the reader requires a more comprehensive background on Habsburg ancestral claims, I suggest Tanner's *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (1993). Also in part 1 is a summary of the pagan Loves of the Gods, covering the tapestry series *Los Honores*, created by Pieter Coeck van Aelst for the 1519 election of Charles to become Holy Roman emperor, and the Loves of Jove palace decorations in Northern Italian venues visited by Charles on his way to his 1530 coronation in Bologna. The latter works include Flemish tapestries of the Loves of the Gods composed by Perino del Vaga in Genoa; the Loves of the Gods painted by Giulio Romano at Palazzo de Té, Mantua, for Federico Gonzaga; and four Loves of the Gods painted by Correggio as gifts to the emperor by Gonzaga. These artworks contain scenes with Jupiter and Danaë, Callisto, Europa, Perseus, and Andromeda, demonstrating that Titian's paintings were inspired by earlier compositions honoring the Habsburg emperor and ultimately based on the synthesis of Christian doctrine, mythology, and Roman imperial privileges dating back to the time of Constantine.

Part 2 is divided into six chapters, each on one of the six paintings. Subsections include the nobility of the human body, virtues and vices, mystical ascent via ecstasy, Habsburg connections to the Order of the Golden Fleece, constellations and ethics, cosmic kingship, justice and charity, the Calumny of Apelles, Habsburg hegemony, defense of the faith, scientific astronomy and Catholicism, Andromeda (a personification of beleaguered Christianity) and the Holy Land, and universal rule. Evidence for the interpretive analysis is richly illustrated with colorful reproductions ranging from Burgundian manuscript illuminations to Roman sarcophagi, from medals to wood cuts, from terrestrial and celestial maps to Velázquez's *Las Hilanderas* (1657). Among literary works explored are those by Ovid and Dolce, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and a hagiography of Saint Teresa of Ávila—conflated with the goddess Minerva—who defends Christianity with a sword and shield. If all these threads seem discontiguous, they are not. Tanner weaves a compelling scholarly narrative, spellbinding in its encyclopedic circumference, that includes references to Titian's luxurious use of color. The breadth of coverage reveals a lifetime of research on the topic, explained by the author as beginning when she took a seminar with Panofsky in New York at the Institute of Fine Arts a half century ago.

Part 3, the “Coda,” reveals Titian’s *Poesie* as embodying sensuality and spirituality combined into a sublime vision portraying the Habsburg’s theocratic ambitions. Tanner includes Titian’s religious works for Philip II when evaluating the mystical elements found within the *Poesie*. *The Penitent Magdalene* (1561), lost in a fire at the Escorial, along with the *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* (1562), displays spiritual longing through sensuous flesh in which love for God leads to spiritual ecstasy, ultimately derived from the biblical Song of Songs, in which the bride yearns for her bridegroom. Titian’s oeuvres are allegories of scintillating fervor; whether pagan or Christian, they culminate in a heavenly apotheosis.

While Tanner’s analysis of Titian’s *Poesie* omits postmodernist, feminist, and post-colonial methodologies of interpretation, her text provides comprehensive historical and ideological context to comprehend the paintings as they would have been understood by their highly educated sixteenth-century patron and Renaissance humanist viewers.

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