

Anthony Apesos

Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas*:
Colorito Triumphant

I am obsessed with the Titian *Apollo and Marsyas*.
I suspect it's the greatest picture in the world.

Iris Murdoch¹

Titian's painting of *The Flaying of Marsyas* [Fig. 1], in the archbishop's palace in Kroměříž, is possibly the last work touched by the brush of the master. Although there is no record of the painting until it was in the Arundel collection in England *circa* 1620, it was probably still in Titian's studio after he died in 1576.² The painting depicts the punishment dealt to Marsyas, the loser in a musical contest between him and the god Apollo. In discussions of the painting, two aspects of the painting have occasioned significant disagreement: the identification of the figure of Midas as a self-portrait and the question of the facture of the painting as evidence of Titian's late style or of simple lack of finish. These two issues are, I will argue, closely linked and can be illuminated by a consideration of Titian's use of Giulio Romano's composition of the same subject. My discussion of the identity of Midas, the facture of Titian's painting and its relation to Giulio's painting lead to an understanding of the *Flaying of Marsyas* as a contribution by Titian to the controversy between *colore* and *disegno* in sixteenth-century Italian art theory.

The Textual Sources

Titian's painting, in many ways, follows a painting of the same subject by Giulio Romano. Most previous writers discuss Titian's



1. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas», Kroměříž, National Museum (Muzeum umění Olomouc – Arcidiecézní muzeum Kroměříž)



2. Venetian School, «Apollo and Marsyas», 1501, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

painting, and Giulio's, with the assumption that the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid is the primary textual source.³ However, Ovid's version is very abbreviated and belies an expectation that the reader comes to his poem already knowing the events that lead up to Marsyas's punishment.⁴ I will discuss the various sources of the Marsyas story here because this assumption that Ovid is the main source for Titian has misled many commentators, as I will show.

Giulio Romano and Titian had available, directly or through their humanist advisors, the several texts that refer to parts of the story that Ovid omits. These include the late classical authors the younger Philostratus, Nonnus of Panopolis, Fulgentius, Hyginus, Apollodorus, and Diodorus Siculus⁵ as well as the later mythologists Natale Conti⁶, Boccaccio⁷, and Vincenzo Cartari.⁸ These later authors also mention the episode but, only briefly, and use those earlier writers as their sources. Perhaps more important than all of these is the first Italian version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* published in 1497.⁹ Written in 1377 by Giovanni Bonsignori, this book is a paraphrase which expands the story in Ovid with additions from some of these other sources plus a few details that seem to be his own invention. The only agreement among all of these versions of the myth is that Marsyas lost a musical contest to Apollo for which Apollo punished Marsyas by flaying him alive.

Marsyas's misfortune was the result of his discovery of the musical instrument that was invented by Minerva. This instrument is described either as a flute or *dulos* and variously fashioned

from wood, bones, or reeds. When the goddess played it before the other gods they laughed at her. Certain that her musical performance could not be the source of their derision, Minerva went off to make music by herself. She discovered the cause of her fellow Olympian's mirth when, by chance, she saw her reflection while playing. Horrified to see how her face was distorted as she blew into the pipes, she discarded and cursed them. Marsyas found the instrument and taught himself to play it and delighted all who heard his music. His pride in his skill lead him to challenge Apollo to a musical contest, the winner of which could punish the loser in whatever manner he chose. The judge of the contest is mentioned in only three versions. Hyginus says the Muses were asked to judge. Diodorus says the contest occurred in the city of Nysa in Phrygia and was judged by the Nyseans. Only according to Fulgentius is Midas the judge, and for choosing Marsyas as the better musician, Midas's ears become transformed into those of an ass. Midas is frequently mentioned by many of these same authors¹⁰, including Ovid, as a judge of a different musical contest that was between Apollo and Pan. Though that contest did not have the fatal end for the loser, Midas's preference for Pan's playing did earn the same punishment of ass's ears as it did in Fulgentius account of the contest of Marsyas. Only Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* details the horror of Marsyas's death and the pain of his torture. Most make Apollo the executioner, although Philostratus gives the job to a local henchman and Diodorus says it was a Scythian – which seems confused since the story takes place in Phrygia. The river

Marsyas is mentioned by Ovid, Hyginus, and Nonnus but each give it a different origin: the tears of Marsyas's friends, Marsyas's blood or Marsyas himself transformed by Apollo out of pity for his victim, respectively. In three accounts of the contest, Apollo, by any standard of sportsmanship, cheats by changing the rules so he can win: Apollodorus and Hyginus have Apollo, after losing the contest, begin to play his lyre upside down – which Marsyas could not imitate with the flute; in Diodorus's version Apollo responds to losing by singing along with his playing – which Marsyas could not match while playing his instrument. In these tellings, as in all versions, Apollo, of course, is ultimately declared the winner. Apollo does not enjoy his triumph, according to Apollodorus, but smashes his lyre implying that he regretted both his cheating and his cruelty.

Most authors do not mention the fate of Marsyas's hide. Hyginus says that the skinless body was given to his follower Olympus for burial, implying that the skin had another destination; according to Nonnus it was hung from a tree where the blowing wind would swell it into the shape of his body. Herodotus says the skin hung still in his day in a market place in Phrygia, and Aelian also reports that it hangs there and adds that it moves when Phrygian music is played but Apollonian music leaves it motionless. Bonsignori's paraphrase of *The Metamorphoses* says the skin was hung in a temple¹¹, and the woodcut that illustrates his retelling of the episode in the 1497 publication is the first visual depiction of Marsyas's hanging hide. This illustration [Fig. 2] also is the first to show Apollo as the executioner.¹²

One version of the story that was published after Giulio Romano died, but which Titian certainly knew, was the 1553 Italian paraphrase by his friend Lodovico Dolce. Dolce, like many previous writers, says that Marsyas is deserving of his punishment, and he adds two details to the story to which, as I will show, Titian responds: Marsyas was tied to a laurel tree, the tree beloved by Apollo, and that Marsyas 'would not and could not put up any resistance'.¹³

Titian and Giulio Romano

Giulio Romano's fresco, painted in the 1530s, a small decoration among other scenes from the *Metamorphoses* in the Camera di Ovidio in the Palazzo del Te in Mantua, contains most of the elements that we see in Titian's picture.¹⁴ Central in both pictures is the climax of the story: Apollo skinning Marsyas alive. Titian could have seen the fresco during his several visits to Mantua.¹⁵ Titian's later use of the composition may have been from Giulio's preparatory drawing now in the Louvre [Fig. 3]. Giulio and Titian apparently had a friendly relationship, and, perhaps, Giulio gave the drawing to Titian as a token of their friendship.¹⁶ Titian surely had this drawing or some other visual record of Giulio's fresco

since his own depiction of the story so closely follows Giulio's composition.

Giulio's composition differs significantly from previous paintings of the scene including that of his master Raphael [Fig. 4]: Giulio shows Apollo taking part in the flaying; he includes Midas as the judge; he depicts Marsyas upside down. Titian follows Giulio in each of these as well as in Giulio's depiction of Marsyas as a goat-legged satyr instead of the more human creature with pointed ears and small horns and human legs of most earlier images. It is possible that Paduan bronzes may have been earlier in showing a goat-legged Marsyas, but the chronology is unclear.¹⁷ But whether Giulio found inspiration from a Paduan inkwell or not, Marsyas as satyr is closer to the written accounts and also emphasizes his difference from and inferiority to the sun god.

The Apollo of Giulio is an eager but elegant figure that ruthlessly pulls off Marsyas' skin with an effortless two-handed movement that closely copies the action actually used in skinning an animal. Apollo's standing accomplice, who is helping with the skinning, has a brutal expression as he points his knife at Marsyas's genitals, threatening castration as an added indignity. Behind Apollo, a nearly naked attendant stands holding Apollo's lyre so the god can go about his job. Dangling from the tree from which Marsyas is hanged is Marsyas's instrument, a syrinx or panpipe. It is attached by a corner of its irregular trapezoid and hangs vertically along the axis of its weight. Since previous paintings and prints show a flute, *dulos*, or a bagpipe, this too may be Giulio's variation or one he took from a Paduan bronze; Titian also follows Giulio in this detail.¹⁸



3. Giulio Romano, «Flaying of Marsyas», drawing, Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins



4. Raphael, «Flaying of Marsyas», Vatican Museums

Attending the scene is a satyr who has a grotesquely enormous scrotum; he holds a bucket in his right hand and looks at the viewer while waving his left hand. Although a woodland creature who should be mourning his musical friend, this satyr's ugly face is weirdly grinning as he catches the viewer's eye. In Philostratus's telling of the contest, the audience of satyrs who bewailed the fate of Marsyas also displayed, 'along with their grief, their playful spirit and their disposition to leap about'. Fehl suggests that 'perhaps the inappropriateness of this satyrs' demeanor reflects this irrepressible playfulness'.¹⁹

The inversion of Marsyas is the most influential component of Giulio Romano's composition. Not only did Titian adopt it, but so did many seventeenth-century painters of the subject. Perhaps, as has been suggested, hanging Marsyas upside down is an allusion to the impossibility of Marsyas to play the upside down flute.²⁰ Thus Giulio's cruel Apollo is inflicting a painful death on his vanquished opponent and mocking his victim at the same time. Of course, hunters and abattoir workers hang the carcasses of animals by the hind legs to skin them, so Giulio's choice of the pose of a butchered animal for Marsyas is both cruelly humiliating and more realistic.

Fehl²¹ and others²² have suggested that Midas's presence as a judge is a conflation or confusion of the story of Marsyas with the other competition between Apollo and Pan where Midas

was the judge. But Fehl²³ does note that Hyginus's telling of the story could have been the source for including Midas here. Whether Giulio was fusing or confusing these episodes or using Hyginus as his authority matters less than the way he depicts Midas. The old king indecorously blubbers into a rag and has the large ears of an ass.²⁴ This foolish Midas is consistent with the rest of the grotesque comedy of Giulio's illustration.

Like Midas, Giulio's Marsyas is a fool; hanging shamefully upside down, his face contorted in a scream of pain, he receives his punishment both for thinking he was a better musician and for believing he could prevail against a god, regardless of his musical skill. Bonsignori's paraphrase dilates on the satyr's foolishness: 'Marsyas means a man [who] also lives in error [...] Apollo flayed him; this means he stripped him of his errors and assigned him to the truth and made it clear to the people how little brains he had in him'.²⁵

It is clear that Giulio Romano's picture shows no sympathy for Marsyas but it is not necessarily the case that Titian had the same view. Philipp Fehl contends that 'a modern viewer must face that Titian, just like Ovid, whose depiction of the scene he chiefly follows, is on the side of Apollo'. To say otherwise, says Fehl, 'is simply not compatible with the nature of the subject as it presented itself to a Renaissance public'.²⁶ But Fehl, who himself refers to many versions of the story of the competition,



5. Copy after Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas», Venice, private collection

disregards that most, including Ovid's, do not show Apollo in a sympathetic light. Indeed, consideration of the question of Ovid's sympathy to Apollo should also encompass Apollo's actions elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*. When Apollo incontinently lusts after the innocent Daphne or when he stupidly makes a fatal irrevocable promise to his bastard son Phaeton or when he rashly kills his lover Coronis, was Ovid expecting his readers to admire the god? Certainly the horrific intensity of Ovid's recounting of Marsyas's suffering under the hands of Apollo seems unsympathetic to the god's cruelty. Readers of Ovid can have little doubt that Ovid's view of the gods as a whole was less than reverent, but if it is possible to entertain the notion that Ovid's pagan values would allow for some admiration of the god, there is every reason to think that a post-Tridentine Christian might not. Dolce's version of Ovid, surely known to Titian, refers to the heavenly harmony of Apollo's music and the humble music of Marsyas, but this is at best weak evidence for Fehl's assertion about the *inevitability* of the attitude of the Renaissance audience.²⁷

And what is more important, even if Fehl's claim about Titian's audience were the case, this would not prevent Titian from seeing the subject in a different light from his contemporaries. To do so underestimates Titian's capacity to innovate and his independence as a painter. Essential to appreciating Titian's independence, and especially important in considering his painting of the *Marsyas*, are Titian's innovations of the practice of painting. Titian with Giorgione, much earlier in the century, re-invented the technique of oil painting²⁸ which before them had evolved very little in the one hundred years since the Ghent Altarpiece.²⁹ Giorgione and Titian invented new manipulations of materials which included opaque impasto, sparse and broken applications of paint dragged over textured impasto or rough canvas, extensive use of opalescent scumbles; all of these they used along with the already prevalent glazing techniques. Heavy applications of opaque paint led Giorgione and Titian to realize that extreme revisions of a painting were possible so that an image did not need to be planned in detail but could be composed experimentally right on the panel or, as was more often in Venice, on the canvas. These discoveries are the foundation for the extraordinarily complex facture of Titian's late paintings. It is easy to forget, in the shadow of more recent painting practice, the strangeness of Titian's way of painting by the standards of the sixteenth century. Given Titian's independence and originality as a painter should we expect him to necessarily follow conventional attitudes toward a particular subject matter?

One could perhaps insist that the kind of mind that could innovate technique is not necessarily the same as one that would think differently about subject matter. Even so, as I have shown, the sources are so contradictory in their depiction of the protagonists of this myth that there is no reason to *presuppose* the allegiance of any artist depicting it. Instead of making assumptions

about the way the subject would necessarily present itself to the Renaissance viewer, it is more to the point to look to Titian's painting itself as the locus that will reveal *his* sympathies.

Titian's Two Versions of the *Marsyas*

Titian's *Marsyas* in Kroměříž was not the only canvas that he painted of this subject. Another painting of Marsyas was listed in a Venetian inventory twenty years after the Kroměříž painting had left Italy to enter the Arundel collection.³⁰ In 1990, a Titianesque painting of the flaying came to light in a private collection in Venice [Fig. 5].³¹ This 'new' *Marsyas* offers insight into the evolution of the Kroměříž painting and into his reconsideration of his response to Giulio Romano's composition. Its quality does not allow it to be considered autograph, but it is no worse than some other copies that were products of Titian's studio.³² It has been suggested that this is a copy of an early stage of the Kroměříž painting.³³ But if we consider the following: 1) that we know that there was another version; 2) as I will show below, that the differences between the copy and the Kroměříž painting are like those found in comparing other of Titian's first and second versions of other subjects; and 3) that it was more likely that Titian would have had a copy made of a painting when he considered it ready and about to leave his studio, not when a painting was still unresolved and not ready to go anywhere – then it seems much more likely that the copy is of a different, earlier painting, possibly the lost painting from the old Venetian inventory, and not the Kroměříž painting at an earlier stage.

Another occasion of Titian reusing an earlier composition is the late painting of the *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* in the Escurial [Fig. 6]; this is a reworking of the earlier *Saint Lawrence* now in the church of I Gesuiti in Venice [Fig. 7]. X-rays of the later painting [Fig. 8] show that in returning to this subject, Titian began with an underpainting that is very close to the earlier composition.³⁴ We know that Titian kept drawings or copies of his paintings in his studio³⁵, therefore earlier compositions were available to be transferred, possibly by studio assistants, onto a new canvas if Titian so desired.

The copy of the early *Marsyas* has some significant differences from the Kroměříž painting as we see it today, but the nature of the differences are consistent with the procedure Titian followed in the second St Lawrence painting. X-rays of the Kroměříž painting³⁶ show that its composition was originally close to the Venice copy. In both the X-rays and the copy, the child faun and the large dog are absent, and the standing figure on the far left turns toward the viewer and holds a lyre [Fig. 9]. These changes are enough for us to assume that the Venetian copy of the presumed lost early version is evidence of the appearance of the beginning stage of the Kroměříž painting. The Venice copy and the beginning of the Kroměříž

painting as revealed in the X-ray photographs were both closer to the Giulio Romano in the number of figures and the lyre-holding attendant. (Although less clear from the X-rays, I assume the ugly satyr-like face of the inverted Marsyas of the copy is hidden beneath the later painting.) Yet in his posing and rearrangement of the figures, the copy of the early version variously dem-



6. Titian, «Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence», Escorial

onstrates Titian's sympathies to be with Marsyas. The figure of Midas has been transformed by Titian from Giulio's undignified blubbering big eared weeper into a figure, still with the ears of an ass but these greatly reduced in size, posed in the traditional position of the philosopher engaged in melancholy contemplation of the spectacle before him.³⁷ The tree to which Marsyas is tied is leafless in Giulio's depiction of the story. Titian adds oak leaves in his paintings and so undermines Apollo's triumph,



7. Titian, «Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence», Venice, Gesuiti

contrary to Dolce who says it is a laurel tree sacred to the sun god. Furthermore, by turning Marsyas's body so that we have a frontal view of his chest and a three-quarter view of his face and by making the composition more compact, symmetrical, and static, Titian's painting strikingly resembles, as others have noted, an altarpiece of a martyrdom of a Christian saint.³⁸ In marked contrast to Giulio's very small fresco, the life-size scale of Titian's picture reinforces the similarity to an altarpiece. Paintings



8. Titian, «Martyrdom of St Lawrence», Escorial, X-ray



9. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas», Kroměříž, National Museum, X-ray (detail)

of the torments and deaths of martyrs were aids to devotional practice that asked the viewer to identify with the suffering saint or to imagine themselves as present at the scene. These practices of empathy would edify the engaged viewer. Perhaps such Christian meditations would be inappropriate for this particular 'painful scene', as Philipp Fehl³⁹ succinctly described it, derived from pagan antiquity. Both Frank Stella and Susan Sontag declared the painting to be so unpleasant that they found it difficult to look at.⁴⁰ But surely anyone familiar with Christian paintings of the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries should find nothing especially shocking here. Perhaps Stella's and Sontag's responses are understandable because unlike pictures of Christian martyrdoms, this one holds no hint of transcendence of the torment. As Melanie Hart observes, by depicting such a scene of intense suffering that is outside of the familiar Christian context, Titian allows us to see the horror of torture forgotten in religious

depictions.⁴¹ Such a meditation on the nature of cruelty and suffering is very far from Giulio's grotesque pantomime.

Hans Ost thinks the child with the dog in the Kroměříž painting may have been added after Titian's death⁴² and Gentili has repeatedly⁴³ asserted that these and the revision of the standing musician were painted after Titian's death. Their reasons for this are difficult to find in the painting: the quality of execution in both the standing musician and of the satyr child with his dog are of a piece with the drawing, color, and paint handling of the rest of this painting and other late Titians.⁴⁴ It is also likely that these changes are by Titian because they are drastic revisions of substantially realized passages, as evidenced by the X-rays of the Kroměříž painting. A later artist, in trying to get the picture presentable for sale, would not have made changes that consist of altered poses and added figures that have little relation to what was painted already. Further undermining any



10. Titian, «Boy with Dogs», Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen



11. Titian, «Crowning with Thorns», Munich, Alte Pinakothek



12. Titian, «Crowning with Thorns», Paris, Louvre

doubts as to the authorship of the revisions is the addition of the child satyr on the right. This figure, who is reminiscent of Titian's *Child with Dogs* in Rotterdam [Fig. 10], is characteristic of late Titian's re-visitations of earlier compositions: in the Berlin *Crowning with Thorns* [Fig. 11] based on his painting in the Louvre [Fig. 12], Titian added a conspicuous child to the tableau, and in the Escorial *Saint Lawrence* [Fig. 13], he made the nearly invisible boy of the earlier painting [Fig. 14] a prominent member of the composition. The pathos provided by the presence of a child at a scene of horrific brutality clearly was a theme of significance for the old artist.

The standing figure on the left is perhaps an even more significant change from the early version to the Kroměříž painting. The literature on the painting has little agreement on the role and identity of this figure. Originally this figure, as is revealed by the X-ray, held a lyre and, if we can trust the copy, made eye contact with the viewer. In the revised Kroměříž version as it now appears, his eyes turn upward in rapturous inspiration with his mouth slightly open, singing, while he plays a different and modern instrument, a *viola da braccio*. Jurgen Rapp⁴⁵ argues that the figure is Orpheus, but his reasoning depends on a neo-Platonic esotericism that has no direct connection to the story



13. Titian, «Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence», Escorial (as in Fig. 6), detail



14. Titian, «Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence», Venice, Gesuiti (as in Fig. 7), detail

of Marsyas. Ost believes this figure to be Apollo triumphant. He proposes that Titian was in the process, never completed, of transforming the kneeling figure, who clearly is Apollo with his laurel crown in the Giulio Romano and in both versions by Titian, into an anonymous henchman.⁴⁶ Neumann also thought that this standing figure is Apollo but that the kneeling figure is also Apollo; the two Apollos are from two different moments in the story: the standing singer being the Apollo of the competition; the kneeling Apollo is the victorious punisher.⁴⁷

Balancing the standing (possible) Apollo, the Kroměříž painting has on the far right an addition to the composition that only Neumann has fully considered: the large swatch of grey paint on the right edge of the painting in the distance behind Midas [Fig. 15]. If we recognize this as the flayed skin of Marsyas – the result of his punishment – we also see it to be, at least, consistent, if not obviously and necessarily, with the identification of the standing musician and the kneeling flayer both as Apollo: the two Marsyases, one being skinned and the other his skin, balance the two Apollos, one playing while singing and the other kneeling while wielding a knife.⁴⁸

If indeed he is repeating these two characters, Titian would simply be using the common device of continuous narrative. This is a device Titian used before for other subjects, and it is also found in the woodcut illustration [Fig. 2] of the story printed in the 1497 Vulgate Ovid. By simplifying and streamlining the contest to show only the playing, singing Apollo, Titian creates an even balance to the lonely skin hanging in the forest that a fuller depiction of the contest would not. The two Apollos do not match in costume, which could suggest the lapse of time and change of aspect appropriate to the different actions, though such a change in dress is not the usual practice in continuous narratives.

Fehl doubts that these two can both be Apollo, and he offers the possibility that the standing musician could be Olympus, a favorite of Marsyas to whom, according to Hyginus, Apollo gave the remains of Marsyas for burial.⁴⁹ Ovid also mentions him: 'The country Fauns, and woodland deities, his brother Satyrs, and Olympus (he whom Marsyas – even in his death throes – loved) mourned him, as did all those who, on those slopes, had shepherded their woolly flocks and herded horned

cattle'.⁵⁰ But this singing musician hardly seems to be a mourner who would be present in the painting as a representative for all those loving friends of Marsyas mentioned by Ovid. Fehl's suggestion that Olympus could be playing an Apollonian stringed instrument and standing on the side of the painting with Apollo is based on Pseudo-Plutarch's dialogue *On Music*. There it is related that Olympus later became a devotee of Apollo and wrote a hymn to that god.⁵¹ Fehl does not mention that, if we are to regard this figure as Olympus, this would necessarily mean that he could not be the mourning Olympus at the flaying because then he was not yet a follower of Apollo; if Olympus, he is the Olympus of a later point in time.⁵² I will return to the standing musician again presently.

If we notice the hanging skin, the wild gesticulation of the standing bucket toting satyr in the Kroměříž painting is not in a pointless frenzy, and so is unlike this character in the Giulio Romano and the copy of lost Titian. Now the old satyr directs the viewer with his left hand to see the results of Apollo's cruelty – the skin of Marsyas. The *pentimento* of his hand shows that Titian altered the position of the fingers so that they point to the slab of grey fur. The face of this satyr is as ugly as in the Giulio Romano drawing and the copy of the lost Titian, but instead of the leer we see in those, here he bears a confused scowl of unease. Freedberg calls this figure the god Pan.⁵³ Of course he does look like Pan (but so do most mature satyrs) and the enormous scrotum he bares in the Giulio Romano, which Titian tastefully censored, is consistent with Pan's reputation for lustiness. Rosand has also suggested this identification⁵⁴, but, in light of other narrative aberrations in the painting, I believe it deserves more consideration than either Freedberg or he gave it.

Accounts of the story of Marsyas do not have Pan at the flaying, but neither was Midas, according to all accounts but one, present. Pan, whose name by a spurious etymology means 'everywhere' can be anywhere – and certainly, of all places, here at this contest in Phrygian Nysa, home of Dionysus (god of Nysa) with whom he is often associated. If we allow that this could be Pan, why is he here? Perhaps to accompany Midas, who favors his music, both of whom can be seen as a pair visiting from another myth. In noting that the picture resembles, in its format, an altarpiece, a genre where saints from different places and historical moments can be found standing in witness to the suffering of another saint, we should not be surprised by such an a-chronic presence. Pan, an associate of Dionysus, being presented in a picture of the death of Marsyas, also an associate of Dionysus, is analogous to a fourth-century saint appearing in a painting of the Lamentation. There is nothing here to give us pause. Jodi Cranston has also noted that paintings like the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus* are precedents for pagan subjects taking the format of *sacre conversazioni* with their centralized compositions and close proximity of the figures to each other. She writes that by using this format, an artist could encourage



15. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas» (as in Fig. 1), detail

contemplation of 'mythological figures that were not connected by a simple, coherent narrative'.⁵⁵

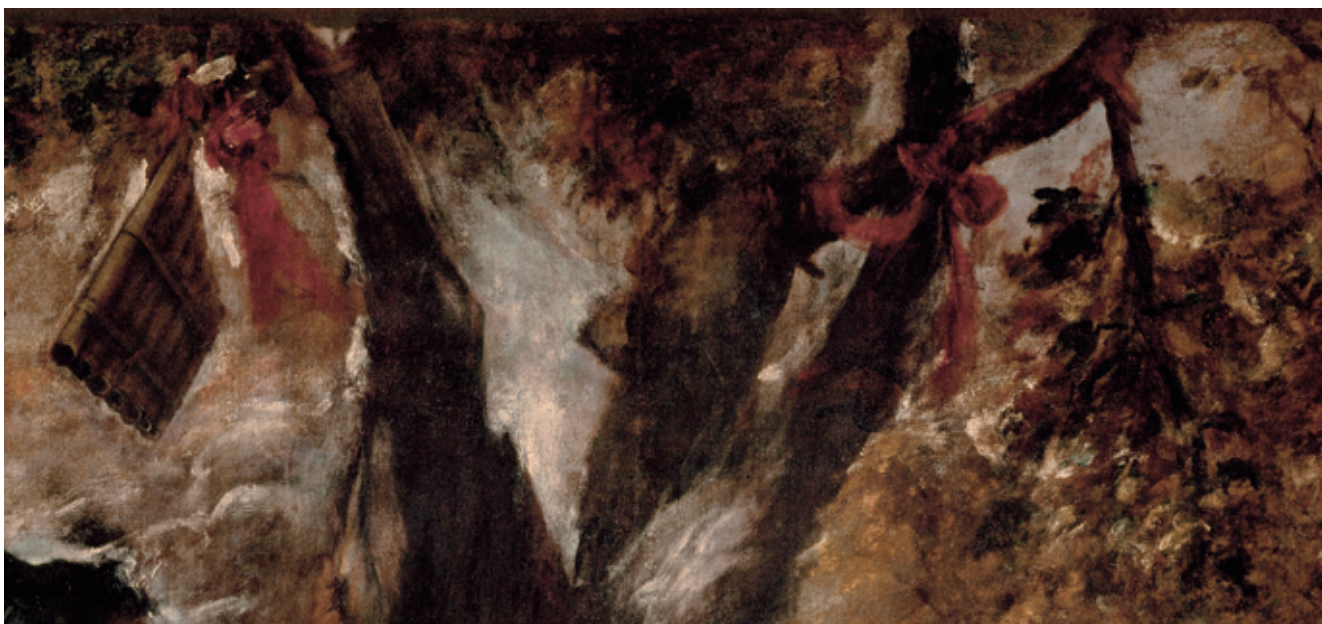
If we allow this, we could identify the standing figure on the left as Olympus from a later place in his career. But if the standing figure is Olympus singing a hymn to Apollo then we might think that he cannot also be Apollo in the contest as Neumann has suggested. But this beautiful singer of an Apollonian song who plays an Apollonian instrument, if he is not Apollo, at least, must recall to the viewer, the Apollo of the contest. The standing figure should be seen as possessing a double function both as a stand-in for Apollo in the continuous narrative of the scene and as Olympus after his conversion to Apollo's cult. To choose between Apollo and Olympus is to unnecessarily limit meaning to boundaries that the painting does not support.



16. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas» (as in Fig. 1), detail

In contrast to the Giulio Romano and the copy of the earlier Titian, in the late version at Kroměříž, Titian depicts Marsyas's face [Fig. 16] as calm and beardless, gently staring at the viewer with widely spaced eyes, uncharacteristic of the goat-like visage of other members of his race. The victim's clear, opened eyes turn toward the viewer and show that he has not fainted from the intense pain of being skinned alive. Titian, like artists from Pisanello to Rembrandt to Goya, would have paid attention at public spectacles of torture and execution so he could depict such scenes truthfully. David Richards observed how the arrangement of the figures on the canvas strikingly resembles the carefully choreographed practices of public execution common in Europe in the sixteenth century.⁵⁶ Even the strange calm on Marsyas's face matches what Titian could have seen. Photographs of the 'death by one thousand cuts', a slow method of execution practiced in China, show the endorphin⁵⁷ generated facial expressions that are the response to terror and agony in the face of victims⁵⁸ and which closely match the blank calm of the expression on the face of Marsyas.⁵⁹

The ribbons with which Titian replaces the ropes [Fig. 17] that tie Marsyas's hooves to the tree lend a more ritualistic aspect to the scene, but this is not at the expense of reality. Two ribbons of strong hemmed cloth of two inch width are more than strong enough to hold a two hundred pound struggling man.⁶⁰ The realism of Titian's imagining of the scene is shown



17. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas» (as in Fig. 1), detail



18. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas» (as in Fig. 1), detail

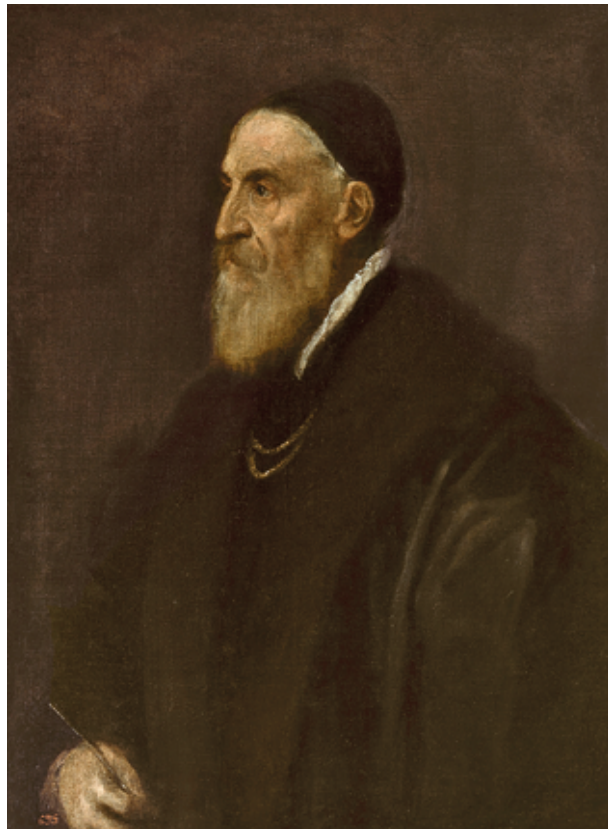
in the broken dangling branch near Marsyas's left hoof [Fig. 17]; the satyr had struggled – the evidence of which makes a contrast to his present resignation. Titian who, as already noted, had diverged from Dolce's pro-Apollo account by painting the tree as an oak in his early version of the subject has further corrected Dolce by including evidence that the satyr did not willingly submit to Apollo's cruelty.

As another gesture toward realism, Titian has in the first version already included a small dog licking up the blood puddling beneath Marsyas's body [Fig. 18]. That this is a lap dog like

those held by courtesans and noble women, as seen in so many sixteenth-century paintings, is an ironic commentary on the real nature of these cute carnivores.⁶¹ This detail heightens the humiliation of Marsyas's fate; being fed to dogs would probably inspire horror in most cultures⁶² and we know that, in fact, it was a special degradation practiced in executing vendettas in Friuli and the Veneto during the Renaissance.⁶³ Already in the earlier version, Titian offset this grim detail by changing the attitudes of the kneeling Apollo and his assistant to workmanly concentration so unlike the cruel enthusiasm of these figures by Giulio



19. Titian, «Self-portrait», Berlin, Gemäldegalerie



20. Titian, «Self-portrait», Madrid, Prado

Romano. Instead of pulling away Marsyas's skin in a single deft tug, Apollo's knife carefully dissects the skin away, cutting through the subcutaneous connective tissue.⁶⁴ He handles the knife so delicately that whenever I show this image to a class, half of my students, before they know the story, mistake it for a paintbrush.⁶⁵

In the Kroměříž painting, the large dog and the satyr boy together block the mound on which Midas sits and also make the staffage on each side of Marsyas symmetrical. The sad gaze of the child invites the viewer to contemplate the scene, reinforcing the allusion to altarpieces which commonly have such mediating figures who make eye contact with the viewer. The boy's expression is a stark contrast to the lyre holder who smirks at us in Titian's earlier version. His dog which the young satyr restrains is eager to join in partaking of Marsyas's blood and, we imagine, the flesh that the small dog cannot reach. What seems like drool from the jowls of this dog is actually the turned inside-out fur lining at the top of Midas's greaves [Fig. 18].

Midas

To reiterate: the depiction of Midas in both the copy of the early version and the Kroměříž painting has been completely transformed from the figure from Giulio Romano's painting. Titian's Midas does not grimace nor does he cover his face as in Giulio's picture; instead, he looks on quietly in the pose of melancholy contemplation. The enormous ass ears of Midas in the Giulio Romano have been reduced to what could be merely pointed tufts of hair.

Midas in the copy of the lost *Marsyas* and the Kroměříž version resembles, as many have observed⁶⁶, both of Titian's late independent self-portraits: one in Berlin [Fig. 19], the other in Madrid [Fig. 20]. Is the resemblance strong enough not to be coincidental? Surely not all of Titian's old men look alike. The Saint Nicholas of Bari (San Sebastiano, Venice) doesn't look like the portraits of the Doges, nor can these be mistaken for the portrait of Archbishop Filippo Anchinto (Metropolitan



21. Titian, «Saint Jerome», Escorial



22. Titian, detail of «Pietà with Saints», Venice, Accademia

Museum of Art, New York) or for the men of the *Transfiguration* (San Salvatore, Venice). The broad forehead, aquiline nose, and cut of the beard that the Madrid and Berlin portraits share are not in the faces of these other old men but are there in the face of Midas. Titian, a great portraitist, could easily have avoided the similarity of Midas to himself – but chose not to.

But some writers on the painting, nonetheless, dispute whether this resemblance means that these Midases are indeed intended by Titian to be self-portraits. Because Midas judged against Apollo, Ost thinks it would be anachronistically Romantic for Titian to identify with a member of the losing side.⁶⁷ Wethey notes the difficulty for modern viewers to sympathize ‘with gods who are so impossibly cruel toward mankind’, implying that this difficulty would not have been the case for the Renaissance viewer.⁶⁸ But Wethey also notes that the ‘gory execution is presented in the same spirit as the martyrdom of a Christian saint’.⁶⁹ This raises the question, not asked by Wethey, with whom would sixteenth-century Venetians sympathize: a cruel pagan god or the figure presented like a Christian saint?

Ost cannot properly consider the question of likeness because he is convinced out-of-hand that in this case self-portraiture is impossible. As Jennifer Fletcher, who shares this point of view, asked, ‘Could he [Titian] who continuously exercised such

refined aesthetic judgment ever have cast himself as a fool?’,⁷⁰ But whether Midas was a fool or Apollo was unjust are both contingent not on who triumphed in the competition between Marsyas and the god but on who may have played his instrument more beautifully and deserved to win; as the variety of accounts of Apollo’s cheating demonstrate, there is no necessity for this to have been Apollo.

If the argument that Midas is necessarily a fool is not supportable, then the assertion that Midas cannot represent Titian cannot be based on it. Instead, in considering the question of whether Midas is meant to be Titian, his accepted self-portraits, especially those that are disguised and embedded in narratives, need to be examined with two questions in mind: Is the resemblance strong enough for it to be a self-portrait? And how is the role played by those characters that are acknowledged to be Titian’s embedded self-portraits concordant with or contradictory to the character of Midas as presented here?

In a number of his later paintings, Titian presents a figure who also resembles the independent self-portraits and the Midas, these include both versions of *Saint Jerome* in Spain [Fig. 21] the Saint Jerome in the *Pietà* (Accademia, Venice; Fig. 22) intended for his tomb and the old man helping *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Prado, Madrid; Fig. 23). Most commentators



23. Titian, «Christ Carrying the Cross», Madrid, Prado

accept, and none that I know of dispute, these as disguised self-portraits.⁷¹ Ost himself uses them as evidence that the Midas is not Titian because these figures are all bald and Midas's hairline is only receding.⁷² But if the Midas of Kroměříž [Fig. 24] was based, as I have argued, on an earlier painting done when Titian might well have had more hair, this objection is off the point. Perhaps Titian, in redoing the earlier painting, could have chosen

to update his appearance – but not necessarily. If, as is probable, the underpainting was begun by an assistant who copied the earlier lost version then the hair and crown of that version would have been on the canvas before Titian's emendations to the composition began. Certainly, if this is a self-portrait, Titian out of vanity or convenience, could have chosen not to bother to alter Midas's hairline. If, as is evident, Titian wanted to obscure



24. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas» (as in Fig. 1), detail

Midas's ass ears, a bald head would not have served this. I don't think it likely that the resemblance of these contemplating figures, including Midas, to each other and to the two independent self-portraits could be accidents. I agree with Fletcher that Titian was not a fool, but I also believe that it would have been foolish for Titian to have created an irrelevant likeness. Perhaps this is not proof, but the alternative seems to me very doubtful.

What those other paintings that are widely accepted to contain embedded self-portraits have in common is obvious – all are contemplating the passion of Christ. Just like these other old men, Midas, in the *Flaying*, is also contemplating a suffering body. But Titian is not making an equivalence of the skinned satyr to his crucified Savior. The self-portraits with Christ are ardent, pulling toward the body of the Lord; in one painting he

is actually helping Him; in others, as penitent Saint Jerome, he is trying to emulate His passion. Unlike these, Midas in his philosopher pose is restrained in his contemplation.⁷³ As Francis Ames-Lewis indicates, self-portraits in the Renaissance were rarely mere self-depictions but were, instead, a medium through which an artist could most naturally fashion a self image.⁷⁴ The placement of a self-portrait within a complex narrative necessarily increases the possibility of such a communication. The remainder of this essay offers an interpretation that I believe confirms that Midas is Titian and that the entirety of this painting is a communication of Titian's image of himself and of his life's work.

* * *

Jutta Held⁷⁵, in her 2008 review of the literature on Titian's painting, has shown that interpretations of the punishment of Marsyas have taken two directions each of which infects our inference of Midas's role in the drama: (1) Apollo's actions are not to punish Marsyas, but reveal the truth: Properly understood, in Held's words, 'Apollo is redeeming the soul of Marsyas and is purifying him [...] and thus releasing the inner self which [...] is full of beauty or conceals a valuable treasure'.⁷⁶ In this understanding Midas, being a defender of Marsyas, is a fool. The discussions of Neumann and Wyss fit this category of reading. (2) The flaying is a just punishment deserved by the proud and foolish Marsyas. Again Midas's allegiance would make him a fool. Fehl and Ost are examples of this view. Held offers a third way of viewing the suffering of Marsyas, providing a more anthropological analysis that sees the painting as a reflection on arbitrary power and the cruel suppression of the weak by the strong. Such a view allows Midas's judgment to be fair and wise and for Titian not to be on the side of Apollo.

The advantage of this third view is that it does not gloss over the obvious: Apollo is not the hero of this painting, and Marsyas's torment, as Titian presents it, is unacceptable as a metaphor for spiritual cleansing. But what is more profound, it does not ignore the tragic essence of Titian's picture.⁷⁷ Here Apollo is beautiful, the executioners are careful and attentive; Marsyas is calmly resigned and his followers grieve. We are shown an act performed without obvious animosity; it is a very painful event from which none of the actors can escape.

From this approach to the painting, Held produces two contradictory extrapolations. In one, the painting is an allegory of the end of Venice's 'autonomous political and cultural status' challenged by greater forces beyond its shores.⁷⁸ In the other, Venice is the victor that must tame its unruly colonies. The particulars of these readings reveal more about Held's political lens for interpretation, and the impossibility of reconciling them to each other suggests that the painting is not about

either. Sidney Freedberg⁷⁹ writes that the painting may have been a response to a specific political event. In August 1571, the Venetian commander Marcantonio Bragadin, after a defeat that meant the loss of a significant Venetian outpost on Cyprus to the Turks, was, after being brutally disfigured and all 350 of his surrendering men slaughtered, taken prisoner. For two weeks his untreated wounds festered until he was publicly skinned alive.⁸⁰ If the *Marsyas* was painted after this event it is impossible that a Venetian could have painted a picture of flaying without Bragadin's suffering in mind, but even if the picture was stimulated by this event it is not 'about' it.⁸¹ It is instead an archetypal depiction of the cruelty in power relationships to which any number of cases can fit. In Held's words, 'Titian may have been dramatising a permanent relationship of violence that is accepted, while at the same time its brutality is condemned and lamented'⁸² – lamented but accepted because permanent and inescapable.

Giulio Romano's drawing shows an unambiguous act of just punishment that could only be lamented by a Midas who is an ass-eared fool. Fehl's and Ost's interpretations of the flaying comfortably fit Giulio Romano's version of the scene but not Titian's. In the Kroměříž painting, he brings the revisions of Giulio's depiction begun in his earlier version to culmination. In the later iteration, Titian's last painting, the story is fully, if compactly, told. Thomas Puttfarcken discusses the appearance in Titian's *œuvre* of the tragic as it was understood by early modern readings of Aristotle's *Poetics*. According to Aristotle, tragedy requires a plot marked by three elements: reversal of fortune, change from ignorance to knowledge, and suffering.⁸³ By expanding the subject of his painting, from Giulio's depiction, to include the standing singer who is simultaneously readable as both Apollo of the contest and Olympus after his conversion to the cult of Apollo, plus the hanging pelt of Marsyas, Titian makes what was only a scene of suffering into a narrative container sufficient to hold Aristotle's notion of a tragic plot. As in the late versions of the *Crowning of Thorns* and *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*, he deepens the sense of horror with the presence of a child as witness to the inescapable grip of power and cruelty that is his inheritance.

Disegno and Colorito

Daniela Bohde⁸⁴ sees the contest between Apollo and Marsyas as shown in Titian's painting as an analogy to the conflict between analysis, or mind, and feeling, or body. The logic of Apollo's stringed instrument versus the primitive naturalness of Marsyas's wind instrument, the kind of instrument played by peasants and semi-human satyrs, are symbols of the sides of this conflict. Since Plato, the shrill sound of the flute was said to inspire irrational passions, as opposed to the lyre which

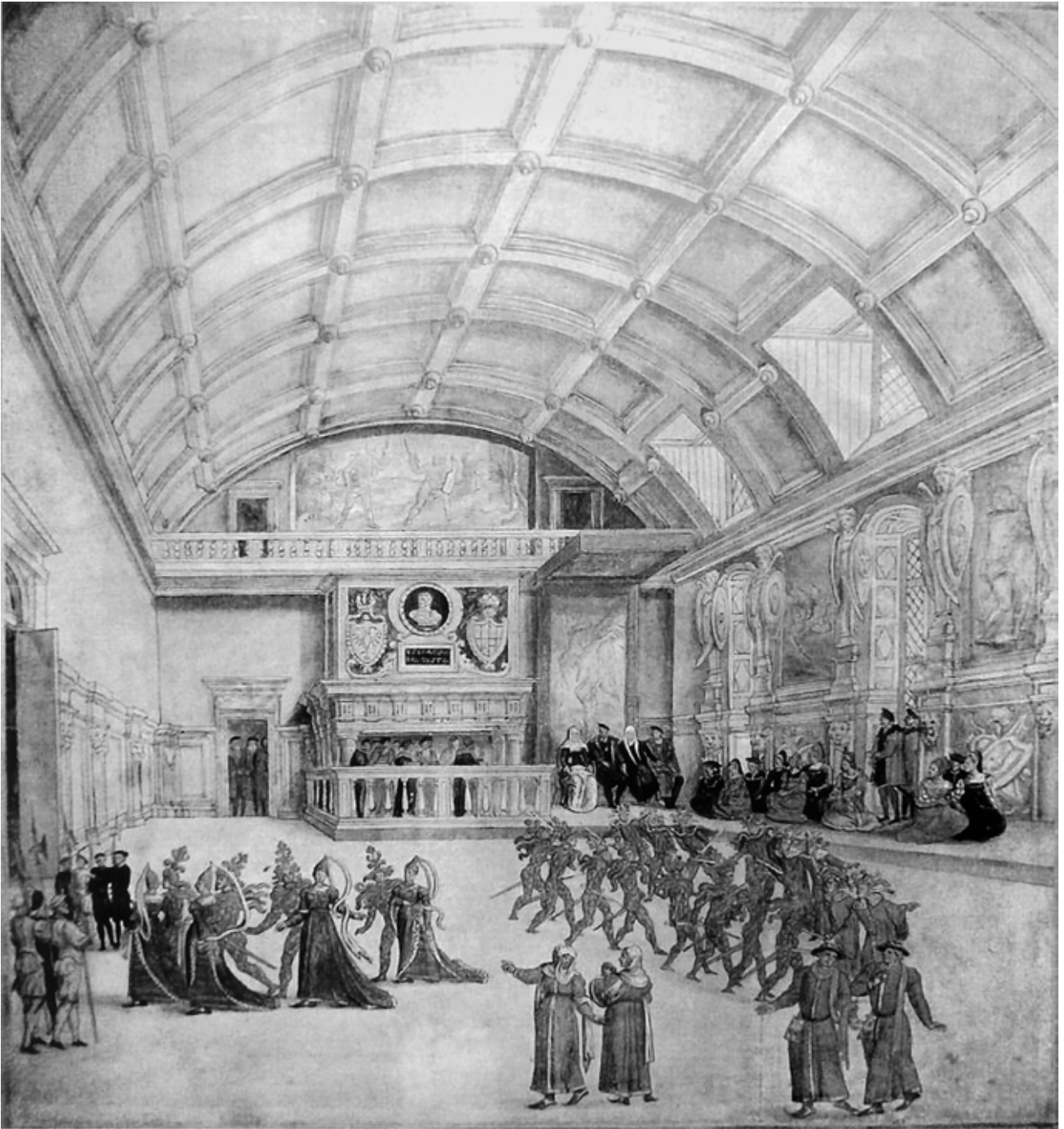


25. Titian, «Danae», Naples, Capodimonte Museum

promotes calm contemplation.⁸⁵ From this was derived the association of the flute with the feminine and stringed instruments with the masculine. Titian emphasizes the difference by replacing the more primitive lyre with an up-to-date and more sophisticated *viola da braccio* while retaining Giulio's innovation that showed Marsyas's instrument to be a syrinx⁸⁶ – an instrument so rustic that it is merely a handful of hollow reeds held together with a clump of beeswax.⁸⁷ Bohde suggests that this conflict mirrors the controversy in sixteenth century art theory between *disegno* and *colore*; in her view, the analytic approach of *disegno* is allegorized by Apollo's probing of the body of Marsyas within the painterly matrix of colored paint that forms the image.⁸⁸ Bohde's idea is particularly persuasive in light of the notion that color was viewed as feminine shapeless substance that required masculine drawing to give it form.⁸⁹ I think we can take

Bohde's interpretation of the role of the conflict between *disegno* and *colore* in Titian painting a little further by inquiring why Titian chose Giulio Romano's composition as his source. Doing so, I believe, helps to strengthen her interpretation.

Titian's pictorial inventiveness was such that, although he would borrow poses and motifs from other artists, as was common practice, he never used another artist's entire composition as a pattern for one of his paintings as he did in the *Marsyas*.⁹⁰ If Titian wanted to create a painting to pay homage to his friend⁹¹, he would not have borrowed from a work that is so minor in Giulio's *œuvre* to do it. The suggestion that Titian used Giulio's picture as a source because he was in too great of a hurry to invent something new has been offered⁹², but there is nothing hurried in the much worked and re-worked paint handling and composition of Titian's painting. Titian's choice of source is



26. Anonymous, «The Great Hall at Binche in 1548», Brussels, Royal Library

no mystery when we understand that despite his friendly relations with Giulio, Titian would necessarily have viewed the court painter of the Duke of Mantua, an artist of great international fame⁹³, as a rival. And, what is more important, Titian would also have recognized Giulio as an exponent of the tradition of Central Italian painting which advanced the notion of the superiority of *disegno*. As Raphael's greatest student, Giulio, for Titian and his contemporaries, was closely linked to Michelangelo, recognized as the greatest exponent of *disegno* and known to be an artist to whom Raphael's art was indebted.

Central Italian artists' ideas are well attested to by their paintings, sculptures, drawings, and writings which show their conviction that anatomical study was a discipline essential to *disegno*.⁹⁴ Although the illustrations of Vesalius's great anatomical treatises were probably produced by an associate of Titian, anatomy was not a key ingredient in the practice of Venetian artists. In the second edition of *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori* (1568), Vasari reported in his life of Titian, that Michelangelo said, after seeing Titian's *Danae* [Fig. 25], 'it is a great pity that in Venice they don't learn to draw well from the beginning and pursue their studies with more method'.⁹⁵ Michelangelo, who dissected and who planned to write a treatise on anatomy, was alluding in this remark to the obvious lack of anatomical study visible in Danae's soft form. There can be no doubt that Titian read Vasari's account of Michelangelo's comments.

Any contest makes a suitable subject for a painting if a debate is to be allegorized. The competition between Apollo and Marsyas that resulted in Marsyas's flaying is an uniquely fitting choice for a contribution to the debate between *disegno* and *colore* since anatomy was so important to Central Italian *disegno*: the very name 'Marsyas' became the term for a skinned cadaver that was used by artists for the study of anatomy.⁹⁶ As an intervention in the debate, Titian's final transformation of Giulio's comic conception of the story with its allegiance to arbitrary autocratic authority into the image of tragic ambiguity that we see in the Kroměříž painting consists of more than the addition and emendation of the figures. At the center of the composition, the fleshy torso of Marsyas hangs. Layers of semi-transparent scumbles of paint play against glazes of color to form a body of throbbing presence. The indeterminacy of the drawing of the chest and abdomen create a sense of breathing, even twitching, flesh. Titian in the *Marsyas* answers accusations of his inadequacy in *disegno* with the ultimate proof of his supremacy as a painter of flesh. For his depiction of the flaying of Marsyas, Titian used a composition by a Central Italian exponent of *disegno* neither as convenience nor by accident. Titian, wrote David Ekserdjian, 'found something magical in Giulio's invention that [Giulio] himself was unable to see'.⁹⁷ What Titian found there was the germ for a critique of the theory of art that the works of Giulio Romano exemplified.⁹⁸

The notion that the *Marsyas* is, as Sidney Freedberg said, 'Titian's most technically radical late work'⁹⁹ and as such is, as I believe, an answer to Central Italian *disegno* is undermined if the painting is, as some assert, unfinished. Hans Ost, for example, argues that the facture of the painting seems extraordinary only because it was never completed. While there is no evidence to indicate why Titian painted either version of the Marsyas story, Ost speculates that the Kroměříž painting was intended to replace a painting of the same subject by Michael Coxcie as part of the commission to paint the *Four Great Sinners of Antiquity* for Mary of Hungary's hunting lodge in Flanders.¹⁰⁰ Two Titian paintings now in the Prado, the *Sisyphus* and the *Tityus*, are all that exist from these four; Ost thinks the *Marsyas*, having been meant to hang with these paintings, would have matched, if Titian had finished it, the clarity of definition of forms that we see in these two survivors. We have a detailed description of the Great Hall as well as a drawing and a print [Fig. 26] that show how Titian's and Coxcie's paintings were installed there. Coxcie's *Contest* and *Punishment* both hung high on the end walls filling most of two lunettes above a balcony overlooking the room. Titian's *Sinners* are on a lower register between the windows. Facing the Titians were six tapestries of the Deadly Sins with the seventh on one of the end walls. In the context of this room, the *Four Great Sinners* are an independent series that complements the tapestries, and the pair of Coxcie's Marsyas paintings together all form three separate considerations on the subject of transgression. So there is no logical necessity to think that Titian would have been asked to repaint the scenes already in place and painted by Mary's court painter. Furthermore the horizontal format of Coxcie's paintings, as seen in the drawing, precludes the possibility that Titian's square painting could have been intended to replace one of them. Also it is clear that Titian carefully considered the collocation of his Four Sinners between the windows of the hall where the simplicity and high contrast of these compositions would have been the most effective treatment; if Titian intended his *Marsyas* to replace the Coxcie picture of the flaying, he certainly would have planned it to be a composition more appropriate for a painting designed to be near the ceiling of an enormous room.

But even if the Kroměříž painting was not intended eventually to accompany and match the *Sisyphus* and the *Tityus*, it, nonetheless, could be unfinished. Charles Hope has repeatedly¹⁰¹ insisted that paintings made late in his life with facture like that seen in the *Marsyas* are unfinished. However, many of these are signed, including the *Marsyas* and most were delivered to their patrons. The *Rape of Lucretia* [Fig. 27] in the Fitzwilliam Collection, Cambridge, is a late painting by Titian that has an intensity of color and degree of finish unlike other works of a similar date, and it has been cited by Hope¹⁰² as the standard by which the degree of finish that all of Titian late work should be judged. But to not appreciate these other late paintings because



27. Titian, «Rape of Lucretia», Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum



28. Titian's *Impresa*, *Imprese di diversi principi*, 1586, Washington, Library of Congress

they do not look like the *Lucretia*, as Lawrence Gowing said, in defense of the finish of the *Marsyas*, is 'blinding oneself to what is unique and unforeseeable in art'.¹⁰³

The dense flickering web of brush work and the spatial elisions that seem too extreme for the tastes of Hope and Ost are the hallmarks of Titian's late style as found in the Escorial *Saint Lawrence* and the *Agony in the Garden* (Prado) painted for Philip II. If these features are more prominent in the *Marsyas*, it is not because it is unfinished. Instead they are a culmination of the development of Titian's facture over more than a half of a century. The painting realizes the expectations raised by the direction of his exploration, yet conforms to no criteria outside of the edges of the canvas. The richness of surface is far from incomplete but is rather the proof of labor that serves to fulfill a promise not understood until its realization. It is striking that through his long career developing his paint handling toward both a greater complexity and an increased sketchiness, Titian was successful, as the undiminished demands for his brush attest, in educating his patrons to follow him to new realms of expression. Also striking is that even now some of Titian's critics still resist his tutelage.

Mark Roskill in his translation of *Aretino*, a dialogue on painting by Titian's contemporary Lodovico Dolce, makes the important distinction between *colorito* and *colore* by consistently

translating them as coloring and as color, respectively.¹⁰⁴ David Rosand has explained that *colore* in the usage of Venetian art theory means colored paint – the substance – while *colorito* is the act of applying this substance to a pictorial surface. In other words *colorito* is the process of painting.¹⁰⁵ *Colorito* as action is what we see described in this famous passage in Marco Boschini's book on Venetian painting which is based on Palma Giovane's recollections of his great master and friend. As well known as this passage is, it is worth reconsidering:

Titian smothered his canvases with a mass of paint [*colore*] that made a foundation for the touches of paint he laid over it [...] these underpaintings were made with resolute use of the brush loaded with pure red ochre, lead white, black, or yellow to produce, in four strokes the beginning of a figure in light and dark with the appearance of relief. Such sketches were always admired by those who travelled from great distances to see the best way of painting. Though these beginnings were mere sketches, they were in demand by connoisseurs. After having made these foundations for his pictures Titian turned the canvases to the wall where he left them for months without looking at them. When he wanted to work on them again, he examined them with a critical eye, as if they were his mortal enemies, searching for any defects. If he discovered anything which was not in accord with his intentions, like a good surgeon, he applied himself to reduce any swelling of flesh, or to putting right an arm or a foot that had taken an awkward posture, and so on, without pity he reformed

the bony structures that were not properly placed. Working in this way he constructed the figure to give it the symmetry that could represent the beauty of nature and of art. After having done this he left it until the paint was dry, and he repeated the same process on other pictures. And so he continued to work on his paintings from time to time until he covered his figures with what seemed living flesh that only lacked breath. [...] The last touches he rubbed in with his fingers adjusting the high lights and blending them into the mid-tones with the touch of a finger. He added touches gradually with a dark stroke in one place to give it strength or a touch of rose, like a drop of blood, in another to give it life, and so he animated his figures to perfection. Palma related that in finishing he painted more with the finger than with the brush.¹⁰⁶

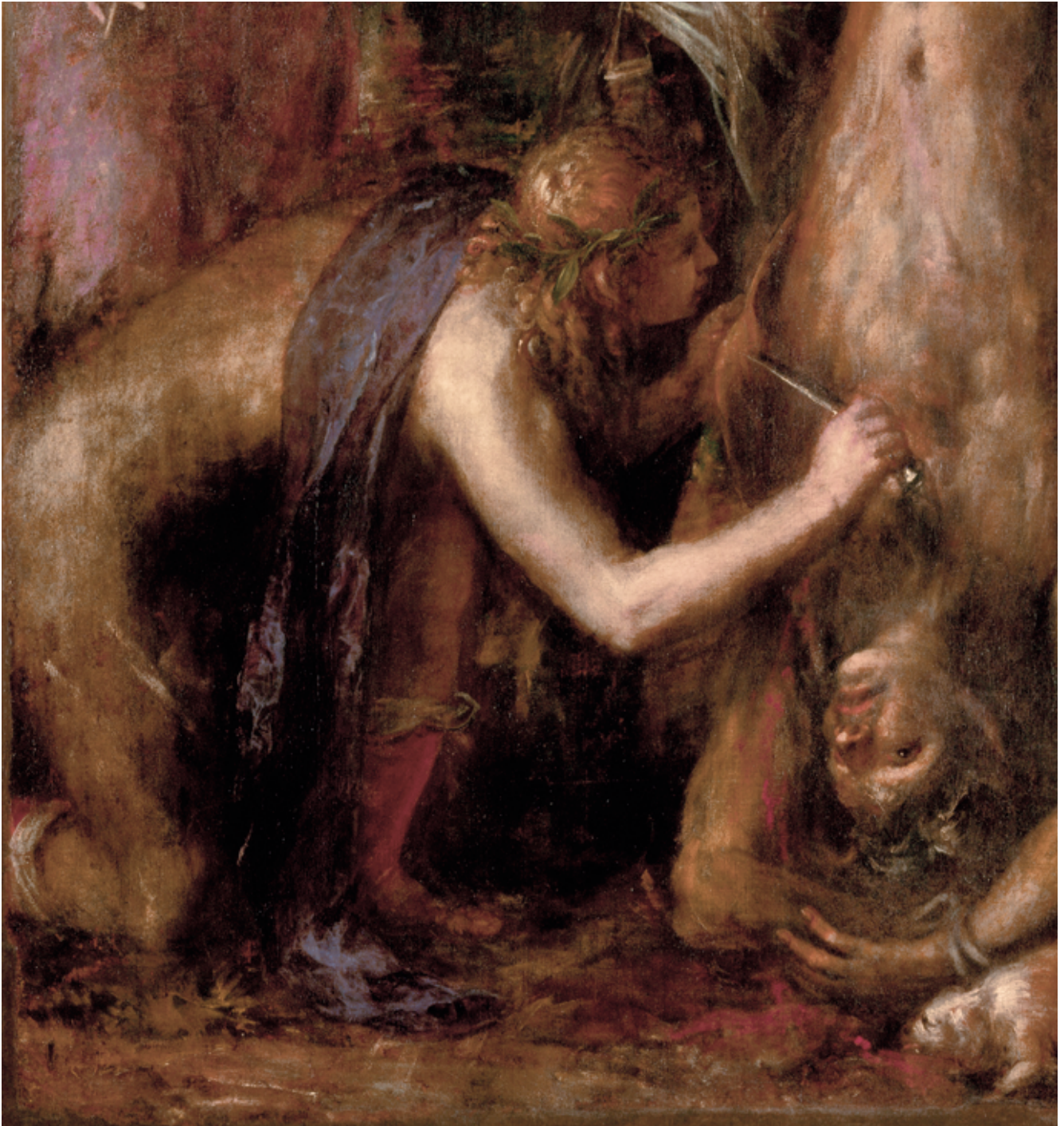
We see in Boschini's account that from the first marks applied to the colored ground, the painting was already admired and desired. The painting then developed through a series of corrections; eventually these became finer touches as Titian began to mold form out of color with his fingers. Unlike the method practiced by Central Italian painters who would fully design the picture in advance as a colorless drawing that was transferred onto the surface, and only then would add color, Titian developed the composition directly on the canvas with paint. In his method we see the appropriateness of Titian's *impresa* [Fig. 28] of a bear licking into form her new born offspring which legend said begins life as a shapeless mass. Mary Garrard has shown that the motto that accompanied this emblem, *Natura potentior ars*, which as she says has been 'endlessly translated in the literature as "Art more powerful than nature" should be correctly understood to mean "Nature is the more powerful art".¹⁰⁷ Not only does this translation better fit Titian's emblem since a mother bear's instinctual behavior is a better symbol for nature than for art, it is also more descriptive of Titian's process. Titian's method is like the development of a living thing: the concept of finish is undermined by the nature of his process. From the start, colored paint is applied; continually the drawing is corrected with paint, and then further adjustments made to form and hue. It seems that the artist can stop at any moment or can continue indefinitely since there is no predetermined idea of what the end would look like. The question of finish in a late work of Titian is unanswerable because it is meaningless; he was finished when he stopped.¹⁰⁸

Titian's painting does more than provide an example of *col-orito* and of the effectiveness of the indeterminate nature of his process. Titian's facture is also coincident with the meaning of what he is representing in the subject of this painting. It presents a demonstration of the power of his way of painting, and it is at the same time a case against *disegno* offered in his presentation of the narrative. He calls as witnesses to offer testimony, the figures in the painting all of whom, except Apollo, are allied. Midas

is the judge who prefers the music of Pan and Marsyas above Apollo's. Olympus is the closest friend of Marsyas. Pan and the child are, like Marsyas, satyrs. Even the standing flayer in both versions is specified as a local by his Phrygian hat and, we can assume, was once an admirer of Marsyas's music before Apollo drafted him into service. Hanging from the standing henchman's waist is the sheath of his knife; Apollo's head overlaps and elides with the sheath indicating that indeed the torment and death of Marsyas originated in the mind of this god. All of them are also related to each other by their associations with the Phrygian born Dionysus. Midas was rewarded with the golden touch by Dionysus for helping Silenus, and Dionysus later showed him how to cure himself of this gift. Satyrs are frequently seen in the company of Dionysus, and Marsyas was especially devoted to him. Pan, named 'everywhere', often shown in Dionysus's company and, by inciting terror to visitors to woodlands, is a being who undermines limits just as the god of wine, ecstasy, and madness does.

Yet Apollo inflicts his punishment of Marsyas in the presence of the satyr's friends, and in doing so forfeits his standing as the god of clarity and limits; indeed, he ceases to be Apollonian. The story of Dionysus's confrontation with Pentheus¹⁰⁹, as told by Ovid, exemplifies that god's power as an agent of chaos: first in the ease with which he disguised his own identity and that of others, and more terrifyingly, when Pentheus is dismembered at the hands of his aunts and mother, in the power of Dionysus to inspire acts of horrific violence. And here in Titian's painting of Apollo skinning Marsyas alive, we see the god of clarity and limits acting with a Dionysian cruelty that is beyond all reasonable limits.¹¹⁰ Titian squeezes Apollo, the victor, into the lower left corner of the scene, kneeling on the blood soaked earth. Apollo's flank and right leg is the only passage that to me would reasonably be seen as unfinished [Fig. 29], but the obvious materiality of the paint and vague drawing further underscore the theme of Apollo's debasement. When Marsyas calls out 'A pipe is not worth this'¹¹¹, we know him to mean that he wished he never had played his instrument rather than suffer so terribly, but we can also hear his cry to mean that he does not deserve such a cruel punishment for merely playing a pipe. As Diodorus tells the story, Apollo smashed his lyre in regret for the severity of the suffering he inflicted, and Nonnus said that Apollo out of pity turned his victim into a river.¹¹² So even Apollo, who later realized that he himself had transgressed sane limits, must be understood as being in the power of Dionysian madness. Titian here goes beyond Aristotle's *Poetics* definition of tragedy to foreshadow Nietzschean sense of tragedy: everyone in the painting is held within the horror of a Dionysian moment and the paint itself on the entire surface is a manifestation of boundaries melting and limits transgressed.¹¹³

The layering of paint that creates the image is complex to a point beyond indecipherability. The later strokes of paint



29. Titian, «Flaying of Marsyas» (as in Fig. 1), detail



30. Titian, «Fête champêtre», Paris, Louvre

seem not laid on top of earlier marks but woven into them. That one critic thought the wind moves the stilly hanging syrinx¹¹⁴ is not surprising since the movement of the paint is so agitated. Around the tail of Marsyas and the gesturing arm of the standing satyr, echoes of paint create the illusion of flickering movement. Elision of forms such as the drool of the large dog with the fur of the lining of Midas's greaves or the Phrygian henchman's knife sheath with Apollo's head compress the space as much as the close proximity of the figures. In the seemingly woven brush marks, the narrative is enacted, alive with arrested energies of Titian's painterly process. Though the figures emerge from the surface in nearly tactile relief, the illusion is everywhere undermined by the facture, bringing the viewer back to the miraculous surface which itself holds tactile qualities that surpass mere impasto. Opacity plays against heavy transparencies and, with the cloudy opalescence of dragged and scumbled paint, create their own spatial illusion of what Hans Hofmann called 'push and pull'¹¹⁵ in counterpoint to the depicted image. The sky squeezes between the roughly painted foliage denying the deep space of the picture while acting to project the figure beyond the confines of the picture plane into our space. To quote Freedberg again, 'the atmosphere, almost unbreathably dense, is like dulled fire. The image seems both palpable and limitless'.¹¹⁶

The extremity of the facture in late works by Titian has been often cited, most eloquently by Freedberg¹¹⁷ as a marker that makes it an epitome of old age style. In his seminal essay 'The Artist Grows Old', Kenneth Clark wrote, 'The aged artist usually employs a less circumscribed and rougher style'.¹¹⁸ He says this includes a 'retreat from realism, an impatience with

established methods and a craving for complete unity of treatment, as if the picture were an organism in which every member shared in the life of the whole'.¹¹⁹ Surely these are all qualities obvious in the *Marsyas*, but those aspects which are defined by style and technique should be seen in the context of the evolution of facture over the span of Titian's *œuvre*. These are not signs of Titian's age but are a continuation of the trajectory of his exploration of his medium. Such an exploration may take time, but it, as such, does not signify old age.¹²⁰

Clark also mentions particular content as characteristic of old artists: pessimism, indignation, and accumulation of symbolic motives¹²¹; these are characteristics present in Titian's choice to revisit the subject and in his treatment of the story and mark this picture to be the work of a very old man. In his old age, Titian had an abundance of demands for his brush. Though we do not know whether the Kroměříž *Marsyas* was to satisfy a commission or if actually Titian painted for himself¹²² the answer to this question is of little significance because whichever is the case he had the freedom to prioritize the direction of his energies. The *Marsyas* is a large painting and Titian was very old and very rich; certainly the effort to create it reflects a significant personal interest in the subject¹²³ in which are included favorite recurring themes from Titian's *œuvre*. Among these themes is the stages of life, a subject in Titian's work already in his early painting in Edinburgh continuing through to the late tri-headed picture in London. With the addition of the child satyr in the Kroměříž painting, which in the earlier version already spanned the spectrum of sentient beings from animals, to satyrs, to men, to gods, includes the stages of life from childhood to old age.¹²⁴ The painting is also a catalogue of states of mind that Titian had portrayed in his great history paintings spanning from the ecstasy of the standing musician, the agony of Marsyas, the absorbed attention of the flayers, and the sorrow of the satyr's friends. Also recurring in his work is the theme of music making. The «Fête champêtre» [Fig. 30] in the Louvre is both his first masterpiece and his most beautiful depiction of the subject of music. There we see a sojourner from the city playing the lute while a rustic youth looks in his eyes as though taking instruction from his sophisticated friend; he has surrendered his pipe to the seated nymph.¹²⁵ The *Fête* is as much an essay on the difference between stringed and wind instruments as is the *Marsyas*. In encompassing the theme of music within the framework of the stages of life and the varieties of emotional states, all significant recurring themes for the artist, Titian is manifesting in this final work the retrospective attitude that is characteristic of old age, as Simone de Beauvoir documented in her great study of human aging.¹²⁶ The true markers of the *Marsyas* as the work of an old man are the accumulation of these retrospective features embraced within the pessimistic story shown.

But if the *Flaying of Marsyas* is to be seen as a kind of summation, conspicuously absent from the painting are women.

This absence as Rona Goffen said, is the 'most significant unmentioned fact about the *Marsyas*, given the predilections of its maker'.¹²⁷ As she also noted, since nymphs 'inhabited the same woods as the satyr Marsyas [...] [the painting] could certainly have accommodated a nymph or two'. She goes on to suggest that by banishing women Titian is rejecting the central 'theme of his own greatest secular works'. This she calls 'a turning away from this world'.¹²⁸

But just as remarkably absent from the painting is the male sex organ. Giulio Romano found room for four fully revealed penises and scrota, among these are the enormous testicles of Pan; the knife-wielding henchman so eagerly at work has an obvious tent in his tunic belying a greater enthusiasm for his task than we would like to consider. In Giulio's composition, only Midas is un-manned – triply so with his animal ears and his effeminate tears. The phallic omission in Titian's painting is not out of modesty nor is the lack of nymphs an act of renunciation. As I see it, both absences are central to the picture as an essay both on *colore* and, especially, on *colorito* – the fundamental nature of Titian's approach to the act of painting.

In his prolonged tactile relationship with his paintings there is an erotic aspect about which Paula Carabell has written eloquently: 'The master's connection to representational space functioned as a closed and amorously based structure that was similar in nature to the dyadic relationship between lover and beloved. Just as the individual attempts to become one with the object of desire, Titian sought to unite with his own creation. His intense bodily involvement with the skin of the canvas, his touch that must surely have doubled as caress, was aimed at creating a narcissistic circle in which self and Other, artist and work, remained inseparable. Such a goal finds equivalent expression in Titian's protracted approach to image-making'.¹²⁹ Titian excludes depictions of male sex organs in the *Marsyas* because signs of his own sex would compromise the otherness and hence the desirability of the painted surface for him. Even more important for Titian in his final relationship with the painting as the Feminine is the banishing of female characters from the image. The presence of the female nude would create a localized

focus of femininity in the picture. Without nude nymphs, the entire surface of feminine paint is open to Titian's 'erotic tactile involvement'¹³⁰ and leaves the presumed heterosexual male viewer able to contemplate the whole of Titian's beloved painted surface in its/her totality. The attempt at Dionysian fusing of his own identity is symbolized through the inclusion of himself as one of the wine god's followers, but the fullest expression of this fusing is the obvious trace of the artist's hand discernible all over the canvas visible throughout the many layers of paint.

Of course the attempt necessarily fails – Titian retained his identity outside of the paint. Titian's awareness of this is shown in the contrast of between the clarity of his self-portrait to the rest of the picture. The crown and face of Titian/Midas, at the right edge of the composition opposite Apollo, is the one place of clarity. He is in the painting but is not quite one with it. Just as Titian as Midas is different from the rest of the painted surface, so Titian the artist must remain on this side of the world he has created. He is with us the viewers as another on-looker on what he himself has wrought in paint, and yet on the scene imaged there he, like us, has no power to intervene.

Neither participant of the contest is victorious; both are locked into the painted matrix and trapped within the painted drama: Certainly the tormented satyr has lost his competition, and Apollo in his madness, kneeling on the dirty earth, pushed to a secondary role at the edge of the picture hardly seems triumphant. The only winner in the painting is *colorito* – Titian's process. Yet the old Midas who is Titian does not exalt in this victory over Apollonian *disegno*. Nor does he take in the anatomy lesson being performed before him. Instead he contemplates the little dog enjoying its meal of Marsyas's blood. In another story Midas was cursed with the power to turn all things into gold. Titian had the greater gift of transforming pigments and oil as if into living flesh. But the old Titian contemplating the little dog knows the futility of his work. Flesh – even painted flesh – is mortal and *disegno*, in seeking to grasp flesh through analysis, is a contributor to its decay. Titian, who created flesh from dead stuff, here disguised as Midas, is absorbed in the sad spectacle of flesh returning, as it inevitably must, to mere matter.

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- 1 I. Murdoch, *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch, 1934–1995*, Princeton, 2016, p. 509.
- 2 S. J. Freedberg, 'Titian and Marsyas', *FMR* 4, 1984, pp. 51–64, 52. For the most comprehensive discussion of the painting before 1999 (including bibliography), see L. Konečný, in *Kroměříž Picture Gallery: Catalogue of the Painting Collection in the Archbishop's Palace in Kroměříž*, ed. by M. Tognier, Kroměříž, 1999, pp. 339–350.
- 3 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 6, 382–400, trans. by A. Mandelbaum, New York, 1993, pp. 192–193.
- 4 Though not about Titian's painting, in her excellent article F. Jacobs, '(dis)assembling: Marsyas, Michelangelo, and the Accademia del Disegno', *Art Bulletin*, LXXIV, no. 3, 2002, pp. 426–448, serves as a typical example of how Ovid's version is referred to as if it were a thorough telling. She wrote, 'The myth by Ovid is perhaps the grimmest and most repellent story in the *Metamorphoses*'. In the paragraph that follows this statement Jacobs goes on to tell the story with much of what Ovid skips; the reader who has not brushed up on his Ovid inevitably infers that the *Metamorphoses* tells a much more complete version of the story than it does.
- 5 Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*, 1.20, in *Elder Philostratus, Younger Philostratus, Callistratus*, trans. by A. Fairbanks, London, 1931; Nonnus *Dionysiaca*, 1.14, 19.317, in *Dionysiaca*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse, 3 vols, Cambridge, MA, 1940; Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, *Mythologies*, 3.9, in *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, trans. by G. Whitbread, Columbus, OH, 1971; Apollodorus, *The Library*, 1.24, and Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 165, 191, both in *Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae*, trans. by R. Scott Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, Indianapolis, 2007; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 3. 59, in *Diodorus Siculus Library of History*, vol. II, trans. by C. H. Oldfather, Cambridge MA, 1935. The website Theoi Project is a convenient on-line source for locating these authors on the story of Marsyas; see <<http://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/SatyrosMarsyas.html>> (accessed on 3 July 2017). These classical authors' accounts are collated there chronologically and in standard translations (usually Loeb Classics).
- 6 N. Conti, et al., *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*, Tempe, 2006, pp. 520–523.
- 7 G. Boccaccio and J. Solomon, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, Cambridge, MA, 2011, pp. 707, 717, 723.
- 8 V. Cartari, and J. Mulryan, *Vincenzo Cartari's Images of the Gods of the Ancients: the First Italian Mythography*, Tempe, 2012, pp. 107–335.
- 9 The Marsyas episode is quoted in full and translated in E. Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art*, New York, 1967, pp. 162–165.
- 10 See the Theoi Project website, <<http://www.theoi.com/Heros/Midas.html>> (accessed on 3 July 2017).
- 11 Winternitz, *Musical Instruments*, p. 165.
- 12 E. Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance: an Inquiry Into the Meaning of Images*, Newark, NJ, 1996, p. 84.
- 13 L. Attardi, 'The Flaying of Marsyas', in *Titian*, ed. by G. Villa, Milan, 2013, p. 242.
- 14 F. Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, New Haven, 1958, vol. I, p. 111.
- 15 J. Shearman, 'Titian's Portrait of Giulio Romano', *Burlington Magazine*, 1965, pp. 172–177.
- 16 Freedberg, 'Titian and Marsyas', p. 56.
- 17 Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas*, pp. 93–95.
- 18 Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas*, p. 93.
- 19 P. P. Fehl, *Decorum and Wit: the Poetry of Venetian Painting: Essays in the History of the Classical Tradition*, Vienna, 1992, p. 375, n. 55. Much of my argument here is opposed to Fehl's paper on the *Marsyas*, but I must say that Fehl's close scrutiny of works of art is a model for my approach to interpretation. A friend and I had a serendipitous meeting with Fehl in front of the *Marsyas* when it was on loan to the National Gallery of Art in 1986. The depth and specificity of his observations that he generously shared with us, a pair of complete strangers, on that day have never left me in my consideration of the painting.
- 20 E. Kuryluk, 'The Flaying of Marsyas', *Arts Magazine*, 65, no. 8, 1991, pp. 44–47, 46; S. Connor, 'Seeing Sound: the Displaying of Marsyas', *Lecture at University of Nottingham* (2002), <<http://stevenconnor.com/marsyas.html>> (accessed on 3 July 2017).
- 21 Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 132.
- 22 Including H. E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, London, 1969, p. 153; Freedberg, 'Titian and Marsyas', p. 53, where he erroneously wrote that Midas was not the judge in 'any of the various ancient versions of the Marsyas tale'; L. Schneider, 'Power and Insight' (exhibition review), *Art News*, 90, 1991, p. 152; Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo*, p. 100; F. Pedrocchi, *Titian*, New York, 2001, p. 304.
- 23 Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 372, n. 13.
- 24 Humfrey's misreading of Midas's gesture as 'holding his nose in disgust' is singularly insensitive. P. Humfrey, *Titian*, London, 2007, p. 202.
- 25 Winternitz, *Musical Instruments*, p. 165.
- 26 Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 130.
- 27 Rosand, who cites Dolce's translation, wrote 'it is not at all clear that Titian is on the side of Apollo'; D. Rosand, "'Most Musical of Mourners, Weep Again': Titian's Triumph of Marsyas', *Arion*, 3rd series, vol. 17, no. 3, 2010, pp. 17–43. Indeed, Rosand goes on to argue that Titian is clearly not on Apollo's side.
- 28 A. Steinberg and J. Wylie, 'Counterfeiting Nature: Artistic Innovation and Cultural Crisis in Renaissance Florence', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32, no. 1, 1990, pp. 54–88; A. Steinberg, 'Blurred Boundaries, Opulent Nature, and Sensuous Flesh: Changing Technological Styles in Venetian Painting, 1480–1520', in *Titian 500* (Studies in the History of Art, National Gallery of Art), Washington, DC, 1995, pp. 199–220; J. Dunkerton et al., *Dürer to Veronese: Sixteenth-century Paintings in the National Gallery*, New Haven and London, 1999; J. Dunkerton and M. Spring, 'Titian's Painting Technique to c. 1540', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 34, 2014, pp. 4–31. For the most recent discussion of the restorations of Titian's *Marsyas* see L. Daniel, 'Restaurování

- Tizianova obrazu Apollón a Marsyas', in *Pod kůží Marsya: Restaurátor a malíř František Sysel*, ed. by S. Jemelková, exh. cat., Kroměříž, 2017, pp. 60–69.
- 29 Even a painter as innovative as Andrea del Sarto does not deviate from the fundamentals of oil technique that had existed. These include the invariable white ground over a smooth wooden support, paint applied as thinly as possible so that paint made from light and opaque pigments are in lower relief on the surface than those composed from dark transparent pigments, and suppression of brush strokes. Andrea's works do often show *pentimenti*, a significant deviation from earlier practice. See J. Brooks, et al., *Andrea del Sarto: the Renaissance Workshop in Action*, Los Angeles, 2015.
- 30 J. Neumann and L. Neubert, *Titian: the Flaying of Marsyas*, London, 1962, p. 10. Evidence of another version is given by L. Konečný, 'Magnasco and Titian: Further Evidence for the Second Version of the Flaying of Marsyas', *Source*, XIX, 4, 2000, pp. 7–11. The author says the similarities of Magnasco's painting of a hunter skinning game (private collection) to Titian's *Marsyas* suggests a 'second' *Marsyas* was to be seen in Italy in the eighteenth century. This seems convincing to me, but the word 'second' implies a painting subsequent to the Kroměříž picture; the more neutral word choice, 'another', would have been more appropriate. It is interesting that if Titian is the inspiration for this Magnasco, the later artist returns the motif to its origin in slaughterhouse.
- 31 For a discussion of this discovery see M. Hudson, *Titian: the Last Days*, London and New York, 2009, pp. 266–169.
- 32 For discussions of the practice of making copies in Titian's studio see E. Tietze-Conrat, 'Titian's Workshop in His Late Years', *Art Bulletin*, XXVIII, no. 2, 1946, pp. 76–88; T. Pignatti, 'Abbozzi and Ricordi: New Observations on Titian's Technique', in *Titian 500*, pp. 73–83; M. Falomir, 'Titian's Replicas and Variants', in *Titian: Essays*, ed. by Ch. Hope and D. Jaffe, London, 2003, pp. 59–68.
- 33 *Late Titian and the Sensuality of Painting*, ed. by S. Ferino Pagden and G. Nepi Sciré, Venice, 2008.
- 34 C. Checa García-Frías and E. Muñoz Rodríguez-Arana, *Tiziano y El Martirio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial: Consideraciones histórico-artísticas y técnicas tras su restauración*, Madrid, 2003.
- 35 W. R. Rearick, 'Titian's Later Mythologies', *Artibus et Historiae*, no. 33, 1996, pp. 23–67; Tietze-Conrat, 'Titian's Workshop'; Pignatti, 'Abbozzi and Ricordi'; Falomir, 'Titian's Replicas and Variants'.
- 36 *Late Titian and the Sensuality of Painting*, pp. 232–235.
- 37 As Cranston has observed, 'the melancholic pose seems entirely inappropriate for the flawed and foolish judge who acts without thinking'. J. Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*, Cambridge and New York, 2000, p. 66. A foolish judge, as I will show, is precisely what Midas here is not. For a discussion of the meaning of the pose, see Z. Smetana, 'Titian's Final Metamorphosis in the *Flaying of Marsyas*', *SECAC Review*, 14, no. 3, 2003, pp. 209–218 (215–216). A philosopher with the ears of an ass may seem incongruous, but the popular dream book of Artemidorus says these are auspicious attributes for a philosopher because he must not be easily swayed by counter arguments. Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica: the Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by R. White, Park Ridge, NJ, 1975, p. 28. Titian could easily have known this book; the Latin translation was published in Venice in 1518 and reprinted eight times in the sixteenth century, and the Italian translation was published in Venice in 1542 and reprinted in 1547 and 1558. J. Atkison, *Medical Bibliography: A. and B.*, London, 1834, pp. 20–21.
- 38 Neumann and Neubert, *Titian: the Flaying of Marsyas*, p. 23; Wetthey, *The Paintings of Titian*, p. 91; J. Sawday, 'The Fate of Marsyas: Dissecting the Renaissance Body', in *Renaissance Bodies: the Human Figure in English Culture 1540–1660*, ed. by L. Gent and N. Llewellyn, London, 1990, p. 113.
- 39 In the title of the earlier publication of his study on the painting: 'Realism and Classicism in the Representation of a Painful Scene: Titian's "Flaying of Marsyas" in the Archbishopal Palace at Kromeriz', *Czechoslovakia Past and Present*, ed. by M. Rechcigl Jr. The Hague, 1969, vol. II, pp. 1387–1415.
- 40 F. Stella, *Working Space*, The Charles Eliot Norton lectures, 1983–1984, Cambridge, MA, 1986, p. 102; S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York, 2003, p. 42.
- 41 M. Hart, 'Visualizing the Mind: Looking at Titian's "The Flaying of Marsyas"', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 23, no. 2, 2007, pp. 267–280.
- 42 H. Ost, *Tizian-Studien*, Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1992, p. 127.
- 43 A. Gentili, *Da Tiziano a Tiziano: Mito e allegoria nella cultura veneziana del Cinquecento*, 1st edn, Milan, 1980, pp. 149–150; A. Gentili, 'Ancora sul "non finito" di Tiziano. Materia e linguaggio', in *Tiziano. Técnicas y restauraciones. Actas del simposium internacional celebrado en el Museo Nacional del Prado los días 3, 4 y 5 de junio de 1999*, ed. by F. Checa Cremades, Madrid, 1999, pp. 171–179.
- 44 Attardi notes the idea that these parts of the painting are additions not by Titian has been rejected by many writers on the painting and she adds that it is fully 'consistent in terms of its manner and figurative content with the artist's late works' (Attardi, 'The Flaying of Marsyas', p. 247).
- 45 J. Rapp, 'Titian "Marsyas" in Krensiere', *Pantheon. Internationale Jahresschrift für Kunst*, 45, 1987, pp. 70–89.
- 46 Ost, *Tizian-Studien*, p. 169.
- 47 Neumann and Neubert, *Titian: the Flaying of Marsyas*, pp. 11–12; as did Kuryluk, 'The Flaying of Marsyas', p. 47, after him.
- 48 Neumann, and Neubert, *Titian: the Flaying of Marsyas*, p. 10.
- 49 Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, pp. 141–142.
- 50 Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. by A. Mandelbaum, 1st edn, New York, 1993, p. 192.
- 51 Plutarch, *On Music*, Chistwick, 1822.
- 52 And surely, at the time of the flaying, Olympus would not be in the cheerful mood shown here.
- 53 Freedberg, 'Titian and Marsyas', p. 53.
- 54 Rosand, "'Most Musical of Mourners, Weep Again'".
- 55 Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*, p. 52. I would add to Cranston's examples a painting more relevant to the case at hand: Signorelli's *School of Pan* (now destroyed).
- 56 D. Richards, *Masks of Difference: Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology, and Art*, Cambridge and New York, 1994, p. 21. For an extended discussion of late Medieval and Early Modern execution practices see M. B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Chicago, 1999.

- 57 Illustrated in J. Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: on the Nature of Seeing*, 1st edn, San Diego, 1997, pp. 111–114.
- 58 Illustrated in Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, pp. 111–114.
- 59 Lilian Roesing says that Marsyas's face recalls the visage of lost resignation on the inmates in the Nazi death camps. L. Munk Rösing, 'Skin and the Non-human: Transformation and Reversal in Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas*', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 29, no. 1, 2013, pp. 98–109.
- 60 I have verified this by experiment; though the subject was not a satyr, I feel safe that the results would have been the same.
- 61 This detail especially offended Erwin Panofsky and was partially responsible for his unease with the attribution to Titian. E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic*. [New York], 1969, pp. 171n.
- 62 Smetana, 'Titian's Final Metamorphosis', p. 214.
- 63 E. Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta & Factions in Friuli During the Renaissance*, Baltimore, 1993, p. 199. The anonymous reviewer of this paper noted, 'The small dog licking up the blood pudding beneath Marsyas's body seems to belong to the iconographic tradition of executions. Next to Titian's canvas there is in the Kroměříž gallery *The Beheading of St John the Baptist* by Lucas Cranach the Elder, which contains an almost identical blood-thirsty dog in its lower right corner'.
- 64 Attardi, 'The Flaying of Marsyas', p. 247.
- 65 Similarity to a paint brush is also noted by L. Schneider Adams, 'Iconographic Aspects of the Gaze in Some Paintings by Titian', in *Cambridge Companion to Titian*, ed. by P. Meilman, Cambridge, 2004, p. 237. The irony of a knife that is destroying a body yet could be mistaken for a brush that creates the illusion of a body, I will argue below, was not lost to Titian.
- 66 At least since Neumann and Neubert, *Titian: the Flaying of Marsyas*, and through to *Late Titian and the Sensuality of Painting*.
- 67 Ost, *Tizian-Studien*, p. 166.
- 68 Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, p. 153.
- 69 Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, p. 91.
- 70 J. Fletcher, 'Titian. Venice and Washington', *Burlington Magazine*, 1990, pp. 740–744.
- 71 Luba Freedman makes a distinction between 'self-portraits in disguise' in which the artist imparts 'his own features to a protagonist [which] implies that he regards himself as an integral part of the *opus*' and not as a mere bystander. She regards Midas as such a self-portrait. L. Freedman, *Titian's Independent Self-portraits*, Florence, 1990, pp. 49–50.
- 72 Ost, *Tizian-Studien*, p. 166.
- 73 Although I find much to admire in P. Sohm's *The Artist Grows Old*, I do not agree that Titian's self-portrait as Midas is a confession of avarice. P. L. Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old: the Aging of Art and Artists in Italy, 1500–1800*, New Haven and London, 2007, pp. 84–92.
- 74 F. Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist*, New Haven, 2000, p. 243.
- 75 J. Held, 'Titian's Flaying of Marsyas: an Analysis of the Analyses', *Oxford Art Journal*, 31, no. 2, 2008, pp. 179–194.
- 76 Held, 'Titian's Flaying of Marsyas', p. 188.
- 77 Puttfarken's sensitive discussion of Titian as a tragic artist must be noted here and will be addressed later in this essay. T. Puttfarken, *Titian & Tragic Painting: Aristotle's Poetics and the Rise of the Modern Artist*, New Haven, 2005.
- 78 Held, 'Titian's Flaying of Marsyas', p. 190.
- 79 Freedberg, 'Titian and Marsyas', p. 63.
- 80 Freedberg includes a contemporary account of this dreadful incident from P. Paruta and H. Carey Monmouth, *The History of Venice*, London, 1658; Freedberg, 'Titian and Marsyas', pp. 66–68.
- 81 Humfrey notes that the chronology of Titian's late works is too unclear for us to know when Bragadin's death occurred in relation to the creation of the *Marsyas*. Humfrey, *Titian*, p. 204. What is obvious is that *if* Titian has the torture and murder of the Venetian in mind then any notion that Titian is favorably disposed to Marsyas's executioner must be dismissed outright.
- 82 Held, 'Titian's Flaying of Marsyas', p. 192.
- 83 Puttfarken, *Titian & Tragic Painting*, p. 61.
- 84 D. Bohde, 'Skin and the Search for the Interior: the Representation of Flaying in the Art and Anatomy of the Cinquecento', in *Bodily Extremities*, ed. by F. Egmond *et al.*, Burlington, VT, 2003; D. Bohde, *Haut, Fleisch und Farbe: Körperlichkeit und Materialität in den Gemälden Tizians*, Emsdetten, 2002.
- 85 *The Republic*, Book III, lines 398–403.
- 86 Z. Blažekovic, 'What Marsyas May Have Meant to the Cinquecento Venetians, Or Andrea Schiavone's Symbolism of Musical Instruments', *Music in Art: International Journal for Music Iconography*, 26, no. 1/2, 2001, p. 36.
- 87 As Kuryluk wrote, 'the myth is interpreted in terms of competition between stringed instruments, associated with culture, and wind instruments, identified with nature'. Kuryluk, 'The Flaying of Marsyas', p. 46.
- 88 Waddington follows Bohde in this, in writing, '[...] Tuscan design versus Venetian colour, Titian was bound to see [...] Apollo's music – representing form, order, proportion, clarity, rationality – should be allied with *disegno*; Marsyan music – vivacity, passion, sensuality, naturalism – becomes *colorito*'. R. B. Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr: Sexuality, Satire and Self-projection in Sixteenth-century Literature and Art*, Toronto and London, 2004, p. 154.
- 89 P. L. Reilly, 'The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory', in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. by N. Broude and M. D. Garrard, New York, 1982; P. Sohm, 'Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48, no. 4, 1995, pp. 759–808.
- 90 Freedberg, 'Titian and Marsyas', pp. 54–56.
- 91 As suggested by Smetana, 'Titian's Final Metamorphosis', p. 212.
- 92 L. Konecný, 'Apollo and Marsyas by Titian', in *Tizian: Apollo a Marsyas – Titian: Apollo and Marsyas*, ed. by L. Konecný, Prague, 2004, p. 11.
- 93 As evidenced by the fact that he is the only artist mentioned by name by Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Act 5, Scene 2 – not that Titian could have known this.
- 94 For the close relation of anatomical study to Central Italian ideas about *disegno*, see Jacobs, '(dis)assembling: Marsyas, Michelangelo, and the Accademia del Disegno'.

- 95 G. Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, London and New York, 1963, p. 207.
- 96 A. Carlino, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, Chicago, 1999, p. 221.
- 97 D. Ekserdjian, 'Even a Talent Like Titian Couldn't Resist Copying', *Art Newspaper*, March 2011, no. 222, p. 29.
- 98 For a rich examination of the well known centrality of competition between the great studios of sixteenth century Italy, see R. Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian*, New Haven, 2004.
- 99 S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*, 3rd edn, New Haven, 1993, p. 517.
- 100 Ost, *Tizian-Studien*, pp. 161–165.
- 101 Ch. Hope, *Titian*, London, 1980; Ch. Hope, 'Review: Titian, Madrid', *Burlington Magazine*, 145, no. 1207, 2003, pp. 740–742. In this more recent review Hope's discussion of the Escorial *St Lawrence* implies a hint of a reconsideration of this position.
- 102 Hope, *Titian*, p. 161.
- 103 This was in Gowing's reply to Nicholas Penny's letter critical of Gowing's assessment of the *Marsyas*. L. Gowing, 'Human Stuff', *London Review of Books*, 6, no. 2, 1984, pp. 13–14. Penny, like Hope, uses the *Tarquin and Lucretia* as the touchstone for his opinion. Both the Penny and Gowing letters appear in the same periodical, vol. 6, no. 4 in March 1984. I concur with Humfrey when he said, 'it is probably a mistake to assume that Titian had a single standard of finish and colour range in his final years'. Humfrey, *Titian*, p. 202. Sohm concurs and posits that Titian's style in this and some other late painting is a intentional performance of old age accomplished through a deliberate display of rough handling. Sohm, 'The Artist Grows Old', p. 98.
- 104 M. W. Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, New York, 1968.
- 105 D. Rosand, 'Titian and the Eloquence of the Brush', *Artibus et Historiae*, 3, 1981, pp. 85–96, 86.
- 106 This translation is my revision of E. I. Barrington's version, *Fortnightly Review*, XXXII, July–December 1882. I eliminated some repetition and modernized the wording.
- 107 M. Garrard, "'Art More Powerful Than Nature"? Titian's Motto Reconsidered', in *Cambridge Companion to Titian*, p. 247.
- 108 The signature on the painting reads 'TITIANVS P'. If Rosand's assertion that the 'P' could as easily stand for *pingebat* – 'was painting' instead of *pinxit* – 'painted' were verifiable, my understanding of Titian's *nonfinito* would be supported. (Rosand, "'Most Musical of Mourners, Weep Again!"). Sohm's idea that Titian's *nonfinito* is a performance of old age parallels but is not identical to what I claim here. Sohm, 'The Artist Grows Old', pp. 83–104.
- 109 Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, Book 3, pp. 97–106.
- 110 Rösing, 'Skin and the Non-human', p. 104.
- 111 Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, pp. 193.
- 112 The website 'Theoi Project' <<http://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/Satyros-Marsyas.html>> (accessed on 3 July 2017).
- 113 F. W. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, and the Case of Wagner*, trans. by W. Kaufman, New York, 1967.
- 114 Kuryluk, 'The Flaying of Marsyas', p. 47.
- 115 This dichotomy is found in the teaching of the abstract expressionist painter Hans Hofmann, see H. Hofmann, and S. T. Weeks, *Search for the Real, and Other Essays*, Andover, MA, pp. 40–48. I take the two terms to mean the qualities of space and movement that the viewer senses to be into (push) and out of (pull) the picture plane and which may be generated irrespective of linear perspective or depiction and which are instead implied by color, texture, and scale.
- 116 Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*, p. 516.
- 117 Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*, pp. 504–518.
- 118 K. Clark, 'The Artist Grows Old', in *Moments of Vision*, London, 1981, p. 169.
- 119 Clark, 'The Artist Grows Old', p. 175.
- 120 As evidenced by Jackson Pollock's mural of 1943 in which he achieved at thirty-one a style that perfectly fits Clark's words quoted above.
- 121 Clark, 'The Artist Grows Old', p. 169.
- 122 Smetana, 'Titian's Final Metamorphosis'.
- 123 Hart, 'Visualizing the Mind', p. 274. Norman Land argues that the view of Titian as a careerist who only worked for money and status ignores his concern for 'the moral and spiritual well-being of himself and his family, and that he was aware of his place in the artistic culture of his time and ultimately in the divine order of things'. N. E. Land, 'Titian: Self Representation and Renaissance Culture', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 34.2, 2008, p. 145. With Puttfarken, I 'doubt whether Titian in working and reworking pictures like the *Death of Actaeon* or the *Flaying of Marsyas* had a specific patron and his demands and expectations in mind. The demands and expectations that shaped the works were surely very much his own'. Puttfarken, *Titian & Tragic Painting*, p. 196.
- 124 Z. Smetana, 'Thematic Reflections on Old Age in Titian's Late Works', in *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Representations*, ed. by E. J. Campbell, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2006, pp. 117–135.
- 125 P. Egan, 'Poesia and the *Fête Champêtre*', *Art Bulletin*, 41, 1959, pp. 303–313.
- 126 S. de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age*, trans. by P. O'Brian, New York, 1963.
- 127 R. Goffen, *Titian's Women*, New Haven, 1997, p. 283.
- 128 Goffen, *Titian's Women*, p. 285.
- 129 P. Carabell, 'Finito and Non-finito in Titian's Last Paintings', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 1995, pp. 78–93.
- 130 Carabell, 'Finito and Non-finito in Titian's Last Paintings', p. 86.

