

*John Rupert Martin*

# BAROQUE



# BAROQUE



*John Rupert Martin*



# BAROQUE



Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

New York London



First published 1977 by Westview Press

Published 2018 by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

**BAROQUE.** Copyright © 1977 by John Rupert Martin.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 76-12059**

ISBN 13: 978-0-06-430077-3 (pbk)  
ISBN 13: 978-0-06-435332-8 (hbk)

*The title page shows  
a detail of  
Peter Denying Christ  
by Rembrandt  
(illustration 199)*

TO BARBARA





# Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# Contents

*Preface* 9

*Introduction* 11

1. *The Question of Style* 19
2. *Naturalism* 39
3. *The Passions of the Soul* 73
4. *The Transcendental View of Reality  
and the Allegorical Tradition* 119
5. *Space* 155
6. *Time* 197
7. *Light* 223
8. *Attitudes to Antiquity* 249

*Appendix A. Peter Paul Rubens, On the Imitation of Statues* 271

*Appendix B. Paul Fréart de Chantelou, Bernini in France* 274

*Appendix C. Arnold Houbraken, Life of Rembrandt* 280

*Appendix D. Francisco Pacheco, On the Aim of Painting* 288

*Appendix E. Philippe de Champaigne,  
On Poussin's Rebecca and Eliezer* 290

*Notes* 297

*Books for Further Reading* 305

*Catalogue of Illustrations* 311

*Index* 359





# Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

## Preface

This book originated from a paper on 'The Baroque from the Point of View of the Art Historian' which I read some twenty years ago at a meeting of the American Historical Association and which was subsequently published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1955).

Amongst the many friends who have generously given me advice and information are Professors Jonathan Brown, William A. P. Childs, David R. Coffin, Roland M. Frye, Rensselaer W. Lee, Olan Rand, the late Wolfgang Stechow and David Wright. In preparing the successive drafts of the typescript I have benefited from the comments and criticisms of my students, amongst them Christine Armstrong, Micheline Moisan, Steven N. Orso, Charles Scribner III and above all Thomas L. Glen, who helped me to organize the Catalogue of Illustrations. For assistance in obtaining photographs I am indebted to Dr Stig Fogelmarck, Mrs Barbara Glen, Dr I. Grafe, Professor Carl Nordenfalk, Professor Seymour Slive, Mrs Shari Taylor and Professor Guy Walton.

I cannot adequately express my gratitude to the editors, John Fleming and Hugh Honour, who not only made innumerable suggestions for the improvement of the text but also drew to my attention pertinent examples, especially of architecture and the decorative arts, which effectively reinforced my argument.

J. R. M.  
Princeton  
September 1975





# Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# Introduction

The nomenclature of art history is regrettably imprecise and confusing. Of the many illogical terms that make up this peculiar vocabulary, 'Baroque' is surely one of the most misleading because, although the word may appear to describe a specific mode of artistic expression, it has in fact become ambiguous through being loaded with too many meanings. Yet while we may deplore the existence of such a verbal anomaly, it is obvious that the term cannot simply be banished from critical discourse. Let us begin, therefore, by defining how 'Baroque' is to be understood in this book – and how it is not to be understood.

The history and etymology of the word 'baroque' are interesting enough, but they are irrelevant to the subject that concerns us here. Since it does not appear to have been applied to the visual arts before the eighteenth century, and since it was not used as a stylistic term, as opposed to a term of abuse, until 1855,<sup>1</sup> it matters very little whether the word can be shown to derive from the Portuguese *barroco*, a 'rough or imperfectly shaped pearl', or from the syllogistic term *baroco*, the mnemonic name invented for the fourth mode of the second figure of formal logic, or from some other source altogether.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever connotations it may have had in the past (and these are far from being consistent), I do not conceive of the term 'Baroque' as designating an art that is extravagant, heavily ornate or bombastic – as calling up the idea of a 'lordly racket', in Erwin Panofsky's memorable phrase. Nor, on the other hand, do I hold with the view that 'Baroque' should be used only in a narrow stylistic sense to signify a particular artistic phenomenon – the 'style of 1630', more

often described as 'High Baroque'.<sup>3</sup> This definition of the term seems to me too restrictive and hence likely to create more problems of classification and interpretation than it solves.

The word 'Baroque', as I shall use it in this book, denotes, first of all, the predominant artistic trends of the period that is roughly comprehended by the seventeenth century. It is important to note at the outset that this is only a convenient approximation; for the epoch as a whole can certainly not be fitted into such a strait-jacket. The shift from Mannerism to Baroque was not sudden or abrupt but was complicated by considerable overlapping. Though the earliest manifestations of Baroque art appeared well before the year 1600, Mannerism was still a living force in many European centres during the first decades of the seventeenth century. The end of the Baroque is even less clear-cut than its beginning. There are works of art belonging to the eighteenth century that can be unequivocally called Baroque. Yet there is no doubt that in general the impetus of the Baroque had begun to slacken by the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

The period offers, it is true, a spectacle of works of art of quite astonishing variety, and it may seem futile to maintain that these products of different countries, different economic and political institutions and different forms of religious belief can have anything in common beyond mere contemporaneity. If unity is to be discovered within this diversity, it is evident that what we must look for is not any well-defined uniformity of style, but the embodiment of certain widely held ideas, attitudes and assumptions.

The seventeenth century has a Janus-like aspect: an age of extraordinary advances in philosophy and science, and of sweeping changes in the economic sphere and in the development of the modern state: but an age characterized also by continuing theological controversy, by an intense concern for the personal religious experience and by a spirit of providentialism inherited from earlier Christianity. Looking as it does both to past and future, the period presents what Stechow has called 'a basically new and optimistic equilibrium of religious and secular forces'.<sup>4</sup> That equilibrium, the distinguishing signs of which are already apparent in the visual arts during the last years of the sixteenth century, was to be upset before the close of the seventeenth by the growing force of empirical science and the weakening of the metaphysical view of the world. The triumph of science and reason represented by Newton's *Principia* (1687) and Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690) also foretold the end of the Baroque.

In attempting to define the essential characteristics of Baroque art we may conveniently begin with naturalism. Verisimilitude, though it takes varying forms, is a principle to which all Baroque artists adhere.

It is indeed a factor in the very genesis of the Baroque, arising as it did in opposition to the elegant stylizations of Late Mannerism. It was not merely a careless remark by Caravaggio (who more than any other may be credited with inaugurating Baroque naturalism) that the competent painter is one who knows how 'to imitate natural things well' (*imitar bene le cose naturali*).<sup>5</sup> The great traditional subjects – mythology, portraiture and above all sacred art – were transformed and given new content by the naturalistic vision of the Baroque. And it was this same vision that made possible the extraordinary achievements of seventeenth-century artists in the fields of landscape, still life and genre. Even in the last years of the century, when academic rules introduced theoretical complications into the creative process, the profoundly naturalistic outlook of the Baroque was never supplanted, as witness the portraitists of the age of Louis XIV who, for all their ornateness and rhetoric, were firmly committed to the illusion of reality. It is to this naturalism that we must turn to find the most direct link between Baroque art and thought: the new emphasis on visual realism is unmistakably related to the secularization of knowledge and the growth of science in the seventeenth century.

One can hardly speak of Baroque naturalism without taking notice of Baroque psychology. The preoccupation with 'the passions of the soul' is to be observed both in the artists and in the philosophers of the period. In what we may call 'subject pictures', from simple genre pieces to multi-figured history paintings on a grand scale, the emotional range is prodigiously expanded. Portraiture likewise exhibits a positive enrichment of psychic content: Rembrandt is not alone among seventeenth-century masters in his capacity to endow the portrait with an intimation of spiritual as well as corporeal presence.

In the field of devotional art, the interest in extreme states of feeling led to profound changes in the representation of the visionary experience: Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa* (to take the best-known example) may be understood not only as the illustration of a miraculous visitation – the reward of saintliness – but also as a penetrating insight into the psychology of mysticism, in which the self seeks to be released from human limitations and to be absorbed in the infinite. In the same way the great Catholic subjects of death and martyrdom are imbued with a new pathos and a new comprehension of suffering, cruelty and steadfastness.

It may seem paradoxical that some of the outstanding realists of the Baroque age – masters whom critics of the later nineteenth century hailed as 'forerunners of Impressionism' – should have painted allegorical subjects, often concealed beneath a naturalistic, genre-like exterior. But there is no inconsistency in this. For Baroque naturalism, though a powerful force, was qualified by a fundamentally metaphysical view of the world. Side by side with the growing

scientific mode of thought, the old emblematic and allegorical cast of mind still persisted.

That the great humanistic themes derived from classical antiquity should be adopted for the purposes of allegory is hardly remarkable. But the allegorical method was also applied, following a venerable tradition of scriptural interpretation, to the rendering of biblical subjects. In the seventeenth century the Old Testament was still regarded as a prefiguration of the New, and in the main artists adhered faithfully to this 'medieval symbolism' whereby Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac, for example, was understood in a mystical sense to signify the Crucifixion.

It is now recognized that Baroque genre paintings, once regarded as simple transcriptions of everyday life, frequently contain allegorical or emblematic meanings. In the same way, a surprising number of still life paintings are found, on analysis, to embody a moralizing theme such as *Vanitas*, the abstract idea being made more real by being conveyed in the most immediate and concrete terms possible. Even landscape paintings may be made to carry symbolic allusions to human transience, as in Poussin's cycle of the *Four Seasons*.

Some of the most splendid allegorical creations of the Baroque epoch were devoted to the glorification of monarchy. Rubens's epic Medici Cycle, celebrating as it does the career of a notably inept queen, testifies to the firm hold that the doctrine of divine right still had on men's minds. The whole gigantic complex of Versailles was conceived as an image, in elaborate emblematic terms, of the splendour of the *Roi Soleil*.

The Copernican revolution brought in its train a sense of the infinite which was to permeate seventeenth-century art and thought. Nothing reveals more clearly the consciousness of infinity in this period than the interest in space, time and light.

The principle of coextensive space is an important one in Baroque art. It may be seen in its most obvious form in the various *trompe-l'oeil* devices employed by artists to dissolve the barrier imposed by the picture plane between the real space of the observer and the perspective space of the painting or, in the case of sculpture, in the statue that transcends the limits of the niche within which it stands. The desire to suggest an infinite prolongation of space also finds expression in the great illusionistic ceiling paintings of the period. As a result of such efforts to achieve an integration of real and fictive space, the observer becomes an active participant in the spatial-psychological field created by the work of art. Far from being merely a form of clever theatrical trickery, Baroque illusionism has a persuasive purpose — that of transferring the mind of the viewer from material to eternal things.

Naturalism and the concern with space are the chief determining factors in Baroque landscape. The Dutch panoramic view, with its prospect of an immense, far-reaching expanse, offers the most familiar example of spatial illusionism in landscape. But the continuity of space is often implied by other means, such as the suggestion that the scene presented to our view is only part of an infinitely larger totality.

We must not overlook, in this connection, the effect on art and artists of the expanding world of the seventeenth century. The taste for the exotic, in particular, may be understood as a reflection of the geographical discoveries of the age of exploration, which served to awaken new interests in distant lands and peoples. Yet Baroque art, though undoubtedly receptive to picturesque motifs from non-European sources, was not profoundly affected by the spirit of exoticism. Painters might include in their works authentic details of costume and setting, but the Baroque world-view was essentially unaltered.

The element of virtuosity in the Baroque architect's manipulation of space should not be allowed to obscure a more important fact, which is that the principle of coextensive space is quite as applicable to seventeenth-century architecture as to painting and sculpture. The principle may be seen in exemplary form in church façades by Pietro da Cortona, Bernini and Borromini, where the interpenetration of exterior and interior space is especially marked. It is the same controlled flow of space that gives to the monumental interiors of the Baroque period their distinctive character.

The idea of a spatial continuum is also fundamental to the art of stage design, which seeks to coordinate the perspective space of the theatre with the real space of the auditorium.

The suggestion of movement, which is characteristic of many works of painting and sculpture of the seventeenth century, may evoke the sense of time as well as of space. The fleeting glance, the momentary gesture, the changing aspects of nature tell of transience, mutability and time's swift flight. Time itself may be personified as Destroyer or Revealer: in the hands of such masters as Rubens, Poussin and Bernini the allegory of 'Truth revealed by Time' becomes one of the classic themes of Baroque art. The recurring cycle of day and night and the succession of the seasons offered to artists another way of dealing – whether in the guise of mythology or of landscape – with the infinity of time.

Light is one of the principal expressive means of the Baroque artist. It is understood, first of all, to be a necessary element of the naturalistic vocabulary; in subjects such as landscape and genre the realistic handling of effects of light is of fundamental importance.



It is typical of the Baroque outlook that divine illumination is also treated naturalistically. The conception of light as a phenomenon that is at once physical and supernatural was first formulated in powerful terms by Caravaggio and was soon adopted everywhere, even by painters who had little taste for that artist's personal style. In the decoration of churches real light is frequently introduced to denote divine intervention: the work of Bernini is full of this imaginative use of directed light.

Painters were able, through subtle contrasts of light and dark, to suggest a variety of other symbolic meanings, including, on the one hand, enlightenment, reason and truth, and on the other, evil, danger, blindness and death. The sun as the source of universal light was made the subject of innumerable emblematic images. The most complex programme of solar symbolism was that devised to glorify Louis XIV at the court of Versailles.

Closely related to the symbolic use of light to express inner illumination is the Baroque painter's ability to suggest consciousness and the life of the mind through a kind of personal radiance. This luminosity, which we might call the light of the soul, is seen in its richest and most poetic form in the portraits of Rembrandt.

No account of Baroque art can fail to take notice of the pervasive influence of classical antiquity. The knowledge of the ancient world, which had been steadily accumulating since the early days of the Italian Renaissance, was now very extensive, and almost all artists of the seventeenth century were affected in one way or another by the images and ideas of the Antique. Though it is true that at this period 'antiquity' was commonly understood to mean ancient Rome, Greek sculptures of the classical age were already being sought after by discerning collectors, and some artists were even prepared to affirm the superiority of Greek art over Roman.

The pioneers of Baroque classicism were the Bolognese painters led by Annibale Carracci who established themselves in Rome early in the seventeenth century. It was they who formulated that 'classical ideal' that was to be perfected by Nicolas Poussin, Algardi and Duquesnoy, and which was to take firm root in France through the work of sculptors such as Girardon. For all of these masters antiquity furnished an abundance of models.

The practice of copying ancient prototypes was not, however, confined to the 'classic' artists. Rubens and Bernini both drew freely upon the repertory of ancient marbles, transforming their models into new and more sensuous figures. Classical influence is of course much less obvious in the work of the naturalist Caravaggio and his immediate following. And in Spain and the northern Netherlands, where the magnetic force of the Antique was substantially weaker than in Italy, there are relatively few direct borrowings from classical sculpture:

even Rembrandt, who had a deep and abiding interest in antiquity, rarely employed a figure from ancient art.

The general progression towards classicism that is characteristic of European architecture in the seventeenth century was not due solely to the influence of antiquity. In the case of Inigo Jones in England and of Jacob van Campen in Holland the chief stimulus undoubtedly came from Palladio. But their works are no less classical for that.

While in France the classical doctrine in architecture was sustained by a formidable series of theoretical treatises, Italian architects (Borromini above all) took a much less authoritarian view of the ancient Orders. Few architects can have had so sympathetic an understanding of classical architecture as Bernini, who nevertheless handled antique details with great freedom. Bernini's imaginative adaptation of classical forms may be exemplified by the Colonnade of St Peter's. As compared to this monumental structure, the Colonnade of the Louvre, by Le Vau, Le Brun and Perrault, looks (for all its majesty) rather austere and doctrinaire.



# Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# I

*Style is a particular manner and skill in painting and drawing  
which comes from the particular genius of each individual  
in his way of applying and using ideas;  
this style, manner or taste comes from nature and intelligence.*

Nicolas Poussin, *Observations on Painting*

## *The Question of Style*

‘Style’ is one of the art historian’s indefinable but indispensable terms. Though we cannot hope to settle the problem of terminology, we can at least begin by distinguishing between the personal style of an individual artist, which is what Poussin refers to in the passage quoted above, and the prevailing style of a school or period, as when we speak of High Renaissance, Mannerism or Baroque.

### MANNERISM AND BAROQUE

Some of the fundamental differences between the two periods may be conveniently illustrated by juxtaposing typical works of painting, sculpture and architecture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As representatives of Mannerism I have chosen Salviati, Ammanati and Vignola; Rubens and Bernini may speak for the Baroque. Let Rubens have the first word.

In *The Descent from the Cross* of 1611–12 [1] grandeur of conception and power of feeling unite to produce an air of epic tragedy. The actions of the figures, from the two workmen at the top to the two women kneeling at the foot, are natural and appropriate; we are made to feel not only the grief and horror of those closest to Christ but also the physical strain and effort involved in reverently lowering a dead body to the ground. Though the scene takes place by night, the compact group around the cross is illumined by a supernatural light that gives special prominence to the white shroud and the collapsed body of Christ, the livid, bloodless colour of which becomes even more

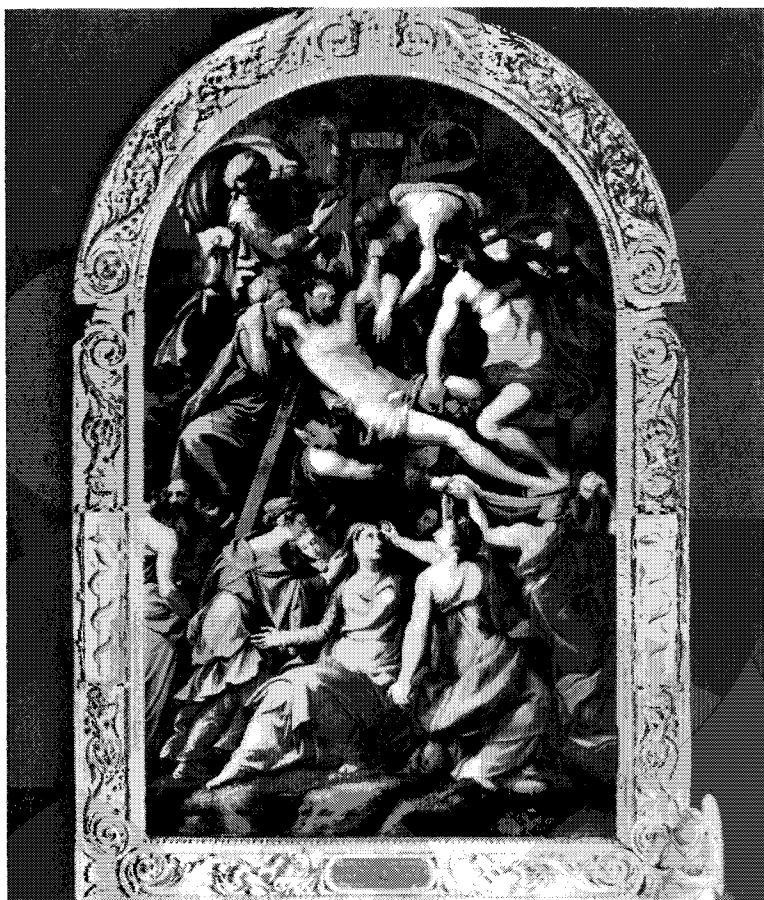


1. *The Descent from the Cross*, 1611–12. Rubens

pathetic by being set beside the strong and vital red of St John's mantle. It is useful, in judging the intent of the artist in a work such as this, to listen to the comments of a seventeenth-century observer. The French critic Roger de Piles says of Rubens's *Descent from the Cross*

that 'the painter has entered so fully into the expression of his subject that the sight of this work has the power to touch a hardened soul and to cause it to experience the sufferings endured by Jesus Christ in order to redeem it'.<sup>1</sup>

As compared to this Baroque conception of the subject, Salviati's elegant *Deposition* of about 1547–8 [2] may appear strangely inexpressive and detached. The composition is agitated and full of incidents, but there is little sense of dramatic unity. Despite their energetic and angular postures, the elongated figures have been arranged so as to create a decorative pattern, as if the painter had chosen to sidestep the rendering of strong emotions. The shallowness



2. *The Deposition*, c. 1547. Salviati

of the space and the tendency of the forms to adhere to the vertical plane also have the effect of removing the event from the realm of flesh and blood. Mannerist refinement and artifice prevail over nature and feeling.



Bernini's *Fountain of the Four Rivers* of 1648–51 in the Piazza Navona in Rome [3] shares with the paintings of Rubens [9] a robust naturalism and a free deployment of forms in space. Four giant river gods, representing the four quarters of the globe, are disposed in lively attitudes on an irregular and deep-cut rocky base from which streams of water gush forth. At the summit of this craggy mass there rises, seemingly without adequate support, an immense and weighty obelisk. For all its complexity and multiplicity of parts, the work possesses a powerful unity, which can be felt building up from the rough and 'haphazard' forms at the bottom to its climax in the soaring obelisk. This spectacular and exuberant monument was not created simply to adorn a Roman piazza. For the fountain – a papal commission – was intended to symbolize the universal triumph of the



3. *The Fountain of the Four Rivers*, 1648–51. Bernini

church, and Bernini's bold and imaginative design is wholly in keeping with this grand theme.

The Mannerist idea of a large public fountain may be exemplified by Ammanati's *Neptune Fountain* in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence [4]. The dominant feature is the gigantic marble figure of Neptune standing on a high pedestal in the centre of the basin, round the perimeter of which are placed figures in bronze. The effect of the fountain with the water in full play must have been very different



4. *Neptune Fountain*, 1560–75. Ammanati



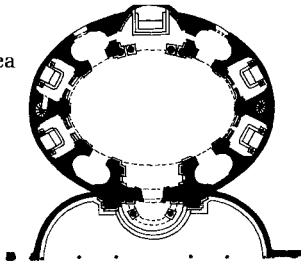
5. Detail of 4

from what we see today, when only a few jets are in operation; but even so it can never have had the impressive visual unity of Bernini's Baroque fountain. The huge Neptune, flat and ungainly and looking as if he were intended to be seen only from the front, seems almost unrelated to the bronze sea deities at the angles, which are moreover disturbingly smaller in scale [5]. Yet these figures are the best parts of the work. Slender, graceful, long-limbed, and posed in elegant and extravagant attitudes, they are typical products of Mannerist fantasy.

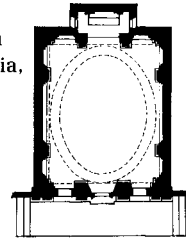


Bernini's church of S. Andrea al Quirinale [6, 6A], begun in 1658, might be described as a Baroque variation on the form of the ancient Pantheon, in which the cylindrical interior of the original has been converted into a domed oval. The façade of this little building presents an extraordinary composition of interlocking curvilinear movements, the oval form of the church itself being echoed in the reverse arc described by the low screen walls on either side. These contrary

6A. S. Andrea  
al Quirinale,  
plan



7A. S. Andrea  
in Via Flaminia,  
plan



7. S. Andrea in Via Flaminia, 1550–53. Vignola

forces are stabilized by the monumental aedicule framing the entrance, from which a semi-circular porch with two free-standing columns and a crowning coat of arms seems to expand into the space of the forecourt.

The diminutive church of S. Andrea in Via Flaminia [7, 7A], built by Vignola in 1550–53, offers a Mannerist adaptation, in severe and simple terms, of the scheme of the Pantheon. The interior, as can be

deduced from the outside, consists of a rectangular space covered by an oval dome. The marked planarity of the façade stands in striking contrast to the spatial properties and to the dynamic movement and counter-movement of Bernini's *S. Andrea*. It is almost as if an elevation of the portico of the Pantheon had been drawn in projection on the flat face of the church.

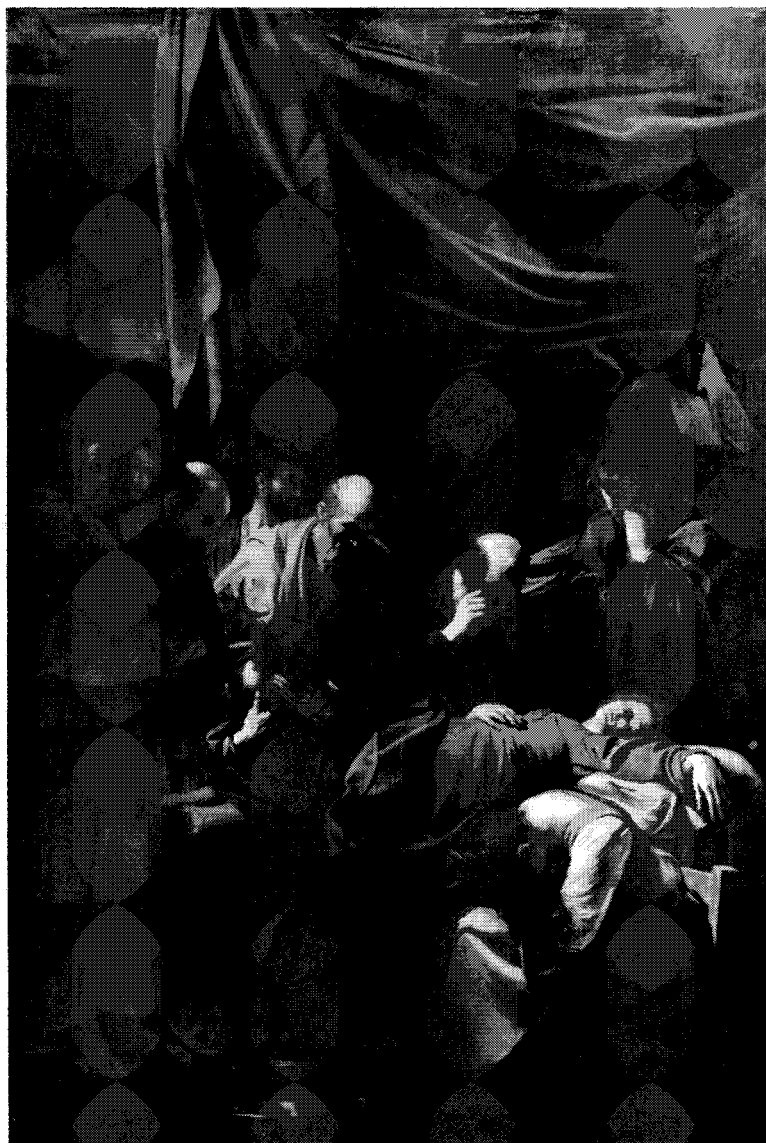
#### THE ABSENCE OF STYLISTIC UNITY

To recognize the broad differences between Mannerist and Baroque is simple enough. But it is quite another matter to define 'Baroque style'. Let us admit at the outset that this is an impossible task. Not only is there no homogeneity of style in the Baroque period, but one is almost tempted to speak of the very diversity of styles as one of its distinguishing features.<sup>2</sup> The sober realism of the Dutch school [125] bears no resemblance to the high-flown imagery of the Roman Baroque [127], and neither shows any affinity to the noble classicism of the age of Louis XIV [62].

Attempts have been made, it is true, to define a coherent stylistic vocabulary for the Baroque period. The most brilliant of these is Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* (1915), a comparison of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art from which the author drew five pairs of concepts. For Wölfflin the essential differences lay in the contrast between 'linear and painterly' modes of representation, between 'plane and recession', 'closed and open form', 'multiplicity and unity', and 'absolute and relative clarity'. Illuminating as these observations are, it is now evident that his categories have certain limitations. First of all, Wölfflin treated the sixteenth century as an artistic whole, making no distinction between that later phase of it which is now generally called Mannerism and the earlier, classic (or High Renaissance) phase. Yet it happens that the contrast between Baroque and Mannerism is more revealing and more significant than that between Baroque and High Renaissance; for the early Baroque movement took shape in opposition to the methods of Mannerism, not to those of the High Renaissance. Secondly, Wölfflin was interested in form rather than meaning and consequently tended to look on Baroque art, and especially Baroque painting, as an anticipation of Impressionism, without taking into account its specifically iconological content. Thirdly, his conception of a unified Baroque style was only arrived at by neglecting such artists as Poussin, though it must be obvious that a comprehensive system that fails to make provision for a major figure (no matter how inconvenient) is on that score alone defective.

The problem of the Baroque may be somewhat simplified, if not fully resolved, by viewing the lack of stylistic uniformity as the result

not only of national differences, but of a process of evolution. The broad stages of this sequence are succinctly described by Jakob Rosenberg in his book, *Rembrandt, Life and Work*. 'The development of Baroque painting', he writes, 'may be traced according to generations, and its leading international representatives during the course of the century were Caravaggio (at the side of the Carracci), Rubens, and Poussin. This means that Italy's initial leadership did not last throughout the century but was succeeded by that of Flanders and France'.<sup>3</sup>



8. *The Death of the Virgin*, 1605–6. Caravaggio



To look at the Baroque in this way, as a succession of phases in an international development, is especially useful in dealing with the representational arts. The first or 'Early Baroque' phase, essentially a naturalistic one, originated in Italy, and its pioneering figure was beyond doubt Caravaggio [8], an artist whose influence, during the second and third decades of the century, had a decisive effect on many French, Netherlandish and Spanish (as well as Italian) artists [40].

The second generation, often called 'High Baroque', found its fullest realization in the sensuousness and colourism of Rubens [9];



9. *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1635. Rubens

to this phase also belong the great achievements of the Italian masters Guercino [178], Pietro da Cortona [127], Bernini [193] and Borromini [84] in the fields of painting, sculpture and architecture. The qualities of luxuriousness and sensuality that are characteristic of this phase are equally conspicuous in the decorative arts: a particularly fine example may be seen in the salt-cellar by Georg Petel in Stockholm [10]. Though such works are often regarded, because of their exuberance and voluptuousness, as typical of the Baroque period as a whole, they should be viewed in their proper stylistic context, that is to say as products of the sensualistic stage of the Baroque.



The third or classicistic phase, in which the opulent and emotional qualities of the 'High Baroque' were supplanted by a more rigorous order, clarity and composure, had its beginnings in Rome in the early 1630s. The growing strength of the classicists, and the challenge that they offered to the more flamboyant Roman artists, may be reflected in a controversy that arose in the Accademia di San Luca at this time. The leading figures in this dispute are generally believed to have been Andrea Sacchi and Pietro da Cortona.<sup>4</sup> It was not Sacchi, however, but Poussin – the most rational and most disciplined master of the



11. *The Arcadian Shepherds*, c. 1640. Poussin

seventeenth century – who was to become the chief representative of this third phase [11]. Baroque classicism won its greatest victories in French art and architecture, but the effects of an international classicizing trend are also perceptible in the works of 'realists' such as Velazquez in Spain and Vermeer in Holland, whom no one would think of equating with true 'classics' of the stamp of Raphael or Poussin.

If a fourth, 'Late Baroque' stage can be distinguished, it is that of the later Louis XIV style, with its decorative reworking of the classic vocabulary [12]. The great Baroque masters had by this time all lived out their lives; the earliest Rococo artists had not yet come upon the scene.



12. *Cardinal de Bouillon*, 1708. Rigaud

Even in the highly individual art of Rembrandt it is possible to see reflected the main phases of the Baroque. The *Money-Changer* of 1627 [13], with its striking illusion of candlelight and its interest in a human oddity, gives clear evidence of the young painter's debt to Caravaggio and the naturalist movement of the Early Baroque. The *Blinding of Samson* of 1636 [196], a product of the most sensual period in the artist's life, is unmistakably Rubenesque in its passionate energy and violence. The *Supper at Emmaus* of 1648 [14], though it does not derive directly from Poussin's pure form of classicism, is nevertheless to be associated with that tendency towards classic calm and frontality that is characteristic of the mid seventeenth century. Yet Rembrandt, though he responds to the successive shifts

in style that mark the development of the Baroque as a whole, is never shaken from his own course. The methods of Caravaggio and Rubens (to say nothing of the many other artists by whom he was influenced) offered powerful stimulants at appropriate moments in his career, but these were invariably modified to suit his own aesthetic ends. The works of the later style, for example *Bathsheba with King David's Letter* [54], lacking as they are in any sort of Poussinesque idealization, can only be called 'classical' by virtue of their form and content – breadth

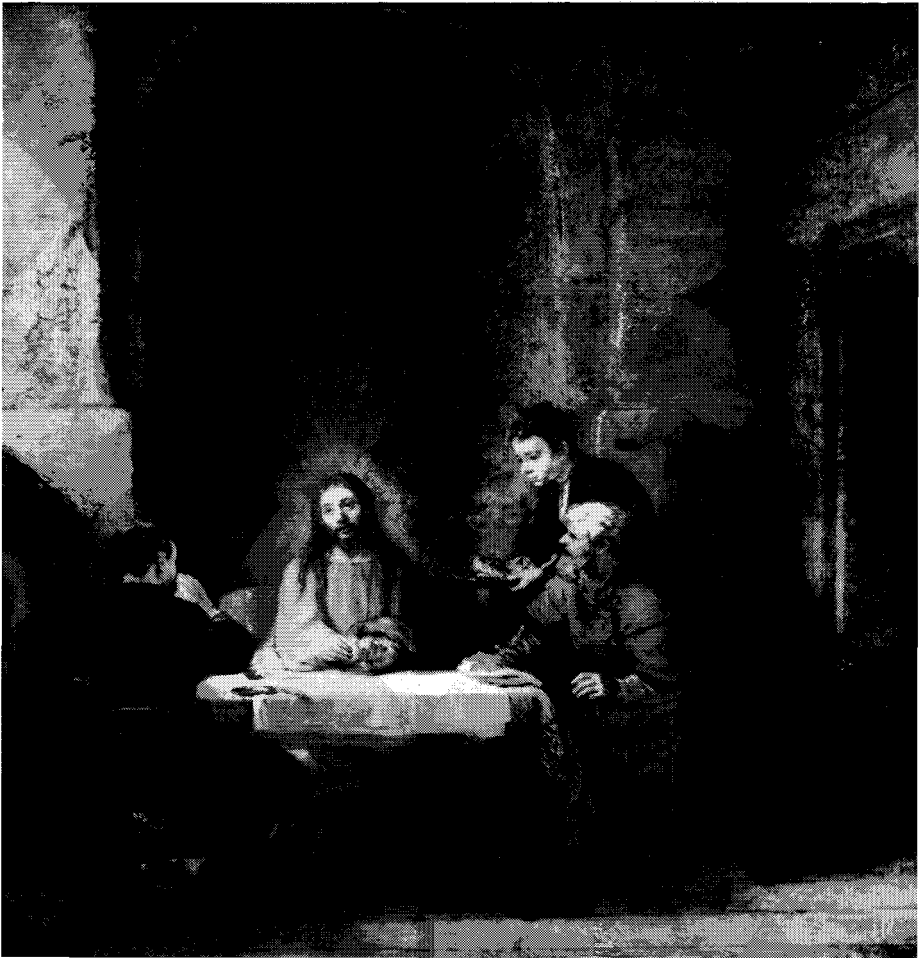


13. *The Money-Changer*, 1627. Rembrandt

and stability of composition engendering lasting dignity and solemnity. It is a fallacy to think of the development of the Baroque – or of any cultural phenomenon – as corresponding to the stages of human life, from youth to old age and death. But in the case of Rembrandt there is a remarkable parallel to be drawn between the biography of the artist and the course of Baroque art.

#### THE PROBLEM OF CLASSICISM

A great deal of ink has been spilt over the nature and meaning of classicism in French and Italian art of the seventeenth century. In Rome, as might be expected, a vital current of classicism manifested



14. *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1648. Rembrandt

itself at the very outset of the Baroque, in the works of Annibale Carracci [21] and his followers [207]. A new phase began in the 1630s, with the emergence of artists such as Andrea Sacchi, François Duquesnoy and Alessandro Algardi; and it was at this time too that classical art theory began to be defended more vigorously, if we may judge from the controversy in the Roman Academy of St Luke that has already been mentioned. But the real force of the classical spirit was not felt, as has also been noted above, until about the middle of the century, when the movement, aided no doubt by the authority of Poussin, began to take on international dimensions.

The more we inquire into the place of classicism in seventeenth-century art, the more we are likely to treat with scepticism the view



that this whole complex period can be reduced to a dialectical inter-play between two opposed principles, that is to say between 'Baroque' and 'Classicism'. Since, according to this view, the two categories are mutually exclusive, it follows that whereas S. Agnese in Piazza Navona [84] may be called 'Baroque', Versailles, on the other hand [112], can only be called 'Classical'. Implicit in this over-simple formula is the belief that classicism (especially French classicism) represents something alien to the spirit of the age — that it should be looked on as a kind of resistance movement, so to speak.

Another expression of the rigid Baroque—Classic polarity is the myth of a fundamental antithesis between the art of Poussin and that of Rubens, a myth that might appear to be substantiated by the famous quarrel between the 'Poussinists' and the 'Rubenists' in the French Academy of the late seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> But that controversy arose only after the deaths of the two artists and cannot by any stretch of the imagination be thought to reflect opinions held by them. Nor should we accept uncritically the idea that there was an irreconcilable difference between the attitudes of Bernini and Poussin. The sympathetic comments made by the former artist on the work of his French colleague ('a great history painter and a great painter of mythology')<sup>6</sup> are in themselves sufficient to show that there is no basis in fact for such a belief.

It is a mistake to consider French art and architecture of the seventeenth century as wholly, or even predominantly, classical. For there were other stylistic tendencies at work — at least until the narrow doctrines of the Academy began to stifle freedom of expression. The peasant pictures of the brothers Le Nain have obvious affinities to the naturalist currents in Italy, Spain and the Netherlands; the nocturnes of Georges de La Tour are part of the history of the Caravaggesque movement; and the broad curving wings of Louis Le Vau's Collège des Quatre Nations in Paris were plainly inspired by the Roman church façades of Borromini and Pietro da Cortona. We may best understand the Baroque if we see it as embracing certain divergent tendencies — realistic, dynamic, classical — which, taken together, contribute to its many-sidedness. And seventeenth-century classicism, in turn, may best be understood as an integral part of the Baroque whole.

#### THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF PERSONAL STYLE

Style must be considered in the particular as well as in the general sense. When we speak of the diversity of styles in the Baroque epoch, we are thinking not only of the different modes favoured by this or that school or generation, but also of the personal characteristics of individual artists. Rembrandt, though he may reflect the stylistic

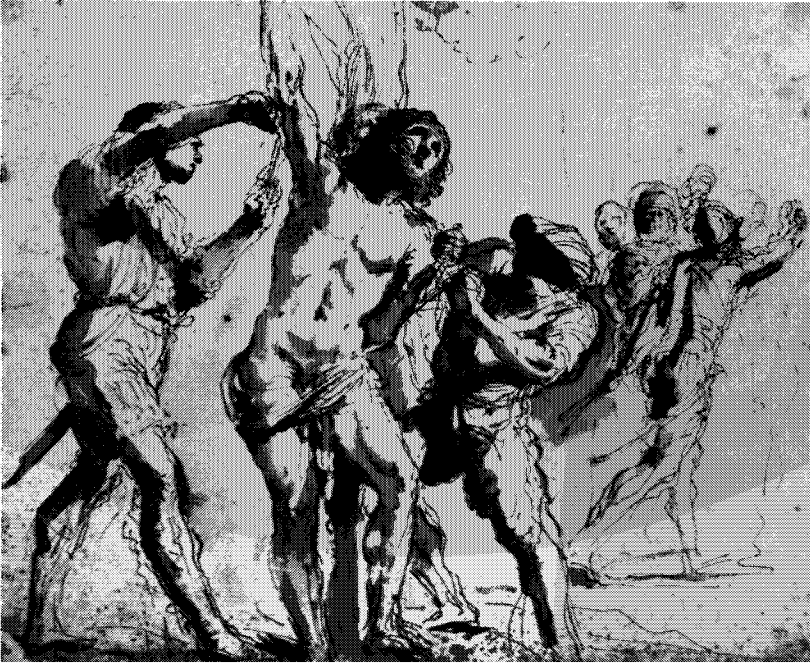
trends of Baroque painting as a whole, is always Rembrandt. There is nothing anonymous or self-concealing about his style: it is recognizably, even inimitably, his.

The consciousness of style – especially the cultivation of a distinctive personal manner – is characteristic of the Renaissance as well as of the Baroque. The difference is one of degree. For there is in the seventeenth century an intensified ‘style-consciousness’ that gives rise to such aesthetic phenomena as the ‘bizarre and extravagant’ architecture of Borromini [155] and the ‘unfinished’ works of Rembrandt.

Style, in the sense used here, is the visible manifestation of the artist’s faculties of imagination and execution. This is quite obviously true of magisterial personalities such as Bernini and Rubens, whose distinctive styles never allow us to forget the mind and hand of the creator. But the role of imagination in this process was also acknowledged by artists of a more conservative bent, whose manner might deceive us into thinking of them as self-effacing. The remarks by Poussin quoted at the beginning of this chapter show what importance he attached to ‘particular genius’ in the shaping of an artist’s style. It is characteristic of the very greatest masters that they achieve their most personal and most profound form of expression in the late style, that climactic stage in an artist’s career when, full of years and experience and freed from conventional restraints, he gives full rein to his powers of invention. The austere grandeur of the *ultima maniera* is quite as evident in the late works of Poussin as in those of Bernini and Rembrandt.

#### THE DRAWING AND THE SKETCH AS THE QUINTESSENCE OF ARTISTIC STYLE

The emphasis on the imagination and the belief in the special genius of the artist undoubtedly go far to account for the increased interest in the drawing as the direct expression of the original idea, untrammelled by tedious detail and finish. It is significant that some of the greatest Baroque painters cultivated the drawing as an art form for its own sake. Looking at the pen and wash drawings of Guercino [15] and Rembrandt [16], we may easily understand why such pieces were bought up in large numbers by amateurs and artists alike. Among the many works by other artists in Rembrandt’s extensive collection, we read of a book of drawings ‘by the leading masters of the whole world’, a large volume of drawings by Adriaen Brouwer, another containing drawings of ‘Roman buildings and views by eminent masters’, two books of drawings by Pieter Lastman, and so forth.<sup>7</sup> The English court painter Sir Peter Lely (1618–80), who amassed one of the greatest private collections of his day, owned not



15. *The Martyrdom of St Bartholomew*, c. 1636. Guercino



16. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, c. 1642. Rembrandt