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“WHAT WAS SHE WEARING?”:

LOOKING AT SUSANNA IN GOLDEN AGE SPAIN

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In memory of Erik Toews

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Abstract

This dissertation performs a feminist reading of depictions of the Old Testament figure of Susanna in a number of plays and one poem from early modern Spain, as well as the 1960 motion picture *Psycho*. I argue that the tradition of visual art surrounding the Susanna story influences literary texts about her, calling into question whether Susanna was really as pure and innocent as the Bible describes her. By painting her with attributes of Venus and a willing expression, artists from the Renaissance forward created a visual suggestion that Susanna lured the elders and did not resist them. While feminist scholars have done considerable work on both the biblical story and the artistic tradition, very little has been written about Susanna in Golden Age Spanish literature, and almost none from a feminist perspective. This project contributes to filling this gap, making an intervention in the study of how women were portrayed in the *comedia*, and performing detailed studies of some plays that have received very little recent critical attention.

Lope de Vega mentions Susanna in passing in a number of works, of which I analyze *El testimonio vengado*, *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, and *La moza de cántaro*. Lope, like Manuel de Salinas in his narrative poem *La casta Susana*, criticizes the familiar artistic depictions of Susanna, defending the courage and honor of the biblical heroine. I study six plays that retell the story of Susanna: *La farsa de Sancta Susaña* by Diego Sánchez de Badajoz; *La comedia de Sancta Susaña* by Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza; *Santa Susana* by Luis Vélez de Guevara; *Las maravillas de Babilonia* by Guillén de Castro, and *El bruto de Babilonia* by the *tres ingenios* Juan de Matos Fragoso, Agustín Moreto, and Jerónimo de Cáncer. In all of these plays, the image of the seductress pictured in art seeps in, creating a tension between the plays' description

of a chaste matron and their staged ekphrases of the bath scene, in which the Venus-like figure emerges. In *Psycho*, Susanna imagery is deployed to connect this ancient story of gendered violence with the twentieth-century gendered violence we see in the film. My project draws connections between the ancient Middle East, early modern Spain, and the United States in our own era, tracing the foundations of rape culture through all of these periods. I argue that the way the male gaze operates within the art and texts I discuss contributes to the tendency in all of these cultures to blame the victim in cases of sexual assault.

Introduction

When we look at Susanna, what do we see? The culturally familiar image of Susanna and the Elders derives from Renaissance and Baroque art: a sexually desirable woman is bathing or preparing to bathe out of doors, as two older men are spying on her, or talking to her, or physically assaulting her. In Tintoretto's famous painting from circa 1555, Susanna is associated with Venus. Fully nude, bathed in golden light, surrounded by jewels and cosmetics, and gazing into a mirror, this Susanna possesses many of the attributes of the pagan goddess of love. The pictorial tradition of similar images of Susanna gained popularity in Venice in the mid-sixteenth

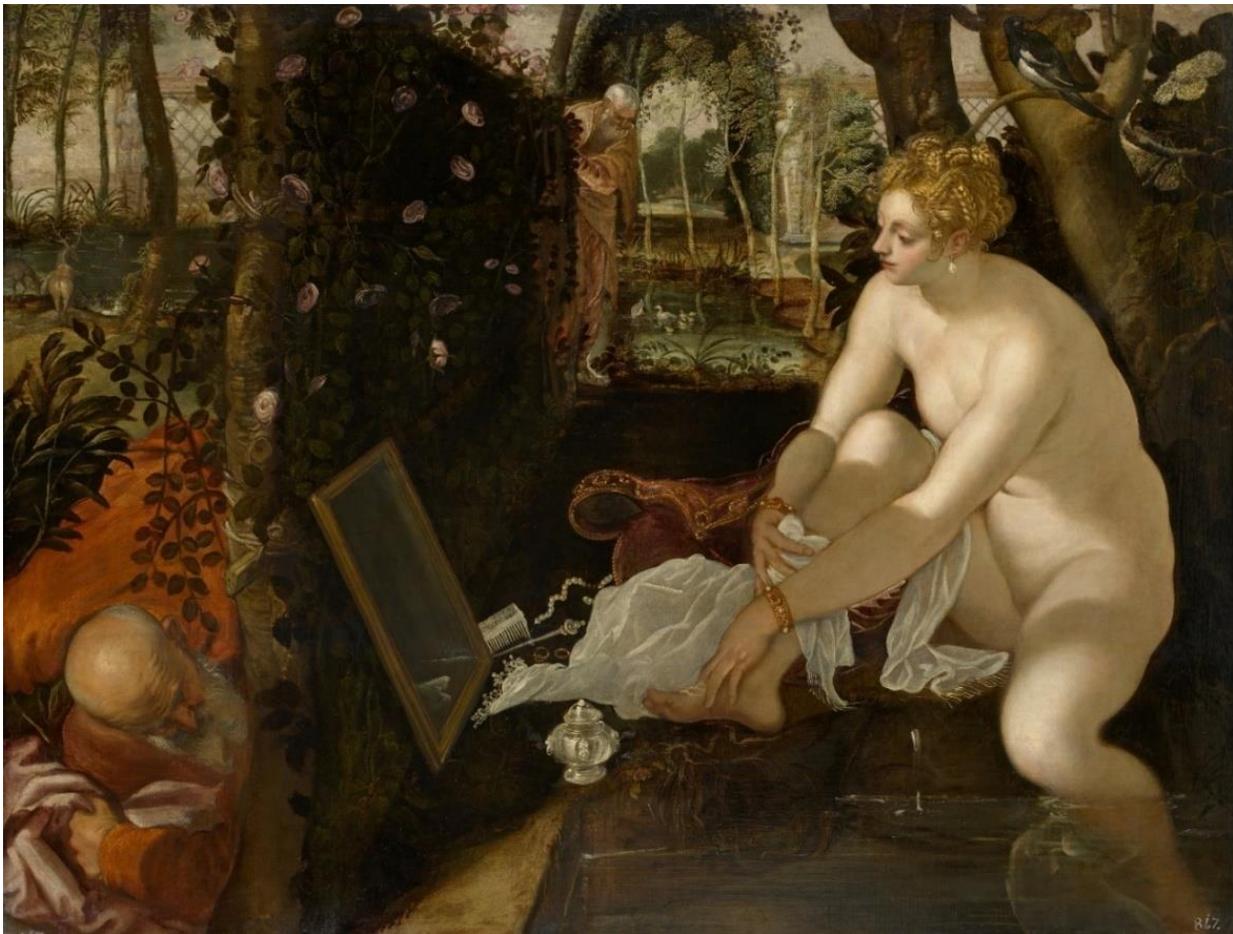


Figure 1: Tintoretto. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1550-1555. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

century, and spread across Italy and into Flanders during the Baroque period. While some scholars have criticized these images for subverting the Bible's depiction of Susanna as a model of virtue and making her appear to be a temptress, others have found the seeds of this interpretation in the biblical story itself.¹ In either case, after these Renaissance images became popular, they began to influence the way others thought about the story.

This dissertation examines nine early modern Spanish plays and one narrative poem that mention Susanna or retell her story, examining the impact the artistic tradition has on the way Susanna is portrayed in these works. Against a misogynistic cultural background in which women are seen as lustful and dishonest, the biblical figure noted for her chastity and modesty is painted with overtones of the temptress in many theatrical adaptations. Her need for bathing is questioned, her carelessness in being alone in the garden is criticized, and her beauty is blamed for the elders' assault against her. An ekphrastic staging of the bath scene is central to most of the plays, evoking the Venus-like Susanna familiar in art and juxtaposing this image against the virtuous matron the play has been portraying.

The elders, meanwhile, are portrayed as sympathetic. This is a reflection of the artistic tradition, in which the artist often invites the viewer of an image to see himself as a co-voyeur alongside the elders. This process of audience identification is cleverly linked to the Susanna story in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, in which the tension between Venus and Susanna, and the audience's sympathy for perpetrator and victim, are explored. Tracing these threads of blame and sympathy in the story of Susanna and viewing the parallels with contemporary societal rape

¹ Mieke Bal finds the roots in the story (see Chapter III), while Ellen Spolsky argues that arguing that "whatever gain the paintings of Susanna and the Elders represent for art history is offset by a loss for truth, for law, and for the image of women as independent human beings whose virtue is not prima facie in doubt" (101). At the same time, Spolsky identifies "pastoral conditions" in the biblical story that were the seeds of the artistic tradition. Dan Clanton and Mary D. Garrard ("Artemisia and Susanna") see things more starkly, arguing that the paintings betray the story and falsify Susanna's real character.

culture can help to shed light on the ancient roots of victim-blaming tendencies in our own culture, and provoke closer examination of harmful cultural assumptions.

I. The biblical tale and its critics

The biblical story of Susanna,² in chapter 13 of the Book of Daniel,³ is short and appears to be straightforward: in Babylon, in exile, there lives a prominent and wealthy Jew named Joachim. He is married to a beautiful and pious young woman named Susanna, who has been educated in Jewish law. Members of the community gather daily at Joachim's large house to conduct civic affairs. Two elders, or judges, are among the citizens who often go to Joachim's house. "When the people left at noon, Susanna used to enter her husband's garden for a walk. When the old men saw her enter every day for her walk, they began to lust for her. They suppressed their consciences; they would not allow their eyes to look to heaven, and did not keep in mind just judgments" (Daniel 13:7-9).⁴ They confess their lust to one another and decide that, together, they will find a way to compel Susanna to satisfy their desires. One hot day, while she is walking in her husband's orchard⁵ as usual, Susanna decides to take a bath,⁶ and sends her

² Spellings of her name vary considerably among sources. I will use the most common English spelling in my discussion.

³ The story appears in both the Septuagint and Theodotion versions of the Book of Daniel, though in very different forms. Fabrizio Pennacchietti informs us that "*Susanna* was excluded from the list of normative texts when the canon of the Hebrew Bible was fixed. As a result the original, in a Semitic language, probably Aramaic, was not copied, and as a result was lost" (8-9). *Susanna* now appears among the Apocrypha in Protestant Bibles, while in Catholic Bibles it remains as the thirteenth chapter of Daniel.

⁴ Bible quotations are from the 2006 edition of the *Catholic Study Bible*, unless otherwise noted.

⁵ In her translation of the text, Marti J. Steussy comments that "estate grounds" is probably our closest equivalent to the Greek word *paradeisos*: "'Garden'... has too horticultural an overtone; 'park' describes the landscape more accurately but has a public connotation that makes Susanna's desire to bathe there seem quite inappropriate" (108). The Vulgate uses *pomarium* or fruit orchard. I have selected "orchard" as the most direct translation from the Latin.

⁶ The possibility of a bath is mentioned only in the Theodotion version. In the Septuagint, the elders approach Susanna when she is walking in the orchard. In the Theodotion, Susanna voices the intention to have a bath; whether or not any bath actually occurs will be discussed later in this introduction. The Bible indicates that she decided to take a bath on this particular day because of the heat.

maids inside to bring oil and ointments.⁷ The elders have been hiding in the orchard and, as the maids are leaving, they approach Susanna and demand that she have sexual relations with them. If she refuses, they warn her, they will claim that they saw her having relations with a younger man. Since the penalty for adultery is death by stoning, this is a serious threat. Susanna sighs in prayer that she is in a difficult position, but that she prefers death to violating God's law. Therefore, she cries out for help, and her servants come running.

As threatened, the elders claim that they caught Susanna in the act with a young man. A trial is held the next day,⁸ and Susanna is convicted and sentenced to death. Young Daniel, inspired by God, stands up and declares that he cannot stand by as an innocent woman is condemned, and that he will prove her innocence. He separates the elders, asking each one what kind of tree Susanna and the young man were under. One says a mastic tree, while the other says it was a holm oak.⁹ Their testimony is thus proven false. Susanna is exonerated, and her death

⁷ The Vulgate says: "Dixit ergo puellis, 'Adferte mihi oleum et smegmata' ". The two items Susanna asks for have been variously translated into English as "oils," "unguent," "soap," "lotion," "cosmetics," "perfume," and even "washing balls." In this verse, as in others, the question of what exactly Susanna is asking for is important to how we read the story. Some scholars and, in particular, some of the Spanish playwrights I study, read this request as Susanna asking for excessively luxurious or sexualized items, which seems to suggest that her bath is inappropriate. The 2010 edition of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* and Dan W. Clanton both translate them as "olive oil and ointment[s]."

⁸ In the trial passage, according to Mieke Bal, are the seeds of the visual interpretation that emerged in the sixteenth century. When Susanna arrives at the trial, we see that "Susanna, very delicate and beautiful, was veiled; but those wicked men ordered her to uncover her face so as to sate themselves with her beauty" (Daniel 13:31-32). Later: "The elders made this accusation: 'As we were walking in the garden alone, this woman entered with two girls and shut the doors of the garden, dismissing the girls. A young man, who was hidden there, came and lay with her'" (Daniel 13:36-37).

⁹ The names of these trees form puns in Greek with the divine punishment with which Daniel threatens each elder. This wordplay was taken by ancient scholars as evidence that the tale was originally composed in Greek. Others, however, argued that the puns could have been adaptations by the translators of other puns in the original Hebrew. This was one of the main points brought into debates about the story's canonicity. In the plays I study, the types of trees are sometimes adapted to sound more Spanish. The elders in *La justicia y la verdad*, for example, name the trees as "un almendro" and "un granado."

sentence is shifted to the two elders.¹⁰ Her family and children¹¹ rejoice that she was vindicated, and afterward Daniel is held in high reputation with the people. The canonicity of the story has been debated since antiquity, with some scholars claiming that it is a folktale that was appended to the Book of Daniel (Pennacchietti 11-12).

The meaning and purpose of the story have been debated since the early centuries of Christianity. Dan W. Clanton identifies a clear moral of the story, which he calls its “thematic purpose.” He defines it as follows: “Susanna’s actions and speech, along with the result of the story itself, posit the notion that her faith, her concept of the deity, is the correct one, over and against the character of the Elders, whose religiosity is sorely lacking and who are executed for actions stemming from this lack” (175). Interpreters tend to read the story either as a tale of unjust persecution and the triumph of virtue, or as a cautionary tale about unbridled power and mob justice.¹²

The biblical tale is brief and many of the details in it are not “externalized,” in Erich Auerbach’s term,¹³ so that the whole remains mysterious and “fraught with background” (9).

¹⁰ The crime of which the elders are convicted is giving false testimony against Susanna. Their attempt to rape her is never addressed as a crime.

¹¹ The Septuagint specifies that Susanna had four children, while Theodotion uses the plural without giving an exact number. Thus in both versions it appears that Susanna and Joachim have been married for at least a few years, though she is still young and beautiful.

¹² In the third century, Hippolytus elaborated on the story as a metaphor in which Susanna is the Church and Joachim is Christ, the two handmaids represent Faith and Love (verse 15), the bath is baptism, and the ointment represents “the commandments of the holy Word,” while the oil stands for “the power of the Holy Spirit” (verse 18). Thus, Hippolytus uses the Susanna story to glorify the Church while defining the Jews and the Gentiles as her enemies. Marti J. Steussy surmises that most modern scholars “seem to take it as self-evident that the ‘religious meaning’ of the stories lies in the example of virtue and faith set by Susanna and (to a lesser extent) Daniel, or in assurance that God will protect the faithful” (40-41). Betsy Halpern-Amaru notes the different emphases in the two versions of the text: “In the Old Greek [Septuagint] version of the tale the central issues are neither lust and passion nor even piety and prophecy. Indeed... the story [is] a case history illustration of corruption and bias within a traditional judicial system” (22). In Theodotion, Halpern-Amaru continues, “the story becomes the dramatic tale of beauty, passion, and piety that is so familiar in western art and literature” (23). The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* is undecided: “It is not certain what purpose the author of the story had in mind. He may have intended merely to edify or teach a moral. He may also have been addressing himself to some contemporary abuse within the Jewish community” (630).

¹³ I discuss Auerbach further in Chapter III.

Auerbach's analysis of the narrative style of the Bible is especially important to the Susanna story, in which many details remain mysterious, with the reader free to invent their own details in the gaps the biblical narrator leaves open. Two areas of this mysterious background—details about which the biblical story is vague—became important in early modern interpretations in literature and visual arts: whether or not Susanna actually takes her clothes off before the elders accost her, and the extent to which the elders physically assault her. The former question, in particular, gained prominence in visual and dramatic interpretations, in which what appears to be a lesson about the triumph of virtue was undermined by Susanna's possible exhibitionism and passivity. A popular variant on the paintings in which the elders spy on Susanna is one in which she, alone and naked, is accosted by them. As written, between the end of the verse where the elders approach her and the beginning of the next one, in which one of them speaks to her, the reader must imagine how each of the three characters will be situated when the dialogue begins. Clanton's summary includes the detail that the elders "go immediately to Susanna and grab her" (3). His choice to add this act of grabbing to his synopsis underlines a possibility that the Bible leaves open, which early modern painters would explore in a variety of ways: the question of whether any physical contact occurs between the elders and Susanna.

Many painters join Clanton imagining that some kind of physical struggle took place. One of Rembrandt's two versions of the story¹⁴ and a number of canvases by Rubens and his workshop depict the elders as rushing at Susanna and trying to pull away her garments; Tintoretto and Claude Vignon both painted versions in which one of the elders brazenly grasps Susanna's breast; and Alessandro Allori's 1561 canvas shows both elders seizing Susanna in a

¹⁴ The one in Berlin (Figure 24).

manner that clearly indicates sexual assault.¹⁵ In Allori's canvas, Susanna's facial expression and gesture show an ambiguous combination of fear and coquettishness.

These more violent paintings take a step toward indicating the actual nature of the elders' demand to Susanna: their advances do not present a temptation for her, nor do the elders, in the traditional euphemism, attempt to "seduce" her. Many scholars use the word "seduction" in their descriptions of this scene, and Steven Walker carefully considers why this is indeed the word he wants: "It is ironic that their [the elders'] fierce verbal attempts to force their prey never resort to physical force; the seduction attempt never becomes a rape. That surely speaks well for the fortitude and firmness of will of Susanna" (15). Although he acknowledges that the elders try to use their power to coerce Susanna, Walker still feels that "rape" would only describe the situation if they used physical violence. Moreover, he credits Susanna's moral strength for their non-use of violence, implying that women who are raped could have averted it, had they had sufficient "firmness of will" (15). However, the threat of public disgrace, prosecution, and death is, in fact, a type of force. Jennifer A. Glancy clearly explains why the elders' threat constitutes an attempted rape:

Rape occurs when one person forces another to engage in sexual intercourse. Seduction occurs when one person persuades another to engage in sexual intercourse. When the elders confront Susanna and announce that she will either submit sexually to them or face execution on the capital charge of adultery, their very real threat of force defines their action as attempted rape, not attempted seduction. Nonetheless, scholarly literature consistently describes the elders' actions as seduction. ("The Accused" 289)

Considering why scholarship on Susanna persists in describing this scene as an attempted seduction, Glancy reasons that the "most important factor is that, as we have seen, the narrative of Susanna relies on a code that represents femininity in terms of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'; this code is often used to excuse men from responsibility for their actions since woman's beauty is

¹⁵ I discuss the question of violence in paintings and plays further in Chapter III.

considered the cause of men's lust... [in the view of many critics] when the elders gaze on Susanna, her beauty seduces them" ("The Accused" 298). Glancy suggests that "identification with the masculine gaze has been a factor in seducing most critics into classifying the elders' crime as adultery rather than rape" ("The Accused" 299-300). Indeed, although Susanna is the ostensible heroine of the story, and the story seems to be a moral tale about her courageous resistance to the elders' attacks on her honor and her person, many interpreters have seen the story through their eyes, as though this were natural, as though identifying with Susanna's perspective were somehow difficult. As Glancy indicates, this is the effect of the male gaze at work.

Feminist critic Amy-Jill Levine finds that the Theodotion text forces readers to identify with the elders, thus entrapping them: "Evoking the phenomenon contemporary feminists have labeled 'blaming the victim' is one reading of Susanna 7-8... For the story to function, [the elders'] desire must be comprehensible to the reader, and thus Susanna must be a figure of desire to us as well. And once we see her as desirable, we are trapped: either we are guilty of lust, or she is guilty of seduction" (313). Levine's reading indicates that the reader must also desire Susanna in order for the story to be coherent, and many readers—especially post-Renaissance heterosexual men intoxicated by remembered paintings of a Venus-like Susanna—appear to identify fully with the elders. However, the reader does not necessarily need to share the elders' lust for Susanna in order to reach an understanding of the story. All that is required is that the reader understand that the elders desire her in an intense and impious way. The Bible tells us that they desired her and that, in doing so, they turned their eyes away from Heaven; the imaginative reader can envision their error without repeating it. However, paintings and plays about the subject have often displayed a tendency to blame the victim, by showing Susanna as irresistible

and, often, suggesting that she is not entirely opposed to the elders' attention. Levine's interpretation may not be the only possible one, but it has been a very popular one through the centuries. The elders sinned, but many writers and artists have been at pains to show us that they really couldn't help it.

The propensity of writers, artists and other interpreters to identify with the elders and imply that Susanna was somehow responsible is a typical reaction to a sexual assault in our own era. As Kate Harding writes, "When it comes to rape, if we're expected to put ourselves in anyone else's shoes at all, it's the accused rapist's. The questions that inevitably come along with 'What was she wearing?' and 'How much did she have to drink?' are, 'What if there was no rape at all? What if she's lying?'" (4). In Susanna's case, the very fact that she was so attractive makes her seem partially responsible to some readers. The pearls, perfumes and mirrors that surround her in Tintoretto's paintings suggest that she was vain enough to welcome the elders' attention, making these paintings into wordless Renaissance equivalents of the "What was she wearing?" question we so often hear today: If she was so modest and chaste, what are the pearls for? Her decision to take a bath out of doors suggests that she was an exhibitionist or, at least, incautious. Sending her maids away was another imprudent act: What was she doing out there alone? In the plays I study, Susanna's own beauty and poor decisions are interpreted and having left her vulnerable to an attack she could have avoided by remaining modestly dressed and locked inside her house with a large retinue to guard her.

The question of "What was she wearing?" has a long history: under Roman law, "If someone accost maidens, even those in slave's garb, his offense is regarded as venial, even more so if the woman be in prostitute's dress and not that of a matron" (*Digest of Justinian Book 47, Part 10, Section 15*). The law goes on to define "accost" as follows: "To accost is with smooth

words to make an attempt upon another's virtue" (*Digest of Justinian* Book 47, Part 10, Section 20). All of this appears in a section on insults and slander; elsewhere, the law discusses illicit sex without taking the woman's consent into account. What she is wearing, however, is clearly singled out as mitigating factor in any crime a man may have committed. When painters show Susanna with gold jewelry, expensive fabrics, mirrors, and perfume bottles, they are invoking this culture in which a woman in "prostitute's dress" is more accessible to invasive male attention than a woman in the clothes "of a matron."

Helen Benedict has identified ten central cultural myths surrounding rape, among them the beliefs that "the assailant is motivated by lust" (14); that women provoke rape: "Victims are believed to have enticed their assailants by their looks and sexuality. This belief is so established that not only lawyers, reporters, and policemen accept it, but victims and perpetrators do, too" (15-16); and that, because they are so enticing, women are responsible for preventing their own rapes (16). All three of these notions come up again and again in discussions of Susanna. It is her beauty that drives the elders to commit their crime, as the Bible flatly states and Renaissance painters enthusiastically confirm. Even scholars from our own era find it easy to relate to the elders, suggesting that Susanna's beauty is so powerful, even to them, that the elders' actions are not surprising.¹⁶

Such readings of the Susanna story uphold the myth that beauty provokes lust and that lust provokes rape, and that women are responsible for making sure that this does not happen. In Benedict's analysis of the current media's treatment of rape victims, they are usually pushed into

¹⁶ Third-century Church father Tertullian, for example, notes that Susanna appears in a veil at the trial. He attributes this act to her guilt over having caused the situation by being beautiful: "...the veil was a voluntary thing. She had come accused, ashamed of the disgrace she had brought on herself, properly concealing her beauty, even because now she feared to please" (qtd. in Halpern-Amaru, p. 29). Tertullian is arguing that all women should not be obligated to go about veiled, explaining that Susanna wore the veil voluntarily because she was ashamed of being so beautiful. In his reading, then, her beauty is the real culprit for the elders' actions, and Susanna herself knows and accepts this. Thus we see all three of the rape myths I have cited folded into one.

one of two categories: The victim is seen either as a “vamp,” in which case it is assumed that the woman, “by her looks, behavior or generally loose morality, drove the man to such extremes of lust that he was compelled to commit the crime” (23); or as a “virgin,” in which case one imagines that the man, “a depraved and perverted monster, sullied the innocent victim, who is now a martyr to the flaws of society” (23). The story of Susanna, in the Bible, leans mostly toward the “virgin” angle; Susanna is married and a mother, but she is very chaste and pious. However, in adaptations in paintings and literature, Susanna emerges as embodying a tension between these two extremes. While trying to present her as a generally innocent and pious woman, artists and writers bring elements of victim-blaming into their depictions, by presenting her as a seductress who provoked the elders and by questioning her behavior before the attack.

Since the Renaissance, biblical scholars who discuss Susanna have been influenced by the widespread cultural image or, to cite Alice Bach’s term, the doxic version of the story. Bach explains that all well-known biblical stories wind up coming into conflict with the “doxic traditions” surrounding them: “By doxa I mean one’s idea of a narrative plot point or character or place from some remembered version of it... Often the doxic version becomes cultural baggage for the reader, setting up assumptions that blind one to what appears in the actual text” (4). In the case of Susanna, during the Renaissance, the doxic version became the image of Susanna at the bath: usually sitting at the edge of a pool or fountain, partially or fully undressed, with the elders either spying on her from a hidden position, or talking to her, or physically assaulting her. The Bible only mentions Susanna’s vocalization of her intention to bathe, not a narration of her actual bathing. The sequence of events would appear to indicate that the bath never took place.

As Bach explains, when one remembers a doxic version of a biblical story, it comes to color one’s understanding of the text, as one’s “mental representations of characters, whether

they be from films, novels, [or] paintings... reflect backward onto the biblical text and serve to fill the reader's gaps. Thus, acknowledging and analyzing these later literary and visual representations help to trace the process of characterization as it functions in the interpreter's mind" (249). Bach does not discuss the influence of paintings of Susanna on understandings of the *Susanna* text, but it is a perfect example of this phenomenon. The text must be distorted to some extent if the reader wishes to understand that Susanna actually took her clothes off. That Renaissance painters should decide to distort it as a justification for painting Susanna nude comes as no surprise: they had the obvious motivation of selling erotic paintings with a pretext of biblical legitimacy. The abundance and fame of many of these paintings have created a very strong doxic image of Susanna as a naked woman which has reflected backward, to use Bach's expression, onto readings of the Bible itself.

Bach herself may have succumbed to this phenomenon, for she writes: "Another object of the gaze is Susanna, who is caught in the voyeuristic gaze of the Elders. She cannot escape their gaze, nor can she return it... Susanna does not attempt to deflect the gaze. Naked and powerless in front of her enemies, she needs to be rescued, re-covered, by the young Daniel" (131). It is possible that Bach is referring to the Septuagint version of Susanna; in that version, Susanna was "uncovered" at the trial, as Jennifer Glancy explains: "In the Septuagint version, Susanna is stripped naked, in accordance with ritual Jewish law" ("Susanna 1" 157). Bach does not specify that she is thinking of the far less canonical version of Susanna, however, and may have imagined the story through the lens of the powerful visual doxa surrounding it. Levine, too, assumes that Susanna fulfilled her intention of having a bath, comparing her to Bathsheba and to Eve (314-315). Barbara F. Weissberger describes the climax of the biblical story as being the moment in which the elders surprise naked Susanna in her bath and notes that this scene was

often represented in painting (203), assuming that the painted scenes depict an event that takes place in the Bible.

Walker writes as though intoxicated by Tintoretto's golden light as he imagines the scene where Susanna sends the maids for oil: "That is good writing not only because of the tactfulness with which it portrays delicate matters, but because of the intensity... Without even seeing the nude scene, we feel the impact of it" (13). Walker imagines that Susanna is already nude as she is describing to her maids her plans to become nude in the near future. He is so convinced that Susanna actually takes a bath in the biblical text that he finds that "Victorian avoidance" (12) of the bath scene is the "most persuasive evidence of that implicit passion" (12): "In Werther's 1855 play, for instance, the elders tactfully proposition Susanna long before she has a chance to undress. Werther isn't the first to feel the need to expurgate *Susanna*" (13). The doxic version is so vivid in Walker's mind that he sees a version that adheres to the biblical text as an expurgation rather than a *more* faithful adaptation. Furthermore, he reads Susanna's nudity as "passion," aligning his own perspective with that of the elders and equating a woman's body with sexual desire itself.

Neither the question of whether or not the elders physically assault Susanna nor the question of whether or not she removes any clothing or gets into the bath before they approach her is definitively answerable in the biblical text. It says that she decided to bathe, because it was a hot day, and then: "'Bring me oil and soap,' she said to the maids, 'and shut the garden doors while I bathe.' They did as she said; they shut the garden doors and left by the side gate to fetch what she had ordered, unaware that the elders were hidden inside. As soon as the maids had left, the two old men got up and hurried to her" (Daniel 13:17-19). The text suggests that Susanna's decision to bathe and the maids' departure happen in quick succession, at which point the elders

immediately accost her. The many painted versions in which the elders are hiding and watching while Susanna takes her bath contradict this reading. Because the maids have only left to fetch bath supplies, the reader imagines that they will not be gone long. The fact that the elders hurry to Susanna implies that they are eager to seize the opportunity to be alone with her, and thus do not watch and wait, as many paintings portray. Thus, it is difficult to interpret the text as meaning that the maids go out, then Susanna gets in the bath as the elders spy on her, and then they eventually approach her after she has been enjoying the bath for some time. Other painted versions, such as Tintoretto's in the Louvre (Figure 17), show the elders spying as the maids tend to a nude Susanna, which clearly violates the text.

A number of scholars insist upon a reading of the Bible in which no bath takes place. The notes to the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, for instance, flatly state: "Contrary to most artistic depictions, Susanna never actually bathes" (1549). In her analysis of the story, Ellen Spolsky concurs: "The text itself... does not describe Susanna as ever actually taking a bath. Therefore, of course, it doesn't tell us that the elders saw her naked" (114). While the *Catholic Study Bible* begins verse 19 with "As soon as the maids had left," Dan Clanton translates it: "As the girls were going out" (66). Both translations suggest that the elders rushed to Susanna the very moment that the maids left her alone. In his 1651 narrative poem *La casta Susana*, Manuel de Salinas opines that she could not have been naked. He defends this position on the grounds of her modesty as well as his rigorous interpretation of the Vulgate:

Que la hallasen ya desnuda
como acostumbran pintarla,
el Texto no lo refiere,
ningún Autor lo declara.
Su castidad y en el Texto
ponderables circunstancias,
contra la común me obligan
a sentir que no lo estaba. (369-376)

Since the Bible does not refer to Susanna having removed her clothing, Salinas concludes that she must not have. He specifically mentions paintings as a source of problematic representations of her; he groups all artistic representations and, perhaps, literary works influenced by them, as the “common opinion.” In other words, Salinas is rebelling against the doxic version of Susanna and seeking to correct it. He cites both her chastity and the considerable circumstances of the text—presumably, the fast-paced narrative sequence between Susanna’s decision to bathe and the elders’ intrusion, leaving no time for her to undress.¹⁷ Nevertheless, his objections are against a part of the text that is occupied by Auerbach’s mysterious background.

In painting Susanna with the attributes of Venus, artists manipulate cultural assumptions about women, vanity, and concupiscence in order to construct a visual implication that Susanna was anything but “chaste.” The plays I study create combinatory ekphrases of these artworks, muddying their depictions of a chaste and virtuous Susanna. Salinas defends Susanna’s reputation, stating that *because* she was so chaste, the elders *could not have* seen her naked—operating under the cultural assumption that if she had been seen naked, even if through no fault of her own, this would have a negative impact on her chastity. Throughout this dissertation, I discuss how these rape myths and social norms about modesty and lust operate around depictions of Susanna, which both reflect and reproduce these misogynistic aspects of culture. In turn, these norms suggest to the viewer or reader that Susanna was less chaste than she seemed. I am not upholding these myths myself, or implying that Susanna would have been inviting what happened to her even if she were vain, or an exhibitionist, or even an adulterer. Among the rape myths I refute is the one that women who are or appear to be promiscuous are somehow inviting assault. The questions that are habitually asked now about a woman’s behavior before a sexual

¹⁷ I discuss this poem in detail in Chapter IV.

assault—“What was she wearing? What was she doing there? Had she been drinking? Had she been flirting with him?”—are implicit in these depictions of Susanna. In the plays I study, I critique the perception that Susanna was “wanton,” because according to the standards of their (and our) culture, this implies that Susanna was “asking for” or “deserved” what happened to her. This critique does not indicate that I uphold the idea that “wanton” women are “asking for it.” Rather, it is part of my larger critique of rape culture.

II. Susanna and rape culture

What is at stake in tracing the ways in which rape culture manifests itself in depictions of Susanna? Within a narrow focus on the early modern period, it sheds light on how women were portrayed in the *comedia*. While much feminist scholarship of Baroque Spanish theater has focused on subversive roles for women, the Susanna plays feature a central female character who submits wholeheartedly to male authority and to her role as a chaste and obedient wife. Many male-authored plays dealing with questions about women’s place in society conclude that women should embrace the roles that Susanna has already embraced. Yet Susanna still runs into trouble, both within her theatrical storyline and in the way her innocence is called into question.

More broadly, my study reveals parts of the foundation of the rape culture that operates today in societies around the world. When Babette Bohn writes of Renaissance Venice’s relaxed attitude toward rape, she appears to be taking it for granted that rape had been taken more seriously as a crime in some earlier era, and would be taken more seriously again in the future:

This reconfiguring of meaning in sixteenth-century Venetian Susanna paintings may well reflect contemporary attitudes towards rape and female sexuality in Venetian culture... rape was not regarded as a serious crime in early Renaissance Venice... the increased eroticism and diminished didacticism of Susanna paintings by Tintoretto and others may be related to the relaxed attitudes towards rape that were prevalent in Venice at the time. (266)

The conflation of “rape and female sexuality” is troubling, as though Tintoretto’s eroticized Susanna’s comfort with her own sexual allure were part of the same semantic camp as sexual violence. Leaving that aside, however, I would like to call into question the extent to which rape has ever been seen as a serious crime. In the Old Testament, we find that rape seems to exist as a concept, as in the Rape of Tamar in II Samuel 13. Elsewhere, as in David’s relations with Bathsheba, it is unclear whether Bathsheba consented, and it does not seem to matter. In general, throughout the Old Testament, the woman’s consent is not seen as relevant.

Exodus 22:15-16 stipulates that “When a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall pay her marriage price and marry her. If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the customary marriage price for virgins.” The verb “seduce” reminds us of Glancy’s discussion (“The Accused”) of the problem of seeing Susanna’s encounter with the elders as an “attempted seduction.” As Cheryl B. Anderson observes, discussing Exodus: “The use of the verb ‘seduce’ here tends to imply that the female consented. However, the female’s consent or lack of it is ‘not a material factor in the case.’ Indeed, the law assumes that she is incapable of giving consent... in the biblical law, the person’s consent is irrelevant because she is female” (32-33). The law is deeply problematic, as it treats a woman who is voluntarily involved with a man—dating him, as we would say now—on equal terms as a victim of rape.

Deuteronomy 22:22 states: “If a man is discovered having relations with a woman who is married to another, both the man and the woman with whom he has had relations shall die. Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst,” leaving no room at all for married women to be raped. Any encounter between a married woman and a man other than her husband is “adultery.” Deuteronomy 22:23-29 goes on to set forth more precise rules for men having relations with virgins; the only possible situation in which it allows that a rape victim might be innocent is if a

virgin who is betrothed to another is raped in the countryside, with no one around to help her.¹⁸ If a virgin were raped in the city, both rapist and victim should be stoned to death, “the girl because she did not cry out for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife” (Deuteronomy 22:24). Anderson identifies several problems with this law:

The difference in the location matters only in the determination of the woman’s culpability. She is deemed guilty if the incident occurred in the town because she is presumed to have consented if she did not cry for help—and, as a female, she is not capable of giving consent. The law, however, overlooks the fact that the male involved might have used force, and that force could have been in the form of a knife or other weapon or in a nonphysical form of force such as a threat or extortion. Clearly, the law does not consider the range of reasons why a woman might not have cried for help (34).

Not only is the law very limited in its understanding of why a woman might not be able to cry for help, but it also presupposes that, if she did cry for help, that help would arrive instantly and prevent the crime from happening. In any case, the only possible situation in which a rape victim might be innocent is defined extremely narrowly. A married woman can only “commit adultery,” and an unbetrothed virgin can only be “seduced.” In both of these cases, the woman’s consent is simply not a factor.

In Renaissance Venice, Bohn informs us, “the attempted rape of a mature, married woman by her social equals or superiors would not have been regarded by a contemporary audience as a crime nearly so serious as the rape or attempted rape of a child or a social superior of the rapists” (266). Rather than reflecting a loosening of Venetian morals, this shows a

¹⁸ “If within the city a man comes upon a maiden who is betrothed, and has relations with her, 24 you shall bring them both out to the gate of the city and there stone them to death: the girl because she did not cry out for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife. Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst. 25. If, however, it is in the open fields that a man comes upon such a betrothed maiden, seizes her and has relations with her, the man alone shall die. 26 You shall do nothing to the maiden, since she is not guilty of a capital offense. This case is like that of a man who rises up against his neighbor and murders him: 27 it was in the open fields that he came upon her, and though the betrothed maiden may have cried out for help, there was no one there to come to her aid. 28 If a man comes upon a maiden who is not betrothed, takes her and has relations with her, and their deed is discovered, 29 the man who had relations with her shall pay the girl’s father fifty silver shekels and take her as his wife, because he has deflowered her. Moreover, he may not divorce her as long as he lives.” (Deuteronomy 22:23-29)

continuity with Deuteronomic laws. A woman who is already married can only be an adulterer. Susanna was aware of this as soon as the elders threatened her: she laments “I am completely trapped... if I yield, it will be my death; if I refuse, I cannot escape your power. Yet it is better for me to fall into your power without guilt than to sin before the Lord” (Daniel 13: 22-23). Susanna’s parents had “trained their daughter according to the laws of Moses” (Daniel 13:3), so she is aware of the Deuteronomic law that allows for no extenuating circumstances if a married woman is raped. Even though only God and the elders will know what happened, she assumes that God himself will not take the circumstances into account, and will judge her for “committing adultery.” She prefers death to committing the “sin” of being raped.

Medieval Spanish laws were based on Roman common law, as Marie A. Kelleher informs us, and as such had no crime that aligns with “what we think of today as ‘rape’” (125). Rather, Kelleher continues, rape “was conceptually linked to two other offenses more clearly defined: seduction (*stuprum*) and abduction (*raptus*)” (125). Over the course of the Middle Ages, however, the concept of sexual assault as a crime against the woman began to develop in Spanish law (Kelleher 129-142). “In the case of Visigothic law,” Kelleher observes, “the victim was the husband or parent of the raped woman. However, legal scholars began to approach the offense of rape in a new way in the high and later Middle Ages... rape became a type of unlawful sexual contact that, while related to both *stuprum* and *raptus*, involved not only abduction but of a woman but also nonconsensual intercourse” (130). As the concept of nonconsensual sex developed, the connection with *raptus* remained evident in the way the crime was connected with violence, even as the confluence came to be seen as a something else (Kelleher 130-133). “[B]y underlining the combination of sexual intercourse and force,” Kelleher continues, “these rape narratives differentiated the attacks from simple abduction or seduction” (132-133). While

Deuteronomy limited the possibility of rape to a very narrow combination of circumstances, Spanish law began to expand the possible situations in which victims of sexual violence might find themselves. At the same time, proof of violence became an essential component of a rape complaint.

In medieval England and Germany, too, as Diane Wolfthal notes, sexual assault victims were required by law to prove their resistance: “Courts demanded that the victim show torn clothes and disheveled hair” (44) to demonstrate that they had fought against their attackers.¹⁹ Many Susanna images feature the heroine with her hair loose and the elders pulling at her garments, and the stage directions in some of the plays I study specify that she have her hair down. This may reflect the influence of these sexual assault laws, though the bath motif would justify Susanna’s loose hair and disrobing without them.

In the thirteenth century in Spain, we see these definitions evolving in *Las siete partidas*. *Título XVII* of the seventh *partida* deals with *adulterio*, and the fourth *ley* therein specifies that an accusation of adultery cannot be made more than five years after the act, unless “el adulterio fuere fecho por fuerza” (650), in which case the limit is thirty years. While the name of the crime, “adultery,” does not appear to change here, this law does recognize forcible adultery in contrast to consensual adultery, and the much longer statute of limitations suggests that this crime was seen as more serious. *Título XIX* deals with “los que yacen con mugeres de orden, ó con vibda que viva honestamente en su casa ó con virgenes por falago ó por engaño, non les haciendo fuerza” (660). This brief *título* includes an introductory paragraph explaining that chastity is a virtue that God loves, and that sexually assaulting these categories of women is therefore especially vile (660). Raping a woman who is currently married and sexually active,

¹⁹ This precedent in English common law continues to exert an influence in rape laws in many U.S. states even in the twenty-first century.

one may infer, is a lesser crime because the rapist, though depriving her husband of his honor, is not violating her holy celibacy.

Título XX addresses “los que fuerzan ó lievan rabidas virgenes ó las mugeres de orden ó las vibdas que viven honestamente” (662). The introductory paragraph echoes *Título XIX*, asserting: “Atrevimiento muy grande facen los homes que se aventuran á forzar las mugeres, mayormente quando son vírgenes, ó mugeres de órden ó vibdas...” (662). As in Deuteronomy, the primary concern is for virgins or other women who are currently (presumably) not sexually active; as in the Venetian law to which Bohn refers, rape of a married woman is seen as a lesser crime than the rape of one of these celibate women. However, the first *ley* of this *título* states: “Forzar ó robar muger virgen, ó casada, ó religiosa ó vibda que viva honestamente en su casa, es yerro et maldat muy grande” (662). The inclusion of married women in this group, along with the longer statute of limitations in cases of “forcible adultery” mentioned in *Título XVII*, indicates that the law was evolving to recognize that a married woman could be forcibly raped. While the previous *leyes* have emphasized that seducing or raping a virgin, a nun, or an “honest widow” are worse than the same crimes against a married woman, the third *ley* of *Título XX* states: “Rabiendo algunt home muger virgen, ó vibda de buena fama, ó casada ó religiosa, ó yaciendo con alguna dellas por fuerza, si fuere probado en juicio, debe morir por ello” (663). Thus, although the rape of a married woman has been described as a less serious offense, the punishment prescribed for all of these is the same.

Of course, a woman who is neither married nor a virgin, or a widow who does not “live honestly in her house,” is not protected under this law. Such women are included as an afterthought at the end of *Título XX*: “Mas si alguno forzase á otra muger que non fuese de las sobredichas, debe haber pena por ende segunt alvedrio del judgador, catando quien es aquel que

fizo la fuerza, et la muger que forzó, et el tiempo et el lugar en que lo fizo” (664). Such a rape was still a crime, but depending on the status of the rapist and his victim, it might be given a light sentence. Protecting women’s virginity and chastity were of primary importance, and shielding the honor of married women was secondary. If a woman did not “live honestly,” or was not under the protection of a husband or male relatives, then it was up to the judge to decide how serious was the assault against her. Here we see one of the manifestations of the enduring tendency of casting rape victims as promiscuous, intoxicated, or otherwise displaying traits that might characterize them as something other than a woman “de buena fama” (663). Raping a “disreputable” woman was a lesser crime, one for which the judge was free to hand down a light sentence, or none at all. A defendant who could successfully defame his victim might be rewarded with his liberty.

Kelleher describes *Las siete partidas* as representing a stage in the development of Spanish law, a process that would lead to defining rape as a crime that is separate from “adultery” or “seduction.” Renato Barahona’s study of a number of *estupro* lawsuits in Vizcaya from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shows a spectrum of circumstances under which charges of *estupro* were brought. Barahona dedicates one chapter to cases where the defendants are accused of persuading women to consent to sex through false marriage promises and other tactics that resemble courtship more than they do force or coercion. In the next chapter, Barahona considers an array of cases which “contain unmistakable elements of threats, intimidation, insults, and verbal harassment, while others involve explicit instances of physical violence and aggression” (59). These forms of violence, Barahona notes, were often used by the defendant “after courtship and other forms of pressure had taken place” (63). In many cases, defendant resorted to coercion and violence only after he had failed to convince the woman to

consent . In all of these cases, however, “seduction” was still the charge, and the line where “seduction” becomes “rape” is unclear. The notion that the woman eventually did consent—or that consent under threat of violence was still consent—remained persistent.

During the early modern period, a number of Spanish texts reflect the notion that women somehow held the power to prevent rape under any circumstances. In Tirso de Molina’s *El vergonzoso en palacio*, for example, Ruy Lorenzo’s servant, Vasco, asks him: “¿piensas de veras que en el mundo ha habido / mujer forzada?” (455-456). Surprised, Ruy Lorenzo cites precedents he has seen in literature and in art: “¿Ahora dudas de eso? / ¿No están llenos los libros, las historias / y las pinturas de violentos raptos? / y forzosos estupro, que no cuento?” (456-459). Vasco counters with a lengthy speech about how the woman could always fight the man off if she really wanted to. Thus, if intercourse occurs, it must mean that the woman consented.

Similarly, in his 1627 *Historia o Elogios de las mugeres insignes de que trata la Sagrada Escritura en el Viejo Testamento*, Martín Carrillo paraphrases the Susanna story, praising the heroine for guarding her purity at all costs, unlike the terribly unchaste Lucretia:

Celebra la Gentilidad por casta á Lucrecia, hacele encomios, escribe de ella Elogios, y con razon se burla San Agustin de ellos, porque aunque atemorizada con deshonra se dexó vencer de Tarquino; pero Susana ni con amenazas de infamia, ni temor de la muerte se rindió. Lucrecia hizo tres gravisimos pecados; consintió en adulterio, admitiendo en su lecho á Tarquino, que primero debía morir que adulterar, matose á sí misma, que fuera contra la ley natural de las gentes; fue soberbia pues quiso con su muerte ganar honra, haviendola perdido con el adulterio. Son notables las palabras de S. Agustin... que condena á Lucrecia, y dice que no debe ser tenuta por casta, pues se dexó vencer, y cometió adulterio. (410-411)

Lucretia’s suicide is not enough to convince Augustine or Carrillo: if she had been really chaste, the rape never would have happened. For these churchmen, like for Vasco, there seems to be some level on which a woman’s consent does exist, and is in fact required for intercourse to be possible. A woman who is raped by force still admitted her rapist to her bed, Carrillo argues;

although the story describes the violence of the encounter, “she let herself be conquered, and committed adultery.”

Attempts to legislate morality, such as the sixteenth-century Council of Trent and the twentieth-century Motion Picture Production Code, have tended to conflate sex with rape and treat both as taboo subjects—in these texts, as in Deuteronomy, rape is viewed as illicit sex, not as a crime. Susanna’s story seems to uphold the absurd idea that a woman can prevent a rape if she is truly unwilling. Susanna, in the city, cries out for help, and help arrives immediately. Writing in the twentieth century, Steven Walker echoes Vasco and Carrillo, praising “the fortitude and firmness of will of Susanna” (15) in thwarting the attempted rape. According to this line of thinking, the fact that Tarquin succeeded in raping Lucretia can only demonstrate that she did not try hard enough to prevent it.

Despite Susanna’s courageous resistance to her attackers and good fortune in having servants nearby to come running, she has been depicted as a seductress in art for centuries. Although the attempted rape was not completed, she has been painted as provoking and welcoming the elders’ lust, a point of view that reveals a strong inclination to view the story from the elders’ point of view. The Old Testament laws, Anderson argues, only represent the male viewpoint: “Clearly, these laws do not take into account the female’s perspective. After a rape, she would undoubtedly see herself as the injured party and would probably find marriage to her rapist to be distasteful, to say the least... the law communicates the message that the faith tradition does not (and should not) consider the possibility that women might have different yet valid perspectives” (4). The rape myth that women provoke rape by being so attractive that men can’t help themselves, vividly narrated in the Susanna story, and the belief that intercourse is impossible without the woman’s consent, are both ideas that are clearly born of a masculine

understanding of sex—an understanding that actually precludes the possibility of rape existing in most circumstances.

Gina Messina-Dysert defines rape culture as “a cyclical system where rape is viewed as inevitable and is accepted as a fact of life and impossible to change... Prevailing attitudes of patriarchal culture and the manifestation of rape culture within society instigate and perpetuate gendered violence” (61). Furthermore, “A rape culture is one in which rape and other forms of sexual violence are common and widespread. In addition, sexual violence is condoned, normalized, and encouraged by prevailing norms and attitudes and misogynistic practices are validated and rationalized” (66-67). One major way in which this sexual violence has been and is normalized is by depicting it not as sexual violence, but as “seduction” or “adultery.” My purpose in this dissertation is to examine the ways in which the Susanna story has been used to validate and rationalize misogynistic practices and beliefs, and consider the manifestations of rape culture that we see around the Susanna imagery in early modern Europe. These manifestations do not merely reflect the sexism of a long-vanished culture. Rather, they are duplicated by phenomena we see around us every day.

The elders threatened Susanna with disgrace and death by stoning, yet many authors even today refuse to see this as an attempted rape. English common law defined rape as “taking place when a man has ‘intercourse with a woman not his wife; by force or threat of force; against her will and without her consent’” (Messina-Dysert 62), yet the threat of force is often dismissed as trivial in sexual assault cases now. The recent case of Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former director of the International Monetary Fund, forms a parallel to the story of Susanna. In 2011, according to an employee of a New York City hotel, when she entered his room to clean it, Strauss-Kahn sexually assaulted her. Strauss-Kahn claimed that the sex was consensual. Stuart Taylor, writing

for *The Atlantic*, after stating that the accuser was a liar,²⁰ attempts to make a logical case for his reader why the encounter could not have been a rape:

[T]here is plenty of reason to believe that this was not a violent sexual assault at all. At the same time, the defense version of events is also rather implausible. The notion that Diallo would willingly perform oral sex on a complete stranger, in the space of less than eight minutes, strains credulity. I speculate that something neither violent nor completely consensual happened, such as an aggressive attempt at seduction to which she consented for fear of angering a wealthy hotel guest. If so, Strauss-Kahn's conduct was deplorable—but was not the forcible sexual assault with which he has been charged. (n.p.)

Discussing this article, Jody Raphael considers Taylor's speculation that the woman consented "because she feared making a wealthy hotel guest angry. However, Taylor should have realized that, in this scenario, such 'consent' could have been held to be coerced under law" (166-167).

That the threat of her assailant's anger is coercion seems clear to anyone who has ever experienced unwelcome sexual advances from someone in a position of power over them.

Whether or not law enforcement would construe this as "threat of force" depends on the law, and how it is interpreted.²¹ Taylor's assertion that a "not completely consensual" sexual encounter is definitely not rape—deplorable, but not illegal—shows rape culture at work: a culture that accepts nonconsensual sex acts and declines to punish the perpetrators. This is the exact same line of thinking that labels the elders' actions toward Susanna as an "attempted seduction" rather than an "attempted rape." All of these arguments that neither the elders nor Strauss-Kahn's

²⁰ Taylor refers to "her history of telling vivid and compelling lies" (n.p.) before calling her "a serial liar" (n.p.).

²¹ According to the penal code of New York State, "A person is guilty of rape in the first degree when he or she engages in sexual intercourse with another person by forcible compulsion" ("New York Consolidated Laws," n.p.). The law does not define what constitutes "forcible compulsion." The failure to define what constitutes force or threat of force has been a weakness of the sexual assault laws in many states: Maryland has only recently changed its laws so that prosecutors are no longer required "to prove that rape victims resisted their attackers" (I. Duncan n.p.). Katie J. M. Baker describes a recent case in Alabama in which police declined to bring charges against a woman's assailant: "Under Alabama's archaic rape law, victims must prove they 'earnestly' resisted their attackers, and the [police] investigator who interviewed Megan quickly decided she hadn't fought back against Bunn—she hadn't 'kicked him or hit him,' he explained. His investigation would conclude that no rape occurred" (n.p.). In many states, the arguments that Glancy ("The Accused") and Raphael make about coercion may not be enough for the actions of the elders or Strauss-Kahn to be legally deemed as rape. This reflects the heritage of ancient laws, which do not consider the woman's consent as relevant, as well as the medieval legal requirement, cited by Wolfthal, that the victim show torn clothing and disheveled hair as evidence of her resistance.

actions could be defined as rape come from a masculine philosophy that defines “rape” in the narrowest possible terms, and sees coercion, threats, and violence as tools of the seducer which, though they may not be among the most chivalrous, are obviously legal.

Another recent case in which a powerful male authority figure’s word was believed over the testimony of female accusers was that of Bill Cosby, whose sexual assault trial recently ended in a mistrial when the jury could not agree on a verdict (Bowley, Pérez-Peña, and Hurdle, n.p.). Before the end of the trial, Susan Chira reflected that “In a way, this is also a trial about how society grapples with the combustible questions of power, predation and due process that complicate he said/she said narratives” (n.p.). If that was true, the results were not surprising: the “he said” narrative—that of the powerful man—was believed, and the woman was deemed to be lying. In public sexual assault cases, the assailant is often depicted as sympathetic, while every detail of the victim’s persona and actions are called into question. As entertainment writer Mark Harris observed, there is a “whole other cultural narrative about who we choose to believe and believing women” (quoted in Chira, n.p.). The cultural narrative to which Harris refers is one of acute contemporary relevance, but also one with very ancient roots. As Rebecca J. Cook and Simone Cusack observe, “There is a long history in the law of stereotypes of female witnesses as ‘inherently untruthful’ or as ‘intrinsically unreliable,’ and therefore more likely to lie about cases involving sexual assault” (16).

In both the Strauss-Kahn and the Cosby cases, as in the Susanna story, the issue of women’s truthfulness and testimony is a central problem. In Daniel 13, Susanna’s testimony at the trial is notably nonexistent. No one asks her any questions, and she offers no testimony other than her prayers. Only Daniel speaks to defend her. As Robert Gordon Maccini explains, this is consistent with the lack of women’s testimony in Hebrew law: “While the Pentateuch records no

instances of women giving legal testimony, neither does it record any explicit prohibition of such. This presumably reflects the actual practice in Israel in pre-Exilic times; that is, women's testimony was prohibited not *de jure* but *de facto*" (65). Although women were not excluded *de jure* from being legal witnesses, Maccini continues, "rabbinic opinion against women's testimony was overwhelming, and rabbinic practice normally debarred women from testifying in legal proceedings" (67). Not only was Susanna a woman, but there were two witnesses against her, and they were both judges, making for a significant imbalance of credibility. In considering the Susanna story, Maccini notes the difference between the Septuagint (LXX) and Theodotion: "in the LXX Susanna protests her innocence silently to God, while in Theodotion her loudly vocalized protest is likewise directed to God but, although certainly audible to all concerned, goes unheeded by the assembly" (72). Susanna does offer a verbal protestation of her innocence, in the form of a prayer, but none of the humans at the assembly react, except for Daniel. Maccini considers the question of why women were disqualified from witnessing: "Many explanations have been offered, none of them definitive... Josephus' expansion of the Mosaic law that mandates multiple witnesses [says] '...But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex'" (69). According to Josephus, "levity and boldness" are apparently tantamount to mendacity. In making a supposition that women are not to be believed, Josephus is hardly alone. Women's supposed dishonesty is proverbial: in Spain, a number of *refranes* warn men not to trust women: "Palabras de mujer, no se han de creer" and "Tres manos tienen las mujeres: mentir sin cuidar, mear donde quieren y llorar sin por qué" (Fernández Poncela 42) are only two of many popular sayings about women's enthusiasm for deceit and manipulation. This cultural idea led to women being barred from giving testimony, or to women's testimony not being believed. Until 1994, judges in the UK were required to instruct

juries “that it was dangerous to rely on the word of the complainant alone” (Temkin and Krahe 25), leading to judges making statements to the juries such as: “It is well known that in sex cases women sometimes imagine things which various ingredients in their make up tend to make them imagine” (quoted in Temkin and Krahe, 25). In both the Strauss-Kahn and Cosby cases, theories circulated about the accusations being part of some “conspiracy” (Page n.p., Harris n.p.) to discredit these prominent men. Rather than believing the testimony given by the women, many believed that the accusers were lying for political or financial reasons (Page n.p., Harris n.p.).

All of these aspects of rape culture are identifiable in the Susanna story, in which she is not asked to give testimony at her own trial. Although the Bible—the text of a collection of male authority figures—states that Susanna was chaste and innocent, the pictorial tradition suggests another version: a Susanna who resembles Venus and appears to be open to a sexual encounter. We see Susanna from the elders’ point of view, encouraging the audience to blame her for what happened and doubt the truthfulness of her account. In this way, the artistic tradition both upholds and is a product of rape culture.

The plays, meanwhile, may be good-faith attempts by male writers to portray a Susanna who displays all of the morality attributed to the character in the Bible. Her wanton artistic image, however, keeps interrupting. The plays hum with the tension between the two extremes: portraying a Susanna who is both the model of chastity we read about and the exhibitionist bombshell we see. The writers, themselves ensconced in a misogynistic society, cannot quite resolve the conflicting aspects of Susanna’s public image. By examining these conflicting aspects in detail, I aim to provide a framework for readers in our own time to take a more critical look at their own assimilation of rape culture beliefs. The roots of our beliefs can be found in a culture in which women were expected to remain indoors under the protection of male relatives

at all times. If we can allow that twenty-first-century women should be allowed to roam about freely, then perhaps we can update some of our beliefs about who is to blame in a sexual assault.

III. Structure and methodology

The feminist biblical commentary and criticism of rape culture I have outlined in this introduction will inform my approach to the literary works, art, and the film I discuss. In Chapter One, I consider two plays by Diego Sánchez de Badajoz and Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza, both from the early- to mid-sixteenth century. As these works either predate or are contemporaneous with the emergence of the doxic image of a nude, Venus-like Susanna, I examine the ways in which the biblical text itself suggests the interpretation that would soon become so widespread in art. In Sánchez's play, the elders watch Susanna as she prepares to bathe, while in Pedraza's, one elder describes to the other the bath that he imagines is taking place as they speak, though they cannot see it: "que ora en el vaño, en verdad, / yaze en gran delectación" (167-168). This hallucinatory desire to see Susanna not only in the bath, but *with great pleasure*, prefigures the pictorial tradition and supports Mieke Bal's argument, which I discuss in detail in Chapter III, that the elders' testimony at Susanna's trial was the inspiration for the doxic image of a bathing Susanna.

In Chapter Two, I first comment on Lope de Vega's *El testimonio vengado*, a play in which Susanna is mentioned in a non-ekphrastic context. Next, I analyze the first stage of this tradition in painting, as it emerged in Venice in the 1550s. Availing myself of the abundant commentary about Tintoretto's painting, I use feminist art criticism to explore the victim-blaming tendencies in these artworks. Among the most pronounced of these tendencies are the visual links between Susanna and Venus. I also give an overview of the Council of Trent's policies regarding religious imagery, relating these to twentieth-century definitions of

“obscenity” and the importance of interpretation in determining whether or not a work of art is “obscene.”

Then, I discuss ekphrastic references to Susanna in two more Lope plays: *Virtud, pobreza y mujer* and *La moza de cántaro*. In the former, Susanna is mentioned in an ekphrastic scene that parallels a similar ekphrasis of Danaë in Terence’s *The Eunuch*. I consider what the substitution of Susanna for Danaë means in Lope’s play. When the male character sees an image of Susanna and the elders, he interprets it as offering “Disculpa de mi error en la edad cana.” I analyze this character’s misinterpretation of the image as it relates to Trent and the definition of obscenity. In *La moza de cántaro*, the pictorial model of Susanna paintings is mentioned by a *gracioso* who creates a pause in the narrative to complain that he dislikes pauses in the narrative. This becomes what I call an oppositional ekphrasis: describing a work of art in order to object to it.

The most famous Susanna images now are oil paintings, familiar to art lovers worldwide via photographic reproductions. During the early modern period, however, this tradition would have been familiar to the public through the circulation of prints, to which I give an introduction in Chapter Three. Most of the ekphrases I discuss are not references to a single work of art, but to what Tamar Yacobi terms “pictorial models.” Next, I outline some important aspects of theory about the male gaze, including Laura Mulvey’s highly influential article, in which she argues that women’s appearance is “coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (442).

I employ Mulvey’s readings of women in cinema in my own readings of Luis Vélez de Guevara’s *Santa Susana* and Guillén de Castro’s *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, two full-length *comedias* that tell the Susanna story. When the characters in these plays perform onstage ekphrases referring to the pictorial model of Susanna, they guide the audience to see her

character in a certain way, much as Mulvey argues that “cinema builds the way [women are] to be looked at into the spectacle itself” (447). The ekphrases function as a kind of filter of Venus-like-ness laid over the eyes of the audience. The ekphrasis flattens the three-dimensional space of the *corral* into the idealized Renaissance space the audience members have previously seen on canvas or paper.

In Chapter Four, I examine some portrayals of Susanna that are more sympathetic to the heroine, beginning with Manuel de Salinas’s 1651 narrative poem *La casta Susana*, which paraphrases and expands the Bible story and adds details to emphasize Susanna’s chastity. Like Lope, Salinas performs an oppositional ekphrasis when he protests that the elders never saw Susanna naked. Next, I consider a few paintings which depict Susanna in a more sympathetic light, although they also go along with the doxic version that Susanna’s bath did actually happen.

Francisco de la Torre’s 1664 comedia *La justicia y la verdad* is an allegorical retelling of the Susanna story that presents the heroine as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary, yet it still includes the bath scene, in which the elders watch Susanna remove her clothes as they ekphrastically describe what they see. One exclaims “¡Qué candor descubre bello!” as he watches her undress. While the plays I discuss in Chapter Three all create a tension between the Susanna described in Daniel 13 and contrasting image projected in the pictorial model, *La justicia y la verdad* reaches a new level of tension by getting the Virgin herself involved in this eroticized ekphrasis.

Chapter Five examines how Susanna and Venus meet again on the walls of the parlor of the Bates Motel in *Psycho*. The paintings of Susanna and Venus again connect these images to each other, and reconnect the whole tradition of *Susanna* images with the reality of gendered violence in our own era. After analyzing the deployment of the images in the film, I examine the

theme of obscenity with a comparison between the Motion Picture Production Code of the 1930s and the Council of Trent of the 1560s. Much as Guillén de Castro pushed the limits of decorum in the seventeenth-century Madrid theater with his stage directions in *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, *Psycho* pushed the limits of decorum in mid-twentieth-century American film.

Next, I return to the idea of the externalization of the details of the Bible story, this time analyzing the idea through the framework of film montage theory. Finally, I consider how *Psycho* compels the viewer to identify with Norman, just as paintings and plays of Susanna relentlessly encourage the viewers to see themselves in the elders, and not in Susanna. *Psycho* shows that the messages that we receive from ancient and early modern *Susannas* remained as relevant as ever in 1960. They still remain relevant today.

Chapter One: “Ora en el vaño yaze en gran delectación”:

Susanna in two sixteenth-century plays

The doxic image of a bathing, seductive Susanna did not emerge until the 1550s. Long before that, the story was employed in early Christian art as an exemplary tale about the power of faith. In this chapter, I will give a brief overview of how Susanna was depicted in early Christian and medieval art before analyzing two brief sixteenth-century plays that tell the story. These plays, by Diego Sánchez de Badajoz and Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza, were published around the same time that the most influential of these paintings were being created,¹ yet they still create a tension between the simplistic story of good versus evil they claim to present and a misogynistically nuanced version of the tale in which Susanna is somehow to blame and the elders are in some ways sympathetic.

I. Susanna in classical and medieval art

Images of a nude or semi-nude bathing Susanna did not emerge in art until the Renaissance. In early Christian art, she appears clothed, even as the elders accost her: seemingly, she is waiting for the maids to come back before she begins her planned bath, or else she has simply not had time to take her clothes off before they jump out at her. Images from the story appear in at least four places in the Roman catacombs, in wall paintings from the early centuries of Christianity. In the catacomb of Callixtus, Susanna appears in a long tunic in a painting of the trial scene, in which Daniel is seen defending her (Boitani 8). The catacombs of Priscilla contain several scenes from the narrative, as Piero Boitani describes, including “the seduction attempt” (8), in which each of the elders “keeps his right hand stretched out before him, rushing toward

¹ The dates when they were actually written cannot be determined precisely.



Figure 2: *Susanna and the Elders*. Fresco. Priscilla Catacomb, Rome. Courtesy of bibleodyssey.net.

Susanna as if striving to reach her first” (8-9). This reading of the elders’ gestures is helpful: if they are in such a hurry to get to her that they are racing one another, then they

must have rushed out as soon as the maids left Susanna alone. In this painting, she is also wearing a long tunic, indicating that she has not had time to take it off. She wears the same tunic in scenes depicting moments during and after the trial, which appear in the same area of the catacombs.

In another interesting painting from the Roman catacombs, Susanna is clothed only in wool: the scene is entirely allegorical, showing Susanna as a lamb (labeled “SVSANNA”)



Figure 3: Allegorical fresco of *Susanna and the Elders*. Catacomb of Praetextatus, Rome. Courtesy of newliturgicalmovement.org.

surrounded by two wolves, one of which is labeled “SENIORIS.” Boitani finds the message of this allegorical version to be clear: “Violence and lust lay a trap for innocent purity’ clearly is the primary

message of the fresco—a simple, straightforward moral reading of the Susanna story” (9). Of course, the lamb also recalls Christ, in keeping with various interpretations of Susanna as a prefiguration of Christ, a prefiguration of the Virgin, or a symbol of the Church.

Boitani analyzes why the story was such a popular theme for art in the catacombs, a burial place for early Christians. The story, he notes, has to do with death and rescue, which functions as a kind of resurrection: “Susanna (like Daniel freed from the lions’ den) typologically signifies the soul of every Christian. By evoking her at the hour of death Christians voice their hope of the soul’s survival and salvation” (11). Indeed, Susanna’s steadfast faith despite her unjust persecution, followed by her sudden salvation, make an appealing story for the Christian facing death to meditate on. Accordingly, scenes from the narrative are also found carved on marble sarcophagi from the third and fourth centuries. One, in Girona, shows several scenes from the narrative: in one, Susanna is seen standing between two trees, with an elder emerging from behind each tree. In another, the elders bring Susanna to the front of the house, and after that we see the trial scene. Susanna wears a long tunic in all of them.

Images of Susanna declined in popularity after the fourth century, a phenomenon which John J. Collins attributes to the decrease in persecution of Christians after the rise of Constantine (438). Alice Miskimin describes two prominent artworks from the Middle Ages which feature Susanna (fully clothed): “A beautiful rock crystal engraved in intaglio with eight scenes from the legend and captions from the Vulgate was made sometime between 843 and 869 for Lothair, King of the Franks. The figure of Daniel defending Susannah against the Elders appears in the thirteenth-century sculpture over the Portail St. Honoré at Amiens” (197). Although the story retained its meaning of the triumph of virtue and faith, it lost some of its urgency as the

persecution of the church by powerful forces lessened in the fifth century. In the Renaissance, Susanna was resurrected as an important subject in art, this time as a sex symbol.

II. *La farsa de Sancta Susaña*

Although nude Susanna paintings began to appear in Italy in the early sixteenth century, the motif did not become widely popular until the 1550s, when Tintoretto painted his greatest versions of the story. Diego Sánchez de Badajoz's *Farsa de Sancta Susaña*² dates to sometime before 1549.³ Diego Sánchez became the parish priest at Talavera la Real, near Badajoz, in 1533 (Wiltout 70). While he was there, he wrote a number of theatrical pieces,⁴ primarily for celebrations of Christmas or the festival of Corpus Christi. All of Sánchez's plays were meant to give religious instruction and entertainment to festival crowds in Badajoz. Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego describes the collected plays as "una literatura piadosa y moralizante... sus farsas vienen a ser sermones en imágenes, con ocasión de una determinada festividad que se celebra, y catálogos de faltas morales que someten a examen la conciencia de la colectividad que contempla el espectáculo" (24). In addition to whatever doctrinal concepts his *farsas*⁵ might illustrate, Sánchez was fond of having his characters also praise the importance of hard work and the dangers of leisure.

² Casal explains the title: "A Susaña le califica de 'Santa' según la asimilación corrientemente practicada en el pueblo entre los santos y los personajes famosos del Antiguo Testamento, como ocurre con San Moisés, y por confusión con la verdadera Santa Susana, que sufrió el martirio bajo Diocleciano" (*Dramaturgia* 226). Whether or not this "verdadera Santa Susana" actually existed is also a matter of dispute: this early Christian martyr's story may represent a Christianization of the Susanna story, which it strongly resembles.

³ Rina Walthaus says that the *Farsa de Sancta Susaña* was probably written in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, while Ann E. Wiltout posits that most of his theatrical pieces were written between 1533 and 1549. Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego puts the dates at roughly 1525-1547. Most scholars agree that Sánchez probably died in 1549.

⁴ These were published as the *Recopliación en metro* by Sánchez's nephew in 1554, after the playwright's death. Three *pliegos sueltos* of individual plays are extant, indicating that his work circulated in this form as well.

⁵ "Farsa" is the word Sánchez chose to describe his short, moralizing theatrical pieces, which usually mixed some comic elements with serious religious content, and are thus not really equivalent to the English "farce."

The *Farsa de Sancta Susaña* was intended to be performed for Corpus Christi, though the Eucharist is connected to the story of Susanna only loosely, and in passing. This is the only one of Sánchez's plays in which the stage directions specifically mention that it is to be performed on a cart, though all of them presumably would have been. The play opens with the following instructions: "*Farsa de Sancta Susaña* en que entran seis figuras. A de yr la carreta hecha vn vergel, y a la vna parte ascondidos dos Viejos con sus varas como juezes, y a la otra parte vna muger muy adereçada que es Susaña; y a de estar a la vna parte del vergel vn mancebo clérigo que es el profeta Daniel y vn Ángel encubiertos, y vn Ortolano y vn Pastor." Of these six figures, the angel never speaks, but remains onstage throughout the play as a reminder of God's presence throughout the action. Similarly, Daniel waits on the cart until it is time for his entrance, at the end of the action. Françoise Cazal comments on the effect of having all the characters on the cart waiting during the lengthy *introito*, forming "una especie de cuadro inmóvil que escenifica la expresión del deseo en los Viejos, y remeda los lienzos tradicionalmente pintados sobre el mismo tema, sirviendo de fondo visual a los diálogos iniciales del Pastor y del Ortolano" (*Dramaturgia* 226). The canvases of which she speaks, however, were almost all painted after the play was written, and tend to depict Susanna as already in the bath. The pictorial tradition of Susanna that existed up to this point, such as the wall paintings in the Roman catacombs, would not be known to the public in Badajoz, though most scholars who have written on Sánchez assume that the story itself would have been familiar to the audience.

Most of Sánchez's *farsas* include a *pastor* character who introduces the play by addressing himself to the audience at the beginning, and remains to one side commenting on the action and sometimes interfering in it. Since Sánchez studied at the University of Salamanca and likely had some exposure to theatrical culture there, Ann E. Wiltrout speculates that he may have

often played the *pastor* role himself, since it would require the most acting skill of all the roles in the play (78-79). In most of Sánchez's *farsas*, the *pastor* provides a combination of comic relief and moralizing interpretation of the story. In the *Farsa de Sancta Susaña*, however, the *pastor* is joined by an *ortolano* character. Cazal explains the *ortolano*'s presence as a tribute to the *gremio de hortelanos* which Sánchez meant to celebrate, as well as a nod to the orchard setting of the story (*Dramaturgia* 220-221). Together, the *pastor* and the *ortolano* deliver a long introduction in which the *ortolano* praises the bountiful crops that God has bestowed on mankind, and summarize the morals of the story of Susanna. This introduction makes up more than half of the play, before the characters in the story begin acting it out as a kind of second act. Then, the *pastor* and the *ortolano* remain to one side and comment on the play as it unfolds.

After praising the bounty of the Earth, the *ortolano* begins to explain how free time always leads people into trouble:

Pastor	¿Ansí quel holgar tray pena?	
Ortolano	El que no dexa el holgar siempre piensa en engañar hazienda o muger agena. Iamás naçe cosa buena del biuir sin exercicio, son vicio y vicio tras vicio con que el alma se condena. A Susaña fatigada del testimonio cruel el holgarse en su vergel dio ocasión a ser tentada. También la vida holgada de los dos alcaldes viejos les dio ganas y aparejos de cometer tal errada. (321-336)	325 330 335

Had the elders been working instead of loafing about in their neighbor's yard, they would not have had time to turn their eyes away from God in their lust for Susanna; and had Susanna been inside the house cooking or sewing, the elders would not have had the opportunity to assault her.

These two sins of idleness are put on the same level in the introduction. Thus the rape myth Benedict identifies in twentieth-century American culture, that women “deserve” rape, reveals itself in Sánchez’s sixteenth-century play: in some sense, Susanna’s actions led to what happened, because she was being lazy. If she had made better decisions and conducted herself more properly, none of this would have happened. Both parties, according to the *ortolano*, are to blame.

The *farsa* puts very little emphasis on Susanna’s beauty, however, and underlines several other lessons to be learned from the play which bear a closer resemblance to the lessons the biblical story may be trying to offer. The *ortolano* also speaks about the sin of bearing false witness:

Hallaréis muchos tacaños
caídos en cien mill menguas,
tan desatados de lenguas
que hazen terribles daños;
vernán los viejos susaños
que tentaron falsa maña. (441-446)

Here we see that the elders are sinful and that they cause damage, all because they spoke falsely. “Viejos susaños” echoes the “Melibeo soy” of Calisto in *La Celestina*; as Calisto’s love for Melibea grew so extreme that he became *melibeo* in place of *cristiano*, so the elders, in turning their eyes away from God, become devotees of Susanna and, thus, no longer faithful to the Lord. But Susanna’s faith and righteousness, the *ortolano* assures us, will see her victorious in the end. In emphasizing the simple and obvious lesson against giving false testimony, the play returns to the story’s didactic roots.

One of the fundamental challenges in adapting a work of prose to the theater is that the characters must somehow convey in dialogue what the narrator may have explained in the original. Sánchez has relieved himself of this problem with the introduction of not one, but two

commentators on the action. The *ortolano* refers indirectly to the sinfulness of the elders, but while the Bible explicitly tells us that they turned their eyes away from God, the *Farsa de Sancta Susaña* allows them to enter expressing their feelings in their own words, and naturally, they see themselves in a different light than does the biblical narrator who condemns their actions. The words the elders choose are typical of amorous poetry:

Viejo ii	¡O, penado coraçon, quándo verás tu deseo!	
Viejo i	¿Qué's lo que en vos, señor, veo?	475
	¿Tenéys alguna pasión?	
Viejo ii	Fuera de toda razón mi alma se desentraña en amores de Susaña. ¡O, mi desconsolación!	480
Viejo i	No es razón de os lo callar: de lo mesmo estoy enfermo, que yo ni como ni duermo ni me puedo sosegar. (473-484)	

Although old men talking like lovesick youths may have an inherently pathetic aspect, this type of language also attributes a certain nobility to the feelings of the elders that makes it easy for the spectator to find them sympathetic. While the biblical story itself follows the rape myth that the elders' actions were provoked by lust, Sánchez's *farsa* suggests that the elders are motivated by romantic love. This more noble feeling invests them with a certain level of dignity. What is more, they have surrendered themselves to the forward momentum of their feelings:

Viejo i	Di, señor, ¿tú no condenas esta nuestra liuiandad?
Viejo ii	Sí, mas la sensualidad ya nos tiene en sus cadenas. (501-504)

Their lust for Susanna has taken them prisoner, and they release their volition, claiming helplessness. When Susanna enters, she is accompanied not by two maids as in the Bible, but by one maid and two *escuderos*. As Casal explains, this was a concession to help the sixteenth-

century audience better understand Susanna’s character: “El procedimiento anacrónico de atribuir a Susaña escuderos destinados a significar su riqueza y el cuidado que tiene Susaña de su reputación, mediante un detalle que remite a la época del espectador, en la que las nobles damas siempre van acompañadas, en sus desplazamientos, por viejos escuderos” (*Dramaturgia* 229). Rather than applying more blame to Susanna, Sánchez—though he has already faulted her for her lack of work ethic—here adds a detail that is not in the Bible in order to make her seem more prudent to his public.

As Rina Walthaus points out, this play was written in an era when actresses virtually never appeared on stage (1830-1831), so we can imagine that an adolescent boy would be playing Susanna. In this initial scene, she enters and immediately says she wants to bathe, with the elders hiding and watching her, and the extra voyeuristic layers of the *pastor* and the *ortolano*, as well as the audience, watching the scene. Sánchez elects to have her disrobe to some extent before the elders’ intrusion:

Susaña	Pues nadie me puede ver aquí quiero desnudarme y en esta fuente bañarme.	530
	Vosotros podéis boluer.	
Viejo i	¡O, qué hermosa muger!	
Viejo ii	¡O, qué angélica figura!	
Viejo i	¡O, hermosa criatura!	535
Viejo ii	No sé qué más puede ser.	
Susaña	¡O, pecadora de mí! ¡O, mi Dios sea conmigo! Deslumbróme el enemigo, que a estos hombres no los vi.	540
	¿Quándo se entraron aquí? (529-541)	

While the Bible says that Susanna sent her maids away and that the elders immediately went up to her, Sánchez interpolates four lines of spoken dialogue by the elders as they enjoy spying on Susanna as she begins to undress. Rather than having the *pastor* or *ortolano* describe Susanna’s

beauty, as the biblical narrator does, Sánchez has the elders themselves describe it, underlining their helplessness to resist its impact.

In these lines, the elders seem to be describing Susanna undressing. Cazal imagines that she merely removes a veil from her face or some sort of accessory that would not be too revealing for the context. She concludes: “Lo cierto es que tiene que quitarse algo de encima para justificar las encendidas y admirativas exclamaciones proferidas por los Viejos” (“Adaptación” 106). For a religious play performed out of doors during Corpus Christi celebrations, and in which, furthermore, a boy is playing Susanna, it is difficult to imagine that she would remove more than a veil and perhaps some sort of outer garment. But, as Cazal observes, the exclamations of the elders make no sense unless Susanna removes something.

Even without the context of the Italian Renaissance paintings which would soon create such a powerfully sexualized doxic version of the Susanna story, Sánchez creates a pause in the action so that the elders can describe what they are seeing, an ekphrastic moment parallel to the pauses that would become so popular with later painters and playwrights. This scene with the elders watching Susanna undress is brief, but it is evocative of paintings like Tintoretto’s *Susannas* in Vienna and Paris, which would be created just a few years in the future. The Bible suggests that the elders approached Susanna as soon as the maids departed, yet Sánchez anticipates the interpretations of Tintoretto, Guercino and other painters with this interpolated hesitation in which the elders ekphrastically spy on the disrobing Susanna. The *Farsa de Sancta Susaña* makes clear that the possibilities for such an interpretation are latent, if not explicit, within the biblical version.

As Weissberger has shown, Sánchez uses his metatheatrical *pastor* character to enhance the pleasure that male spectators take in the play, forming an unspoken alliance between the

elders, the *pastor* and *ortolano* characters, and the men in the audience, and that this serves to undercut the moral of the story which the *pastor* and the *ortolano* deliver: “Pero la actitud del pastor (y del dramaturgo, cuyo representante parece en parte ser) hacia la mirada es marcadamente ambigua, pues incita metateatralmente en los espectadores el mismo placer escopofilico que en el nivel didáctico les critica” (203). By establishing this ambiguity between the play’s stated didactic purpose of praising faith, virtue, honesty, and hard work, and this moment of voyeuristic pleasure in which the audience enjoys the vision of Susanna undressing through the eyes of the elders and their co-voyeurs, the *pastor* and the *ortolano*, Sánchez’s play takes its place among later Spanish theatrical depictions of Susanna that objectify and blame her at the same time that they praise her chastity and strength of will.

The *Farsa de Sancta Susaña* uses implicit stage directions to continue to make it clear that some degree of violence is occurring onstage, supporting the interpretation of Clanton (3) and a number of Baroque painters that the elders grab and pull at Susanna rather than just threatening her verbally. When the elders first leap out at Susana, one orders the other to hold her:

Susaña	¡O, señores! ¡Dios me valga!
Viejo I	¡Atájala, no se salga!
Pastor	¡Ay, lobos, ay, ay! (542-544)

Later, after threatening her with their false accusation, the dialogue indicates that a further physical struggle follows. The *pastor* looks on in horror and wants to stop the elders’ assault, but the *ortolano* instructs him not to interfere:

Viejo ii	Acaba, señora, ya: ¿quiesnos matar y morir?
Pastor	Veys, veys, ya la van asir. Quiero dezir: “Ta, ta, ta”.
Ortolano	El diablo te lo da, ¿tú qué piensas de ganar?

Oír y ver y callar,
que esto se vsa por acá.
Susaña ¡Peruersos viejos liuianos!
 Angustia me cerca fuerte (633-642)

Although Sánchez would be doing terrible violence to the source material if he allowed the *pastor* to stop the elders, Weissberger finds a sinister voyeuristic motive in the *ortolano*'s injunction: “Es notable la ambigüedad del adverbio ‘acá’, que parece evocar simultáneamente el jardín bíblico y las calles de Badajoz. Más interesante es el hecho de que el acuerdo entre pastor y hortelano en este momento se rompe pues el pastor quiere actuar (para impedir la injuria a Susana) y el hortelano sólo quiere mirar (para gozarla)” (207). That the *ortolano* is inspired to continue watching because the sexual violence being enacted is pleasing to him is not clear—it can also be read as a recommendation to let divine justice run its course, which is in keeping with another of the play’s themes, that God’s ways are sometimes mysterious and humans must accept them even if they cannot understand. At the same time, the *ortolano*'s words do have the effect of allowing the violence to continue, whether it horrifies the audience, or secretly arouses them, or both.

The violence in the *Farsa de Sancta Susana* does make it clear that Susanna is surviving an attempted rape and not resisting an attempted seduction:

Pastor ¡O, que la quieren forçar!
Susaña ¡O, cuytada! ¿Y qué haré?
 Soltadme, son llamaré. (653-655)

Benedict, Harding and others have found that violent rapes tend to make the victim more sympathetic to the public, who see her resistance as showing that she was less complicit or responsible. In keeping with this cultural bias, the violence that Sánchez’s text calls for thus underlines Susanna’s innocence, showing how strongly she objects to what is happening. She even addresses the elders directly with a condemnation of their actions (“¡Peruersos viejos

liuianos!”), something she does not do in the Bible, in which her only words are addressed to God in prayer. These images contradict the Renaissance images, such as Annibale Carracci’s widely distributed print (Figure 7), in which Susanna is seen as a temptress who responds calmly, perhaps even with pleasure, as the elders approach. On the other hand, the play does bear a resemblance to more violent Baroque images in which Susanna is physically attacked. While these paintings can be read as being more sympathetic to the victim’s plight, they also generate more excitement for more sadistic viewers.⁶

Christian Metz outlines a basic principle of scopophilic pleasure: “Voyeurism which is not too sadistic (there is none which is not so at all) rests on a kind of *fiction*, more or less justified in the order of the real, sometimes institutionalised as in the theatre or strip-tease, a fiction that stipulates that the object ‘agrees’, that it is therefore exhibitionist” (62). Tintoretto’s Vienna painting, which shows the elders as still hidden and Susanna with a secretive smile, rests on this fiction that she knows they are there and is pleased by their gaze; images like this one fall into Metz’s “not too sadistic” category. Violent Baroque images that show Susanna fighting off the elders’ forceful incursion, such as those by Rubens, Jordaens, and Vignon, would fall into the “more sadistic” category, in which voyeurism still offers pleasure, but of a different sort. With the paintings and the plays, the audience is capable of recognizing that what is happening is wrong at the same time that they enjoy it.

The economy of time and personnel with which Sánchez tells his story causes Daniel’s intervention to be collapsed into the bath/assault scene,⁷ which is indeed the only scene. After the

⁶ As I discuss in Chapter V, the painting of Susanna by Willem van Mieris on the wall of the Bates Motel in *Psycho* is a particularly violent Baroque-style image, setting the stage for the sadistic shower scene that immediately follows.

⁷ Cazal observes that this compression also removes the “people of Israel,” which functions as a character in the biblical tale and connects the story to its Jewish origins, while Sánchez situated his play in no particular place and in a time period that seems more like his own. (“Adaptación” 96)

elders have made their false accusation, Susanna prays for justice, addressing herself directly to God, and Daniel immediately enters, pronouncing the sounds of prohibition the *pastor* wanted to say to the elders:

Susaña	Tú sabes en la verdad que me dan aquesta muerte por yo temer de ofenderte y no perder mi bondad; tu alta diuinidad no querrá que su malicia preualezca a la justicia, sin que salga en claridad.	715 720
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Aquí entra Daniel algo apresurado, diciendo:

Daniel	Ta, ta, ta, engañada gente, no se haga tal errada: la sentencia está mal dada que condena la ynocente; fue juzgada falsamente sobre falso testimonio.	725
Pastor	Yos digo que entró el demoño a llos viejos en la frente.	
Ortolano	Prega a Dios de la valer pues ninguna culpa tiene.	730
Pastor	Y a ellos que llos condene, que ansí lo suele hazer.	
Ortolano	El que me oyer y me ver, tenga en Dios su coraçon, que quien leuanta trayción en ella tien de caer. (713-736)	735

In the play, Susanna’s prayers are both lengthier and more frequent than they are in the Bible. She prays for salvation as soon as she sees the elders, before they have a chance to start threatening her, and here she makes her dilemma clear just before Daniel arrives. Daniel appears to be addressing some larger public that has already condemned Susanna, though this has not happened on stage. Daniel’s words also deliver a clear lesson about false testimony, which the two metatheatrical characters further highlight with their commentary. God’s justice is shown to

be correct, and the elders are shown to have given in to the influence of the Devil. The play concludes with a song about the importance of truth and steadfast faith:

La diuina Magestad
que los secretos aclara,
quiere tanto a la verdad
que nunca la desampara;
muestren los buenos la cara,
que aquel que justicia tiene
Dios lo salua y lo sostiene. (788-794)

Weissberger finds these final lines disturbing: “me parece que el marcado ‘voyeurismo’ teatral y metateatral de esta obra complica la lección moral de inocencia y bondad que se asocia en los versos finales con la imagen de la cara descubierta” (207). She connects the image of revealing the face of Truth with the trial scene in the Bible, in which the elders demand that Susanna’s veil be removed:

Aunque el clérigo escoge no dramatizar esta escena en su farsa, hemos visto que por otro lado sí enfatiza el efecto escopofílico inherente al tema de la historia de Susana por medio del papel asignado al pastor. Este espectador metateatral, deliberadamente “voyeurístico”, funciona como nexo dramático entre el “voyeurismo” de los viejos y el del público masculino. Se puede afirmar que la complicidad de este público en el pecado de mirar a la mujer desnuda depende de su identificación con el pastor, la cual a la vez es necesaria para el entendimiento de la lección moral. (208)

As Weissberger points out, the *pastor* character in this play creates a tension of the sort that is created in the Venetian paintings that would begin to emerge a few years later: the viewer identifies with the elders, which helps him enjoy the scene more. The *pastor* figure brings even more complication to this dynamic, as he provides another layer of distance between the viewer, delighting in the scene, and the *perversos viejos livianos*. While identifying with the *pastor* instead of the elders allows the spectator to enjoy the scene from a position of reduced complicity with the elders’ crime, it also runs the risk of blurring his comprehension of the lesson the *pastor* delivers.

Susanna's husband, Joachim, is the first character mentioned in the biblical story, yet he plays a very small role in it. He is nowhere to be found during the attempted rape scene, says nothing at the trial, and only afterward gives thanks that his wife's name has been cleared. The story is not about him, but his silence has given pause to many readers of the tale, including Alice Bach:

The oddest element in this story in my view is the deafening silence of Joakim, the wealthy husband of Susanna. He has no discourse nor does he perform any action in the story... Joakim is entirely absent from the scene in which the duplicitous elders accuse his wife and she is condemned to death. It appears, then, that Joakim cannot trust a woman even as pious as Susanna... Thus, in spite of the fact that Susanna has been falsely accused, the possibility of her committing adultery is very real in the minds of the storytellers of the Second Temple period. The role of a beautiful woman like Susanna is defined by her sexual identity. She is expected to entice men. (71)

Is Joachim silent because he is afraid that the elders were telling the truth? His absence from the biblical tale leaves room for all sorts of speculation. Sánchez finds it convenient to leave him out of the play entirely, which fits in well with his spare production. Seventeenth-century dramatists, seeking to extend the story to fill three acts, usually included Joachim as a character. Luis Vélez de Guevara's Joachim expresses doubts of just the sort Bach describes, tailored to match other Baroque *comedia* rhetoric about women's fragile honor. Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza includes a few scenes with Joachim, using the character to fill in logically some of the many gaps in the biblical tale.

III. *La comedia de Sancta Susaña*

In Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza's 1551 *Comedia de Sancta Susaña*, the title character's household includes her husband, both parents, two maids, and two male servants. In addition to Daniel and the elders, here named Sedechia and Achian,⁸ the cast also includes a

⁸ The two elders are not named in the Bible or in Sánchez's play. Origen mentions that "Achias and Sedechiah" may be the elders' names in a commentary cited by Jerome, and also in a letter to Africanus, in which he gives the names

handful of townspeople, a town crier, and two replacement judges. As Robert Hathaway writes, “If we know today rather little about Sánchez... we know far less about the Segovian weaver Juan de Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza who authored the *Comedia de Santa Susaña*” (110-111). Fortunately, one *edición suelta* of the play was printed with a brief introduction, which reads: “Comedia hecha por Juan Rodrigo Alonso, que por otro nombre es llamado de Pedraza, vezino de la ciudad de Segovia, en la qual, por interlocución de diuersas personas, en metro se declara la hystoria de Sancta Susaña a la letra, qual en la prosecución claramente parescera. Hecha, al loor de Dios nuestro señor. Año de mil y quinientos y cincuenta y ocho años.” Hathaway observes that “Pedraza’s promise of fidelity to the Biblical text (‘la hystoria... a la letra’) was not an empty one: of its nine hundred and twenty-seven verses slightly more than ninety percent narrate the Susanna story, following closely the sixty-four verses in Daniel, in contrast to just less than forty percent in the Sánchez version which treats it rather abruptly for the dramatist’s own prescriptive purposes” (111). Hathaway explains that, unlike Sánchez, Pedraza was “a secular dramatist... [who] adapted the newer popular style to give a more contemporary human stature—at least in appearance—to the biblical characters” (111). If, indeed, Pedraza was more interested in telling the story for its dramatic interest than for its moral message, then the expansion of the role of Susanna’s husband makes good dramatic sense. While his participation may be irrelevant to the theme of Susanna’s unjust persecution—or, as Bach posits, his absence may show that Joachim was suspicious of his wife’s fidelity—his anguish in the face of the accusation is a very human response that Pedraza and later dramatists found compelling,

as “Sedekias and Achiab.” But it is possible that the story he cites in the letter “was independent of Susanna” (Braverman 126-127). Pedraza appears to be the first to use these two names in the Spanish theater, and the elders are given similar names in most seventeenth-century Spanish plays. Based on this, Raquel Minian de Alfie deduces that Pedraza’s play served as an inspiration to Luis Vélez de Guevara when he wrote his *Santa Susana* (c. 1620-1640), which in turn inspired later dramatists (185-186).

although the Bible does not make any reference to it. Pedraza only depicts it briefly, but later dramatists would give Joachim an expanded role.

Hathaway points out that, although Sánchez's *Recopilación* was published in 1554⁹ and Pedraza's comedia in 1551,¹⁰ not only was Sánchez's play the older of the two, but the two works belong to eras more different than what these dates suggest. Sánchez's play adheres to the more traditional style of the early sixteenth century, while Pedraza's *Comedia de Sancta Susaña* belongs to an era in which the Spanish theater was in transition, influenced by Italian dramaturgy and on the road toward the *comedia nueva* of Lope de Vega (117-118).¹¹ Pedraza's play includes a *pastor* character who introduces it, and remarks that it is not raining (indicating that the play is being performed outdoors) before announcing his intention to head for the hills:

ques de como fue Susaña
acusada falsamente;
sopricos que lo escucheys,
pues se acabara muy breue;
y pues, señores, no llueue,
no ayays miedo que os mojeys;
las faltas emendareys
del autor, si hallays errores;
yo me vo a los alcores;
señores, a Dios quedeys. (55-64)

Pedraza's *pastor* only appears at the beginning to give welcoming words, and at the end to make the traditional request for forgiveness of the play's faults. The role of exegete is largely unfilled, though a *pregonero* character appears within the play to give a summary of events and then, a bit later, an interpretation of the moral lesson.

⁹ This publication date is likely about five years after Sánchez's death and perhaps as much as three decades after the *Farsa de Sancta Susaña* was written.

¹⁰ The edition I cite is a reprint from 1558, but Walthaus notes that the play was first printed in 1551 (1830).

¹¹ Regarding the difference in genre between these two works that the titles *Farsa* and *Comedia* might seem to imply, Hathaway advises caution: "To compound the difficulties of determining the precise meaning of such generic labels, we have no real clues as to the reason for their use. Each of our three plays presents the same story, thus the connotations of 'farcical,' 'jocose/popular,' and 'tragic/noble' are not necessarily valid for *farsa*, *comedia*, or *tragedia*" (118).

Madonna. It forms the crowns of angels, of saints, and of the Madonna herself. When it is the attribute of the Infant Christ it recalls the Heaven from which He came” (31-32). Celia Fisher identifies jasmine and musk roses in a Filippino Lippi painting of the Virgin and Child, noting that the message sent by the flowers is “not only of virginal purity but also of scent, in fact all the perfumes of Arabia, since jasmine and musk roses not only waft fragrance through the air but provide the ingredients of commerce. It was for this important attribute that they were introduced from the Far East, where both originate, along the silk trading routes into Europe” (30). The jasmine, according to Fisher, points both toward the Virgin’s purity and toward sensual eastern luxuries.

The flower, native to India, was cultivated in the Persian Empire, and “there seems little doubt that it must have been carried by the Moors to southern Spain during their occupation [*sic*] of that area” (Green and Miller 5). The Umayyad sultans of Córdoba showed a strong interest in botanical research (Husain 49), a link in a chain which Jack Goody identifies as the penetration of Eastern garden imagery into the Western imagination:

The Far and the Near East became major resources in the later rise of the culture of flowers in the West; the whole of Asia supplied plants... while the Near East continued to supply a model for the enclosed garden. That model was also present in the biblical account of the Garden of Eden, but it was brought closer to the West not only by the circulation of literary works and by the influence of the returning Crusaders, but by the implantation of Islam in southern Spain... The paradise gardens of Iran and of earlier Mesopotamia were the direct ancestors of the gardens of Islam, not only in myth but in actuality. The continuity is evident. (102)

The jasmine, while symbolic of purity, was also associated with Muslim Andalucía and was often mentioned in traveler’s tales of journeys to the East.¹² Susanna’s mention of the jasmine is

¹² Accounts of Eastern gardens were popular both before and after Pedraza’s time. Green and Miller note that Marco Polo “described the countryside, orchards and gardens he saw *en route* to the East” (38), and Goody writes: “About 1470 a Flemish traveller to Tunis claimed there were four thousand individual, irrigated, gardens around the town, full of fruit and with flowers perfuming the air” (105). Whether or not these travelers mentioned jasmine by name, it was likely to be among the images and, especially, scents that the readers of these texts would have imagined. Later

an olfactory as well as visual reference that could serve to establish her as a sex object in a luxurious atmosphere, even as it brings this into tension with her image as a model of virtue. Pedraza's play, then, also sets the stage by evoking rape myths about the victim's appearance and behavior somehow making her responsible for the attack against her. While Sánchez outright blames her for being idle, Pedraza also adds a layer of othering to his implications: she may be pure and good, but she may also be a Babylonian seductress. Although she adds "si no ay contradiccion" (72) to her expression of her will to bathe, the way she has expressed it has established a contradiction between the two ways in which her character may be viewed.

Several characters make mention of the fact that Susanna typically bathes in the garden, alone, every afternoon. In her first speech, Susanna mentions her desire for the oil and ointment, and for solitude. Her maids tell her that no one is in the house except the two elders, and that she need not worry about them because they are respected members of the community. When the three women go out, the elders, Sedechia and Achian, lurk separately onto the stage. They ask each other what they are doing there and announce their intentions to go home for lunch, just as they do in the Bible. When they both resume their lurking and bump into each other again, each confesses his feelings to the other. Sedechia not only uses the language of love poetry in describing his desire, but after naming its object, locates her as reclining in the bath at this very moment:

sabreys, señor, que vencido
del amor, aquí he venido,

travelers' accounts do mention jasmine by name: "On his second visit to Persia, that inveterate 17th-century traveler and recorder Sir John Chardin took the hazardous route from the Black Sea, reaching Isfahan in June 1673... Chardin also describes the flowers he saw... 'Along the Caspian coast there are whole forests of orange trees, single and double jasmine, all European flowers, and some other species besides'" (Green and Miller 39). And, about fifty years later: "In the early 18th century Lady Mary Wortley Montagu described the Sultan's garden in Istanbul... 'In the midst of the Garden is the Chiosk, that is, a large Room, commonly beautify'd with a fine fountain in the midst of it. It is raised 9 or 10 steps and enclos'd with Gilded Lattices, round which Vines, jess'mines and Honey suckles twineing make a sort of Green Wall'" (Goody 105). Similar accounts may well have circulated in Pedraza's time, and may have evoked similar Orientalist images in the minds of their readers.

a sus fuerças muy subjecto, 160
 Herido en el coraçon
 de su mano cruel sin par,
 a solamente buscar
 la salud de tal passion,
 Que pende, tene atencion, 165
 de Susaña y su beldad,
 que ora en el vaño, en verdad,
 yaze en gran delectación. (158-168)

The stage direction reads: “Entrada su señora en el jardin con sus donzellas, dizen los dos viejos, llamados Sedechia y Achian” (between lines 104 and 105). Sedechia imagines the scene with lascivious delight, his projected “gran delectación” pairing well with Susanna’s previous remarks about “estrados,” “coxines,” “jazmines,” and “vnciones” in painting the orchard as a sensual pleasure garden, a vision that seems to exist both in the Sedechia’s mind and in Susanna’s reality.¹³ Susanna is worried if there may be a contradiction (72), but the elders find reality to be in harmony with their imaginations.

Susanna apparently bathes each day around the same time and Sedechia and Achian apparently know it, whether or not they have succeeded in spying on her in the bath before. This scene in which they bump into one another suggests that each one has independently chosen today as the first time he will hide in the orchard. Sedechia suggests to Achian that they hide until the girls leave, which he expects them to do soon:

ocultos entre las ramas,
 hasta ver fuera a las damas,
 por que mejor negociemos.
 Y salidas, vsaremos
 con Susaña, a quien notad
 dexaran en soledad,
 conforme como queremos. (186-192)

¹³ This almost hallucinatory description from the elder’s imagination fits in well with Mieke Bal’s analysis of the Bible story (see Chapter III).

It is not made explicit whether or not Pedraza intends for the Susanna character to disrobe to any extent—removing a veil or a shawl, for example—in preparation for her bath. The length of this scene in which she prepares to bathe, especially in comparison with the length of the play as a whole, leaves room for interpretation. After this scene with the elders, another stage direction reads: “Entrados los dos viejos en el jardín, do ocultos yazen, Susaña manda a sus donzellas que a casa se bueluan, y salidos los dos viejos, se van para Susaña, qual parescera en fin de las dos coplas siguientes” (between lines 199 and 200). Then Susanna and the maids return, though Susanna seems to still be preparing for a bath that has not yet begun. She asks the maids to make sure that she is completely alone, and to lock the garden doors. The maids assure her that they will. Another stage direction then reads: “Salidas las donzellas, los dos viejos salen de donde estan escondidos, y dizen” (between lines 215 and 216). Instead of now addressing Susanna directly, the elders take a few lines to exclaim to one another how excited they are that all this is happening, and to plan their attack:

Sed.	Casi fuera de sentido me hallo, de plazentero, en solo ver, compañero las donzellas que han salido. Despachemos, pues se han ydo,	220
Ach.	y, sin mas detenimiento, demos fin a nuestro intento, pues no ay de quien sea impedido. Hora, sus, vamos do esta refrescando su belleza;	225
Sed.	y de su gran gentileza gozaremos si quiera. Y si no, ¿que muda aura para podella vencer?	
Ach.	Quando no lo quiera hazer, forçada de nos sera. (216-231)	230

The elders have not formed a plan before they approach Susanna, but Achian’s suggestion is clear enough. Unlike later commentators who want to frame the elders’ actions as an “attempted

seduction,” Pedraza’s Achian is at least not trying to conceal the evil of his intentions. However, just after Achian says this, Sedechia actually does make an attempt at seducing Susanna. In the Bible, the elders approach her and immediately demand that she lie with them, or else they will denounce her for committing adultery with a young man. Pedraza’s Sedechia, the more clever and sentimental of the two elders, approaches Susanna not with a threat, but with a declaration of love:

Sed:	Dios te salue, dueña honesta, copiosa en hermosura, en quien hora dio natura sobre qualquiera terrestre.	235
	De todas gracias compuesta, muy mas linda que notamos, nuestra pena publicamos ante ti, según que resta.	
	Y es, señora, que los dos morimos por tus amores, y para en tales dolores la salud pende de vos.	240
	Por esso quieras con nos consentir, sin mas desman, aquí, do nos ueran sino solamente Dios.	245
Ach.	Reclina como cumplamos breue nuestras voluntades, pues sin duda de las tales mucho su fin desseamos.	250
	Por tanto te suplicamos quieras luego consentir en esto, sin resistir, que los dos te demandamos. (232-255)	

Achian’s coarse and selfish gloss on Sedechia’s trope-laden speech creates a contrast so jarring that it can be read as a parody of the language used in courtly love literature, such as Diego de San Pedro’s *Cárcel de Amor*, in which Leriano writes to Laureola about how he is sick and dying of love for her: “Yo me culpo porque te pido galardón sin averte hecho servicio, aunque si recibes en cuenta del servir el penar, por mucho que me pagues siempre pensaré que me quedas

en deuda” (81). Sedechia echoes Leriano’s style when he implores Susanna to relieve their agony: “los dos / morimos por tus amores, / y para en tales dolores / la salud pende de vos” (241-243). Instead of asking for a “galardón,” he quasi-euphemistically requests that she consent (245).

Achian, on the other hand, has no illusions about what he is really asking for. Unlike his friend, he also feels no need to give Susanna a reason why she should agree; he merely asks her to lie back and assures her that it will be over soon: “Reclina como cumplamos / breue nuestras voluntades” (248-249). With these lines, Pedraza draws a sharp distinction between the two elders, at least superficially. Achian emerges as the seedy reality behind Sedechia’s poetic façade. By having Sedechia first present himself as a suffering lover, and then letting Achian speak for the male gaze as it really is, this scene highlights the conflict in making the elders seem sympathetic to the (heterosexual male) audience while still denouncing them as sinners and criminals. This tension is present to some extent in the original story, but becomes barely perceptible in some Renaissance paintings where the elders’ activity seems so understandable that the story’s denouement is easily forgotten. But with Achian’s unadorned petition, Pedraza shows the elders for the depraved miscreants they are in essence.

Not to be outdone in evil, Sedechia improvises the threat about the false accusation after Susanna’s lengthy refusal of their initial demand. Susanna refuses again, saying that she would rather die than sin before God, and furthermore, she will not commit such an offense against her husband (296-307). Achian, matter-of-fact as ever, says: “Mas no te aprovecha nada, / que al fin has de ser forçada, / pues que por bien no has querido” (308-310). Susanna then shouts for help, and the servants come running. Thus, the “attempted seduction” quickly becomes, undeniably, an attempted rape, thwarted by Susanna’s cries for help. Again, Pedraza gives no explicit stage

directions about what the elders are doing, and the dialogue is open to interpretation as to the level of violence to be acted out. While none of the characters make exclamations indicating that violence is currently happening, Achian repeatedly announces his intentions to use violence to satisfy his desire. A staging in which they assault her as she cries for help would certainly be an appropriate interpretation of the text.

Susanna prays to the Lord to deliver her, but a jailer character appears and takes her away. The servants then go inside to break the news to Joachim, who has been shouting for them and is angry that they have not yet appeared. Once they relate to him what has just happened, Joachim expresses astonishment and doubt:

¿Es possible que se a dado
oy tan breue en mi jardin
desonrra tal de Joachim
en instancia de su estado?
¡O mi Dios, que lo has notado
y alcanças todo secreto,
a ti, señor, lo cometo,
pues en ti soy consolado! (423-434)

Like his wife, Joachim puts his trust in God. This character's absence in the Bible helps the accelerated pace of the narrative, leaving his feelings and reactions as part of the mystery of the text. In the play, this character serves to smooth the Bible's abrupt transition from the attempted rape to the accusation to the trial. When he goes to the trial, Joachim approaches the two elders and asks them, "con insufferible passion" (456), if it is true that Susanna cheated on him.

Susanna's parents then come in and each delivers a lament, also indicating their faith in God's justice and each affirming that they do not believe she could have committed such a crime.

While Joachim agonizes over his uncertainty, Susanna's parents are convinced that she is incapable of such an immoral act. After all of this, the two elders still lie about what they saw,

heightening the viewer's sense of their shamelessness. As Achian testifies about what he saw, he cannot resist projecting the image of her in the bath once again:

mando boluer sus donzellas
para quedar delinquente.
Las quales mando boluer,
ya que fue en el vaño entrada,
breuemente a la posada,
por mejor lugar tener
De adulterio cometer,
qual vimos, con vn mancebo,
que, salidas, entro luego
con Susaña auer plazer. (572-581)

In Pedraza's play, Susanna's bath exists most vividly in the imaginations of the two elders, who talk about it so eagerly that it would appear they have never seen it, but have given it a great deal of thought. When Susanna comes in, they ask that her veil be removed, as they do in the Bible.

Once Susanna is unveiled, both elders gasp at her beauty:

Sed.	Quitenle con breuedad dencima la cobertura; ¡vea toda criatura quien hizo tan gran maldad!
Ach.	¡O, que figura notad, compañero, y que lindeza!
Sed.	¿Quién de su gran gentileza gozaua y de su beldad? (606-613)

The elders are so astonished by the sight of the unveiled Susanna that it would appear that they have not seen much of her before.¹⁴ All of their talk of her bathing, then, must have been based mostly on fantasy, along with something they may have overheard her say to her maids.

Pedraza's play makes one wonder if the Venetian paintings of Susanna as a love goddess are in

¹⁴ Hathaway observes that "Any idea that the elders saw Susana disrobed at any time, seems to be denied in this same scene" (121).

fact meant to represent what these perverse, lascivious old men saw in their minds rather than anything that actually occurs in the story.¹⁵

When Daniel comes forward to refute the elders' claims, he pointedly mentions that Susanna's lineage is better than that of the elders:

¡Peruertidos en maldad,
que juzgastes la muger
hebrea, que en cometer
nunca fuera tal suziedad! (727-730)

After delivering a diatribe against Sedechia, before questioning Achian, Daniel says:

Maldito perro cruento,
de la linea de Cana,
no del tribu de Iuda,
ni fuyste del descendiente. (843-846)

In the Bible, Daniel does indicate that Susanna's tribal affiliation makes her better than the elders. When he first stands up at the trial, he asks: "Are you such fools, O Israelites! To condemn a woman of Israel without examination and without clear evidence?" (Daniel 13:48). Later, he insults the lineage of the second elder before questioning him: "Offspring of Canaan, not of Judah, beauty has seduced you, lust has subverted your conscience" (Daniel 13:56). Thus Daniel's speech to Achian, "Maldito perro cruento, / de la linea de Cana, / no del tribu de Iuda" (843-845) is a close translation of the Bible. But earlier, he changes "daughter of Israel" to "hebrea," in keeping with early Church practice regarding the Jewish tradition.

Betsy Halpern-Amaru explains that this characterization of Susanna as an *hebrea* is in line with the early Church's use of her as a foundational figure who helped to define why Christianity was different and better than Judaism:

The interest of the Church Fathers in *Susanna* arose in the context of the evolution of the Christian canon and the attempt on the part of early Christianity to come to grips with its Jewish past... walking a thin line, the Church strove to authenticate its link to the Jews

¹⁵ This view supports Mieke Bal's argument that the trial scene in the Bible is the source of the pictorial tradition.

(in the positive context called “the Hebrews”) and at the same time to discredit them (in the negative context, called “the Jews”). The Fathers employed *Susanna* to work both sides of the precarious endeavor. (25)

While the parish priest Sánchez de Badajoz strips the story entirely of its Jewish context, the secular playwright Pedraza aligns it with Susanna’s role in the early Church as an exemplary Jew and a prefiguration of Christ (as well as of the Virgin Mary). This aspect was taken up by later Spanish playwrights, as were the names that Pedraza gives the Elders. However, since the distinction between *judíos* and *hebreos* and some variation on the names Sedechia and Achian both originate with the writings of the Church fathers, and the line about the tribe of Canaan appears in the Bible itself, this does not necessarily mean that Pedraza’s play served as a source for these later dramatists.

While they both represent adaptations of the Bible, these two early Spanish plays can be seen as adaptations that offer interpretations of the Bible only. Renaissance images created the doxic version of the Susanna story that would impact later literary interpretations, as playwrights wrote works with an intertextual relationship both to the Bible and to these paintings. Even so, these early plays both establish a certain ambiguity in the story in the way they present the elders as evil (but relatable, and suffering from lovesickness), and Susanna as virtuous (but a loafer and a vixen). Both plays, though brief and reasonably faithful to the original story, also draw out the bath scene to create a dramatic pause or ekphrasis, a harbinger of a tendency that would emerge in later plays. While the Bible’s Susanna story lines itself up with rape myths that have endured into our own time, these plays follow different but parallel paths in the same victim-blaming direction.

Chapter Two: “Disculpa de mi error en la edad cana”:

Susanna in Lope de Vega and Venetian Art

In the mid-sixteenth century, the image of Susanna started to change. Painters in Venice began to depict the chaste and devout wife of Joachim from Daniel 13 as a voluptuous nude, lounging by a pool, exuding seductive energy. Much of the iconography in these images was transferred from Classical and earlier Renaissance paintings of Venus, as Susanna became a popular stand-in for erotic mythological subjects such as Venus or Danaë. The story of Susanna and the elders was an appealing substitute for pagan female nude figures, as it lent a pretext of biblical legitimacy to images of a clearly erotic nature. Although, as I showed in the Introduction, the actual bath does not take place in the Bible, the mention of the idea of bathing was enough to align Susanna with the image of the bathing Venus. In performing this substitution, artists such as Tintoretto, Paolo Veronese, and Jacopo Bassano created complex, sumptuous images in which the viewer, assumed to be male, is beckoned to see himself in and envy the elders, while blaming Susanna for enticing him.

Though he was an admirer of Venetian art who often described paintings by Titian, Bassano and others in his work, Lope de Vega’s ekphrases of Susanna appear in contexts where the meaning of the Susanna story is contrasted with the way it is depicted or interpreted. However, Lope writes of Susanna with reverence when he retells or refers to her story without an ekphrastic description. I argue that Lope’s ekphrases of Susanna reflect his disapproval of the Renaissance artistic tradition of Susanna, in which her image is blended with that of Venus and her courage and steadfastness are blurred, with a pagan temptress stepping into the place of the biblical victim of false testimony.

I. *El testimonio vengado*

As I discussed in the last chapter, Susanna's image in the early Christian Church and through the Middle Ages focused on the story as a morality tale against bearing false witness, and on Susanna's role as both a model of chastity and an exemplar of unshakeable faith. In medieval Spanish literature, the story of Susanna is mentioned in connection with these aspects of the story. In *El cantar de mio Cid*, when Ruy Díaz leaves doña Jimena and their daughters at the monastery of San Pedro, Jimena prays for her husband's safety. She gives examples of God's greatness, from the creation to the birth of Jesus, before giving examples of times when he saved the faithful:

salveste a Jonás cuando cayó en el mar,
salvest a Daniel con los leones en la mala cárcel,
salvest dentro en Roma al señor San Sabastián,
salvest a Santa Susaña¹ del falso criminal. (339-342)

Jimena includes Susanna in this list simply as a person whom God rescued from danger, as he did the other three figures she mentions. The group includes three men and one woman, but their gender is not an important factor here: all were pious, and all were saved.

Susanna's name appears in a similar context in the fourth quatrain of *El libro de buen amor*, as the Juan Ruiz asks for God's blessing in his endeavor to write his book. He cites various examples of God's grace, including saving Daniel in the lions' den and Saint Margaret from the belly of the dragon. He continues:

Señor, tú que libreste a la santa Susaña,
del falso testimonio de la falsa compañía,
líbrame tú, mi Dios, d'esta coita tan maña,
dame tu misericordia, tira de mí tu saña. (4)

¹ As we have seen in both plays I discussed in Chapter I, in Spain it was common to refer to the Susanna of the Old Testament as "Saint Susanna" throughout the medieval and early modern periods. To complicate matters, there is a Saint Susanna, an early Christian martyr, though documentary evidence about her is scarce (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 631). References like this one, making mention of false testimony and criminals, clearly refer to the Susanna of Daniel 13.

As was often the case, Susanna appears alongside Daniel, as their stories appear in the same book of the Bible, and both were saved by divine intervention. Both appear here as part of a longer list that includes Esther, Jonah, Saint James, and others. As in *El cantar de mio Cid*, the list of the saved includes men and women indiscriminately. Their faith and virtue are the important things.

Lope de Vega's *El testimonio vengado* mentions the biblical story and Susanna's salvation, without making reference to the artistic tradition around it. The play, which Morley y Bruerton dates to between 1596 and 1604 (Salvador Lipperheide 1690), tells the story of King Sancho III of Pamplona and his family. Gerardo Salvador Lipperheide explains that the story, from the eleventh century, of how Sancho divided his kingdom between his sons was "considerada fabulosa por diversos autores" (1691), but that it remained important because it "daba cuenta del origen legendario de los reinos de Castilla y Aragón" (1691).

As Antonio Durán Gudiol explains, Sancho's first son, Ramiro, was born outside of wedlock to a "noble dama de Aibar" (14), prior to Sancho's marriage to doña Mayor of Castilla in 1010. After that, Sancho and Mayor had three sons: García, Gonzalo and Fernando (Durán Gudiol 15). The *Crónica Silense* tells that Sancho's kingdom was divided between all four sons, with Ramiro becoming king of Aragón; García inheriting Navarra; Fernando, Castilla; and Gonzalo, the duchies of Sobrarbe and Ribagorza (Durán Gudiol 16-17). According to the *Crónica Silense*, Ramiro inherited Aragón because his illegitimacy prevented him from inheriting any of the other territories (Durán Gudiol 17). But, Durán Gudiol explains, "Esta justificación no fue aceptada por el autor de la *Crónica Najerense*, el cual, basándose probablemente en cantares de gesta, asegura que Ramiro I fue agraciado por Sancho el Mayor con la 'partecilla de Aragón' una vez legitimado mediante el parto simbólico del bastardo por la

reina en agradecimiento a la defensa de la misma, acusada del adulterio por sus propios hijos legítimos” (17-18).

The story of doña Mayor parallels the story of Susanna, in which an innocent woman (Mayor) is falsely accused of adultery by miscreants (García, Gonzalo and Fernando) but defended by a virtuous man (Ramiro), while her husband (Sancho) does not discernibly take the part of anyone involved. If, as Durán Gudiol proposes, the author of the *Crónica Najerense*, seeking to explain an obscure historical event, retold a story presented in popular song, then the historical legitimization of this story parallels that of the story Susanna.² Furthermore, if the story was invented, the *cantares de gesta* that popularized it may have been inspired by the story of Susanna, given the resemblance between the two narratives. Three romances about the subject appear in Agustín Durán’s *Romancero general*, one by Lorenzo de Sepúlveda, one by Juan de la Cueva, and one anonymous, but all written in the sixteenth century or later. Two of them mention that don García accused his mother of adultery because he was enraged when she would not let him ride his father’s horse, and all three of them say that the king and queen had only two sons together, García and Fernando. These versions with two accusers resemble the Susanna story even more closely, although Durán notes that the trope is a common one: “Apenas hay un libro de caballería, apenas un poema de este género, donde no se halle alguna dama falsamente acusada de adulterio y defendida por caballeros leales” (205). The original Susanna story may have been the inspiration for various similar tales, or it may merely be an especially old example of this recurring plot device.

² The story of Susanna is excluded from the Hebrew and Protestant Bibles, deemed apocryphal based on linguistic evidence that it may have been composed in Greek and not Hebrew, and thus was a later addition. Its resemblance to certain Middle Eastern folktales suggests that it was a traditional story that was incorporated into the Book of Daniel by naming the youth who defends Susanna as Daniel (Pennacchietti 11-12).

Lope undertakes the dramatization of a historical episode in *El testimonio vengado*, though he does so with a free hand. “Lope era antes dramaturgo que historiador” (1694), Salvador Lipperheide reminds us, and “en opinión de todos sus contemporáneos, tenía licencia para recrear [las cosas] verosímilmente y suponerlas ‘como deberían haber sido’. Lope reescribía la historia, la manipulaba y sometía a nueva interpretación, porque podía y debía hacerlo” (1694). Salvador Lipperheide affirms that the audience of the play would have been familiar with the story of doña Mayor “a través del romancero y otras manifestaciones en la literatura popular” (1694), and indeed Lope’s play follows the action of the romances by Lorenzo de Sepúlveda and Juan de la Cueva rather closely, although it does include Sancho and Mayor’s third son, Gonzalo.

While Sancho is away from Nájera³, don García asks his mother if he may ride the white horse that Sancho has specifically asked that she not permit anyone to ride. She refuses, then backs down and says yes. The master of the stable, Pedro Sesé, is shocked when García asks that the horse be saddled, and comes to the queen to ask if she really gave García permission to ride him. She then withdraws her permission and García, furious, enlists Fernando and Gonzalo’s cooperation in accusing her of adultery with the same Pedro Sesé, to avenge himself on both of them. Don Sancho returns, hears the accusations of his sons, and orders his wife imprisoned for one year, to see if anyone will defend her. At the end of the play, don Ramiro defends Mayor’s honor in single combat with García. The latter is defeated, begs for his life, and confesses to bearing false witness against his mother. The queen disinherits García but sentences him to live with his shame, and announces her symbolic adoption of Ramiro, who becomes heir to the thrones of both Castilla and Aragón.

³ The play does not mention Nájera by name but, as Salvador Lipperheide posits, “La acción se desarrolla en palacio, y, según hay que suponer a partir de todas las fuentes históricas, en Nájera” (1697).

The play characterizes the three brothers, especially García, as feminine, establishing Ramiro as masculine, honorable, and a *cristiano viejo*, and as such the rightful heir to the throne. Lope characterizes the brothers as lascivious and impetuous, much like the elders, though they are young and brash rather than old and foolish. Discussing gender roles in Lope's honor plays in general, Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano notes that "Honor, closely related to sexual predation and the aggressive display of martial ability, is the most essential masculine gender attribute" (28-29). The three sons are not sexual predators on the same level as the elders: they falsely accuse their own mother of adultery, but it is not in retaliation for a failed attempt to coerce her into sex. The play does characterize them as libertines who have been spoiled by their royal upbringing. As Yarbrow-Bejarano observes, "García and his brothers are feminized by their indulgent life at court, their excessive erotic involvement with women, and concomitant rejection of marriage" (234).

This characterization of the brothers begins in the first act. As soon as their father leaves, they celebrate the greater freedom they will now enjoy, and make plans to visit a "brava cortesana" (349) who has recently arrived in Nájera. García encourages his brothers to put on their best clothes (352), and decides he wants to ride his father's white horse for the occasion. When Mayor refuses, then acquiesces, then reasserts her refusal, García begins to cry. Startled, Mayor questions his masculinity: "¿De eso humedeces los ojos? / ¡Vil mujer!... ¿Tú has de llorar?" (641-642). García angrily explains that his tears are the masculine kind:

Las lágrimas de flaqueza
son lágrimas de mujer;
mas las de rabia y tristeza
no es agua: fuego han de ser
lágrimas con fortaleza. (643-647)

He has embarrassed himself with this emotional display, and he acts quickly to reassert his manhood and punish his mother, both for denying him use of the horse and for witnessing this humiliating outburst. Mayor leaves García alone with his rage, and he wonders:

¿Qué me detiene el honor
de Reina, ni el justo amor
de madre, para creer
que es en efecto mujer
y capaz de todo error?
¿Qué haré, que de enojo rabio? (668-673)

In order to assert his manliness, García impulsively decides to lie about his mother in a way that is specific to her gender: that she has been unfaithful to her husband. He is confident that he will be believed because of her gender. In his view, not only are women weak and untrustworthy, and thus likely to commit adultery, but the untrustworthiness of all women means that her denial will be given less weight than his accusation. While the unjust persecution of Mayor resembles that of Susanna, García is motivated by revenge rather than lust, and bears little resemblance to the elders.

As I discussed in the Introduction, and further discuss in Chapter IV, women were generally seen as liars both in ancient times and in early modern Spain. All of this social background is so firmly and immediately clear to García that he takes it all into account and arrives at a decision within the few moments he is alone. When his brothers enter at the end of this speech, he tells them the story he has just fabricated, claiming that he saw everything. They believe him, and disown her at once:

DON GARCÍA	Éste [i.e. Pedro Sesé] afrenta a nuestro padre con la Reina, y yo lo vi.
DON GONZALO	No es mi madre.
DON FERNANDO	Ni mi madre. (684-686)

Just as García predicted, his two brothers find it easy to believe that Mayor is likely to make terrible mistakes, because she is a woman. All three brothers will stand united against their mother, but in this initial accusation García is the only one who claims to have seen anything. García prefaces his false accusation with a claim to his masculine legitimacy, and others at court quickly follow suit when they hear his claims.

In Nájera, truth and reliability are coded as masculine while inconstancy, deceit, and mendacity are seen as feminine. Another scene interrupts García's treachery, as el conde Fortún travels to the nearby village of Miralba. At the king's behest, Fortún has gone to check on Ramiro, the king's illegitimate son, who has been raised there by "un labrador o criado / del alcaide de Miralba" (105-106). Lope takes the opportunity for a bit of *menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea*, as Ramiro's guardian, Belisardo, discusses the virtues of country life. Ramiro himself later takes up the theme, wondering: "¿Adónde está la verdad / sino entre la pobre gente, / que la mentira insolente / siempre reina en la ciudad?" In opposition to García's dichotomy of man as trustworthy and woman as deceitful, Ramiro establishes the contrast between truthful country folk and the dishonest denizens of the city. The play will uphold Ramiro's formulation: it is García who lies while Mayor is honest; and it is Ramiro, raised in the country, who comes to her aid and defends the truth.

At the end of Act I, when she is informed of the accusation against her, the incredulous Queen Mayor exclaims:

El Dios que libró a Susana
declare este testimonio.
Hijos, ¿para esto os parí?
Hijos, ¿para esto os crié?
¿Por qué me dejáis? ¿Por qué?
¿Por qué me tratáis así?
¿Castigo del cielo es,

que mis pecados confirman
y que todos los tres lo afirman? (969-977)

None of the three romances about doña Mayor make direct references to Susanna, although the stories are similar. Lope's inclusion of it makes an intertextual connection that serves to enhance the audience's understanding of Mayor's innocence and righteousness, reminding them of this similar story from the Old Testament and the power of God's justice. Much as she did in the early Christian church, and in *El cantar de mio Cid* and *El libro de buen amor*, Susanna here represents vindication for those who unswervingly believe in God. Perhaps Lope was thinking of similar medieval allusions to Susanna when he decided to have Mayor mention her here, evoking the era of the *Reconquista*. The title of the play has already prepared the audience for a lesson about bearing false witness, and at the end of the first act the reference to Susanna again foreshadows the ultimate redemption of the play's falsely accused heroine.

Unlike references to Susanna that appear in various other plays and poems by Lope, Mayor's evocation of her here is strictly textual, not ekphrastic—that is, it is not an allusion to works of visual art. Because of the enormous quantity of paintings and prints of the imagined bath, any reference to the bath can be seen as an allusive ekphrasis; however, rather than making reference to the bath scene, Mayor remembers Susanna's liberation at the end of the story. She is thinking not of Susanna's beauty, but of her steadfast faith and ultimate salvation. As such, this mention of Susanna is almost counter-ekphrastic, emphasizing the part of the story the paintings eliminate, and eliminating the part of the story that is emphasized in art. Susanna calls out to God in her moment of anguish, and Mayor calls out to the God who freed Susanna, showing her deep understanding of the story and its outcome. Like Susanna, Mayor remains faithful, but passive, waiting for a man to enact God's will and save her.

In the Golden Age *comedia*, Yarbro-Bejarano explains, “A woman is ‘honrada’ if she protects her husband’s honor and rights of private sexual ownership through the practices of enclosure and self-effacement prescribed by the feminine virtues of chastity and silence” (16-17). Queen Mayor and Susanna are both exemplars of these virtues, and both stories reflect the preoccupation with woman as a fragile vessel holding man’s honor. *El testimonio vengado* reflects Susanna’s feminine virtues, but it also echoes early Christian and medieval references to her in which her gender is of secondary importance, as she is one of many persons of both genders who is saved by God. During the Renaissance, these attributes of Susanna would become muddled, as a new tradition emerged in art.

II. Susanna, Venus, and the Renaissance nude

Early Christian images of Susanna focused on Susanna’s faith and her ultimate redemption. In these images, even at the moment that the elders approach her, she is shown as clothed. This interpretation follows the biblical text more closely than the one in which the elders spy on her as she bathes, since the most probable interpretation of the text is that Susanna’s bath never actually happened. However, the story gained enormous popularity in the 1550s and through the next three centuries, as many painters painted Susanna as an erotic nude figure during the bath scene that they imagined, in spite of the text.

The revival of the nude in Renaissance art was initially focused on classical themes. W. R. Rearick suggests that “the mandates of the Council of Trent caused patrons and collectors to regard the majestically sensual *poesie* of Titian and his generation with caution and painters to relocate this hedonistic repertory in the acceptable context of moralistic biblical themes” (341). The mere mention of the bath in Daniel 13:15 presented an irresistible temptation to paint this one moment in the Susanna story as a nude with a plausible religious justification. The

importation of this sensual hedonism into stories like that of Susanna creates a juxtaposition, in many Renaissance versions, in which any moral meaning the story might contain becomes secondary, and Susanna's nudity becomes the true theme of the painting.

A. Venetian Susannas

Laura Mulvey's 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" launched the use of the term "the male gaze," and continues to exert a strong influence in feminist theory and studies of visual arts, as well as cinema. Many critics of Susanna paintings from the Renaissance have situated the tradition within the objectifying and scopophilic male gaze. Michael Gill, for instance, writes:

The story is a clear-cut account of innocence steadfast against evil intentions. Yet the majority of painters chose to portray it much more equivocally. Tintoretto makes the Elders comical voyeurs, groveling in the shrubbery for a squint up Susanna's legs... The picture is not about virtue and vice, but the sweaty frustrations of voyeurism. Titillation is a male motive for enjoying paintings of naked women, and by recognizing this, the painting laughs at the viewer as well as nudging him in the ribs. (262-263)

The painting Gill is describing, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Figure 1), is one of several paintings of Susanna that Tintoretto executed. At least four survive, and more are documented (Falomir 298). But the one in Vienna is by far the most famous of those painted by Tintoretto, and perhaps the most widely known and frequently written about of all Susanna canvases. It depicts a luminous blonde Susanna, fully naked, smiling enigmatically as she gazes into a mirror that does not reflect her image. She is wearing expensive jewelry, and has removed more, which lays in the grass next to her, along with a jar of ointment or perfume, a comb, a hairpin, and other articles of grooming. She has propped her mirror up against a hedge of roses,⁴

⁴ The rose has an array of symbolic meanings pointing in different directions, making it polyvalent in Tintoretto's complicated painting. The flower was associated with Aphrodite/ Venus, the Three Graces, and Flora in pagan antiquity, "for all of whom it symbolized love and beauty" (Hall 157). As Christianity spread, "the rose would come to honor the Virgin Mary and her role in the life of Christ, thereby veiling its pagan roots" (Cucciniello 65). The

and in the foreground we see one of the elders creeping around the hedge to get a peek, while the other stands at the farther end. Both elders are bald, and resemble older saints and apostles that appear in other Tintoretto paintings, such as *Il lavatorio* in the Prado.

Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto's fellow Venetian, painted at least seven versions of the Susanna story. His most erotic Susanna is the one now in the Prado: this one is standing rather than sitting, with a gorgeous piece of gold brocade draped across her front, leaving much of her chest, side and legs exposed. Her face is turned toward the elders, showing no signs of distress.



Figure 4: Paolo Veronese. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1580. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Rather, she appears to be listening, as though considering an offer they were making. While Tintoretto's Vienna Susanna shows a seductive receptivity on her face, this one shows a blank

Virgin "was sometimes designated 'rose without thorns,' that is, without sin" (Hall 157). But the thorns, too, had another meaning: "In chivalrous imagery, rose gardens may surround a maiden, its thorns protecting her chastity" (Carr-Gomm 190). Pope Pius XII addressed a group of rose growers in Rome in 1955, saying "When the memories of paganism were erased, the charm of the rose reverted to the true God" (quoted in Cucciniello, 65). Thus the roses in Tintoretto's painting are symbols that can be interpreted in different ways: the elders see Venus, while the beholder is free to choose between Venus, Flora, the Virgin Mary, and the thorns that protect Susanna's chastity.

lack of opposition. Like all of Veronese's Susannas, this one crosses her chest with one arm, like Praxiteles' *Venus pudica*. Unlike Praxiteles' Venus, Veronese's Madrid Susanna completes the gesture, grasping her breast in a gesture that could be read as autoerotic, or modest, or defensive, depending on how the viewer is inclined to see it.⁵

All of Veronese's Susannas wear pearls around their neck and in their ears, and cover themselves with rich fabrics. These visual clues link Susanna to Venus, who was associated with adornment. The lack of resistance on her face is another point of resemblance between her and the typically calm Venus, and serves to further change the character of the story. In the Bible, Susanna shouted for help and is prepared to die, signs of her strong resistance; these painters erase this resistance with calm, receptive facial expressions.

Jacopo Bassano painted at least three Susannas during his career. A version now in Ottawa, from 1555 or 1556, shows a nude Susanna reclining toward the elders, listening to them



with a facial expression that conveys no embarrassment, fear, or even surprise. She appears to be comfortable and interested in what they are saying. The Susanna figure was

Figure 5: Jacopo Bassano. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1556-1566. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

⁵ This gesture is echoed in various ways in *Psycho* (see Chapter V).

modeled on an Eve figure Bassano had painted about ten years previously, now in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence (Brown and Marini 326), while the elder in the foreground is a variant on one of the three kings in his Vienna *Adoration* (Brown and Marini 326). Not only do the elders look respectable, as they do in Tintoretto's and Veronese's versions, but Bassano actually links them to the Wise Men, while Susanna is modeled on the person responsible for the Fall of Man. If the beholder is puzzled about whom to identify with here, one can hardly blame him.

Rearick finds this Susanna to be "coyly decorous" (340), while the elders have "rodential" (340) features, and concludes that the group "is evidently meant to convey more than hedonistic pleasure" (340). He notes that the apple tree on the right extends the connection to Eve, but reads Susanna's gesture toward the tree as a rejection of temptation. He adds that the white lily at the bottom center is a symbol of purity and the goldfinch at left symbolizes the immortal soul, while the entire garden represents a *hortus conclusus*, a symbol of virginity (340).⁶ Rearick concludes that the "symbolism of original sin, virginity, and virtue justified pervades the picture to such a degree that Susanna not only retains its moralizing character but assumes an almost Northern puritanism in its insistent allusions" (340). He prefaces this reading with the observation that the scene conveys *more* than hedonistic pleasure (340), however, allowing that hedonistic pleasure is not only conveyed, but should be assumed to be the painting's primary aim. Indeed, the hedonism is apprehensible to the viewer at first glance, while a reading of the religious imagery requires a detailed examination and advanced knowledge of religious symbolism.

⁶ Attributing this symbolism to Bassano is dubious, as the *hortus conclusus* occurs in Daniel 13.

Many scholars have commented on the discrepancy between the erotic nature of these and other Renaissance paintings of Susanna and the chaste heroine of the biblical story. Mary D. Garrard offers a particularly scathing summary of the tradition in general:

Few artistic themes have offered so satisfying an opportunity for legitimized voyeurism as Susanna and the Elders. The subject was taken up with relish by artists from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries as an opportunity to display the female nude... with the added advantage that the nude's erotic appeal could be heightened by the presence of two lecherous old men, whose inclusion was both iconographically justified and pornographically effective. It is a remarkable testament to the indomitable male ego that a biblical theme holding forth an exemplum of female chastity should have become in painting a celebration of sexual opportunity, or, as Max Rooses enthusiastically described Rubens's version, a "gallant enterprise mounted by two bold adventurers." ("Artemisia and Susanna" 149-150)

Rooses' misreading of the story, cited here by Garrard, is an important example of the voyeuristic fantasy. Identifying with the elders to the point of seeing them as either merely mischievous or legitimately enamored are two problematic interpretations of the story that emerged in the Spanish theater. While I believe that such readings were largely influenced by the pictorial tradition, traces of such readings already appeared in the works of Diego Sánchez de Badajoz and Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza, as I discussed in Chapter I.

Objecting to the "standard" depiction of Susanna in paintings, Dan Clanton observes that the "customary artistic interpretation of Susanna during the Renaissance was a sexual, eroticizing one. This trend resulted from patrons and artists focusing on the mimetic level of the narrative, which contains the sexual, voyeuristic aspects of the plot" (121). Throughout his book, Clanton argues that a mimetic interpretation of the Susanna story leads to a misinterpretation of it, while a thematic reading clearly shows that the story is about Susanna's virtue and eventual vindication. He argues that paintings such as this one represent a complete disregard for the message of the original story: "Tintoretto's depictions of Susanna have no religious significance

or theological message. Rather, the theme is simply a vehicle for the pornographic display of the female nude, and an increased opportunity for biblically sanctioned voyeurism” (129).

Ellen Spolsky agrees with Clanton, arguing that “whatever gain the paintings of Susanna and the Elders represent for art history is offset by a loss for truth, for law, and for the image of women as independent human beings whose virtue is not *prima facie* in doubt” (101). Paintings such as Tintoretto’s, she writes, objectify the woman and make her available to the viewer’s gaze: “His stare might be illicit, but the painter helps him over his guilt, as it were, by picturing her nudity as vanity; her preening legitimates his gaze, and she is thus made accessible to the viewer. The genre of the paintings further enfranchises the viewer: he is forgiven, as it were, by the pastoral” (103). By casting Susanna as a vain, pampered woman with expensive jewels and rich fabrics in a lush landscape, Spolsky argues, the painting seeks to justify the viewer’s voyeurism.

These images play into the rape myths that women provoke rape, that they “entice their assailants by their looks or sexuality” (Benedict 15), and that they somehow “deserve” to be raped because they were not cautious enough (Benedict 16).⁷ Presenting Susanna as beautiful is in keeping with the story, but these rape myths work in combination with the iconographical clues in these images to suggest that Susanna is really to blame for the elders’ crime. These painters’ use of these symbols brings a wide range of assumptions about gender and consent belonging to rape culture, making it likely that viewers will read the paintings in the ways I have discussed: identifying with the elders and blaming Susanna.⁸

⁷ See my discussion of rape culture in the Introduction.

⁸ Giving Susanna attributes of Venus and symbols of vanity activates these cultural assumptions, and this is what many recent critics object to. This is not to say that showing Susanna as vain or flirtatious actually justifies the elders’ behavior. She refused their advances and they tried to force her by means of extortion. This is an attempted rape. The sort of person Susanna is does not change this definition. In observing Susanna’s hair color, jewelry, or facial expression, I am not implying that any of these adornments might in some way mitigate the evil of the elders’

B. Venus, Eve, and Susanna

As I discussed above, Veronese's different Susannas all share certain attributes of Venus. Tintoretto's Vienna canvas makes an even stronger connection between Susanna and the goddess of love. Of this image, Margaret R. Miles writes:

These paintings attempt to reproduce, in the eyes of an assumed male viewer, the Elders' intense erotic attraction, projected and displayed on Susanna's flesh. The Elders, placed in crepuscular shadows, do not bear the weight of communicating the urgency of their active desire; rather, her body represents that desire. Viewers are directed—trained—by the management of light and shadow and by the central position of Susanna's body to see Susanna as object, even as cause, of male desire. In the paintings Susanna's innocence becomes guilt as her body communicates and explains the Elders' lust. (123)

In order to see the elders' lust for Susanna, we must see Susanna as provoking that lust. Thus, it is her beauty that becomes the problem, not the inability of the elders to react to it appropriately. The Bible tells us that they turned their eyes away from God, while the paintings ask us if we can really blame them. All of this further contributes to the rape myth that women's beauty causes sexual assault (Benedict 15).

Ellen Spolsky, too, notes Tintoretto's references to Venus: "the presence of conventional references to Venus (mirrors, jewels, peacocks, cupids), suggests that the beauty of the woman be read as mitigation of the Elders' crime" (102). Tintoretto and Veronese both painted Susannas who resemble Venus both in pose and ornamentation, though neither Guercino nor Veronese include mirrors. Garrard finds Rembrandt's Berlin *Susanna* (Figure 24) to be "one of the most sympathetic treatments of the biblical heroine" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 153),⁹ but objects to the evocation of Venus inherent in her posture: "Yet even Rembrandt implants in the pose of Susanna, whose arms reach to cover her breasts and genitals, the memory of the Medici Venus, a

actions. My aim here is to critique how the Susanna story has been manipulated to play into cultural assumptions about ways in which women "deserve" or "invite" rape, without validating these assumptions myself.

⁹ I discuss Rembrandt's *Susannas* more in the Chapters IV and V.

classical model that was virtually synonymous with female sexuality” (“Artemisia and Susanna” 153).

The Medici Venus and the Capitoline Venus are both copies of the *Venus pudica* by Praxiteles. Geoffrey Grigson notes that Praxiteles “carved Aphrodite ready for the bath, an Aphrodite whose form we know at least approximately from the various ancient copies” (162). Book VIII of *The Odyssey* describes how, after being netted in bed with Ares, Aphrodite went to Paphos, where the Graces bathed her in her temple (paraphrased in Grigson, 163-164). In the Capitoline Venus, Aphrodite’s bath accoutrements are next to her, Grigson explains: “When a Greek woman went to the bath, water was poured over her from a pitcher or ewer. Praxiteles included the pitcher; and Aphrodite’s towel, on top of it” (164). The nudity and the bathing motif are attributes of Venus in themselves; furthermore, the towel draped over the ewer in the Capitoline Venus, with its fringed edges, bears a strong resemblance to the towel Susanna uses to dry her leg in Tintoretto’s *Vienna Susanna* (Figure 1).

The quality of goldenness, as Monica S. Cyrino explains, was a “crucial feature of Aphrodite’s luminous beauty... [and] her intrinsic and eternal characteristic” (67). The goldenness is associated with the gold jewelry she always wears, but “Aphrodite’s association with gold also suggests the visual properties of light. Descriptions of Aphrodite’s beauty and adornment... typically include the phenomenon of luminosity [in Greek poetry]: the poets describe her bright eyes, shimmering clothes and glittering jewels” (70). Thus, we can add goldenness to the list of attributes of Venus we see in Tintoretto’s *Vienna Susanna*, which is suffused with a golden light that appears to displace the action of the story, specified as midday in the Bible, to the glow of early evening. The jewelry and toiletry items are also references to Venus, as Cyrino reminds us, noting that the goddess “can be said to symbolize the notion of

‘beauty enhanced for a purpose’” (56-57).¹⁰ Susanna’s nudity in itself can even be read as an attribute of Venus, as the “nudity of Aphrodite, as portrayed in Greek art, literature, and cult, is an expression of her eternal power, autonomy and meaning” (73).

Since images of Venus bathing, peering into a mirror, or otherwise beautifying herself were common, depicting Susanna doing the same suggests an openness to a sexual encounter that obscures the emphasis the Bible places on her God-fearing chastity. That many painters showed Susanna trying to cover herself seems natural; if surprised by male intruders while bathing, most women probably would reflexively try to hide their nakedness with their arms. The transposition of this gesture from Venus to Susanna is not in itself misleading, but combined with the pearls, the goldenness, and these other attributes of Venus, and especially with the passive, welcoming, or coy facial expressions that Susanna often wears in these images, the combined effect is to erase Susanna’s resistance to the elders’ attack.

Venus is not the only nude whose visual associations tarnish Susanna’s reputation. Miles makes a powerful argument that nudity is associated with Eve in Christian art, and a result, any female nudity calls the woman’s honesty and decency into question. She ties this argument explicitly to Susanna:

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings of Susanna and the Elders illustrate more than a perennial fascination with female nakedness. They also reveal the existence of a visual culture in which it was impossible to paint a naked female body in such a way that it symbolized innocence. Since the act of vision itself is informed and directed by culturally trained visual associations and by an interpretive lexicon, the possibility of seeing Susanna’s nakedness as innocence was blocked by repeatedly reiterated and reinforced associations of female nakedness with Eve and original sin. (124)

Thus, Miles continues, in “the visual mode, Susanna’s nakedness inevitably contradicted her virtue” (124).¹¹ In Miles’ reading, the manner of portraying her does not matter so much as her

¹⁰ I extend this to include the rich fabrics that Veronese and other painters like to drape across their Susannas.

¹¹ Like many scholars, Miles assumes that the bath actually took place in the original story.

nudity itself, which reminds us of the fall of Man in a way that leads us to automatically blame the woman. The lush garden setting can now be seen as evoking not only the pastoral tradition, but also *the Garden*. Thus, Susanna's nudity, aside from being unlikely according to a careful reading of the Vulgate text, is also an attribute of both Venus and Eve. As a result, the viewer reads these Venetian Susannas as both seductive and treacherous.

Tintoretto includes a mirror in the Vienna (Figure 1) and Louvre (Figure 17) canvases, though it is far larger and more prominent in the former. The mirror, too, was an important attribute of Venus/Aphrodite, as Cyrino explains: "As a symbol of the goddess, the mirror encapsulates the powerful moment of epiphany and recognition when the beautiful appearance of Aphrodite is perceived by someone else" (65). Not only does the mirror signify Venus, it also refers to vanity and the danger of women's vision.

C. Mirrors

Mirrors had been associated with Venus and *vanitas* since antiquity. As Benjamin Goldberg observes, "the moral implications of self-admiration... clung to the mirror throughout the [Renaissance]" (135). People of both sexes were concerned with their complexions and used cosmetics, he continues, which "inflamed the moralists of that time, who considered acts of self-admiration or self-beautification in a mirror, whether by a man or a woman, as vulgar acts befitting the likes of the devil" (143). The French moralist Jean des Caurres, Goldberg explains, "was appalled by the moral decay of the day. He observed that ladies carrying mirrors fixed to their waists kept their eyes in perpetual activity. This, he felt, would result in their eternal damnation" (143). While the preoccupation with beauty was to be condemned in women, this was not the only dimension of the moral problem of mirrors. The idea of women lifting their eyes and looking at anything was disturbing in itself.

In her study of Renaissance profile portraits of women, Patricia Simons observes that, in the early Renaissance, “lowered or averted eyes were the sign of a woman’s modesty, chastity and obeisance. A loose woman, on the other hand, looked at men in the street. Temptation or a lover were avoided or discouraged if a virtuous woman did not return the gaze” (20). Given the importance assigned to vision in the period, and the power of sight to inflame the appetites, it was especially important for women to limit what they looked at. Simons notes that San Bernardino exhorted women to “bury their eyes,” which “was only a particularly concrete version of a commonplace concerning the decorum of the viewed eye” (21).

A woman looking into a mirror is never simply looking at her own reflection, however. Trained to look at themselves as they will be seen by men, women learn to look at themselves in the mirror and scrutinize how they will appear to male observers. As John Berger sums it up, “[A woman] comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman... Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another” (46). In art, Berger continues, a female nude “is not naked as she is. She is naked as the spectator sees her” (50). He comments on the importance of this in the tradition of Susanna paintings, citing Tintoretto’s canvas in the Louvre (Figure 17) in which Susanna confronts the gaze of the viewer, while in the Vienna *Susanna* (Figure 1), looking at herself in the mirror, “she joins the spectators of herself” (50). Berger analyzes the complexity of the mirror as a symbol here:

The mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of woman. The moralizing, however, was mostly hypocritical. You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure. The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight. (51)

Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* (Figure 18) takes up the ancient trope of the toilet of Venus, in which the goddess bathes and adorns herself, often before or after a sexual encounter. Looking at herself in the mirror, Venus knows that her role as the embodiment of love and carnal desire is most clearly and emphatically expressed in her image, through the faculty of sight of those who behold her. By generalizing this image to include any woman and making it an allegory of vanity, as Berger rightly observes, painters highlight the unfairness of the position this puts the woman in: not only is she objectified, but she is objectified in such a way that it is made to seem like her own responsibility.

Berger's analyses of art highlight the fundamental problem that women face in attempting to become *surveyor* instead of *surveyed*. Women were and are in a no-win situation in society, both then and now: expected to live up to an ideal of beauty and at the same time criticized for it. These tensions are present in the original Susanna story, which places the blame on the elders but contains the possibility of blaming, at least in part, Susanna's beauty or her behavior for what happened. These possibilities of blame are moved into the foreground in early modern adaptations of the story in art and literature. In Tintoretto's Vienna painting, Susanna seems to be intent on her own reflection, even enchanted by it, but her reflection is not there. Susanna's reflection is completely absent from the painting.

This mirror is placed for Susanna's viewing pleasure, set such an angle that the spectator of the painting might expect to see a foreshortened reflection of her, like the reflection of Venus we see in Titian's *Venus with a Mirror*, in which the mirror is similarly angled away from the viewer. In the Titian, Rona Goffen writes, Venus is aware of the putti and of the viewer, but is indifferent to all of them. "Yet our gaze is authorized by the goddess whose own action invites emulation: we, too, are encouraged to contemplate her beauty. The *Venus with a Mirror* is

(partly) about vision, about seeing and being seen, about reality and its reflection, and about the exaltation of beauty that is embodied in the goddess and knowable through sight” (136). The painting, Goffen continues, is “a vibrant seduction of the viewer; not a tease but a transcendence, achieved through vision. Titian’s *Venus* is not the *passive* object of contemplation: she also looks, and she contemplates—herself” (137). Titian painted *Venus with a Mirror* in the mid-1550s (Goffen 133), around the same time as Tintoretto’s *Vienna Susanna*. Given their similar chronology, it is impossible to say if this painting existed yet, or if Tintoretto was aware of it, when he was painting his *Susanna with her mirror*. Goffen’s observations about *Venus*’s active contemplation of herself could similarly be applied to *Susanna*, but they are complicated by the blank darkness in *Susanna*’s mirror.

Tintoretto’s *Susanna* is farther away from her mirror, but its positioning leads us to expect to see some part of a reflection of her there. Instead, *Susanna* is erased entirely from her



own mirror. At the bottom of its surface, the mirror inaccurately reflects some of the items immediately in front of it: it captures the straight white line of the long hairpin that *Susanna* has set in the grass, though the knobs at the top are missing and the angle is

Figure 6: Tintoretto’s *Susanna and the Elders*, Vienna (detail)

not quite right; next to this, we see just the vaguest suggestion of the teeth of the white comb that lays in the grass next to the pin; some gold rings that Susanna has removed are on the other side of the pin, closer to the surface of the mirror, but these are not reflected in it. The white garment or towel with which Susanna is rubbing her leg, fringed to resemble the fringe on the towel of the Capitoline Venus, tumbles into very close proximity to the surface of the mirror, but its reflection there is not quite right: the fringe has vanished, and the contours of the white folds we see in the mirror do not match what we see in the real version. Apart from these few disingenuous splotches of white, the mirror reflects nothing. Susanna is not there.

This Susanna is decorated like Venus in Titian's *Venus with a Mirror*, but Susanna does not see her reflection, while Venus does. The mirror cannot reflect the image of the biblical Susanna, nor can it reflect the golden, voluptuous Venus peering into it. Muddied by the contamination between the imagery in the painting and the story it purports to represent, the mirror reflects nothing back to us. A purportedly religious image that is not really trying to create a visual model of virtuous conduct, Tintoretto's Vienna *Susanna* emanates a worldly light that the mirror within it cannot reflect. Trapped between Susanna's virtue, Eve's deceit, and Venus's allure, the mirror holds the image of nothing.

D. Trent and obscenity

The erotic, Venus-like nude Susannas that began to emerge from various Italian cities formed part of a larger trend of "lascivious" versions of religious nudes that included Eve, Bathsheba, the penitent Magdalene, and various other saints, which gained widespread popularity and garnered widespread condemnation during the Renaissance. The Council of Trent, in response to the Reformation's disapproval of all religious images, emphasized the importance of art in religious education. By means of "paintings and other representations"

(*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* 219), according to the decrees of Trent, people could learn to understand the articles of faith and reflect on them. Furthermore, the decree states that “great profit is derived from all holy images... through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety” (219). In affirming the crucial role that art plays in reminding the faithful of the Church’s teachings and giving them examples of good behavior, the council made it necessary to set firm restrictions against art that might give bad examples. Trent takes a tough stance against such art, but completely fails to define it:

[In] the sacred use of images, all superstition shall be removed, all filthy quest for gain eliminated, and all lasciviousness avoided, so that images shall not be painted and adorned with a seductive charm... Finally, such zeal and care should be exhibited by the bishops with regard to these things that nothing may appear that is disorderly or unbecoming and confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing disrespectful, since holiness becometh the house of God. (220)

The decrees list a number of adjectives that artists must make sure cannot be used to describe their works: “lascivious,” “seductive,” “unbecoming,” “profane,” and “disrespectful” works may not appear, and the bishops are the ones charged with patrolling images for appropriateness. This decree, from December 1563, continues that “no one is permitted to erect or cause to be erected in any place or church, howsoever exempt, any unusual image unless it has been approved by the bishop” (220). Here, too, the definition of “unusual” remains tacit.

Four hundred years later, in 1964, United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart would decline to define “hard-core pornography,” writing: “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it” (United States Supreme Court n.p.). The Council of Trent seems to assume a similarly unspoken-but-obvious

definition of the type of art it describes with its various disapproving and imprecise descriptions. The bishops will know lasciviousness and seductive charm when they see it, and they must take measures to assure that the more impressionable general public will not see it as well.

After Trent, artists worked to integrate its decrees into their practices. In his 1649 *Arte de la pintura*, Francisco Pacheco offers to “enseñar la manera que ha de tener el pintor cristiano en la imitacion del natural, si se le ofrece alguna figura de mujer desnuda” (354), which, he asserts, is sometimes essential: “Y supondremos lo cierto que no puede tener el pintor valiente (sea en buenhora modesto) excusarse de la noticia, y perfeccion del desnudo de una figura de mujer, *por ser parte tan principal de la pintura* [my emphasis]... muchas veces se ha de ofrecer hacer demostración en una Eva, en una Susana, en martirios ó historias sagradas” (354). Rather than recommending that the painter avoid nudes altogether—the only sure way not to paint anything lascivious, seductive, or unbecoming—Pacheco contends that the skilled painter cannot avoid it. This genre is central to the art of painting, according to Pacheco, and so the accomplished artist must demonstrate his proficiency by painting female nudes. Nevertheless, he specifies that these must be painted chastely. Discussing this passage, Javier Portús Pérez observes that Pacheco “admite la posibilidad del desnudo en algunas representaciones sagradas, lo que implica la creencia en la necesidad de un ‘desnudo decente’” (*Sala Reservada* 1998 33). While Margaret Miles argues that all female nudes seem dishonest because they remind us of Eve, Pacheco suggests that even Eve could be painted as a decorous nude. His inclusion of Susanna as an example of a possible subject for a modest nude shows that the doxic version of the story of Susanna in which she removes her clothing and gets into the bath had already taken hold by Pacheco’s time. His suggestions might seem to indicate the possibility of a painting in which she

is portrayed sympathetically, although this hope is undermined by his defense of the female nude as an essential element of art.

Painters in many regions of Italy and the Low Countries continued to produce female nudes, including nude Susannas, after Trent. In Spain, however, after the council, very few artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries painted female nudes (Giménez and Calvo Serraller 287-288).¹² In the atmosphere of this general prohibition, the popularity of female nudes in the art collections of the Spanish kings and nobility generated some tension. Pacheco comments, in partially camouflaged language, on the Venetian nudes in the Spanish royal collections: “dejo aparte los famosos pintores, que se han extremado en licencia, expresion de tanta diversidad de fábulas; y hecho estudio particular de ellas, con tanta viveza ó lascivia, en dibujo y colorido. Cuyos cuadros (como vemos) ocupan los salones y camarines de los grandes señores y príncipes del mundo” (354). He specifies *fábulas* or mythological paintings as particularly problematic, while his suggestions of subjects that the “Christian painter” might employ for his nudes includes only biblical themes. But he leaves these images to one side, neither justifying nor entirely denouncing them.

Commenting on the problem of how bishops were to know lascivious art when they saw it, Portús Pérez discusses the question of interpretation, and the possibility that a painting could be decorous in one person’s eyes, but indecorous in the eyes of another: “Aborda el tema, por ejemplo, fray Benito de la Serna, quien lo resuelve afirmando ‘que por figura lasciva se entiende la que de suyo lo es, y de alguna manera representa algo deshonesto, no la que sólo es lasciva por la mala intención de quien la mira’” (*Sala Reservada* 1998 41-42). Fray Benito’s definition

¹² José de Ribera and Claudio Coello each painted one nude *Susanna*. I discuss Ribera’s *Susanna* Chapter IV.

supports Pacheco's idea that a nude could be painted in a decent way, though both writers allow for the possibility that artworks could be indecent in themselves.

Although Pacheco and Benito de la Serna both denounce some paintings as irredeemably lewd, de la Serna insists that interpretation may determine whether certain works might be lewd or edifying, depending on who looks and under what circumstances. This notion opens the possibility that some paintings which might seem hopelessly lewd to the average person might still be appreciated safely by persons of surpassing discretion. The nudes in the royal collection were hidden away in the *Sala Reservada*, where they could not do harm to the impressionable general public. Trent dictates that the bishops must assure that "nothing may appear that is disorderly or unbecoming and confusedly arranged" (220); it does not specify that such works may not *exist*, only that they may not *appear*. Since they were secured where the ignorant masses would not see them, the sexy Venetian paintings belonging to the Spanish court were only seen by educated men who knew how to enjoy them safely.

The question of whether or not a work of art is obscene, Lynda Nead observes, often revolves around the question of "where and how the image is seen, who has access to it and how they behave or respond in its presence. All these factors mark the differentiation between legitimate and illicit cultural consumption" (86). The notion that the appreciation of the finest and most cultured people determines the difference between high artistic nudity and lowbrow obscene material carries over into our time.¹³ In introducing his definition of "nude," Kenneth Clark points out that "the word was forced into our vocabulary by critics of the early eighteenth century to persuade the artless islanders that... the naked human body was the central subject of art" (3). Nead sums up the situation as presented by Clark and others: "At either end of the

¹³ This was also true in the early twentieth century, as I show in Chapter V in my discussion of the Motion Picture Production Code that went into effect in 1934.

cultural register we have the images of high art and pornography. On the one hand, there is the fine-art female nude as a symbol of the pure, disinterested, functionless gaze and of the female body transubstantiated; and, on the other hand, we have the images of pornography, the realm of the profane and mass culture where sensual desires are stimulated and gratified.” (85). The question of *stimulation* is another important distinction.

Speaking before Lord Longford’s panel on the effects of pornography in 1972, Clark stated: “To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation, and is bound by some sort of imaginative transposition. The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character” (quoted in Nead, 27). In this speech, Clark puts pornography on the same level as political propaganda. He cites Correggio’s *Danaë* as a work in which “the sexual feelings have been transformed, and although we undoubtedly enjoy it all the more because of its sensuality, we are still in the realm of contemplation” (quoted in Nead, 27). As Nead comments: “Here the term ‘sensuality’ plays a critical role as a form of sexual content that is permissible and can be accommodated within the category of art, since sexual desire is present but transformed or momentarily arrested” (27). For Longford and Clark, the quality of motivating a man to action determines whether a work is pornographic or artistic. The distinction that they draw between acceptable objectification of women and the unacceptable kind is a very useful elucidation of attitudes that have prevailed for centuries.

Robert Hahn’s analysis of Tintoretto’s Vienna *Susanna* maintains the art vs. obscenity distinction, though using different terms: “In our most idealizing view, she is an image of the consummation sensual love always seeks, of flesh dissolving into spirit... Whether an erotic image inspires, ascending toward spirit, or simply arouses, sinking toward pornography, is not only in the eye of the beholder (or theorist), but also in the hands of the artist” (645). In Hahn’s

view, an idealized, Venus-like Susanna is what the viewer ought to see, and is the highest and best possible reading of the image. Thus, the artist can influence the way the beholder will understand the painting, but the beholder's reaction is still his own responsibility. According to Hahn's framework, one person may experience the refined, abstract arousal appropriate to a cultured heterosexual male upon viewing a nude by Titian or Tintoretto, while comprehending that this is high art; another, coarser fellow may cross the line into actual arousal, which is inappropriate. When this happens, according to this cultural formulation, the beholder is to blame for failing to interpret the art correctly. Justice Stewart said he knew pornography when he saw it, but another beholder might see the same thing and know something else.

III. *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*

The question of different beholders arriving at different interpretations of an image is raised early in Lope de Vega's *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, and the first act demonstrates a tension between Lope's admiration for Titian and other Venetian painters and a clearly Tridentine message about the power of religious images. The male protagonist, Carlos, is a sinner bent on committing further sins, and throughout the first act he furiously resists the encouragement to mend his ways that he receives from the woman he pursues, from the devotional art in her home, and from his own servant. Art is seen to be capable of exerting some influence toward good or evil, but the individual's inclination in one direction or the other triumphs over this influence, at least in the short term.

As Frederick de Armas observes, Lope's work makes frequent references to art: "Italian Renaissance art is exhibited throughout Lope de Vega's plays, creating a museum of words where Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Federico Zuccaro, Jacopo Bassano and many others enhance the works with their designs, and design new meanings with their art" ("Lope de Vega's

Speaking Pictures” 171). Although Lope mentions the Susanna story many times in non-ekphrastic passages, in *El testimonio vengado* and elsewhere,¹⁴ he makes less frequent mention of the story in connection with its appearance in the Venetian art he so admired.

De Armas outlines different types of ekphrasis and its uses:

[E]kphrasis can be notional (based on an imagined work of art), or actual or true (based on a real work of art). It can also be combinatory (combining two or more works of art), transformative (changing some elements in the art work into others that can be connected to the original ones), metadescriptive (based on a textual description of a work of art which may or may not exist), or fragmented (using parts of a work). Ekphrasis can conform to the traditional pause in a narrative to describe an object (descriptive ekphrasis), or it can tell the story depicted in the art work (narrative ekphrasis). (*Ekphrasis* 22)

Virtud, pobreza y mujer refers to an imaginary tapestry of the Susanna story, creating a notional ekphrasis, but giving contextual clues about the art in the woman’s home that allow the spectator to imagine what the tapestry might look like. However, it does this in connection with the names of Venetian painters whose works are *not* present in the room where the tapestry is seen:

La alcoba una antepuerta defendía
de un tapiz de la historia de Susana,
en cuyo espejo yo miré que había
disculpa de mi error en la edad cana. (453-456)

Here, Lope sets up a kind of transformative ekphrasis of an imaginary work, leaving doubts in the viewer’s mind as to what was seen and what they should imagine. *La moza de cántaro*, on the other hand, refers to a whole tradition of images of Susanna without specifying any, in a combinatory ekphrasis:

¿Qué es ver a Susana estar
entre dos viejos desnuda,
y que ninguno se muda
a defender ni a forzar? (529-532)

¹⁴ Antonio Sánchez Jiménez gives helpful lists in “Casta Susana,” p. 71 and *El pincel y el Fénix*, pp. 298-306. *Los pastores de Belén* also tells the story in narrative fashion, without referring to works of art.

In both these passages, Lope describes a work of art in order to object to the way in which it is painted, drawn, or engraved.

Although paintings of Susanna and the elders by Tintoretto, Veronese and Rubens are all in the Museo del Prado's collection now, none of these were in the Spanish Royal Collection in Lope de Vega's time. I do not propose that any of the Venetian canvases I discussed above exerted a specific influence on Lope, but rather that they exemplify the tradition of Susanna images that became prevalent in Italy in the mid- to late-sixteenth century, and that this iconographic tradition would have been known to Lope, if not through direct contact with any of these paintings or copies of them, then via prints inspired by these or similar images.

In *La viuda valenciana*, Lope depicts the circulation in Spain of prints reproducing works by famous Italian painters. In this play, one of Leonarda's suitors gains entry to her home by disguising himself as an "estampero" (873), or a merchant selling prints. He offers various prints to Leonarda, including "El *Adonis* del Tiziano, / que tuvo divina mano / y peregrino pincel" (890-892). He continues to show her more of his wares:

Ésta, por vida de Aurelio,
que es de las ricas y finas,
que es de Rafael de Urbinas
y cortado de Cornelio.
Ésta es de Martín de Vos,
y aquésta de Federico. (897-902)

In order to understand this scene, Teresa Ferrer Vals notes that one must keep in mind "la importancia del grabado en la época para la difusión y conocimiento de la pintura... En una época en que los viajes eran no sólo costosos sino muchas veces peligrosos, el grabado contribuía de manera decisiva a la divulgación de la pintura" (168). In lines 899-900, the false *mercader* (really Valerio in disguise) offers Leonarda a work that was drawn by Raphael de Urbino but "cut by Cornelio" (900). Ferrer Vals identifies this "Cornelio" as Cornelis Cort, who

“[e]jecutó grabados sacados de los cuadros de los más importantes pintores italianos, entre ellos de Rafael” (168). Among these other painters were Titian and Tintoretto. Cort lived in Italy for many years and had a close working relationship with Titian (Bury 11). Michael Bury explains that Titian “made special drawings for [Cort], even when there were existing compositions of the subjects he wanted engraved” (11), and argues that “those drawings were created with a view to their success as prints” (11), going on to note that Cort had a similar relationship with Federico Zuccaro (11), another artist mentioned in this scene: Ferrer Vals notes that Zuccaro is probably the “Federico” of line 902 (169).

As Bury observes, artists and engravers often worked together to make original images, or images inspired by compositions in paintings, or even duplicates or other prints (68-78). Sometimes painters would work with engravers to design prints, as Titian and Zuccaro did with Cort. As this scene in *La viuda valenciana* reveals, prints executed in Italy were commonly circulated in Spain. Prints of the *Susanna* story formed part of an iconographic tradition that included the Renaissance paintings I discussed above. Which specific images influenced Lope’s ekphrases is unknown, but in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer* and *La moza de cántaro*, he refers to and criticizes this iconographic tradition, or “pictorial model,” in general. I will discuss this in more detail in the following chapter.

In the first scene of *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, don Carlos expresses his astonishment when his servant, Julio, informs him that the beautiful, chaste, and impoverished Isabel has refused the money he sent her. Julio tells him that Isabel will only let a man possess her sexually once she is married, so Carlos vows to promise marriage in order to have his way with her. Julio points out that this is evil, but Carlos is determined. Thomas Case reads the play as a criticism of the selfishness of the nobility: “The whole period is known for the decline of values and the lack of

self-sacrifice. Don Carlos, the noble in *Virtud*, typifies his social class: he is a cheat, a liar, a womanizer, a murderer, a gambler; in short, he is deceitful, despicable and undeserving” (323). Carlos quickly establishes himself as a scoundrel, announcing his intention to deceive and dishonor Isabel within the first few minutes. He proposes to Isabel and she accepts him, for she is in love with him herself. In the next scene, Carlos and Julio return, and we understand that it is the following morning. Carlos describes Isabel’s home to Julio:

Julio, yo entré en su casa de Isabela
tan pobre, aunque tan limpia y aseada,
que unos paños de red juzgaba a tela,
y a escarcha de oro su labor pintada.
Animábame todo a la cautela,
que la pobreza siempre fue burlada,
y así mirando en todo tan vil precio,
hice de la virtud y honor desprecio. (429-436)

After admiring Isabel’s hard work in making her poor goods seem nicer than they are, Carlos experiences the sensation that her household items are motivating him to exercise caution, and desist from his wicked plans. He fights against this impulse, actively scorning virtue and honor as he continues to look about her home. He already has an idea in mind of the sort of décor he would like to see, and is disappointed when he finds its visual opposite:

Imágenes tenía que no eran
del Mudo, del Basán ni del Ticiano,
ni de las vanas fábulas que alteran
el mayor de los tres contrario humano.
Dar devoción sospecho que pudieran,
mas no al hereje Amor, tan luterano
que ni templos ni imágenes respeta,
tanto a su imperio la razón sujeta. (437-444)

Carlos makes specific reference to two Venetian painters, Titian and Bassano, and to one who was known to paint in a Venetian style: el Mudo, or Juan Fernández de Navarrete. Lope was a great admirer of Titian’s works, and de Armas notes that “allusions and ekphrases of Titian’s

canvases abound in [Lope's] texts" ("Lope de Vega's Speaking Pictures" 171). Furthermore, as Portús Pérez indicates, Titian was, in Lope's eyes, "el pintor por excelencia del desnudo y de la fábula antigua" (*Sala Reservada* 2002 26). Carlos's reference to Titian in line 438-439 is a direct reference to these *fábulas*, and the enticing nudes that Carlos wanted to see. Naming the three painters is a something of an antonomastic ekphrasis, calling to mind their styles of painting merely by saying their names. Referring to the *vanas fábulas* narrows down the ekphrasis to mythological subjects, and easily calls to mind Titian's Venuses and Danaë's in the Spanish Royal Collection. As Francisco Pacheco would write later, these paintings contained "tanta viveza ó lascivia, en dibujo y colorido" (354), indicating that the drawing and color were themselves lascivious: the style, and not only the subject matter, could contain the sensual message that posed a danger to the public.

Portús Pérez describes a scene in *La quinta de Florencia* that directly confronts the line between aesthetic inspiration and a motivation to action that twentieth-century anti-pornography theorists proposed: "en estos versos se hace alusión a varios temas recurrentes del debate sobre la figuración erótica. Por una parte, el poder persuasivo de este tipo de pintura, que puede llegar a ser tan alto como para precipitar la acción. Por otra, la relación entre calidad artística y capacidad persuasiva, que en este caso aparece implícita con la mención a un gran artista [Miguel Ángel] como autor de la pintura" (*Sala Reservada* 2002 27). Portús Pérez observes: "En Lope convivía su conciencia de las posibilidades transgresoras de la pintura erótica con una atracción personal hacia los cuadros mitológicos" (*Sala Reservada* 2002 27). Elsewhere, Portús Pérez analyzes this contrast in reference to this play in particular: "dos elementos de las obras de arte que sirven para caracterizar moralmente a sus poseedores son su iconografía y su calidad estética. Así actúan [en] *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, [en que] se pondera el carácter virtuoso de Isabel mediante la

alusión a que sus paredes no están adornados con ‘vanas fábulas del Mudo, de Bassan ni de Tiziano’” (*Pintura y pensamiento* 175). In fact, Carlos describes the aesthetic quality of the works he seeks (the antonomastic ekphrasis of the three painters’ names), and the iconography (“vanas fábulas”), as two distinct elements; his description separates the style of the painting from the subject matter: Isabel’s images “no eran / del Mudo, del Basán ni del Ticiano, / ni de las vanas fábulas” (437-439). Since they were *neither* by one of these painters *nor* did they depict mythological subjects, the images disappoint him on two different levels.

The twentieth-century commentaries I discussed in section II. D. focused on the idea of artistic merit as an indication that a work of art is not pornographic, as though “artistic” and “pornographic” must always be understood as mutually exclusive categories.¹⁵ Portús Pérez discusses how this scene in *La quinta de Florencia* negotiates this division on different terms, beginning its discussion with the assumption that fine art does motivate action, and that, furthermore, the better the art is, the stronger its power of persuasion will be. Not only is this a contradiction of the idea that pornography begins at the moment that the beholder feels motivated to act, but the two discussions involve very similar paintings: as Lope was troubled by finding Titian’s and Michelangelo’s nudes to be both incitements to sexual wrongdoing and great works of art—indeed the more so the latter, the more strongly so the former—three hundred and fifty years later, Kenneth Clark used Corregio’s *Danaë* as an example of why fine art could never be considered pornography, precisely because it lacked this power of incitement.

Carlos’s discourse on the images in Isabel’s home makes it clear that not only are lascivious nudes of mythological scenes capable of inflaming him to lust, but that religious images are also capable of dampening his passions and leading him toward the path of

¹⁵ They needn’t be.

righteousness. His words are a gloss on Trent's pronouncements on religious images. He contrasts Isabel's pious, unsexy images with the Venetian-style pictures he would like to see, and suspects that these pictures could inspire devotion in a person less depraved than himself (441). He is immune to the purifying influence of the images, because he has willfully enslaved himself to *Amor*, a multipurpose reference: it makes a further ekphrastic allusion to Titian's various Venuses and the various *amorcillos* who accompany them; it situates Carlos with the tradition of Renaissance love poetry and the lovers who sacrifice all for love; and it further emphasizes his total rejection of Christian values, as he allows himself to be enslaved by the ancient pagan god of love. He hammers his willful sacrilege home by attaching the adjectives *hereje* and *luterano* to Cupid in just one hendecasyllabic line. The use of the sixteenth-century adjective *luterano* emphasizes the timeless quality of the amorous wrongdoing Cupid can inspire, and the connection to the sixteenth-century paintings Carlos wants to see.

Before entering Isabel's home, Carlos already firmly believes in the power of erotic art to push miscreants such as himself toward wrongdoing. Not only that, he is actively hoping to find some work of art that will give him the encouragement he needs. As a nobleman, he may have read Terence's comedy *The Eunuch* in school. In the play, a similar scene takes place when Chaerea disguises himself as a eunuch in order to gain access to prohibited spaces and be close to Pamphila, the girl he desires. Later, he recounts to his friend Antipho how seeing a painting strengthened his resolve to assault the girl:

Presently they made preparations for her bath. I urged them to hurry. While things were being got ready, the girl sat in the room, looking up at a painting; it depicted the story of how Jupiter sent a shower of gold into Danae's bosom. I began to look at it myself, and the fact that he had played a similar game long ago made me all the more excited: a god had turned himself into human shape, made his way by stealth to another man's roof, and come through the skylight to play a trick on a woman... Was I, a mere mortal, not to do the same? I did just that—and gladly. (379-381)

The story Terence evokes is that of Zeus and Danaë, in which the latter's father locks her in a chamber to prevent her from having children, but Zeus visits her in the form of a rain of gold. Whether or not Danaë is a willing participant in this union is unclear, though Renaissance paintings tend to depict her as quite receptive to the arrival of the rain. Danaë, along with Susanna, Bathsheba, Venus, Lucretia, Diana and Actaeon, and a few other stories from antiquity, were considered in the Renaissance to offer legitimate pretexts for painting female nudes. In Chaerea's account, delivered to his friend after the fact, he does not describe the painting, so the audience can only wonder if Danaë showed any resistance in the image. It is clear, however, that Pamphila did resist: a woman in the household later complains that "the villain ripped her whole dress and tore her hair" (387) and "The girl is crying and doesn't dare say what happened when you ask her" (387). This description reveals that Chaerea has perpetrated a violent rape, although by his own account he merely "play[ed] a trick on a woman" (379), inspired by the fact that Zeus "had played a similar game long ago" (379). In general, the play characterizes Chaerea as an immature rascal who learns responsibility by marrying his victim (who never speaks), rather than as a vicious criminal who merits punishment. As in later manifestations of rape culture, the rapist is seen as sympathetic, while the victim does not quite register as a person.

Saint Augustine cited *The Eunuch* as a poor choice of text for Latin education, fearing that this scene might seduce pupils into "wantonness" (Hagendahl 379). Augustine condemned a play in which a painting inspires a youth to commit a rape, because it might inspire its readers to further lascivious behavior, in a double instance of art potentially inspiring wantonness. Carlos may have had this scene in mind as he perused Isabel's home looking for an image that will

encourage him to go ahead with his trick.¹⁶ Finally, as he explains to Julio, he sees what he was looking for:

La alcoba una antepuerta defendía
de un tapiz de la historia de Susana,
en cuyo espejo yo miré que había
disculpa de mi error en la edad cana. (453-456)

Carlos has just mentioned Titian and *vanas fábulas*, such as the *Danaë* that entered the Spanish royal collection in 1553,¹⁷ and this scene recreates the scene in Terence's comedy where Danaë is specifically mentioned in a similar ekphrasis. The reference to Titian and *vanas fábulas* would also call Venus to mind, a link reinforced by Carlos's recent mention of *Amor* as a person. So Carlos is picturing Venuses and Danaës by Titian when he sees a tapestry of Susanna covering Isabel's bedroom door, and he performs a transformative ekphrasis in which the very idea of Susanna sparks a sensual Venetian treatment of the story, though this appears to exist only in Carlos's imagination.

The ekphrasis of the actual door covering is limited to the identification of its material (tapestry) and what it illustrates (the story of Susanna). With the time he has just spent describing how inexpensive and old all of Isabel's other textile goods are, and the strong impetus toward devotion he sees in her religious images, Carlos has established what seems to be a strong contrast between the rest of Isabel's furnishings and his reaction to this tapestry. If the audience imagines the tapestry as being in keeping with the "paños de red" (431) and the "colcha de holanda [muy] delgada" (446) that Carlos has just been describing, they might picture an old and

¹⁶ Unlike Chaerea, Carlos really is tricking Isabel—lying to her about marriage to gain her actual consent, rather than using violence as Chaerea does.

¹⁷ The *Danaë* commissioned by Philip II is now in the Wellington Collection in London; the Prado currently holds another *Danaë* by Titian, which was purchased by Diego de Velázquez on a trip to Italy in the 1630s. Danaë's facial expression is an interesting difference between the two largely similar canvases: in the version now in the Prado, Danaë's face shows an aroused receptivity, while the Danaë in the Wellington Collection's earlier painting appears to be, more than anything else, bored.

faded tapestry, possibly dating to a time before the mid-sixteenth century, when the erotic Susanna paintings began to catch on in Venice. Isabel's virtue and strength of character, as already described by various characters, and the quality of the religious images Carlos has seen, further encourage the audience to imagine a tapestry that depicts the biblical story in a way that sets a good example for the faithful, and not resembling the erotic treatment he was hoping to see.

Julio points his interpretive error out to Carlos as he is telling him about it the following morning:

Fue necio Amor, porque mirar debía
el fin que tuvo presunción tan vana,
que los ejemplos tomas en la parte
del bien, no la del mal. Quiero escucharte. (457-460)

Julio remembers the story, and remembers that the elders were the villains in the tale. Unlike the muddled culpability typical in the works of Venetian painters like the ones Carlos has mentioned,¹⁸ Julio sees the story as a clear case of justice triumphing over criminals. As de Armas points out, "En realidad, el tapiz en la puerta de Isabel es signo admonitorio y 'apotropéico,' o sea que sirve de protección" ("¿Es éste Adonis?" 71). The tapestry was actually a warning, but Carlos, through sheer force of will, chose to see it as an invitation. When Julio reminds him what the story is really about, he does not want to hear it: Julio's abrupt change of direction in the middle of line 460 can be read as an implicit stage direction, indicating that Carlos has made some gesture of impatience, or threatened violence, as a sign of his displeasure at Julio's instructive interruption.

¹⁸ Bassano is the only one of the three who painted a Susanna that has survived. Whether Lope had seen a print or drawing of Bassano's, Tintoretto's, or Veronese's renditions of the Susanna story is unknown to this author. As I posited above, it is likely that Lope is referring to the pictorial tradition in general.

As de Armas observes, Carlos's description of Isabel's home contains three moments of ekphrasis: first, the lack of Venetian paintings; second, the Susanna tapestry; and third, the image of the Virgin and Child upon which Carlos swears to marry her, but Carlos reacts poorly to all three: "Desentendiéndose del primer sitio, interpretando mal el segundo y mintiendo sobre la tercera imagen, Carlos conquista a Isabel y la abandona" ("¿Es éste Adonis?" 72). Indeed, Carlos deliberately misinterprets the Susanna tapestry, overlaying it with the image of a seductive Susanna he has perhaps seen elsewhere; like Tintoretto, Veronese, and Bassano, Carlos may have assigned attributes of Venus to Susanna in his mind. This reaction is understandable, if he has seen paintings or prints like these, in which the viewer learns to see himself in the elders. He explicitly says that in the "espejo" (455) of the tapestry, he sees "disculpa de mi error" (456). "If the elders behaved this way, I might as well do it too," Carlos thinks—exactly the message that Chaerea articulates having drawn from the painting of Zeus and Danaë, and the message that Tintoretto, Veronese and Bassano painted into their treatments of the Susanna story.

As I discussed in section II, the mirror in Tintoretto's famous version cannot reflect either Susanna or Venus, because the woman in the painting is styled as an ambiguous combination of the two. Carlos, however, has no difficulty seeing his own reflection in the mirror of the elders. His visual imagination has already been prepared him to identify with them by the pictorial tradition in which they seem gentlemanly and respectable. In the version by Bassano I discussed in section II, the elders are modeled on the wise men and Susanna on Eve. Carlos picks up Bassano's cues: he interprets the painting as suggesting that the elders could not really be expected to behave any differently. At the same time, the moralistic concern of the era about mirrors and the activity of the eyes is validated: Carlos has lifted his gaze to take in erotic

artworks in the past; in Isabel's home he beholds her Susanna tapestry and is inspired to perform lecherous actions.

The description Carlos gives to Julio of the tapestry creates an intriguing tension, wherein he is describing a work of art that existed only in his mind, a vision of seductive Venetian nudes projected onto the tapestry he actually saw; at the same time, Julio and the audience suspect that this is happening, and envision a picture of the work different from the one Carlos describes and remembers. He reacts as though he has seen a lascivious Venetian image, and resolves to go through with his plan to bed Isabel after having promised to marry her. Carlos credits the tapestry with giving him the courage to go through with it, so the tapestry—like the painting in *The Eunuch*—meets Clark's definition of obscenity: it impels the viewer to action, rather than spiritual contemplation. However, in both plays, the obscene intention is already present in the minds of both characters: they see the images as obscene because their thoughts are obscene. Terence's play does not give much indication of how we should imagine the painting, but Lope provides several contextual clues to point us toward the conclusion that the tapestry does not offer as salacious an image as the one Carlos wants to see. Obscenity is in the eye of the beholder.

The replacement of Danaë, in the Terence, with Susanna conveys a range of meanings in Lope's play. As I discussed above, Portús Pérez points out the similarity between the scene in *The Eunuch* and the one in *La quinta de Florencia* in which a work of art is seen as permission to act. De Armas elaborates on this scene, commenting on the replacement of Danaë in *The Eunuch* with Venus in *La quinta de Florencia*. At first, as he observes, "this does not seem to make sense since it is a move from a scene of power and rape (which would suit César's desires) to a scene of mutuality of desire" ("Lope de Vega's Speaking Pictures" 177). But, de Armas argues, Lope

was creating a “puzzle for his learned audience” (“Lope de Vega’s Speaking Pictures” 178). Knowing that Titian had painted companion pieces of Venus and Adonis and Danaë for Philip II, he argues, the audience would understand the replacement as a clever allusion: “Lope, with a wink to the informed audience, is replacing one painting with its companion piece” (“Lope de Vega’s Speaking Pictures” 178). But the replacement of Danaë with Venus has further implications:

While Danaë is passively receiving the golden gift, Venus is actively preventing her lover’s departure. This is important for the play, since Laura is no Danaë. She is shown to have agency and will-power, dismissing César in spite of his power. It may be argued that Danaë would have been a better subject, since César is constantly attempting to gain Laura by showering upon her gifts and wealth. But Laura successfully refuses her earthly Jupiter, thus denying the Danaë model. (“Lope de Vega’s Speaking Pictures” 178)

While I do not wish to enter into a reading of *La quinta de Florencia* here, I would like to take this reading of the contrast between Danaë and Venus as a useful point of departure for a consideration of the contrast between Danaë and Susanna in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*. The latter play also contains language that explicitly denies the Danaë model, as Julio reports that Isabel has refused Carlos’s many offers of monetary gifts. As de Armas observes, the Danaë story involves the themes of power and bribery, and interpretations of it have often disturbingly blurred the distinction between seduction and rape.¹⁹ Did Zeus purchase Danaë’s consent? Was she a willing participant in the conception of Perseus? As was the case in the Bible and in Roman law, in Greek mythology, the woman’s consent to the act usually does not figure directly into the story: Danaë’s father opposed the union, and therefore it was illicit, regardless of the woman’s feelings. We know that Venus and Adonis shared an enthusiastic mutual passion, but it is not clear what Danaë’s reaction to Zeus’s invasion of her space was.

¹⁹ I discussed the applications of this distinction in the Susanna story in the Introduction.

Many Renaissance paintings depict her in a way that suggests delight both at the gold and at her impending sexual activity. Rona Goffen finds nothing but willingness in Titian's *Danaë* in the Prado: "Like her predecessor in Naples, the Madrid *Danae* is languorous and receptive. Her lips are parted as she smiles at her beloved, perhaps sighing. Even so, Danae remains calm in the face of Jupiter's erotic onslaught... Danae's physical passivity is distinguished from her *emotional* responsiveness, however: smiling, she yields willingly to her lover" (218). The Danaë myth might be a story of rape, but Titian's Prado painting is not.

Garrard notes the "heroic position [rape] has occupied in mythic tradition" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 152), including the "inventively diverse forms of sexual conquest performed by Zeus and Apollo, all inevitably sanitized in description as 'abductions'... Language has conveniently not distinguished between willing and unwilling women" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 152). Given the lack of emphasis on the woman's consent in these mythological texts, Garrard finds that artists who paint these same maidens as welcoming "have at least acted in consonance with the masculine bias of the creators of the Greek myths" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 152). Charged with the task of creating an erotic female nude to please a male client, painters embraced the subject of Venus, whose consent was clear, and of various women such as Danaë, who could be read as consenting, though this was ambiguous in the texts.

In his book *The Unrepentant Renaissance*, Richard Strier argues that many Renaissance writers and painters approached the idea of romantic love and sexual relations with an unabashed zeal. He gives the examples of Petrarch's lack of remorse for his idolatry of Laura (59-75), and of Thomas More's *Utopia*, in which potential spouses much affirm their attraction to one another before marrying (11). Strier's reading of these examples shows that the Catholic disapproval of sex was not shared by all Renaissance thinkers, and his examples are illustrative in that they

represent unbridled passions that do not harm the women involved. In the *Utopia* example, the importance of mutual willingness is stressed as a condition of sexual relations, a vision in which the consent of both parties is seen as fundamental. Petrarch lamented the isolation of his hopeless love, but he never assaulted Laura, nor did he lie in order to have her sentenced to death. The tradition of paintings of Venus certainly can be read as an unproblematic celebration of sex; provided that one imagines that Danaë was a willing participant in her encounter with Zeus, paintings of her can also be seen as erotic in a positive way.

Due to her textual origins, Susanna provides a stark contrast to this tradition. As Garrard argues, “Susanna, however, as a potential rape victim who emphatically halted the proceedings, is a rare heroine in biblical mythology... and Susanna’s unusually well-defined resistance throws into bold relief the extent to which she has been distorted into a willing participant in post-Renaissance art” (“Artemisia and Susanna” 152). If Venus is a model of a female engaging in consensual sexual relations, if Danaë is an example of a woman whose consent is not considered, and as a result can be imagined without contradicting the text, then Susanna is an example of a woman who firmly refuses men’s advances, and is harshly punished for it. Painting a Susanna receptive to the elders’ advances directly contradicts the text and, in so doing, undermines its message. If the tradition of Renaissance nudes that encompasses Susanna, Venus, and Danaë in a homogenous whirl of golden flesh is a positive celebration of sexuality, then it celebrates sexual assault alongside consensual sex without making a distinction.

Carlos has apparently seen images of Venus-like Susannas by Venetian painters, and in his mind they blur together with the mythological images that tell very different stories. While his previous descriptions of the furnishings in Isabel’s home suggest that her tapestry does not actually resemble the Titians or Bassanos he was hoping to see, we are left wondering what it

looks like. It cannot be a purely erotic Renaissance image of *vanas fábulas*, nor does quite fit in with the clearly devotional images that Carlos sees upon first entering the house, which disappoint him so sorely. Lope's use of this image evokes the tension between the images recommended by Trent and the lascivious ones that may not be shown; between the Spanish Counter-Reformation's lack of nudes in art and the Venetian *vanas fábulas* known to be in the royal collections; and between Lope's own admiration for Titian and his recognition that many of his canvases fell outside the good graces of the Church. The way that Carlos misreads the image supports the arguments by Garrard ("Artemisia and Susanna"), Spolsky, and Clanton that the Renaissance tradition violates the moral of the Susanna story. On the one hand, Lope seems to be criticizing this twisting of the message; on the other, he admires the beauty of Venetian art.

Just as the switch from Danaë to Venus in *La quinta de Florencia* signifies the heroine's agency and integrity, the switch from Danaë to Susanna in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer* signifies the heroine of this play's firmness and piety. At the same time, Lope uses the image to show that Carlos's wrongdoing is willful, symbolized by his misinterpretation of the image. Based on the way Lope uses the Susanna story in other texts, I believe that this ekphrastic reference is also expressing his reservations about the way the pictorial tradition undermines the text.

The only ekphrastic mention of Susanna occurs early in Act I, but two narrative allusions to the story occur later in the play, reinforcing the parallels between Isabel and Susanna, and between Carlos and the elders. When Carlos is held prisoner by Muslims in Orán, his captor's daughter, Fátima, is unsuccessful in her efforts to seduce him. She is coming out of the bath when she sees him, and her servant suggests that she uncover herself a bit to attract his attention. Fátima replies: "No puedo, / que tengo a algún lince miedo, / que por ventura me ve" (1836-1838). Although Fátima and the other Muslim women in the play are hypersexualized

stereotypes, here her modesty prevents her from taking the risk that anyone but Carlos might see her partially unclothed. Were it not for that danger, she implies, she would uncover herself in hopes of enticing Carlos. Her emergence from the bath and the possibility that she might disrobe in order to seduce him calls to mind the Venetian paintings in which Susanna is cast as a seductress and the elders as her victims. Lope depicts Fátima as a lusty woman who is hoping to seduce Carlos, a character very different from Isabel, a chaste and virtuous Christian. Carlos, on the other hand, is positioned as a lustful, intrusive elder with respect to both women.

When she disguises herself as a *mora* named Zaida and sells herself into slavery, Isabel is purchased by Hipólito, a wealthy *indiano* who has returned to live in Toledo. Frustrated after his many failed attempts to seduce her, Hipólito resolves to rape Isabel in his garden. He orders his servants to leave and lock the garden gates behind them (1983-1985), in a scene reminiscent of Susanna's request to her servants, though Hipólito is menacing his slave woman in his own garden. Once they are alone, he besieges her with poetry, insisting that all creatures must love and it is in her nature, as a woman, to return his love (2029-2068). She replies that she would, if she did not already love another man (2073-2076), whereupon he announces his plan to rape her violently:

Zaida, cerrados estamos:
yo tengo resolución
de salir con mi intención.
Si las voces excusamos,
será bien para los dos;
si no, yo sabré taparte
la boca. No hay que turbarte. (2085-2091)

In this scene, Hipólito's references to their being shut in alone and to the possibility of her screaming both recall the Bible story of Susanna. With his talk first of Petrarchan love and then of sexual violence, Hipólito's words also evoke both of the elders in Juan Rodrigo Alonso de

Pedraza's *Comedia de Sancta Susaña*, going from poetic to rapacious in a few moments. When she hears what Hipólito has decided to do, Isabel reveals her true identity and her reasons for enslaving herself. Hipólito is immediately pacified and begins praising her strength of character, comparing her to other brave and chaste women such as "Porcia... Sulpicia, Lucrecia y Drías" (2139-2141), a list that might contain Susanna in other works by Lope, but here leaves her out. The names are spoken, however, by a character who has just enacted a rape scene of his own, with Isabel once again the victim of a man's invasion of her privacy and assault on her chastity. Unlike the biblical Susanna, Isabel succeeds in persuading her attacker that what he is doing is wrong.

Lope's characterization of Isabel as a Susanna-like paragon of chastity is complicated, however, by another issue on which Trent takes a stand: the custom of unofficial marriage. The twenty-fourth session of Trent begins with this somewhat confusing declaration:

Although it is not to be doubted that clandestine marriages made with the free consent of the contracting parties are valid and true marriages so long as the church has not declared them invalid, and consequently that those persons are justly to be condemned, as the holy council does condemn them with anathema, who deny that they are true and valid... nevertheless the holy Church of God has for very just reasons at all times detested and forbidden them. (185)

The decree "considers the grave sins which arise from clandestine marriages, especially the sins of those who continue in the state of damnation, when having left the first wife with whom they contracted secretly, they publicly marry another and live with her in continual adultery" (185).

Instead, "it commands that in the future, before a marriage is contracted, the proper pastor of the contracting parties shall publicly announce three times in the church... between whom marriage is to be contracted" (185). If, for some reason, such an announcement might hinder the marriage, Trent allows that one publication in the church may suffice, or that the marriage may take privately, with two or three witnesses, but that it must be announced publicly before it can be

consummated (186). The decree is firm in its insistence that wedding ceremonies be performed only by a priest: “Those who shall attempt to contract marriage otherwise than in the presence of the parish priest or of another priest... the holy council renders absolutely incapable of thus contracting marriage and declares such contracts invalid and null” (186).

This was the doctrine issued from Trent, as Isabel would have been fully aware. Trent also emphasizes the importance of confession, as María del Pilar Chouza-Calo explains: “Confession became the most favorable venue for the Church to promulgate an acceptable discourse on sexuality and morality” (68). A very devout woman such as Isabel would have kept up with Church policy, and her confessor would have made sure that she did not forget. The play makes it clear that she has not forgotten: although she and Carlos sit down with an *escribano* and some *testigos* to sign a marriage contract, she then resists the various attempts Carlos makes to stay. He tells Julio “Que cenásemos juntos persuadíle” (473), and later “Dieron las diez, rogóme que me fuera, / y era arrancar la más antigua encina” (479-480). Isabel tries to persuade Carlos to leave, though his determination to remain makes him as steadfast as an oak. If she viewed this as being their wedding night, she would surely accept his presence in her home. Instead, she strongly resists his efforts to spend the night with her, as Carlos reports to Julio the next morning:

Por abreviar, después de las dos dadas,
y de sufrir mil cóleras y enojos,
y querer con las manos enojadas
rasgar con las hojas y bañar los ojos,
quitó de las paredes las pintadas
imágenes, que al mar de mis antojos
pudieran dar templanza, y así dijo:
«Carlos, jura a esta Madre y a su Hijo.»
Juré, Julio, juré; Julio, jurara
si hubiera más, que allí se encierra todo.
Y ella con dulce y vergonzosa cara
me permitió de su conquista el modo. (485-496)

This description of Isabel's terrible anger is offered casually, but it shows how strongly she felt that Carlos should leave. Finally, she forces him to commit further sacrilege by swearing on an image of the Virgin and Child—one of the “honest” images that she has in her home. What she is forcing him to swear, it is understood, is that he will marry her in the future. That is, at this moment, she does not yet consider them to be married in the eyes of the Church. But after Carlos swears this further oath, she gives in to him with “dulce y vergonzosa cara” (495)—*vergonzosa* because she knows that they are violating Church doctrine, but *dulce* because she is in love with him.

Later, Isabel's maid, Inés, tells her not to mistreat her eyes by crying so much. Isabel replies:

Para vengarme de mí
doy a mis ojos enojos.
Suyos fueron los anteojos:
paguen su contento, Inés.
Si suya la culpa es,
pasen penas semejantes,
que pues se alegraron antes,
bien es que lloren después. (663-670)

Here, Isabel blames herself for committing a sin with Carlos, because she felt desire for him. She places the blame on her eyes, evoking the discourse of the era about women keeping their eyes lowered. As I discussed in section II, women were discouraged from using mirrors or looking about when in public, lest their gaze fall on or be met by a man, leading to lust. Isabel's dilemma here evokes the early modern admonitions against the activity of women's eyes, and also John Berger's analysis of woman as surveyor and surveyed: as a beautiful young woman, the culture she lives in has made it clear that she has a responsibility both to herself and to the men who see her. Carlos saw her as alluring, and she met his gaze and felt an attraction to him. Here, she castigates herself for letting that attraction take over and give in to him, though she knows she

should have waited until they were married by a priest. She is angry with herself for allowing the activity of her eyes to lead her into this situation. While Carlos is eager to see his own reflection in the “mirror” of the elders, Isabel used to be proud of her self-appointed position as a paragon of virtue. Now, she peers into her mirror looking for the image of that chaste woman but, like Tintoretto’s Susanna, she does not see anything reflected there.

Isabel judges herself harshly, but Lope is more sympathetic to her than she is. Earlier, Julio told Carlos that Isabel was not as chaste as he had thought, and Carlos defended her honor, although he had just abandoned her: “Necio, si me casé por escritura, / por testigos, por graves juramentos... ¿qué culpas de Isabel los pensamientos?” (421-424). Carlos appears to consider them to be married, but Isabel realizes that Carlos has made an empty promise, which falls short of marriage according to the Church. When Inés suggests that Isabel go talk to Carlos’s sister, Isabel replies:

¿Qué remedio podrá darme
sino cansarme y culparme
de que fui necia y liviana?
Toda mi esperanza es vana:
engañóme el juramento. (712-716)

At the end of Act I, Isabel tells Carlos’s uncle: “Carlos con fuerte escritura / y juramentos bastantes / está obligado a mi honor” (893-895). She recognizes that they are not yet married, but still considers his promise (and its consummation) to be binding, and in the remaining two acts undertakes great sacrifices to save him, eventually leading to his reciprocating her love. It is a happy ending for characters who have not always obeyed the dictates of the Church. In Isabel’s case, her disobedience was motivated by love, and for this, Lope is inclined to forgive her. As he has an incidental character remind us in Act II, “Las ofensas amorosas / merecen perdón” (1620-1621). In his notes on the play, Donald McGrady points out that Petrarch expressed a similar

idea in two of his sonnets. Petrarch was entreating Laura to forgive him, but in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, the forgiveness for sins of love comes from Heaven itself.

In his decision to align Isabel's character with the image of Susanna, which was complicated in his time by the artistic interpretations that showed her as a temptress, Lope added a note of ambiguity to Isabel's character: even though she was born to set an example for all women, she is still susceptible to the temptations of the flesh. Perhaps her human frailty, her inclination to surrender to the power of love, is even part of what makes her a role model for other women, in Lope's eyes: she has deep moral and religious convictions, but she also loves passionately. Carlos is an unrepentant scoundrel in the first act, but it is Isabel's love that redeems him in the third. Both of them sin in the beginning, both of them suffer for it, but in the end both are liberated from their troubles and forgiven for their mistakes, and the physical desire that they felt for each other at the beginning becomes sanctified. This arc of suffering and redemption is a deeply Christian narrative, one in which love triumphs, and sins made for its sake are pardoned.

IV. *La moza de cántaro*

La moza de cántaro begins in a parallel manner to *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*: one of the main characters enters, talking to a servant about their distaste for the opposite sex. Doña María starts the play in *mujer esquiva* mode, ripping up letters from suitors and declaring "yo no tengo de querer / hombre humano" (58-59). She wishes to remain unmarried and continue living with her father, because none of her suitors are good enough for her:

no quiere mi vanidad
que cosa indigna le ofenda.
Nací con esta arrogancia;
no me puedo sujetar,
si es sujetar el casar. (71-75)

Right at the outset, María assures her maid and the audience that her *esquivez* is an innate character flaw with no rationale behind it. She is defying nature by refusing to marry, and fate will set her straight in good time. Her father soon enters, describing an incident in which don Diego, one of María's suitors, slapped him. Her brother is away in Flanders, so María takes it upon herself to go to the jail and kill don Diego with a dagger. As he is dying, she says to Diego:

¿En canas tan venerables
pusiste la mano, perro?
Pues estas hazañas hacen
las mujeres varoniles. (368-371)

In defining herself as a *mujer varonil*, María succinctly describes the problem with her character. As Melveena McKendrick observes, María's arrogance "is doubly reprehensible in a woman because it smacks of masculinity" (*Woman and Society* 155). She defies nature by not marrying, and defies society by avenging her father's loss of face when her brother should have done so. McKendrick continues: "The thesis of the play is clear—the desire for independence and the impulse to unnecessary (unnecessary because her father has a son to avenge him) self-assertion is improper in a woman. María's punishment is the transformation to a lowly status which brings the truth home to her" (*Woman and Society* 157). Indeed, the next time we see María, she is traveling alone on her way from her home in Ronda to Madrid, where she takes a job, under an assumed name, as a servant girl to a wealthy *indiano*.

The action of the play switches to Madrid before María arrives, before the audience even realizes that she intends to go there. After the murder scene in the jail, we next see don Juan and a character known only as *el Conde* talking about a beautiful widow. The Conde describes her in material terms, as though she were an art object:

¿Hay tal gracia de monjil?
Que es de azabache, repara,

imagen, menos la cara
y manos, que son de marfil. (409-412)

Doña María began the play in dynamic fashion, announced herself as *esquiva* and *varonil*, then fled the scene of her crime. All of that action comes to an abrupt halt here as these two new characters stop the action with this description of a woman, and the substances of which she and her clothes are metaphorically made up. It is an ekphrastic moment not only because it forms a pause in the narrative in which an object—that is, an objectified person—is described, but also in the objectifying, material terms in which the Conde describes doña Ana, as if he were describing a statue.

This scene illustrates Laura Mulvey's point about the gendered functions of male and female characters within a cinematic narrative, in which the "presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of the story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion within the narrative" (442). Mulvey is referring to the majority of Hollywood films in which the action is driven by male characters, who are "figure[s] in a landscape" (443), as opposed to the female characters who appear as sexual motivation for the men in the story.²⁰ The woman whom the camera contemplates as an erotic object rather than as a human being with agency forces the narrative to hesitate, and then struggle to proceed with her included. This description invites the argument that these numerous cinematic moments are ekphrases of a kind, although a kind that, according

²⁰ Mulvey cites filmmaker Budd Boetticher as saying: "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" (442). In his autobiography, Buster Keaton expresses a similar narrative guiding principle that he used in his short films: "The cast for our two-reelers was always small. There were usually but three principals—the villain, myself, and the girl, and she was never important. She was there so the villain and I would have something to fight about" (130).

to de Armas, “do[es] violence to the term” (*Ekphrasis* 22). Although defining such moments as ekphrasis is “transgressive (albeit returning to its meaning in Hellenistic rhetoric)” (*Ekphrasis* 22), de Armas allows the possibility of an “ekphrasis that takes into account the pause in a narrative, but does not use it to describe an art object” (*Ekphrasis* 22). In the films Mulvey discusses, there is no description as such, merely a pause while we observe the woman (who is, perhaps, singing a song). In *La moza de cántaro*, an ekphrasis of this type occurs when the action is paused to introduce new characters. These characters, in turn, describe another character, a woman, as an erotic object.

In his study of the Susanna image in Lope’s poetry, Antonio Sánchez Jiménez observes that the playwright never composed a full-length *comedia* about this biblical figure. He proposes a hypothesis as to why not:

En un autor tan interesado como Lope en pasajes de contenido sensual y de naturaleza pictórica, esta escasez resulta un tanto inesperada. Tal vez lo que explique esta falta de representaciones sean las implicaciones estilísticas de la historia bíblica: debido a su naturaleza *voyeurística*, la escena exigía una parada de la trama narrativa, algo no muy recomendable en el arte escénico. (*El pincel y el Fénix* 299-300)

As we have already seen in Chapter I, and will see further in Chapters III and IV, other playwrights put a great deal of emphasis on this voyeuristic moment, while in the Bible it does not occur at all. The plays I will discuss in the following chapters become narrative ekphrases of the pictorial Susanna tradition, prolonging the bath scene as the elders describe Susanna, undressing offstage, in poetically ekphrastic terms. It is a challenge that Lope certainly could have undertaken, as Sánchez Jiménez suggests. Although he did not choose to, this brief narrative pause in *La moza de cántaro* gives us a glimpse of how he might have approached a scene of Susanna’s bath, with the men describing her beauty during a lull in the action.

As the Conde is talking about Ana, Juan's servant, Martín, returns from his mission to glean information about Ana from the servants in her home. The male gaze takes center stage as three men discuss in detail the appearance of a woman who is not there. The Conde asks Martín why she wears such a short widow's veil. Martín says some humorous things about Ana's clothes, then proceeds to remark that it is visually boring for widows always to wear the same thing:

MARTÍN	Ver siempre de una manera a una mujer, es cansarse.	
CONDE	Pues ¿puede el rostro mudarse?	515
MARTÍN	Pues ¿no se muda y se altera mudando el traje, el semblante?	
JUAN	Conde, Martín dice bien, porque el variar también da novedad al amante.	520
MARTÍN	De mi condición advierte que me pudren las pinturas, porque siempre las figuras están de una misma suerte.	
	¿Qué es ver levantar la espada en una tapicería a un hombre que todo el día no ha dado una cuchillada?	525
	¿Qué es ver a Susana estar entre dos viejos desnuda, y que ninguno se muda a defender ni a forzar?	530
	Linda cosa es la mudanza del traje.	
CONDE	La viuda, en fin, ¿es conversable, Martín? (513-535)	

The entire scene in which these new characters are introduced has already paused María's story; within this pause, the Conde pauses to describe Ana, and then Martín launches into this digression about pauses being unsatisfying. It makes for a succinct metatheatrical joke, and it gives an allusion to the Susanna story that seems to be unique in Lope's oeuvre: she is mentioned not as an exemplar of a virtuous woman, nor as a victim of false testimony, nor even in a

sexually suggestive but willfully misread ekphrasis; rather, she appears in an ekphrasis by a man who is explaining why he dislikes art. It is the most detailed ekphrasis of a Susanna image that Lope wrote, and yet the only obvious purpose it serves in the story is to fill out Martín's praise of sartorial variation.

Martín constructs an ekphrasis that is both allusive and combinatory, describing a whole array of Susanna images. In the four lines before he mentions Susanna, he makes a much vaguer allusive ekphrasis of some violent history painting in which the action remains frozen. He dislikes paintings because of this static drama: "me pudren las pinturas, / porque siempre las figuras / están de una misma suerte" (522-524). He does not merely complain that history paintings irritate him for this reason, leaving open the possibility that he might like other genres such as portraits or landscapes; or that he dislikes certain specific paintings, saying something like "me pudren las pinturas en que siempre las figuras están de una misma suerte." Instead, he says that he hates (all) paintings, because they never change. This might seem to be an assertion of the supremacy of the theater as an art form, were it not for Lope's oft-expressed enthusiasm for the visual arts, and the fact that it appears in the mouth of a *gracioso* as part of a rambling speech about women's clothing.

In the verbs he chooses, Martín indirectly expresses a criticism of the pictorial Susanna tradition. He objects to the static images in which "ninguno se muda / a defender ni a forzar" (531-532). His disappointment that Susanna does not defend herself emphasizes her actions in the biblical story, as opposed to the verbs related to lounging and luring Martín might employ were he trying to describe a Venetian painting of the subject. And he names the action the elders are about to take as rape, avoiding the traditional euphemism that they attempted to "seduce"

Susanna, agreeing with the argument Jennifer Glancy would make hundreds of years later.²¹ Like Julio in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, Martín is a *gracioso* who is familiar with the story of Susanna and its correct Christian interpretation. Rather than blaming the beholder for misinterpreting the image as Julio does, Martín seems dissatisfied with the images he has seen because they do not tell the story properly. By freezing the action, Martín complains, these paintings erase the actions of the characters which will reveal them to be brave or wicked, as the case may be. Martín's description is what I term an oppositional ekphrasis, in which he describes a work of art in order to raise an objection to it. Sánchez Jiménez's hypothesis that Lope avoided the Susanna subject because it called for "una parada de la trama narrativa" (300) is supported by Martín's objection to this painting, especially since the pause in the narrative created by the Susanna paintings obscures the meaning of the story.

In his analysis of Lope's sonnet "A una tabla de Susana, en cuya figura se hizo retratar una Dama," Sánchez Jiménez suggests that Lope was not pleased with the pictorial tradition of Susanna images. The sonnet satirizes the "a lo divino" portraits that were popular in Spain, especially the *dama* who had herself painted as Susanna, implying that the lady was no paragon of chastity:

Tú, que la tabla de Susana miras,
si del retrato la verdad ignoras,
la historia santa justamente adoras,
la retratada injustamente admiras.

Mas tú, que de los viejos te retiras,
¿qué fuerza temes, qué violencia lloras?;
pues vives tan segura a todas horas
de fuerzas, testimonios y mentiras.

Dos esta tabla juntos manifiesta:
el de Susana, honor del matrimonio,
que la afición decrepita contrasta,

²¹ See Introduction.

y el tuyo, Fabia, en vida tan compuesta,
que para levantarte un testimonio
es necesario que te llamen casta.

As Sánchez Jiménez points out, the sonnet also blames the viewer of the painting: “Lope abre su soneto precisamente con una referencia a un interlocutor (‘Tú’) que se encuentra contemplando el cuadro de Susana... el espectador admira excesiva y lascivamente (‘injustamente’) el cuerpo de ‘la retratada’ Fabia-Susana porque la joven se halla semidesnuda” (“Casta Susana” 78). This accusation of lasciviousness may indicate a general displeasure on Lope’s part of the way Susanna was painted during the Renaissance. As Sánchez Jiménez argues:

[E]l Fénix resalta que la afición por la historia de la casta Susana se basaba más en un placer voyeurístico por contemplar el cuerpo desnudo de una pudorosa muchacha que en la admiración de la castidad. De hecho, Lope utiliza el poder reflexivo de la écfrasis para subrayar que la casta Susana provoca precisamente pensamientos incastos en aquellos que contemplan su historia. (“Casta Susana” 79)

Much as Martín’s choice of verbs (*defender*, *forzar*) indicates Lope’s understanding of the Susanna story as an attempted sexual assault, not an attempted seduction, Lope’s criticism of the viewer of Susanna paintings in this sonnet suggests that he harbored reservations similar to those expressed by feminist critics in recent years: that the paintings prioritize the viewer’s sensual pleasure over telling the story of the heroine’s virtue, and thus obscure the meaning of the story. Given the number of times that Lope recounted the Susanna story based on the biblical text, and the reservations expressed about its visual interpretations in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, I read Martín’s complaints in *La moza de cántaro* as more than mere silliness in the mouth of a *gracioso*. Although this speech begins with the humorous idea that paintings are boring because they do not move, the complaint about the Susanna story being poorly represented in paintings is serious.

After voicing his concerns about art, Martín suddenly remembers what he was talking about, and reiterates that he likes to see women change their clothes. The Conde, similarly eager to return to the matter at hand, asks: “La viuda, en fin, / ¿es conversable, Martín?” (534-535), getting the story about his romantic interest in the widow Ana back on track. Martín’s mention of Susanna is not closely related to Ana’s character, however, and none of the female characters in the play is aligned with the Susanna image the way Isabel is in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*.

The next time we see María, she is stopping at a *mesón* in Adamuz in the Sierra Morena, on her way to Madrid. In this scene, the *mesonero* describes her to the *indiano* before she comes in, in another ekphrastic description of woman-as-object before she arrives onstage. She enters, lamenting her misfortune and voicing her lingering rage at don Diego, whom she has killed for slapping her father:

Así para quien se atreve
a las edades ancianas;
que es, atreverse a unas canas,
violar un templo de nieve.
Pero la mano piadosa
del cielo quiere que espante
a un Holofernes gigante
una Judith valerosa. (817-824)

María mentions Judith as a way of praising her own valor, perhaps to encourage herself as she flees from the law. In comparing the man she killed to an enemy general, she makes a hyperbolic comparison between her situation and that of a biblical woman that remains generally faithful to the original story. Judith was another Old Testament woman who was often portrayed in paintings during the era, with especially famous versions by Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi from the years just before *La moza de cántaro* was written. María does not mention Judith in the context of any particular painting, but she creates an allusive ekphrasis in which she aligns herself with women’s violence against men in general. Although María is still delighting

in this image of herself at this point, midway through Act I, she will soon learn to humbly reciprocate Juan's love and find happiness by the end of the play. In terms of Renaissance imagery, Judith is an apt comparison for María, who describes herself both as Judith-like and as a *mujer varonil*.

Although Susanna is mentioned in Act I, she does not form a parallel for any of the women in the play; Susanna is a supremely feminine woman who is faithful to her husband and to God, and defends her chastity out of devotion to both of them. Ana is not much like Susanna either, as she spends most of the play rebuffing the Conde's entreaties and pursuing Juan. After she first meets him, Ana casts aside the mourning clothes that Martín has found so tiresome, and starts wearing elegant gowns in hopes of attracting Juan's attention. This change, revealed in the stage directions, shows that Ana's devotion to her dead husband lasted only until she met someone else she was interested in. The danger of women's vision that I discussed in section II of this chapter is once again at the forefront: Ana lifted her eyes and saw Juan, and developed amorous feelings for him. Juan, in fact, is the most Susanna-like person in the play: his loyalty to the Conde, his cousin and friend, prompts him to spurn Ana's affection. Even after he has fallen in love with María, he politely insists to Ana that he would share her feelings were it not for the Conde. But in reality his love for María is unwavering, and his resolute example helps both women align their feelings with those of the man who loves them.

This reciprocation by women of the love men offer them is an essential component of Lope's views on feminine agency, McKendrick argues. For him, she writes, the foundation of femininity was accepting and returning a man's love:

Although Lope was, intellectually and emotionally, more intensely concerned with the question of woman's life and rights than any other dramatist, he was at the same time woman's sternest judge in these matters. No one... could doubt that he had an enormous admiration and respect for womanhood and the highest respect for woman's capacity for

moral courage, devotion, steadfastness, and nobility. No one who reads *La moza de cántaro* could doubt that he had a warm and perceptive understanding of the female heart and mind. But he deplored any attempt on woman's part to deny her essential femininity. He, above all the dramatists, saw her as a sexual being. (*Woman and Society* 330)

In the Bible, Susanna is an outstanding example of “moral courage, devotion, steadfastness, and nobility” (*Woman and Society* 330), who is also a sexual being. Unlike María and other *mujeres esquivas*, Susanna is a loving wife who has borne her husband children; she is a sexual being for him and for no one else. She, her husband, and their children are wronged by the elders' attack against her. If the pictorial tradition forgets this, Lope wants to remind us. Perhaps Lope felt that the depictions of Venus and Danaë in erotic Venetian paintings were admirable, but objected to the depiction of Susanna in images of the same style, much as Mary Garrard, Ellen Spolsky and other critics object to them in our times: because they misrepresent the story.

As McKendrick points out, Lope did not endorse any ideas that women might live fruitful lives independently of men, but he does defend Susanna as a committed wife whose honor and safety were impugned by depraved men. The Bible specifies that she was beautiful, but depictions in which she seems to be encouraging the elders' attention obscure her character as a chaste and innocent victim of their false testimony. As a knowledgeable art enthusiast with a keen eye for symbolism, Lope was sensitive to the iconographical tradition, and would have observed how the paintings link Susanna and Venus. He expressed his disapproval through the oppositional ekphrases in *La moza de cántaro* and the “A una tabla de Susana, en cuya figura se hizo retratar una Dama” sonnet. In these works, Lope subtly critiques the artistic tradition as a poor interpretation of the source text, without advocating for any kind of a feminist liberation. Julio expresses the moral of the story clearly, while Martín's objection is more indirect, but they may both be voicing Lope's own view: Susanna was a virtuous woman who defended herself against a criminal attack, as should be made clear in any artistic depiction of her story.

In *El testimonio vengado*, *Los pastores de Belén*, and elsewhere, Lope refers to the story without alluding to the artistic tradition surrounding it; when he does refer to the art, he voices objections to it. His love of Venetian *vanas fábulas* and his desire to be a devout Christian were often at odds, but the incongruence of the biblical Susanna and her distorted Venetian reflections was too much. His plays continually direct women to be devoted, faithful wives like Susanna. When the plays confront paintings in which Susanna appears to be something other than that, the plays advise us to read the text more carefully.

Chapter Three: “*Quítase la más ropa que pueda*”:

Susanna in European Prints and Three Seventeenth-Century *Comedias*

While my first chapter discussed short plays from the mid-sixteenth century, and the second examined a handful of fleeting mentions of Susanna in works by Lope de Vega, this one undertakes the study of three full-length seventeenth-century *comedias* that set out to retell the story of Susanna. In all of them, the doxic image of Susanna as a seductive bathing beauty or, in Rina Walthaus’s words, a “*femme fatale bíblica*” (1829) confronts the textual paragon of chastity, creating ambiguous theatrical works. Luis Vélez de Guevara follows the biblical text fairly closely in *Santa Susana*, greatly expanding the characters of the two elders as well as Susanna’s husband and father, while giving the eponymous heroine little more to say than paraphrases of what she says in the brief biblical tale. Susanna is much more outspoken in Guillén de Castro’s *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, as the author emphasizes her chastity and resistance with scenes that do not occur in the Bible, but that enhance his audience’s appreciation of her strength of character. *El bruto de Babilonia*, by the *tres ingenios* Juan de Matos Fragoso, Agustín Moreto, and Jerónimo Cáncer, despite being a *refundición* of Castro’s play, creates a Susanna story that bears only a passing resemblance to the tale in Daniel 13.

As I discussed in the Introduction, the story as told in the Bible leaves out a great many details, most notably whether or not Susanna’s bath actually took place and whether the elders physically assaulted Susanna before her servants arrived from the house. Erich Auerbach identifies these narrative lacunae as typical of the biblical narrative style. In contrasting the Old Testament’s style with that of Homer, Auerbach observes that the Bible externalizes “only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity;

the decisive points to the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent [so that the whole] remains mysterious and ‘fraught with background’” (9). This “mysterious whole” is what allowed Renaissance painters to imagine that the bath took place,¹ and subsequent readers to be so swayed by these pictorial representations that they read the text as indicating that the bath happened.

The stories in the Bible, Auerbach continues, are intended to serve a spiritual purpose: “without believing in Abraham’s sacrifice, it is impossible to put the narrative of it to the use for which it was written” (12). The story of Abraham and Isaac contains a meaning about absolute faith in God, and that meaning is what matters to believers. This meaning, however, becomes increasingly more difficult to understand as the faithful are more and more removed from the time and culture of the stories the Bible tells:

[The text of the biblical narrative] seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history. This becomes increasingly difficult the further our historical environment is removed from that of the Biblical books; and if these nevertheless maintain their claim to absolute authority, it is inevitable that they themselves be adapted through interpretative transformation. (12-13)

However these stories may be adapted, Auerbach continues, the community of the faithful eventually becomes too sophisticated to take them at face value: “But when, through too great a change in environment and through the awakening of a critical consciousness, this becomes impossible, the Biblical claim to absolute authority is jeopardized... the Biblical stories become ancient legends, and the doctrine they had contained, now dissevered from them, becomes a disembodied image” (13). Auerbach is writing specifically of the story of Abraham and Isaac, the doctrine behind which eventually became separate from the still-familiar image of Abraham

¹ As I discuss in section II of this chapter, Mieke Bal attributes these painterly fantasies to the manner in which the elders deliver their false accusation of adultery against Susanna.

clutching a knife, raising his hand over the helpless Isaac. This image remained popular in art, with Caravaggio and Rembrandt, among many others, creating famous paintings of the subject in the early modern era. But these were only “disembodied images” that had mostly or entirely lost their connection to the story about obeying God.

Early modern paintings of Abraham and Isaac represent the crucial moment of the story, whether or not they remain closely connected to the religious doctrine the story originally meant to convey. Paintings of Susanna from the same era, however, are “disembodied images” (13) that not merely have become disassociated from the doctrine of the original story, but actively work against it. Rather than depicting the climactic moment, when Daniel triumphantly uncovers the truth at the trial, the doxic image is based on “what lies between” (9) in the narrative, on that which “remains mysterious and ‘fraught with background’” (9). While images of Abraham and Isaac are likely to help a viewer remember the story, images of Susanna and the elders are more likely to cause the viewer to remember it incorrectly, and to “make it “impossible to put the narrative of it to the use for which it was written” (12). As I discussed in Chapter II, the pictorial tradition of Susanna is so widespread and recognizable that many writers believe that the bath not only actually happened in the story, but that it was a key episode that could not be eliminated.

In this chapter, I focus on how Luis Vélez de Guevara, Guillén de Castro, and the *tres ingenios* Juan de Matos Fragoso, Agustín Moreto, and Jerónimo Cándor retell the Susanna narrative, once this doxic image had already become prevalent. To better understand how the doxic image of Susanna became familiar to the Spanish public, the first section of this chapter will consider the culture of artistic prints in early modern Europe. The second section explores some fundamental principles of gaze theory, to lay the foundation the arguments that I make

about how the male gaze operates within the plays. The next three sections turn to the plays themselves. On one level, these plays strive to recover “the use for which [the narrative] was written” (Auerbach 12) and remind audiences of Susanna’s virtue and the dangers of bearing false witness. On another level, all three plays seek to avail themselves of the popular, Venus-like image of Susanna to draw in audiences. All three plays expand on and update the short narrative to make it more accessible to their audiences: Vélez nestles it comfortably within the honor play tradition by giving both Susanna’s father and husband lengthy speeches about the frailty of woman, while Castro paraphrases the story in such a way that Susanna’s purity and resistance are reemphasized in a way his audience will understand. The collaborative play, based on Castro’s, reframes Susanna’s story as a captivity tale. In all of them, the doxic visual image of a seductive Susanna works against the verbal characterization of her as extremely chaste, as the imperative to *enseñar deleitando* becomes a paradox: the aspects of Susanna that delight the audience are the ones that undermine the lesson.

I. Susanna and European print culture

As I briefly mentioned in the last chapter, Lope de Vega’s *estampero* scene in *La viuda valenciana* provides a glimpse into the importance of prints as a means of circulating reproductions of works by famous painters during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Prints of the doxic version of the Susanna story circulated in Spain during the seventeenth century, and would have been familiar both to playwrights and their audiences. It is likely that the images would have been remembered not as individual works, with the details of each and the differences between them vividly recalled; it is more probable that the various prints and paintings that a person may have seen would have formed a kind of composite doxic image of Susanna in that person’s recollection. The *comedias* that emerged after the Renaissance artistic

tradition took hold create, as a result, both narrative and combinatory ekphrases, to use Frederick de Armas's categories of ekphrasis, which "can be... combinatory (combining two or more works of art)... or it can tell the story depicted in the art work (narrative ekphrasis)" (*Ekphrasis*, 22). Or, in Tamar Yacobi's term, these ekphrastic *comedias* contain narrative ekphrases not of single works, but of "pictorial models" (601).

Yacobi explains that, while ekphrastic theory often focuses on literary works which describe or allude to a single work of art, many literary works also contain interesting ekphrases referring not to a specific picture, but to a whole tradition of images (600-603). For example, "when Nabokov describes a scene in a Parisian restaurant in terms of *The Last Supper* or when Isak Dinesen views two embracing sisters as 'maidenly Laocoöns,' they are not alluding to any specific picture or statue but to a pictorial model, a common denominator, a generalized visual image" (601). Furthermore, Yacobi observes, such pictorial models can be found in one work of literature or in many, "as when a writer, a school, or an age revisits a certain image (e.g., a landscape topos) common to various paintings" (603). My argument is that a pictorial model of the Susanna story emerged in which Susanna resembled Venus and does not appear to resist the elders' intrusion, and that the seventeenth-century works of Spanish literature that I discuss respond to this pictorial model as much as they do to Daniel 13. The works that I analyze in this chapter and the one that follows create ekphrases not of any single work of art, but of this pictorial model, which was familiar to the Spanish public more through the circulation of prints than through direct contact with oil paintings. To reinforce this argument, I will now delve into more detail about the circulation of artistic prints, and a few widely-circulated *Susanna* prints that form a part of this pictorial model.

The technology required to mass produce high-quality engravings and etchings, and the culture of their wide circulation throughout Europe, both arose at the same time as the tradition of seductive Venetian Susannas, in the 1550s. Although woodcut prints had been in use in Europe for more than a century, Antony Griffiths explains that the “print trade was transformed in the 1550s by the rise of copperplate production with the growth of expertise in engraving and etching” (216). The main centers of print production between the 1550s and the 1580s were Antwerp, Rome, and Venice, but by the 1580s, Antwerp dominated the trade (216). Very few prints were produced in Spain at this time, but prints produced in Antwerp were distributed across Spain, especially after the Spanish captured the city in 1585. Griffiths continues: “Spanish control kept open a huge international market in Catholic imagery, while in the seventeenth century Rubens and his successors showed a concern for publishing prints that had been matched by few painters before them” (216).

That the market was vast and international is demonstrated by the sheer quantity of prints that were produced in Antwerp during this period: “The rise of the great publishers in the 1550s was only possible thanks to the efficient distribution system that operated across Europe. Hieronymus Cock and his widow issued some 2,000 plates over 50 years, which would have led them to bankruptcy if they had only been selling within Antwerp” (Griffiths 286). Famous artists such as Dürer, Titian and Rubens personally employed people to distribute their prints out of town (288), while publishers often sent stock to book and fairs to trade with publishers from afar, increasing circulation (289). While there is insufficient documentary evidence to describe the international print trade with precision, Griffiths notes that it was active and voluminous: “The packing lists of prints loaded onto wagons travelling from Paris to Madrid in the first decade of

the seventeenth century record huge deliveries: one in July 1605 contained 21,000 engraved devotional prints” (303).

These widely circulating prints could have a significant impact on an artist’s career, Griffiths notes: “Painters had to take notice of the print business and to decide how to engage with it... The international reputation and fame of artists was increasingly determined by whether prints were available of their designs” (251). Many painters, including Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, and Rubens employed engravers to make reproductions of their paintings.² David Landau and Peter Parshall point out that the notion of using prints to reproduce paintings was a recent one: “The earliest dated print that is a conscious reproduction of an independent, complete work of art is probably... [a rendition of] Raphael’s *The Transfiguration* from 1538” (166). After this, Landau and Parshall write, “when the floodgates opened, the tide was irresistible” (167).

Given the rapidly increasing importance of prints in enhancing an artist’s prestige, the new possibilities for the extensive circulation of prints, and the close relationship between the Spanish court and prominent Venetian painters, it is likely that printed reproductions of painted *Susannas* by Tintoretto, Veronese, and other Italian artists circulated in Spain, and were familiar to the Spanish public. This would also account for the rapid spread of the standard Renaissance depiction of Susanna, which originated in Venice in the 1550s and soon spread around Italy and across Europe. In addition to the printed reproductions of paintings of Susanna, there were many original Susanna images created for distribution as prints.

Some painters, including José de Ribera and Annibale Carracci, created a number of engravings themselves, although they devoted themselves primarily to painting. Annibale Carracci learned engraving from his brother Agostino, and later, in works like *Susanna and the*

² See Chapter II.

Elders, Annibale “turned to etching to produce ambitious and impressive prints” (Bury 70). The Annibale Carracci etching Bury mentions, from circa 1590, shows a typical Susanna composition: a sexy Susanna in a lush garden shows neither resistance nor alarm as she is approached by respectable-looking elders. Of this etching, H. Diane Russell writes: “In this print,



Figure 7: Annibale Carracci. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1590-1595. Etching with engraving. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

as in many contemporary examples of the theme, Susanna is shown as a voluptuous nude, posed like the crouching Venus, a well-known classical figure full of erotic implications” (57). Susanna reaches for a piece of drapery

to cover herself, Russell continues, but “her gesture does not reject the elders’ advances, and her glance almost conveys longing... As in most representations of the theme, there is no sense that Susanna is afraid of the two men or that she abhors their advances” (57). Russell’s comments on

Carracci's etching underline the continuity between this print and the painted images of Susanna, depicting her as willing and sensual. Mary D. Garrard observes that Susanna's pose here evokes the *Venus Anadyomene*, "a type known in numerous variants, whose association with the bath connects her [i.e. Venus] with Susanna on a luxurious and erotic level" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 153-154).

Not only is Annibale Carracci's Susanna crouching like the classical bathing Venus model, but the artist borrowed the upper body and face of Venus from one of his own paintings to create this Susanna. Ana González Mozo cites Tintoretto's *Susanna* now in the Prado as the model for the pose of Venus in Annibale's *Venus, Adonis and Cupid* in the same museum (75), observing that "the clear allusion to female figures from works by Veronese and Tintoretto suggests that the artist may not have used a model or painted the figure from life, rather that she



Figure 8: Annibale Carracci. *Venus and Adonis* (detail). Circa 1590. Courtesy of the Museo del Prado, Madrid.

was a synthesis of many different contemporary ideals of feminine beauty" (75). Diane DeGrazia Bohlin, however, cites previous scholars who have used the similarity between the painted Venus and the etched Susanna to date the etching:

"Bodmer dated this

etching c. 1595, Calvesi/Casale c. 1592, and Posner about 1590, the latter two mentioning the correspondence of the Susanna with the figure of Venus in the painting of *Venus and Adonis* in the Prado, Madrid” (444). While Annibale’s etching was an original design and not a copy of a painting, it was a design that typified the Renaissance iconography of Susanna paintings, with an especially close connection between the print and the Venus in one of his own paintings. He gives Susanna not only the same face as his Venus, but the same welcoming facial expression with which Venus gazes at her lover. The observer does not need to be versed in symbolism to understand the message. Susanna, like Venus, gazes at the arriving men as though she had been waiting for them, yearning for them. Venus’s breast bears the wound of Cupid’s arrow, evidence of how deeply she is enamored of Adonis; the Susanna figure is missing this detail, but her facial expression is that of a woman who has been similarly lovestruck. Many copies of this print survive, suggesting that it circulated widely and in large numbers.³ With its especially close connection between Susanna and Venus, this print must have played a significant role in changing the doxic image of Susanna from resistant victim to amorous temptress.

In Northern Europe, prints with Old Testament women as subjects were popular. Susan Dackerman analyzes the role of these prints, which may have been intended to have a didactic role in the Reformation. For example, as the Catholic model of celibacy was rejected, the prints may have served to remind women of the importance of having children. However, Dackerman wonders “to what extent did women have access to such prints, or even if women were indeed the intended audience” (2). If some Susanna prints might have been intended as exempla for

³ Copies are currently held in the Biblioteca Nacional de España, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia, to name but a few.

women, it is clear that the majority were intended for male consumption. As H. Diane Russell asserts:

Most of these [prints of Susanna] were made by men, for a largely male audience... And it is likely that Susanna's reputation for chastity added to the erotic appeal of the prints. Rubens, for example, while pointing to the chastity of Susanna in the inscription for one of the engravings he designed, nevertheless referred to the same image as a "galanteria" in writing to a male correspondent about it. For his part, the receiver of the letter had hoped that Rubens' *Susanna* would "be beautiful enough to enamour even old men." (32)



Figure 9: Peter Paul Rubens. *Susanna and the Elders*. Engraving. Circa 1620. Courtesy of the British Museum.

While the Susanna story could serve as an exemplary tale of chastity within marriage, Rubens and his patron were interested in a salacious image, context notwithstanding. As Elizabeth McGrath explains, Rubens published an engraving of Susanna and the Elders around 1620, for which he himself supplied a Latin inscription (81). The print was dedicated to Anna Roemer Visscher, "and when pictures of naked women were used to make public compliments to illustrious and respectable

female contemporaries, it was clearly essential to supply a moral that specifically relates to

chastity” (McGrath 84). While noting that this moral of the story was appropriate to the image, and a similar inscription had appeared on other Flemish Susanna prints, McGrath posits that “Rubens by no means thought that the scene was exclusively, or even primarily, a biblical exemplum of virtue, and it was certainly not painted by him, any more than it was by other artists, in order to give a moral lesson” (84). Citing the same epistolary exchange quoted above, McGrath concludes: “In his picture Rubens contrived that the modesty of Susanna, which would be emphasized in the dedication to Anna Visscher, actually enhances the erotic appeal; the heroine’s obvious annoyance that we, the spectators, are spying on her naked charms makes us only too conscious that the artist has invited us to follow the example of the Elders and do just this” (84). McGrath argues that Rubens consciously adopted the pattern established by Italian painters in the previous century, creating images that encourage the viewer to identify with the elders. But instead of implying Susanna’s complicity, Rubens uses her opposition to heighten the eroticism, showing the elders touching a resisting Susanna, pulling her clothes away, and pushing the story away from being a voyeurism fantasy and towards being a rape fantasy.

Near the end of the sixteenth century, Agostino Carracci created a Susanna print that must have played a role in the turn toward sadistic treatments of the story. Agostino often made print reproductions of works by painters, and created engravings after Tintoretto paintings in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice (DeGrazia 258). No prints that Agostino may have made of Tintoretto’s *Susanna* survive, but given the relationship between the two artists, it seems possible that he made one.⁴ Agostino also created his own print of Susanna. As DeGrazia writes, this series of fifteen prints came to be called the *Lascivie* “because of their specific sexual references.

⁴ The standard depiction of Susanna in the Renaissance spread rapidly and far beginning in the 1550s, suggesting that prints played a role in its dissemination. Tintoretto’s canvas now in Vienna appears to have been a model for many of the later *Susannas* created by other artists.

They have been lumped together by writers even though they are dissimilar in subject matter and often in format... Whether Agostino meant for these all to be a series is unknown, since the only common ground they share is their erotic intent” (289). Most of the subjects are mythological, with *Susanna* and *Lot and His Daughters* being the only images with a biblical origin. This series of prints emerged in the post-Tridentine period and “caused the wrath of Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605), who rebuked Agostino for his lack of decorum” (DeGrazia 289). Despite the Pope’s disapproval, DeGrazia explains, “Agostino’s *Lascivie* seem to have been widely circulated, as judged by the numerous examples in poor condition, indicative of overuse of the



Figure 10: Agostino Carracci. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1590-1595. Engraving. Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum.

plate. The Counter-Reformation in Italy seems not to have assuaged the desire for sexually explicit art, which had a long tradition in both Italy and the north in the sixteenth century” (289).

Agostino’s *Susanna and the Elders*, from c. 1590-1595, shows Susanna as stark naked, resisting as one elder grapples with her and the other looks on, leaning against a column. This elder who stands apart has one hand clutched to his chest while the other disappears behind the column. This unseen hand has lifted his robes to take a position between his legs, as his face indicates his obscene pleasure. The look of

distress and panic on Susanna's face seems to only make him enjoy the scene more. The image makes the connection between voyeurism, arousal, and sexual violence disturbingly explicit, as this elder's excitement is heightened by the other one's physical domination of their victim. As Russell observed, this is an image "made by men, for a largely male audience" (32). In all of these printed Susannas, the male gaze is clearly in force.

II. The male gaze and audience identification

The pictorial model of Susanna, as established in these prints, as well as in the paintings I discussed in Chapter II, creates an eroticized version of the heroine that deviates from the biblical text. The plays I discuss in this chapter attempt to stage *both* of these Susannas for their audiences: the eminently chaste matron and the Venus-like vixen. As a result, the figure of Susanna ends up being at odds with herself. The characters of the elders are also contradictory, presented as both poetically enamored *galanes*, deserving of the audience's sympathy, and villains deserving of their contempt. In order to understand the gendered dynamic behind this interplay, I will employ theories about the male gaze and how it functions in art and cinema. As preparation for my analysis of the theatrical texts, this section gives a brief overview of these theories.

As John Berger observed in 1972, the way that images of women were presented changed over time, from Renaissance paintings to twentieth-century magazines and television. "But the essential way of seeing women," Berger writes, "the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in a quite different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him" (64). Here, Berger succinctly defines what Laura Mulvey would term "the male gaze" three years later. Mulvey's 1975 article

“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” launched the use of the term, and continues to exert a strong influence in feminist theory and studies of visual arts, as well as cinema. In setting forth her definition of the male gaze, she gives examples of non-cinematic erotic spectacle:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire. (442)

As Mulvey indicates, the male gaze operates in still images (pin-ups) and in theatrical settings (strip-tease and Ziegfeld) as well as in the cinema. Though she is focused on the twentieth-century phenomenon of motion pictures, her analysis can be applied to far older forms of erotic spectacle. One could say that Susanna was among the most popular pin-ups of the sixteenth century. The paintings of her are “coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (442): she is displayed as a sexual object, and this takes precedence over the meaning of the story.

Mulvey contrasts the iconic, static female figures in film with the active male figure: “He is a figure in a landscape. Here the function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception” (443). This natural human perception is assumed to be male; this is so deeply encoded in our culture that people of any gender operate under the assumption that male is the default. The actual hero of the Susanna story, Daniel, is male; but the climactic trial scene offers a far less enticing possibility for erotic spectacle. Therefore, the paintings depict the bath scene. In Daniel’s absence, the elders are the only characters in the story who can reproduce “the so-called natural conditions of human perception” (443), because they are the only men there, and the audience cannot be expected to identify with

a female character. Furthermore, the situation—men spying on a woman who is bathing—is one that offers a great deal of satisfaction to the male gaze.

Scopophilia, as Mulvey explains, means “pleasure in looking” (440). Freud associated it with “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (440), a curiosity that begins in childhood, as children peep at others to learn about their surroundings. As a person matures, according to Freud, scopophilia “continues to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object. At the extreme, it can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other” (Mulvey 440). The story of Susanna and the elders is situated at the frontier between ordinary scopophilia and obsessive voyeurism. In the Bible, the elders’ voyeurism leads them to take criminal action; but many paintings, such as those by Tintoretto and Guercino, show them only as voyeurs, who have not yet made their presence known to Susanna. Furthermore, the nature of the image creates a situation in which the viewer of the painting joins the elders as their co-voyeur, all taking pleasure from their illicit view of Susanna. Their act of voyeurism is one that bearers of the male gaze are expected to identify with.

Annette Kuhn has theorized the pleasures of voyeurism, what she terms “lawless seeing,” giving an example of a photograph of a woman in a bathtub: “An attractive woman takes a solitary bath and is carried away by the sensuousness of it all. The spectator sneaks a look at her enjoyment of an apparently unselfconscious moment of pleasure in herself: the Peeping Tom’s favourite fantasy” (30). The photograph is almost a modern-day version of a Susanna image, though more explicit in both the realism and the degree of nudity, and without the elders. Here,

the viewer of the image is the only voyeur. In Kuhn's analysis, the voyeur wants to spy on a woman in an autoerotic moment in hopes of solving the mystery of woman:

The voyeur's conviction is that the riddle of femininity will ultimately yield its solution if he looks long enough and hard enough. Since his desire is pinned to the actual process of investigation/scrutiny, though, the maintenance of desire depends upon the riddle's solution remaining just out of sight... The spectator can indulge in the "lawless seeing" permitted by the photo's reassurance that the woman is unaware of his look. (30)

Kuhn's ideas help to account for the enduring popularity of the spying-on-a-bathing-woman trope in art and pornography, and for some of the special fascination that Tintoretto's Vienna *Susanna* (Figure 1) has held for beholders. In this image, Susanna seems to be intent on her own reflection (although her reflection does not appear in the mirror), paying no heed to the elders or the spectator of the canvas. He is free to enjoy his "lawless seeing" with the double comfort that not only is Susanna unaware of his presence, but that he is only living vicariously through the gaze of the elders, and is thus not doing anything wrong himself. The conventions of mainstream cinema, Mulvey writes, "portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy" (440). This sense of separation is found in Susanna images where the viewer is encouraged to spy on Susanna with the elders, while imagining that he remains free of guilt.⁵

Renaissance images of Susanna, like the majority of female nudes, often seem to be aimed exclusively at a male audience. Carol Duncan argues, however, that these images work to compel women to internalize misogyny, and that the art "we have learned to recognize and

⁵ Arguing that both art and theater existed in hermetically sealed worlds, Denis Diderot used the example of paintings of Susanna to illustrate the autonomy and guiltlessness of the viewer. In *Pensées détachées*, he writes: "The canvas encloses all the space, and there is no one beyond it. When Susannah exposes her naked body to my eyes, protecting herself against the elders' gaze with all the veils that enveloped her, Susannah is chaste and so is the painter. Neither the one nor the other knew I was there" (quoted in Fried, 96).

respond to as erotic is frequently about the power and supremacy of men over women” (109).

Rather than assume that all viewers are men, she considers the impact of these images on the consciousness of women:

[T]he nude, in her passivity and impotence, is addressed to women as much as to men. Far from being merely an entertainment for males, the nude, as a genre, is one of many cultural phenomena that teaches women to see themselves through male eyes and in terms of dominating male interests. While it sanctions and reinforces in men the identification of virility with domination, it holds up to women self-images in which even sexual self-expression is prohibited. As ideology, the nude shapes our awareness of our deepest human instincts in terms of domination and submission so that the supremacy of the male ‘I’ prevails on that most fundamental level of experience. (113)

Following Duncan’s argument, art teaches women to apply the male gaze to other women and themselves, seeing themselves as objects and identifying with the men in images of Susanna and the elders. The many images of Susanna that invite the audience to identify with the elders can be read, from this perspective, as portraying the elders as sympathetic to both men and women.

Mieke Bal uses the term “focalization” to replace “point of view,” or what I describe as “audience identification,” to discuss the phenomenon of viewer or reader’s sympathy switching from Susanna to the elders. Analyzing the biblical story, Bal finds tension in the focalization, such as at the trial: “the narrator says, ‘She was closely veiled, but those scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty’” (10). When the narrator describes the elders as scoundrels, Bal writes, there is “no room for moral ambiguity” (10).

However:

Only when focalization is embedded, and the elders are assigned the power to present their own focalization, does focalization come to provoke the specific reading attitude of male voyeurism. Yet the embedded clause, “so that they may feast their eyes on her beauty,” insinuates the focalization of the elders into the framing “righteous” perspective. Although the unveiling is condemned, the visual feast is promised by the same token. Perniciously, the moral dimension of the tale absorbs the pornographic one and provides the innocent reader with an excuse to anticipate the pleasure *sanctioned*, rather than countered, by the moral indignation. (10, emphasis in the original)

Many critics see the general tradition of paintings as a contradiction of the story,⁶ but Bal disagrees. In Bal's reading, the elders' invented tale of seeing Susanna with a young man represents a hallucinatory wish-fulfillment fantasy. The elders describe the young man doing what they would like to have done, but were not able to do: Susanna did not desire them, and they feared they might be impotent. The visual description of this imagined tryst that the elders give at the trial is the basis of the artistic tradition, Bal argues: "I contend that the Susanna story holds the germs of the pornographic flavor which later became its sole motivation in the painterly tradition. In the hallucinatory quality of the elders' account lies the implicitly pornographic aspect of the biblical story" (11). Bal emphasizes the visual language with which the elders recount the story that they have invented, in which they catch Susanna with a young man who flees the scene. She argues that Renaissance artists depicted the hallucinatory fantasy that existed in the elders' minds, in which they substituted themselves for this fictitious virile youth. Images such as the Annibale Carracci print (Figure 7) support this argument, as Susanna gazes at the approaching elders in exactly the same way that Venus gazes at Adonis.

More sadistic images of Susanna, however, complicate this view. Agostino Carracci's print of Susanna (Figure 10), in which one elder brutalizes her while the other masturbates with vicious glee, upholds Bal's observation that the elders may have feared their own impotence, but shows a satirical version in which this fear is displayed to the viewer of the print. Nevertheless, the viewer is also free to draw erotic enjoyment from the depiction of Susanna's abuse. The Bible may have encouraged artists to depict the elders' fantasy, but these artists were also making the most of the Bible's being "fraught with background" (9), in Auerbach's term, to read the story in a variety of different ways. The Bible does not state that Susanna was already in the

⁶ These critics include Mary D. Garrard ("Artemisia and Susanna") and Dan W. Clanton, who read the tradition of paintings and prints as a perversion of the biblical story. See Chapter II, section II.

bath as the elders spied on her, but the elders clearly wanted to see her naked. Inspired by their impious lust, painters created the image the elders wanted. The Bible does not specify that the elders physically assaulted Susanna, but it leaves room to imagine that an assault took place. Knowing that such images might be pleasing to sadistic consumers, artists created them. The vague biblical narration of these details allows artists to create a web of complicated identification in which the viewer loses track of whom he is supposed to pity or condemn.

As Kuhn observes, the voyeur's delight rests on his not being detected; and yet, in the Rubens and Agostino Carracci prints, Susanna's resistance to physical assault also heightens the pleasure. And in all of these images, as Bal astutely points out, the moral indignation on Susanna's behalf does not counter the viewer's pleasure, but rather *sanctions* it (10). She continues:

Ultimately, the sense in which focalization, as a narrative position, and voyeurism, as an erotic one, join forces is related to the status of visual technique itself. The distinction between gaze and glance is also related to the technical issue of visual representation: it is certainly not coincidental that the perfection of voyeurism was offered in the twentieth century through the technical perfection of the cinema. (15)

The technical perfection of the cinema certainly brought with it an abundance of commentary about voyeurism, which has been helpful in theorizing voyeuristic aspects of much older forms of art. Christian Metz considers the relationship between voyeurism and exhibitionism in live performances, as opposed to cinema: "Voyeurism which is not too sadistic (there is none which is not so at all) rests on a kind of *fiction*... sometimes institutionalised as in the theatre or striptease, a fiction that stipulates that the object 'agrees,' that it is therefore exhibitionist... 'Since it is there, it must like it'" (62). Metz's observations are helpful in envisioning the tradition of Susanna images as occupying a spectrum: while all of them are sadistic to some degree, the ones in which the elders are not physically assaulting Susanna fit very well with this description of

depicting Susanna as a willing object of their gaze. She is objectified so completely that she can be referred to with an impersonal object pronoun (“Since it is there, it must like it”), but her exhibitionism is demonstrated in her face and her posture. We see this in the knowing smile of Tintoretto’s Vienna Susanna (Figure 1), in the curious expression of Veronese’s Prado Susanna (Figure 4), in the loving returned gaze of Susanna in Annibale Carracci’s print (Figure 7). But, as Metz continues, this type of image only serves up to the point at which “the object’s refusal and constraint” (62) are necessary to the viewer. At this point, the images tip into overtly sadistic images such as the Agostino Carracci and Rubens prints discussed above. Metz continues that in the theater, this impression of the object’s cooperation in voyeurism remains in effect “despite the distance instituted by the look—which transforms the object into a *picture* (a ‘*tableau vivant*’) and thus tips it over into the imaginary, even in its real presence” (62). This *tableau vivant* effect is only heightened in the theater when what is seen onstage evokes an image the viewer has seen before.

III. Santa Susana

In the mid-sixteenth century, Diego Sánchez de Badajoz adapted the Susanna story for use as a Corpus Christi play, with a religious message for the audience. In the post-Lope Spanish *comedia*, biblical stories were adapted alongside stories from history, classical mythology, and folklore. In Raquel Minian de Alfie’s view, both Luis Vélez de Guevara and Guillén de Castro made use of the Susanna story from the Bible “como un tema más, adaptable a la comedia del siglo de oro. Por ello también las tramas se han complicado, de acuerdo con el gusto estético del barroco” (188). As Minian de Alfie indicates, stories from the Bible were exploited more for their dramatic potential than for their spiritual content. Isaac Benabu agrees: “Lo que se pretende al dramatizar lo bíblico en las obras que se representaron en los corrales, es decir, en el teatro

público, es el potencial teatral de las escrituras santas, y no lo ejemplar. En contraste absoluto con el discurso bíblico, lo que interesa [al dramaturgo] es lo conflictivo, lo trágico” (60). The three plays I discuss in this chapter were presented as secular theatrical works, but some of the moralizing elements of the biblical tales remain in place.

While playwrights mined the Bible for compelling tales, another attractive aspect of adapting these stories was that they were already familiar, as Francisco Florit Durán observes:

[L]os autores de piezas teatrales bíblicas ofrecen al público un argumento conocido, que no procede de sus propias minervas, sino que en virtud de la cultura bíblica de los espectadores, proveniente fundamentalmente de los sermones escuchados en las iglesias e incluso de obras literarias y teatrales que habían anteriormente abordado el mismo asunto, ponen sobre el escenario historias sabidas de antemano por el público de los corrales. (32)

Florit Durán does not mention another route by which these stories would have been familiar to the theatergoing public: the visual arts. Due to the prevalence of the Susanna image in both paintings and prints, Susanna was familiar to the audience perhaps more as an image than as a narrative. As with the story of Abraham and Isaac, the image had become detached from its source narrative. As I showed in the first section of this chapter, prints of the Susanna story circulated widely throughout Europe, and were affordable even among the lower classes. The *estampero* scene in *La viuda valenciana*, which I discussed in Chapter II, gives us an idea of how vendors of artistic prints circulated in Spanish cities, and were figures familiar to the audience. Surviving prints conform with the standard depiction of Susanna in the paintings I discussed in the previous chapter, and it is likely that reproductive prints of some of these paintings circulated, but have been lost. All of these formed the pictorial model to which the plays refer. While the paintings of Susanna I have discussed would have been unknown to much of the theatergoing public, the pictorial model would have been familiar by means of these affordable and easily portable prints. The way that the plays I discuss in this chapter and the next linger on

bath scene is itself evidence that the playwrights expected their audiences to be familiar with the doxic image of a bathing Susanna: the bath scene is presented as a centerpiece and a highlight, the spectacle that the audience came to see. Given that the bath does not even occur in the Bible, its prominent position in the plays indicates that the playwrights knew the audience would have seen bathing Susannas in art, and would be expecting and looking forward to this scene in their plays.

The Susanna plays all mix in other chapters from the Book of Daniel, indicating that the biblical text was an important source for these adaptations. But the pictorial model exerted a heavy influence on the plays. In presenting the bath scene, the plays succumb to the temptation to exaggerate the salacious possibilities of the story. These possibilities emerge from the lack of externalized detail in the Bible, as Auerbach observed, and were made more accessible to the artists because of the elders' licentiousness, as Bal argues. But the images themselves are what the playwrights consciously evoke, creating works that are as much narrative ekphrases of their pictorial model as they are retellings of the biblical story.

*Santa Svsana, comedia famosa de Lvys Velez de Gvevara*⁷ was printed in an *edición suelta*, without any indication of date or place or publication. Forrest Eugene Spencer and Rudolph Schevill suppose that Guillén de Castro's *Las maravillas de Babilonia* may have been a source for Vélez de Guevara (112-113), in which case *Santa Susana* would date to sometime after 1625. Raquel Minian de Alfie argues that *Santa Susana* was more likely the source text for *Las maravillas de Babilonia* (183-185). Neither argument is supported by conclusive evidence.

⁷ Luis Vélez de Guevara was born in Écija, Andalucía. Piedad Bolaños Donoso states that he was born in late July of 1579, and baptised on the first of August (10-11), while C. George Peale states that there is contradictory evidence indicating that he was born in either 1578 or 1579 (244). After time in the military, serving in Italy and the Levant, "Vélez followed the king and government to Madrid, where he enjoyed the favor and patronage of nobility and royalty" (Peale 244). He appears to have been friendly with Lope de Vega, who praised his writing in *Laurel del Apolo* (Bolaños Donoso 19). He died in Madrid on November 10, 1644, leaving behind more than 400 *comedias* (Bolaños Donoso 21).

Vélez de Guevara names his two elders Sedechias and Acab, while Guillén de Castro names his Joaquín and Acab. Similar names were attributed to the elders in early Christian exegesis,⁸ so this fact does not necessarily indicate whether either playwright was familiar with the other's work. Both plays combine the Susanna story with other episodes from the book of Daniel, though Vélez's play only incorporates Daniel as a kind of *deus ex machina* to wrap up each act. At just over 2200 lines, *Santa Susana* is significantly shorter than *Las maravillas de Babilonia*. It is more focused on Susana, and follows the biblical text more closely, than does Castro's play. Under the circumstances, we can only state that *Santa Susana* most likely dates to sometime between 1610 and 1640.

Early in Act I of *Santa Susana*, Joachim asks Elcias, Susanna's father, for her hand in marriage. Vélez stretches the very brief Susanna narrative by staging her marriage to Joachim in the first act. This eliminates the plural children that they have in the Bible, but gives Joachim something to do. Joachim begins his petition with a lengthy description of his great wealth, built on the foundation of some jewels he brought with him into captivity.⁹ Joachim goes on to describe his large estate, and gives a typical Renaissance *locus amoenus* description of the garden. Elcias replies that Joachim would be a good match for his daughter, and opines that any man who finds a decent and faithful wife has experienced rare good fortune:

Que aquel que mujer hallò	270
sabia, honrada, y virtuosa,	
a la fortuna vencio;	
porque es en el mundo cosa	
que a pocos se concedio.	
Y no ay caso, al parecer,	275
mas dificil que emprender,	
dichosas que son hallar	

⁸ See Chapter I, note 8.

⁹ With this narrative, Vélez de Guevara offers a possible explanation for an issue that biblical exegetes have long used as evidence that the Susanna story is apocryphal: Joachim's great wealth and large garden do not fit with the social conditions of the Jews during the Babylonian captivity.

vn amigo, acertar
a elegir buena muger.
Que los que son mercaderes 280
de esto, con otro decoro
tratan tales pareceres,
que ay minas de plata y oro,
y no de buenas mugeres. (270-284)

While Joachim has just described his material wealth at length, Elcias posits that it is he who possesses the real treasure: good women are rarer than silver or gold. Both characters will elaborate on this Siglo de Oro commonplace about women's general untrustworthiness and inclination to adultery later in the play. Here, Elcias describes his daughter as one of the very few good women, without specifying exactly what is bad about other women (this goes without saying). Elcias goes on to describe Susanna's beauty and virtue using metaphors of material wealth:

Ventanas son de cristal 310
de la casa desta huerta,
sus ojos luz celestial;
y su boca hermosa puerta,
con vmbrales de coral.
En aquesta casa viue 315
vn alma hermosa, de quien
nobleça inmortal recibe,
dotada del mayor bien
que el mundo del caso escriue. (310-319)

Through his lengthy *culterano*¹⁰ description, Elcias describes Susanna as a parallel to the house Joachim has just described, assuring him that her decency and good reputation will provide him with legitimate children, and that this is a treasure greater than Joachim's material wealth. While Góngora and other Baroque poets used metaphors of crystal, jewels, and gold to describe the beauty of a beloved woman, Elcias speaks of his daughter this way to sell her to Joachim, despite

¹⁰ As Peale points out, "Vélez introduced Gongorism into the *comedia*" (249).

the fact that he is unable to offer a dowry. In describing her as containing wealth, he is establishing a transactional relationship that makes a dowry unnecessary, even redundant.

Elcias's metaphorical description of Susanna's body as a house that encloses her also refer to the Renaissance mistrust of woman and the culture of enclosure that surrounded them. Peter Stallybrass summarizes the idea that women's bodies must be subjected to constant supervision: "The surveillance of woman concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house. These three areas were frequently collapsed into each other. The connection between speaking and wantonness was common to legal discourse and conduct books" (126). Thus, Elcias's description of Susanna's mouth as "hermosa puerta, / con vmbrales de coral" (313-314) operates on three levels: not only is Susanna worth her weight in gold and precious stones, not only is she beautiful in the way a *culterano* poet would describe beauty, but her mouth is also protected by her prudence and by Elcias's caution. This last connotation refers to "the Renaissance *topos* that presents woman as that treasure which, however locked up, always escapes. She is the gaping mouth, the open window, the body that 'transgresses its own limits' and negates all those boundaries without which property could not be constituted" (Stallybrass 128). Before she is married, before the elders have impugned her honor, Susanna's beauty and virginity are presented as unimpeachable and rare. Elcias has upheld his responsibility of keeping Susanna enclosed, her virginity secure, and now he is transferring this responsibility to Joachim.

Marcia L. Welles suggests that "virginity and chastity are, in fact, fetishized: female purity is prized in and for itself; its value, institutionalized in strict behavioral codes, is both personal and social" (31). With this fetishization in place, she continues, objectification follows naturally: "Fetishization of necessity implies reification, and a fetish that has the female as its

object involves a cruel act of dehumanization, a synecdochic reduction of a whole person to a part—the organ of reproduction” (33). Susanna’s chastity is a *hortus conclusus* that the audience already knows will be invaded by lustful old men, and this description of her serves as ironic foreshadowing of this breach of the “walls” of her “house”: as hard as Elcias and Joachim have tried, Susanna will not uphold their unblemished honor. As Elcias has already noted, good women are rarer than gold. These metaphors of a secure fortress maintain the misogynistic thread of suspicion about women’s honor that runs throughout the play. They also serve as allusive ekphrases to the bath scene to come, in which the old men invade Susanna’s private sanctuary.

Simultaneously, this lengthy description of her beauty reminds the audience of the Venus-like Susannas they have seen depicted in prints like the ones I discussed in section I, and prepares them to see the bath scene as a dramatic ekphrasis of this pictorial model. To make sure that the audience does not miss the connection between his description and the visual arts, Elcias says to Joachim as Susanna approaches: “mas si escuchaste el retrato, / contempla el original” (348-349). Here, as in all of her scenes in this play, Susanna enters only after a man has delivered a prolonged description of her appearance.¹¹ The memory of her image precedes her everywhere she goes. Moreover, the synesthetic combination of the noun *retrato* with the verb *escuchar* underlines the ekphrastic nature of this description. Although Elcias talks of her good reputation with the people, the bad reputation Susanna has acquired through Renaissance art looms over her throughout the play.

¹¹ In her discussion of Juan Luis Vives’s 1523 *De institutione feminae Christianae*, Welles observes that, according to Vives, “It is in not speaking, and not being spoken about, that a woman best fulfills her paradigmatic role... Modesty also demands that the maiden ‘should not desire to see or be seen’” (25). Susanna gives no indication of desiring to be seen in this play, and yet men describe her appearance before every one of her entrances. Through no fault of her own, Susanna has failed to meet Vives’s requirement that woman not be spoken about.

In her first scene, Susanna does little more than assure her father that she will marry whomever he selects for her: “Si tu ves que me conuiene, / yo no tengo voluntad” (368-369). They agree to marry, and Elcias goes to see Nebuchadnezzar to lament the captivity of his people and ask that Sedechias and Acab be made judges. Nebuchadnezzar agrees, then inquires about Susanna, whom he wishes to take for a concubine (533). Elcias refuses, and Nebuchadnezzar begins kicking him viciously, until Daniel makes his first appearance and convinces the king to stop. The act ends with Susanna and Joachim’s wedding. The two elders, guests at the wedding, express their incipient impure thoughts as they gaze at the bride:

ACAB.	Amor, que es esto! en la fria sangre de mi pecho enciendes el tuyo, que de mi dia a tan poca luz pretendes, ver con tan loca porfia? Ay, Susana, loco estoy de mirar tus ojos bellos!	765
SED.	Donde sin camino vas, Susana? de tu cabellos cuelga el alma que te doy. Que es esto, Amor! que has traçado en aqueste puerto elado de mi vejez torpe y ciego; y passandole tu fuego, dexa su yelo abrasado? (763-777)	770 775

Here, both elders use language typical of love poetry to describe themselves as victims of Susanna’s beauty and Cupid’s whimsy. The elders make themselves sympathetic to the audience by describing their feelings with the words of *galanes* in other plays who might win their *dama* in the end. The issue of what Bal calls focalization emerges here: the characters of the elders urge the audience to identify with them and see them as sympathetic. The personification of Amor reminds the audience of the Venus-like Susannas they have seen in art, further enforcing the connection through literary allusion. Both elders cite a change in their temperature: they were

cold, as was appropriate to their age, and are both surprised that the flame of love could ignite them at this point in their lives. Sedechias revives the imagery of the portal, this time a metaphor for his own old age, a defense which has failed to keep Cupid out: “Que es esto, Amor! que has traçado / en aqueste puerto elado / de mi vejez torpe y ciego” (773-775). The god of love has not respected the boundaries of his stage of life, and in the next act Sedechias will not respect the boundaries of Susanna’s private garden.

The lengthy bath scene gets underway early in the second act, with one of the elders entering from each wing, sharing a sonnet in alternating lines:

ACAB. Donde caminas pensamiento mio!
SEDE. Donde me lleuas pensamiento loco!
ACAB. Como con la vejez no te prouoco!
SED. Como a mi edad arrastra un desvario!
ACAB. En el viento sin alas me confio.
SED. Al Sol, siendo tiniebla, tengo en poco.
ACAB. Corriendo al mal, el desengaño toco.
SED. Al daño a ciegas vas, sin aluedrio.
ACAB. Refrenate liuiano pensamiento.
SED. Bueluete atrás liuiana fantasia.
ACAB. Edad caduca enmienda el loco intento.
SED. Pero aliente el amor mi cobardia.
ACAB. Amor me dé su raro atreuimiento.
SED. Vença el cuydado.
ACAB. Rinda la porfia.
SED. Acab.
ACAB. Sedequias. (942-956)

Both the Bible and the artistic tradition depict the elders as essentially one person, and here their shared sonnet accentuates how united they are in their Petrarchan feelings: the irresistible pull of the beloved arouses feigned repentance and simulated shame, as they plead with their own better judgment to stop them from what they are doing, even as they lurk in Susanna’s garden hoping to catch a glimpse of her. They offer pseudo-laments that Amor is making it impossible for them to do what they know is right. They acknowledge their thoughts and fantasies as “liuianos” (950

and 951), evoking Bal's analysis that it was their fantasy that the artists depicted. In the divided final line, each expresses a final insincere hope that caution will prevail, before the sonnet reaches its abrupt conclusion when they spot each other.

At first, both pretend they were there looking for each other. Finally, each confesses to the other that he loves Susanna. Acab asks Sedechias "quando buelue Ioachin / de su heredad?" (1028-1029), explaining Joachim's peculiar silence in the Bible by specifying that he is away, and the elders are spying on his wife in his absence. Rather than agreeing beforehand to act together, the elders nearly get into a physical altercation over which of them will compel the other to leave the garden, but their quarrel is interrupted by the arrival of one of Susanna's maids. This entire extended scene is a prologue to the narrative ekphrasis of the bath scene, as the elders describe their hidden position in the garden and their intentions to spy on Susanna there, foreshadowing her appearance. As usual in this play, Vélez has male characters describe Susanna at length before she appears.

Susanna's two maids, like the elders, do not have names in Daniel 13. Vélez names them Delbora and Sesa, and has Delbora enter first, singing. Acab and Sedechias quickly agree to hide behind some trees, further setting the stage for the narrative ekphrasis that follows, as the stage direction reads "*Entra Susana dando el tocado a vna criada llamada Sesa, como que se desnuda, y entrase cantando*" (between lines 1132 and 1133). The three women cross the stage as Susanna is beginning to undress, tantalizingly taking off only her head covering. She disappears again into the other wing before the elders emerge from their hiding place and describe what they supposedly see, just offstage, as Susanna's bath begins:

Vanse, y salen los viejos.
ACAB. Azia la fuente caminan,
que dà sombra aquel laurel,
desnudandose Susana. 1145

SED. Loco estoy, que emos de hazer?
 ACAB. Que entrambos, la conquistemos;
 porque ya nuestra vejez
 no està para competencias.
 SED. Pues esto acaba de ser. 1150
 ACAB. Aora va descubriendo
 de aquel hermoso y cruel
 pecho la nieve y el fuego
 que sabe elar y encender.
 Blanco de nuestros suspiros, 1155
 de adonde bueluen despues
 encendidos y abrasados,
 con ser nieue la que ven.
 SED. Ya de la fuente el cristal
 se comiença a encender 1160
 salpicando con aljofar
 donde toca con los pies.
 Y la estatua de alabastro,
 de aquel divino pinzel,
 del plasmador de los cielos 1165
 se va començando a ver.
 Ya entre mis cenizas frias
 comiença el rescoldo a arder
 brasas de la mocedad,
 centellas de la vejez. 1170
 ACAB. Ya Delbora, y Cesa, sola
 la dexan, al parecer,
 esta es notable ocasion.
 SED. Pues no perdella.
 ACAB. Alto, pues.
 SED. Por entre estos terebintos 1175
 cubiertos yremos bien.
 ACAB. Vna tigre he de rendir.
 SED. Vn marmol he de vencer.

Entran Delbora, y Sesa. (1143-1178)

The extent to which Vélez delights in the bath scene shows the strong visual attraction that the Susanna story held for Baroque theatrical aesthetic. Rina Walthaus, whose analysis focuses on “cómo se presentan en [las comedias] el tema de la castidad y el famoso episodio del baño de Susana” (1830), observes that in this scene Vélez “explota el elemento físico y erótico de la

escena del baño, aunque es, por supuesto, dentro de los límites que impone el género teatral” (1836).

As I discussed in Chapter II, Antonio Sánchez Jiménez hypothesizes that Lope avoided writing a Susanna play because, “debido a su naturaleza *voyeurística*, la escena exigía una parada de la trama narrativa, algo no muy recomendable en el arte escénico” (*El pincel y el Fénix* 299-300). Here Vélez creates a lengthy “parada de la trama narrativa,” or in other words, an ekphrasis. Susanna’s actual uncovering of her beautiful and cruel chest of snow could not be shown on stage, but eliminating this scene would deprive the audience of what the doxic image had led them to expect: the scene in which the elders watch Susanna bathe. The artistic tradition had created a doxa in which this scene was assumed to be an integral part of the story,¹² and that doxa was responsible for a large part of the story’s enduring appeal.

The impossibility of having the actress playing Susanna disrobe on stage was not the only obstacle to staging an actual *tableau vivant* of the bath scene; the walled garden with its fountain would have been difficult to recreate on stage, given the limited scenery available. As Elizabeth Marie Cruz Peterson explains, “Lope de Vega and his contemporaries, who wrote primarily for a stage without curtains, scenery, wings or lighting, aimed to please the audience aurally, probably more so than visually” (47). Under these circumstances, an ekphrastic evocation of the doxic image was an expedient solution: the audience was able to enjoy a salacious scene of voyeurism in which only the voyeurs remained on stage. The technique of ekphrasis created Susanna’s bath within the imagination of each audience member. Vélez understood that he had to walk the fine line between, on the one hand, presenting a morality tale in which sinners got their just deserts,

¹² Sánchez Jiménez views this scene as integral enough that he sees the difficulty of staging it as Lope’s reason for avoiding the subject entirely; the idea of writing a Susanna play in which the main character keeps her clothes on is unthinkable, even if it would represent a more faithful adaptation of Daniel 13.

and on the other, offering his public a titillating spectacle within the limits of theatrical decency. The pictorial tradition had led the audience to expect an erotic display, and it is through an extended ekphrastic description of this pictorial model that Vélez evokes the image of a completely nude Susanna that the audience imagines.

While scholars disagree on whether or not the biblical text contains erotic elements, they do agree that eroticism is both centered and heightened in the artistic tradition. It is this tradition to which Vélez is clearly referring with the highly visual descriptive poetry he puts into the mouths of his elders here. This scene pauses the narrative and stretches the mention of the bath into a languorous scene of undressing. Lest the audience's perception become too frozen as they imagine a painted or printed scene, Vélez keeps the action flowing with gerunds and continuous tenses: "desnudándose" (1145), "va descubriendo [el pecho]" (1151), "se comienza a encender" (1160), "se va comenzando a ver" (1166). With these vivid descriptions of ongoing movement, the elders paint a scene that unfolds in the audience's imagination in slow motion, a kind of ekphrastic guided meditation in which the audience has no choice but to identify completely with elders. While paintings show the elders in such a way that the viewer sees himself as *another* voyeur, a *third* elder, Vélez puts his audience in the position of wishing to see what the elders are describing.¹³ Instead of joining them in the scene with a conspiratorial giggle, the viewer now envies them and wishes to take their place.

If, as Bal proposes, the artistic tradition was based on the elders' fantasy, then Vélez's elders reappropriate their own fantasy from the artists, describing a composite vision of the works created by so many visual artists. Meanwhile the distance between the stage and the

¹³ This situation, in which it is clear that a voyeur character in the story sees a naked woman while the audience sees him watching her, thus displacing the woman's nudity into the audience's mind, occurs in a strikingly similar way in *Psycho* (see Chapter V).

audience “transforms the object into a *picture* (a ‘*tableau vivant*’) and thus tips it over into the imaginary, even in its real presence” (Metz 62). The play exists in a frontier space between text and image in which meanings cross and overlap, and Susanna is objectified in a circle of verbal and visual representations. As if aware of his own complicated reappropriation of her image, Acab refers to the “divine paintbrush” (1164) or perhaps, in this context, “the divine hand of the artist,”¹⁴ that created Susanna: the hand is ostensibly that of God; but also that of a whole battalion of painters and engravers; and also his own, as he describes her to the audience; and also that of the audience, each member of which configures her in their imaginations according to his words, aligning them with the images of Susanna that he has seen before.

In explaining how the cinema is distinct from the theater, Laura Mulvey describes how “conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of the fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative; it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or an icon, rather than verisimilitude, to the screen” (443). This effect is produced by the close-up and not by a longer shot in which the film viewer sees the entire woman and her surroundings. When a woman is interacting with other characters, she can still participate in the narrative, but these close-ups convert her—a fragment of her—into a flat image, resembling a work of art. Metz holds that the distance between spectator and stage already transforms the onstage ensemble into a picture, and this effect can only be enhanced if what is happening onstage resembles a picture the audience has seen before. But Susanna is not on stage at this point: as Acab and Sedechias are describing the scene, the viewers insert Susanna into the empty space on stage, imagining a painting or an engraving like the ones they have seen, with Susanna

¹⁴ The DRAE gives “Mano que pinta” as the third definition of “pincel.”

perhaps now bearing a resemblance to the actress playing Susanna in the play, although she is not there at the moment. Vélez de Guevara's ekphrasis flattens the Renaissance space of the *corral* into the idealized Renaissance space the audience members have previously seen on canvas or paper.

In the cinema, Mulvey writes, the power of the camera to control the viewer's gaze is crucial: "Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself" (447). Indeed, the camera can focus on a particular part of an actress's body and force the audience to look only at that, while in the theater the audience can normally let their gaze rest upon whichever part of the actress they prefer—or, in this scene, on no part of her, for she has left the stage. Rather than controlling the viewer's gaze with camera movements, this scene "builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself" by taking the actress playing Susanna out of the picture while poetically evoking static, flattened works of art. When Susanna reemerges onto the scene, the viewer has already flattened her in his mind, and she appears before him now as he has seen her in art, in a combinatory ekphrasis now re-combined to include this actress.

In this case, if the company follows Vélez's stage direction, the audience soon sees a sadistic version of the scene, with the elders physically assaulting a disheveled Susanna. The two maids cross the stage again, talking about how hot it is, and how they are going inside to fetch "lo que es necesario / para el baño" (1187-1188).¹⁵ Delbora starts singing again as they exit, and meanwhile the elders have exited into the other wing, from the safety of which they now drag Susanna:

¹⁵ In the Bible, Susanna asks them for the oil and ointments in direct discourse. Due to the construction of this scene, with Susanna's bath occurring offstage, Vélez puts their reason for leaving into the mouths of the departing maids.

presumably takes place as Susanna remains “medio desnuda,” her hair loose, and the elders holding her while she presumably struggles. Here the play diverges from the ekphrastic depiction we have just seen, in which the elders describe an unseen doxic pictorial model of Susanna. Now the text more or less follows the Bible, though prolonging this scene.¹⁷ At the same time that the audience hears a story similar to the one the Bible tells, however, what they are seeing on stage comes from visual interpretations, such as the Rubens and Agostino Carracci prints discussed in section I, not from the Bible itself. Whether Susanna and the elders struggled physically is not mentioned there, part of the background information that we must fill in for ourselves.

Rina Walthaus finds that Vélez “explota el elemento físico y erótico de la escena del baño” (1836) more than other playwrights who retold the Susanna story, including Diego Sánchez de Badajoz, Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza, and Guillén de Castro. She lists ways in which “El elemento físico es más palpable” (1836) in Vélez’s work, including:

por la descripción teicoscópica de la desnudez de Susana, dada por los viejos escondidos, que describen la carne de Susana en términos culteranos [y] particularmente, por el ataque claramente físico y violento cuando los viejos salen al escenario “asidos de Susana” etc.... El espectador puede contemplarla así, mientras los viejos la tocan, hacen su propuesta escandalosa y Susana los rechaza. (1837)

As Walthaus observes, while this violent attack may reveal the depravity of the elders, it also affords the spectator the opportunity to contemplate her as the elders attack her. In this way, this scene resembles the print by Agostino Carracci in which one of the elders assaults Susanna while the other is aroused by watching. In the play, both elders assault her as the audience has an opportunity to derive sadistic pleasure from the scene. As Carracci, Rubens¹⁸ and other artists

¹⁷ A prolongation which serves to heighten both the dramatic tension and the erotic effect of Susanna’s semi-nudity.

¹⁸ The Rubens print I discuss in this chapter is “probably from 1620” (81), according to McGrath, so it may be more or less contemporary to Vélez’s undated play.

created sadistic versions of the image for sadistic consumers to enjoy, Vélez follows their lead and offers a scene of voyeurism followed by a sadistic assault.

This violence may serve to sway the audience against the elders, while just a few moments ago the spectator identified with them fully as they described Susanna's bath. But the elders continue to play on the audience's sympathies even as they drag Susanna around. As in Juan Rodrigo Alonso's earlier play, the elders speak in the language of poetic love: Sedechias informs Susanna that "culpa tiene tu hermosura" (1212) for their madness, continuing the narrative of love-addled irresponsibility that he and Acab have both been expounding since the end of Act I. They keep telling each other, telling Susanna, and telling us that they cannot help it, they are just fools in love. Furthermore, the violence of the scene fits in with the misogyny expressed elsewhere in the play, and would only make it more erotic for some members of the audience. Any audience member feeling aroused by the elders' abuse of Susanna could find relief in the fiction of exhibitionism as defined by Metz: the actress is willingly participating in the performance, and so "the object 'agrees'... 'Since it is there, it must like it'" (62). The consensual exhibitionism of the actress that the audience conjectures is projected onto Susanna's face by artists like Annibale Carracci, who show her as welcoming; if Susanna displays vexation or fear, as she does in images by Rubens, then the spectator can imagine that this is but another layer of her performance.

After the first act, in which she is betrothed and then married to Joachim, Susanna's words in this play are limited to paraphrases of what she says in the Bible. All of the men she knows, however, have significantly more developed characters here than they do in Daniel 13. Susanna tersely expresses fear and anguish, but her feelings are largely unknown as she remains off stage while the men in her life volubly explicate their doubts and sorrows. Elcias joins the

crowd that comes running when Susanna and the elders shout at the end of the bath scene, and is among the first to hear Sedechias's accusation. He immediately finds it difficult to believe:

- ELC. Pero, como puede ser
posible en Susana tal?
SED. Porque Susana es muger,
y es en ellas natural
el mudar de parecer. (1302-1306)

Susanna assures her father of her innocence, but Sedechias's terse reference to the misogynistic commonplace of women's unreliability is enough to make him doubt. Although he praised her in Act I as one of the few good women on Earth, he acknowledges that "la muger significa / flaqueça y fragilidad" (1342-1343), and now lumps his daughter in with all the other weak women. Elcias is still bemoaning his fate—interspersed with moments of doubt, wondering if the elders could be lying for some reason or if their eyesight has failed—when Joachim returns from his *heredad* and receives the news from his father-in-law. Joachim goes on to deliver his own soliloquy of doubt, but the play continues to insist on the message that no women can be trusted, because they are women, no matter how devout they are or how well they have been brought up.

Vélez's emphasis on the male characters may reflect his interpretation of the biblical story, but it was likely also influenced by the theatrical company he was writing for. As James A. Parr and Lourdes Albuixech observe, it was common for seventeenth-century playwrights to design roles for celebrated actors to perform:

Cuando un dramaturgo del siglo XVII escribía una comedia, tenía que considerar una multiplicidad de intereses prácticos, tales como el del "autor de comedias"... el del público, el del censor, el de los miembros de la comparsa y, de manera muy especial, el del actor o la actriz principal. En el caso de *La serrana de la Vera* de Vélez de Guevara se trata de una obra encargada específicamente para demostrar el talento de la famosa actriz Jusepa Vaca. El poeta no solo le dedicó la obra en la portada de su manuscrito, sino que diseñó la acción dramática para que la actriz pudiera lucir sus dotes de representación. (17-18)

The type of active female role that Vélez created for Jusepa Vaca in *La serrana de la Vera* is absent from *Santa Susana*, perhaps due to the requirements of the company he was working with for this play. The playwright may have been charged with creating a showcase role for an older man, and highlighted the role of Elcias as a result. The actress playing Susanna, in turn, may have been very beautiful but ill-equipped to learn extensive speeches. Melveena McKendrick points out that not all actresses were fully literate, and some probably needed help learning their lines. “Companies could not have met [their] deadlines if actresses playing substantial parts had had to be fed all their lines in order to memorize them—it would have been impossibly labour-intensive and time-consuming” (“Representing Their Sex” 90), McKendrick explains. A big star like Jusepa Vaca must have been able to read and memorize her lines with relative ease, and presumably would have reviled a small role such as that of Susanna in this play. With her limited lines and the abundant erotic ekphrases about her, the title role in *Santa Susana* would be an ideal part to showcase the beauty of an actress whose ability to memorize or perform lengthy speeches was more limited.

Elcias begins Act III with another soliloquy questioning his daughter’s virtue, as he waits for the trial to begin. This time, he convinces himself that the elders could have been lying, or perhaps just made a mistake. Acab and Sedechias arrive and react disdainfully to Elcias’s observation that they may have been confused about what they saw in the garden. A minister announces that Susanna is about to enter for the trial, and once again a man prepares for her entrance with a metaphor-laden description of her beauty:

ACAB. Salga, pues.

SED. Saldrà el Aurora

llorando perlas, y dando
deseo al Sol de sus perlas,
que procurando cogerlas,
irà su luz embidiando.

1680

Sale Susana con vn velo blanco delante de los ojos.

ACAB. Nublado el Sol ha nacido.

SED. Pues salga de esse nublado 1685

mas hermoso, y mas dorado;
porque quede el Sol corrido.

ACAB. Quitadle el velo a Susana.

Quitadle el velo los ministros.

para que conozcan todos
su rostro. (1679-1690)

While Susanna remains nearly silent throughout the play, the men around her never stop talking about how beautiful she is and how much they cannot trust her. She has met the requirements of modesty and chastity as far as she can by hardly ever speaking, but she cannot stop the men from talking about her. Here, Sedechias offers a metaphor about the dawn as context before her entrance, to set the stage so that those present at the trial can brace themselves to behold Susanna's beauty. She has attempted to enclose herself again, protecting herself from being seen and covering her mouth with her veil, but Acab insists that her veil be lifted so that everyone can see her face. This occurs in the Bible, which specifies that the elders were yearning to see her again. In *Santa Susana*, this gesture seems to be intended not for the diegetically assembled *público*, but for the audience watching the play. Acab is keen to show Susanna's face to this audience, which is aware of the elders' crimes. By showing everyone Susanna's face one more time, he seems to be saying: "Look at her! Can you blame us?"

Throughout Vélez's play, the audience's identification with the elders is as unstable as it is in Bal's reading of the Bible. Bal is discussing the biblical model for this scene when she observes that the elders' perspective in the unveiling "provides the innocent reader with an excuse to anticipate the pleasure *sanctioned*, rather than countered, by the moral indignation" (10). Bal's reading illuminates a truth about the relationship between an audience and their entertainment that is fundamental to understanding the Susanna story and its reception: the

audience need not approve of a character's actions to see through their eyes. Contact with the doxic pictorial tradition sways *Santa Susana* toward presenting an erotic spectacle in which the elders are understood to be wicked, but remain sympathetic, particularly against the background of women's unreliability, which the play constantly emphasizes.

With her focus on Susanna's purity, Rina Walthaus finds that "la obra de Vélez de Guevara ofrece un tratamiento enteramente secular del tema" (1837). Guillén de Castro's play, she argues, underlines Susanna's chastity in a number of ways. Castro's strategies for emphasizing Susanna's honor are almost all his own inventions, however, as his play diverges quite drastically from Daniel 13. Both plays offer many possibilities for a sexually suggestive staging, but Vélez's account is a far more faithful adaptation of the biblical story. Vélez fills in the lack of details in Bible by having all of the male characters in the story voice their feelings, including the elders. Guillén de Castro, on the other hand, offers a Susanna who speaks her mind.

IV. *Las maravillas de Babilonia*

Guillén de Castro's¹⁹ *Las maravillas de Babilonia* was "representada en 1625, e impresa en la *Flor de las mejores doce comedias de los mayores ingenios de España*, Madrid, 1652" (Walthaus 1833). Walthaus and other critics uphold the attribution to Castro, while Courtney Bruerton lists a number of reasons to doubt his authorship.²⁰ The play tells the Susanna story but,

¹⁹ Guillén de Castro was born in Valencia in 1569 to a cultured and noble family (Mujica 51), spent some time in the Viceroyalty of Naples between 1607 and 1609 (Mujica 52), before moving to Madrid and becoming a playwright. As Barbara Mujica writes: "In Madrid Castro joined a prestigious literary society, the *Academia Poética*, which counted among its members some of Spain's most renowned authors—Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Ruiz de Alarcón, Góngora, Quevedo, and Calderón. Lope and Guillén de Castro apparently became close friends... [Castro] made flattering remarks about Lope in several of his plays. Lope, in turn, praised Castro in *Laurel de Apolo* and dedicated *Las almenas de Toro* to him" (52-53). He died in Madrid 1631.

²⁰ The reasons given are comparisons of versification between this and Castro's other plays, such as a dialogued sonnet which "is not found elsewhere in Castro" (142). Bruerton concludes that these "misfits with Castro's versification render it at least doubtful that the play, even if originally by Castro, has preserved its metrical arrangement" (143).

as the title indicates, it incorporates many other episodes from the Book of Daniel, and a number of details of Castro's own invention. Various motives may have been behind these modifications of the story, foremost among them being that the biblical tale of Susanna is not long enough to sustain a three-act *comedia* without substantial elaborations. Juan Manuel Escudero Baztán cites the Vulgate as the "hipotexto" (481) of this play, or "por lo menos el sustrato inicial, porque es imposible precisar por ahora si hay textos intermedios de carácter oral o sermonario que pudieron mediar entre el texto bíblico y la comedia atribuida al dramaturgo valenciano" (481). Some important "textos intermedios" that Escudero Baztán does not mention are the many images that made up the pictorial model. Castro²¹ weaves allusions to the doxic image into the bath scene, even as he creates a Susanna with more agency than the biblical original. The brevity of the biblical account allows for interpretive elaboration, and Castro takes the opportunity to update and expand upon Susanna's chastity in ways that will be more emphatic and more entertaining for his seventeenth-century Spanish audience.

In the first act, Castro, like Vélez, begins with Joachim seeking to win Susanna's hand in marriage. To add both dramatic tension and comic relief, Castro names one of the elders Joachim as well, while the other is Acab. In Act I, the elder Joachim tells Acab that he is in love with "La hermosa y casta Susana, / que, entre humilde y entre honesta, / a las luces de la aurora / está prestando bellezas" (395-398). At this point, Susanna is available, and this Joachim exhibits what appear to be decent intentions to marry her. He speaks with a gypsy matchmaker, Finea, who promises to go speak to Susanna on his behalf. Unfortunately for him, in the next scene Susanna enters, speaking with the young Joachim. Establishing the precedent for the degree of agency he intends to give his Susanna, Castro gives her a lengthy speech to begin the scene:

²¹ I shall henceforth refer to the author of this play as "Castro." This is not an assertion that he is definitively the author, but rather a concession to brevity.

Vendré yo a ser la dichosa en que tu intento prosiga, pues cuando la ley me obliga llego a ser tu humilde esposa.	475
Yo te confieso que adoro el casto recogimiento, y, a la voz del casamiento, Joaquín, me entristezco y lloro.	480
Mas, cuando llego a pensar que es de nuestra ley preceto, miro al amor con respeto dándole al alma lugar, que aunque castamente amara y limpio amor me venciera, jamás licencia le diera si Dios no me lo mandara (473-488)	485

In Castro's play, not only is Susanna set forth as a remarkably chaste character from the beginning, but she asserts her own chastity in her own words. Harkening back to the role of Susanna in the early Church as a model of chastity within marriage, this Susanna expresses her piety and devotion to God's law even as she assures the audience that she herself is incapable of feeling any sexual desire whatsoever. Young Joachim, his lines marked as "Marido" to distinguish him from the elder Joachim,²² agrees that their matrimony will be centered on a love that is pure and the mandated by God: "en mi fuego amoroso, / llega el sol de tu favor / al supremo estado, amor, / y al estado más dichoso" (509-512). Joachim uses poetic love language at the same time that he emphasizes the holiness of their union, contrasting his desire for Susanna with her mere tolerance of marriage because it is God's law. This scene serves as a reminder of the importance of the sacrament of marriage, and situates Susanna and Joachim's marriage within that sacred tradition.

²² Although Susanna's husband is named Joachim in the Bible and neither elder has any name at all, Castro cedes primary ownership of the name to the elder.

Cuando, porque el sol no escriba
 con plumas de hierros de oro
 que ha quebrantado el decoro
 a mi casa el sol, me guardo; 770
 ¿brasonas tú que te aguardo,
 como causa que yo adoro?
 ¿Qué flaqueza viste en mí,
 que, por vencida o culpada,
 debiera estar obligada 775
 a darte el injusto sí?
 Justamente me ofendí,
 porque tu edad se lastime,
 viendo que el amor se oprime
 cuando cenizas te debe, 780
 que, al que por mozo se atreve,
 no es bien que por mozo estime. (763-782)

This misunderstanding could have been resolved with a far softer explanation, which still would have resulted in the elder's humiliation. Instead, Susanna fulminates against, first, the notion that she could have accepted the proposal of a stranger and, second, the very idea that a man of Joachim's age could or should marry a young woman such as her. She preemptively negates any possibility of interpreting the bath scene as being a willing encounter between her and the elders, or a "temptation" that she resisted: she has already declared that she would rather not marry at all, and now denounces Joachim's love for her as unnatural. She scolds him for his daring and reminds him that, whether or not he fancies himself a young man, he cannot be one. Although the entire first act is a prologue to the Susanna story and all of these details are Castro's inventions, he uses his additions to bolster the Bible's characterization of her. Where the narrator of Daniel 13 merely states that Susanna is chaste and pious, the Susanna of *Las maravillas de Babilonia* expresses her own commitment to chastity forcefully, often, and at length. While Renaissance visual artists depict her as seductive and willing, erasing her resistance to the onslaught of the elders, Castro interpolates scenes that prefigure her firm refusal

and prepare the audience to perceive her as a character who would never tolerate such a proposition.

Susanna's reprimand provokes mixed feelings in Joachim the elder, who responds "En vivo fuego me enciendo / de venganzas y de amor" (793-794). The younger Joachim then steps forward and is welcomed by Susanna, as Acab mutters "Menos envidioso estoy" (811). This wedding scene is full of bitter, savage humor at elder Joachim's expense, and he understandably reacts with anger:

¿Yo corrido y despreciado
si a darla honor he venido?
Mas, pues mi afrenta ha nacido
de una mujer tan liviana,
haré con alma villana
por dar a mis celos fin,
que en venganzas de Joaquín
haya afrentas de Susana. (815-822)

This embarrassing series of events has taken up most of the first act, padding out the short story of Susanna, but it has also given one of the elders something that neither of them has in the Bible: a motive for trying to hurt Susanna and Joachim. Susanna's outspoken dedication to chastity and God may serve to make her more sympathetic to the audience, especially in a theatrical culture that abounded in strong female characters, as did Spain's during this time. However, as Stallybrass has shown, a woman who talks too much is suspicious: "The connection between speaking and wantonness was common to legal discourse and conduct books" (126). In this light, Susanna's defense of herself in the presence of her betrothed and, presumably, her father,²⁵ makes her seem a touch *varonil*, lacking the feminine submissiveness appropriate to chaste ladies. Stepping back and letting a man defend her would be more ladylike.

²⁵ Neither of Susanna's parents are characters in *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, although the Bible specifies that both were relieved when Daniel exonerated her, so they were present in her life and would presumably have attended her wedding.

At the same time that Castro's first act makes the audience like Susanna, it also makes them feel pity for Joachim the elder. Instead of being a filthy old man who does nothing other than attempt to rape a married mother, he begins the play as a foolish but honest old man who hopes to marry a beautiful maiden. The elders in the plays by Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza and Vélez de Guevara express love for Susanna in poetic terms, framing themselves as unfortunate lovers pleading with a cold and pitiless beloved. By situating themselves in the *exclusus amator* tradition, the elders in most of the works I study play on the sympathies of the spectators, who come to pity the elders and wonder whether Susanna could not be gentler and less disdainful. Here, Joachim the elder is situated in a truly pathetic position, as a man who wants to marry Susanna and thinks his dreams have come true, only to have his beloved deliver a public excoriation at the altar. While Susanna's position in this scene is entirely defensible, Joachim's disgrace is sure to evoke pangs of sympathy from any men in the audience who have ever been rejected by a woman. Like Vélez, and guided by Renaissance art, Castro sets up a situation in which the viewer simultaneously condemns and identifies with the elders. Meanwhile Susanna, in addition to the faults of carelessness, laziness, or voluptuousness that may have made the audience view her as partially responsible, can now also be seen as sharing the blame for having spoken to Joachim too harshly.

While Daniel is a fringe character in *Santa Susana*, *Las maravillas de Babilonia* features a number of extensive scenes between Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, and various other characters, and retells several stories from the Book of Daniel. Among these is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, from Daniel 3. These characters are discussed by Nebuchadnezzar, his servants, and the two elders at the beginning of Act II, as the king orders that the three young Hebrews be thrown into the fiery furnace at the same time that he orders Daniel be tossed into

the lions' den.²⁶ After his ordeal is over, Daniel pays a visit to Joachim and Susanna in their garden. Daniel 13:4 states that members of the community often visited Joachim; Castro takes this detail and creates a scene in which Daniel visits both Joachim and his wife at home. He has just been delivered from the lions' den, and has not heard about what happened to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In a lengthy *romance*, Susanna tells him the story. Daniel is so horrified that he immediately leaves to tell Nebuchadnezzar that his pride has made him a monster, and Joachim accompanies him. This, then, becomes the reason that Castro uses to explain Joachim's absence when the elders assault Susanna.

The two elders enter separately, see each other, and flee. Susanna remains in the garden with her two maids, Ana and Finea, who has apparently now entered Susanna's household. After Daniel and her husband leave, Susanna relaxes in the garden while Ana and Finea sing to her. After the elders come on stage and then exit again, Susanna asks if her bath is ready:

FINEA.	Yo quiero mezclar con rosas ese cristal lisonjero.	1600
SUSAN.	Siempre yo las aguas quiero limpias, pero no olorosas.	
FINEA.	¡Que melindrosa! ¿Quién vió tan nueva excusa de mujer?	1605
SUSAN.	Para limpieza han de ser, mas para el deleite no. Ya que a las buenas imito, presumo que olores son en los templos devoción y en los baños apetito.	1610
ANA.	Esta vez le hemos de echar del jardín algunas flores.	

Vanse.

²⁶ *Las maravillas de Babilonia* conflates Nebuchadnezzar with all of the other Babylonian kings in the Book of Daniel. While Nebuchadnezzar does preside over the attempted burning of the three youths in Daniel 3, Darius is the king who has Daniel thrown into the lions' den in Daniel 6. In Daniel 13, no king is mentioned; Nebuchadnezzar's interventions in Susanna's story, which occur in several of the plays I study, are all inventions of the authors (possibly initiated by either *Las maravillas de Babilonia* or *Santa Susana*).

the nudity as far as possible reflects a certain stylistic trait found in other stage directions in Castro's play: in Act I, at the wedding, a stage direction reads "*Salen por una puerta SUSANA y los que pudieren, y por la otra DANIEL y JOACHÍN y acompañamiento*"; and in Act III, at Susanna's trial, we find: "*Sacan a SUSANA, atadas las manos, y en el rostro un velo negro, y JOACHÍN y ACAB, y los que pudieren.*" In these two instances, Castro uses the future subjunctive, indicating that the number of people attending the trial will depend on this size of the theatrical company and of the stage. Castro understands that different companies will mount different sizes of productions, but indicates that, during these scenes of important public events, he would like to see as many actors on stage as the budget and space will permit.

Susanna's nudity, however, is singular and present: "*Quítase la más ropa que pueda.*" Castro requests that the actress remove as much as she can, under the circumstances of this particular staging and according to this particular actress's willingness to disrobe. The theater was often under pressure from moralists and the crown to rein in overtly sexual performances, such as in 1615, when "el Consejo de su majestad decreta que 'las mujeres representen en hábito decente de mujeres y no salgan a representar en faldellín corto, sino que por lo menos lleven, sobre la ropa, baquero o basquiña'" (Bravo-Villasante 210). Decades later, in 1689, the Jesuit priest Ignacio de Camargo, in a chapter entitled "Las comedias como hoy se representan en España son obscenas y torpes y ocasionan de suyo innumerables pecados," complained: "Salen también numerosas veces mal vestidas, por no decir mal desnudas, porque lo pide el papel de la Magdalena u de otra Santa Penitente" (quoted in Bravo-Villasante, 213). Castro's stage direction asks that the performance involve as much nudity as they could get away with, precisely the kind of nudity-for-nudity's-sake attitude that Camargo rails against; and it was with awareness that such crusading Jesuits may have been lurking that Castro included the subjunctive qualifier.

The playwright may have been imagining different types of performances in his own time; a private performance in the home of a libertine nobleman would allow more nudity than a performance in a *corral* or at court. Perhaps Castro was imagining the posterity of his work, some staging in the years to come in which Susanna could take off an astonishing amount of clothes, and he wanted to be sure these future generations understood that she really must take off *as much clothing* as could *conceivably be tolerated* in their situation, whatever and whenever it may be.²⁷ The dramatic necessity of removing as much clothing as possible is unclear, however, for woman as energetically virtuous and modest as the Susanna Castro has been drawing.

The lack of externalization in the Bible left room for Susanna to be represented in art as a sensual nude in the mode of erotic mythological paintings, a scene invented by artists and interpolated into a narrative gap in the biblical tale, part of the extensive background with which the tale is fraught. This became the doxic image of Susanna, so heavily influential that scholars read the biblical story as though it were describing the bath, even though it does not. Castro was already up against this doxa as he was composing his play, and he knew that he had to present a bathing Susanna to his audience, or they would be likely to leave dissatisfied. Susanna's resistance is the main feature of her character and the primary action she takes in the Bible, yet this resistance is precisely what the artistic tradition erases. Castro's characterization of Susanna shows an effort to recover this resistance and valor on Susanna's part, but once he arrives at the bath scene he is faced with a Scylla and Charybdis situation:²⁸ on the one hand, the Bible tells of

²⁷ As I shall discuss in Chapter V, *Psycho* presents an interesting parallel to this directive to push the boundaries of nudity as far as the circumstances could tolerate; in this case, chief among those circumstances was the Motion Picture Production Code.

²⁸ Having to choose between two difficult alternatives is the situation in which the biblical Susanna finds herself; she exclaims: "I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands" (Daniel 13:22). In a handful of plays, Lope de Vega used the image of Susanna as an image equivalent to the contemporary "stuck between a rock and a hard place," with characters exclaiming that they were trapped, like

a brave and virtuous Susanna; on the other hand, the audience expects to see some nudity—indeed, as much as possible—and Castro must present something like this doxic image of Susanna to satisfy his public. The sexualized image of Susanna had overwhelmed the original story to the point that not including it was unthinkable. In attempting to create a mimetic portrait of Susanna as a character, Castro adds details to flesh out the characterization that the Bible accomplishes with a few spare adjectives. His Susanna stands up for herself with courage and determination, yet once the bath scene arrives, the play runs into the insurmountable doxa. However chaste and plucky Castro's Susanna might be, she has to be sexy too. The audience expects it. In their minds, the doxic Susanna *is* Susanna.

While Vélez has Susanna vanish into the wings as the elders ekphrastically describe her bath, Castro's Susanna disrobes as much as possible on stage before retreating into the wings. The stage direction gives no indication of how long this undressing might last, creating the possibility of an extended strip-tease onstage as the elders watch, a wordlessly performed narrative ekphrasis, as opposed to the verbal ekphrasis performed as a description of something the audience could not see. Even in a public performance in seventeenth-century Madrid, a prolonged strip-tease scene could be performed here by having Susanna remove jewelry, head coverings, outer garments, and the like. Susanna has just been discussing a bath with her two maids, already creating an ekphrasis of the doxic image of Susanna bathing. Just before she is to remove her clothing, or possibly as she is removing it, Susanna says “la limpieza exterior, / si no hay lascivo interés, / espejo del alma es / que le da más resplandor” (1616-1619). In combination with the conversation with her two maids, her mention of a mirror here creates an especially

Susanna, between two elders. Lope's characters would say this to indicate either that they faced two disagreeable alternatives, or merely that they had been seized by two men. As such, it appears as a non-ekphrastic and not specifically gendered allusion in these plays. Castro's Susanna utters no paraphrase of this sentiment, however, as she takes her fate into her own hands rather than lamenting her helplessness.

close ekphrasis of the two Tintoretto paintings, in Vienna and Paris, that include a mirror. Although no prints of these survive, they may well have circulated. As Susanna is talking about the cleanness of her body mirroring the purity of her soul, she is unwittingly describing a tradition of images that do not faithfully mirror her character.

At this moment, Castro's play enters into the narrative ekphrasis that flattens the Renaissance space of the *corral* into a remembered image of artistic representations of Susanna, through a combination of description and action. The allusive, combinatory ekphrasis referring to the pictorial model of Susanna gives, as Laura Mulvey writes, "flatness, the quality of a cut-out or an icon, rather than verisimilitude, to the screen" (443)—only in this case, it gives it to the stage. Mulvey asserts that the "place of the look defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, strip-tease, theatre, shows and so on" (447). However, these two plays by Castro and Vélez use ekphrasis to manipulate the audience and control what they see. As Mulvey argues:

Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. (447)

Indubitably, Mulvey points out some qualities of cinema that are unique to this modern medium. With their ekphrastic references to the pictorial tradition of Susanna, however, both *Santa Susana* and *Las maravillas de Babilonia* control the dimension of time by prolonging a scene that does not exist in the Bible, and they control the dimensions of time and space through references to images that depict a scene that is not shown on stage. By having his characters describe the garden in which they find themselves, by having Susanna undress as much as possible, Castro's play utilizes ekphrastic codes to "create a gaze, a world and an object, thereby

producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (447). That measure of desire is, in this instance, precisely the pictorial model of a bathing, Venus-like Susanna, the doxa that has emerged and asserted itself in this scene and overwhelmed the chaste Susanna that Castro had been portraying up until this point.

After Susanna disappears into the wings, the elders debate what they should do. Before they are able to devise much of a plan, they go offstage and fetch her:

ACAB. Como tú atrevido estés,
es fuerza que yo me atreva.
JOAQ. Pues ¿qué podemos hacer?
ACAB. ¿Qué? Procuralla vencer
que en mujer no es cosa nueva. 1655
Pero ya del baño sale.
¡Ánimo, cobarde amor!
Adonde vence el temor
poco la esperanza vale.
Yo me arrojó, que el lugar 1660
con la soledad convida.
JOAQ. Yo he librado ya mi vida
en sólo el ejecutar.

Vanse a entrar y sale SUSANA.

SUSAN. ¡Villanos! ¿Qué atrevimiento
tan loca licencia os dio? 1665
JOAQ. Tu hermosura nos venció,
amoroso es nuestro intento. (1651-1667)

Here, Castro’s stage direction is less precise than the ones he has used earlier, and less clear than the one Vélez uses: “*Salen Acab, y Sedequias asidos de Susana, suelto el cabello, y medio desnuda.*” Walthaus criticizes this stage direction by Vélez because “El espectador puede contemplarla así, mientras los viejos la tocan, hacen su propuesta escandalosa y Susana los rechaza” (1837). Castro’s directions are not entirely clear here, but Susanna removed *la más ropa que pueda* just before line 1620, and now, in line 1656, “del baño sale” just before she is apparently dragged back onto the stage by the elders. Where Castro had invented scenes to fill in

the mysterious gaps in the biblical narrative, he now creates his own mystery in this stage direction. The implication seems to be that, after removing as much clothing as possible on stage, Susanna went into the wings, removed the rest of her clothes, got into the bath, got back out, and put something else on before indignantly reemerging. Two questions remain open to interpretation by the theatrical company: How much clothing has Susanna put back on after the bath? Are the elders forcibly pulling her onto the stage, or does she come out on her own? Depending on how this stage direction is read, Walthaus's complaint might be applied to both plays: here, too, the spectator contemplates a sadistic scene as Susanna, wearing as little clothing as possible, is pulled onto the stage by two elders deranged with lust.

If the elders are dragging Susanna, this scene becomes a narrative ekphrasis of the pictorial model seen in many prints and paintings, particularly those such as the ones by Rubens and Agostino Carracci in which Susanna suffers as the elders assault her. Many of these images appear to take place within the first moments that Susanna has become aware of the elders' presence, before she has time to defend herself. This first moment of the scene, when Susanna is forced back on stage, creates a *tableau vivant* of such images. Unlike the images, however, the scene continues to unfold as Susanna reacts decisively in her own defense:

ACAB. Todo está mirado,
 y ya está determinado
 amor; a gozarte aspira
 nuestro encendido deseo. 1680

JOAQ. Tus intentos serán vanos
 si te defiendes.

SUSAN. ¡Villanos!
 Apenas mi ofensa creo;
 pero entretanto que os veo
 con esa intención cruel, 1685
 el tronco deste laurel
 que a ver en mis manos llevo,

Toma un ramo.

me dará su oculto fuego para abrasaros con él.	
Entre torpezas villanas	1690
vuestro fuego le encendía;	
temió, porque le oprimía	
la nieve de vuestras canas.	
Hizo diligencias vanas	
el fuego que agravios llora;	1695
mas como el yelo mejora,	
su yelo, en el paso estrecho,	
huyó el fuego a vuestro pecho	
adonde revienta ahora.	
Mas, pues en la nieve fría	1700
de vuestros años pesados	
no os halláis avergonzados,	
cáuseos vergüenza la mía.	
Templaré el fuego que ardía	
ya con incendios tan claros;	1705
y porque vuestros reparos	
teme el apetito ciego,	
he de helaros con mi fuego,	
con mi yelo he de abrasaros.	

Da tras ellos a palos. (1677-1709)

We see that Castro's Susanna is more robust and intrepid than the biblical Susanna. While the latter sighs and expresses her helplessness directly to God, praying for salvation, the former takes a tree branch and attacks the old men with it. As she does so, she reappropriates the entire Petrarchan system of metaphors that described the man as on fire with love while the woman's heart remained as cold as ice. Taking a branch of a laurel tree—the tree that crowned Petrarch as a poet, the tree that Daphne was changed into for rejecting Apollo's advances—Susanna uses poetry as a weapon, threatening the elders with the latent fire contained within the wood (1688). These elders, like those of Vélez de Guevara and Juan Rodrigo Alonso de Pedraza, have used the language of love poetry to make themselves sympathetic to the audience, but Susanna turns it against them, referring to humor theory to contrast the ice and snow of their old age with the fire in their chests (1698-1699). She takes complete control of the situation, finishing with an

assertive paradoxical *quiasmo*: “he de helaros con mi fuego, / con mi yelo he de abrasaros” (1708-1709). What the elders are doing during this speech in another *lacuna* in Castro’s play: there are no indications of how they should react as she is speaking. They might be pawing at her as she tries to get away, pulling at her remaining garments, as they do in various images by Rubens.

To create a mimetic version of Susanna who fully exemplifies the resistance of the biblical character, Castro creates a Susanna who defends her honor with the simultaneous deployment of elaborate metaphors and real violence. Walthaus notes the strength of this Susanna:

La escena del baño —motivo que no puede anularse, pero que fácilmente pudiera ser interpretada como síntoma de deleite o sensualidad— no hace sino confirmar la pureza de Susana. Ésta, justificando el baño, rechaza explícitamente olores y perfumes y prefiere las aguas puras, ya que ‘olores son en los templos devoción’ etc.... No obstante, pese a sus castas palabras, la escena no deja de ofrecer al espectador de la comedia unos momentos atractivos y tal vez picantes, porque Susana [está casi desnuda]... Susana, sorprendida por los viejos al bañarse entre bastidores, vuelve al escenario y a la mirada del público mostrándose mucho más enérgica que en el relato bíblico. (1835)

Like many commentators of the Susanna story, Walthaus has been influenced by the doxic image to the point that she views the bath scene as an element that cannot be removed. As might be expected of any twenty-first century reader, Walthaus is drawn to this feisty Susanna who turns Petrarchan tropes on their heads as she runs after old men defiantly swinging a tree branch. This interpretation of the character is enormously appealing to the modern reader, and may have been inspired by Castro’s desire to create a strong role for one of the stage’s female stars.

Melvena McKendrick draws attention to the satisfaction that these kinds of roles must have provided for the Spanish actresses, who “could not have been unaware that in many of the parts they played, all written for them, they were effectively challenging society’s prescriptions for, and assumptions about, women and the way a woman’s life was to be lived, that they were

articulating in public what women often felt and thought in private” (“Representing Their Sex” 91). This role allows for the quiet and pious Susanna to respond with violence to the tradition of male violence against women, assuming a position of female empowerment that, furthermore, triumphs at the end of the play. Daniel still rescues Susanna at the trial, but during the bath scene, Susanna fights back.

At the same time, this pugnacious Susanna has just emerged from the bath, so that the force with which she counterattacks the elders is not only unfeminine but, given her state of undress, immodest. She protects herself fearlessly, but as she does so, she “coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (Mulvey 442). The play is at odds with itself, giving us a Susanna who is so chaste that she becomes unchaste, displaying her body as she protects her bodily autonomy. She is enacting a sadistic version of the pictorial model, where the elders’ violence against her heightens the erotic element, forcing this Susanna to become a sexualized object at the same time that she strives to be an exemplar of purity. This narrative ekphrasis is full of action, yet the display of Susanna’s body pauses the narrative and flattens the Renaissance space of the *corral* into a still image, one that reminds the audience that Susanna is a sex symbol. The doxic image overtakes the text, and the spectator is likely to be so carried away in looking at Susanna that he does not pay attention to what she is saying. Castro fills in the narrative *lacunae* in Daniel 13, adding elements to make this Susanna more true to the biblical heroine. But the doxic seductress still invades his play when it matters most, allowing his audience to have it both ways.

V. *El bruto de Babilonia*

La gran comedia, El bruto de Babilonia was written by the *tres ingenios* Juan de Matos Fragoso,²⁹ Agustín Moreto,³⁰ and Jerónimo Cáncer.³¹ The oldest of the three authors, Cáncer, died in 1655, while the youngest, Moreto, was born in 1618. Thus, we can extrapolate its likely date of composition as being sometime between 1640 and 1655. The authors' names appear in different order in different editions, making it difficult to determine who authored which act.³² Though it is attributed to these *tres ingenios*, the play should really also be credited to a fourth: Guillén de Castro. Much of *El bruto de Babilonia* is paraphrased from *Las maravillas de*

²⁹ Juan de Matos Fragoso was born in Avito, Portugal in 1608, and died in 1689 (García Martín viii). He studied in Evora, but spent most of his adult life in Madrid (Bleiberg and Marías 574). Like Moreto and Cáncer, he wrote many plays in collaboration with other playwrights (García Martín viii). Bleiberg and Marías describe him as “un discreto refundidor de temas ajenos, dentro de la estructura teatral de Calderón” (574).

³⁰ Agustín Moreto y Cabaña was born in Madrid in 1618 to “well-to-do Italian parents” and died in Toledo in 1669 (Casa 132). His “period of major literary activity seems to have been between 1642 and 1656” (Casa 132). As Frank Casa explains, “Frequent closing of the theaters due to royal deaths and recurrent pestilences as well as an interdiction on ‘new’ material forced writers to deal with themes that had been treated earlier. Moreto made a virtue of this necessity and wrote a series of plays based on earlier sources... This propensity... was so well known that it prompted a fellow playwright and sometime collaborator, Jerónimo Cáncer y Velasco, gently to satirize him: ‘Que estoy minando imagina / cuando tú de mi te quejas; / Que en esta comedias viejas / he hallado una brava mina’” (133). In addition to *El bruto de Babilonia*, Matos, Moreto and Cáncer collaborated on three other plays as a trio: *No hay reyno como el de Dios*, *La adúltera penitente*, and *Caer para levantar* (García Peres 359). In addition, Moreto and Matos Fragoso composed three *comedias* as a pair (García Peres 359).

³¹ Jerónimo de Cáncer y Velasco was born in Barbastro, Aragón, probably sometime in the 1590s and died in Madrid in 1655. He was given to writing plays in collaboration, and worked with Calderón, Moreto, Rojas, and Vélez de Guevara, among others (Bleiberg and Marías 143). His will was written in 1649, and it was perhaps with his death in mind that he published his *Obras varias* in Madrid in 1651 (Solera López clxxiv). This volume contains mostly poetry, and features an *aprobación* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, who writes that “el ingenio de su autor, tan celebrado en España, es su más segura aprobación” and that Cáncer’s style employs, with “agudeza y donaire los primores de la lengua castellana” (*Obras varias* 4).

³² According to Escudero Baztán, the first time *El bruto de Babilonia* appeared in print was in “*Parte treinta. Comedias nuevas y escogidas de los mejores ingenios de España*, Madrid, Domingo García Morrás, 1668” (487), in which edition the names appear as Matos, Cáncer, Moreto. The copy I am working with, from Cervantes Virtual, was digitized from the collection of the Biblioteca de Menéndez y Pelayo in Santander. Here, the names are given as “De d. Jvan de Matos, d. Agvstin Moreto, d. Geromino Cancer.” It is a *comedia suelta* with no date or place of printing. Luis Fernández-Guerra, in his study of Moreto, finds a certain “desconcierto y falta de armonía en este borrón de tres ingenios, donde es locura pedir propiedad y verosimilitud bíblica... La jornada tercera parece de Moreto” (xxx) while Delia Gavela García cites James Castañeda and Ruth Lee Kennedy, who “argumentan, rebatiendo a Fernández Guerra, que en la segunda jornada se ve la mano de Moreto” (612). This conclusion would appear to be borne out by the order of the names in the *edición suelta* from the Biblioteca de Menéndez y Pelayo, which I am using. The second act is the most original of the three, and the one that asserts the most stylistic individuality as compared with Castro’s play.

Babilonia, particularly in the first and third acts.³³ The status of this play as both a collaborative work and a *refundición* complicate any commentary on it.³⁴

While all of the Susanna plays bear a certain resemblance to one another, being adaptations of the story in Daniel 13, many passages in *El bruto de Babilonia* follow similar passages in *Las maravillas de Babilonia* very closely.³⁵ Marcella Trambaioli reminds us that “hoy en día se da por sentado que la praxis teatral barroca se basa, a la vez, en la *imitatio* y en la *variatio*, siendo el arte de hacer comedias un juego combinatorio de elementos nucleares que se repiten de forma cada vez distinta” (258), and that the emphasis that our culture places on originality did not exist in the early modern era. José María Ruano de la Haza sets forth five “técnicas o métodos” (35) of *re-escritura*: “refundición, reelaboración, reconstrucción, adaptación y reutilización” (35). He defines *refundición* as “la práctica de componer una comedia nueva basándose en elementos —temas, situaciones, personajes— de otra anterior (o de un texto en prosa anterior, como hace Calderón con *El purgatorio de San Patricio* o Guillén de Castro con *Don Quijote*)” (35), while a *reelaboración* “pule, perfecciona, afina y modifica un texto teatral

³³ Given that Castro’s play was performed in Madrid in 1625, when Agustín Moreto was seven years old, one can safely assume that the collaborative work is a *refundición* or *reelaboración* of Castro’s work, and not vice versa.

³⁴ C. George Peale observes that “Collaborative composition is one of the fascinating and little-understood practices of the Spanish *comedia*’s second generation” (248). Kerry K. Wilks, discussing a collaboration by Calderón, Mira de Amescua, and Pérez de Montalván, concurs: “Very little research has been done on the genre of collaborative plays, which may be related to the perception that these plays are inherently weaker in structure due to the multitude of authors” (56). In her study, Wilks points out how the author of the first act would set the parameters before passing it along to the author of the second, who would then be challenged to follow these constraints (79). The process naturally resulted in each author’s desire to outshine his collaborators, Wilks argues: “Pérez de Montalván would obviously want to create a *jornada* that was as spectacular as his colleagues’. This interplay between the authors may be seen as a type of competition. Even though there was no concrete prize to be won, each knew that the audience would have the opportunity to judge their works separately when they were presented together. When viewed in this manner it is easy to see that this situation would create a strong desire to either match or improve upon the preceding act. Thus, rather than responding to a body of classical and modern texts, they responded to each other’s work” (79). The kind of interplay Wilks describes is more complicated in *El bruto de Babilonia*, in which our *tres ingenios* are responding to the Bible, the artistic tradition, and Guillén de Castro’s play, in addition to one another.

³⁵ Juan Manuel Escudero Baztán asserts that the “hipotexto real [de la comedia de Matos, Cáncer y Moreto] no es la historia bíblica sino la propia comedia de Guillén de Castro” (480).

para crear una nueva versión” (35). Under Ruano de la Haza’s rubric, *El bruto de Babilonia* would be considered a *reelaboración* of Castro’s earlier play.

In observing that many of Moreto’s plays were *refundiciones* or *reelaboraciones* of earlier works, Frank Casa states that “it is commonly agreed that in nearly all cases, Moreto was able to give greater definition to the dramatic structure of the original and, while staying more or less within the broad outlines of the source play, forged a new presentation and a new interpretation of the theme” (133). In the case of *El bruto de Babilonia*, though only one act is by Moreto, Escudero Baztán finds that the work does indeed achieve a greater structural definition than does Castro’s source play:

Pero la comedia colaborada muestra una coherencia mayor a la hora de establecer una cierta unidad dramática, contra todo pronóstico, pues *a priori* la técnica dramática de la colaboración podría considerarse más propensa a la fragmentación por su multiplicidad autoral... Así, se observa una intención declarada en superar el carácter episódico de la fuente, de observar, en suma, una construcción dramática menos dispersa en varios niveles. (488)

Escudero Baztán deems both plays to be about Nebuchadnezzar, with the Susanna story only a subplot. Setting aside the deviations from the biblical account, he finds the play by the *tres ingenios* to be more cohesive than Guillén de Castro’s work. While the title of *Las maravillas de Babilonia* promises a kind of anthology of strange happenings (which the play delivers), the title *El bruto de Babilonia* refers to Nebuchadnezzar only, and he does become the central figure in this *reelaboración*. In Castro’s play, the king’s storyline is almost entirely separate from the Susanna plot, but in *El bruto de Babilonia* Nebuchadnezzar becomes the primary antagonist to Susanna as well as Daniel and the other *hebreos*. The Susanna storyline may have been derived from a minor plot element that arises in Act I of Vélez de Guevara’s *Santa Susana*. In that play, Nebuchadnezzar asks Elcias to give Susanna to him as a concubine; Elcias refuses, and the king flies into a rage. Daniel enters and calms him down, and Susanna and Joachim’s marriage goes

ahead as planned. Nebuchadnezzar's desire for Susanna does not come up again in Vélez's play, but the *ingenio* who wrote the first act of *El bruto de Babilonia*³⁶ makes this a central feature of the entire Susanna plot.

Unique among all the plays I study, this one features Susanna in its opening scene, sharing a tender lovers' idyll with Joachim. They are enjoying some time together in the countryside when Nebuchadnezzar, out hunting, comes upon them and is inflamed with desire for Susanna.³⁷ Being a tyrant, the king forcibly takes Susanna as his concubine, confining her to one of his palace gardens. Curiously, he then delivers a short soliloquy declaring that he does not intend to rape her:

Con firmezas, y cariños
he de examinar, si puedo
reducir aquesta Hebrea
à mi amor, pero si veo
que à mi poder se resiste,
no he de ofender su respecto,
porque primero es en mi
la razon, que no el deseo.

This speech is far removed from anything that happens in the Bible, in which there is no indication that Nebuchadnezzar ever sees Susanna or knows who she is, and she has been married to Joachim for some time when the story begins. While the other seventeenth-century *comedias* in this chapter add Susanna and Joachim's wedding to draw out the story, *El bruto de Babilonia* creates a captivity narrative within a captivity narrative: against the background of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, Susanna is held prisoner by the despotic-yet-gallant Nebuchadnezzar. This speech in which he establishes his intention not to rape her shows that he

³⁶ Probably Matos Fragoso, whose name consistently appears first in the various printed editions.

³⁷ This scene resembles the one in *Fuenteovejuna* in which the Comendador is out for a hunt and comes across Frondoso and Laurencia in the countryside. *El bruto de Babilonia* bears some structural resemblance to that play, as the terrible leader torments his people. Yet Nebuchadnezzar stops short of sexual violence against Susanna.

is a better man than the elders.³⁸ Escudero Baztán argues that this integration of Nebuchadnezzar into Susanna’s storyline bolsters the narrative cohesion of the entire play. Delia Gavela García comments that *El bruto de Babilonia* employs “el deseo que Susana desata en el monarca para humanizarlo [i.e. Nebuchadnezzar]” (609). Although he decides against raping her, he still holds her prisoner against her will, separating her from her fiancé, yet the spectator/reader most readily identifies with his feelings: the audience identification again aligns itself with the male gaze, and Nebuchadnezzar’s cruel, possessive fixation somehow makes him seem sympathetic.

Susanna and Joachim continue to pledge their love to one another despite their separation, and in Act II, Joachim creeps into the garden where Susanna is held, surreptitiously watching her. As Joachim is deliberately spying on Susanna, the two elders, who have heretofore expressed no desire for her, innocently come into the garden to pick flowers. Without meaning to spy on her, they accidentally see Susanna bathing, and are stricken with love:

- 2.³⁹ Alli vna muger se baña,
 y si la vista no yerra
 es Susana, divertirme,
 y disimular es fuerça.
1. Mas por mas que lo procuro,
 toda la atencion me lleva.
2. Su hermosura me arrebatá,
 por mas que yo me divierta.
1. Cielos, que impulso tirano!
2. Cielos, que llama violenta!
1. Todo mi sentido arrastra!
2. Contrasta mi resistencia!
1. En el yelo desta nieve,
 ay fuego que à entrar se atreva
2. En la nieve destas canas
 toca llama que no muera?

³⁸ It also explains why Joachim remains devoted to her, as her chastity remains intact.

³⁹ The *dramatis personae* calls only for “Dos viejos,” and the elders’ lines are all designated only as “Viejo 1” and “Viejo 2.” During this scene, however, they call each other by name, making it clear that Viejo 1 is named Nacor, while Viejo 2 is named Acab. “Acab” is the elder name that *Santa Susana* and *Las maravillas de Babilonia* have in common.

In *Santa Susana* and *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, as in the Bible, the elders' desire for Susanna comes over them gradually, but here it strikes them all at once and immediately drives them to reckless action. They express their feelings in a typically Petrarchan series of contrasts, then they quickly go through the motions of dissembling to one another before agreeing to act together and going off stage to retrieve Susanna. The play elides the ekphrastic moment in *Santa Susana* where the elders describe Susanna's bath as the actress is hidden, instead directing the performers to deliver lines from an offstage position:

DENT. SUS. Qué es esto, alevos villanos?

DENT. 1. Tente Susana, què intentas?

SUS. Quitaros antes la vida,
que profaneis mi pureza.

*Salen los viejos retirandose de Susana, que saldrà à medio vestir.*⁴⁰

Barbaros, ciegos, caducos,
que apetito, que torpeza,
à tan lascivo despecho,
vuestra inutil mano alienta?

1. Què es lo que dizes muger?

2. Que has pensado, muger necia?

SUS. Traydores, lo que se vè,
se conoce, no se piensa,
pues troncos sin alma ya,
en cuya seca materia,
esse fuego que os aviva,
mas que la aviva la quema.
Que aveis visto en mi? que impulso,
ò què motivo os alienta?
si os provocò mi hermosura,
no os refrenò mi modestia?
Si fue à coger vuestra mano
la rosa de mi belleza,
no temìò de mi decoro
las espinas que la cercan?

⁴⁰ Though *El bruto de Babilonia* is a *reelaboración* of *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, it contains no echo of Castro's stage direction about removing as much clothing as possible. Instead, this stage direction resembles Luis Vélez de Guevara's instruction that Susanna emerge "*suelto el cabello, y medio desnuda*" (between lines 1196 and 1197). The specification of "half-nudity" is open to interpretation.

Like *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, *El bruto de Babilonia* creates a narrative ekphrasis of the doxic image of Susanna, and makes it the centerpiece of the second act. Just before she emerges from the wings, Susanna threatens to kill both elders, the strongest words we have seen from any of the Susannas, though neither explicit nor implicit stage directions indicate that she actually perpetrates any violence against them. After delivering a shortened gloss on the speech Castro gave to his Susanna about the fire latent in wood, this Susanna creates a new metaphor about the thorns of her decorum, which will do damage to the elders if they do not desist. This Susanna, too, reappropriates the typical imagery of love poetry to give the beautiful rose agency and the power to draw blood. These metaphors touch on the complex symbolism of the rose, the thorns of which protected a woman's chastity in chivalric imagery (Carr-Gomm 190).⁴¹ Susanna has taken the symbols of nature between her two fists to protect herself. She goes on, however, to make them an offer: if they go away and leave her alone, she will never speak of the incident to anyone. Meanwhile, Joachim has returned, drawn out of his hiding place by Susanna's shouts, and he listens at a distance. The elders do not desist, and they try to extort her consent, improvising the accusation that they saw her with a slave. Susanna tries to dissuade them:

- SUS. Vuestra misma culpa os ciega,
 à tan falso testimonio,
 y de vn abismo à otro os lleva.
 1. Yo lo vi.
 2. Y yo.
 SUS. Pues que visteis?
 Que con vn hombre que entra
 en este jardin, agravias
 de tu esposo la nobleza.
 JOA. Valgame el Cielo! què escucho?
 ya aquí rebelar es fuerça
 el secreto, por salvar
 de mi esposa la inocencia.
 SUS. Hombre conmigo? Eso es falso.
 1. La verdad, Susana, es esta.

⁴¹ See Chapter II, note 4.

SUS. Pues quien era esse hombre?
Sale JOACHIN. Yo.
 SUS. Què miro, Cielos!
 JOA. No temas.
 1. Yo estoy sin mi!
 2. Yo tambien.
 JOAC. Oy acaba la sospecha
 que de mi esposa teneis,
 aunque tiene causa, es ciega,
 pues quando entrar aveis visto
 à vn hombre aquí estar con ella,
 no aveis visto que soy yo?

Mieke Bal argues that the visual, hallucinatory nature of the elders' account of their false testimony, that of Susanna's liaison with the nonexistent young man, is what inspired Renaissance visual artists to create the image of the sexualized Susanna. The *ingenio* who wrote the second act⁴² of *El bruto de Babilonia* retells the story so that this young man does exist, and is in fact Susanna's fiancé,⁴³ with the morally and sentimentally defensible goal of being in innocent proximity to her. In contrast to Joachim's unaccountable silence in the biblical tale, and his narratively explained absences in the other plays I study, here he is actually present in the garden during the bath scene, and he defends Susanna from the elders, though he cannot stop them from making their accusation.

Susanna's trial and Daniel's cleverness in proving the elders were lying still appear in the third act, but Susanna's story has been distorted almost beyond recognition.⁴⁴ The bath scene still appears, written so that the staging would be very likely to resemble the pictorial model of sadistic images in which one or both of the elders have seized Susanna. That Susanna is now the

⁴² I am inclined to believe that the second act is by Moreto.

⁴³ After promising to marry in the first scene of Act I, Susanna and Joachim were separated when Nebuchadnezzar took Susanna into his personal captivity. They have not been able to celebrate their wedding, but each refers to the other as their *esposo*, since they are betrothed.

⁴⁴ Minian de Alfie does not mention this play at all. Walthaus acknowledges that it exists, but confines mention of it to a footnote observing that it follows *Las maravillas de Babilonia*. Gavela García and Escudero Baztán have authored studies of this play, but they focus on the Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar plots and say little about the Susanna storyline.

virginal concubine of a cruel Nebuchadnezzar who is not quite cruel enough to rape her, and that Joachim is also hiding in the garden and will soon come to her aid, do not prevent this narrative ekphrasis from taking place on stage and satisfying the audience's desire to see it, whatever further damage it might do to their remembered version of the story. For the authors of this play, the bath scene is the one element that must take place on stage, the essence of the Susanna story.

Luis Vélez de Guevara and Guillén de Castro both endeavored to write works that would convincingly dramatize Susanna's virtue and resistance at the same time that they created an ekphrastic erotic spectacle. Vélez's title character remains largely silent as she piously waits for deliverance, a character who might strike modern readers as appallingly passive, yet who closely resembles the biblical prototype. Castro, on the other hand, presents a fierce, dynamic Susanna who actively defends her honor, but only after she has removed as much clothing as she possibly can. She fights against the elders, but in so doing, she displays her body for the audience. In contrast, the *tres ingenios* of *El bruto de Babilonia* have very limited concern with retelling the biblical story. For them, Susanna really is "un tema más, adaptable a la comedia del siglo de oro [*sic*]" (Minian de Alfie 188). In all three plays, the pictorial model of Susanna exercises a strong influence, steering the plays toward eroticized narrative ekphrasis in which a partially undressed Susanna would be on display. This doxic image had become so familiar that it would have drawn in audiences with its erotic appeal, even as this image clashed with the chastity of Susanna's character.

Chapter Four: “¡Qué candor descubre bello!”:

La casta Susana and *La justicia y la verdad*

In chapters II and III, I discussed the widespread Renaissance image of Susanna in which she is in the middle of taking a bath when the elders spy on or assault her. The extensive artistic tradition around this doxic yet textually unlikely interpretation of the biblical story—that Susanna’s bath actually took place—depicts a spectrum of voyeurism and rape fantasies. In these, Susanna is cast as a temptress who lured the elders and thus, by the twisted logic of misogynistic popular wisdom, “deserved” what happened to her. In these images, the visual cues the painters deploy to cast the blame on Susanna are diverse. Many align her with Venus, suggesting that she is a willing participant in the sexual misconduct of the elders. During the seventeenth century, more violent treatments of the theme became popular. While these might be read as more sympathetic to the heroine of the story, they also represent a more sadistic voyeuristic fantasy that was aimed to please a darker side of the male gaze.

During this period, a number of writers and artists questioned or objected to this doxic tradition. We have already seen how Lope de Vega created subtle oppositional ekphrases of Venetian Susannas in two of his *comedias*, while emphasizing the heroine’s steadfastness and courage in other works. In this chapter, I examine Manuel de Salinas’s 1651 narrative poem *La casta Susana*, published in 1651, as another example of oppositional ekphrasis aimed at the prevailing pictorial treatment of Susanna. I then examine a few paintings that present versions of the bath scene that are more sympathetic to Susanna. Finally, I consider Francisco de la Torre y Sevil’s 1664 *comedia La justicia y la verdad*. In this play, Susanna is allegorized as the Virgin Mary even as the purity of her intentions is questioned by allegorical figures representing Truth

and Justice, who are acting as her servants, and by God himself, allegorized as her husband Joachim. Both of these writers create images of Susanna that are more sympathetic to the heroine than the images that prevailed in art, and both explicitly address their works to modest audiences: Salinas to the queen of Spain and other noblemen, de la Torre to clergymen and other prudent readers. Nevertheless, de la Torre struggles with the influence of the standard Renaissance image of a seductive Susanna, while Salinas wonders how much of the incident was Susanna's fault.

I. *La casta Susana*

In *La casta Susana: Paráfrasi poética de su sagrada historia*, printed in 1651, Manuel de Salinas¹ paraphrases the Bible at length, adding details and emphasizing the chastity of the heroine at every turn. At one point, he explicitly objects to the pictorial tradition around Susana that had been so popular for the last one hundred years. Before he makes this direct protest, there are several references to paintings, paintbrushes, and portraits that prepare the reader for the idea that what follows will be the authentic portrait, painted with words, as opposed to the defamatory images that had been emerging from Italy and Flanders.

Salinas dedicates his poem to the queen of Spain, Mariana de Austria, the second wife of King Felipe IV. In his dedication, Salinas explains that he is writing in response to the queen's wish: "habiendo yo entendido deseaba V[uestra] Majestad ver puestas en fácil verso algunas Historias de la Sagrada Escritura, me sentí inclinado a tentar si podría con mi corto talento satisfacer a esta general obligación" (237). The poem is indeed written in very easy verse, a

¹ Manuel de Salinas y Lizana was born in Huesca late in 1616 (Cuevas Subías, *La formación* 102), studied letters at the Universidad Sertoriana in that city until 1632 (Cuevas Subías, *La formación* 171-197), and went on to study law at the same institution from 1632 to 1641 (Cuevas Subías, *La formación* 215). He belonged to a prominent noble family that included the scholar and art collector Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa (1607-1681), whose art collection was clearly an influence on Salinas's writings. Salinas eventually became canónigo of the Cathedral of Huesca, and died in 1688 (Cuevas Subías, "Introducción" a *Obra Poética* lxiv).

romance in a-a with little of the filigree so typical of the period. Pablo Cuevas Subías imagines that “alguien bien introducido en la corte... animó a Salinas para que poetizase algún pasaje apropiado” (“Introducción” a *Obra Poética* cxiv). Cuevas Subías hypothesizes that Salinas was interested in the story of Susanna in part because “Desde un punto de vista religioso y moral, este personaje había sido maltratado por la pintura en los lienzos de grandes pintores como Tintoretto y Rubens... [Susana] era retratada por holandeses e italianos como una Venus seductora” (“Introducción” cxv). Salinas protests this mistreatment by painters throughout his poem, using his paraphrase to underline Susanna’s virtue and downplay or eliminate aspects of the story in which she makes decisions that might seem questionable to a seventeenth-century Spanish audience, such as her decision to bathe alone in the garden.

Cuevas Subías highlights Salinas’s inventiveness in his expansive retelling of the story:

Los aspectos más creativos de la obra también vienen indicados en el título [*La casta Susana. Paráfrasi poética de su Sagrada Historia*]. El determinante *poética* apela a una actitud *hacedora*, creativa. Las lagunas y misterios de este pasaje del Libro de Daniel encuentran un poeta, intérprete iluminado que va más allá de la mera exégesis didáctica del *parafraste*. Por último, el epíteto *casta* es bien significativo de la parte más original de Salinas. Pequeños detalles en la traslación, y sobre todo los pasajes añadidos, llevan el foco de atención a la castidad heroica de Susana. El deseo del autor es hacer de ella una heroína de la honra, un ejemplo en el que mirarse las mujeres nobles para luchar contra el pecado.² (“Introducción” cxix)

Cuevas Subías observes the “lagunas y misterios” that I have discussed in the Introduction and Chapter III. This is the quality Erich Auerbach noted in the biblical narrative style, “fraught with background” (9). As I have discussed, the two central questions in the text explored by artists are whether Susanna ever got into the bath and whether there was any contact between the elders and her before members of her household arrived on the scene. Having seen painters take both of

² In portraying Susanna as an example of a woman who struggled against sin, Cuevas Subías reveals that he has been influenced by the traditional interpretation of Susanna resisting the elders’ attempted “seduction.” Salinas, however, never implies that Susanna was tempted by any sexual desire for her attackers.

these *lagunas* and run with them in directions that did not, in his view, accurately reflect the intent of the original text, Salinas set out to write a corrective portrait of Susanna. His poetic paraphrase includes many added passages that contradict various aspects of the doxic image of Susanna.

Salinas creates a poetic voice who tells a tale parallel to the one in Daniel 13, but an amplified version of it that insists more forcefully on Susanna's chastity and the malevolence of the elders. This voice presents itself as a reader who has understood the story in the correct way, and seeks to make that correct reading even more explicit for readers whose interpretations of the text may have been influenced by the corrupted interpretations made in art. The poem never challenges the veracity of the biblical narrator, but consistently presents itself as the real portrait of Susanna herself, as though it had access to a vision of the complete truth about her that the reader would not have seen elsewhere. The voice asserts itself as the ideal reader of Daniel 13, one who understands its rightful meaning, and from this position he creates a narrator who tells the story so that it might be more apprehensible to a seventeenth century female noble audience. Crucially, this female audience is the one to which Salinas directs his poem. In so doing, he explicitly denies the male gaze and works to counteract it.

Alice Bach's discussion of the narrator and narratee in the Bible is helpful in thinking about Salinas's creative retelling of *Susanna*. Bach writes that "the importance of recognizing the biblical narrator as a figure telling a slanted story has been undervalued" (13), and endorses an attitude of suspicion on the part of the reader: "Instead of blindly obeying, I argue with this narrator. And instead of being seduced by the narrator's version, I endorse a strategy that allows the reader to step outside the reader's appointed place in order to defy the fixed gaze of the male narrator" (14). Positing that the biblical narrator can usually be assumed to be male, Bach goes

on to wonder who the imagined or ideal narratee might be. She observes that the narrator might be imagining different narratees in different texts: “Imagining various types of narratees gives us a glimpse at the cards the narrator is holding. For example, the portrait of the fumbling pharaoh in the account of the plagues in Exodus might tell us that the narrator expected an anti-pharaonic attitude in his narratees and played to that audience” (21). For most of the Bible, Bach assumes that the narrator will represent the patriarchy and that the ideal narratee will be male,³ and she encourages readers of the Bible to resist the narrator’s appearance of objectivity.

“A bumptious reader,” Bach writes, “will challenge the privileged role of the narrator” (17). Summarizing Mieke Bal, she continues: “Faithful readers share the narrator’s theological code, male readers the gender code, and those whose political stripe matches that of the narrator the political code. Suspicions arise when the reader does not share the social, political, and gender codes of the narrator. The more codes one does not share with the narrator, the more incongruent the reading” (23). This problem is perfectly illustrated by the Susanna story. The Bible shows Susanna as having great courage in choosing death over the sin against God of giving in to the elders, while a modern, more secular reader might feel that giving in to their demands would be an acquiescence that, though repulsive to her, would be a better guarantee of her safety. The idea that she is willing to die to maintain her sexual purity is objectionable to many twenty-first century readers, and as a result, the moral of the Susanna story that the Bible presents is unacceptable to the bumptious modern reader. Instead, modern readers point to the deeply problematic emphasis on restricting female sexual behavior, whether consensual or non-

³ Various scholars confirm this assumption with their Bible commentaries. Steven C. Walker, for example, appears to be assuming the maleness (and heterosexuality) of both narrator and narratee when he writes “The better to make us feel the impact of Susanna’s beauty, the story compels us to peek over the shoulders of the elders as they peer through the bushes at Susanna’s bathing” (12). In his discussion of the story, Walker repeatedly expresses attraction to Susanna and a conviction that the bath actually took place, indicating that his reading of the Bible has been heavily influenced by paintings of Susanna. Walker has given an affirmative response to these painters’ invitation to identify with the elders, and assumes that his own readers will too.

consensual. In the process Erich Auerbach describes, the Bible's absolute authority is lost "through too great a change in environment and through the awakening of a critical consciousness" (13). The idea that Susanna's chastity is more valuable than her life, accepted in ancient Babylon and early modern Spain, is subjected to rigorous objections from feminist readers in the twenty-first century.

In her brief discussion of the Susanna story, Bach compares it to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, two tales that "bear motifs of a chaste hero falsely accused of sexual activity" (65-66), but with the genders reversed. When the elders first accuse Susanna, the Bible says that Susanna's maids were shocked (Daniel 13:27). Bach observes that the narrator, "emphasizing the piety of the Jewish heroine, is anxious to fill the silence that might allow the reader to doubt the veracity of Susanna's story" (67). When a woman is accused of adultery, it is quite easy to believe the accusation, as many characters in *comedias* remind us. Attitudes that women were naturally inclined to mendacity were pervasive in Spanish society, as Anna M. Fernández Poncela reminds us: "La mujer engaña y miente constantemente a juzgar por el mensaje extendido y reinicidente en los refranes, ésta parece ser [una] de sus características... más sobresaliente" (42).⁴ Women's inconstancy and inclination toward adultery were also proverbial, Fernández Poncela continues: "[L]a posibilidad de la infidelidad matrimonial de la mujer... entra dentro de su maldad e imagen de desconfianza" (48).⁵ These attitudes did not originate in Golden Age Spain, but were popular beliefs inherited from earlier civilizations. The (assumed male) narratee of the Bible story, too, might be inclined to suspicion, even though he has just heard the

⁴ Among the many *refranes* relating to women's lack of truthfulness, Fernández Poncela cites the following: "La mujer y la mentira nacieron el mismo día" and "Mujer que no mienta ¿quién la encuentra?" (42).

⁵ Some sample *refranes* that reflect this view: "De la mujer que mucho llora, no te fies gran cosa; y de la que no llora en su vida, menos todavía" and "A quien tiene escopeta, guitarra, reloj o mujer, nunca le falta un traste que componer" (48).

elders conspire to invent the allegation. Bach continues: “A feminist reader might well identify with Susanna as object of the gaze, rather than the ‘intended’ masculinized voyeuristic view of sharing the gaze of the Elders. It is a struggle to re-present the figure of the objectified woman as the subject of her narrative” (69). Like Amy-Jill Levine, Ellen Spolsky, and Mieke Bal,⁶ Bach sees the tendency to identify with the elders as present in the Bible itself, though she invites feminist readers to challenge this point of view.

If the biblical narrator does objectify Susanna and help the (male) narratee to see himself in the elders’ shoes, then this perspective is in tension with the narrator’s professed position that the elders are wicked and impious while Susanna is virtuous and God-fearing, and the ending which sees her triumphant.⁷ In this sense, Renaissance and Baroque painters and printmakers were bumptious readers of the Susanna story: they challenged the privileged role of the narrator (Bach 17), discarding the message about Susanna’s purity as they gleefully identified with the elders to the farthest possible extent, and welcomed the viewer to do the same.

As Mieke Bal argues, the Renaissance paintings and prints that show Susanna as seductive and compliant can be read as projections of the way the elders imagined the scene: rather than painting what actually happened, artists paint the elders’ fantasy.⁸ The viewer sees Susanna as they saw her, and as a result misunderstands the story. In these images, it seems that the elders gave in to an irresistible woman who was trying to tempt them, and no harmful consequences are foreseen for anyone. These paintings then rely on small clues to remind the viewer that the elders’ view is erroneous. Tintoretto shows one elder comically crawling on the

⁶ See Introduction and Chapter III.

⁷ My reading of the Bible story is that Susanna’s virtue and salvation by Daniel is the *main* focus of the story, even if the narration of the elders’ voyeurism weakens the message by encouraging the narratee to objectify Susanna.

⁸ See Chapter III, pages 16-18.

ground while roses, symbolizing purity,⁹ separate him from Susanna. Bassano adds a tiny goldfinch and a microscopic lily to remind us of Susanna's chastity and immortal soul, even as she looms large over them in her alluring luminosity. If the doxic visual tradition foregrounds an elders-eye view of Susanna, then the male gaze has assumed control over these images to the point that the perspective of the biblical narrator—or, at least, that facet of the biblical narrator that sees the story as a morality tale about Susanna's goodness and the elders' iniquity—is relegated to the miniscule symbols that subtly undermine the visual message that occupies the overwhelming majority of the canvas. These sallies into unabashedly depicting the male gaze at work on Susanna could be read as ironic, but they leave a wide opening for the viewer to misapprehend the story.¹⁰

In establishing himself as the new narrator of the Susanna story, Manuel de Salinas repeatedly refers to the task he has set himself in terms of art, portraiture, and painting, asserting that he will draw, with his words, the true image of Susanna. This theme is already taken up in one of the prefatory poems by Juan Francisco Andrés, *Coronista del reino de Aragón*. Entitled “El retrato de la casta Susana del doctor don Manuel de Salinas, canónigo de la Santa Iglesia de Huesca,” the sonnet uses metaphors of painting throughout, while emphasizing Susanna's character:

Erudito Salinas, tus pinceles
de SUSANA delinean la tristeza,
el peligro feliz de su belleza,
infamada de Togas infieles.
Tan altamente en expresiones fieles
retratas su candor y su firmeza
que renueva su nombre tu destreza,
ciñéndola tus versos de laureles.
Tu mano artificiosa y elocuente

⁹ The rose symbolizes both Venus and the Virgin Mary (see Chapter II, note 4).

¹⁰ The words and deeds of Carlos in Lope's *Virtud, pobreza y mujer* is almost a thesis treatment of how this process would play out in the psyche of a man predisposed to wrongdoing.

propone al Orbe todo su pintura,
por que admire lo esbelto y lo valiente.
Cada rasgo descubre su hermosura,
y en cada rasgo misteriosamente
el arte resplandece y la dulzura.

Picking up on the art metaphors Salinas uses in the poem, Andrés describes how Salinas's paintbrushes will outline Susanna's "tristeza" before mentioning her beauty, which he describes in ambiguous terms. "Candor," too, is used ambiguously. The *Diccionario de autoridades* of 1729 has two entries for *candor*: first, "La blancúra, no entendida simplemente como color, sino la que está unida y tiene en sí resplandor, y arroja de sí una como luz" and second, "Metaphoricamente se toma por la sinceridad, pureza, y candidez del ánimo, que no tiene mezcla de malícia, ni pasión que perturbe su sosiego y tranquilidad" (n.p.). According to the *Diccionario*, "whiteness" was the original meaning, while "sincerity" was a metaphorical extension of that. Andrés employs the word so that it means both things simultaneously, evoking the very common use of *candor* in Spanish love poetry to praise a woman's paleness, which Salinas also does in the poem, but pairing it with "firmeza," as though laying a trap for the reader within this verse: first the reader thinks Susanna's paleness is lovely, but then he is sharply reminded that her strength of character is the true object of Salinas's praise. But then this opposition is echoed in line 11: "por que admire lo esbelto y lo valiente." What seemed to be a trap in line 6 is shown in line 11 to be a directive to the reader to admire *both* things: Susanna is admirable for her beauty *and* for her valor.

This insistence on the simultaneity of two different ideas continues in the first tercet, as Andrés presents Salinas as a poet-painter. Line 8's reference to "laureles" is a typical image of a poet's work, but the sonnet goes on elaborate his art metaphors: "Tu mano artificiosa y elocuente / propone al Orbe todo su pintura, / por que admire lo esbelto y lo valiente" (9-11). As a writer,

we would expect Salinas's hand to be eloquent, and "artificioso" is an adjective often applied to a writer's skill; but Salinas is a writer whose hand offers its "pintura" to all the World, teaching the people to admire Susanna's character at the same time as her loveliness. In so doing, Salinas's skill will renew Susanna's name (7), suggesting that the poem will be a corrective to the doxic image created by the Italians and Dutchmen that Cuevas Subías mentions in his introduction.

Salinas begins his poem with praises of the king and queen of Spain. He then describes Babylon and Joaquim, Susanna's husband, following and embellishing on the biblical account. The Bible tells us that Susanna's parents had raised her to be God-fearing; Salinas expands on this detail with an extended metaphor about God as the painter of human virtue:

sus padres como justos
atendieron a dotarla
de las prendas más preciosas
con las virtudes más altas.
Así el Pintor soberano
la dibuja, que no gasta
Divino Pincel colores
de perfecciones humanas.
A la celestial Esposa
cuantas veces la retrata
es con misteriosas líneas,
que en lo exterior no se alcanzan. (69-80)

In introducing the character of Susanna, Salinas sets forth a clear distinction between her actual creator, God, and the worldly painters who, he implies, do not paint her accurately. Although the Bible says that Susanna was very beautiful, Salinas describes her virtue and criticizes exterior beauty as unimportant. God's paintbrush invests her portrait with true beauty, which is found in her chastity, her piety, and her firmness of character. Salinas follows the writings of various early Christian exegetes when he writes that God has modeled Susanna after the Virgin Mary (77-78), but that the qualities that God transferred from this illustrious model to Susanna cannot be seen

obscure the meaning of the Susanna story and sully her reputation as an exemplum of chastity, Salinas implies. He makes this point more explicitly later in the poem.

The narration of the poem often follows the biblical story closely, with elaborations. It also digresses into lengthy amplifications, such as an extended *locus amoenus* description of the Edenic garden. When the elders arrive on the scene, Salinas describes them with an abundance of adjectives reflecting their depraved morals as he explains how they used to linger at her house after community gatherings. He points to a lack of caution on Susanna's part as well, suggesting that she could have avoided the assault had she been more cautious:¹¹

Al tiempo que al medio día
se volvían a sus casas
Susana hermosa a la huerta
para solazarse baja.
Los viejos, que siempre en irse
más que los demás se tardan,
en este honesto ejercicio
la veían descuidada. (229-236)

As we have seen, the notion that Susanna should have been more careful is often repeated in literary retellings of the story, even ones that are as sympathetic to her ordeal as this one is. The idea is prevalent in other Golden Age treatments of sexual assault, and is still prevalent today, as Kate Harding reminds us “When it comes to rape, if we’re expected to put ourselves in anyone else’s shoes at all, it’s the accused rapist’s. The questions that inevitably come along [are] ‘What was she wearing?’ and ‘How much did she have to drink?’” (4). One of the rape myths Helen Benedict identifies is that “because they are so enticing, women are responsible for preventing their own rapes” (16). With its report on Susanna’s incautious leisure in her own private orchard, the poem repeats these questions, implying that, by walking in the orchard without an armed

¹¹ In this respect, Salinas’s poem echoes Diego Sánchez de Badajoz’s play, which presents a sermon against lust and false testimony, on the part of the elders, but also an excess of leisure, on Susanna’s part (see Chapter I).

guard of men, Susanna is partially responsible for what happened. In the same passage, the great care that the elders took in spying on Susanna is contrasted with her imprudent lack of attention to her safety:

Acechaban cautelosos
los descuidos de Susana,
sabiendo que en un descuido
la más atenta resbala.
¡Oh, riesgos de la hermosura!,
que lo decente no basta
a defenderla si tiene
enemigas Atalayas. (249-256)

Preparing for the wolves and sheep metaphor he will soon use explicitly, Salinas describes the elders as stalking Susanna like carnivorous beasts. In this context, her inattention to her safety could be read as the innocence of a lamb who does not know better; but since Susanna is an adult, married woman, the poem seems to imply that she ought to have taken more preventative steps. Although most of the poem blames the elders for their own actions, a rhetorical flourish asserts itself here and blames beauty itself. “Atalaya” refers both to the men who would stand guard in watchtowers at the frontier and, in *germanía*, to a thief. This dual-purpose image refers to two situations in which an attack can be more or less permanently expected from one’s enemies. Much as a country must constantly guard its borders, much as city dwellers and travelers must always be on the lookout for thieves, so too must a beautiful woman always protect herself from wolfish onslaughts. These various enemies might all be in the wrong in their attacks, but the attacks are nevertheless to be expected.

Continuing this passage, Salinas describes the voyeurism mentioned in the Bible. As the Bible does, he describes an ongoing, routine voyeurism:

Contemplando su belleza
más en ella se cebaban,

a cuya vista en sus pechos
iba creciendo la llama. (257-260)

Cuevas Subías reads these four verses as an allusive ekphrasis: “Esta visión pictórica de Salinas parece tener detrás alguno de los cuadros de ‘Susana y los viejos’. El famoso de Tintoretto refleja precisamente el espionaje previo de que fue objeto Susana. Salinas, no obstante, contempló directamente uno de los de Rubens, en la copia que poseía su primo Lastanosa” (271n257-260). Tintoretto and Guercino, among others, painted the elders spying on Susanna as she bathes, which does not happen in the Bible. Rubens painted several versions of the story,¹² and made prints of several more. Susanna is aware of the elders’ presence in all of them, often struggling against them as they grab her and try to pull away her clothes.

Cuevas Subías notes that verses 233-272 of Salinas’s poem paraphrase Daniel 13:8, which reads: “When the old men saw her enter every day for her walk, they began to lust for her” (Daniel 13:8). This verse in the Bible describes a habitual situation in which the elders observed Susanna repeatedly, over time, as she walked in the orchard (fully clothed) and their impious desire for her gradually grew: “They suppressed their consciences; they would not allow their eyes to look to heaven, and did not keep in mind just judgments. Though both were enamored of her, they did not tell each other their trouble, for they were ashamed to reveal their lustful desire to have her. Day by day they watched eagerly for her” (Daniel 13:9-12). In the biblical narration, the voyeuristic element is presented here, as the elders watch Susanna separately, over a period

¹² Cuevas Subías cites an inventory of Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa’s possessions published by Ricardo del Arco y Garay in 1934, which includes “Una Susana y los viejos, de Rubens. Es copia” (273). Cuevas Subías speculates: “bien fuera el de los viejos llegando a tocar a Susana (Academia de San Fernando, Madrid, 1609-1610) o bien aquel en que la asaltan desde el ramaje en que la observaban (Alte Pinakothek, Múnich, 1635)” (271n257-260). Del Arco y Garay’s inventory of Lastanosa’s art collection also includes *Lucretias* by Titian and Dürer, “Una *Danae*, del natural. Lienzo grande” (273) by an unspecified artist, and “Una *Historia de José y Putifar*, de Rubens. Es copia” (273). The Renaissance tradition of bringing mythological sensuality into biblical subject matter would have been evident to Salinas through his cousin’s collection. His oppositional ekphrasis in *La casta Susana*, then, must have been informed by viewing and reflecting on Lastanosa’s paintings.

of time, as she walks in the orchard. Each elder gradually becomes less virtuous and God-fearing.

In Daniel 13:15-17, Susanna states her intention to take a bath, again as the elders watched: “One day, while they were waiting for the right moment, she entered the garden as usual, with two maids only. She decided to bathe, for the weather was warm. Nobody else was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. ‘Bring me oil and soap,’ she said to the maids, ‘and shut the garden doors while I bathe’” (Daniel 13:15-17). The repeated description of the elders as spying, combined with the mention of a bath, led Renaissance painters to create the doxic image in which Susanna is seen in the bath while the elders watch. Salinas may have been thinking of such images when he wrote this passage, as he prepared the oppositional ekphrasis that is to follow. The narrative here follows Daniel 13:8-10 closely, as Salinas continues his efforts to tell the story properly and restore Susanna’s good reputation.

Salinas expands on the Bible’s narration that the day was hot and that Susanna wanted to bathe (Daniel 13:15). First, the poet emphasizes the extreme heat in terms that make the reader sympathize with Susanna’s desire to cool off while evoking the desert imagery in Garcilaso de la Vega’s *Canción I* and many of Fernando de Herrera’s love sonnets, in which the heat of Africa or Asia represents the burning love of the poetic subject (contrasted with the coldness of his beloved’s heart), and the isolation he feels as her rejection has left him an outcast from society. Salinas reappropriates this metaphorical language of love poetry and applies it to the actual heat of the sun as our heroine, at midday in Babylon, seeks relief:

Era la estación ardiente
del verano, y como abrasa
el Sol con rayos de fuego
la adusta Región del Asia,

335

la costumbre de la tierra
 siguiendo, porque pensaba
 estar sola y no sabía
 de los viejos la emboscada, 340
 quiso bañarse y del cuerpo
 la natural destemplanza
 templar en lícitos baños
 sin curiosidad liviana.
 De la natural limpieza 345
 Dios no se ofende, sí extraña
 que al Artífice Divino
 quieran reprehenderle faltas.
 Quien con excesivo afeite
 en su rostro pone manchas, 350
 a Dios de imperfecto arguye,
 de su Autor se desagrada. (333-352)

The elaboration on the heat is characteristic of the approach Salinas takes to his poetic paraphrase. While the Bible merely mentions that the day was hot, Salinas takes four lines to explain that the sun burned this arid region with rays of fire. Spanish playwrights both before and after him put poetic love language into the mouths of the elders, manipulating the audience's sympathy toward them and their desperate, burning love for Susanna. Salinas, on the contrary, plays with this system of metaphors as he creates a non-metaphorical description of the real sun creating a burning heat in literal Asia, where the story takes place. The heat of the elders' "love" becomes the actual heat of the midday sun, and as a result the reader feels sympathy for Susanna in her discomfort.

Continuing his elaboration in Susanna's favor, Salinas specifies that it was customary in Babylon, at the time, to take a bath out of doors. This would have seemed improper to his Spanish audience in 1651, and scholars in our time have worried about it too. In her translation of and commentary on *Susanna*, Marti J. Steussy translates verse 17 as "She said to the maids, 'Bring me some oil and lotion, and shut the estate gates, please, so I can swim'" (104). Steussy explains that "In Greek, Susanna requests lotion and soap because she wants to take a bath, but

outdoor bathing is so risqué in our culture that readers quickly conclude that Susanna was ‘looking for trouble.’ Culturally, taking a swim provides a better equivalent” (110).¹³ In other words, although the Bible uses the word “bathe,” Steussy fears that this will cause readers to immediately lapse into rape culture thinking and conclude that, because of where she was and what she was doing, Susanna was “asking for it.” Without agreeing with this likely victim-blaming, Steussy foresees it and tries to impede it with an English verb that seems to paint Susanna as less of an exhibitionist.

Salinas anticipates a very similar type of victim-blaming supposition from his audience, and he endeavors to prevent it with the explanation that, culturally, this was a normal thing to do in that time and place. He is aware of the rape culture of his own era, and has already suggested that Susanna’s lack of caution made her partly responsible. Here, however, he endeavors to arrest any victim-blaming tendencies that have previously emerged in his own poem and unleashes a strong argument in favor of Susanna’s bath. Not only was it extremely hot outside, not only was it normal to bathe outdoors in Babylon then, but also the bath was licit, and God permits natural cleanliness.

In the biblical tale, Susanna’s bath may signify her purifying herself after her menstrual cycle ended, so that she could resume relations with her husband. Rivkah Slonim explains this important Jewish tradition: “Family purity is a system predicated on the woman’s monthly cycle. From the onset of menstruation and for seven days after its end, until the woman immerses in the *mikvah* [ritual pool], husband and wife may not engage in sexual relations” (xxvi). This monthly cleansing ritual is a spiritual occasion for pious Jewish women, Slonim continues: “Many women use this auspicious time for personal prayer and communication with God. After immersion,

¹³ Steussy also adds the non-biblical “please” to the servants, lest Susanna come across as too imperious.

woman and husband may resume marital relations” (xvii). It is likely that this association between women and bathing was so familiar to the audience of the Hebrew Bible that there was no need to make it more explicit. Salinas, like all early modern Spanish adapters of the Susanna story, walks a delicate line with her devout Jewishness: he praises her and her piety, without expressing approval for Jewish customs. Yet this purification ritual could be part of the “*costumbre de la tierra*” (337) to which he refers, making it all the more licit and, indeed, necessary in the eyes of God. Susanna performs all of the rituals required of a pious Hebrew woman.

Lines 345-352 insert a typical brief discourse about cosmetics being vain and an affront to God, with the implication that Susanna was not engaging in any excessive self-adornment, but only taking a clean and honest bath, without lascivious curiosity (344)—this phrase perhaps in response to images like Tintoretto’s painting in Vienna, in which Susanna appears to derive great pleasure from her own reflection in the mirror (although her reflection cannot be seen). Salinas makes it clear that his Susanna, the real Susanna, had nothing of the sort in mind when she decided to bathe in a chaste and appropriate manner. In his play of 1664, Francisco de la Torre would have his characters question, with considerable ponderation, whether or not Susanna really needed a bath; Salinas anticipates the reader’s concerns, and preemptively refutes them.

Salinas has Susanna send the maids to fetch myrtle oil, without raising the question of what they went to get and whether or not it would be proper for her to have it.¹⁴ When he reaches

¹⁴ The question of what Susanna asked for and what this implies about her has generated much commentary, from biblical scholars to the painters who show her with multiple cosmetic items. Dan Clanton notes that the second word could be translated as “cosmetics,” which would link Susanna with other Old Testament heroines like Judith and Esther, who used this beauty product “in preparation for a (possibly sexual) rendezvous with a man” (64). Clanton wonders how “are we as members of both audiences as well as flesh-and-blood readers meant to take its use in the context of Susanna’s story?... [C]ould the narrator/author be trying to entice the audience(s) with Susanna’s bathing preparations as the Elders have been enticed by her beauty all along?” (64). This last question again evokes Bach’s notion of a patriarchal biblical narrator speaking to an imagined heterosexual male narratee.

the moment in the Bible that Renaissance painters expanded into the doxic image of Susanna in the bath, Salinas confronts these images directly:

Apenas pues la obedecen [i.e. sus doncellas le obedecen a Susana]
y por el postigo pasan
dejando cerrado el huerto
a buscar lo que les manda, 365
cuando los sangrientos lobos
a la corderilla incauta
con furioso halago embisten,
con mañosa furia asaltan.
Que la hallasen ya desnuda
como acostumbran pintarla, 370
el Texto no lo refiere,
ningún Autor lo declara.
Su castidad y en el Texto
ponderables circunstancias,
contra la común me obligan 375
a sentir que no lo estaba. (361-376)

Salinas emphasizes that the elders charged at Susanna just moments after the maids had departed, reinforcing the implied timeline in the biblical text, which does not seem to allow enough time for Susanna to have begun bathing before the elders approached her.¹⁵ In verses 365-366, he follows through on the metaphor of wolves attacking a helpless lamb that he has previously suggested with his verbs. In so doing, he echoes the allegorical fresco of the story in the Roman Catacombs, in which two wolves inscribed “elders” surround a lamb labeled “Susanna.” This imagery makes it clear toward whom the audience should direct its pity. Cuevas Subías points out that is also employed in Diego Sánchez de Badajoz’s *Farsa de Santa Susaña*, as the shepherd onlooker exclaims “¡Ay, lobos, ay, ay!” at this point in the story (277n365-368).

¹⁵ Several scholars argue against the idea that Susanna had time to bathe. The beginning of verse 19, “Cum autem egressae essent puellae” in the Vulgate, is translated in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* as “When the maids had gone out,” and the notes state: “Contrary to most artistic depictions, Susanna never actually bathes” (1549). *The Catholic Study Bible* translates the beginning of verse 19: “As soon as the maids had left;” and Dan Clanton translates it: “As the girls were going out” (66) (See Introduction). With his “Apenas pues la obedecen,” Salinas aligns his version with all of these, creating a breathless sequence of events in which the elders rush in just as the maids are leaving, suggesting that the bath never took place.

Cuevas Subías sees this as another allusive ekphrasis to the Rubens painting now in the Academia de San Fernando: “Esos sangrientos lobos que embisten y asaltan podrían ser écfrasis de la Susana rubensiana de Madrid” (277n365-368). It could also refer to a number of paintings in which the elders appear crazed in their physical assault, such as the ones by Jacob Jordaens and Jan van Noordt. Both of these later Flemish painters were more than likely influenced by Rubens’ earlier *Susannas*.

After these preparatory ekphrases in which he emphasizes the wild, ravenous state of mind the elders were in, Salinas pauses his narrative to describe and object to the images in which Susanna is depicted as already naked. This prevalent image in art would have been known to Salinas through the copy of one of Rubens’ *Susannas* in his cousin Lastanosa’s collections, and, as we have seen in Chapters II and III, the tradition of these images was widely known in Spain through circulating prints. Here, Salinas makes it clear that he is referring not to any specific image, but to the pictorial model, the artistic tradition in general: “as they are accustomed to paint her” (370). If his previous references to the elders spying on her were ekphrases, he wants to stop here, at the moment in the story that most painters choose to imagine, and make it very clear to his reader that he is *not* performing an ekphrastic treatment of those images here. He would not choose to do so, because those images are incorrect. This bath never took place. He has already established that the maids had just left when the elders emerged from their hiding places (361), and now he emphasizes that neither Daniel 13 nor any early Christian exegetes make any mention of the bath actually happening: “el Texto no lo refiere, / ningún Autor lo declara” (371-372). Rather, because she was known to be so chaste (373), and other “weighty circumstances in the Text” (373-374) compel the voice in the poem to form the counter-doxic opinion that Susanna was not naked at this moment.

Cuevas Subías argues that this passage reflects Salinas’s legal training. In Books XLVII and XLVIII of the *Digest of the Emperor Justinian*, for example, “se prescriben disposiciones sobre la injuria y el adulterio que pueden engarzarse paralelamente al recorrido poético que siguió Salinas en su obra” (*La formación* 234). The *Digest* states that “Si alguno intentase pervertir la honestidad de alguna doncella, si estaba vestida con traje de sierva parece que



Figure 11: Lucas van Leyden. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1508. Engraving. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

comete menor culpa, y mucho menos si estaba vestida de ramera, y no de madre de familia” (quoted in *La formación*, 234). Salinas was following his training in both law and religion, Cuevas Subías argues, when he presented his case against the doxic image of a nude Susanna: “En la mente del narrador poético no cabe la desnudez junto a la castidad y mucho menos que la casta bíblica no fuera tal. En tanto ministro eclesiástico católico, Manuel de Salinas quiere depurar la imagen artística del pasaje bíblico” (*La formación* 234).

In order to perform this purification, Salinas creates an oppositional ekphrasis in this passage that is also a notional ekphrasis, “based on an imagined work of art” in de Armas’s term (*Ekphrasis* 22). As he rejects—“contra lo común” (375)—the doxic image of Susanna, Salinas proposes a version of the pictorial model in which Susanna is not nude. The reference to the

wolves invites the reader to imagine an image similar to the ones she has seen before, but in which Susanna has not yet begun to disrobe. Such images were not unheard of, such as Lucas van Leyden's 1508 engraving. It focuses on the elders, leaving a fully dressed Susanna in the distance, dipping her feet into the water, or Paolo Veronese's painting in the Collezione D'Arte Della Banca Carige in Genoa. This canvas is similar to his many other treatments of the subject, but shows Susanna as almost completely covered by a wrap. Contradicting the various critics



Figure 12: Paolo Veronese. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1580s. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Genova, Collezione D'Arte Della Banca Carige, Genoa.

who see Susanna's nudity as textually inevitable, Salinas argues that it is textually indefensible, and challenges the reader to imagine Susanna without imagining her luminous flesh.

In using her chastity as an argument against the idea that the elders saw her naked, Salinas is upholding the rape myth that Susanna was responsible for preventing the attack against her. The implication is that, even when strange men are prowling in her garden unbeknownst to

Salinas has his nosy bystanders point to the garden and the bath in themselves as problematic. Ellen Spolsky signals the garden as an element of Greek pastoral romance that invades the Theodotion version of the Susanna story and lays the groundwork for its eroticizing interpretations in art (112-113). In his study of ekphrastic descriptions of gardens in Greek romances, A. R. Littlewood argues that “ekphraseis of gardens are an integral part of the love-romance with an important psychological rôle to play” (96). Gardens were already associated with sexuality in Greek culture, Littlewood writes: “trees and flowers, which reproduce, water, which irrigates and gives life, and wind, which carries seeds... all became sexual powers” (96-97). This link between gardens and erotic scenes is clear in these novels, as Littlewood continues: “Thus a literary description of a garden, in itself unnecessary to the plot or argument, is not unlikely to be invested with erotic undertones... Frequently the garden is the scene for erotic action” (97). Furthermore, the gardens are usually associated with the heroine of the romance, and an ekphrasis of the garden is often closely followed by an ekphrastic description of her (98-99). The erotic associations of gardens are clearly on display in Tintoretto’s paintings of Susanna, and the Annibale Carracci etching I discussed in Chapter III. Salinas’s townsfolk, too, are aware of their sexual symbolism, and include the garden among the inanimate objects or abstract concepts that are to blame for what happened.

These people are mistaken about Susanna, Salinas tells us, but he still gives them space to voice their opinions in his cautionary tale. And the tale does not caution the general public against such defamatory and misogynistic murmurings; rather, it exhorts its female readers not to behave in such a way that might permit such gossip to be spread about them. That Susanna never has behaved in such a way, and these rumors spread anyway, seems to suggest that women are

pintura, seguía seduciendo al hombre contemporáneo... Contra este estado de cosas ha opuesto el canónico su retrato” (312n1105-1108). The *retrato* Salinas offers is at great pains to recuperate the character of Susanna as chaste, courageous, and devout, in spite of the visual images that have circulated about her. More than any other Spanish writer who dealt with the Susanna theme, Salinas is sympathetic toward his heroine and openly disputes the doxic image of her. Although the poem muses about how Susanna might have avoided the incident and allows some neighbors to gossip about her, it concludes that faith and strength are the enduring lessons to be learned from Susanna’s example.

II. Sympathetic Susannas in art

Salinas strove to “paint” the true portrait of Susanna in his poem, openly opposing the pictorial model. By the end of the sixteenth century, this pictorial model had become so dominant that the majority of writers and artists who sought to create more sympathetic images of Susanna still made significant concessions to the doxa. The central concession is the one that Salinas most stridently denies: that the elders came upon a Susanna who was already naked. The plays I examined in the previous chapter exhibit a tension between the textual references to Susanna’s chastity and the visual references to her licentiousness. The play I will next examine in this chapter, Francisco de la Torre’s *La justicia y la verdad*, loses its balance as it confronts these contradictory visions of Susanna. In the artistic tradition, we find a small number of images, such as the two mentioned in the previous section, in which Susanna is not naked when the elders find her. There are also a handful of images that depict a Susanna who is sympathetic to the viewer in spite of being naked. This iconographical challenge parallels the one undertaken by de la Torre in his play, as he attempts to stage the bath scene while maintaining that Susanna is absolutely pure. Before turning to de la Torre’s efforts to resolve the doxic and the textual

Susannas, I will consider how a few seventeenth century painters undertook a similar resolution in the visual mode.

As I discussed in Chapter III, in the doxic early modern visual depiction of Susanna, viewers seem to be looking at the Susanna who appears in the imagination of the elders. When Susanna merely mentions a bath, the elders instantly conjure the image of her naked, and this is what the painters show us. The doxic image of Susanna bathing was so firmly entrenched that other scenes from the story were seldom painted, and most artists who went against the grain of the standard depiction of Susanna did so within the doxa of showing her bathing. What these artists subverted was the prevailing trend of projecting the elders' view onto Susanna. Some painters, such as José de Ribera, reversed this operation and projected Susanna's view onto the elders, giving them monstrous, almost demonic faces. Other painters created images that were more sympathetic to Susanna's plight, especially by showing her face as distraught and removing the suggestive garden.

In 1610, seventeen-year-old Artemisia Gentileschi created one of the most sympathetic treatments of Susanna. Annibale Carracci's widely circulated print from circa 1590, which I discussed in Chapter III, features a Susanna who is posed to resemble the bathing Venus, as Mary D. Garrard observes: "In the Carracci, Domenichino and Rubens *Susannas*, the classical model is the crouching Venus Anadyomene, a type known in numerous variants, whose association with the bath connects her with Susanna on a luxurious and erotic level" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 153-154). Garrard posits that the Carracci print would have influenced Artemisia Gentileschi, but notes that, in Gentileschi's 1610 *Susanna*, "the Venus model has been conspicuously avoided. Instead, the artist, evidently as aware as the Carracci circle artists of the possibility of *double entendre* through classical allusion, replaces the crouching Venus with an



Figure 13: Artemisia Gentileschi. *Susanna and the Elders*. 1610. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

gesture of resistance and horror. In giving Susanna a pose from this sarcophagus, Garrard argues, Gentileschi “restored to the Susanna theme the tone of high seriousness that it surely deserves” (“Artemisia and Susanna” 155).

unmistakable reference to a different antique prototype” (“Artemisia and Susanna” 154). The prototype Gentileschi uses is Orestes’ nurse from the Orestes sarcophagus, “the source of numerous borrowings by artists in the Renaissance” (“Artemisia and Susanna” 155). The nurse’s arm is held out in a

In the painting, Susanna's stiff, upraised arm reveals a reflex defensive reaction to the approach of the elders, and the awkward pose of her entire body contrasts with the large majority of Susanna images: in most of these, she has a languorous, reclining posture; or she makes a *pudica* gesture which evokes Venus; or she strikes a harmoniously Baroque action stance as she struggles with or flees from the elders. Gentileschi interferes with her audience's expectation of enjoying imagining themselves in the elders' situation, creating a Susanna whose discomfort and fear are reflected in her twisted, miserable posture.

Susanna's facial expression is another important departure from the standard depiction of Susanna, in which her face is tranquil, whether or not she is aware of the elders' presence. In Carracci's print, for example, Susanna turns to face the elders without a hint of fear. In Veronese's *Susanna* in the Prado, Susanna listens as the elders speak, her face appearing to indicate that she is considering whatever they are saying. Gentileschi's Susanna, on the other hand, recoils from the elders in horror, her neck twisting away from them at a harsh angle, her face showing fear and revulsion.

This Susanna's body is also different from the idealized, Venuslike nudes favored by Italian painters. As Garrard observes, Susanna's body shows "uncompromising naturalism, since as a woman [Gentileschi] had access only to female nude models" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 157). Male painters would often avoid impropriety by painting from male models or, as Francisco Pacheco suggests, could cobble female figures together by painting the faces and hands of "mujeres honestas" (355), while copying the bodies from "valientes pinturas, papeles de estampa y de mano, de modelos y estatuas antiguas y modernas, y de los excelentes perfiles de Alberto Durero" (355-356). As Garrard argues, in Gentileschi's painting, "Susanna's body is persuasively composed of flesh; it is articulated by specific touches of realism... such as the

groin wrinkle... and the lines in her neck. The naturalistically pendant breast, the recognizably feminine abdomen, and the awkwardly proportioned legs further attest that this figure was closely studied from life” (“Artemisia and Susanna” 157).

Apart from her expression and her pose, by painting Susanna with a body that a young woman might realistically have, Gentileschi breaks the association between Venus and Susanna that was so prevalent among other Italian painters. Garrard concludes that Gentileschi’s Susanna “conveys through her awkward pose and her nudity the full range of feelings of anxiety, fear and shame felt by a victimized woman faced with a choice between rape and slanderous public denouncement. As a pictorial conception, Susanna presents an image rare in art, of a three-dimensional female character who is heroic in the classical sense” (“Artemisia and Susanna” 158). Although Gentileschi yields to the doxic interpretation that the bath took place, she presents a human woman who manifests the vulnerability and helplessness that a real person might show in that situation. While Salinas argues that Susanna was never nude because she was so chaste, Gentileschi endeavors to show a female figure who is chaste in spite of being nude.

As hard as Gentileschi tried to create an image that would persuade the viewer to identify with Susanna rather than with the elders, the competing interpretations of many other painters create a kind of cognitive dissonance for some modern viewers, such as Robert Hahn, who writes of this painting:

It is a harrowing portrait of dismay, but while the painter is a woman who empathizes with Susanna’s violation she is also an artist who knows her audience. As in Guercino, although the viewer-as-voyeur is not directly addressed with a gaze, he is not forgotten. This Susanna squirms as if to escape but remains in place, a voluptuous young woman lifting her arms to reveal a pendulous breast whose measure and weight are palpable. Her hips and belly are lovingly modeled and her pressed-together thighs, muscular and pliant, are of indisputable interest to the lover, the connoisseur, and the voyeur. (641)

Where Garrard and other feminist critics see Gentileschi's *Susanna* as breaking with the tradition, Hahn finds ways in which it keeps with it, and for the same reason: to make the paintings saleable to a heterosexual male audience. Susanna only squirms *as if* to escape; Hahn implies that this is but an act, and that the fact that Susanna has not already run away is tantamount to acquiescence. In a classic victim-blaming maneuver, Hahn reads Susanna's presence in the painting as consent, her tormented expression as theatrical. Her attractive body is of interest to "the lover," not the assailant, as though her mere existence on the canvas beckons some kind of consensual encounter. In my own reading of this painting, it depicts the moment that the elders first make their presence known to Susanna; her posture suggests an initial, violent flinching of horrified disbelief. In spite of her obvious distress, Hahn assures us that the viewer of the painting, whoever he may be, will still find this Susanna to be sexually attractive. The invitation extended by other painters to identify with the elders rather than with Susanna spills over onto this canvas, and the male gaze asserts itself forcefully despite the artist's efforts to subvert it. Gentileschi has removed the references to Venus and the sexually suggestive garden, but Hahn's gaze lifts them from other Susanna paintings and floats them over the surface of this one like layers of color over a *grisaille* underpainting, hallucinating a Venus in the place where Gentileschi worked so hard to paint a human woman. Such is the power of the doxa: Tintoretto's *Susanna* looms in the air like a sexy mist, obscuring the viewer's perception of this very different painting.

Initially, Garrard made her arguments about Gentileschi's sympathy for Susanna to support her assertion that Artemisia Gentileschi, not her father Orazio, really was the author of this image. While her first treatment of the subject argues that *only* a female painter could identify with the victim, she softened this stance in a later book: "There is of course a risk of

oversimplification in drawing a characteristic gender distinction between Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, and then between Artemisia and her male imitators, on the basis of their respective treatments of a female character” (*Artemisia Gentileschi* 202). Garrard makes another addition to this chapter in her effort to avoid this oversimplification: she includes a 1655 *Susanna* by Dutch painter Gerrit van Honthorst, and finds no fault with it:

Occasionally, there have appeared versions of the *Susanna* theme that place some emphasis upon her character and her personal anguish. One of these is a painting by Honthorst of 1655, in the Borghese Gallery, in which a muscular, androgynous *Susanna* is on her feet, struggling vigorously to escape, her face an image of horror and shock that is as convincing a mirror of inner suffering as that of Artemisia’s heroine. (*Artemisia Gentileschi* 194)



Figure 14: Gerrit van Honthorst. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1650s. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Indeed, van Honthorst's *Susanna* is a significant departure from the traditional depiction. While Gentileschi's *Susanna* looks like a non-idealized, attractive young woman, van Honthorst's is less feminine. The painter has gone out of his way to subvert features typical in other *Susanna* images: here, *Susanna* struggles to get away from the elders, both arms fighting to release her plain wrap from the grasp of the elder closer to her. Unlike the Tintoretto and Guercino *Susannas*, this one does not recline alluringly next to a pool of water; she is in the water, her hair wet and completely loose. She is unadorned by jewelry or any other luxury item. She is off-balance, standing on one underwater foot as she tries to escape, totally failing to assume a *contrapposto* or any other classical pose. She is bathing, but no *Venus* would be caught in this unharmonious stance. She is alarmed and afraid, her face contorted by her panic. Only a truly sadistic voyeur could delight in such an image.

Van Honthorst's elders are also unlike the standard depiction. As I discussed in Chapter II, most Italian artists would show elders who look respectable, their features and poses possibly borrowed from *Wise Men* or older *Apostles* in their other canvases. Even Gentileschi does not use the elders' expressions to advance any particular interpretation of their character; in another context, these same figures might be harmlessly enjoying a tale in a saloon. Van Honthorst's elders, by contrast, are wickedly gleeful, even as their actions drive *Susanna* to such anguish. Their laughter underlines their complete disregard for her suffering, their solipsistic dedication to their own interests, and their utter perversion. As Garrard observes, it is an oversimplification to imagine that only a woman artist could feel sympathy for *Susanna*.

In theorizing the male gaze, Edward Snow warns against a similar oversimplification:

Crucial as the unmasking of patriarchal/ideological/pornographic motives may be, the demystifying project runs the risk of occluding whatever in the gaze resists being understood in those terms. The fugitive elements within vision that elude or strain against the ideological can all too easily get ground up in the machinery that seeks to expose the

ideological, so that the critical apparatus winds up functioning as a simulacrum and supplement of the ideological apparatus itself. Nothing could better serve the paternal superego than to reduce masculine vision completely to the terms of power, violence, and control, to make disappear whatever in the male gaze remains outside the patriarchal, and pronounce outlawed, guilty, damaging, and illicitly possessive every male view of woman. (31)

Snow's remarks are especially relevant to any consideration of the image of Susanna in the early modern period. Although the majority of paintings were created to flatter "the paternal superego," as Snow puts it, we have seen how at least two male writers objected to these depictions, based on their understanding of the biblical text and their human ability to feel empathy for a person of a different gender. Furthermore, Van Honthorst was not the only male artist to create an image that works against the standard Renaissance depiction of Susanna.

Post-Tridentine avoidance of lascivious images led to a notable lack of nudes painted in Spain. Rather than paint Susanna as clothed, or portray some other episode from the story, most Spanish artists avoided the subject altogether. José de Ribera, the Valencian painter who spent the majority of his career in Naples, created a very sympathetic Susanna there around 1617. Ribera's version of the story appears to be influenced by Gentileschi's, particularly in the absence of the lush garden, replaced with a harsh, cold stone wall on which Susanna sits. Rather than reclining comfortably among jewels, cosmetics, and rich fabrics, this Susanna sits with her feet in the water, two layers of simple blue and white cloth wrapped around her. She has no adornment of any kind, and her brown hair is loose and rather flat, indicating that she has not dyed it and is actually going to wash it, unlike the Venetian Susannas with their elaborate hairstyles. These details indicate a lack of vanity, and distinguish her bath from the bath of Venus, who was preparing for a sexual encounter. Ribera's Susanna, like Salinas's, has entered her bath "without lascivious curiosity." This Susanna is a vulnerable, frightened young woman,

depicted at the first moment that she becomes aware of the elders' presence, much as she is in Gentileschi's painting. Her face shows surprise, embarrassment, and fear. She is pretty, but she



Figure 15: José de Ribera. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1617. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

looks like a real person. Like many Venetian Susannas, she is lit up as if in a spotlight, but instead of Tintoretto's golden evening glow, this Susanna is illuminated by a stark, bluish light that makes her look cold and alone, and also saintly. Ribera chooses to light his canvas with a light like cold moonlight, removing the golden light that was an attribute of Venus, further distancing his Susanna from that association.

The doxic visual tradition projects the way the elders saw Susanna onto the canvas, but Ribera shows us the elders as they looked to her: their wrinkled faces and monstrous leers make them look demonic as they loom over her, emerging from total darkness behind the wall that she

thought was protecting her. While she is illuminated by a celestial white light, the elders irrupt out of the blackness, their faces and hands only faintly lit up by a reddish light as if from the flames of hell. If the viewer of the painting chooses to see himself in them, he is likely to feel uncomfortable about identifying with these grimacing criminals.

Being in a pleasant garden setting, having blonde hair, or wearing jewelry would not actually mean that Susanna was “asking for it,” of course. But the images of her that show her looking like Venus play upon cultural assumptions that women who look or behave a certain way are not decent women, and deserve no respect. Worse, the images in which her face shows a lack of resistance create a misrepresentation of the story in which the two elders are recast as a pair of venerable Adonises and Susanna is an even more wanton Venus, welcoming them to her pond. By showing a brown-haired, unadorned, frightened Susanna, Gentileschi, Ribera and Van Honthorst break with this traditional set of symbols and present the story of a frightened, helpless young woman under the threat of sexual violence, which is what the story is about.

Susanna’s loose hair in the van Honthorst and Ribera canvases is open to interpretation. Writing of Pieter Lastman’s Susanna, Bal notes that she “has loose hair, which might suggest that she is quite loose herself” (15), contrasting this with Rembrandt’s Susanna in Berlin (Figure 24), who has elaborately dressed hair: “This attention paid to her hair does more than deny the possible suggestion of sexual looseness proposed by the Lastman” (15). In the canvases I discuss in this chapter, however, we see that loose hair is a feature in Susanna paintings that lean in the opposite iconographical direction. Tintoretto, Veronese, and Allori portray Susanna as having blonde hair in a complicated arrangement of braids and twists, decorated with ribbons and pearls. This serves as a visual complement to the jewelry, cosmetics, and sumptuous fabrics with which

Susanna surrounds herself in these images, suggesting an excessive attention to her appearance that is further accentuated by Tintoretto's mirrors.

This image contrasts with Gentileschi's Susanna, who has no jewelry, no toiletries, and only a simple white cloth with her. This Susanna has her hair twisted and pulled back, but partially loosened, as though she were in the process of undoing her hairstyle to wash her hair. Perhaps following her lead, Ribera shows Susanna's hair as completely loose, while van Honthorst shows it as loose and wet, as though she had been washing it. Washing the hair was part of the Jewish purification ritual for women, as Slonim explains: "The immersion is valid only when the waters of the mikvah envelop each and every part of the body and, indeed, each hair. To this end, the woman bathes, shampoos, combs her hair, and removes from her body anything that might impede her total immersion" (xxvii). These three paintings, then, show a Susanna who is cleansing herself according to this modest and ancient ritual, separating herself from the adornments that might interfere. In so doing, she also separates herself from the visual attributes that link her to Venus.

Rembrandt's *Susanna* paintings have generated a great deal of conflicting commentary, as Dan Clanton summarizes: "Rembrandt's two Susannas represent sites of competing claims to their function(s) and effect(s) on viewers" (169). Some scholars find them to be sympathetic to Susanna, while others read them as ambiguous. The version in The Hague shows a Susanna who appears, at first glance, to be alone; closer inspection reveals the darkened head of one elder emerging from the bushes, while the other elder may be the viewer himself. Susanna looks at the viewer with an expression that seem to show fear, but is difficult to read. She makes the gesture of the *Venus pudica*, but her body is not idealized: her skin wrinkles, and her legs bear

indentations from the garters that held up her socks. She wears expensive jewelry, but her bath slippers look humble.

Rembrandt's work departs from the depiction that had been standard up until then. Rather than depicting a moment when the elders watched Susanna and she was unaware of their



Figure 16: Rembrandt van Rijn. *Susanna*. 1636. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Maritshuis, The Hague.

presence, or showing the elders talking to or attacking Susanna, Rembrandt shows Susanna at the moment that she realizes that she is not alone, as Eric J. Sluijter observes: “What the viewer sees is a Susanna who suddenly realizes that

she is being watched—one could imagine that she has just heard a twig snap” (43). The near-removal of the elders and focus on Susanna is “completely new” (42), Sluijter asserts, while the eye contact between the viewer and Susanna gives the painting a sadistic aspect: “Susanna is trapped by the beholder’s gaze, which becomes explicitly the illicit gaze of the voyeur... In this very erotically charged moment, the engaged viewer experiences, as it were, the rush of being caught in an illicit act by the source of his sensual enjoyment. In this way the moral and erotic tension are linked as never before” (44). Sluijter finds this Susanna to be sympathetic in that she looks frightened, but he reads her fear as serving to heighten the erotic effect. Ellen Spolsky concurs, analyzing the implications of Susanna’s alarm:

[T]he Hague Rembrandt... [captures the moment] at which she becomes aware of an intruder. She is now crouching to cover her nakedness (though ineffectually), her face turned in fear, looking over her shoulder to identify the threat. Here, a frisson is added to the eroticism of the pictured body, caused by the impression of its vulnerability. It is difficult not to see the painter’s choice of this moment as sadistic; the viewer is allowed to enjoy her shock and fear. (103-104)

Spolsky and Sluijter both read this painting from the point of view of a sadistic viewer who will find Susanna’s fear even more arousing. Clanton sees the image from a more compassionate perspective, and thus as sympathetic to Susanna: “In my opinion, both of the works resist the traditional iconographic meaning(s) found in traditional renderings due to the figure of Susanna... Rembrandt paints Susanna looking directly at the viewer, and this gaze, I would argue, contains no trace of erotic appeal or sexual suggestion” (169). Whether or not this painting is meant to be erotically appealing to a sadist is a question of individual interpretation. Sadism is in the eye of the beholder. Of this painting, Bal writes: “One can argue about the meaning of the eyes, and some viewers will find them more suggestive of vulnerability than others. But neither her mouth nor her look explicitly seem to call for help, support, or protection” (15). Rembrandt left us works that not only can be interpreted in different ways, they almost have to be. His

Susannas point in both directions: one the one hand, toward empathy for Susanna; on the other, toward an identification with the elders, on a sadistically erotic level.

Any attempt to portray the Susanna story in a way that is sympathetic to the victim, then, runs the risk of becoming a depiction that will be read as even more erotic because of Susanna's fear. While Rembrandt created images that can be read as both sadistic and sympathetic, other viewers have insisted on finding the most sympathetic portrayals to be arousing. In his play about Susanna, Francisco de la Torre y Sevil strikes what might seem to be a definitive blow against any attempt to overlay this doxic image of a sexy Susanna over the paragon of virtue he presents by announcing that his Susanna is an allegorical figure of the Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, the Renaissance pictorial model of Susanna seeps into this allegory, with disquieting results.

III. *La justicia y la verdad*

La ivsticia y la verdad by Francisco de la Torre y Sevil¹⁸ was printed in 1664 by the Valencian printer Geronimo Villagrasa.¹⁹ The title page reads: "COMEDIA DE SVSANA, REPRESENTACION METAFORICA DE MARIA, A HONOR DE SV PVRA CONCEPCION. DEDICALA A LA MISMA, CON EL GLORIOSO TITVLO DE VIRGEN DE LA LUZ, EL QVE A SV CLARA SOMBRA LA ESCRIVE."

¹⁸ Francisco de la Torre y Sevil was born in Tortosa in 1625 to a distinguished family (Alvar 3). He spent much of his adult life in Valencia (Alvar 3-4), and died in late 1680 or in 1681 (Alvar 5). Huerta Calvo, et. al. give his dates as 1625-1679, adding that "A mediados de la década de los sesenta obtuvo el hábito de Calatrava, y fue asistente del virrey de Valencia (mecenas de Calderón); en 1654 publicó un tomo de sus obras poéticas titulado *Entretenimiento de las musas*" (697).

¹⁹ The Biblioteca Nacional de España holds two copies of this play. One features the date and place of publication on the title page, and a *Dedicatoria y elogio a la Virgen*, a *Censvra del Dotor Antonio Bvenaventra Guerau*, and a *Prologo al Letor* before the play begins. The second copy appears to be identical, but trimmed. It may have been from the same printing, but the prefatory material was removed from it at some point. The first page of the play in this shorter copy is marked "B," indicating that this was not intended to be the first page. The longer copy, with the prefatory material, bears the same mark on the same page. Therefore, I conclude that the 1664 printing, with the prefatory material, was likely the original (and perhaps only) printing.

In the opening *Dedicatoria y elogio a la Virgen*, de la Torre addresses the Virgin directly, likening his work as a poet to the work of visual artists:

Escrita va en este papel la imagen de vuestra pureza, pintada luze en vuestro retrato la relacion de vuestra hermosura, para que se prueve assi la afinidad de las plumas y los pinzeles; de las voces y los colores; estos empleos a la vista, essotros al oydo; porque para admiracion de entrambos sentidos os formò Dios, àzia el oydo, cuerda armonia de su gloria; y àzia la vista, luz niña de sus ojos. (220R)

De la Torre does not directly address the subject of painted images of Susanna; rather, he promises the Virgin that his play will be a painted portrait of her, suggesting that the spectator or reader of the play will see a Susanna who reminds them of a painting of the Madonna. Much as Renaissance painters overlaid the image of Venus onto the story of Susanna, de la Torre will overlay it anew with the image of the Virgin. The play's consumers will be readers rather than spectators:

Sea otro motivo el frequentarse vuestro Oratorio en el de la Real casa de San Felipe Neri, docta Congregacion de exemplares varones, à quienes deven por vos singular luzmiêto mis papeles, y bien singular, pues siendo el teatro materia tan lexos como de su vista de su aprovacion, admiten gustosos el que se les cometa la censura de vuestras comedias, para que hasta en esto se vea con propiedad el misterio de vuestra Concepcion; pues siendo como general ley en estos insignes sugetos no ver comedias, leen las que os tocan a vos. (220R-220V)

Going to the theater and seeing *comedias* is unbecfitting of “doctos y ejemplares varones,” so it is better that these read the play rather than see it performed, de la Torre assures the Virgin herself.

However, as de la Torre notes in the prologue, the play was performed in Valencia: “salio vna vez en la representacion, a la publicidad del teatro; y sale otra en la prensa, al teatro de la publicidad. La singular comun aclamacion que tuvo representado, desea impresso para que sea todo en el aplauso de su soberano assumpto impresso, y representado” (222R). While his dedication to the Virgin asserts that plays are unseemly, in the note to the reader, the playwright appears to hope that his reader saw the play. He is printing it, he writes, for the benefit of those

who were unable to see it: “para que seas letor della, el que no pudiste ser oyente, que aunque la compañía que la representò fue grande, para impedir el concurso fueron los dias cortos, y el tiempo contrario, vengose el tiempo... [que] en su destemplança embaraçõ con crecidas lluvias las calles de Valencia” (222R-222V). This climatic misfortune did not deter de la Torre, who cheerfully offers his printed play to the reader: “si tu no pudiste ir a la comedia, la comedia va a ti; y aumentada, que porque no fuera prolixa a la proporcion del teatro, se le quitò mas de vn tercio en diferentes partes que ahora se le restituye” (222V). It is not difficult to see how the play, as it is printed, may not have been ideally suited to the requirements of a theatrical company performing a play for profit: at just over 3600 lines, full of dense religious allegory, it resembles three *autos sacramentales* stitched together. A much shorter version would have been more suited to performance.

The allegorical nature of the play is clearly defined in the *dramatis personae*:

Ioachim que es Dios.
Susana la Virgen.
Nabuco el demonio.
Sedequias el Engaño.
Acab el Tiempo.
Daniel Iuzio de Dios.
La Verdad.
La Iusticia.
La Essencion.
La Ley.
La Duda.
El Cuydado. [etc.]

In casting Susanna as an allegorical representation of the Virgin Mary, de la Torre not only takes up the popular mode of Old Testament hermeneutics wherein female figures are read as prefigurations of the Virgin, but also creatively glosses the role Susanna played in the early Church as an exemplar of chastity within marriage. The allegorical identity of Susanna leaves no choice but to make Joachim God himself, though this role is not paralleled at all by Joachim’s

actions in the Bible. The playwright assigns the two elders the allegorical identities of Tiempo and Engaño, though the correspondence between these two abstract concepts and the elders' behavior is not entirely clear. The titular virtues, Justicia and Verdad, play the role of Susanna's two maids, while the other allegorical characters are purely allegorical, and are not associated with any characters from the Book of Daniel.

La justicia y la verdad may have been inspired by any of the Susanna plays I have discussed previously. The two elders share the names of those in Vélez de Guevara's play, and they speak in Petrarchan love metaphors when they describe their feelings for Susanna. This may reflect the influence of a previous playwright, but it may also have been nearly inevitable for any male character expressing amorous desire in a seventeenth-century *comedia*. The allegorical aspects make de la Torre's play unique, however, as the title virtues oppose themselves to Tiempo and Engaño from the first scene, shutting them out of Paradise:

IUST.	Has de salir.	
VERD.	No has de entrar.	<i>cierran.</i>
TIEMP.	Porque?	
VERD.	Porque eres tu el Tiempo, yo la Verdad inmortal, que el parayso te cierra y la causa es, que jamas puede estar en su constancia, la inconstancia que en ti està. (8-14)	

In the context of the Susanna story, the notion that time is the enemy of truth is intriguing. In the many discussions of the story and its interpretations over the centuries that I have discussed throughout, the idea that the original story has become *distorted* has been a recurring theme. The doxic versions of biblical stories that Alice Bach critiques are misapprehensions of the original tales that have developed over time. The doxic depiction of Susanna in art took hold across time, overpowering the original story. Is Verdad reasserting the truth of the Susanna story over the

distortions to it that Tiempo has permitted, if not exactly caused? If this was de la Torre's intention, he does not assert it directly, and subtlety is not one of the primary features of his allegory. He stated in the *dedicatoria* that the play would paint the portrait of the Virgin; if he intends this as a corrective to other portraits of Susanna, he keeps that to himself.

These other images of Susanna are alluded to soon, however, as Justicia and Verdad patiently explain the solar system to Tiempo and Engaño:

IUST. En essa estrella que es Venus,
Eva retratada està.
TIEM. A Venus por mas hermosa,
la mançana le daran.
VER. Tambien a Eva se la dieron
de discordia vniversal,
por mas ignorante aqui,
si por mas hermosa allà. (127-134)

The astronomy lesson takes on its own allegorical meaning, as Venus becomes the portrait of Eve. Tiempo remembers the story he has heard about the great beauty of Venus, and Verdad reminds him of Eve's terrible mistake. The connection between the two is explicit, reminding the spectator/reader of their connection in art. As Margaret Miles points out, the "reiterated and reinforced associations of female nakedness with Eve and original sin" (124) made it virtually impossible to "[see] Susanna's nakedness as innocence" (124).²⁰ Not only is Eve invoked here, but she is brought up in connection with Venus, with the latter being the *portrait* of the former. Both are figures that were almost always painted as feminine nudes, and the visual traditions surrounding both had heavily contaminated the visual tradition of Susanna. De la Torre's spectator/reader already expects Susanna's bath scene to occur at some point, and now he is prepared to think of the nude Susanna in terms of these two other nudes. If he is reading the play rather than watching it performed, that means he has more time to think about it. The extra time

²⁰ See Chapter II.

for prurient speculation that reading allows makes de la Torre's eroticizing language questionable, here and elsewhere.

An interesting feature of de la Torre's own invention is the introduction of the *gracioso* Pergamino, the servant of Tiempo, who makes his entrance with some brutally obvious slapstick symbolism:

*Sale Pergamino, tropieça
al entrar, y cae.*

PERG. Valgame el mismo profūdo,
ay Dios!

CUYD. Allí siento ruydo,
que es esso?

PERG. Vno, que ha caydo.

CUY. Esso es entrar en el mundo;
que la Concepcion se advierte
entrada al ser, y salida,
porque es entrar en la vida (514-520)

With his entrance, Pergamino represents the entire fallen human race. He stumbles through the play with his allegorical function as *pergamino* taking on greater or lesser significance as the scene demands. In this first scene, he makes a Catalinón-esque speech about the habits of Tiempo, his lascivious master:

Festea a toda señora,
blanca, y negra, atroche, y moche,
acuestase con la noche;
y amanece con la Aurora.
Al día, con luzes bellas,
regala en bizarro alarde,
pero en llegando a la tarde
le haze vèr las estrellas.
Su lacivia a todo sube,
en fria, y gorda se embeve,
que echandose con la nieve,
haze parir a la nube (590-601)

Pergamino's speech paints Tiempo as an indiscriminate serial harasser of women. Lacking don Juan's attractiveness but not his relentlessness, he becomes a comically lascivious old man. At

Susanna’s trial, in the Bible, Daniel alludes to an earlier incident involving one of the elders: “This is how you acted with the daughters of Israel, and in their fear they yielded to you” (Daniel 13:57). Pergamino’s description of Tiempo evokes this passage near the end of the Susanna story, in which we learn that Susanna’s extraordinary beauty was not, in fact, the cause of the elders’ sudden and unprecedented decline into lascivious criminality. Rather, the elders (or at least the one that Daniel is addressing here) had extorted sex from other women before, and gotten away with it. De la Torre is conscious of this verse as he composes his play. All of the characters in *La justicia y la verdad*, whether of high or low social status, speak of the elders from the outset as disgusting human beings toward whom they feel nothing but contempt.

Later in the first act, Joachim-as-God comes out and makes a lengthy speech about how he has created this house and garden exclusively for the pleasure of his beloved, Susanna-as-María:

Casa te puse en esplendor no escasa, que por ser tuya, es ya del Sol la casa, por criadas fieles contra la malicia te di Ley, Essencion, Verdad, Iusticia, ...	750
Y alfin del ciego mundo, introduzido dentro de la Babilonia, este florido penzil, de Abril, y Mayo eterno asseo, hize, para tu gusto, y tu recreo, cerrè su puerta, ya contigo abierta, porque contigo el cielo tiene puerta.	760
Dispuse aqui, para tu aplauso pios quatro partes del Orbe, en quatro rios, fuentes en que te mires, y suaves baños, en que te laves; que te laves señalo, no por necesidad, si, por regalo	765 770
pues deve ponderarse, que la que limpia està, no ha de lavarse, y tu con modo estraño, buelves, mas limpio, y saludable el baño,	

que contigo, picina se examina,
pues tu el Angel seràs de la picina. (749-776)

775

The garden is a problematic element in the Susanna story: Marti Steussy discusses the difficulty of translating *paradeisos* because it indicates too public a place (108),²¹ which in turn connotes that Susanna was “asking for it” merely by being there: “outdoor bathing is so risqué in our culture that readers quickly conclude that Susanna was ‘looking for trouble’” (110). Ellen Spolsky concludes that the garden setting is key among the pastoral elements in the Theodotion version of the story, which she sees as the origin of the Renaissance tradition of sexualizing paintings of Susanna. In these paintings, the lush setting is among the visual cues that encourage the spectator to read the painting as erotic and Susanna as willing (112-113). As I discussed in section II of this chapter, the paintings that create more sympathetic portrayals of Susanna often eliminate the garden, thus lessening the erotic impact of the image. De la Torre, on the other hand, paints the garden in.

The Edenic overtones of Joachim’s description evoke the pictorial tradition, reminding the spectator/reader of the images in which Susanna resembles both Venus and Eve. Further reinforcing this connection, the allegorical characters have recently reminded us that Eve’s portrait is painted in the planet Venus. Although Joachim-as-God addresses Susanna-as-María as his wife, his description of the garden suggests images of Eden, which means Susanna will be cast out once she inevitably sins. The language of the closed and open doors is polyvalent: “cerrè su puerta, ya contigo abierta, / porque contigo el cielo tiene puerta” (763-764) refers, firstly, to Mary’s role as intercessor for mankind, praising her clemency as the pathway into Heaven for sinners. At the same time, these lines remind us of Eve and Adam being cast out of the garden, the doors forever shut against them. The lines also evoke the image of women’s enclosure, as

²¹ See Introduction, Note 5.

Peter Stallybrass describes: “The surveillance of woman concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house. These three areas were frequently collapsed into each other. The connection between speaking and wantonness was common to legal discourse and conduct books” (126).²² Joachim’s reference to the Virgin opening the gates of Heaven to souls carries two subtexts that work against this image of the sinless Mary: Eve having the doors shut against her, and Susanna carelessly allowing the elders to find a hiding place in her garden. It also highlights the no-win situation of any woman who as an object of desire: in order to be compassionate, she must open the door; in order to be virtuous, she must close it. There is no middle position, and no safe ground that she can occupy.

Susanna’s carelessness about protecting herself, and the validity of her desire to bathe, are questioned in other plays, such as Diego Sánchez de Badajoz’s moralizing speech about her laziness. De la Torre has Joachim make it explicit that Susanna does not need to bathe, because she is already so pure: “que te laves señalo, /no por necesidad, si, por regalo” (769-770). In the first act, this appears to be a rhetorical flourish added to Joachim’s long speech about Susanna’s beauty and sinlessness, and the glorious garden he has created for her. In Act III, however, these lines will cast a darker shadow, as Susanna is found to be at fault in her encounter with the elders.

In a peculiar manifestation of the *comedia* tradition of having a romance between the servants mirror the main romance, a subplot develops in which Tiempo and Pergamino both attempt to court Verdad. Tiempo instructs Pergamino to deliver a letter to her, but Pergamino hopes to win her for himself:

PERG. Y tambien el Pergamino,
 para ponerles corozas.
 Oye Verdad pues le va

²² See Chapter III, section III.

el Cuydado, guarda fiel,
 VERD. Que quieres?
 PERG. Darte un papel.
 VERD. De quien es? *toma el papel y*
 PERG. El lo dirà. *lee la Verdad.*
 ...
 VERD. Dile que venga mañana,
 PERG. A que hora?
 VERD. Entre dos luzes;
 buelve la respuesta presto.
 PERG. Mi ventura ha sido brava,
 oye que se me olvidava.
 VERD. Que dizes?
 PERG. Verdad, solo esto.
 Que es tu divina beldad,
 aclamada por hermosa,
 y por Dios sera gran cosa
 vèr desnuda la Verdad.
vanse. (1096-1121)

The allegorical implications of having Pergamino be currently in the service of Tiempo, but hoping to be in the service of Verdad, are never fully explored. Verdad is one of Susanna's maids, so a relationship between her and Pergamino might make sense in a typical *comedia*, even without the allegorical meaning of a Pergamino wanting to record or reflect the truth. The commonplace metaphor about the naked truth takes on an amusingly prurient tone in Pergamino's remark, reminding the spectator/reader of the connection between nudity, transparency, and honesty. Here, nudity is referenced as a synonym for honesty. Susanna's character might hope to benefit from these positive associations, but the doxa will interfere.

As in the plays I discussed in Chapter III, *La justicia y la verdad* dedicates a great deal of time to other episodes in the Book of Daniel. Most of the second act is taken up with these, with Susanna's story being confined to a lengthy musical celebration of her beauty, and to the subplot of Pergamino and Tiempo both trying to court Verdad. De la Torre saves all of the most exciting plot points for the third act, where the lengthy bath scene is followed by the lions' den scene, and

an elaborate set piece in which Susanna and Daniel lament their captivity simultaneously. Once released from the lions' den, Daniel rushes directly to Susanna's trial to set her free.

This compression of action in the third act does not lead de la Torre to compress the bath scene, however. That unnarrated time in the Bible, that mysterious background, once again becomes a languorous and erotic scene of a woman discussing and performing her ablutions. Verdad and Justicia, described by Joachim as servants of Susanna in the first act, finally assume their roles as the two maids who were with her in the garden. Tiempo and Engaño are already there, hiding and watching, but the female characters take the more active part in describing the scene:

Salen Susana, Iusticia, y Verdad.

VERD.	La siesta señora obliga a bañarse.	
IUST.	Can cervero, el can del cielo es, humeando ardientes rayos.	
SUS.	Molesto es el calor, desnudadme, que despues entrarè dentro; mirad si solo, y cerrado esta el jardin.	2730
VERD.	Ni aun el viento passar puede.	
IUST.	Ni aun murmura el agua.	2735
SUS.	Su raudal tierno, apenas en breve rastro dexa sobre el verde suelo, no seña de la humedad, sino sudor del incendio.	2740
TIEM.	Que discreta!	
ENG.	Di, que hermosa!	
TIEM.	Que candor descubre bello!	
SUS.	Desnudare lo que falta, dentro a solas, el vnguento aromatico, y el agua templada, que añadir suelo,	2745

para mas alivio al baño,
dadme.

Like Salinas,²³ de la Torre emphasizes the terrible heat of the burning Babylonian afternoon as a justification for Susanna's bath: she may already be cleaner than the water, but she will still enjoy cooling off in it. But Susanna commands her maids to undress her in 2731, and then all three continue discussing the heat at length as they are, presumably, undressing her all the while. This scene is a narrative ekphrasis of the pictorial model of the bathing Susanna. Most of the images focus on dense, green gardens, like the one de la Torre's Joachim has described in the first act.

Vélez de Guevara handles the problem of the bath scene by having the elders perform an elaborate ekphrasis while Susanna's bath takes place offstage, while Guillén de Castro's stage directions call for a mute, onstage undressing scene, the details of which are open to interpretation. De la Torre, in a play that was performed in Valencia, but which he surmises his reader will have been too prudent to see, has Susanna undress onstage while she herself delivers an ekphrastic speech announcing her intention to bathe: "Molesto /es el calor, desnudadme, / que despues entrarè dentro; / mirad si solo, y cerrado / esta el jardin" (2730-2734). This passage especially evokes the Tintoretto Susanna in the Louvre, in which Susanna's two maids attend to her as she gazes out at the viewer. The paintings by Gentileschi, van Honthorst, and Ribera deny the pastoral and situate Susanna in stark surroundings, subverting the expectations the viewer has developed thanks to paintings by Tintoretto, Veronese and others. De la Torre, however, has Susanna poetically describe the garden as she is undressing in it, and has the elders speak to remind us that they are watching. Rather than taking the opportunity to strike some kind of

²³ Salinas's poem was published thirteen years before de la Torre's play, and may have been one of the sources from which de la Torre drew inspiration for this work.

compromise with the doxic version of a bathing Susanna, de la Torre makes a number of verbal nods to the more sexualizing images within the pictorial tradition.



Figure 17: Tintoretto. *Susanna and the Elders*. Circa 1550. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre, Paris. Image courtesy of Art History 390 on flickr.com.

For performers, the single word “desnudadme” serves as an implicit stage direction. For the reader, on the other hand, it remains on his mind as he reads the rest of the passage. As the ladies poetically discuss the heat, this undressing continues. In case the reader had forgotten, Tiempo interrupts the poetic description of the heat with a poetic description of Susanna’s pale flesh: “Que candor descubre bello!” (2742). This scene might be a thorny one for a theatrical company to present, as Susanna is still on stage and cannot reveal very much “candor bello” to the audience. This passage could be read as de la Torre’s own indirect stage direction, a kind of implied *Descúbrese el más candor bello que pueda*; or it could be interpreted as meaning she

should remove some permissible outer garment, such as a head covering or her shoes.²⁴ Any performance of this scene, including one imagined in a reader's mind, would enact the fiction of exhibitionism that Christian Metz proposes: "Since it is there, it must like it" (62). The actress playing Susanna has consented to this onstage undressing, and this appearance of consent runs the risk of slipping into the spectator/reader's perception of Susanna herself: if the elders can see her, she must be willing to let them see her.

Whether or not the play is to be performed, the decision to include a scene like this in an allegorical presentation of the Virgin Mary is questionable. The bath scene would have been satisfying to the theatrical audience, but to a reader this scene creates a pause in the narrative that could become perilously lengthened: while the actors would keep going into the next scene, the reader is free to stop here as long as he likes, letting his imagination wander where it will. Unlike Salinas, de la Torre has never promised to restore Susanna's good name. What he has promised is to tell the story of Susanna as an allegory of the Holy Virgin, and here he has the Holy Virgin involved in a spicy striptease. As much as the Venus-like Susannas of the Italian Renaissance twisted the biblical story's message about resistance and salvation, they were merely sullyng the name of Susanna. The doxic version of Susanna is so strong that it seizes the reins of de la Torre's allegory and runs off with it like Plato's undisciplined horse, creating an association between the Virgin Mary and the bathing Venus that de la Torre surely had not set out to create. Elsewhere, the play might lift Susanna up, but here it pulls the Virgin Mary down into the seductive pictorial model.

²⁴ Taking off her shoes and revealing the *candor bello* of her feet would deliver the erotic impact the audience might have been hoping for, and would have been in line with various poetic treatments of women bathing their feet. But even this might have been too indecorous for many theater patrons.

In the Bible, Susanna sends her maids to fetch oil and ointment, and is thus alone for a few moments. In de la Torre's play, she expects the maids to already have the "unguento aromatico" (2744) and "agua templada" (2745) that she ordinarily adds to her bath:

VERD.	Yo el agua no tengo.	
IUST.	Yo el vnguento olvidè.	
SUS.	Pues	
	id por todo. Mas teneos.	2750
	El vnguento, tu, y tu el agua,	
	como olvidaste?	
VER.	Vn compuesto	
	essa agua es, que la hazen turbia,	
	otros ingredientes frescos,	
	que el arte ha inventado, yo	2755
	soy la Verdad, claro espejo,	
	y por esso el agua turbia	
	olvidè, porque al aprecio	
	de la Verdad, no conviene	
	lo turbio, sino lo terso.	2760
IUST.	Iusticia soy, el precioso	
	vnguento dexè, temiendo	
	no digan que a la Iusticia,	
	la manos le vnta el vnguento.	
VER.	Ya por ambas cosas vamos.	2765
	<i>Vanse.</i>	
SUS.	Bien hablaste, bolved presto.	
	Que mudo està todo? (2748-2767)	

De la Torre aligns his protagonist with the pictorial model of Susanna surrounded by cosmetics as she enhances her natural beauty. While Salinas defends Susanna's right to take a bath with "De la natural limpieza / Dios no se ofende" (345-346), de la Torre implicates his Susanna in a desire for an unnatural cleanness. Her servants object to her request from the perspective of their allegorical identities, asserting that the toiletries she wants occlude the functions of truth and justice.

It is not clear exactly what the "agua templada" (2745) Susanna usually uses is, but Verdad is opposed to the "otros ingredientes frescos, / que el arte ha inventado" (2754-2755),

suggesting some sort of soap or perfume. Whatever it is, it muddies the water, making it less than transparent so that the Truth cannot be seen clearly. Since the Truth should be a clear mirror, Verdad wishes to remain unsullied by this darkening agent. In Tintoretto's Vienna painting, Susanna gazes into a mirror that does not reflect her, revealing only distorted images of a few of her grooming objects and a general murkiness.²⁵ The mirror is an important attribute of Venus, as Monica S. Cyrino explains: "As a symbol of the goddess, the mirror encapsulates the powerful moment of epiphany and recognition when the beautiful appearance of Aphrodite is perceived by someone else" (65). Tintoretto's golden, self-absorbed, exhibitionist Venus looks into the mirror searching for this epiphany, but Venus cannot be reflected in the mirror of the Susanna story. In de la Torre's play, Truth herself asserts that she is a clear mirror, which seems like it might lead to the interpretation that the purity of the Virgin can be reflected in the clear mirror of the Susanna story. Instead, Verdad refuses to touch Susanna's perfume, lest the clarity of Truth herself become muddied by contact with it. Susanna is asking for something that the Virgin should not have, and the mirror of the allegory is darkening. Pergamino wanted to "vèr desnuda la Verdad" (1121) in Act I, and now Verdad objects to anything other than absolute clarity in Susanna's bathwater. The fact that the abstract concept of Truth raises this objection to the Virgin Mary opens a gap of doubt in the allegory about the blameless Susanna. The mirror remains dark: the Susanna story cannot reflect the Virgin back to us.

Nor does Justice wish to touch Susanna's ointment, lest people say that "la manos le vnta el vnguento" (2764). Both of the titular virtues are concerned about making metaphors literal: Justicia does not want to "grease her palms," while Verdad does not want to "muddy the waters." Susanna habitually uses both of these items in her bath, asking for the things "que añadir suelo"

²⁵ See Chapter II, section II. C.

(2745). If Justicia and Verdad are not even willing to touch them, what does it say about Susanna that she uses them regularly? Joachim already told her in the first act that she did not need to bathe at all; if she did, it was only for her pleasure. Now, we see that the items she uses in her bath are suspicious. Rina Walthaus writes that the “interpretación del baño como confirmación de la limpieza moral de la protagonista... recibe su mayor plasmación en esta obra de La Torre y Sevil” (1838), but she does not address these complaints by Justicia and Verdad about the way Susanna likes to bathe, which seriously undermine this “limpieza moral.”

Susanna’s mention of these items is faithful to the Book of Daniel, although in the Bible there is no judgment implied; no one seems to feel that Susanna would be better off without these luxurious items: “‘Bring me oil and soap,’ she said to the maids, ‘and shut the garden doors while I bathe.’ They did as she said; they shut the garden doors and left by the side gate to fetch what she had ordered” (Daniel 13:17-18). Susanna is a wealthy woman; the day is hot; she is in the privacy of her own garden; the biblical account seems to accept that she might enjoy some luxurious items to make her smell nice. Slonim’s account of the purification ritual indicates that cosmetics must not be used during the bath, but their use afterward may be permissible.

The absence of the maids gives the elders opportunity to assault Susanna, but the Bible does not imply, as de la Torre does, that the attack is therefore Susanna’s fault. Perhaps influenced by ideas of paintings in which Susanna appears bedecked with pearls and brocades, using fancy jars of ointment, and looking in mirrors, de la Torre has her own servants question her motives, as though she were in violation of some ancient sumptuary law. The connection with Venus made in the pictorial model of Susanna must be partially responsible: Venus beautified herself in preparation for sexual encounters with men; Susanna was painted to look as though she were doing the same, implying that she welcomed the elders’ approach, and this was

to be condemned. The doxic version of the Susanna story, in which she seems to bear some responsibility for the elders' assault, is so strong in de la Torre's mind that his allegory about the Virgin Mary features a scene in which the personifications of justice and truth chastise her for being greasy and dirty.

In his commentary on the Susanna story in art, Meyer Schapiro summarizes the exegesis of the Bible passage by Hippolytus of Rome, a Greek Christian theologian of the third century:

Susanna, he wrote, is the persecuted church; her husband, Joachim, is Christ; their garden is the society of the saints who are like fruitful trees; Babylon, which surrounds the garden, is the world in which Christians live; the two elders are the two peoples, the Jews and the pagans, who are enemies of the church; Susanna's bath is the water of baptism that regenerates the church on Easter Day; the two maidservants are faith and charity; the perfumes they apply to their mistress' body are the commandments of the Word; and the oil is the grace of the Holy Spirit, especially that which is conferred by confirmation. (10)

De la Torre's allegorical treatment of the maids as Truth and Justice, then, is not far from Hippolytus' own interpretation of the story, while the play's hostility toward the bath is an innovation. While Hippolytus sees perfumes and oils as symbolic of some of Christianity's basic elements, de la Torre has his characters compare them to corruption and falsity.

In the sixteenth century, keeping herself and her household clean were considered to be among the duties of the perfect wife. In Chapter XI of *La perfecta casada*, Fray Luis de León informs us that:

desta casada perfecta es parte también no ser en el tratamiento de su persona alguna desaliñada y remendada, sino que... a su persona la ha de traer limpia y bien tratada, aderezándola honestamente en la manera que su estado lo pide, y trayéndose conforme a su cualidad... Porque la que con su buen concierto y gobierno da luz y resplandor a lo demás de su casa, que ella ande deslucida en sí, ninguna razón lo permite. (136-38)

Fray Luis emphasizes the importance of rank in his description of the wife's cleanliness: a woman of a certain "estado" must "aderezar" herself "honestamente, conforme a su cualidad." A woman of low social status might be forgiven for being filthy, and indeed it might be more

appropriate that she keep her mind on hard work and avoid the activity of bathing, which is definitely indolent and possibly lascivious. It is fitting that a noblewoman like Susanna, however, should keep herself clean and smelling fresh. Reason cannot permit anything less. Yet Susanna's choices about her ablutions are presented in *La justicia y la verdad* as a sensual pleasure she does not require, but in which she was tempted to indulge; and as such, a sin. Amidst the constant choruses of how she is without sin, this interlude is jarring. It destabilizes the core allegory of the play, possibly introducing a deeply subversive message into a story about the Virgin's sinlessness.

This impertinence from her maids might be expected to anger Susanna, but instead she says that they spoke well and asks them to hurry back. At this point, as in the Bible, the elders emerge from their hiding place. Like the elders in all of the plays I discuss, "Sedequias el Engaño" and "Acab el Tiempo" pounce on Susanna spouting clichéd metaphors about her beauty and their "love" for her. Susanna tries to dissuade them and, unlike the elders in the other plays I discuss, these elders listen to her and momentarily feel ashamed. Overcoming this flash of decency, however, they devise their threat:

TIE.	Que entregada al adulterio con vn joven, te hemos visto, y que cerraste por esso las puertas.
ENG.	Y las criadas despediste.
SUS.	Riesgo fiero; mas que mucho estè en èl, si Iusticia y Verdad se fueron? Que el alma sin las virtudes siempre tropieça en los riesgos. (2798-2806)

Susanna here confirms the allegations that her maids leveled against her: by asking for the inappropriate toiletries, she was doing nothing less than purging her soul of its virtues. She

ordered Truth and Justice to leave her, leaving herself in an immoral state that made her vulnerable to an attack for which she now lays the blame squarely on herself. Susanna's concern about having dismissed her female attendants is also grounded in the Hebrew purification ritual, as Slonim confirms: "A female attendant, known as a *shomeret*, is present at immersion... In keeping with the biblical injunction against placing oneself in danger, the attendant is also there to assist the woman as necessary" (xvii). This may account for the of victim-blaming we have seen in other adaptations of the Susanna story, but its association with the Virgin makes it more surprising.

As she refuses the elders' coercion, Susanna ekphrastically compares herself to Venus and to another bathing woman painted in scenes of voyeurism:

Yo
 conceder? Caduco Tiempo,
 torpe Engaño. En esta nieve
 apagarse mis luzeros
 podian? Y esta pureza
 pudo mezclar sus reflexos,
 siendo candor de Diana,
 en esta espuma de Venus? (2883-2890)

The contrast between the images of the muddy bathwater and the clear mirror of Verdad are re-invoked in this dense web of ekphrastic metaphors, with the clarity of Susanna's "pureza" being clouded by the "reflejos" of Diana and Venus. As it did in the prefatory sonnet Juan Francisco Andrés wrote for Salinas's narrative poem, "candor" means more than one thing here: Susanna is contrasting the chaste Diana with the promiscuous Venus, but at the same time, "candor" evokes the image of the pale, beautiful bathing Diana seen in art, when Actaeon surprised her at her bath. The word also harkens back to Susanna's recent discussion of her bathwater with Verdad, who was concerned about her reputation. Verdad wanted to ensure that her mirror reflects "sinceridad, pureza, y candidez del ánimo, que no tiene mezcla de malicia, ni pasión que

perturbe su sosiego y tranquilidad” (*Diccionario de autoridades* n.p.), and now Susanna is concerned about the “reflejos” of Diana and Venus being mixed together. While Diana is associated with “candor,” reminding us of the clarity and purity that Verdad always seeks, the reflection of Venus is “espuma.” This is a clear ekphrastic reference to Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, which Susanna now directly connects to herself. She also situates the image in the position of the “agua tibia” that she requested earlier. Susanna is concerned about the mixed reflections in the mirror of her honor, in which the “espuma de Venus” (2890) is likened to the “agua turbia” (2757) that darkens the mirror.

Only now does Susanna realize that her allegorical mirror is murky, a situation that she laments by ekphrastically linking herself to both Diana and Venus. Daniel will exonerate Susanna in the end, but her reflection has already been contaminated by a series of visual allusions over which the play itself appears to have lost control. Although Rina Walthaus writes: “es en la obra de La Torre y Sevil donde Susana queda identificada enteramente con la Virgen sin mácula” (1839), the doxic *mácula* of the pictorial model in fact contaminates Susanna and, by allegorical extension, the Virgin herself. De la Torre set out to write a play that exalted Susanna as a prefiguration of the Virgin, but the doxa of the Susanna story seized the reins of his play and left him with a mud puddle of swirling ekphrases in which the Virgin herself becomes associated with Venus and the general Golden Age suspicion of deceitful women.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the doxic image of Susanna as actually taking a bath was already so strong that even artists who strove to paint the story in a way that was sympathetic to the heroine accepted the bath as an unavoidable part of the story. The features that were typical of the popular doxic tradition, however, such as Susanna’s resemblance to Venus and the sexually allusive garden, were resisted by artists like Gentileschi, van

Honthorst, and Ribera, who tried to induce the viewer to identify with Susanna rather than with the elders. The influence of the pictorial model of a Venus-like Susanna was so strong that writers who similarly attempted to create verbal portraits of her were forced to address it, or risk losing control of their narrative. By confronting the doxa directly and creating an oppositional ekphrasis, Manuel de Salinas asserted the primacy of his vision of Susanna over the way she was typically treated in art. Francisco de la Torre did not engage in a straightforward defiance of the doxa, and the imagery surrounding it oozes into his work like an ekphrastic excretion, sullyng the name of the biblical figures he had sought to venerate.

Chapter Five: “This picture has great significance”: Susanna in *Psycho*

In the 1960 trailer for *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock informs us that the parlor of the Bates Motel was Norman Bates’ “favorite spot,” then invites us to visit the parlor with him. Once there, he points to a painting on the wall and says “This picture has great significance, because...” before lowering his eyes and changing the subject, leaving his audience to wonder what, if any, the great significance may be. The image is a copy of a 1731 painting of Susanna and the elders by Willem van Mieris, and the placement of the object itself is significant to the narrative of *Psycho*, since it covers the hole through which Norman spies on Marion Crane. At the same time, the story and its many depictions in art have intertextual ramifications that extend in many directions, connecting this painting, and the other paintings in the parlor, with the characters and events in the film. For centuries, paintings of Susanna and the elders have subtly played on the sympathies of viewers, inducing them to identify both with Susanna and with the elders. By placing this painting so prominently in this scene, *Psycho* picks up this complicated identification of the spectator as it manipulates its own audience into identifying with both Norman and Marion. Thus, in the paintings and in the film, viewers find themselves identifying with both victim and perpetrator in acts of gendered violence.

I. Venus and Susanna in the Bates Motel

After Marion arrives at the Bates Motel, Norman brings her some sandwiches and milk and invites her into the parlor behind the motel’s office. Norman steps into the dimly lit parlor carrying the tray, which he sets down before switching on a lamp. In the doorway, Marion casts mildly surprised glances at the stuffed birds mounted high on the walls. The paintings in the parlor do not capture her or the camera’s prolonged attention, but they remain in the background

in this scene and others. While Norman and Marion are talking, the camera cuts from him to her and back, never showing both of them in the same frame. Behind Norman, we see an owl perched menacingly in the corner. Beneath the owl and somewhat overshadowed by it is a small framed painting, which we never see close up and which has received much less critical attention than the Susanna painting has. William Rothman does not attempt to identify this painting, but observes that “the nude in the painting on the wall is Marion’s stand-in in this frame [which] will



Figure 18: Titian. *Venus with a Mirror*. Circa 1555. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

be confirmed when Marion strikes that figure’s exact pose” (283). After she has finished eating, Marion holds her left arm diagonally across her chest, as we can see the woman in the painting is doing. While Rothman notes this figure’s pose but does not offer any interpretation of it, Neil Hurley sees

the woman's crossed arm as a *pudica* gesture: "On the wall is a picture of a nude woman modestly wrapping her arms around her body in a protective gesture; Marion is seen with one arm similarly gripping her other arm in a subconscious posture of self-defense" (240). Marion may be feeling defensive, but the woman in the picture is not making this gesture because she feels modest or threatened.

The picture behind Norman, next to the Susanna, is a copy of Titian's *Venus with a Mirror*, now in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. (Figure 18). In Titian's painting, Cupid holds up a mirror as Venus poses, smiling with satisfaction at her reflection. Another Cupid figure reaches out to Venus from behind the mirror to lay a crown of flowers on her head. Venus is wrapped in a sumptuous red velvet cape bordered with fur and extravagant gold and silver embroidery, which covers the lower half of her body but appears to have fallen off of her right



Figure 19: The *Capitoline Venus*. Roman copy of a late Hellenistic sculpture. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

shoulder, leaving her torso bare. She holds her left hand up to her chest, perhaps to admire the gold bracelet and ring that adorn it, and check to see how well they go with her pearl earrings and the gold and pearl decorations she wears in her blonde hair. Venus's crossed arm is neither shielding her nudity nor defending her, but is striking perhaps one of many poses as she contemplates her own loveliness. Her posture is reminiscent of the Capitoline Venus, a copy of Praxiteles' *Venus Pudica* type (Figure 19), in which Venus uses her hands to cover her nudity from the eyes of an unknown observer. Titian's Venus, however, seems to be holding the pose purely to admire her own loveliness, not

to protect herself. The painting not only connects Marion to an idealized vision of feminine beauty, but also alludes to the relationship between Venus and Cupid, an ambiguously sexual mother-son relationship parallel to the one Norman is describing to a disquieted Marion. Later, we will see a small statue of cupid in the foyer of the Bates house.

The placement of the two paintings also highlights the connection, discussed in Chapter II, between Venus and Susanna in Venetian painting. Titian's Venus wears her blonde hair in a complicated arrangement with braids and pearls, much like the Susannas of Tintoretto and Veronese. The *pudica* gesture Venus makes is echoed by many Susannas, surprised in a private moment and trying to shield their nudity but making a charming, consummately feminine gesture in the attempt. The two female figures are connected in Renaissance art and, as the camera stands in for Norman's eyes, we see him connecting Marion with both figures.

When the parlor conversation begins, we see Norman from the front, more or less from



Figure 20: Norman and Venus. Still from *Psycho*.

Marion's point of view. After Norman has finished his speech about private traps, Marion glances toward the house—in the direction of the Venus, but without seeming to see it—and says: "If anyone ever talked to me the way I heard..." For the first time, we see Norman in profile as he listens (Figure 20). He is leaning forward, blocking the Susanna with his torso, so that we can only see the Venus in front of him as he expresses his frustration with his mother. He says he would like to leave her forever, or at least defy her, then pauses and leans back, revealing the Susanna behind him (Figure 21). "But I know I can't," he concludes. Marion asks him why he doesn't go away, and he inquires whether he should seek a private island, like her. "No," Marion replies, setting down her sandwich and folding her left arm across her chest, "Not like



Figure 21: Norman, Venus and Susanna. Still from *Psycho*.

me." Joseph Smith identifies the Venus image as "a classical painting of a woman trying to shield her naked body" (62), but observes that this is the moment where Marion strikes the same pose: "she assumes it on her line, 'No, not like me,' though the figure really is like her. This is, it serves as a precursor to the naked and defenseless posture she'll adopt in a few short minutes; the

nude figure's position under the ominous-looking owl reinforces her forthcoming role as victim" (62). Marion is denying that she is like Venus, but Norman thinks she is.

Even as the audience reflects on Marion's secret, her journey, and her possible repentance, Norman sees her as a reflection of the ideal of feminine beauty that hangs on his wall. George Toles has commented on "the omnipresence of mirrors and reflections in *Psycho*. Beginning with Marion's decision to steal forty thousand dollars, which she arrives at while looking at herself in the mirror, almost every interior scene prominently features a mirror that doubles as a character's image, but that *no one* turns to face" (134). In the painting, Venus is looking at herself in a mirror, and her image is doubled there.¹ As Norman looks at Marion, he sees his images of Venus and Susanna reflected in her, or projected onto her. Norman has been looking at these paintings for years, during the solitary hours he has presumably spent in the parlor, arranging his stuffed birds and peeping on previous guests. As Hitchcock told us in the trailer, it is his favorite spot. He's not looking at the painting of Venus in this shot, but he is looking at Marion, casting his gaze—freighted with the remembered image of this painting—in her direction. Perhaps unconsciously reacting to his gaze, heavy with the reflections of these symbolic images, Marion crosses her arms, hugging herself protectively. Later, in the shower, she will strike a *pudica* pose reminiscent of many Venuses and Susannas as she folds her left arm across her chest, trying to shield herself from her attacker and also, conveniently, shielding her breasts from the viewer (Figure 22).

¹ There are also two Cupid figures, one on either side of the mirror, evoking the reflections of Norman and Marion we see in mirrors and windowpanes.



Figure 22: Marion makes a *pudica* gesture during the shower scene. Still from *Psycho*.

Titian's image of Venus is reflected again in the painting hanging on the wall next to it, which the viewer of the film sees only when Norman leans back with his resigned "But I can't." This painting is van Mieris' *Susanna*. We see it clearly later, when Norman looks at it for just a moment before he removes it from the wall to peer through the hole it conceals, a peephole looking into Cabin One (Figure 23).

Scholars of *Psycho* have pointed out some of the important allusions that the painting makes. Donald Spoto, for example, underlines the connection between voyeurism, desire and violence in both the painting and the film:

And so that we have no doubt about his intention, Hitchcock makes everything clear: Norman removes from the wall a replica of "Susanna and the Elders," the biblical story of three [*sic*] old men who spied on a righteous woman as she prepared for her bath and then, passions aflame, leaped out at her with threats of sexual blackmail. Norman, in other words, removes the *artifact* of deadly voyeurism and replaces it with the *act* itself. So much for "mere" spying. (322, emphasis in the original)



Figure 23: Norman looks at the van Mieris *Susanna* before removing the painting from the wall. Still from *Psycho*. That this “artifact of deadly voyeurism” has been hanging in the parlor of the Bates Motel for some time suggests that it indicates some predisposition in Norman, as the uninitiated viewer will not fully understand until the end of the film. But there are further connections, as Erik Lunde and Douglas Noverr observe: “Indeed, a close reading of the Biblical story from the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Daniel reveals several themes elucidated in *Psycho*: voyeurism, wrongful accusation, corrupted innocence, power misused, secrets, lust and death” (101). Citing this passage from Lunde and Noverr, Michael Walker argues that “I would focus, rather, on the significance of the painting for Norman. The voyeurism theme is certainly relevant, but in the original story Susanna resists their sexual assault... it would be more accurate to describe the painting as depicting a rape fantasy, a fantasy which is unfulfilled; hence its particular relevance for Norman” (327). When Norman tells Marion that “we’re all in our private traps” and “we fight and claw to get out,” he could be describing the painting behind him.

These critical readings identify the ends of the spectrum of Susanna paintings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; a gamut that the film covers in a short period of time as Norman begins with a tranquil, illicit viewing of the lovely Marion as she undresses, evoking Tintoretto's pastoral versions, but then forcefully invades Marion's private space and assaults her in a realization of the violent Baroque versions such as the one hanging on his wall. Although many paintings of the Susanna story depict a lusty voyeurism in which the viewer does not see Susanna coming to any harm, the painting on Norman's wall is a dramatic and tenebrist version with wild elders emerging from deep shadows to grapple with a Susanna who struggles against them, her body and garments twisting attractively.² Roland-François Lack identified this Susanna as a 1731 canvas by Willem van Mieris, formerly housed in a museum in Perpignan but stolen in 1972. Lack credits Barbara Stelzner-Large with having first identified the painting, and notes that José Franco-Pereira and Henry Keazor had both previously discussed its authorship as well (n.p.).

While critics see Susanna in the film and associate the story with voyeurism, van Mieris' version is associated more with violence, as Walker argues. But the film enacts both kinds of Susanna images, with the violent Baroque image concealing the hole through which Norman will perform his voyeurism, like the elders in many Venetian paintings who hide among lush foliage, such as Tintoretto's Vienna *Susanna*. In this image, Susanna bears an especially strong resemblance to Venus in the *Venus with a Mirror* by Titian, which hangs adjacent to Norman's *Susanna*. Indeed, in Tintoretto's painting, Susanna's mirror is propped against the hedge that one

² If the dark and violent Susanna paintings are the antithesis of the *hortus conclusus* Renaissance versions, *Psycho* itself may represent an attack on the pastoral, as Philip J. Skerry argues. He describes a landscape hanging on the wall of the Phoenix real estate office where Marion works: "The eye follows the river into the depths of the painting, and it doesn't take long for the audience to register the notion of an escape into a bucolic, Edenic world—a pastoral, in effect" (88-89), noting that the rest of the film destroys this vision of the *locus amoenus*, and that "In many ways, *Psycho* is Hitchcock's great antipastoral" (89).

of the elders is hiding behind. As he pokes his head surreptitiously around the corner, he echoes the figure of Cupid in Titian's painting, holding the mirror up so Venus can admire herself. As Ellen Spolsky observes, these images associated with Venus suggest "that the beauty of the woman be read as mitigation of the Elders' crime" (102).

Many painted Susannas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seek to delight their heterosexual male audience by inviting him to see himself in the elders' position as voyeur, simultaneously making this intrusion seem less heinous by presenting Susanna as passive, or even willing. Giving attributes and postures of Venus to Susanna enhances this effect. Mary Garrard observes that Rembrandt's 1647 version of the story, in Berlin (Figure 24), is more



Figure 24: Rembrandt van Rijn. *Susanna and the Elders*. 1647. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

sympathetic to Susanna's plight, "Yet even Rembrandt implants in the pose of Susanna, whose arms reach to cover her breasts and genitals, the memory of the Medici Venus, a classical model that was virtually synonymous with female sexuality" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 153). If Susanna is "virtually synonymous with female sexuality," then how can anyone expect the elders not to spy on her?

The paintings in the parlor scene in *Psycho* reconnect Venus and Susanna, positioning Marion Crane as the third vertex in the triangle. Like Venus, Marion holds her arm diagonally across her chest; like Susanna, Marion is spied on and then attacked as she washes herself. Like both, she is desirable, which the psychiatrist at the end gives as the explanation for the crime perpetrated against her. In European paintings of the early modern period, both Venus and Susanna are almost always depicted as blondes, which underlines their visual symmetry to Marion and many other Hitchcock heroines/victims.



Figure 25: Norman with Susanna #2, about to spy on Marion. Still from *Psycho*.

The connection between Venus and Susanna is reinforced by the doubling of these two figures in two other paintings in the parlor. There appears to be a second Susanna hanging on the parlor wall opposite the one with the *Venus with a Mirror* and the van Mieris Susanna.³ We first see this painting after Marion leaves, when Norman goes to the office to check the alias with which she signed the register, then steps back into the parlor (Figure 25).

We see the second Venus only when Arbogast, the private detective, briefly inspects the parlor alone. During this scene, it hangs next to the door that leads to the office (Figure 26).⁴



Figure 26: Arbogast with the Venus and the Three Graces image. Still from *Psycho*.

³ I have not been able to identify this extremely tenebrist version, though it bears a resemblance to Susannas by Anthony van Dyck and Mattia Preti, as well as to the Rembrandt just mentioned. There are many canvases in which Susanna clutches her garments to her chest, as she appears to be doing here, either in a modest effort of cover herself as the elders approach, or in an attempt to hold on to them as the elders try to pull them away.

⁴ I have not been able to identify the subject of this painting with certainty, but the composition evokes the central part of Botticelli's *Primavera*, depicting Venus and the Three Graces, and the Venus figure on the left resembles Titian's nearby Venus. Interestingly, this painting is only seen in the frame with Arbogast, never with Norman; as I will discuss later, the second Susanna moves into this position later in the film.

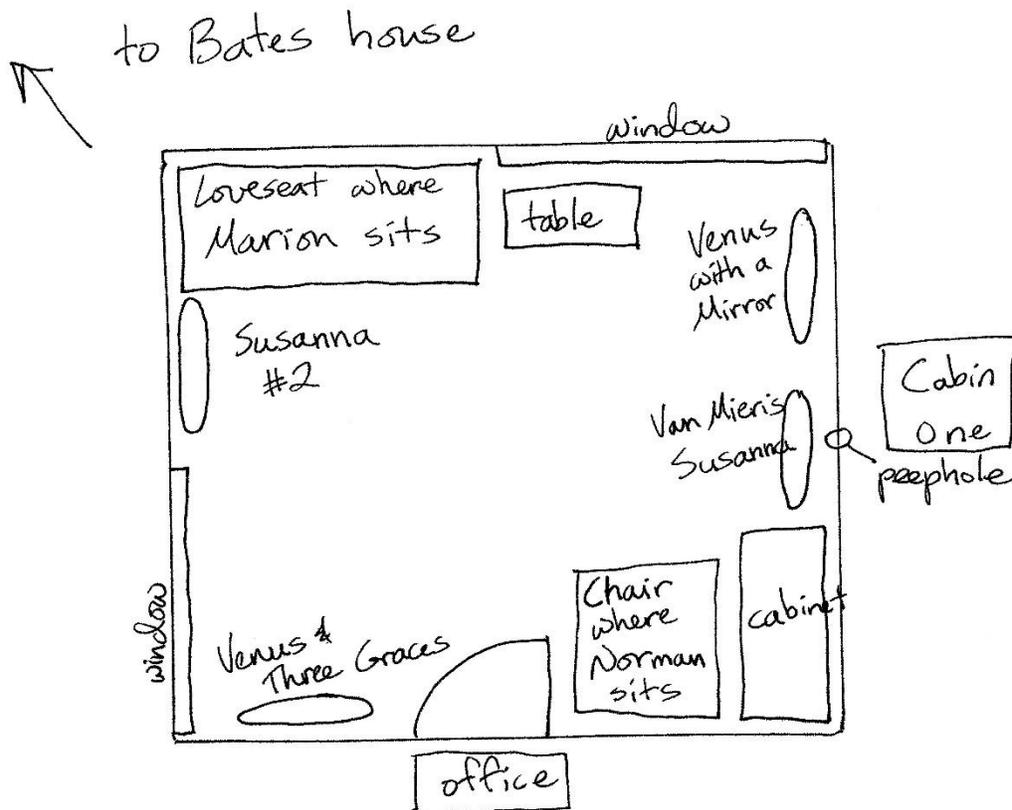


Figure 27: Diagram of the Bates Motel parlor as it appears in most scenes. Sketch by the author.

While Norman and Marion are talking, we first see Norman in profile as he leans forward in his chair, and we see only Venus. When he leans back, revealing the Susanna image, this action suggests a progression from the Venus (serene, static, admiring herself in the mirror) and the Susanna (turbulently assaulted, still able to assume an attractive *contrapposto* in her distress). Female beauty can exist at peace so long as it remains unseen by unpredictable masculine energies, but once that happens, violence seems to be a natural part of the sequence. Raymond Durnat cites Hitchcock as having a similar attitude toward the disruptive powers of feminine beauty: “As Hitchcock once said, ‘A beautiful woman is a force for evil.’ She may not be evil in herself, but male sexual desire is, and she can’t help provoking it. She’s the innocent cause of evil in others” (80). As the psychiatrist says at the end of the film, “He killed her because he

desired her.” This connection between feminine beauty and male violence against it underlies the tradition of Susanna paintings.

When Norman first enters the parlor, however, the camera follows him as he crosses in front of the Susanna first, then bends down to set down his tray and turn on the lamp. As he bends, the Venus becomes visible behind him. He first goes quickly from Susanna to Venus, but then we see the paintings in the reverse order, more slowly, as he is sitting and conversing with Marion. After she retires for the night, the camera focuses on the Susanna for one moment, before Norman removes it to watch Marion undressing. As David Greven observes:

The story is overdetermined as a Hitchcock motif, containing, as it does, so many of his signature themes. There is a long tradition in Western visual art of reading this biblical narrative as a rape scene, and this painting joins the number of classical rape paintings that adorn the back wall of Norman’s office, all of which signal the history of anti-woman violence, and that this hideous history is being made in the present. (97)

As we have seen, the Bible is ambiguous as to whether or not there was any physical contact between the elders and Susanna before she cried for help, thwarting any attempt they may have made to rape her forcefully. There is no ambiguity, however, about the fact that they carry out the threat they made to her, accusing her of adultery and testifying to it at her trial, willing to see her executed for this imaginary crime. The Bible does not refer to their motives in this part of the story. Once Susanna had cried for help, the reader can imagine that the elders had to take some action to explain why they were in her garden while she was screaming. So while they may have acted in part to cover their tracks, they also acted in part out of a desire for revenge once she had spurned their advances. Marion has refused Norman’s request that she remain in the parlor “just a little while longer, just for talk,” and a moment later he spies on her and then, like the elders, unleashes violence against her.

II. Art, voyeurism, and violence

Psycho echoes both the voyeurism and the misogynistic violence referred to in the Susanna story, but Norman's use of it as the screen that hides his peephole makes the voyeurism connection especially sly, as Tom Gunning points out: "The congruence between the painting's subject and the use Norman Bates puts it to is so exact that it strikes one as a Hitchcockian joke" (28). Joseph Stefano's screenplay calls for the parlor to be decorated with "paintings... nudes, primarily, and many with a vaguely religious overtone" (n.p.), but does not specify Susanna. When Norman removes a picture from the wall, the screenplay only says "a picture" (n.p.). Art director Robert Clatworthy recalled that Hitchcock was "finicky about odd unsettling details of decor—such as the kitschy sculpture of hands folded in prayer in Mother's room—than with the structures themselves. Crucial for Hitchcock, too, were the sets for Norman's parlor behind the motel office, the bathroom, and Mother's room" (Rebello 95). And, as Hitchcock said elsewhere, "All backgrounds must function" (Skerry 77). It seems likely, then, that the inclusion of only images of Susanna and Venus—doubled ones at that, echoing the many other doubles in the film—rather than any other "vaguely religious nudes"⁵ that might have been chosen, was indeed Hitchcock's joke, and not anyone else's.

Gunning analyzes the relationship between Norman's voyeurism and his violence against Marion:

We know from the subsequent actions that his vision has excited not only his lust but also his guilt and impulse toward punishment, triggering the murder of Marion, punishing her for a sexual titillation entirely due to Norman's own voyeurism (like the plot of the Elders against Susanna). Thus guilt and violence of the sort depicted in the painting serve

⁵ Bathsheba would be a good possibility, as the story also features bathing and voyeurism, but without the additional connection of violence that appears in many Susanna paintings. Other religious figures depicted as nudes in paintings include Salomé, Mary Magdalen and various female hermit saints or martyrs. Depending on how vague Stefano meant for the religious overtone to be, other popular Renaissance subjects such as Lucretia, Danaë, or Diana could have been included.

as a screen to block and transform the image of desire, a visual filter that darkens and perverts the sexual impulse. (29-30)

The Bible plainly states that Susanna's beauty is the cause of the elders' crime: "Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice" (Daniel 13: 8-9). This scene in *Psycho* tells a similar story, using the Susanna painting as a metonymy: Marion is beautiful, Norman wishes to see more of her, so he peers illicitly through the wall; as a result, he is so inflamed with desire that he acts recklessly and violently against the woman he desires. As Gunning observes, the art serves both to hide the act of voyeurism and to twist it into something more sinister.

That a work of art could inspire and motivate a man's desire is an idea with a long history. Lynda Nead summarizes several of accounts of men lusting after art:

There are a number of myths... concerning the stimulating effects on male viewers of nude female statues and paintings. In his *Natural History* Pliny describes an assault on Praxiteles' statue of Aphrodite of Cnidos. It seems that a young man had become so infatuated with the statue that he hid himself one night in the shrine and masturbated on the statue... In another permutation of this fantasy of male arousal there is the case from sixteenth-century Italy, of Aretino, who so admired the exceptional realism of a painted nude Venus by Sansorino that he claimed "it will fill the thoughts of all who look at it with lust." Over two centuries later, there is the example of the bibliophile Henry George Quin, who crept into the Uffizi in Florence when no one was there, in order to admire the Medici Venus and who confessed to having "fervently kissed several parts of her divine body." (87)⁶

As Nead observes, in the Pliny and Quin examples, the covert aspect of the man's access to the art enhances his excitement: "The excitement is produced, partly at least, by the transgression of and deviation from norms of public viewing and by the relocation of the work of art within the realm of the forbidden" (88). Norman uses his van Mieris Susanna to shield his realm of the

⁶ The Quin story specifies the Medici Venus, the very statue that makes the famous *pudica* gesture that Renaissance painters copied for their Susannas, which Marion assumes both in the parlor and in the shower.

forbidden, but also draws strength from it to perform forbidden actions: after he spies on Marion, we see him in profile; thus we can only see the edge of the painting's frame as he rehanges it on the wall and looks at it for a moment before glancing ominously toward the house. Norman has transferred his illicit desire for the Venuses and the Susannas onto the real person Marion Crane; the painting has given him courage to peep in the first place, and now the combination of the painting and his real life voyeurism have inspired him to do violence against her.

The trope a work of art depicting violence against women being seen as an inspirational precedent is quite ancient, as I have shown in my discussion of *The Eunuch* and *Virtud, pobreza y mujer* in Chapter Two. In the first act of *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, Carlos (like Chaerea in *The Eunuch*) sees an image of men approaching a woman who is forbidden to them, and takes courage from it and goes ahead with his planned misdeed. Carlos lies to Isabel to obtain her consent, but she does spend the night with him willingly after they become engaged.

Carlos uses the verb *defender* to describe the tapestry hanging on Isabel's bedroom door—unconsciously suggesting that the Susanna story was protecting Isabel's privacy and shielding her from intrusion by men with harmful intentions, as the moral of the story would suggest, and as his servant reminds him when he hears the story: “Fue necio Amor, porque mirar debía / el fin que tuvo presunción tan vana” (457-458). But Carlos does not care to read the story this way. The Bible makes it clear that the elders are the villains, yet Carlos chooses to see them as a mirror of himself and an excuse for his own actions: “en cuyo espejo yo miré que había / disculpa de mi error en la edad cana” (455-456). Although he acknowledges that what he does is wrong, he views the precedent set by the elders as one that he can follow, and hopes that his sin will be mitigated since he is following the trail they have blazed. As in *The Eunuch*, Carlos is

portrayed as an irresponsible person who learns to behave decently when he marries Isabel—who has been devoted to him throughout—at the end of the play.

In Lope's play, Isabel hangs the Susanna tapestry on her own bedroom door, perhaps in the hope that it will discourage lascivious men from entering her private space and mistreating her. She sees the story from Susanna's point of view, and attaches her hopes to the end, in which Susanna is vindicated and the elders punished. But Carlos misreads the story and sees it through the eyes of the wrong characters—he puts himself in the elders' place, and interprets the story from their point of view, and hopes that their crime will mitigate his own, rather than reading the scene as a warning against doing what he is about to do.⁷

In the Bates Motel, the image of Susanna plays a similar dual role, meaning different things to different characters and to the audience. The painting defends Marion's privacy, though she does not realize it. The van Mieris Susanna maintains the integrity of the wall between the parlor and Cabin One until Norman decides to take it down and look through the hole. Like Chaerea and Carlos, Norman's lust is excited by the painting, and it encourages him in his transgressions. Like Susanna, Isabel, Danaë, and Pamphila, Marion thinks that she is shielded by the walls of her private space, but a woman's private space is subject to intrusion by men who see their desire for her as a justification for their invasion of her privacy.

Terence's audience has little chance to identify with Pamphila, who has no lines in the play, while Carlos's speech about Susanna occurs so early in Lope's play that the audience cannot help but latch on to Carlos, as he has so far appeared to be the main character. In *Psycho*,

⁷ Hitchcock was educated in Jesuit schools and may well have been familiar with Terence's play. It seems quite improbable that he or any of his collaborators would have read *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*. The parallel between the uses of the Susanna motif in the two works shows the complexity and resilience of the story in our culture, rather than a direct influence of Lope's work on Hitchcock.

at the time that Norman spies on Marion through his Susanna-defended peephole, we have just met him as a character while Marion has been, for 45 minutes, the heroine of the film.

At the moment of her death, Marion extends a hand in search of support before collapsing in the shower. Toles analyzes the shocking effect on the audience of this moment and the loss of Marion as a main character: “Marion’s gesture to save herself answers our felt need [that she survive], then instantly turns that need against us. Part of Hitchcock’s complex achievement in the film is gradually to deprive us of our sense of what ‘secure space’ looks like or feels like” (120-121). The audience thought that they were safe in identifying with Marion, just as Marion thought she was safe in Cabin One. But as the Susanna paintings in the parlor have warned us, the prying eyes of perverted men will seek out beautiful women wherever they go—they do not really have any safe and private spaces. Hitchcock pulls the entire audience into this sense of insecurity, thrusting them into a sense of vulnerability parallel to Marion’s at the same moment that he leaves them no choice but to now identify with Norman.

This switch of audience identification from Marion to Norman has been much discussed. Robin Wood describes the spectator’s sense of disorientation at the moment of her death: “so engrossed are we in Marion, so secure in her potential salvation, that we can scarcely believe it is happening; when it is over, and she is dead, we are left shocked, with nothing to cling to, the apparent center of the film entirely dissolved” (146). As Skerry points out, throughout the Bates Motel scene, between Marion’s arrival and her murder, the camera gradually switches to Norman’s point of view (173), preparing the audience to identify with him after her abrupt departure from the story. As Norman spies on Marion getting undressed, Skerry continues, “Hitchcock kindly allows the audience to spy with him” (175). Hitchcock, like the Renaissance

painters of Susanna, depicts a scene of voyeurism and invites the viewer to join in, assuming the voyeur's point of view—and the viewer is expected to react to this “kindness” with gratitude.

The film has conditioned viewers to think of themselves as voyeurs from the very beginning: after the opening credits, the first images of the film are aerial views of Phoenix, gradually tightening on one building, then on one window of that building, finally sweeping through the open window, under the partially closed blinds, to reveal Marion lying on a bed in her white bra and half-slip, gazing up at her lover, Sam, as he towels off his bare torso. We are illicit witnesses to an illicit affair, much as the elders claimed to have witnessed Susanna committing adultery with a young man. The viewers have not asked to be put in this position, which makes it easier to see Norman and the elders, our co-voyeurs, as co-victims of circumstance.

Joseph Smith notes that the peeping scene “serves as an effective link between the two halves of the film... it's our first opportunity to observe Norman alone, and thus to begin identifying with him. Yet like our identification with Marion, the connection we feel with Norman is troubling. As Norman watches Marion undress, we watch too, and thus we share his guilt” (67). Smith continues, “Hitchcock accentuates the culpability of viewers—or at least of those viewers who are male—by cutting away just as Marion is about to remove her brassiere” (68). The assumption that the heterosexual male viewer sees himself in the voyeur is a central feature of the majority of paintings of Susanna and the Elders, particularly those that depict a voyeuristic scene before the elders approach Susanna. By placing the two Susannas in the parlor, Hitchcock has added a layer of assistance to help his viewer see himself in Norman.

Even in the original biblical tale of Susanna, as Amy-Jill Levine argues, the text forces readers to identify with the elders. The character of Susanna, she writes, is “compromised by the

elders' desires. For the story to function, their desire must be comprehensible to the reader, and thus Susanna must be a figure of desire to us as well. And once we see her as desirable, we are trapped: either we are guilty of lust, or she is guilty of seduction" (313). This victim-blaming aspect of the original story—that Susanna's beauty was the cause of her misfortune—was exploited to its fullest potential by painters in the early modern period, luring the viewer of the painter in to the perspective of the elders. Spolsky observes that one of the elders often holds up a shushing finger, "extended toward the viewer, as if to say 'Don't disturb her'—and at the same time, 'Don't be so quick to judge us—wouldn't you also be enchanted by her?'" (102). This same shared culpability is exploited in Norman's peeping scene in *Psycho*, and implemented to steer the viewer toward identifying with him. Much as Norman sees the elders in his painting as a mirror of himself, the viewers of *Psycho* now see themselves reflected in Norman.

Hitchcock takes this point to an extreme close-up during the scene in which Norman spies on Marion, just after removing the van Mieris Susanna from the wall. As he peers into Marion's brightly lit room, a beam of light from the peephole illuminates his face. We see a close-up of his eye from the side, the light shining into it as he watches her. First we see Marion tossing aside her blouse, standing in the black bra and half-slip we saw her wearing in her room in Phoenix, just after deciding to steal the money.⁸ We see her as if through the peephole, but the camera cuts away just as she reaches to remove her bra: now we see only Norman's eye for a moment, before cutting back to his view as she wraps a robe around herself.⁹ Here the film plays the same game as early modern plays, pushing the limits of what can be tolerated by a

⁸ The film opens with our unauthorized view of Marion in a white bra and half-slip—her change into black underwear, at home in Phoenix, is an unobvious signal that she has decided in favor of a life of crime.

⁹ While many film critics view this scene as one in which the viewer cannot help but identify with Norman and join him in delighting in this illicit viewing of Marion, the female viewer may in fact take a moment here to remember that poor Marion has been in the same constricting undergarments for a day and a half, since she spent the previous night in her car by the side of the road. Rather than envying Norman's view when she removes her bra, we feel her relief.

mainstream audience. The film cannot show Marion naked, but it makes clear that Norman has seen this, and it invites its audience to envy him. Skerry analyzes this important moment:

Norman has seen Marion naked; he has seen what no audience for a commercial film had seen up through 1960. This extraordinary situation of having a character not only see what an audience cannot in the diegesis of the film, but also see what an audience could not in the extra-diegetic world of cinema in general, is unique in Hitchcock's oeuvre. In this subscene, Norman is the principal viewer, but what he sees cannot be shown to us. (119)

During this scene, the camera cuts back and forth between a Norman's-eye view of Marion, and views of Norman's eye itself. This allows the audience not only to identify with Norman, but also to fill in the gap of what he is seeing that cannot be shown. In the Susanna scenes where she is unaware of the elders' presence, the painters included the elders so that the audience could identify with them and take pleasure in knowing that they were seeing something they were not allowed to see, but that the audience sees too. In *Psycho*, Norman actually sees what the audience cannot be allowed to see. Instead, we gaze upon his single, fascinated eye for this one moment.

The Motion Picture Production Code was declining in power in 1960, and *Psycho* helped push it toward its final demise. For decades, actual nudity had been unheard of in mainstream films, and even the amount of skin that Leigh showed was daring for the time: “‘A bra and slip—even just showing the midriff section—was very racy then and fairly verboten,’ [costumer] Rita Riggs explained” (Rebello 99). Skerry observes that Hitchcock frequently pushed the boundaries of the Code, as in the opening scene between Sam and Marion: “Hitchcock tweaks the by now vitiated Production Code... by having a kissing scene last for a considerably longer time than the Code usually allowed” (83). The scene where Norman spies on Marion was a deliberate metacinematic comment by Hitchcock, Skerry argues: “[Norman's] ability to see a body in an undressed state at such close range is an extra-diegetic comment by Hitchcock on the unraveling

of the Production Code in the fabric of mid-century America” (175). The scene, as it exists in the film, is both a challenge to the Code and a protest against it.

III. The Production Code and the Council of Trent

The Production Code was written in 1930¹⁰ in response to pressure from religious groups about the bad influence that immoral Hollywood films could have on young people, which had become an even more alarming threat with the advent of sound films. “Adopted under duress at the urging of priests and politicians,” (Doherty 1), the Code represented the major studios’ agreement to subject themselves voluntarily to a set of rules. Thomas Patrick Doherty explains the Code’s creation:

The Production Code, the enabling legislation for classical Hollywood cinema, was written by Father Daniel Lord, a Jesuit priest, and Martin Quigley, a prominent Roman Catholic layman... As theological prolegomenon and cultural guidebook, the Code was a sophisticated piece of work. Contrary to popular belief, the document was not a grunted jeremiad from bluenose fussbudgets, but a polished treatise reflecting long and deep thought in aesthetics, education, communications theory, and moral philosophy. In the context of its day, the Code expressed a progressive and reformist impulse akin to that other emblem of elite cultural management, the “noble experiment” of Prohibition. (6)

The Code’s Catholic authorship is evident in its Tridentine tone. As I discussed in Chapter II, section II. D., the Council of Trent approves of visual art as a means of religious instruction, and emphasizes its importance in influencing the minds of the faithful:

[B]y means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon; also that great profit is derived from all holy images, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety. (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* 219)

¹⁰ Though it was written in 1930, the Code’s precepts were widely flouted by the studios until mid-1934, when they began to be enforced in earnest. As a result, films made between 1930 and the summer of 1934 are frequently referred to as “pre-Code,” though the Code had already been written and was ostensibly in effect.

In referring to “paintings and other representations,” this resolution of the Twenty-fifth session of Trent may have meant to include religious plays such as those penned by Diego Sánchez de Badajoz and performed during religious festivals. Trent, focused on how best to cultivate piety, underlines the importance of art as both a reminder of God’s beneficence and an effective way to establish exemplary conduct. If the faithful model their behavior on that of the saints, they will lead good lives. Thus artistic representations of the saints and of Jesus are necessary and valuable, contrary to what the Protestants had been saying. Paintings are the art form most explicitly discussed, but other forms of art can be equally helpful in guiding the masses toward good conduct.

Similarly, the Production Code of 1930 is concerned with the influence artistic representations can have on the general public. Rather than approaching the problem from the perspective of how best to cultivate moral religious practices, its starting point is the widespread popularity of motion pictures, and the danger that films might cultivate immorality. Movies that celebrated crime, debauchery, and wantonness would have a detrimental effect on society, the Code argued, and thus must be controlled. The Code’s pronouncements on the moral effects of art echo the resolutions of the Council of Trent:

Motion pictures are very important as *Art*. Though a new art, possibly a combination art, it has the same object as the other arts, the presentation of human thoughts, emotions, and experiences, in terms of an appeal to the soul thru [*sic*] the senses. Here, as in entertainment: *Art enters intimately* into the lives of human beings. Art can be *morally good*, lifting men to higher levels. This has been done thru good music, great painting, authentic fiction, poetry, drama. Art can be *morally evil* in its effects. This is the case clearly enough with unclean art, indecent books, suggestive drama. The effect on the lives of men and women is obvious. (quoted in Doherty, 348; emphasis in original)

Here, the Code establishes a clear distinction between permissible art, of the kind defined by Trent centuries earlier, and the kind that leads men astray, which it joins Trent in denouncing. Just as Trent admonishes that, in sacred images, “all lasciviousness [shall be] avoided, so that

images shall not be painted and adorned with a seductive charm” (220), the Code too warns against the indiscriminate presentation of “certain definite manifestations of sex and passion” (quoted in Doherty, 354). While the wording of the decree of Trent seems to find the warning against lascivious images of saints to be self-explanatory, the Code goes farther in arguing against any depiction of sexuality in films: “The presentation of scenes, episodes, plots, etc., which are deliberately meant to excite these manifestations on the part of the audience is always wrong, is subversive to the interest of society, and a peril to the human race” (quoted in Doherty, 354). Moreover, the Code prohibits nudity and semi-nudity, even when not related to scenes of passion: “The effect of nudity or semi-nudity upon the normal man or woman, and much more upon the young person, has been honestly recognized by all lawmakers and moralists” (quoted in Doherty, 357),¹¹ adding that “the fact that the nude or semi-nude body may be *beautiful* does not make its use in the films moral. For in addition to its beauty, the effects of the nude or semi-nude on the normal individual must be taken into consideration” (quoted in Doherty, 357; emphasis in original). Although this document is condemning freewheeling American films from the 1920s, it could easily be condemning freewheeling Venetian paintings from the 1550s.

¹¹ As I discussed in the Introduction, feminist Bible scholars such as Jennifer Glancy (“The Accused”) have objected to the traditional description of the elders’ approach to Susanna as an attempted seduction rather than an attempted rape, and have been at pains to explain why it is the latter. Such arguments assume that the difference between “seduction” and “rape” are obvious to their readers. The Code differentiates “seduction and rape” from “scenes of passion,” but—like Old Testament and Roman laws—it groups the concepts of “seduction and rape” together with no differentiation, as though the woman’s consent still had no relevance to the degree of immorality of the theme:

Seduction and rape are difficult subjects and bad material from the viewpoint of the general audience in the theatre.

- (a) They should never be introduced as subject matter unless absolutely essential to the plot.
- (b) They should never be treated as comedy.
- (c) Where essential to the plot, they must not be more than suggested.
- (d) Even the struggles preceding rape should not be shown.
- (e) The methods by which seduction, essential to the plot, is attained should not be explicit or represented in detail where there is likelihood of arousing wrongful emotions on the part of the audience. (quoted in Doherty, 354)

Trent firmly recommends the obliteration of any works that do not comply with its strictures: “If any abuses shall have found their way into these holy and salutary observances, the holy council desires earnestly that they be completely removed, so that no representation of false doctrines and such as might be the occasion of grave error to the uneducated may be exhibited” (219). The danger of a deleterious influence on the uneducated would later be echoed by the Production Code’s concern for the influence on “the normal individual,” but especially the young. Trent goes on to explicitly charge the bishops with assuring that no lascivious art or other representations be tolerated in their bishoprics: “That these things may be the more faithfully observed, the holy council decrees that no one is permitted to erect or cause to be erected in any place or church, howsoever exempt, any unusual image unless it has been approved by the bishop...” (220) Thus Trent served among other things, as a kind of Production Code of its own time for images and performances, trying to protect the innocent, uneducated, and foolish from misunderstanding images that they may not have had the sophistication to interpret correctly. While the learned and upstanding citizen may be able to enjoy a Tintoretto painting or a Joan Blondell film safely, the young, the ignorant, and those harboring latent depravities must be protected from them.

Though the Code specifically notes that “Exposure for the sake of exposure or the ‘punch’ is wrong, [and] Scenes of undressing should be avoided” (quoted in Doherty, 357), filmmakers were naturally drawn to the “punch” that semi-nudity might bring to their pictures, and by the late 1950s were including scenes that would have been forbidden a decade earlier. *Psycho* directly challenges this regulation, and its passing of the censors is credited by many as dealing the Code a fatal blow.

Much as Hitchcock and other filmmakers were testing the limits of the Code by 1960, in his stage directions to *Las maravillas de Babilonia*, Guillén de Castro explicitly directs the production to push the boundaries of decency when he writes “*quítase la más ropa que pueda.*” Had *Las maravillas de Babilonia* been produced as a Hollywood film, this stage direction would have produced very different results in 1939, when the Code was in full force, or 1960, the year of *Psycho*, or 1986, when *Psycho III*, full of nudity and graphic violence, hit theaters. Perhaps the playwright was imagining some posterity for his work, a distant future in which elastic boundaries of taste would allow for different levels of undress. Perhaps he was imagining it being staged in different settings in his own time, where the eyes of the bishops might be turned away from some performances more than others. Either way, the stage direction suggests a similar interest in the “punch” of exposure and the scene of undressing. It is difficult to imagine that this stage direction was meant to help the audience understand the horror of Susanna’s persecuted innocence, and not to entertain them with her gratuitous semi-nudity—which should approach total nudity as far as it possibly could.

While Guillén de Castro urges that the staging of his play show as much of the actress’s body as it can, other Spanish Susanna plays worked around the constraints of morality by setting up Susanna’s nudity in the viewer’s mind, as Francisco de la Torre does when he has the two elders exclaim with delight as they watch the offstage Susanna undressing. Such suggestive scenes that all but force the audience to imagine nudity, without showing it, were common in pre-Code Hollywood films. Doherty gives an example:

[I]n *The Office Wife* (1930), the camera follows Joan Blondell’s legs into a bathroom, where her lingerie drops to the floor as she disrobes. The camera remains focused on her legs as she slips out of her chemise, her arms entering the frame from above, thereby conjuring an image of the naked actress bending over, her dorsal exposure beckoning in offscreen space should the camera tilt upward just a few inches higher. In pre-Code Hollywood, even what the spectator doesn’t see is more nakedly suggested. Under the

Code, so explicit a mental image—that is, an image not even depicted on screen but merely planted in the spectator’s mind—would be too arousing to summon up. (11)

Though the Code sought to prevent such oblique arousal, thirty years later Hitchcock defied it with his quick cut to Norman’s eye and back to Marion putting on her robe. While *The Office Wife* created its suggestive image by showing only permissible parts of Joan Blondell’s body while reminding us that the other parts were still there, *Psycho* uses the montage technique to splice out Leigh’s contextually inevitable nudity, substituting a brief shot of Norman’s eye in such a way that the audience imagines what he sees.¹² In the murder scene, Hitchcock further assaults the Code, using montage to suggest images of both violence and nudity without actually showing either.

IV. Montage and the art of the unseen

The scene where Marion prepares for her shower as Norman spies on her flouts the Code in its scene of undressing, which is clearly meant to provoke and astonish the audience.¹³ This is followed by a brief moment where she sits down at the desk in her room, in her robe, and calculates how much money she has spent and how hard it will be to make restitution to Mr. Cassidy, from whom she stole the \$40,000 at the beginning of the film. Talking to Norman in the parlor, Marion had resolved to return to Phoenix and return the money. Her repentance and intention to atone for her crime would have pleased the enforcers of the Code, and as she steps into the shower we see that she feels a new lightness of spirit, letting the water wash her clean of guilt. But moments later she is murdered, with a brutality that the spectator is forced to imagine,

¹² Both Joan Blondell in *The Office Wife* and Janet Leigh in *Psycho* disrobe in preparation for getting into the bathtub or shower. As with Susanna’s mention of a bath in *Theodotion*, and the pornographic image of a woman alone in the bathtub that Annette Kuhn analyzes (see Chapter III, section II), the idea of a woman washing herself holds endless fascination for would-be male voyeurs.

¹³ In so doing, this scene of disrobing and voyeurism also evokes the Baroque theater and its objective of *asombro*.

without actually seeing her being stabbed. At the same time, we can see that she is naked, but we can only distinctly see her arms, neck, shoulders, belly, legs and feet. In overhead shots, we see the blurred outline of her body, twisted to reveal only the side of her hip, her right arm across her chest in a *pudica* gesture as she attempts to shield herself from the slashing knife. Hitchcock's masterful use of montage editing makes this possible, as Skerry observes:

This kind of scene construction and editing [i.e. in which violence is suggested but not shown] had evolved over the years, and directors had utilized these techniques to circumvent the Code by suggesting violence and by transferring the action to the mind of the spectator. Eisenstein had perfected this technique in his theory and practice of montage: shot A + shot B (both on the screen) = shot C (in the mind of the audience). (7)

Sergei Eisenstein's theorization of montage technique was not concerned with avoiding showing violence. Eisenstein and other early Soviet filmmakers had set out to understand how the art of the cinema worked, and had reached the conclusion that film editing was the one quality that was unique to cinema, and thus the characteristic that distinguished it from other art forms such as theater, photography, and interior decoration. Lev Kuleshov, another Russian filmmaker, describes observing the audiences at various film screenings in 1916 and noting their emotional reactions to different films. He found that American films seemed to evoke the greatest emotional reactions from audiences, concluding that the use of many different, short shots edited together, showing only the essential action, was the reason for this stronger emotional reaction.¹⁴

Kuleshov conducted experiments in which scenes filmed in different parts of Moscow were edited together, with footage of an American film spliced in, to create a landscape that existed only in the minds of the audience.¹⁵ Kuleshov found that editing could create strong

¹⁴ Showing a man committing suicide in a room, the Russian film would have a single shot of a man in a room, full of extraneous details and lacking close-ups, while an American film would show a montage with a close-up of his anguished face, a close-up of his hand taking a pistol from a drawer, a close-up of his finger pressing the trigger, and so on (42-50). Kuleshov concludes: "This method of filming only that moment of movement essential to a given sequence and omitting the rest, was labeled by us 'the American method'" (50).

¹⁵ In Kuleshov's experiment, he filmed a man and a woman walking alone in different parts of Moscow, then meeting in a third part of Moscow, then looking away. Here Kuleshov spliced in a shot of the White House from an

associations between unrelated scenes, allowing the filmmaker to juxtapose images in order to construct a new reality in the minds of the audience. This observation was to have such lasting importance that it became known as the *Kuleshov effect* (Bordwell and Thompson 231).

Eisenstein, like Kuleshov, found himself in the position of defending the idea of montage against more conservative filmmakers who feared it would be jarring and confusing to audiences. He elaborated on the Kuleshov effect, observing that the proponents of montage had “discovered a certain property in the toy [i.e. film editing] which kept them astonished for a number of years. This property consisted in the fact *that two pieces of film of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition*” (4, emphasis in original).

Eisenstein gives examples of combinations of words, images or ideas that create associations or new concepts when they are combined, arguing that this idea is not new in the cinema nor unique to it. For instance, if we see a grave and a woman weeping, we assume that she is the widow of the man buried there (4-5). Portmanteau words are another example.¹⁶ He concludes that “the phenomenon we are discussing is more than widespread—it is literally universal. Hence there is nothing surprising in the circumstance that a film audience also draws a

American film. Then the two Russian actors climb the stairs in a Moscow cathedral, but viewers imagine these are the stairs in the White House. “This particular scene demonstrated the incredible potency of montage, which actually appeared so powerful that it was able to alter the very essence of the material... with montage it becomes possible both to break down and to reconstruct, and ultimately remake the material” (52). In another experiment, Kuleshov uses the new art of the cinema to recreate Zeuxis’s decision to create Helen of Troy by means of selecting the best parts of five different models:

In the second experiment we let the background and the line of movement of the person remain the same, but we interchanged the people themselves. I shot a girl sitting before her mirror, painting her eyelashes and brows, putting on lipstick and slippers. By montage alone we were able to depict the girl, just as in nature, but in actuality she did not exist, because we shot the lips of one woman, the legs of another, the back of a third, and the eyes of a fourth. We spliced the pieces together in a predetermined relationship and created a totally new person, still retaining the complete reality of the material. (53)

¹⁶ I would posit that the adjacent paintings of Venus and Susanna in the Bates Motel make for a further example.

definite inference from the juxtaposition of two strips of film cemented together” (7). In montage, Eisenstein continues,

Piece *A* (derived from the elements of the theme being developed) and piece *B* (derived from the same source) in juxtaposition give birth to the image in which the thematic matter is most clearly embodied.

Expressed in the imperative, for the sake of stating a more exact working formula, this proposition would read:

Representation A and *representation B* must be so selected from all the possible features within the theme that is being developed, must be so sought for, that their *juxtaposition*—that is, the juxtaposition of *those very elements* and not of alternative ones—shall evoke in the perception and feelings of the spectator the most complete *image of the theme itself*. (11, emphasis in original)

In Eisenstein’s breakdown of the idea, the “image of the theme itself” or image *C*, the abstract concept that the filmmaker wishes to get across to his audience, is best created in the mind of the spectator. This way, each spectator can tailor their own “image of the theme itself” according to their own perceptions and experiences. In Eisenstein’s famous Odessa steps montage in *Battleship Potemkin*, the juxtaposition of (A) mercilessly firing troops, and (B) suffering people, are meant to create an image (C) of the injustices of capitalist imperialism. Shot (C) is the goal of the film, but it does not exist in it anywhere. Rather, each viewer constructs it in their mind.

In the shower scene in *Psycho*, Skerry explains that the carefully crafted juxtaposition of very short pieces of film create a terrifying montage:

Of course, many of these psychological effects come about through the editing process itself, during which Eisenstein’s $A + B = C$ is working to its full effect. Hitchcock prided himself on not actually showing the knife stabbing Marion. He claims that the violence occurs inside the viewer’s mind (shot C, in the Eisensteinian sense).¹⁷ He also claims that the nudity is equally suggestive, never explicitly shown. (11)

¹⁷ Skerry correctly points out that, during the murder montage, one brief shot shows the tip of the knife barely slicing into Marion’s abdomen. He interviews various people involved with the making of the film and asks them about this shot, but they claim no know nothing about it, some allowing that it may have been added later by some unknown entity. Skerry’s use of the verb “claim” here seems to reflect his dissatisfaction with this unresolved issue.

Unlike the class struggle in *Battleship Potemkin*, the knife entering Marion's torso is not too abstract to film, as the hundreds of slasher films released since *Psycho* have demonstrated. The Production Code prohibited it, however, and Hitchcock's pride in not showing it might stem in part from his use of montage to cleverly sidestep the Code's restrictions. In his interview with Skerry, screenwriter Joseph Stefano says: "I asked [Hitchcock], 'How will you get that across? The knife goes like this, and then we cut to a fake wound?' And he said, 'Oh no, no. We don't need any of that. This is a murder that is taking place in the audience's mind, and it should be just a flash'" (56). In addition to any concerns he may have had about the Code, Hitchcock appears to have also felt pride that, by leaving the stabbing unseen, he was forcing the viewers to create a more terrifying vision in their minds.

Hitchcock's shower scene, with its Eisensteinian montage, went against the precepts of the "Hollywood montage" (Dmytryk 135) that was prevalent in classical studio films. While Eisenstein favored drastic changes of perspective and shocking combinations of images that would jar the audience into understanding his abstract theme,¹⁸ Hollywood films favored editing that would distill the essence of the story, but do so invisibly. Director Edward Dmytryk explains that "most cuts are specifically contrived to pass unnoticed. If the film is well shot and well cut, the viewer will perceive it as a motion picture which seems to flow in continuous, *unbroken* movement on a single strip of film" (11-12). As Kuleshov discovered in 1916, early American filmmakers realized that editing was essential to the construction of a compelling narrative, but the Hollywood style evolved to favor editing that reduced the story to its essence in a way that flowed smoothly for the viewer. Ken Dancyger explains that D.W. Griffith and his followers

¹⁸ "Eisenstein views the spectator as putting up a material resistance that must be overcome by violence. The audience must be attacked; the work of art is a tractor plowing the spectator's psyche; the artist administers a series of 'shocks'; Soviet cinema must crack skulls" (Bordwell 115-116).

realized that a single continuous shot would be boring. In order to keep the audience interested, these early directors “discovered that it isn’t necessary to show everything. Real time can be violated and replaced with dramatic time” (350). Thus, Dancyger continues, the filmmakers asked themselves: “What elements of a scene will, in a series of shots, provide the details needed to direct the audience toward what is more important as opposed to what is less important?” (350). These questions were the basis of the Hollywood montage.

Dancyger gives an example of how dramatic time can be employed in a film to avoid wearying the audience with a scene of a character traveling: “Rather than show the character move from point A to point B, the editor often shows her departing... Unless there is a dramatic point to the scene other than getting the character from point A to point B, the editor then cuts to a street sign or some other indication of the new location” (359). A real-time depiction of this character walking to her car, unlocking the door, getting in, turning the key in the ignition, pulling out of the driveway, and so on would be stultifying to the audience. As Skerry tells us: “Hitchcock once said that cinema was life with the boring parts left out” (143).¹⁹

As Kuleshov observed, seeing the whole room in which an action was occurring, rather than just the essential elements of the scene, was also a distraction. The Hollywood montage eliminated these details that would be dull or superfluous. Rather than creating the drastic juxtaposition that so excited Eisenstein, the Hollywood montage sought to present seamlessly a narrative that allowed the viewer to suppose what happened during unseen intervals. Instead of shot (C) being an abstract or unshowable concept as in the artistic Soviet montage, in the Hollywood montage shot (C) consists of narrative details with which the viewers need not

¹⁹ Marion Crane’s drive from Phoenix to the Bates Motel is an example of a scene with a “dramatic point... other than getting the character from point A to point B.” Though several incidents from the drive are shown, including Marion’s face as she drives along imagining the repercussions of her crime, the time is still significantly compressed.

concern themselves. This was achieved through the splicing together of shots filmed at different times and in different places, a process that was unique to film, but the idea of streamlining a narrative to boil it down to its most compelling elements is far older than cinema. The theories of film editing I have been discussing here are new manifestations, tailored to a new technology, of the approaches to narrative that Erich Auerbach outlines in “Odysseus’ Scar.” The Hollywood montage style that Dmytryk and Dancyger describe is similar to the Old Testament’s narrative approach, as Auerbach defines it, including “only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points to the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent [so that the whole] remains mysterious and ‘fraught with background’” (9). Or, in Hitchcock’s words, “with the boring parts left out” (Skerry 143).

As I have discussed throughout, the Bible’s description of the story of Susanna does not directly refer to Susanna actually disrobing and getting into the bath. It merely states that (A) the elders were watching her and that (B) Susanna decided to take a bath. To borrow Eisenstein’s terminology, the juxtaposition of these two details “evokes in the perception and feelings” (11) of many Renaissance painters the alluring image (C) of a seductive, Venuslike Susanna bathing as the elders watched her. While the biblical story leaves out the detail to keep the story moving, in the Hollywood sense of narrative economy, the image of a bathing Susanna is shot (C) in the Eisensteinian sense. Similarly, the violent paintings in which the elders assault her show a scene that is neither described nor contradicted in Daniel; they were assembled in the painters’ minds based on detail (A) the elders went up to her and (B) they demanded that she satisfy their desires. Given these facts, the extrapolation that (C) they ripped off her clothes and physically assaulted her will naturally emerge as the “*image of the theme itself*” (Eisenstein 11) in the minds of many

readers, especially if they are painters eager to make a sale.

These details, so lavishly embellished by so many generations of painters, are missing from the biblical account in such a way that they are neither explicitly there nor impossible to imagine. They do not appear to be narrative lacunae to the reader of the book of Daniel; the narrative flows smoothly and briskly, squeezing a great deal of drama and tension into a compact tale. A precise description of the movements of Susanna and the elders at every moment would transform this gripping whirlwind into a tedious slog. The story's original creators eliminated details, creating a smooth, Hollywood montage of the essentials of the story. But painters reinterpreted the elision of detail—creating a vast lacuna of detail in their minds, inserting a shot (C) that stretched the likelihood of what (A) and (B) appeared to suggest. The universal association born of juxtaposition that Eisenstein described became either a pastoral voyeurism fantasy or a rape fantasy. These fantasies then became paintings, and the paintings, in turn, inspired plays in which parts that are omitted from the narrative for reasons of pacing become the longest parts of the story, drawn out and pushed to the limit to give the audience a thrill, leaving the triumph of virtue at the end to become a forgettable epilogue.

The Council of Trent and the Production Code are two among many efforts to enforce a moral content in works of art and entertainment, so that every work will have a clear and wholesome message that cannot be misinterpreted. Despite their best efforts, the ambiguously wrong continues to hold fascination for artists and audiences. In the novel by Robert Bloch on which *Psycho* is based, the character of Marion is named Mary, and her death happens in one sentence. Toles examines how Hitchcock's film adaptation gives this event center stage: "Is Marion's shabby, useless death a proper occasion for a virtuoso set piece? Surely an abbreviated, less conspicuously artful presentation would honor the victim more, if the *meaning* (in human

terms) of what transpired figured at all in the artist's calculations" (128). Even if *Psycho* has no moral in the sense that we imagine a biblical tale should, a young woman's sudden death still means something, and the film distracts us from this by showing us a dazzling work of art.

In a similar way, Tintoretto's breathtaking Susannas draw us in with their luminosity and make us forget what the story was about. As Garrard observes: "Even when a painter attempted to convey some rhetorical distress on Susanna's part, as did the eighteenth-century Dutch painter Adriaan van der Berg, he was apt to offset it with a graceful pose whose chief effect was the display of a beautiful nude" ("Artemisia and Susanna" 150). Garrard argues that the pleasure agenda of the male artists and their male patrons overwhelmed the meaning of the Susanna story, and the female painter Artemisia Gentileschi was the only one to identify with Susanna rather than the elders. In *Psycho*, the audience has identified with Marion up until she is murdered, but her murder in the center of the film forces them to begin to identify with Norman.

V. "They love Norman now"

Writing of the montage in the shower scene, Skerry notes how the scene disobeys the "180 degree rule" (150) of classic studio style montage, in which the cameras are arrayed to face the scene as an audience faces a theatrical stage, respecting an invisible barrier beyond which the camera's eye does not move. This preserves a sense of perspective that makes the films seem realistic to audiences. But in *Psycho*, Skerry explains, Hitchcock bewilders his audience by putting the camera everywhere: "In effect, through nonclassical montage, Hitchcock catapults the audience into a space where the control they thought they had because of their character identification boomerangs, as they become victimized, along with the characters" (151). While this boomerang effect makes the audience feel victimized, it simultaneously makes them feel a kinship with the killer, although they don't know it yet. As Spoto comments, "All of *Psycho* in

fact becomes a series of our own schizoid feelings, our wanting to see and our not wanting to see” (320). We feel for Marion and Norman simultaneously, just as the viewer of a Susanna painting, or a member of the audience at a *comedia* where the semi-undressed Susanna fends off the elders’ assault, feels for her and her attackers simultaneously.

As I discussed in the second section of this chapter, *Psycho*’s audience already began to identify with Norman during the voyeurism scene. The success of this is demonstrated by how many male film scholars express envy of Norman’s ability to watch as Marion removes her underwear. After Marion dies, the viewers of the film do not know to whom they should cling. In his interview with Skerry, screenwriter Stefano says: “After the shower scene we’ve lost the person that we were with, that we identified with, that we cared about. Remember, we didn’t want that cop to arrest her. We wanted her to get away with the money. We’re all such felons at heart” (55). Stefano believes that the audience’s desire to identify with the protagonist is stronger than any desire they are likely to have to identify with justice and the law. Stefano says he told Hitchcock, “At that time [i.e. after Marion’s death], the movie is over unless we get the audience to care about Norman” (55). Several new characters, notably Marion’s sister Lila Crane, are introduced in the second half of the film, and Marion’s boyfriend Sam Loomis reappears. Though Sam and Lila could have the potential to become our new protagonists as they investigate Marion’s disappearance, the audience has already latched on to Norman.

Seeking to make the audience care about Norman, Stefano reports that it was his idea to include Norman’s lengthy cleaning up sequence after the murder, recalling times in his childhood when he was forced to clean up after his alcoholic father (55). In Spoto’s account of viewing the film, Stefano’s technique is effective: “Just as we have conflicting feelings about Marion... so we have divided feelings about Norman. He does such a first-rate cleanup of

Mother's messy murder, doesn't he, and with him we're ever so relieved when Marion's car, which has momentarily stuck in the swamp, finally sinks with a septic gurgle" (320). Watching the premiere of the film with his wife, Stefano says that he heard the audience gasp when Marion's car stopped sinking. He turned to his wife and whispered: "You know, I got them! They love Norman now. They don't care if he buries her in a swamp" (63).

At this point, as far as the viewer knows, poor Norman is concealing the crime perpetrated by his "ill" but "harmless" mother. Norman's efforts to protect his mother, Wood writes, make it easier for the viewers to shift their identification to him: "Norman is an intensely sympathetic character, sensitive, vulnerable, trapped by his devotion to his mother—a devotion, a self-sacrifice, which our society tends to regard as highly laudable... He is a likable human being in an intolerable situation" (146). While the viewer may have disapproved of Norman's peeping and wished he had respected Marion's privacy, this infraction is not enough to erase all of the sympathy we feel for his helpless sweetness and his efforts to do the best he can with his awful lot in life. He is himself very attractive, to the extent that a viewer who is attracted to men may find their judgment clouded as the narrative continues to unfold. If the heterosexual man can't blame Norman for being a voyeur, the heterosexual woman really wants him to be as kind and gentle as he seems to be. In any case, we have no choice but to hold on to him, as Skerry explains:

We know from many of Hitchcock's comments about the film that he enjoyed "tricking" the audience into identifying with Marion so that when she dies, we are left hanging, in a sense... Thus, if we accept the notion of identification, which was first discussed in Aristotle's *Poetics* in the analysis of catharsis, then we can conclude that the killing of Marion creates for the viewer what Ortega y Gasset calls "existential shipwreck." (176)

After a shipwreck, Ortega y Gasset writes, the survivor looks for something to cling to, and will grab at any piece of driftwood they can find (Skerry 176). In *Psycho*, Skerry continues, this

driftwood to which the viewer must cling is “the seemingly innocent, naïve, charming, boyish, and attractive character of Norman. In the cinematic world of the late 1950s, Norman would be the perfect romantic protagonist... It is probably Hitchcock’s greatest casting decision to propose Anthony Perkins for Norman” (176). In Bloch’s novel, Norman is middle-aged, overweight, and an alcoholic. Hitchcock proposed Perkins for the role, baiting the trap into which the viewer falls by making them like this attractive young man who appears to be awkward but perhaps noble. As Hitchcock himself says in the trailer, “This young man—you had to feel sorry for him.” Indeed, Perkins’s sweet face is hard to resist, especially for first-time viewers who are concerned for him and what his mother appears to be putting him through.

The actor invested careful thought in the role. Stephen Rebello describes how Perkins “developed a powerful affinity not only for the surface behavior of Norman Bates but also for the inner workings. ‘It was my idea to have Norman nervously chewing candy in the film,’ Perkins enthused about the character who was to become a national folk antihero. ‘He would not plot malice against anyone. He has no evil or negative intentions. He has no malice of any kind’” (118-119).

Rebello’s description of Bates as “a national folk antihero” is intriguing. Even among experienced viewers who know who he is, know what he has done, Bates remains a compelling figure. Hitchcock and Perkins so carefully crafted him to be likable that we still like him after we learn the truth, as Smith suggests in his personal anecdote of seeing *Psycho III* in a theater in 1986: “During the scene in which Norman finally climbs into bed with an attractive woman, one young male viewer called out cheerily, ‘Go for it, Norman!’ That viewers could still feel this way years after knowing the truth about Bates is ample testament to Perkins’s nuanced, sympathetic portrait” (55). Without a doubt, this is true. But it also testament to the dual

consciousness produced in the viewer by the original film, evoked by the image of Susanna and the Elders: one feels for poor, innocent Susanna. But one also feels for the elders, whose actions are not pardonable, but may be understandable.

Much as Hitchcock elected to cast the charming, handsome young Perkins as Norman, Renaissance painters tended to paint the elders as venerable old men, who seem fairly respectable even as they perpetrate their crime against Susanna. Tintoretto's elders bear a strong resemblance to St. Peter and other esteemed older religious figures who appear in his other canvases, such as the *Lavatorio* in the Prado. Just as the viewer's shared voyeurism with them made the painting more alluring and the elders more relatable, the elders' appearance as nice, grandfatherly figures makes it difficult to judge them too harshly. In van Mieris' painting, the elders are temporarily disfigured by wanton expressions, and their postures are more openly transgressive than they are in many other Susanna canvases. But the painting's presence in the film carries with it all of the cultural freight of its history, and these ramifications remain on the screen as a result. The audience's identification with Norman parallels the earlier identification viewers had with the Elders. Even if the viewer's sympathies are split between the male violator and the female victim, these two stories form a part of the larger tradition of the perpetrators of violence against women being seen as somewhat sympathetic.

After Norman peeps on Marion and replaces the van Mieris Susanna on the wall, the audience does not see this painting again. The second Susanna, however, continues to haunt Norman from a distance in later scenes: it is seen through the door when Norman is talking to Arbogast in the office (Figure 28), and again when he hangs up the phone after talking to Sheriff Chambers while sitting in the parlor (Figure 29).



Figure 28: Norman talking to Arbogast in the office. Susanna #2 is visible through the parlor door. Still from *Psycho*.



Figure 29: Norman gets up after talking to Sheriff Chambers on the phone. Still from *Psycho*.

In these scenes, it is on the wall opposite the other Susanna, perpendicular to the wall separating the parlor from the office. Near the end of the film it moves, and now hangs next to the door when Sam Loomis confronts Norman in the office (Figure 30).



Figure 30: Norman and Sam in the parlor. Susanna #2 now appears next to the parlor door. Still from *Psycho*.

Previously, when Arbogast was snooping in the vacant parlor, this same space was occupied by the second Venus; thus, the progression from the ideal of female beauty to the act of violence against it is repeated as the second Susanna takes the place of the second Venus. The second Venus is only seen when Arbogast is in the parlor. Arbogast is never shown in the frame with either of the Susannas; as far as we know he is not a pervert, and thus he is free from association with the elders. Sam, too, is never shown with the Susannas. The second Susanna changes position, as though it were insistently inserting itself into the frame with Norman, hounding him, hanging over his shoulder like a guilty conscience.

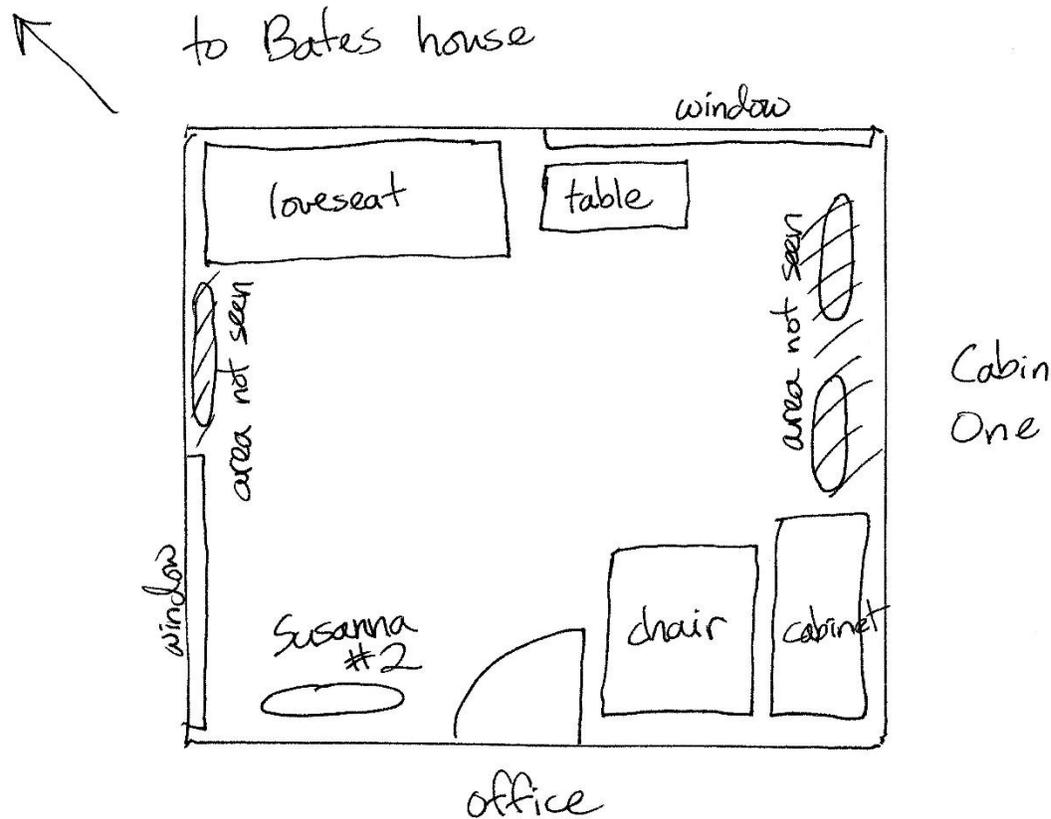


Figure 31: Diagram of the Bates Motel parlor as it appears in the scene in which Sam confronts Norman. Sketch by the author.

Like Carlos in *Virtud, pobreza y mujer*, Norman Bates sees a painting of a woman’s privacy being violated and is inspired to violate a real woman’s privacy. Like the elders, his desire for a woman converts into an act of violence against her. Whether or not Lope’s play was familiar to the audience or the filmmakers of *Psycho*, it is part of the cultural impact of the Susanna story, and it makes the film that much richer and more complex. As Wood writes: “[Hitchcock] himself—if his interviews are to be trusted—has not really faced up to what he was doing when he made the film. This, needless to say, must not affect one’s estimate of the film itself... Hitchcock (again, if his interviews are to be trusted) is a much greater artist than he knows” (151). Hitchcock cast Anthony Perkins to make it that much easier—and more perilous—for the viewer to sympathize with Norman, as well as with Marion. This dual

identification with both the victim and the perpetrator is emphasized by the Susanna paintings, linking Norman to the elders, which in turn links him to an expansive artistic and literary tradition that extends across many centuries and cultures. Hitchcock could not have known the full extent of the multilayered connections he was making by including these images, yet they hang on the walls of the Bates Motel, indicating that Norman's crime is a new manifestation of a much older story.

Conclusion

Susanna makes a striking addition to ekphrasis studies, in part because the tradition of images based on her story completely overwhelmed the source text. Already by the end of the sixteenth century, the doxic image of a nude Susanna in the bath scene had become so familiar that Francisco Pacheco gave Eve and Susanna as two examples of nude female figures at which a painter must try his hand to prove his mastery (354). Ever since, the pictorial model has usurped the imaginations of commentators to the point that many read the Bible as describing a bath, which it does not. The seductive pin-up version of Susanna lulled the playwrights of seventeenth-century Spain not merely to include the bath scene in their plays, but to make it a central feature of the spectacle. The provocative associations with the pictorial model, and the hopes of drawing an audience familiar with them, were likely what drew some of these writers to the subject matter. Luis Vélez de Guevara's play seems to exist largely as an occasion for the ekphrastic bath scene, while the play by the *tres ingenios* lifts the familiar image of the bath scene and paints it into a different story.

Others, however, made an effort to restore to Susanna her biblical reputation for chastity: Guillén de Castro created a fierce Susanna who defends herself, while Francisco de la Torre cast her as an allegorical prefiguration of the Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, both of these plays waded up to their necks into ekphrases of the bath scene and emerge on the far bank dripping with eroticizing overtones that muddy the image of their purportedly decorous heroine. These ekphrases sidle into the plays as if against the better judgment of the playwrights themselves, as though the doxic image created by visual artists held an allure so powerful that they were powerless to prevent it from glorifying/profaneing their pure and lovely Susannas. This

phenomenon could be described as insidious ekphrasis: a description of a pictorial model that latches onto the poet's imagination and irrupts into his work whether he likes it or not. By the seventeenth century, the doxic, Venus-like popular image of Susanna had already become so powerful that it barged into plays where it should have been unwelcome and made itself at home. The textual description of Susanna, which it contradicted, struggled to assert itself against this overpowering doxa.

This wily doxa did have its foes, however: Lope de Vega and Manuel de Salinas both resisted it, the former very subtly, the latter quite directly. Lope implies an objection to the distortion of the biblical story in his oppositional ekphrasis in *La moza de cántaro*, while Salinas creates an ekphrasis of the pictorial model in order to voice his opinion that it is wrong. Based on his careful reading of the Vulgate, Salinas reaches an interpretation that the bath never took place, and that the doxic image is based on an erroneous extrapolation. This image of the bathing Susanna was already so culturally entrenched that it loomed over all literary treatments of her: it insinuates itself into any text whose author does not actively combat it. The unstable gap between the Susanna in the Bible and Susanna in art carries over into these Spanish ekphrases of her, creating two camps: those who create sexy ekphrases, whether unconcerned with the biblical persona or in spite of themselves; and those who contest this racy pictorial model. The painters widened the *lacunae* in the biblical narrative to allow for these interpretations, and the image of Susanna became complicated as a result. A few studies of the theme in early modern Spanish literature have been undertaken before, but they have been very limited in scope. The works I discuss here have been studied very little, but offer many insights into how we think about women and their autonomy.



Why, finally, does Susanna matter? What difference does it make to examine the various ways in which these texts and images satisfy the male gaze, and how the male gaze upholds rape culture? This pernicious web of assumptions is so deeply rooted in our societies that it shapes our thinking in ways that are difficult to notice. Deconstructing these ancient ideas can help us see how they are operating in our own thinking right now.

When we look at Annibale Carracci's Susanna, we see a sexually awakened woman who is welcoming her lovers. When we see that she and so many other Susannas resemble Venus, we begin to think of Susanna as a powerfully erotic woman who lures men to behave imprudently out of desire for her. We see women and sex as synonymous. When a man feels sexually attracted to a woman, we think that the woman is responsible for making him feel this way. We begin to think that Susanna "provoked" the elders to try to "seduce" her, and who can blame them? The male gaze teaches us that we must, under any circumstances, always identify with the men in the story, and so we see Susanna as a temptress who has led us astray. We are incapable of reading the story as being about Susanna.

The male gaze teaches us that the men in the story are the characters who matter, the human beings in the story, and so we are worried about judging them too harshly. We fear that extenuating circumstances may not have been taken into account; conversely, we worry that if there were any extenuating circumstances, perhaps they should not have been taken into account. Ideas about obscenity have long taught us to think of sex and rape as equally taboo, so we feel that it is controversial and in poor taste to discuss either one. On the other hand, if we have decided to be "sex positive," we discuss Old Masters paintings that depict rape scenes as though they were celebrations of consensual sex. Because it is impolite to talk about rape, we persist in reporting on famous rape cases as "sex scandals" rather than "criminal assault scandals," as

though criminal assault and “seduction” or “adultery” were all the same thing. We continue to judge the assailants in these cases for being unfaithful to their wives rather than for what they did to their victims.

Our laws, like the Old Testament, like the *Digest of Justinian*, continue to offer extremely narrow definitions of what sexual assault is, denying the validity of the charge in almost all circumstances. Our laws deny that a crime occurred if the woman is not seriously injured by her “earnest resistance.” Coercion is not viewed as a serious threat, and respected journalists argue that “not completely consensual” sex is not against the law. The Old Testament did not recognize the difference between sex and rape. Greek mythology did not recognize the difference. Ancient Romans did not recognize the difference. We still do not recognize the difference.

The male gaze also teaches us that, even if we are capable of understanding the allegation, it is highly dubious. Women—Eve and Pandora were women—are liars and sinners. We cannot take women at their word, women are “capaz de todo error” (*El testimonio vengado* 672). When we look at a painting or a print of Susanna, appearing to be willing as the elders approach her, we see a different story from the one we read in the Bible. We see a woman who gave consent, but later lied about it. This does not surprise us. We ask ourselves: “¿piensas de veras que en el mundo ha habido / mujer forzada?” (*El vergonzoso en palacio* 455-456). We consider: “ay minas de plata y oro, / y no de buenas mugeres” (*Santa Susana* 270-284). We don’t believe the victim. We think it was her fault. We wonder what she was wearing, what she was doing there, how she was behaving, why she had that flirtatious look on her face. She probably caused it to happen by being too beautiful, seeming too available, not locking herself in her house. We worry about the assailants, how her accusation will affect *them*, how *they* feel. We

already carried these ideas with us when we first saw the painting, and the painting confirmed our suspicions.

Using Auerbach's framework, paintings of Susanna are "disembodied images" (13), disassociated from the doctrine of the original story. These images neither convey nor uphold any message about chastity, faith, or courage. They do, however, convey a different doctrine, one that has not become unfamiliar to the community of the faithful with the passage of time. The misogynistic messages of these images are still easy to interpret, they blend in very easily with similar, but more recent, messages about women being deceitful, seductive, and loose. We still look at these paintings, and they still reaffirm and revitalize these rape culture ideas.

And then in real life, when we hear about a respectable older man who preyed on a younger woman, we identify with him, we worry if he is being treated fairly. We ask what the victim was wearing, why she was alone with him. We suspect she is lying. We seem to remember seeing her looking like she didn't mind. We are not thinking about the paintings right now, but the paintings are in our consciousness. They are among the thousands of cultural reminders all around us all the time that make us see ourselves in the elders and believe that they are telling the truth. We don't listen to Susanna.

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