NICOLAS POUSSIN'S *SELF-PORTRAITS* FOR POINTEL AND CHANTELOU

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ABSTRACT

Nicolas Poussin's two *Self-Portraits*, painted in 1649 and 1650, have been the subject of countless art-historical investigations, but remain only incompletely understood. This study attempts to draw the meanings of the self-images into clearer focus. To this end, the relationships between Poussin and the eventual recipients of the two portraits, Jean Pointel and Paul Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou, are examined more probingly and are positioned centrally in the analysis of the works. A careful exploration of the web of associations among the three men reveals that Poussin's caution in dealing with Chantelou, his often jealous and emotional patron, was a factor of great consequence to the development of the *Self-Portraits*. Bearing this in mind, both Poussin's letters and the scholarly accounts which accept his written statements at face value, may be approached with a more critical eye. This practice, in turn, leads to a broadened range of possibilities for the interpretation of the two *Self-Portraits*, and to a greater appreciation of the extent to which Poussin's creations were affected by human dynamics.

RÉSUMÉ

Les deux *Autoportraits* de Nicolas Poussin, peints en 1649 et 1650, ont été l'objet d'innombrables enquêtes d'art-historique, mais demeurent, jusqu'à un certain point, incomprises. Cette étude tente de tirer quelque signification des autoimages. A cette fin, les relations entre Poussin et les récipiendaires éventuels des deux portraits, Jean Pointel et Paul Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou, sont examinées en profondeur et sont au coeur de mon analyse des travaux. Une exploration consciencieuse des associations entre les trois hommes révèle que la prudence démontrée par Poussin dans ses rapports avec Chantelou, son protecteur souvent jaloux et émotionnel, fut un facteur déterminant au développement des *Autoportraits*. Dans ce contexte, les lettres de Poussin, ainsi que les exposés érudits qui acceptent ses déclarations écrites en se basant sur les apparences, peuvent êtres vues d'un oeil un peu plus critique. Cet exercice, en retour, mène à un éventail de possibilités pour l'interprétation des deux *Autoportraits* et d'une plus grande appréciation de l'importance que la dynamique humaine a eu sur les créations de Poussin.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the most recognizable works in the oeuvre of Nicolas Poussin are his two *Self-Portraits*, completed within a year of each other, in 1649 and 1650 (and presently in Berlin and Paris, respectively). These self-images, as the only two known with certainty to have been painted by the artist, have attracted considerable art-historical attention. But despite the frequency with which they are discussed in Poussin literature, an appreciation of much of their meaning and significance still remains elusive. This study attempts to make a contribution towards the fuller understanding of the enigmatic paintings, primarily by reframing the manner in which we view them. Central to this modified approach is a more careful examination of the roles played by the two patrons involved in the commissions, Jean Pointel and Paul Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou, and a more insistent focus on the ways in which the nature of the preexisting relationships between Pointel, Chantelou and Poussin shaped the development and appearance of the *Self-Portraits*.

Many of the accepted theories and assumptions about the two portraits are based on statements made by Poussin himself, in his written correspondence with Chantelou. While the artist's letters are of unquestionable worth as primary sources of information about the project, undercritical reading of their content has caused us to overlook some important possibilities for the interpretation of the images. Most notably, Pointel's involvement in the creation of the *Self-Portraits* has been minimized as a concern by art historians and critics, who draw support for their assessment from Poussin's infrequent mention of Pointel in his letters discussing the works. When considered against the background of a detailed study of Poussin's associations with his patrons, however, the

letters take on new meanings. In this context, as we will see, it becomes reasonable to identify the painter's near-silence about Pointel as part of an ongoing and deliberate effort to guard against the emotional outbursts to which he knew Chantelou to be prone.

A recognition of the likelihood that Pointel occupied as fundamental a position in the design of the *Self-Portraits* as Chantelou is crucial. It is with this possibility in mind that we may regard each canvas as possessing meaning for the individual for whom it was planned, a practice which reveals new insights not only about the content of the works, but also about Poussin and the complex web of relationships which underlay every stage of the portrait undertaking.

Our examination of Poussin's two *Self-Portraits* begins with a brief introduction to the basics of the project as they are most commonly outlined by writers. The chronology of the portraits, insofar as it may be reconstructed through the artist's letters to Chantelou, is recounted, and an historical overview of the affiliation between Poussin and Chantelou is outlined. As well, the second half of Part I offers a summary of the many explanations of the depicted elements of each painting, which serves to ground our subsequent investigations into the content of the *Self-Portraits*. The heavy focus on Chantelou in Part I mirrors an art-historical tendency to assume that both works resulted from only his request. In Part II, an alternate scenario is proposed, in which Pointel figures more prominently. In shifting the focus to a consideration of the human dynamics involved in Poussin's creation of the self-images, we highlight not only Pointel's likely pivotal role in the project, but also the tremendous need to approach the artist's letters with a more critical eye. The third section of this study deals with the art-historical treatment of Poussin's affiliations with Pointel and Chantelou in relation to the portraits.

A number of problematic trends are identified, each of which prevents an appreciation of a broader range of possible meanings for the two paintings. After a brief reevaluation of Poussin's "modes theory," Part IV explores some of these possibilities for the interpretation of his famous but often incompletely understood *Self-Portraits.*

I. BACKGROUND

i. History of the *Self-Portraits* and Poussin's early association with Chantelou

On the surface, Poussin's decision to paint the *Self-Portraits* completed in 1649 and 1650 (figures 1 and 2) seems unremarkable. By the late 1640s, the artist was at the height of his career and, one might fairly assume, would have seen fit to present to the world a dignified image befitting his stature, as so many artists throughout time have done. As self-portraits, however, the representations are somewhat unusual, in that the idea for them was neither initiated by Poussin, nor greeted by him with particular enthusiasm. In fact, it seems safe to believe that without the sustained prompting of Poussin's patrons, the two images so known today never would have come into existence at all. The uniquely fundamental role of the client in each undertaking (an appreciation of which is crucial to the present study) is underlined by Pierre Rosenberg: "Si la tradition de l'*Autoportrait* est ancienne, il est rare pour ne pas dire unique qu'un artiste adresse son propre portrait à son mécène."[1]

Our understanding of the *Self-Portrait* project (which we may regard as comprising both self-images) has benefited tremendously from the survival of many of letters sent by the artist to the recipient of the second work, Chantelou, an amateur art collector and artistic adviser in the French court of Louis XIII. Although these letters deal primarily with progress on the 1650 portrait, they also contain occasional, usually indirect, references to the Pointel picture, and are invaluable in elucidating the main stages of the histories of the two closely related paintings. The first of many references to the *Self-Portraits* in Poussin's correspondence with Chantelou occurs in a letter drafted

by him on April 7, 1647: "il ni a maintenant personne à Rome qui face bien un portraict ce qui sera cause que je ne vous envoyerei pas si tost celuy que vous désirés."[2] Although, most unhappily, the other side of the correspondence is lost and none of the letters written by Chantelou to Poussin has been discovered, knowledge of subsequent events allows us to fill in some of the blanks.

The artist, it seems, in responding to a request for a portrait of himself from Chantelou, embarked on a search for a suitable Roman talent to undertake the task. This search proved very difficult and frustrating for Poussin, and in a letter to his patron dating from August 1648, nearly a year and a half after the initial mention of a portrait, his growing exasperation (and unmitigated lack of respect for the skill of his Roman contemporaries) is expressed: "J'aurois désia fet faire mon portrait pour vous l'envoyer ainsy comme vous désirés. Mais il me fasche de despenser une dixaine de pistoles pour une teste de la facon du Sieur Mignard qui est celuy que je cognois qui les fet le mieux. quoy que frois pilés fardés et sans aucune facilité ni vigeur."[3] It is unclear at exactly what point his anger over the prospect of paying for a mediocre work leads him to abandon the mission to find a capable portrait painter, but after the better part of another year of vague promises to Chantelou, we discover from a letter dated June 20, 1649 that a work is complete, and that it has been done by none other than Poussin himself. For reasons he does not elucidate, we also learn from this letter that a second self-portrait is about to be started. He assures Chantelou that he will receive the one that turns out best, but requests that he not mention this to anyone, so as to prevent any jealousy from occurring.

Following the artist's words, the *Self-Portrait* which "turned out best," it would seem, is the second attempt, for this is the one which was sent to Chantelou in the spring

of 1650. At approximately the same time, the remaining (earlier) version was delivered to another of Poussin's important French customers, Pointel, a successful banker and silk merchant from Lyons. That either *Self-Portrait* was ever undertaken, leaving aside for a moment the considerable obligation Poussin felt to fulfil the wishes of his patrons, is surprising. To this point in his career, Poussin's reputation had been established primarily through allegorical, religious and history paintings, categories which, especially in the seventeenth century, were considered, as noted by Edward Lucie-Smith, as among the "more prestigious and indeed 'respectable' department[s] of artistic endeavour."[4] Not only would a foray into portraiture have done little to further Poussin's already elevated standing, but, for an artist of his disposition, it would have represented a particularly unpleasant task. As he writes to Chantelou prior to the completion of the second *Self-Portrait*, "Je confesse ingénument que je suis paresseux à faire cet ouvrage auquel je n'ai pas grand plaisir et peu d'habitude, car il y a vingt-huit ans que je n'ai fait aucuns portrait."[5] Even a cursory glance at the master's oeuvre serves to corroborate his professed distaste for this genre of painting; only a single other portrait is found.[6] Interestingly, it is another self-portrait, a chalk drawing dating from 1630 (figure 3), which presents an earnest, unglorified image of the artist following his recovery from a serious illness.[7]

Poussin's personal lack of interest in portraiture must have been outweighed at this time by his desire to please Chantelou, who had been a friend and patron for nearly a decade, and to whom he undoubtedly felt strong bonds. The association between the two, the development of which is worthwhile detailing, began under little-known circumstances, and at a moment which seems to have passed unrecorded. It is most

likely, however, that contact between Poussin and Chantelou was facilitated by Roland Fréart, Sieur de Chambray, Chantelou's older brother. Chambray, the author of a handful of important seventeenth-century artistic treatises and a cultural attaché of the French court, spent the early 1630s in Rome, studying architecture and placing himself in contact with collectors and artists, among them Poussin. A shared interest in the antique spawned a friendship which was continued through letters[8] and engendered a mutual respect which Chambray seems to have described to his brother. Chantelou, according to Emile Magne, "était évidemment entré en relations avec Poussin dont son frère lui avait fait l'éloge."[9]

It is possible that Chantelou actually accompanied his brother on at least part of his Italian sojourn,[10] and that he first encountered Poussin in this way. But insufficient evidence of such a meeting obliges us to consider another scenario: that the two figures did not meet face to face until 1640 when Chantelou was dispatched to Rome to retrieve the artist for service in France.[11] The earliest surviving letters exchanged between Poussin and Chantelou date from 1639, however, thus demonstrating that there was at least epistolary contact between them before their first documented personal meeting; the familiar tone of these early letters, moreover, leads us to suspect that a friendly association had begun significantly before this date. The painting which is the subject of much commentary in these early letters, Poussin's *The Israelites Gathering Manna*, helps in pushing back the date for contact between the two figures at least two years earlier. Commissioned by Chantelou and delivered to him in the spring of 1639, the *Manna* must have been underway at least as early as 1637, as a letter from Poussin to Jacques Stella reveals.[12] Although they most likely existed, there is no record of letters exchanged between Poussin and Chantelou discussing the details of the *Manna* commission before

January 1639, just a few months before the painting was completed and delivered, creating an unfortunate gap in our understanding of the manner in which the project was initiated and of the early phases of the association between the two men.

We find ourselves on more solidly documented ground as of 1640, the year marking the beginning of Poussin's much noted (though brief) stay in France. A prestigious invitation to perform work in the court of Louis XIII had been extended to Poussin in January, 1639 by Cardinal Richelieu and François Sublet de Noyers, Superintendent of Buildings.[13] Following a year and a half of careful but deliberate delay in accepting, Poussin, who possessed no desire to leave the comfort of his surroundings in Rome, was finally forced to submit to the power of the monarch.[14] In late 1640, it was Chantelou, acting as secretary to Sublet de Noyers, his cousin, who was entrusted with the task of overseeing the return of the artist to his native France.

Despite the doubtless distaste Poussin felt for the heavy-handed manner in which his presence at the French court was secured, the bulk of the responsibility for the scheme could not have been placed on Chantelou, who was merely carrying out the order of his superiors. Poussin maintained a friendship with his patron both during this time and after his exit from France in late 1642. The professional association with Chantelou was also sustained after Poussin's return to Rome, resulting in several works, including a small *Ecstasy of St. Paul* in 1643, and the project which demanded the bulk of Poussin's artistic energy in the mid-1640s, the *Seven Sacraments* series, completed between 1644 and 1648. Initially envisioned by Chantelou as a copy of the earlier set of *Sacraments* created in the late 1630s for Cassiano dal Pozzo (the final one of which Poussin had brought with him to Paris to complete, and which Chantelou had viewed and admired),

the second series instead was conceived as a stylistically and thematically different group. Indeed, the heightened gravity and rationality of the Chantelou *Sacraments* represents, according to Howard Hibbard, a "turning-point in [Poussin's] artistic career," marking not only a shift to "a kind of hyper-classicism,"[15] but also an increased recognition of his supremacy among artists working in the classical idiom.

It was to this artist of elevated standing that Chantelou made his request for a portrait. By the late 1640s, his collection of Poussin's works had already grown to a considerable size and was widely regarded as the most important in France. The addition of an image of the esteemed artist would have been the crowning jewel to the collection, increasing its worth and attesting to the close personal friendship which had developed between the two men, a source of intense pride for Chantelou. (Interestingly, whether the portrait was actually completed by Poussin or not seemed of little importance to Chantelou, given that his petition, as far as we can tell from the letters, either asked for a portrait by the hand of another artist or did not specify at all.) The presence of Poussin's portrait (or self-portrait) in his patron's home gallery also would have been a source of honour for the artist. Jacques Thuillier comments on the flattering effect the acquisition would have had: "Transformant son cabinet en un véritable sanctuaire à la gloire de Poussin, Chantelou désira y ajouter l'effegie du peintre."[16]

Although this promise of glory might have spurred others on to a rapid and eager completion of the project, it seems to have had little effect on Poussin, who approached the work largely without enthusiasm, whether initially or closer to its completion. After learning of the prominent position in which the *Self-Portrait* had been hung in his countryman's home, however, Poussin seems to have adopted a more positive attitude.

With a customary allusion to the antique, he expresses his pleasure to Chantelou in a letter of July 3, 1650, "La place que vous voulés donner à mon portrait en votre maison augmente mes dettes de beaucoup. Il y sera aussi dignement comme fut celui de Virgille au musée d'Augustes."[17]

This arrangement, in which "the Virgil-Poussin portrait is thus to be hung in the Augustus-Chantelou 'museum'," [18] as Victor Stoichita describes it, may also be seen as a parallel to Renaissance tradition. Poussin, aware of such similarities, continues in his letter: "J'en seroi aussi glorieux comme s'il étoit chés les Ducs de Toscanne avec ceux de Léonard Michel L'Ange et Raphael."[19] This reference to the celebrated collection of self-portraits begun by Cardinal Medici [20] gives a sense of the prestige which the arrangement would have afforded not only Poussin, but also Chantelou; for if, in this model, Poussin's *Self-Portrait* is akin to those of the Renaissance masters, then it is Chantelou who must be viewed as a figure of the stature and cultural sophistication of the Duke of Tuscany.

ii. Reading the Images

Although the prestige gained by both patron and artist through the *Self-Portrait* project is an element of considerable significance, it is not the condition from which most analyses of the works' depicted meanings usually begin. Rather, it is the undeniably strong bonds between Poussin and Chantelou which are more frequently positioned as central to understanding the two paintings, and which traditionally have been seen to be reflected as the dominant thematic motif.

The prominence of friendship as a theme stems not only from the loyalty and respect demonstrated by Poussin in vowing to complete a project he so obviously disliked, but also from some of the pictorial content of the works themselves. The most direct reference to friendship is to be found in the element which has generated the greatest amount of scholarly debate, the partial female figure which appears on the left-hand side of the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* (figure 4). The woman, whose head and torso are visible in profile, is positioned on a painted canvas within the actual canvas, and wears on her head a diadem in which sits an open eye. A curiously disembodied pair of arms reaches out to embrace her. This crucial scene most commonly has been interpreted as a reference to friendship and the love of painting, with the woman herself identified as the allegorical figure of Painting (La Pitttura) and the outstretched arms recognized as an expression of affection towards her, and symbolically, between Poussin and Chantelou.

It is from Giovanni Pietro Bellori, Poussin's seventeenth-century biographer, that this explanation comes, and from his direct personal association with the artist that its credibility has been established.[21] Bellori's general trustworthiness as a biographical

source, however, has not prevented art historians from challenging his identification of the figure. Poussin's deviation from contemporary representation of Painting and from established iconographic models such as those of Cesare Ripa, has led many to question Bellori's assessment, including Oskar Bätschmann, who notes that it "contradicts all emblematic and iconographic knowledge."[22] Not only has Poussin represented Painting, if that is who she is, without any of the usual tools of her art, he has also made her identity significantly more ambiguous by adorning her head with the eyed-tiara, not traditionally one of her attributes.[23] While numerous alternate identities have been proposed for the woman in the painted painting (among them Thermutis, Hera and "Theory"), the uniqueness of Poussin's figure, in the end, makes unlikely the discovery of any art-historical precedents which could lend support to such new theories, which invariably "conflict with Bellori's unequivocal statements,"[24] as Donald Posner assesses.

Given the oft-cited friendship which existed between Bellori and Poussin and the fact that Bellori is known to have spent time observing the master in his studio, Claire Pace's contention that the biography "derived in large part probably from the artist himself" seems fair.[25] And if we assume Poussin to have discussed his artistic practice with Bellori directly, we may also assume him to have offered to his friend an explanation of the mysterious scene containing the woman in the second *Self-Portrait*. It is not only Bellori's words, therefore, but likely Poussin's own, which alternate readings of the figure's identity must cast doubt on in order to convince; the difficult nature of this task has meant that despite the unconventional manner in which the woman has been presented, most attempts to prove an identity *other* than Painting have fallen short.

A theory suggested by Posner in 1967 offers a reading of the crowned woman as Painting while attempting to explain her difference from traditions of depiction in terms of Poussin's own beliefs. In this account, the figure represents a particular and original version of the allegorical personage, whose eye in the tiara makes reference to the element of his art which Poussin valued most, *Prospect* or "intellectual vision."[26] It is this intellectual or perspective vision, characterized by rationality and thought, which the artist distinguished from natural vision, "le simple aspect," in a famous letter of 1642 and which is denoted by the symbolic richness of the eye.[27] Poussin's inclusion of Painting, therefore, may be regarded as a comment on his conviction that art is an intellectual pursuit, and as a reminder to those who would see the work of the need for "looking with attention,"[28] as Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey term the quality. Chantelou, as Poussin's longtime supporter and the eventual owner of the painting, likely would have appreciated this message, and also would have understood the arms extended to the figure as a tribute to his friendship and faithful patronage.

The diamond ring worn by Poussin in the 1650 *Self-Portrait* also possesses meanings of friendship (figure 5). The four-sided pyramidal shape of the diamond, as Georg Kauffmann originally pointed out,[29] is well-known as a Stoic symbol of constancy, a trait which, for Poussin, was closely bound to ideals of friendship. This association is recalled in a line written in 1647 by the artist to Chantelou: "Je ne suis point homme légier ni changeant d'affection quand je l'ei mise en un subjec."[30] The qualities attached to the pyramid-cut diamond, those named by Bätschmann as "permanence, honesty and indestructibility"[31] were, therefore, precisely those characteristics which defined the

brand of friendship practiced by Poussin and the adherents of Stoicism, and which, in the *Self-Portrait*, allude to the longstanding bond between the artist and his patron.

The remaining parts of the second *Self-Portrait* and most of those of the first have less frequently been the subject of in-depth investigations and remain less thoroughly understood than the elements discussed to this point. It should be mentioned that the portrait presently believed to have been the one sent to Pointel was only (re)discovered in 1953, a fact which may account, in part, for the lack of critical study devoted to it. Even in the intervening half century, surprisingly little critical focus has been placed on this work or on the feature occupying the largest part of the canvas; namely, the central image of Poussin himself. Consideration of the painted Poussin in both the 1649 and 1650 paintings is typically confined to cursory examination of a few aspects. One is the layered garment he wears in both representations, identified by many as a toga (Anthony Blunt refers to it simply as a "black cloak," James Thompson as a "dark gown," Louis Marin noncommittally as a "cloak or toga"[32]). Stoichita's descriptor, "an *antica* style coat,"[33] though no more probing than the others, is useful in its allusion to that which is common to most labeling of Poussin's attire, the inference that the painter has chosen to depict himself in the manner of the ancients. Poussin's decision to follow the model of the Romans may reflect not only the growing popularity in seventeenth-century art of dressing portrait sitters in antique clothing instead of inconstant and ever-changing contemporary dress,[34] but also his own artistic influences and perceptions of himself. As a creator whose sources of inspiration were predominantly antique and Italian, and whose paintings and writings stressed the importance of scholarship and intellectual endeavours,

is reasonable to think that Poussin would have desired to present himself in his *Self-Portraits* in the vesture of a learned, ancient figure.

The explanation, while plausible, seems only weakly supportable by the appearance of the painted cloak itself, however. The rather generic costume donned by the artist, a casual arrangement of draped, black fabric, bears as much similarity to a range of other clothing items as it does to a Roman toga. Given this imprecision, there is certainly room for another interpretation – that the gown represents a type of *seventeenth-century* (not ancient) apparel, worn by Poussin and his contemporaries. The relatively understated and subdued attire recalls the unassuming dress of the figures populating so many Baroque genre and landscape scenes, particularly those by Dutch painters. The heaviness of the robe, especially apparent in the portrait for Chantelou, suggests a woolen mantle, to be worn, perhaps, while travelling by horseback or by coach. Though no such account has been proposed by art historians, a reading of Poussin's painted garment as a form of contemporary travel clothing makes sense in the context of the *Self-Portraits*, both of which were to be involved in a voyage, to the homes of their eventual owners. Recalling that it was the portraits which were to journey to France, and not Poussin himself (that is, the painted artist and not the actual one), we may view the allusion to travel as a sort of visual pun, included by Poussin to challenge the mental acuity of the works' viewers and to assert his own.

Although few in number, the tools with which Poussin appears in the two paintings also reflect a wish to create an image of great intelligence and intellectual sharpness. The usual attributes of painterly activity, a brush and palette, for example, have been abandoned in favour of items referring more directly to the rational and

speculative thinking deemed so critical to art by Poussin. In the Pointel *Self-Portrait*, the artist holds a book in his right hand and a pencil-like object in his left. Several framed canvases form the middle and background of the Chantelou work, but a book or portfolio encircled by a red ribbon is the only item held by the painter, and, in its prominent position, seems at least as suggestive of another activity as the canvases are of painting. The instrument in the first canvas (though its exact identity is uncertain – it has been called a "long pen," a "chalk holder," and a "stylus" by Walter Friedlaender, Blunt and David Carrier, respectively[35]) seems to recall not the exercise of painting, but that of drawing (or even of writing), thereby acting as a reminder of Poussin's affinity for and interest in *disegno*. The addition of a book in each *Self-Portrait* furthers the impression of a learned and wise figure and alludes to his characterization as "peintre-philosophe," the manner in which, as Friedlaender comments, Poussin "wanted to be seen and understood for all time."[36]

Arguments for Poussin's self-representation as such a "painter-philosopher" often have made use of the title "De lumine et colore" which until recently appeared on the spine of the book he holds in the 1649 work (figure 6). Since it was believed by the artist's contemporaries, and duly noted by his biographers, that he had intended to pen a formal treatise on artistic principles, many writers have accepted the book in Pointel's painting as a reference to this project. A letter published by André Félibien, another of Poussin's biographers, offers insight into the matter. The letter, from Jean Dughet, Poussin's brother-in-law, to Chantelou, responds definitively to the overly-optimistic assumptions that the artist had completed a "Traité des Lumieres et des Ombres" by the time of his death in 1665, stating that no such manuscript existed.[37] The heading on the

book in Pointel's *Self-Portrait* cannot, therefore, be viewed as a tribute by Poussin to his own literary accomplishment. Even if he had completed a treatise by 1649 and had decided to include a reference to it in his painting, the peculiar nature of a title stressing light and colour has long been pointed out. As Blunt astutely notices, "No satisfactory solution has been offered for the fact that Poussin, a firm partisan of *disegno*, should have chosen to inscribe on the book he is holding the battle cry of his opponents, the supporters of *colore*."[38]

Blunt's reluctance to accept the volume's title without question, in the end, turned out to be prudent. The "satisfactory solution" he sought seems to have been provided by restoration and cleaning of the first *Self-Portrait* for the 1994 Grand Palais exhibition, which discovered the words on the spine to have been added after the painting was completed.[39] Exactly when the addition was made and by whom is not known. The same "De lumine et colore" title already appeared on the book in Jean Pesne's engraved version of the *Self-Portrait* (figure 8), which "certainly was made while Poussin was still alive," according to Cropper and Dempsey.[40] It is possible, then, that someone (unlikely though not impossibly, Poussin himself) had added the inscription to the original by 1665. Also possible, however, is that Pesne's title represents not a direct copying of what he saw in the original work, but a creative intervention which would have worked to associate the artist with a treatise he never wrote, but which was so ardently desired of him. (Why Pesne would have seen fit to include a nod to colour in the title perhaps may be explained by Poussin's known admiration for the treatises of Padre Matteo Zaccolini, which deal in part with colour in relation to perspective).[41]

The most fundamental revelation yielded by these investigations into the origins of the title, that the lettering was most likely not applied by Poussin himself, is the one that relates most directly to consideration of the meanings the work originally possessed. With this in mind, we can no longer accept the "De Lumine et Colore" heading as part of a message put forward by the artist about his theoretical leanings or as one directed toward his patron, as has been another frequent approach. The same limitations must now also be applied to our study of the inscribed text atop the first portrait; another passage whose authenticity has been called into question following the recent cleaning.[42] The lines which appear above the artist's head in the 1649 *Self-Portrait* often have been viewed as a thematic counterpart to those on the otherwise empty canvas in the 1650 *Self-Portrait* (figures 7 and 5); the realization that they, like the book title, were probably a later addition, however, prevents us from understanding any relation they bear to the 1650 inscription as having been intended by Poussin himself.

Leaving aside Poussin's role in their creation, it is not difficult to see why the two sets of painted words have frequently been examined in tandem. The close similarity of the texts – both contain, in Latin, the painter's name, his place of birth, references to his profession and indications of the year and city in which the works were created – has encouraged a search for their connected purpose in the portraits. Interestingly, it is the one significant difference between the two, the presence of the word "effegies" in the later work, which may be a clue to possible existing parallels. As Bätschmann points out, "effegies," means both "portrayal" and "shadow picture."[43] As if to call attention to this less obvious second meaning, the represented body of the artist throws darkness over the right half of the inscribed canvas. Bätschmann has explored the layered correspondence

of these elements to Poussin's two versions of *The Arcadian Shepherds* (figures 9 and 10), in which the figures contemplate a tomb inscription partially covered by the shadows they cast.[44] If the central theme of the *Shepherds*, the ever-presence of death and impermanence, is to be seen subtly recalled in the second *Self-Portrait*, the (painted) sculpted monument in the first *Self-Portrait* may act as a more direct reference to such transience.

The laurel-bearing putti and stone tablet upon which the image of the artist is foregrounded in the Pointel portrait have long been recognized as components of a tomb or epitaph. Blunt has identified the sources for this portion of the composition as funerary monuments sculpted by Poussin's friend, François Duquesnoy.[45] The themes invoked in the second *Self-Portrait*, then, presence and absence, and the ephemerality of existence, find their counterpart not in any portion of the inscription in the first *Self-Portrait*, but in this painted tomb relief and its unavoidable connections to death. Why Poussin might have chosen to introduce such a motive in these works remains incompletely understood. Although thoughts of mortality might reasonably accompany the process of making a self-portrait (through which a painted copy destined to "outlive" the human "original" is created)[46], it is perhaps concerns about the permanence of art which Poussin here entertains. In spite of his loyalty to the more enduring, intellectual qualities of painting, the artist seems to recognize that, just as the shadow, ultimately, as Carrier reflects, "all images are transitory, as mortal as the man whose presence is recorded."[47]

NOTES TO PART I

[1] Pierre Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), 426.

[2] Nicolas Poussin, *Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Charles Jouanny (Paris: Archives de l'art français, N.S. v, 1911), 355 / Nicolas Poussin, *Lettres et propos sur l'art*, ed. Anthony Blunt (Paris: Herman, 1964), 119. USAGE NOTE: Quotations from Poussin's letters in the text are from the Jouanny edition, but where the same passage appears in Blunt's *Lettres et propos*, the reference is given; the Blunt versions have been updated to less cumbersome modern French, while the Jouanny ones are as Poussin wrote them. Spelling and punctuation are reproduced in this study as they appear in Jouanny.

[3] Ibid., 386-387 / Ibid., 132.

[4] Edward Lucie-Smith, *A Concise History of French Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 108.

[5] *Correspondance*, 412 / *Lettres et propos*, 142.

[6] One account states that "Poussin made some portraits when as a young artist he could barely keep afloat; all these early works are lost." No hint is offered as to the source of this insight. See Jacques Thuillier and Albert Châtelet, *French Painting from Le Nain to Fragonard* (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1964), 27.

[7] Pierre Rosenberg has challenged the attribution of this drawing to Poussin (see his "Review of H. Brigstocke, *Sotheby's Ashmolean Exhibition. A Loan Exhibition of drawings by Nicolas Poussin from British Collections*," *Burlington Magazine* 133 (1991): 210-212), but the proposal has not gained widespread support. The dating of this work, however, does seem problematic. Even if the portrait is accepted as being by the hand of Poussin, it cannot be the one referred to in his letter of 1650 (see note 5 above). Here he says that he has not created a portrait in 28 years, leading us to expect one to exist from c.1622. An inscription beneath the chalk drawing dates it securely to 1630. It is possible that in his letter he was referring to only large-scale, formal portraits and did not see fit to include the 1630 drawing in this description. This still leaves open the question of which portrait (unknown today) Poussin painted in 1622.

[8] Esther Sutro, *Nicolas Poussin* (London: Jonathan Cape & The Medici Society Ltd., 1923), 48. For the surviving letters, see *Correspondance*, 1911.

[9] Emile Magne, *Nicolas Poussin: Premier Peintre du Roi 1594-1665* (Bruxelles-Paris: G. Van Oest & Cie., 1914), 100.

[10] *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 11, s.v. "Paul Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou," by Malcolm Bull.

[11] Elizabeth G. Holt, *A Documentary History of Art*, vol. II (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1974), 124.

[12] Originally published by Félibien, this fragment of a letter dated to 1637 clearly makes mention of the *Manna* for Chantelou. See *Correspondance*, 3-5./ *Lettres et propos*, 27.

[13] *Correspondance, 5.*

[14] See *Correspondance*, 33. In this letter an impatient Sublet de Noyers reminds Poussin that he is a French subject, and that Kings have "long arms."

[15] Howard Hibbard, *Poussin: The Holy Family on the Steps* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), 17.

[16] Jacques Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 287.

[17] *Correspondance*, 417 / *Lettres et propos*, 147.

[18] Victor Ieronim Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: an insight into early modern meta-painting*, translated by Anne-Marie Clasheen (New York: Cambridge, 1997), 211.

[19] *Correspondance*, 417 / *Lettres et propos*, 147.

[20] *Lettres et propos*, 146 (Blunt's note 37).

[21] Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le Vite de' Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti Moderni* (Rome, 1672), 440.

[22] Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 47.

[23] Donald Posner, "The Picture of Painting in Poussin's Self-Portrait," in *Essays in the History of Art presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, eds. Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbard and Milton J. Lewine (London: Phaidon Press, 1967), 200.

[24] Ibid., 201.

[25] Claire Pace, *Félibien's Life of Poussin* (London: A. Zwemmer Ltd., 1981), 31.

[26] Posner, "The Picture of Painting in Poussin's Self-Portrait," 202.

[27] *Correspondance*, 143 / *Lettres et propos*, 63.

[28] Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 210.

[29] Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1967), 266.

[30] *Correspondance*, 372 / *Lettres et propos*, 123.

[31] Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin*, 49.

[32] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 265; James Thompson, *Nicolas Poussin* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993), 5; Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 191.

[33] Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, 208.

[34] On the issue of the increased popularity of ancient attire in portraiture at this time, see Diana De Marly, "The Establishment of Roman Dress in Seventeenth-Century Portraiture," *Burlington Magazine* 117 (1975): 443-451.

[35] Walter Friedlaender, *Nicolas Poussin: A New Approach* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1966), 172; Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 265; David Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 10.

[36] Friedlaender, *Nicolas Poussin*, 75.

[37] Pace, *Félibien's Life of Poussin*, 128-129.

[38] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 265.

[39] Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin*, 426.

[40] Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin*, 145.

[41] Ibid., 146-147. On the topic of the eagerness of the French Academy to connect Poussin to a treatise, see Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin*, chapter 4, esp. p. 147. On the likelihood that "De Lumine et colore" refers to Zaccolini, see Cropper and Dempsey, chapter 4, esp. pp. 150 and 173.

[42] Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin*, 426.

[43] Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin*, 53.

[44] Ibid., 53ff. See also Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 5.

[45] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 266.

[46] This notion, essentially that art has the power to immortalize, is, naturally, also related to funerary monuments. Erwin Panofsky discusses the papal tombs of Alexander VII and Urban VIII, each of which features a personification of Death alongside a sculpted effigy of the Pope. Similar to Poussin's *Self-Portraits*, which perpetuated the artist's memory long after his death, the tombs of these pontiffs were intended to immortalize their respective legacies See Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1964), 94-95.

[47] Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 8.

II. THE PATRONS AND POUSSIN'S LETTERS

i. Chantelou's jealousy and an alternate scenario for the *Self-Portraits*

It is perhaps the enigmatic quality of Poussin's two *Self-Portraits* which has given rise to such a great number and wide variety of interpretations regarding their meanings. If the messages contained within the paintings were readily discernible by the artist's patrons in the seventeenth century, they are considerably less obvious to audiences today. The apparently inconclusive nature of what is depicted on the canvases has led to extensive explorations of particular depicted elements, of their art-historical precursors and iconographic and iconological significance, in an attempt to arrive at a more complete understanding of the works and to broaden knowledge about their creator. Insight into the images and into the project, however, is also to be found outside of the paintings themselves, in an analysis of some of the conditions and situations surrounding their production. It is to this side of the portraits that we now turn our attention. To begin this section of our investigation, the nature of the artist's relationships with his two important patrons, Chantelou and Pointel, is examined, in an effort to highlight the need to read beyond the seeming straightforwardness of key passages in his written correspondence. A consideration of the evidence which suggests that Poussin was employing strategy and caution in his letters to Chantelou enables us to recognize not only the danger of reading his words at face value, but also the tremendous amount of critical perspective to be lost in so doing. An alternative scenario to the one the painter would have had Chantelou believe is proposed in this section; the differences, though

slight, have important bearing on the manner in which we interpret the *Self-Portraits*, an issue to which we return in the fourth section.

It should be stated at this point that the notion of examining Poussin's dealings with his patrons is hardly novel, nor is the practice of understanding the self-portrait project to have unfolded other than as it was described to Chantelou entirely original. Where the current investigation of these concerns differs, however, is in its desire to draw the parts more closely together, and to elucidate the delicate links between two elements; the nature of Poussin's association with the pair of Parisians and the extent to which this shaped the content and tone of his letters. It is the benefits of exploring such connections which studies contemplating the areas only independently of one another fail to attain. More is said about the critical treatment of this issue in the third section; for now, a passage from one of the artist's most frequently cited letters serves to return us to the present concerns.

The excerpt, from a letter to Chantelou dated June 20, 1649, reads as follows: "J'ei fet l'un de mes portraits et bientost je commencerei l'autre Je vous envoyerei celuy qui réussira le mieux. mais il n'en faut rien dire sil vous plaist, pour ne point causer de jalousie."[1] The statements seem self-evident and unproblematic, and as testimonials from the artist himself, there has been little reason to challenge their credibility. A common tendency of art historians has been to accept this and other of Poussin's letters as direct and authoritative reflections of events and opinions. Not surprisingly, what has been drawn from this passage is exactly what has been written, that at this point in the project, Poussin has completed one portrait and will soon start another, that he intends to send

Chantelou the one that comes out best, and that he has asked his patron not to say anything about it, to avoid causing any jealousy.

The clarity and simplicity of the passage, it is true, at first seems to belie the presence of any deeper or subversive meaning. Poussin routinely kept his patron apprised of any developments in the creation of works that he had commissioned, detailing his progress in the letters he wrote; the announcement that he has recently completed one portrait appears to be simply another such update. The letter bears greater significance, however. It marks the first overt reference to the fact that Poussin himself had undertaken the project, and it also informs Chantelou for the first time of his intention to create a second self-portrait. That neither of these pieces of information had been offered to Chantelou on previous occasions, despite the frequent letters which passed between the two men, is in itself telling, and could suggest that Poussin was not writing freely and openly, but in a very careful, deliberate manner, releasing information with a degree of restraint.

The reasons for which Poussin felt it necessary to be covert in his communications with Chantelou are many and constitute a very interesting if underemphasized side of their relationship. It should be stressed at this early point that the goal of this examination is not to discount the friendship between the two men, which clearly remained intact, but rather to cast it in a somewhat different light, highlighting subtleties in the nature of their association. An exploration of some of the causes of Poussin's prudence in dealing with his friend unmasks what may remain hidden behind the seeming obviousness of the letters, the likely involvement and equally central role in the self-portrait project of Pointel, the recipient, in the end, of the first work. Poussin's

promise to send Chantelou the portrait that "comes out best" must be read not flatly as reflecting a genuine desire that this client receive the aesthetically superior of the two paintings, but as preemptive action against envy that was sure to be aroused in response to the letter. For, although Poussin does not specify what will happen to the portrait that does not "come out best," it surely would have seemed likely to an attentive reader that another customer was destined to have bestowed upon him the same honour of possessing a prestigious image of the artist.

More than likely, Poussin conceived the *Self-Portraits* with both patrons in mind, and not, as he would have had Chantelou believe, thinking of only one of his Parisian associates. Since the primary documents from which we pull our knowledge of the various stages of the operation, Poussin's letters, do not make explicit the reasons for beginning another painting, a definitive answer may never be available. But if Chantelou had requested a portrait from the artist and, as we are told, one had been completed, we must wonder why another would be started. Poussin's report of a second work is rendered even more suspicious by the appeal for silence which follows it. Until this point, one could assume the impetus for a second portrait to have been not the involvement of another buyer but simply Poussin's dissatisfaction with his first effort for Chantelou. The curious mention of jealousy, however, casts doubt on such a theory. If Poussin is painting only for this patron, whose jealousy is he worried about provoking and why does he plead for discretion?

The scenario which comes closest to providing answers for these questions is one in which Pointel occupies as crucial a role as Chantelou in the genesis of the works and is viewed as being as much the *raison d'être* for the *Self-Portraits* as Poussin's other top

French patron. The painter's letters to Chantelou demonstrate the primacy of the nobleman in the early stages of the portrait scheme; the unfortunate loss of all letters to or from Pointel precludes the similar establishment of his founding role in the project.[2] Nonetheless, the absence of evidence that he was connected to the origins of the works must not be confused with the presence of proof that he was not. It is still entirely possible that, even if perhaps not the one to have first made a request for a portrait of the artist, Pointel was implicated in the formative phases of the paintings, and thus was to Poussin as important to the project as was Chantelou. Advancing this idea, it is not unreasonable to assume that the work that Pointel eventually received was conceived with him in mind from the start and, correspondingly, that the second *Self-Portrait* was planned expressly for Chantelou.

It is this strong likelihood that Poussin knew from very early on which of his portraits would be given to each patron that allows us to view his promise to choose for Chantelou the one that "comes out best" with heightened sensitivity and a more critical eye. Since it seems doubtful that the process of dispatching the two completed works ever involved much of a choice, Poussin's declaration, then, should perhaps be regarded as a slight bending of the truth. While the suggestion here is hardly that the artist filled his letters with blatant lies, it is not difficult to imagine him sensing the need to devise an explanation which would both justify the start of another portrait and reassure Chantelou of his continued devotion to him. Poussin's apparent desire to postpone revelation of Pointel's involvement in the *Self-Portraits* becomes more understandable when we consider some of the episodes in the history of his relations with Chantelou. Recalling several outbursts of this figure's jealousy (often of none other than Pointel) and Poussin's

displeased response to them, it becomes clear that the 1649 letter, far from being a simple, veracious bulletin, was part of the artist's ongoing and concerted efforts to keep the emotions of his often impetuous friend in check.

Chantelou's propensity for jealousy and for displaying a lack of good judgement had manifested itself on several previous occasions and seems to have been a recurring motif in his relationship with the artist. In written communication with his patron, we find Poussin repeatedly responding to what we must assume to have been fairly harsh reproach of him and his works (the letters sent to Poussin by Chantelou, we should recall, have not survived; Poussin's factual writing style and habit of recapping the nature of the charges to which he was replying, however, offer more than ample evidence of such criticism). Overtones of Chantelou's displeasure with paintings created for him are especially strong in many of the letters discussing the *Seven Sacraments*. In March 1647, after the third canvas in the series had been delivered (figure 11), Poussin writes to the recipient: "Si le batesme que vous avés repseu semble à quelcun trop doux. quil lisent la response que Trajan Bocalin fet faire à Apollo..." and provides another answer which can be given "sil ne sont contens de la répartie."[3] What is most interesting about this passage is not Poussin's suggestion to use a mythological tale in responding to hesitant reception of his work, but the fact that Chantelou evidently was concerned enough about the opinions of others to mention them to his correspondent. In another letter written shortly after, Poussin again speaks about reaction to his canvases, noting the public scrutiny to which he has by this point become accustomed. Fully cognizant of Chantelou's sensitivity to prevailing attitudes, he offers reassurance of the earnest efforts employed in serving him and urges him to receive the paintings "de bon oeil."[4]

A letter composed two months later returns to a discussion of Chantelou's dissatisfaction with the *Baptism.* The tone has become more serious and the artist has moved away from learned analogies and polite gesturing. Perhaps inspired by the collector's persistent and more pointed criticism, Poussin responds directly and defensively to insinuation that the less pleasing appearance of the *Baptism* reflects a lack of fidelity to Chantelou: "Vous devés vous assurer que ji ay procédé avec le mesme amour [et] dilligense. Jy ay employé le mesme temps que aux autres précédens et que le désir de faire bien est tousjours égal."[5] We have little reason to doubt that his devotion to his patron was anything but genuine. As Richard Verdi notes, "loyalty to one's friends" was a human quality to which Poussin "attached great value,"[6] and we may assume the faithless doubts voiced by Chantelou to have both irritated and hurt the morally upstanding artist.

In Poussin's famous letter of November 24, 1647, the painting in question has changed, but again we encounter the mistrust and jealousy of his Parisian patron. This time, it is the *Ordination* (figure 13), another of the *Sacraments* and the last canvas to have been received by him, which elicits a grievance. Judging from the response from Rome, Chantelou has expressed not only his displeasure over the work but also his corresponding belief that Poussin's *Finding of Moses* (figure 14), completed earlier that year for Pointel, possessed greater beauty and, thus, was indicative of the artist's greater affection for this rival collector. Poussin asks candidly: "Si le tableau de Moïse trouvé dans les Eaux du Nil que possède Mo[r] Pointel vous a donné dans l'amour. esse un témoignage pour cela que je l'aye fet avec plus d'amour que les vostres [?]"[7] The answer offered by the artist takes the form of the much discussed "theory of the modes," through

which he explains that the differing treatment of works is determined more by the nature of the subject matter than by sentiment for the intended audience. Applied directly to the concerns at hand, as it was no doubt hoped Chantelou would do, the theory serves to make Poussin's message clear: the sweeter appearance of the *Finding of Moses* was not to be viewed as evidence of stronger bonds of love or devotion for Pointel, and that it was regarded as such was an unacceptable demonstration of jealousy and a failure to exercise good judgement.

Chantelou's flawed judgement could scarcely have been more misapplied than to the *Seven Sacraments*, works created for him with as much dedication as Poussin ever displayed for anyone. The artist's letters provide his client with constant reassurances that no new commissions would be undertaken until the set was complete, a pledge supported by the paucity of images datable to the mid 1640s. Indeed, as Blunt asserts, "from 1644 till the beginning of 1648 Poussin's principal concern was with the execution of the second series of *Sacraments*."[8] Despite his singleminded focus on these works, the pace of his progress seems not to have satisfied Chantelou. On November 12, 1645, Poussin informs his patron that he expects to have the *Confirmation* completed by mid-December, adding, "ne vous estonnés point (Mr) du longtemps que je més pour finir un tableau seul car il contien vintedeus figures sans les choses accessoires qui sont au fons."[9] The justification for the time spent on the painting underlines Chantelou's doubtless impatience, but also emphasizes Poussin's unwillingness to compromise the quality of the series. In addition to this devotion to their success, a well-known dislike for copying paintings (whether his own or those by other artists)[10] was put aside when Chantelou first requested the *Sacraments*. Although in the end Poussin conceived a new series, he

initially agreed to undertake his patron's choice of original compositions or copies of Pozzo's canvases, this latter option being a most unpleasant one for the artist.[11] That the choice was offered to Chantelou at all is significant. Such unselfish gestures seem not to have been appreciated by the courtier, however, whose criticisms smacked of ungratefulness and whose passions and insecurities blinded him to the devotion and constancy of his far-away friend.

It was perhaps Chantelou's submission to excessive emotion, even more than the lack of faith he exhibited in Poussin's character, which the artist found to be most offensive in his patron's criticism. As has been thoroughly documented, Poussin's philosophy of life was closely aligned with the basic tenets of Stoicism, an ancient Greek school of thought whose adherents championed reason over passion. His connections to this doctrine have been well explored,[12] and his letters are among the most direct references to the ideas of the ancient writers who exemplified Stoic precepts. Blunt explains one of the fundamentals of the ideology: "Indeed, for the Stoics, all emotions were incompatible with reason and therefore to be condemned."[13] This belief is reflected in Poussin's communication with his patron. A terse rejoinder to Chantelou's insistence that he had been served with insufficient respect and devotion is offered by the painter in a letter of October 8, 1649: "Si vous voulés considérer toutte choses sans passion elles ne vous reviendros jamais."[14] (The meaning is clarified in Blunt's translation of the line as "If you will consider things without passion they won't ever make your gorge rise."[15]) On another occasion, Poussin is less restrained and cites the "cruelle jalousie" which renders his patron as irritating as "une Mouche grosse comme un Eléphant."[16] Clearly, then, Chantelou's highly emotional and chiefly subjective claims that Pointel had been served

with more affection by their mutual friend, could have been met with nothing but distaste and disappointment by a man whose every action was informed by a will to live calmly and according to the laws of reason.

There is still another aspect of Chantelou's displays of emotion that would have rendered them more unpleasant to Poussin; the fact that they were often inspired by criticisms that other people had leveled against his works. Chantelou's voicing of his own discontent about the paintings lovingly crafted for him would have been one thing; his insecure and fickle adoption of the opinions of others, and subsequent repetition of them to Poussin, was entirely another. Letters to Chantelou, as we have seen, sometimes offered a prefabricated defense to give to skeptics. At other times, Poussin simply expressed concern for the impressionable nobleman and his tendency to view through the eyes of others. In concluding his "modes" letter, Poussin makes one final cautionary observation to Chantelou: "je crains que la pratique de tant d'Insensés et Ignorants qui vous environnent ne vous corrompent le jugement par leur contagion."[17]

That some of these "insensate and ignorant" people likely colouring his patron's judgement were known and disliked by the artist since the time of his brief visit to Paris in the early 1640s could not have made Chantelou's epistolary reproaches any easier to swallow. Poussin's eighteen-month stay in the French capital was an acutely unhappy and stressful time, during which his Stoic calm was tested by an unending string of artistic requests and by what Alain Mérot describes as the "caustic comments of his rivals,"[18] most notably Simon Vouet. A damaging campaign to discredit his skills was also rumoured to have been underway by prominent French painters. The important position maintained by Chantelou at court in the late 1640s guaranteed his association

with Cardinal Mazarin, about whom Poussin had "openly expresse[d] his own anti-Mazarin sentiments,"[19] according to Sheila McTighe. Also, the collector's continuing role in the Parisian art world must have occasioned contact with at least some of Poussin's enemies, especially given that he fashioned his home as a cultural meeting place always "open to art-lovers,"[20] as Mérot tells us. The overtones of Poussin's warning, moreover, suggest that he knew of such interaction, and it was perhaps from this contact that he feared the "corruption" of Chantelou's judgement would occur.[21]

To recap the main points of the discussion thus far, we have seen that Chantelou was predisposed to jealousy and to being swayed by the opinions of others, and that these traits were intensely disliked by Poussin. Moreover, it has become evident that this propensity for jealousy was strong enough for Poussin to have expected it to be activated by the realization that another client was involved in the *Self-Portrait* project. Also apparent is that the artist's distaste for this excessive emotion was strong enough to have caused him to seek methods of preventing it from surfacing in his patron. Bringing these insights to the letters, especially to Poussin's statement that he will send Chantelou the portrait which "comes out best," has better enabled us to perceive the probability that his words were carefully chosen to circumvent disclosure of the full reality of the situation. In the more plausibly reconstructed version of the creation of the works, we see that Poussin likely did not paint two portraits only to decide upon completion to whom each would go; rather, it seems more probable that each work had been approached and designed with its eventual owner in mind. We may understand Pointel's role in this revised model of events to have been of greater significance than is usually acknowledged, and in an attempt to further clarify our reading of Poussin's letters about

the *Self-Portraits* (before we later return more squarely to the works themselves), we now consider more directly Pointel's involvement in the situation.

ii. Pointel

An intriguing reference to Poussin's "other" Parisian art buying friend is found in a letter of June 3, 1647. The artist describes Pointel as "de ces hérétiques qui croyent que Vostre Serviteur le Poussin.a quelque talent en la peinture que n'est pas commun." He then extends the analogy with an allusion to those who were critical of his works: "Mais jei peur que l'on ne lapide sil ne se tait, car il n'est plus temps de illuminer les aveugles; Crist mesme en fut mal vouleu."[22] The dramatic parallel "reveals the sharpness and the vivacity of the Parisian debate over Poussin's work,"[23] as Marin observes, but perhaps more interesting is the image of Pointel which is created. The impression is of a faithful admirer of Poussin's art, one as unwavering in his devotion as those who willingly risk stoning in the name of their beliefs. That the recipient of this letter was Chantelou indeed adds another dimension to the characterization. Poussin's presentation of his other associate as possessing such loyalty and steadfast judgement contrasts sharply with the inconstancy to which he knew his correspondent to be prone. Underlying the letter's tone of subtle reproach is the inference that Chantelou himself is among the (judgementally) blind who may be beyond the enlightenment offered by Pointel. Poussin's keen awareness of his patron's hostile regard for the third member of the trio must have supported a belief that his message would be clearly understood.

The jealousy which Chantelou had developed for the other Parisian art buyer never seems to have escaped Poussin's mind. As the project draws to a close, Pointel's involvement can no longer be denied and is disclosed in a letter of May 29, 1650. Accompanying the revelation to Chantelou, though, are reiterations of the promises

previously made to him and an explicit mention of his jealousy. In the correspondence announcing the completion of the second *Self-Portrait* Poussin writes: "J'ai fini le portrait que vous désiriés de moi...Monsieur Pointel aura celui que je lui ai promis en même temps duquel vous n'aurés point de jalousie car j'ai observé la promesse que je vous ai faitte aiant choisi le meilleur et le plus resemblant pour vous, vous en voirés la différence vous même."[24] Aside from demonstrating Poussin's continued care to forestall the development of suspicion or envy in his patron, this passage is noteworthy in drawing attention to two other points. Firstly, the matter-of-fact reference to Pointel's initial involvement in the project suggests that it was not the earliest occasion on which Chantelou had been informed of this detail. Despite frequent mention of the portraits in Poussin's previous letters to him, however, this is in fact the first divulgence of the key role to have been played by Pointel in the creation of the works. To engage in a speculative reading of the passage, it seems as though Poussin has thought it best to offer the information in as understated a manner as possible. Were it not for the strong possibility that each patron's work would have been seen by the other man, at some time, upon delivery of both canvases to Paris, one wonders whether Poussin would have chosen to mention Pointel's involvement at all. The other consideration highlighted by this excerpt involves the repetition of the intent to send Chantelou the best *Self-Portrait* and the one which most resembles its maker. The close proximity of this statement to mention of Pointel (both occur in the same line) raises an uneasy tension which must be addressed. At the heart of the report lies a seeming incongruity: if Chantelou is assured of the better work, what, we must ask, could he have thought the artist to have promised Pointel, if not also a successful likeness? More to the point, why would Poussin have

been satisfied to send Pointel a portrait which was visibly less proficient? The obvious answer, to the second question at least, is that he would not have been. His attempt to make Chantelou believe the contrary reinforces what we have already identified as a tendency towards evasiveness when dealing with his temperamental patron. The doubtless untruth of Poussin's implied intent to save the "inferior" *Self-Portrait* for Pointel becomes more evident when the strong bonds which existed between the two men are considered.

Our understanding of the association between Poussin and Pointel, a banker, silk merchant and art collector, would benefit tremendously from the discovery of even some of the letters exchanged by the figures. Even without the advantage of access to their private written communication, however, a fairly complete picture of their relationship has emerged. As with Chantelou, the conditions of Poussin's first contact with Pointel, who was from Lyons, but had settled in the French capital, are not known with any degree of precision. It is assumed that the figures met during the painter's stay in Paris which began, we recall, at the end of 1640.[25] If it is no earlier than at this time that the men encountered each other, it is evident that a close bond developed rapidly, as the will drafted by Poussin before his departure from France 1642 named Pointel as an executor.[26] The mutual respect suggested by this arrangement is confirmed by references to Pointel in the letters, about whom, as Blunt notes, the artist "speaks with real affection"[27] and openly identifies as a good friend. There is also evidence to indicate that Pointel had visited Rome on two lengthy sojourns, one in the mid-1640s, the other a decade later, and that he spent time in the company of Poussin during these stays,[28] thus allowing their friendship to deepen and to develop outside of written correspondence.

Pointel's considerable role in Poussin's business life has also been established by the recent publication of an inventory of his possessions drawn up after his death in 1660.[29] Recorded in the list are twenty-one paintings and eighty drawings by Poussin. Aside from the first *Self-Portrait*, Pointel also owned several important works from the 1640s and 1650s, including the *Judgement of Solomon* from 1649 and a selection of Poussin's classical landscapes, in addition to the *Finding of Moses* previously mentioned and a version of *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well* (figure 12), over which Chantelou had also expressed jealousy. Viewed as a whole, Pointel's works form an impressive collection, the tone and high quality of which speak of Poussin's esteem for this figure and reflect a shared ethos between the artist and the patron whom Mérot classifies as having been among a group of "serious-minded, hard-working men of integrity with a bent for order."[30]

Considered upon this background, it is even more difficult to accept that the jealousy Poussin mentioned in the June 1649 letter, in which he appealed to Chantelou to be discreet, was that of Pointel. Let us recall the line: "Je vous envoyerei celuy qui réussira le mieux. mais il n'en faut rien dire sil vous plaist, pour ne point causer de jalousie." It seems that Poussin was not as concerned with guarding against jealousy from Pointel (which had not hitherto manifested itself as a concern) as he was with taking action to preclude the possibility that Chantelou discuss the topic with the other patron, only to have doubt cast on the version of the story he had been offered. Or, as Marin more succinctly asks, "Who, then, is in question in this jealousy, or rather who is really the jealous one?"[31]

The answer seems clear, especially given that the oft-mentioned "rivalry" between the two French patrons seems weighted heavily in one direction; there is little proof that Pointel ever expressed invidious sentiment towards or about Chantelou. Also clear is the folly of believing that Poussin would have decided in good faith to give Pointel, his longtime friend and supporter, a self-portrait that was in any way visibly inferior. Once again we are returned squarely to Chantelou's jealousy as a force which informed the artist's choice of words in his letters. These words obscure the probability that the decision to ship the 1649 *Self-Portrait* to Pointel and the 1650 work to Chantelou was made not at the end of the undertaking, but at its earliest stages, and hence that Poussin did not "choose" a better or worse painting for anyone, but simply sent each patron the one which had been intended for him all along. Although such a characterization of Poussin's actions as even mildly evasive or strategic might at first glance seem incompatible with the image of Stoic virtue and moral uprightness (and constancy bordering on dullness) which has predominated, a brief consideration of incidents from his past allows us to see that the *Self-Portrait* letters are not the first or only occasion on which such traits were exhibited.

In examining the events and extensive manoeuvring which led up to Poussin's voyage to Paris in 1640, we find another instance of his gentle employment of strategy. His profound reluctance to leave his adopted Italian homeland is well known. Thuillier takes up this theme in a rereading of Poussin's letters to court officials in the late 1630s, and, in so doing, highlights a very interesting and commonly occurring disparity between the artist's motives and the declared purpose of his correspondence. In one example, Poussin writes to Chantelou in early 1639, as Thuillier comments, "sous prétexte de lui

annoncer qu'il achève pour lui le tableau de la *Manne*,"[32] but soon tilts the focus to the real reason for his letter. The invitation from de Noyers is acknowledged, and Poussin expresses his desire to remain in Rome, making certain to mention the great risk a long journey would pose to his health. As Thuillier's subtle reading intimates, the aim of the letter had much more to do with engaging the sympathy of Chantelou, and with convincing him of the ill-timing of a trip to France, than with announcing progress on the *Manna.*

The evasiveness of the artist again seems to have made an appearance in an event involving Pointel and a possible trip taken by the two men to Naples. Although there is strong evidence to suggest that the excursion did occur, Poussin's letter to Chantelou, written just two days after his return makes no reference to it, despite the uncharacteristic delay in responding which it caused. Blunt astutely views the omission as having been occasioned by the patron's jealousy.[33] Not uncoincidentally, it is in this letter that Poussin deflects criticism about the *Baptism* painted for Chantelou, which its owner subsequently compared unfavourably to Pointel's *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well.* That his sensitivity to Chantelou's jealousy of Pointel should have caused him to avoid mention of the latter at this time is hardly surprising, as Blunt notes, especially given that the voyage to Naples interrupted what was supposed to have been a time of exclusive service on the *Sacraments* and might itself have prompted scorn.

The impulse to conceal the truth from Chantelou or to present it in a more positive light sometimes seemed so ardent as to have resulted in almost implausible statements. In the same letter in which Poussin informs Chantelou that Pointel will receive the other *Self-Portrait* ("J'ai fini le portrait que vous désiriés de moi...Monsieur Pointel aura celui

que je lui ai promis en même temps..."), he also writes, "Je prétends que ce portrait vous doit être un signe de la servitu que je vous ai voué, d'autant que pour personne vivante je ne ferois ce que j'ai fait pour vous en cette matière."[34] Poussin's attempt to convince Chantelou that he has done for him what he would do for no other living person is somewhat baffling, given the disclosure, not two lines earlier, that he will send the other *Self-Portrait* to Pointel. Despite the inherent contradiction of his assurance, what is apparent is Poussin's tendency to craft his statements according to the outcome he desires, rather than as a direct reflection of reality.

It was Poussin's desire to avoid the jealousy and reproach of his patron, Chantelou, as we have seen, which often caused his very deliberate inclusion or exclusion of an essential piece of information in his letters. The inspiration was certainly the same in Poussin's choice to defer revelation of Pointel's involvement in the *Self-Portrait* campaign, and far from standing in tense opposition to his Stoic leanings, his actions may actually have been motivated by them. While it would be absurd to suggest that Stoicism advocated disingenuous conduct, it is not difficult to imagine occasionally disingenuous measures to have been taken when Poussin's beloved Stoic peacefulness and stability were threatened. Bickering and hostility among his friends assuredly would have constituted a breach of this calm, and as Hilliard Goldfarb points out, Poussin earlier had demonstrated an interest in maintaining the peace between Chantelou and another important patron, Cassiano dal Pozzo.[35] Such concern for emotional tranquility is not surprising, especially bearing in mind that, as Verdi writes of the artist, "in his personal affairs, he avoided conflict or confrontation."[36] Sensitive consideration of such traits chips away at the historical image of Poussin as a monolith of constancy and makes room

for a perhaps more useful understanding of him as a multi-dimensional being who sometimes employed strategy in his actions. It is an awareness of this inclination, particularly consequential in his dealings with Chantelou, which allows us to view the artist's behaviour and letters in a different light, and which, in turn, offers a modified range of possibilities for our appreciation of the self-portrait project and the works it produced.

NOTES TO PART II

[1] *Correspondance*, 402 /*Lettres et propos*,139.

[2] Blunt notes that "some of the correspondence with Pointel still survived in the late eighteenth century," *Nicolas Poussin*, 216, note 22, though whether these were letters to or from Pointel is not entirely clear. Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, 12, says that all Poussin's letters to Pointel are lost.

[3] *Correspondance*, 351 / *Lettres et propos*, 117.

[4] Ibid., 354 / Ibid., 118, letter of April 7, 1647.

[5] Ibid., 356 / Ibid., 119, letter of June 3, 1647.

[6] Richard Verdi, *Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665* (London: Zwemmer, 1995), 29.

[7] *Correspondance*, 372 / *Lettres et propos*, 123. For English translation, see Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 367-370.

[8] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 250.

[9] *Correspondance*, 322 / *Lettres et propos*, 109.

[10] See Thomas L. Glen's "A Note on Nicolas Poussin's *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well* of 1648," *Art Bulletin* 67 (June 1975): 221-224, which underscores Poussin's aversion to copying works by other artists. Even though this commission was occasioned by Pointel's desire to possess a picture similar to Guido Reni's *Virgin of the Sewing Circle*, Poussin chose not to copy this earlier work for his patron. He responded instead with an original composition, the unusual *Rebecca and Eliezer*, which was considerably different from the Reni painting in theme and content.

[11] See Poussin's letter of January 12, 1644, *Correspondance* 245 / *Lettres et propos*, 87. Although clearly presenting the option of an entirely new set as the more favourable one, the artist still gives Chantelou the opportunity to choose copies by his hand.

[12] Blunt's chapter IV, "Poussin and Stoicism" in *Nicolas Poussin* is indispensable in a study of the artist's connections to this philosophy.

[13] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 175.

[14] *Correspondance*, 408 / *Lettres et propos*, 142.

[15] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 175.

[16] *Correspondance*, 376 / *Lettres et propos*, 126.

[17] *Correspondance*, 375 / *Lettres et propos*, 125.

[18] Alain Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1990), 124.

[19] Sheila McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 29. Chantelou, to his credit, is widely believed to have shared Poussin's "anti-Mazarin sentiments," though he was not in a position to display them openly.

[20] Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 302.

[21] See Esther Sutro, *Nicolas Poussin*, 61. Sutro refers to an intriguing work Poussin painted "in an allegorical-satirical vein [in which] he is supposed to have represented Simon Vouet, Lemercier and Fouquières, his chief detractors, as well as Noyers and Chantelou, and none too flatteringly; but the picture has disappeared." It is very interesting, if there is any truth to the story, that Poussin chose to depict Chantelou among his rivals, and suggests that annoyance might have lingered long after his departure from France.

[22] *Correspondance*, 357-358 / *Lettres et propos*, 120.

[23] Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, 185.

[24] *Correspondance*, 414-415 /*Lettres et propos*, 145. The intended sense of "en même temps" in this quote is ambiguous. It is impossible to tell if Poussin means that Pointel will receive his portrait "at the same time" as Chantelou, or if he was promised a self-portrait "at the same time" as Chantelou.

[25] Blunt does not pinpoint the exact time of their meeting, but mentions Richelieu as having been a probable link between Poussin and Parisian patrons, *Nicolas Poussin*, 213.

[26] Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 130. See also Anthony Blunt, "A newly discovered Will of Nicolas Poussin," *Burlington Magazine* 124 (November 1982): 703-704, which reveals that Pointel was also listed as an executor of a recently discovered 1654 will of the artist.

[27] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 217.

[28] Blunt, "A newly discovered Will of Nicolas Poussin," 704.

[29] See Jacques Thuiller and Claude Mignot, "Collectionneur et Peintre au XVII[e] siecle: Pointel et Poussin," *Revue de l'Art* 39 (1978): 39-58.

[30] Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 130.

[31] Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, 184.

[32] Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, 175. For the letter of January 15, 1639, see *Correspondance*, 8-11 / *Lettres et propos*, 28-29.

[33] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 290. For the letter of June 3, 1647, see *Correspondance*, 355-358 / *Lettres et propos*, 119-120.

[34] *Correspondance*, 415 / *Lettres et propos*, 145.

[35] Hilliard T. Goldfarb, "A Highly Important Poussin Acquisition and Chantelou's *Seven Sacraments* series," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* LXXI/8 (October 1984), 299 note 5.

[36] Verdi, *Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665*, 28.

III. ART-HISTORICAL TREATMENT OF THE *SELF-PORTRAIT* PROJECT: SOME PROBLEMS

Given the renown of Poussin's two *Self-Portraits*, one might reasonably ask what is to be gained from a reexamination of these works, or, more specifically, what is to be achieved by a more careful consideration of the role of the patrons in their production. The answer, perhaps, is to be found in returning to previous analyses of the extent to which Poussin's interaction with Chantelou and Pointel impacted on the development of these paintings. A brief look at the way in which this topic has been treated by critics demonstrates that there remain many holes in our understanding of this aspect of the *Self-Portrait* project. More damaging to our potential to understand the images than these holes is the art-historical tendency to presume that no such gaps in our knowledge exist. The over-confidence of the seamless accounts which have resulted may stem from Poussin himself, from too heavy a reliance on his written statements about the portrait commissions. In approaching the artist's own words as an unequivocal testimonial of the details of the portrait undertaking, critics often have neglected the disparity between Poussin's version of the events and what seems more likely to have transpired. And when this issue is explored, it is commonly done only superficially, thus leaving much uncovered and allowing for interpretations of both the commissions and the *Self-Portraits* to be built on questionable assumptions. An examination of some of the critical tendencies in approaching the two self-images draws these concerns into clearer focus and underscores the need to reposition the complex web of relationships between the artist and his two patrons as central to a consideration of these canvases.

A common characteristic of studies of the *Self-Portraits* and one which is perhaps the most significant obstacle to a fuller understanding is the habit of approaching the artist's letters from an entirely unquestioning standpoint. David Carrier, one of the few art historians to have pinpointed this trend, comments on the manner in which one crucial note in particular, the previously cited letter of May 29, 1650, is considered. In discussing the second *Self-Portrait* he states: "Poussin wrote to Chantelou that this second version was 'the better painting and the better likeness'. That seems an unambiguous statement, and so most art historians accept it on face value."[1] The simple but extremely consequential practice of reading Poussin's statements at "face value" which Carrier here recognizes is more than a little surprising considering the many reasons we have to think that the artist was employing strategy in his communication with his jealous patron. Carrier articulates the more likely reality of the situation: "Obviously he would not have told his friend that he thought both versions equally good, even if he believed that."[2]

This more probable scenario seems not to be so obvious. Despite the extreme likelihood that Poussin assured Chantelou that he would receive the better portrait only in an attempt to subdue his emotions, many prominent art historians still continue to suppose that the *Self-Portrait* sent to Chantelou is in fact the one believed by the artist to have been of greater aesthetic merit. While this assumption is certainly surprising, examples of it are not difficult to find. In his influential monograph on the artist, Friedlaender asserts that Poussin "made not one self-portrait, but two, giving...the second, which he considered superior, to Chantelou."[3] In discussing the creation of the two portraits, Bätschmann assesses: "Poussin started work without much enthusiasm, was dissatisfied with the first portrait and laboured over the second version..."[4] Verdi, too,

claims that the painter began another self-portrait after being "unhappy with his first attempt."[5] Even Blunt, the veritable touchstone of Poussin studies and probable point of reference for most of these writers, recounts the tale of the artist's displeasure with his first effort and reinforces the notion in his defense of the work: "To our eyes Poussin had little reason to be dissatisfied with the first portrait."[6]

Such accounts, seemingly unproblematic at first, belie the very essence of the letters written to Chantelou and, moreover, preclude a recognition of the involvement of Pointel in the project, the very condition which necessitated Poussin's carefully constructed reassurances. The assumption that a second *Self-Portrait* was begun only as a response to the painter's dissatisfaction with the first rests on a belief in the sincerity of one of his earlier statements to Chantelou, "Jei fet l'un de mes portraits et bientost je commencerai l'autre. Je vous enuoyerei celuy qui réussira le mieux..."[7] As we have seen, Poussin's decision to undertake a second self-image likely had less to do with discontent with the first result than with the need to fulfil the wishes of the two patrons who had requested portraits. In his correspondence with Chantelou, the artist was impelled to reveal the creation of an additional *Self-Portrait* only in a way that would not arouse suspicion; gently leading the jealous courtier to believe that another work was underway not because of Pointel but because of Poussin's great desire to please Chantelou. Accounts which endeavour to explain the artist's choice to begin a second portrait by means of a dissatisfaction which may not even have existed with the first image obscure a broader reality. Similary, analyses such as that of Friedlaender, which assert that Poussin chose for Chantelou the canvas that he deemed superior, are based on an uncritical acceptance of the artist's promise to send this patron the image that was "le meilleur et le

plus resemblant"[8] and deny the important roles played by both Chantelou's emotions and by Pointel in the project.

A feature which renders these surface readings of Poussin's letters somewhat more puzzling is the general recognition of Chantelou's jealousy as a force which informed the artist's actions in other situations. Although his importance as a figure in artistic circles is only beginning to be realized,[9] Chantelou's personality is somewhat better understood, thanks to the unique glimpses into his demeanour provided by the surviving letters from Poussin. The nobleman's impetuousness is widely acknowledged. Poussin's irritated response to this trait, too, has been substantially documented. The painter's reluctance to elicit his patron's jealousy, as we have seen, has been positioned by Blunt as the reason for Poussin's silence about his journey to Naples with Pointel. Other writers have commented with sensitivity on the strain which Chantelou's chronic insecurity placed on his friendship with the artist. Mérot, for instance, notes that when faced with his patron's ungrateful complaints of having been served with less devotion than Pointel, Poussin "sometimes...becomes quite heated."[10] The covetousness underlying such charges is also perceived by many art historians, among them Cropper and Dempsey, who observe that Chantelou nourished "a desire to possess that could, as Poussin's letters reveal, turn quickly to jealousy."[11] Such insights into the character of an individual as crucial as Chantelou are invaluable and advance our understanding of the affiliation he maintained with Poussin. As useful as the observations provided by these writers are, however, it is a source of frustration to see them applied with unsatisfying inconsistency to the *Self-Portraits*, a practice which only contributes to our frequent obliviousness to the "hidden" meanings of Poussin's letters discussing the project.

There exists a common tendency to regard Chantelou's jealous ways and the manner in which Poussin reacted to them in isolation, as a feature of their relationship, in other words, which created some tense moments but which permeated their business dealings only to a minor extent. Despite this general critical shortcoming, it would be unfair and untrue to claim that no writers have gainfully incorporated this dynamic of the association into a study of the *Self-Portrait* commission. Parts of the more insightful studies view the nature of the friendship sustained by Poussin and Chantelou and the unfolding history of the portrait transaction as related parts of a larger totality; it is from these broader considerations of the project that the most beneficial insights have emerged. Even in these inquiries, however, beneath the valuable connections which are highlighted, there lingers a resistance to acknowledging the possibility of Pointel's early and crucial involvement in the creation of the works, which stems largely from an uncritical reading of the artist's letters.

Portions of the accounts of Blunt and of Verdi, for example, each perceive the links between the character of the friendship and certain elements of the *Self-Portrait* scheme. They beneficially situate Chantelou's mistrust and his previously voiced jealousy of Pointel's works as the reason for the artist's choice to send the nobleman the better painting and the better likeness.[12] But as we have seen, in not calling attention to the probability that this is only what Poussin *said* about the second painting and not necessarily what he *believed* (that is, in reinforcing the idea that Poussin truly held the 1650 work in higher esteem), such accounts do not force us to challenge the straightforwardness of the artist's words. The point is a delicate one and hypothesizing about thoughts held by the master can be, of course, a risky and infinitely speculative

undertaking. Certainly we will never be able to assert with complete authority that Poussin did not believe that the later *Self-Portrait* was better. Perhaps the biggest risk of accepting that he considered the second effort superior or even that he was concerned with labeling either one as "better" or "worse," however, is that we deny the more likely possibility that, despite what he wrote to Chantelou, he viewed each portrait more in terms of its suitability to the patron for whom it had been designed. In failing to view the paintings as having been planned for Pointel and Chantelou, respectively, we again overlook the significant role played by Pointel in the project and sacrifice a great deal of insight into the depicted meanings of the works.

The interpretation of the *Self-Portrait* drama offered by Cropper and Dempsey focuses much attention on Chantelou's jealousy as an element which affected the nature of the proceedings. The authors convincingly argue that it was upon a background of the collector's extensive history of acting on his emotional impulses that Poussin created the self-images. The significant worth of their study lies in this recognition. As they state: "Jealousy over possession of the best of Poussin's paintings was implicated in the project from the beginning, for the *Self-Portrait* was conceived at the very moment Chantelou expressed his jealousy of the *Finding of Moses* painted for Pointel."[13] Although the writers connect the second Parisian patron to the project, as a primary object of Chantelou's envy, they too fail to perceive the more fundamental role he likely played in the conception of the paintings.

In explaining the great extent to which Poussin felt the need to convey a message to his judgementally imperfect friend, Cropper and Dempsey proceed to examine the *Self-Portrait* received by Chantelou in terms of the instructive quality of the elements of

the painting. The carefully developed insights they present about this work are unquestionably valuable (and are referred to in the next section). A problem occurs, however, when the authors attempt to analyze *both* images in terms of the lessons the painter sought to impart to Chantelou. Cropper and Dempsey postulate that "Poussin had to seek out inventions that would teach Chantelou to be a true friend, and about jealousy, possession, and the love of painting." But they then go on to discuss the elements of "the first of the two self-portraits (that eventually destined for Pointel)"[14] in this same framework. The implication, then, is that both the first and second *Self-Portraits* were planned and executed with only one patron in mind, Chantelou, the same version of the story presented, not coincidentally, by the artist's letters precisely to this figure.

The decision to identify as problematic a critical tendency such as this one is somewhat subjective. It is, perhaps, a question of the degree to which one thinks art historians need to recognize a particular element and, correspondingly, of the degree to which one perceives this to have been done successfully. In the case of Cropper and Dempsey's treatment of the *Self-Portraits*, the element is Chantelou's jealousy. While they are certainly not incorrect in regarding this aspect of the patron's character as having conditioned the content and theme of Poussin's second self-image, it may be questioned whether or not they recognize the full extent to which it shaped the project in more fundamental ways. For inherent in a willingness to accept that Poussin completed both portraits for Chantelou is a rejection of the possibility that Pointel was involved from the start. And belief that Pointel was *not* involved from the start stems primarily from Poussin's denial of the possibility in his letters,[15] action itself necessitated by Chantelou's jealousy.

A degree of irony in the critical treatment may be perceived if one is not lost in the seemingly circular logic. The significant consideration of Chantelou's jealousy prompted Poussin to write letters to him which were intentionally silent about Pointel and the self-portrait that he would receive; these letters, in turn, have become the primary source from which art historians derive a version of events which minimizes Chantelou's jealousy as a factor (and, correspondingly, Pointel's importance to the scheme). The letters, perhaps the most valuable sources of insight to which scholars could hope to have access, have been used unknowingly to hide aspects of history. Poussin's concealment of the influence of a second patron in the activity seems so fully effective as to have prevented many art historians even today from considering the possibility of Pointel as an early factor. We may agree with Carrier, who muses that "Poussin's posthumous control over the reading of his images is remarkable,"[16] and we may similarly note the far-reaching effects on our understanding of the works which Chantelou's jealousy continues to have.

It is the often insuperable authority ascribed to Poussin's own words which presents the main barrier to our perception of the second *Self-Portrait* as anything but the one believed by the artist to have been "better." In consideration of this issue, however, critics have brought in for support the similarly equivocal recorded opinions of another artistic master, Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The dynamic sculptor visited France in 1665 and saw a number of Poussin's works while entrusted to the care of court veteran Chantelou. He viewed both *Self-Portraits*, proclaiming, as has been widely noted, the version owned by his Parisian protector to be superior.[17] Mérot is one of many who use Bernini's declaration to buttress the painter's written statements to his patron: "...we know that

Poussin himself preferred the Chantelou portrait, and Bernini, who saw both works in Paris...thought it a better likeness."[18] That we know these remarks only from the courtier's records of Bernini's trip to France is important. It is not difficult to imagine that Chantelou's enthusiasm in hearing praise of his prized portrait would have spilled over to his documentation of the comments; Bernini's endorsement of the superiority of the 1650 *Self-Portrait*, it is at least possible, was not as ardent as the diary entry would indicate.

Even if we do accept Chantelou's diary as a faithful record of what was said, we have good reason to question the inspiration behind the sculptor's statements. Cecil Gould's examination of the time spent by Bernini at the French court highlights the possibility of the artist's ulterior motives:

> Despite the many tactless remarks which Bernini made in France there is plenty of evidence in Chantelou alone that he was not totally devoid of a sense of diplomacy. As he was indebted to and temporarily dependent on Chantelou, and as he must have known that Chantelou was Poussin's principal patron, the question arises to what extent his praise of Poussin was due to politeness.[19]

Thus, we must wonder if Bernini's enthusiasm for his host's painting might have been slightly exaggerated. Even in the event that it was not, there remains something unsatisfying and ineffectual in attempting to emphasize the correctness of Poussin's supposed estimation of the 1650 work by demonstrating that a single other (albeit prominent) person shared his opinions. Furthermore, it is fair to ask how qualified Bernini would have been to decide which of the portraits represented the better likeness, given that it is not known with certainty that he had even met Poussin. Hibbard does not offer a definitive answer to this query, but asserts that "Bernini was apparently not very

familiar with Poussin's works before coming to Paris" and stresses that the members of "Poussin's circle in Rome...were not Bernini's friends."[20] It seems that many historians are guilty of accepting Bernini's statements at face value, a practice whose troublesome nature, not surprisingly, sounds no alarms when the lines are used to support an equally superficial reading of Poussin's letters.

Another problematic tendency among examinations of the *Self-Portraits*, and one closely related to the trends we have so far discussed, is a reliance on the notion that Poussin decided which painting would be sent to each patron only after both were completed. Implied by such a reading is a certain arbitrariness, a disconnect between the work and the person for whom it was being created (an issue to be considered more fully in the context of the modes theory in the next section). It is difficult to imagine that an artist who so ardently desired to satisfy his patrons would have been content to select for Pointel, as an afterthought, a work from a pair which had been designed for Chantelou. The improbability that Poussin decided to give Pointel the leftover portrait is underscored in the literature by the attention focused on the personalized nature of the transaction with Chantelou and of the lessons the artist sought to impart to him through the painting. One must assume that at least the same amount of care would have been applied to creating a *Self-Portrait* for Pointel, also such a good friend and important patron.

That the decision to earmark the first *Self-Portrait* for Pointel and the second for Chantelou was made by Poussin much earlier than is usually allowed, becomes clearer when we consider how busy the painter was during this time. "The years 1647-51," as Blunt estimates, "must have been among the most productive in Poussin's whole career."[21] It seems scarcely possible for the artist to have taken advantage of the many

enticing offers which were presented to him. As Thuillier and Albert Châtelet recount, "Commissions poured in and his problem was to choose between them; his acceptance of one came to be regarded as a favor."[22] Viewed against this backdrop, we must ask why Poussin would have willingly chosen to undertake more works than was necessary, especially portraits, which he so disfavoured. Since, for reasons outlined above, we cannot accept that the 1650 portrait was started only because Poussin was dissatisfied with the one begun the previous year (that the first attempt was sent to Pointel at all indicates that the painter could not have deemed it so severely inferior), we must think that there was a more definitive reason for completing two *Self-Portraits*. This reason, as we have seen, is Pointel himself, and Poussin's intention, from the earliest stages of the project, to craft a work specifically for him.

Such consistent denial, on the part of the critics, of Pointel's fuller role in the conception of the images seems to beg an explanation. While there is no single reason which can account for the trend, the fact that so many writers accept the single patron scenario offered by Poussin's letters may be related to the artist's own theory of the modes. The reluctance to consider that Poussin began each *Self-Portrait* focused on a particular patron seems to be an attendant feature of a belief in the theory, which claims that the audience a work would eventually have was irrelevant to the manner in which it was planned and executed. Pointel's early connection to the first portrait is not discussed or recognized because it seems not to matter to many art historians, or more precisely, they hold that it did not matter to Poussin. The need to reevaluate Poussin's "modes letter" is one of the concerns to be addressed in the next section; also to be explored are several other issues which take shape in the context of an examination of the *Self-*

Portraits which places Poussin *the person* and *his associations with his patrons* in a more central position.

NOTES TO PART III

[1] David Carrier, "Poussin's Self-Portraits," *Word & Image* vol. 7, no 2 (April-June 1991): 127-148. See also Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, overture pp. 1-46 which repeats most of the ideas in the article.

[2] Ibid..

[3] Friedlaender, *Nicolas Poussin: A New Approach*, 74.

[4] Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting*, 49.

[5] Verdi, *Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665*, 269.

[6] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 265.

[7] *Correspondance*, 402 / *Lettres et propos*, 139.

[8] Ibid., 415 / Ibid., 145.

[9] It is only in the past roughly one hundred years, with the rediscovery and reprinting in 1885 of a manuscript copy of his diary of Bernini's visit to France, that Chantelou has attracted any degree of scholarly attention.

[10] Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 138.

[11] Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting*, 191.

[12] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 265.

[13] Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting*, 187.

[14] Ibid., 188. Their choice of terminology, referring to the first *Self-Portrait* as the one "eventually destined for Pointel," is in itself telling and implies a belief that the earlier portrait was not originally planned for Pointel, but that both were approached with Chantelou in mind and a choice was made later. Other references to the 1649 work as "the *Self-Portrait* he completed for his friend Pointel" (p. 145), for example, might suggest otherwise, but are probably only efforts to simplify nomenclature; it becomes awkward to refer continually to the first portrait as "the other one created for Chantelou but eventually sent to Pointel." Any doubts which remain about the intent of the authors are far outweighed by their later assertions that both works were designed for Chantelou.

[15] Poussin did, of course, eventually reveal to Chantelou the involvement of the other patron in the self-portrait scheme (in his letter of May 29, 1650), as has been noted. He did so at a very late stage, however, after having had ample opportunity to mention it on other occasions. When he does reveal the fact, he does not dwell on details, suggesting through his tone a desire to have Chantelou believe that the decision to send Pointel the other image was a mere afterthought.

[16] Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 71.

[17] See Chantelou, *Journal du Voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France*, ed. Ludovic Lalanne (Paris, 1885), 90.

[18] Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 147. Verdi, *Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665*, 270; Friedlaender, *Nicolas Poussin: A New Approach*, 172; and Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin*, 188 also make similar use of Bernini's statement.

[19] Cecil Gould, *Bernini in France: An Episode in Seventeenth-Century History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 62. It is also noteworthy that Pointel, by this time, was dead; Bernini might have felt even more inclined to offer his unmitigated praise of Chantelou's painting knowing that he could not offend the original owner of the other *Self-Portrait*.

[20] Howard Hibbard, *Bernini* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 171-172. There is also the somewhat odd treatment of this question by Blunt (*Nicolas Poussin*, p.97), who identifies a mysterious painted portrait as being of Poussin and by Bernini, and speculates, "If it is indeed by him, it would be interesting proof of the close relation between the two artists at this period." This point is little discussed by other writers, but this scenario seems largely hypothetical, as no strong evidence has surfaced to suggest an association, or even a single meeting, between the painter and sculptor.

[21] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 257.

[22] Jacques Thuillier and Albert Châtelet, *French Painting From Fouquet to Poussin*, trans. from the French by Stuart Gilbert (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1963), 215.

IV. TWO PORTRAITS FOR TWO PATRONS

i. Reconsidering Poussin's "Modes Theory"

In recognizing the importance of Chantelou's character and of Pointel's involvement as factors in the creation of the two *Self-Portraits*, and the frequency with which art-historical accounts of the project understate or ignore the influence of both elements, the need to reengage in a careful examination of the works and related issues becomes clear. The full effect of these two intertwined forces on the creation of the portraits is consistently denied; it is no wonder that many intriguing possibilities for interpreting the images have been overlooked or understudied. Bearing in mind the insights which have been gathered about the nature of Poussin's ties with his two important patrons and about the modified scenario of the production of the self-images, some of these possibilities are explored in this section. When the individual depicted elements of the two portraits are considered within the context of a richer comprehension of the personal and professional dynamics at play, a new range of prospects for their study presents itself.

There is a substantial barrier which must be overcome before one may proceed in this vein, however. As has been mentioned, a critical reliance on the ideas set out by Poussin in his theory of the modes, in a November 1647 letter to Chantelou, severely limits the extent to which the *Self-Portraits* and the events surrounding their production may be examined in terms of the two involved collectors and the influence, direct or indirect, they wielded. Not only does a firm belief in the theory prohibit an acknowledgement of the importance of Pointel in the *Self-Portrait* scheme by insisting

that style derives from content, it stunts any attempt to see the works as having been furnished with meanings for either patron. As an underlying tenet, this belief is troublesome when utilized in studies which discuss the second portrait in terms of the lessons about good judgement it contains for Chantelou (studies, that is, which simultaneously affirm the relevance of the modes ideas to Poussin's art, *and* treat the 1650 canvas as having been conditioned by Chantelou). It is for these reasons that Poussin's modes theory needs to be reconsidered in the context of an examination of the portraits, and for the same reasons that the authority which traditionally has been ascribed to it will be questioned, a process that assists us to see beyond the restrictions which it often imposes on an appreciation of the importance of the patrons to the works.

The theory, according to which we must view the appearance of the *Self-Portraits* as having been determined by factors other than the audience which each was to have, is formulated around the philosophies of the ancient Greeks. To offer only the most basic of explanations, at the heart of the artist's declamation was the identification of a complex system of principles, observation of which would produce particular effects in music, or, of greater relevance to Poussin, in painting. As he writes in the November 1647 letter to Chantelou: "Nos braves Anciens grecs Inventeurs de touttes les belles choses trouvèrent plusieurs Modes par le moyen des quels il ont produit les Merveillieus effets."[1] Drawing heavily from the musical theories of a 1553 publication by Gioseffe Zarlino, *Istituzioni harmoniche*, Poussin names each mode and outlines its character. The Dorian mode, for example, created a mood that was "stable grave et sévère"[2] and was to be employed and its limits respected when painting suitably serious themes and subject matters. The result would be a unity between the depicted subject and the manner or style in which it was

represented. It is the correspondence between the treatment and content which is stressed in the letter and which many commentaries continue to isolate as a primary concern of the artist.

Though Poussin's interest in the theoretical side of his art and his general concern for the appropriate handling of a given theme are hardly in question, assuming that he approached each of his works as an exercise in following strictly defined guidelines may present an impression of his method as overly mechanistic. Nonetheless, in discussing the modes, Blunt maintains that Poussin "was consistent in applying this doctrine."[3] Grounding their studies in this belief, several scholars have hypothesized that, if viewed under the proper lens, Poussin's paintings may be seen as direct applications of these organizing principles. To this end, the two *Self-Portraits* have commonly been understood as exemplifying a particular mode. Marin, for example, endeavours to view the images in this light and hints at the complexity of the system in categorizing the 1649 work as "a Hypolydian variation of the Lydian mode" and the 1650 work as "a Phrygian variation...of the Dorian style."[4] Instead of regarding the gentler appearance of the first painting and the stern character of the second as even partially connected to the patrons for whom the works were planned, the style of each *Self-Portrait* is explained in terms of Poussin's adherence to a strict theoretical doctrine.[5]

In estimating the degree to which the artist formulated and strove to apply precise theory to his compositions, it may be useful to consider the context out which the modes dissertation arose. It appeared in a letter to Chantelou, we recall, in which Poussin responded to the stinging accusations that Pointel had been served with more love and devotion. The recitation of the ancient guidelines was the culmination of an elaborate

defense of Poussin's unwavering dedication. It is not difficult to imagine the content of the letter to have been chosen based on its potential effectiveness in quelling Chantelou's emotions. A theory which stressed that a painting's appearance was determined by the subject it depicted and not by an artist's feelings for the person who would possess it (thus negating the possibility that Pointel's lovelier pictures were evidence of Poussin's greater affection for him) must have seemed a perfect tool.

If the likelihood that the concept of the modes was cited for its suitability to combat Chantelou's jealousy is not enough to cast doubt on Poussin's wholehearted belief in its precepts, one can consider another instance of a similarly purposeful application of theory. An article by Carl Goldstein discusses a letter sent by Poussin to Sublet de Noyers in 1642 in which the artist replies to harsh criticism of his plans for the decoration of the Grande Galerie in the Louvre. The theory of rationalized vision which Poussin offers has been regarded as one of the most original examples of his scholarship. Goldstein, however, offers another view: "Since his project in the Grande Galerie was severely criticized Poussin seems to have felt that only an elaborate riposte, based on sound principles rather than opinions, would silence his detractors."[6] The treatise which constitutes this riposte, far from being a precise articulation of notions he held as fundamental to his art, seems to have been composed with a greater degree of informality and opportunism. As Goldstein continues, "He reproduced ideas that he understood imperfectly and these were taken from a source that he regarded as appropriate to the occasion."[7]

The same may be said of Poussin's modes theory, given what has been discovered about the gaps in his "confused, and in part contradictory"[8] translation of Zarlino's text.

While the suggestion is not that he possessed no interest in the theoretical value of the principles presented to Chantelou, we must wonder to what extent Poussin engaged in a wholesale application of them to his creations. If the modes had been a system of tremendous importance to his working method, one assumes that it would have been described to Chantelou less clumsily and without the inconsistencies it contained. It is perhaps Denis Mahon who departs most radically and profitably from traditional views about Poussin and the modes theory in offering a refreshingly commonsensical possibility:

> Poussin's inclusion of this dissertation in his letter to Chantelou is to be regarded as in all probability a matter of the purest chance. If Chantelou had not happened to irritate him on this occasion with some not very tactful or understanding comment, it is unlikely that the so-called 'Theory of the Modes' would ever have been heard of.[9]

In introducing a fortuitous quality to ideas which have been enshrined by historians as Poussin's most precise statements on art, Mahon gives us reason to pause. While such a reading, it is true, forces a reconsideration of the accuracy and exactitude with which the master conceived and applied art theory, it may actually serve to accentuate the great care he applied to interaction with his patrons. Our estimation of Poussin's deliberateness need not be diminished, perhaps only redirected. For, in his letters to Chantelou and to de Noyers, it seems that extreme caution was exerted, if not in the enunciation of theoretical principles, then in attempting to affect the patrons' opinion of his art through his comments.

Despite Poussin's ample concern with the human dynamics involved in the artistic practice, it is the impression of him as a supreme theorist which continues to be

promulgated. The likelihood that his theories were less than absolutely employed is overshadowed by an image which takes him far beyond a reasoned and ordered being to a figure whose every action in painting and in life was governed by compliance with an unyielding if ill-defined set of rules. It is the confident assertions of Poussin's "precise statements" and "his great rigidity of theory,"[10] here offered by Christopher Wright, which perpetuate the near-mythic image. Such descriptions speak of a reluctance on the part of many art critics to regard Poussin as anything but an artist of the utmost sobriety and theoretical preeminence.

While this inflexible impression might seem to stem from Poussin himself, from his letters and professed admiration for all things rational, there is a more important underlying cause for its persistence. A longstanding desire to promote Poussin as the standard-bearer of theory may trace its origins back to the founding of the French Academy in 1648. The well-worn debate between the camps of *disegno* and of *colore* was, in the seventeenth century, transformed into a heated argument between the *Poussinistes* and the *Rubénistes*.[11] Subsequent wrangling was "as much...about the relationship of theory to practice" as it was "truly about drawing versus color, or the historical Poussin and Rubens,"[12] as Cropper and Dempsey note. The Académie, in an effort to bolster its claims of the superiority of theory and design, embarked on an enthusiastic campaign to stress the importance of these elements to the working method of its most successful native son. Accompanying this emphasis on Poussin's theory, however, was a systematic denial of the role of any social or otherwise "external" factors in the creation of his works. The resulting firm establishment of the modes thesis as central to Poussin's art has continued to prevent a recognition of the part played by the

patrons. Sheila McTighe recalls our attention to the link between the canvases and their audience, and elucidates the link between the Academy and a perception of this relationship:

> ...in the exhortatory nature of Poussin's relation to [the] patrons, revealed in his words to Chantelou and in the images themselves, we can see the historical remnants of a particular relation between image and viewer – a relation that the creation of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture and its public, official sphere of artistic reception was to destroy.[13]

Equipped with a knowledge of the agenda as part of which Poussin was celebrated as a great theorist, we can further question his ultimate faithfulness to the modes philosophy and to a system of creation impervious to the influence exerted by his patrons. In attempting to reconcile the theory with the suggestion that the *Self-Portraits* were planned around two specific collectors, again we are well served to remember the context into which the modes ideas were introduced and the historical forces to which they have been subjected. Mahon's keen perception achieves this balance. Of the modes letter he writes: "To treat this quite casual text as if it were intended to be handed down to posterity...would be to lose one's sense of proportion over an event which was no more than trivial in itself, however ably it was later made to serve the purposes of ...the Académie Royale in helping to raise the status of art-theory."[14]

Before we leave the issue of the modes, one final point should be made in favour of the hypothesis that Poussin's treatment of his works was not determined only by the nature of the subjects he depicted. Despite what the artist himself wrote, his dealings with the French poet Paul Scarron strongly indicate that a painting's audience was taken into serious consideration. Scarron wrote to Poussin in 1645 requesting a picture. Poussin

refused, but was to receive numerous other appeals, some coming through Chantelou, who was a friend of the writer. For his part, Poussin was disinclined to accept the invitation to work for Scarron, whose burlesque poems he found extremely distasteful and whose repeated petitioning for a painting and unsolicited deliveries of his books to the artist became increasingly irritating. Finally Poussin relented and a work was undertaken, the *Ecstasy of St. Paul*, completed in 1650, fully five years after the poet's initial request was made. As a letter to Chantelou dated January 17, 1649 attests, it was only with great reluctance and out of devotion to his good friend that Poussin agreed to the task. As he writes, "monsieur Scarron m'a escrit un mot pour me faire souvenir de la promesse que je luy ay fette. auquel jei respondu et promis de rechef de m'efforcer de le satisfaire à vostre solicitation plus qu'à la sienne car il ni a rien en quoy je ne m'engageasse pour vostre respect."[15]

If, as the modes theory outlines, painting was a self-governing system of representation, that is to say one in which all matters of pertinence to crafting an image were contained within the boundaries of a frame, Poussin's dislike of Scarron seems an irrelevant concern. Since the main consideration, suitable application of style to topic, was not affected by Scarron (the choice of subject ultimately had been left to the master), one must ask what fuelled Poussin's unwillingness to create a painting for this figure.

The answer is not complicated, but does not conform with a view of Poussin as a strictly theoretical artist who employed the precepts of the modes unwaveringly. His adherence to this theory is flatly repudiated by McTighe, who addresses the issue of Scarron: "Poussin assumes that the character of the audience does indeed affect the nature of the image."[16] Not only does the audience affect the work, in her lucid

estimation, it is as important an element in Poussin's approach to painting as any other precisely recorded theoretical tenet. McTighe's account allows us to grasp the special relationship between artist and viewer which seems to have coloured Poussin's attitude toward creating for Scarron and informed his choices about the two *Self-Portraits*. As she elaborates:

> In the end, whatever his disclaimer to Chantelou, Poussin's practice of painting seems to rest on the assumption that painting was a privileged and private conduit between the painter as servant and the individual patron as master... Scarron whose work scandalized Poussin, was unsuited to join in this closed transaction."[17]

When the artist finally submitted, it is telling that the subject matter chosen was St. Paul, a figure appropriate not only in his role as the patron saint of poets and as Scarron's namesake, but also in his morally exemplary position. As Mérot notes, "it is possible that in this work Poussin was making something of a point about poetic dignity to the man who wrote *Virgile travesti*,"[18] a composition disdained by the artist.

Scarron's personality seems to have impacted on the nature of the image he received to a far greater extent than the modes theory would allow. In recognizing that Poussin likely did not assiduously employ, or even intend to employ, the doctrine quoted in his letter to Chantelou, we may begin to appreciate the full influence of the patrons on the self-portraits he crafted at their request. This greater freedom to understand the content and style of the two works to have been strongly conditioned by the character of the recipients, and by the complex relationships among them, enables us to consider a broader range of possibilities for the interpretation of the creations.

ii. Some Possible Interpretations of the *Self-Portraits*

Even a casual glance at the two *Self-Portrait* canvases reveals striking differences in mood. The painting for Chantelou, dominated by straight lines and geometry as much as by the central and unflinching representation of the artist himself, is serious and crisp. Pointel's image, though also restrained, seems softer and less severe by comparison. Given what we know about Poussin's often challenging association with Chantelou and his more harmonious friendship with Pointel, it seems reasonable to conjecture that the tone of each portrait is a reflection, to a certain extent, of the manner in which the artist regarded each relationship.

The 1650 *Self-Portrait*, in particular, may be examined for hints of Poussin's attitude about his affiliation with Chantelou. However, more than as a simple visual depiction of the association, the image stands as a form of pictorial lesson offered by the artist to his courtier friend. It is in this sense that Cropper and Dempsey have proposed an interpretation of the second portrait as having been designed as a variety of open essay, in the tradition of French writer, Michel de Montaigne. Poussin's familiarity and general agreement with the ideas of the author is widely recognized and solidly documented; as Blunt tells us, "Montaigne is one of the very few authors whom Poussin quotes by name"[19] in his written correspondence. Possible reasons for the painter's choice to use Montaigne, specifically his 1580 essay, *De l'amitié* (*On Friendship*), as a model for Chantelou's painting are explored by Cropper and Dempsey. In addition to the suitability of an essay as a form of communication intended to be read, the authors note Montaigne's concern, in his exposition, with the notion that "a tyrant is incapable of

friendship, and can neither love nor be loved, because friendship results from a good life, good nature, faith, and constancy."[20]

These ideas, also closely paralleled with the tenets of Stoicism, would have been particularly pertinent to Poussin's emotionally inconstant friend. The correspondence between the tyranny discussed by Montaigne (which consists of, as any dictionary entry of the word "tyranny" will show, an improper use of power or authority) and the jealous and oppressive behaviour exhibited by Chantelou in his authoritative role of patron, could not have been overlooked by the artist. It is likely no coincidence that a letter to the nobleman following the completion of his *Self-Portrait* mentions tyranny. In protesting Chantelou's unsuitable exertion of power in over-rewarding Poussin for his work on the project, the artist writes: "J'étois assés content d'avoir lieu en votre cabinet en peinture, sans remplir ma bourse de pistolles. Cest une espèce de Tirannie que de me rendre tant votre redevable, que jamais je ne ne puisse aquitter ma dette."[21] Fashioned as an attempt to teach the collector about the dangers of unchecked jealousy and of any disruptions to the delicate balance between obligation and free will, the 1650 *Self-Portrait* by Poussin seems to contain specific messages which would have held special importance for Chantelou.

Another feature of the work which has received only the smallest amounts of attention, but which seems ripe for consideration in terms of its meaning for Chantelou, is the small landscape scene upon which the figure of Painting has been placed (figure 4). Truncated by the outer limit of the canvas and by the overlapping represented frame within the scene, the outdoor terrain and sky are only minimally visible, but may possess significance greater than their size would suggest. Posner is one of the only writers to

even venture a comment on this element, offering a description of the sky: "The sun, hidden behind a mountain, casts a dim light on the landscape in the background. The dark blue sky extends across the width of the strip of canvas visible at the top."[22] While an exact definition of the atmospheric conditions is likely to remain elusive (the smallness and relative imprecision of the scene would seem to preclude it), it does not seem unreasonable to disagree with Posner's estimation and to postulate that the mini-view displays more ominous weather, that is, a storm.

The darkness of the blue in the sky and apparently thick clouds hovering overhead strongly suggest unsettled weather. Descriptions of some of Poussin's calm landscape scenes, such as "an image of limpid tranquility,"[23] applied to a 1651 work, do not seem at all fitted to the vignette in the *Self-Portrait*. On the other hand, the darker tonality and greater murkiness of the sky of such clearly labeled storm paintings as *Un Orage*, seem very similar to that of the portrait. It is true that no trace of lightning appears in Chantelou's image, a common inclusion in Poussin's scenes of violent weather, but it could always be assumed that it is in the same place Posner would have us believe the sun is, hiding behind the mountain.

A storm would have been very suitable to a painting conceived as a pictorial lesson for Chantelou. In Poussin's landscapes created between 1648 and 1651, almost exactly the years over which the *Self-Portraits* were made, his keen interest in exploring the theme of storms unleashed by Fortune manifests itself. The tempests depicted in the landscapes are symbolic representations of "the havoc which Fortune plays with men's lives,"[24] as Verdi notes, and many of the compositions deal with the ways in which to handle these unpredictable outbursts. The response advocated by Poussin was to remain

firm and immobile ("demeurer ferme et immobile"[25]) and to maintain a clarity of vision. Given the suitability of these recommendations to Chantelou, the wavering and fickle patron, it is logical to suppose that Poussin would have seen fit to include a storm scene in his *Self-Portrait*. Nonetheless, critics have not been willing to consider the landscape fragment in the 1650 image in these terms. Verdi comes very close, noting that Poussin represents himself in the Chantelou portrait as one who has "triumphed over every adversity and trick of Fortune;"[26] but he stops short of viewing the painted storm as a message for Chantelou about how to act in the face of these "tricks of Fortune."

The idea of including a storm within the portrait seems even more appropriate when we consider one of the finer points of Poussin's conception of the tempests' effect on humankind. Influenced by the ideas of Pierre Charron, a seventeenth-century neo-Stoic philosopher and follower of Montaigne, Poussin viewed the world as containing three levels of men, each touched to a different extent by the storms of the allegorical persona of Fortune. The most and least populous groups are comprised, respectively, of the least and most intelligent types, and are largely unaffected by the ravishes of disturbances. The middle category of the social hierarchy endures the storms' effects most acutely. "The people of middle abilities, those who find themselves between the rulers and the lowest castes, are like the soul disturbed by passions, perpetually bruised by the commotions of the state,"[27] as McTighe relates. Chantelou, as neither a political leader or a peasant, would have been regarded by Poussin as a member of this intermediate echelon. Not only would he have been most susceptible to the political turmoil which plagued France at the time of the creation of the *Self-Portrait*, he had also demonstrated his greater tendency to succumb to his emotions in many other situations.

Despite identifying many of Poussin's other important patrons as belonging to the middle level of men, McTighe does not mention Chantelou in this group and, like virtually all Poussin scholars, opts not to consider the possible connections between the courtier and the storm probably included for his benefit in the 1650 portrait.[28]

Any meaningful links between Chantelou, the painted tempest, and the eye in the tiara are likewise left unexplored by most. As was noted in section I, the eyed-crown atop the woman's head is most commonly regarded as a reference to the intellectual or perspective vision deemed by Poussin to be so crucial to his art. But given the eye's proximity to the storm scene and Poussin's belief in the importance of maintaining clear vision in the midst of life's difficulties, the tiny feature almost certainly possesses another meaning. As much as the eye was intended as a statement about good artistic practice, it was also likely included as a reminder to Chantelou of the good moral judgement which the painter encouraged of him, especially in trying situations. Poussin had urged his patron, on an earlier occasion, to receive his works "de bon oeil;"[29] perhaps we are to understand the depicted eye in the 1650 *Self-Portrait* as a similar, symbolic request by the artist for Chantelou to accept this canvas in friendship, and to respond to it in a more rational, less purely emotional manner.

The painted inscription in Chantelou's picture may also have been designed as a message for this figure's moral improvement. More precisely, it is one part of this mysterious dedication, the word "andelyensis," for which Marin proposes a unique reading. The Latin version of Poussin's town of origin appears among other information, such as the year and city in which the portrait was created. "Andelyensis" stands out, however, as the only word to have been split in two parts and presented on two separate

lines by the artist (figure 5). The resulting configuration draws attention to the latter half of the town's name, "yensis," which begins the second line of the inscription, and to the letter Y, which begins the word fragment. While no part of the subdued painted text calls copious amounts of attention to itself, Marin is right in singling out this passage as somewhat peculiar. In exploring Poussin's odd choice, the critic notes the emblematic significance of the letter Y as "the Pythagorean letter of choice between good and evil, virtue and pleasure."[30] It is not insignificant that the same idea of choice of lifestyle alluded to by the character may be related to the represented storm. According to Verdi, the landscapes painted by Poussin during these years, in which explorations of tempests figured prominently, "may be seen as outlining the consequences of not following such a [virtuous] path and of sacrificing both virtue and wisdom for love, lust, or power."[31]

When we allow for the likelihood that Poussin planned each portrait for the patron to whom he knew it would be given, it becomes possible to consider that the 1650 image was designed in every way as a lesson in moral judgement for Chantelou. For, even what rested outside the boundaries of the canvas, it would seem, was carefully organized by Poussin as a test of his friend's ability to see with clear moral vision (or "de bon oeil"). Once both works had been completed and Chantelou was about to receive his long-awaited painting, the artist wrote to excuse one final delay. Prefaced by the customary flourish of polite gesturing, the reason for the wait is offered: "j'avois délibéré de vous envoyer mon portrait à l'heure même que je l'eus fini, affin de ne pas vous le faire désirer plus long temps; mais quelqu'un de mes bons amis aiant désiré ardemment en avoir la copie. Je n'ai pu honnêtement lui refuser."[32] The identity of the friends desiring copies is not revealed, but the mere knowledge that Poussin was allowing another person the

privilege of possessing the allegedly superior work (albeit a copy) was surely to have made the collector uneasy, if not jealous. We cannot assume that Poussin consciously desired to activate his friend's jealousy, especially after the great care he took in suppressing it for the duration of the portrait undertaking. The revelation was perhaps intended as a challenge for Chantelou, an invitation to apply the lessons imparted to him through the painting. As Cropper and Dempsey assess, "the *Self-Portrait* itself became a locus for the trial of Chantelou's judgement and for the representation of Poussin's own."[33]

The characterization of Poussin's self-image as a test for his patron is reinforced by another comment in the letter accompanying the portrait. In what can only be considered a purposeful move, the artist informs Chantelou that he has made arrangements for his *Self-Portrait* to be taken care of by none other than Pointel, should the nobleman ever be out of town.[34] In seeing the two portraits side by side, Chantelou would be faced with the ultimate challenge to exercise the good judgement advocated by the painter and, as it was no doubt hoped by Poussin, would emerge from the situation calm and unplagued by his customary jealousy.

That Poussin should have thought his friend better able to achieve this evenness of spirit after having processed the messages of the portrait, is underscored by his conception of the function of his works. "Poussin seems to assume that his paintings should have a real power to change his patron's moral vision,"[35] as McTighe comments of artistic transactions with Chantelou.

In viewing the second *Self-Portrait* as one incarnation of the artist's attempts to offer a series of lessons to a patron, it is reasonable to search for similar organizing

principles in the Pointel work. Aside from its softer appearance, however, it is more difficult to analyze the 1649 portrait in terms of Poussin's second Parisian associate or to discern moralizing messages in it. This observation gives rise to an important distinction which here needs to be made. Viewing Chantelou's painting in terms of the messages it contained for him should be regarded as an approach suitable to this particular work, and not as an approach necessarily applicable to all Poussin's creations. In other words, while we have every reason to believe that the first *Self-Portrait* was designed expressly for Pointel, the nature of the relationship between the artist and this collector was not such that lessons on ethics would have been necessary components. The portrait which resulted, informed by a solid and harmonious friendship, is a less didactic, more warmly toned work in which Poussin did not aspire to "change his patron's moral vision."

An anecdotal tale recorded by Félibien testifies to the superior judgement Poussin knew Pointel to possess.[36] The story centers around the *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*, painted for the French banker in 1648. According to Félibien, Poussin's work was so admired as to have prompted numerous enticing offers, including one from a woman prepared to offer Pointel anything he desired in exchange for the prized canvas. Pointel declined the proposal, however, claiming that he treasured his Poussin canvases too much to sell any of them, or even to agree to be apart from one for a single day. Word of the event undoubtedly found its way back to the artist, who assuredly would have appreciated the constancy of his friend and the esteem with which his creations were regarded.

The stark contrast between Pointel's probity and Chantelou's fickleness would have been highlighted by the latter patron's greater willingness to part with paintings created by Poussin. The transfer to Nicolas Fouquet of *The Israelites Gathering Manna*,

the first work Poussin completed for Chantelou, occurred during the artist's own lifetime.[37] It is difficult to imagine that a person "so sensitive to potentially dissatisfied customers,"[38] as Henry Keazor describes the master, would not have been at least somewhat disappointed by Chantelou's sale of a canvas which had been so lovingly crafted for him. Of another scenario, involving a Poussin composition proposed to have been disposed of by the courtier, Keazor asks how Poussin could not have reacted to "Chantelou's behaviour of giving away a painting, which he had initiated exclusively for him."[39] We might equally wonder this of the sale of the *Manna*. While the transaction, it is true, took place well after the production of the *Self-Portraits* and was not, therefore, a contributing factor to their design, the story nonetheless serves to emphasize the instability of judgement to which Poussin had long known Chantelou to be prone.

It is this instability, as we have seen, which prompted Poussin to build into the pictorial and thematic structure of the second *Self-Portrait* a series of lessons aimed at improving Chantelou's ability to judge well. The need for subtly crafted guidelines on equal friendship and for visual warnings against any form of tyranny, too, stemmed from the inherent predispositions of the patron. It is interesting that Poussin seized the opportunity to educate Chantelou at all, given the traditionally subordinate nature of the position he occupied in the working relationship. But the relationship they maintained has long been recognized as "a curious mixture of intimacy and subservience,"[40] as McTighe aptly describes it. Poussin and Chantelou maintained a friendship for over twenty-five years and left few topics undiscussed in their correspondence; at the same time, though, the artist obligingly carried out the numerous tasks his patron requested of him, "some of them trivial in the extreme," as Mérot observes, such as obtaining for him "those scented

gloves which were all the rage in Parisian polite society."[41] While Poussin surely appreciated the continued fellowship and support of the nobleman (his portrait, after all, was conceived in part as a testament to their friendship), one must wonder whether the burden of such a ceaseless string of requests was not seen by him as another exertion of tyrannical power and as a further reason for the lessons in the painting.

Poussin's affiliation with Pointel, also developed over many years, seems to have been unblemished by such potential for hostility. Though comparatively few documentary records of this relationship are known, there is every indication in the information we do have that it was characterized by a strong kinship of spirit and a shared moral disposition, detectable, perhaps, in the painter's peaceful countenance in the 1649 portrait. It has even been proposed that Pointel's social class would have led Poussin to identify more closely with the businessman; the position of the two men, one as a member of the emergent bourgeois class, the other as a French painter struggling against artisan status, would have been similarly precarious. The effect of the parallel in situation is detailed by McTighe: "Poussin may thus have had reason to hold his patron Jean Pointel in a different sort of esteem than that which linked him to his noble patrons..."[42] Carrier identifies the defining characteristic of Pointel's class, a feature which would have been most relevant to the artist's concerns: "The bourgeois is a man who is not noble and who lives mainly by his work, but a kind of work in which mental effort is more important than physical effort."[43] If Pointel, by means of his membership in the bourgeois order, was sympathetic to such aspirations, it is no wonder that the artist who sought to emphasize the intellectual aspect of his art would have seen in his countryman a kindred spirit. The writing instrument and book held by the painter in the 1649 Pointel

work, viewed in this light, appear to acknowledge this mutual interest in mental effort. The simpler, less forcibly didactic *Self-Portrait* addressed to this figure, when we allow ourselves to consider it as having been planned for him, seems a very fitting form of communication with a patron who did not need to be taught because he already shared so many of Poussin's fundamental views.

NOTES TO PART IV

[1] *Correspondance*, 372-373 /*Lettres et propos*, 123.

[2] Ibid., 373 / Ibid., 124.

[3] Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 292.

[4] Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, 189. See also Charles Sterling in the exhibition catalogue, *Nicolas Poussin* (Paris, 1960), 260. Sterling views the first *Self-Portrait* as reflecting the Phrygian mode, and the second work as being in the Doric mode. The difference between these two accounts speaks of the subjectivity and ambiguity involved in attempting to label works according to the modes theory.

[5] Marin's focus is clearly on the theoretical aspects of Poussin's creation of the *Self-Portraits*, but early in his examination he does offer some keen insights about the artist's handling of Chantelou and the strategy he employed in avoiding his jealousy. These insights, however, remain largely separated from his consideration of the actual portraits.

[6] Carl Goldstein, "The Meaning of Poussin's Letter to De Noyers," *Burlington Magazine* 108 (May 1966): 233-239. For the letter, see *Correspondance*, 139-147.

[7] Ibid..

[8] Denis Mahon, "Poussiniana: Afterthoughts Arising from the Exhibition," *Gazette des Beaux-arts* 60 (July-August 1962): 1-138.

[9] Ibid., 125. See also Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 203. He also recognizes the debatable nature of the modes theory, noting that Poussin "never saw it as a system to be followed rigidly, but rather as a general principle..."

[10] Christopher Wright, *The French Painters of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Orbis, 1985), 67.

[11] For more on the heated debate between the two groups, see John Rupert Martin, "Portraits of Poussin and Rubens in Works by Daniel Seghers," *Bulletin du Museé National de Varsovie* vol II, no 3 (1961): 67-74. Although written before the discovery that the inscription on the book in Poussin's 1649 *Self-Portrait* was a later addition, Martin's article gives a sense of the polarized reputations of the two painters in the seventeenth century and of the Academy's role in the arguments.

[12] Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting*, 154.

[13] McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories*, 51.

[14] Mahon, "Poussiniana," 126.

[15] *Correspondance*, 394. For an account of Poussin's association with Scarron, see also Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, 232-235.

[16] McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories*, 145.

[17] Ibid..

[18] Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 133.

[19] Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 168, note 33.

[20] Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting*, 182.

[21] *Correspondance*, 418 /*Lettres et propos*, 148.

[22] Posner, "The Picture of Painting in Poussin's *Self-Portrait*," 200.

[23] Clovis Whitfield, "Nicolas Poussin's 'Orage' and 'Temps Calme'," *Burlington Magazine* 119 (January 1977): 4-12. The painting described in the quote is Poussin's *Un Temps Calme*.

[24] Richard Verdi, "Poussin and the 'Tricks of Fortune'," *Burlington Magazine* 124 (November 1982): 681-685.

[25] *Correspondance*, 384 / *Lettres et propos*, 129. Letter of June 22, 1648.

[26] Verdi, "Poussin and the 'Tricks of Fortune'," 685.

[27] Sheila McTighe, "Nicolas Poussin's representations of storms and *Libertinage* in the mid-seventeenth century," *Word & Image*, vol. 5, no. 4 (October –December 1989): 333-361.

[28] Posner is the only art historian I have found who attempts a reading of the small scene in terms of its meaning for the *Self-Portrait*, but, as has been noted, he is not of the opinion that it depicts a storm and his argument diverges somewhat from the possibilities presented here. However, he does note that the faint light may be related to

Ripa's notion that intellectual vision functions from within, while "corporeal eyes need light to see," "The Picture of Painting in Poussin's *Self-Portrait*," 202.

[29] *Correspondance*, 354 / *Lettres et propos*, 118. Letter of April 7, 1647.

[30] Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, 204. See also Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 203, who notes the same symbolic meaning for the letter Y, but not in relation to the *Self-Portrait.*

[31] Verdi, "Poussin and the 'Tricks of Fortune'," 684.

[32] *Correspondance*, 416 / *Lettres et propos*, 145-146.

[33] Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting*, 187.

[34] See the letter of June 19, 1650, *Correspondance*, 416 / *Lettres et propos*, 146.

[35] McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories*, 1.

[36] See Glen, "A Note on Nicolas Poussin's *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well* of 1648," (1975) and Félibien, *Entretiens* VIII, 100-101.

[37] While the exact date of Chantelou's sale of the *Manna* seems unknown, Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 255, records that from Fouquet, the work entered the collections of Louis XIV, and this by 1661. At any rate, there is no doubt that Chantelou had parted with it well before 1665, the year of Poussin's death.

[38] Henry Keazor, "A Reconsideration of Nicolas Poussin's Drawings for a *Conversion of St. Paul*," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (December 1996): 263-276.

[39] Ibid., 266.

[40] McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories*, 1.

[41] Mérot, *Nicolas Poussin*, 138.

[42] McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories*, 72.

[43] Roland Mousnier, *The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy*, 1979, quoted in Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 37.

CONCLUSION

In attempting to understand the painted self-representations left behind by Nicolas Poussin, the need to look beyond the two-dimensional confines of the canvases seems especially acute. While a self-contained examination of the iconographic meanings of the *Self-Portraits* lays important groundwork for further explorations, it cannot be the final goal. In the case of the two images of Poussin, scholars are well served to consider the relationships between the painter and the patrons, Chantelou and Pointel, which shaped the setting into which the works were introduced. An appreciation of the nobleman's often impatient, jealous nature, and of the artist's dislike of and measured response to these traits, allows us to read the letters exchanged between the men with a more discriminating eye. Chantelou's considerable envy of Pointel seems to have provided the painter with ample reason to conceal the involvement of the latter until the very end of the project; at this point Pointel was incorporated by Poussin into the exercise in moral judgement which the *Self-Portrait* was to be for Chantelou. Any form of strategy is commonly overlooked by art historians, however, who continue to regard as fact the situation described by the artist's careful statements, thus denying the possibility that he conceived each portrait for a particular patron. Viewing the *Self-Portraits* in terms of the figures for whom they were created necessitates a reconsideration of Poussin's celebrated theory of the modes; this practice itself reveals that the author was much more attuned to and influenced by human interaction than his reputation as an unwavering theorist would allow.

It is perhaps a need to recognize this connection between Poussin's life and his art that a study of the *Self-Portraits* makes most evident. The historical lack of success in drawing these links seems to stem from our inability to grasp fully the nature of Poussin's reserved personality. Félibien describes the master as "very prudent in all his actions, restrained and discreet in his words, opening his heart only to his close friends."[1] In this sense, Poussin, probably by his own design, is very inaccessible. The "relative paucity of documentary evidence about his intimate life,"[2] as Andrée Hayum comments, has left Poussin scholars without a reliable base from which to draw insight about his character. In the absence of bountiful information about his private side, we have turned to his theories and prepared statements for an understanding of Poussin and his art. And in an attempt to satisfy a need to believe that we can explain every aspect of the man and his works, the theories often have supported dangerously overdeterministic accounts of his creations.

The notions which have resulted, among them the idea that Poussin painted within a system impermeable to outside influence, are so frequently repeated as to have become flat in their meaning. Carrier offers an explanation for the continued art historical dependence on such concepts, noting that "clichés stabilize our interpretation of Poussin's work."[3] Resting on the clichés and on the explanation of the pictures which they seem to offer has a significant effect – it creates the false impression that it is no longer necessary to consider the ways in which Poussin's disposition and interaction with his social context impacted his paintings. Applying this maxim to the *Self-Portrait*, it may be recalled that it was an uncritical reliance on the modes theory which prevented a recognition of the importance of Poussin's affiliations with his patrons in shaping the

images. When the artist is analyzed in isolation from his milieu, our appreciation of the many meanings of his canvases is diminished.

His status as a "classical artist," too, has encouraged critics to look other than at his personal life for understanding of his works. In a cleverly purposeful reiteration of several Poussin clichés, Carrier draws attention to the manner in which a major source of insight has remained untapped: "Because Poussin uses an explicit iconography, interpreters need not discuss his life. Poussin is a classical artist whose life is irrelevant to his art...Classical artists are impersonal."[4] A similar view is offered by Andrée Hayum, who comments on the perceived unsuitability of approaching the oeuvre of an intellectual artist by way of his personality: "The learned nature of Poussin's subject matter has...militated against psychological analysis."[5]

Thus, it is the impression of Poussin as a detached Stoic, as a strict theorist, and as an impersonal legend which has prevailed most often, and which has been of such great consequence to our understanding of his self-portraits. In the final analysis, the real value of a reexamination of these two canvases may lie more in modifying this rigid view than in drawing conclusions about specific depicted elements. In exploring the unfolding self-portrait project in the light of Poussin's intriguing associations with Chantelou and Pointel, we obtain not only a richer sense of the works, but also a greater awareness of the extent to which the artist and his creations were influenced by particular situations and involved particular personalities. This broadened view of Poussin and his paintings offers an equally widened range of possibility for their interpretation and accentuates the benefits to be derived from an approach which strives to view individual areas of study as connected parts of a larger whole.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

[1] Félibien, *Entretiens* IV, 77 (quoted in English in Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, 352).

[2] Andrée Hayum, "Poussin Peintre," *Art in America* (May 1995): 78-85, 131-133.

[3] Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 77.

[4] Ibid., 70.

[5] Hayum, "Poussin Peintre," 131.

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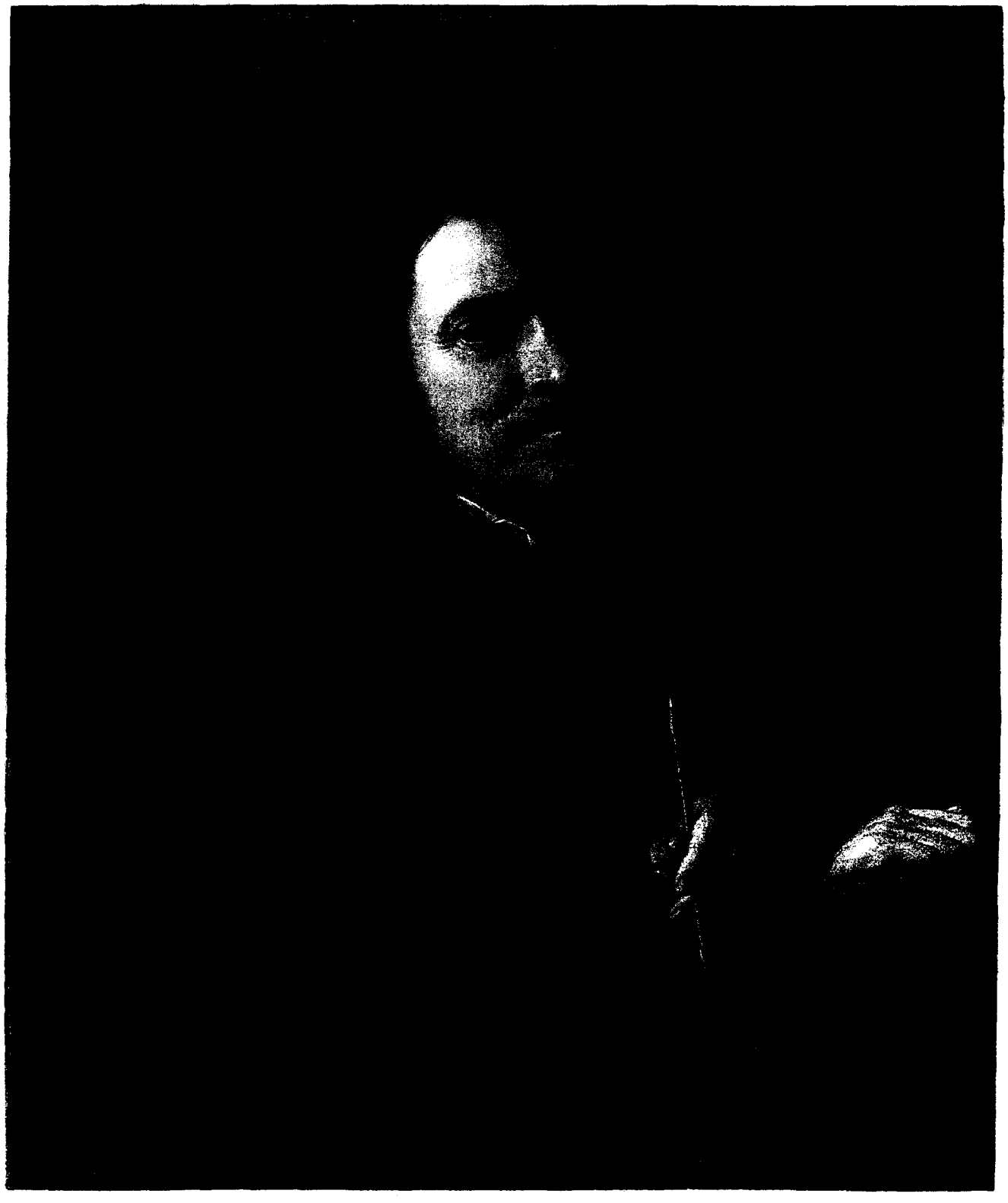

FIGURE 1 – Nicolas Poussin, *Self-Portrait*, 1649

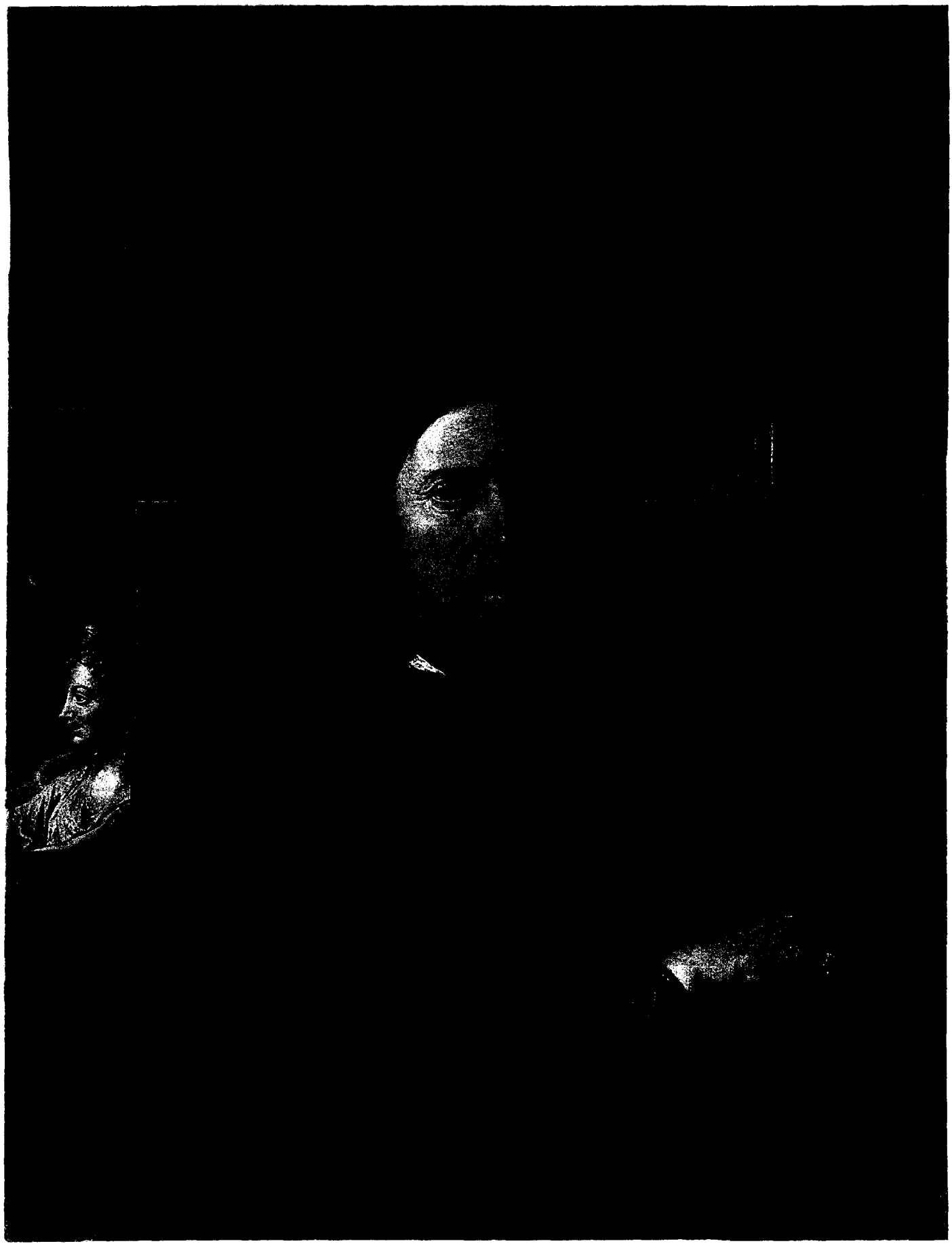

FIGURE 2 – Nicolas Poussin, *Self-Portrait*, 1650

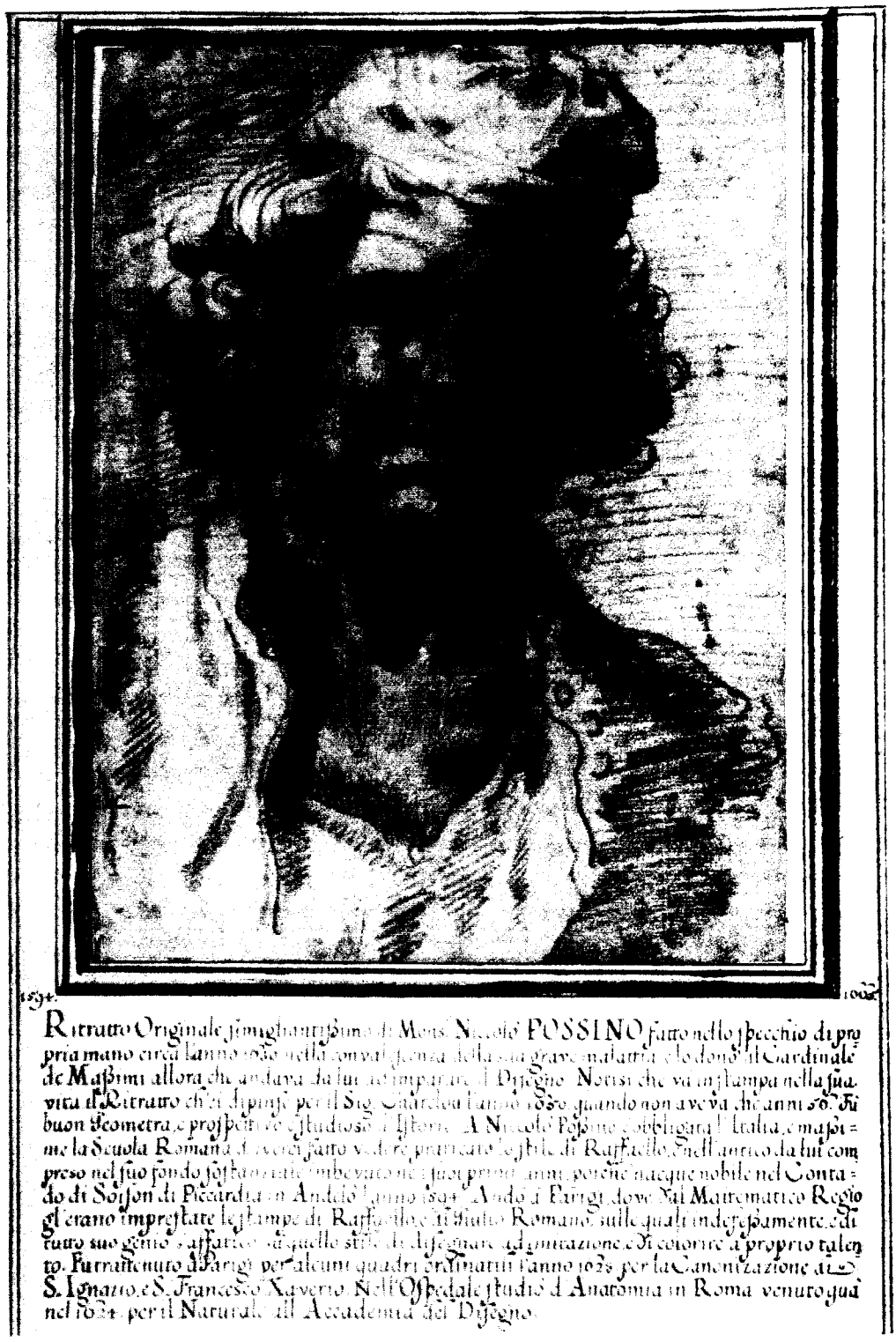

FIGURE 3 – Nicolas Poussin, *Self-Portrait*, chalk drawing, 1630

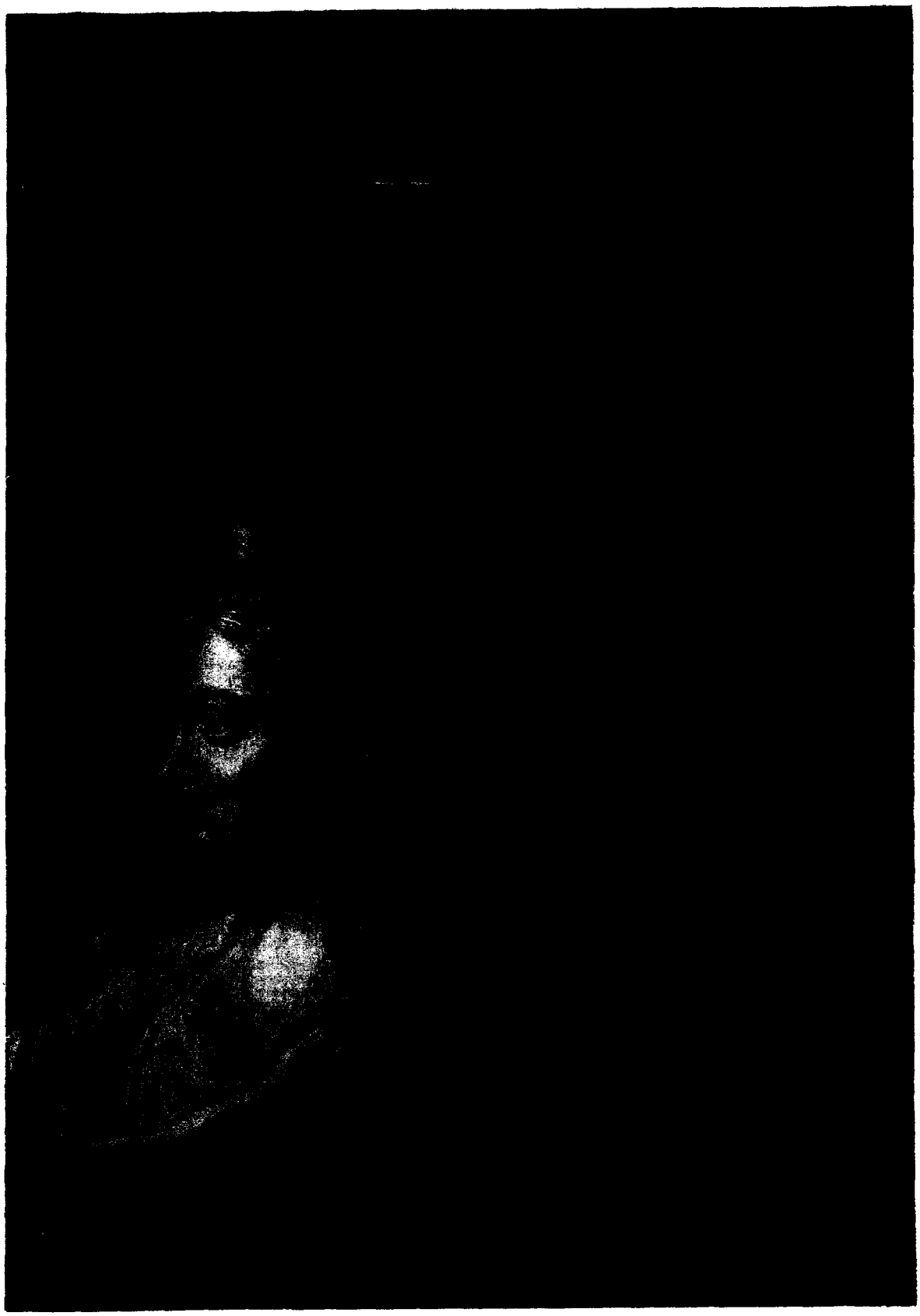

FIGURE 4 – Nicolas Poussin, detail of *Self-Portrait*, 1650

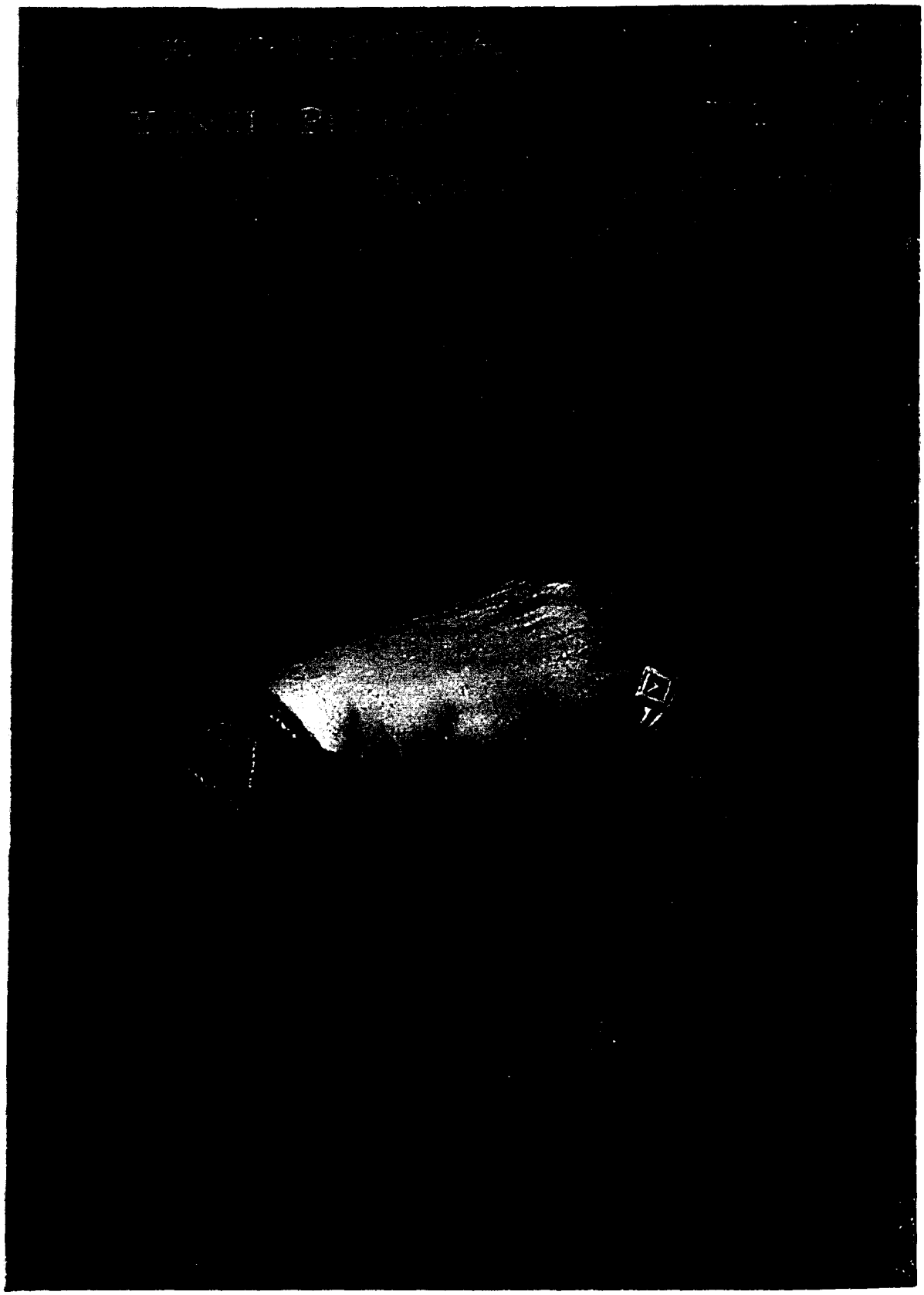

FIGURE 5 – Nicolas Poussin, detail of *Self-Portrait*, 1650

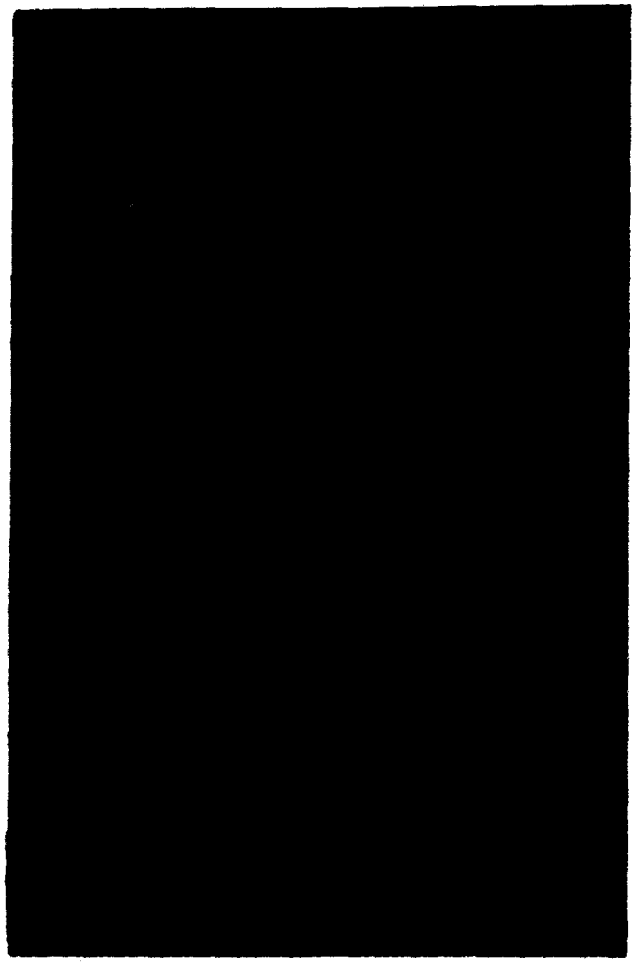

FIGURE 6 – Nicolas Poussin, detail of *Self-Portrait*, 1649, book inscription

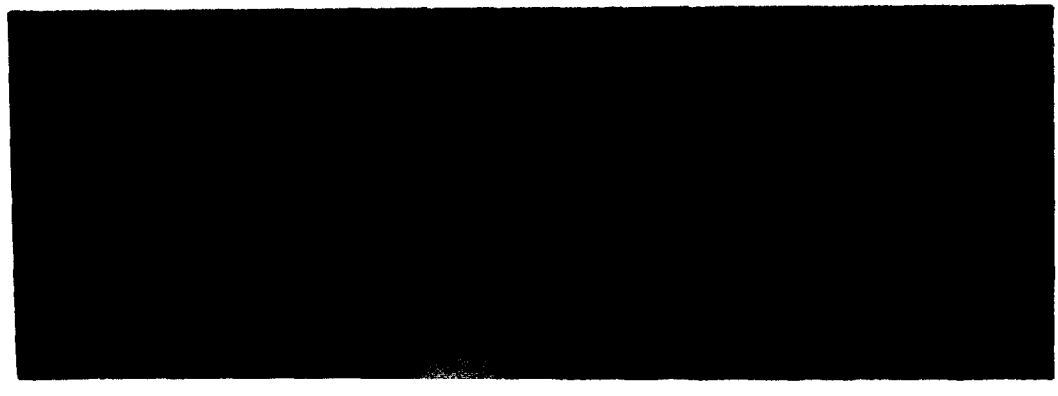

FIGURE 7 – Nicolas Poussin, detail of *Self-Portrait*, 1649, inscription at top of canvas

FIGURE 8 – Jean Pesne, engraving after Poussin, *Self-Portrait*, 1649, exact date unknown

FIGURE 9 – Nicolas Poussin, *The Arcadian Shepherds*, late 1620s

FIGURE 10 – Nicolas Poussin, *The Arcadian Shepherds*, c. 1640

FIGURE 11 – Nicolas Poussin, *Baptism*, 1646, from the second series of the *Seven Sacraments*

FIGURE 12 – Nicolas Poussin, *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*, 1648

FIGURE 13 – Nicolas Poussin, *Ordination*, 1647, from the second series of the *Seven Sacraments*

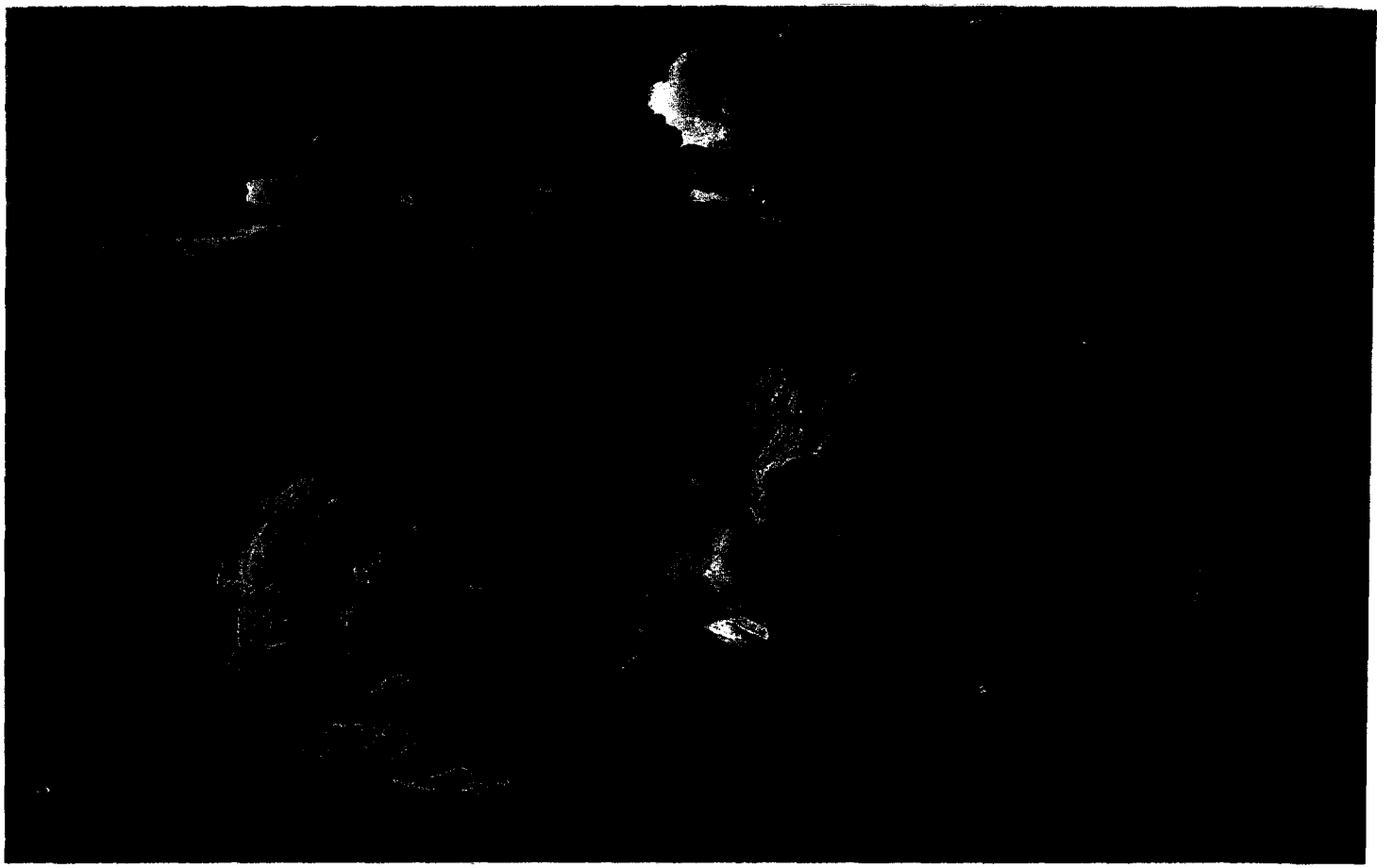

FIGURE 14 – Nicolas Poussin, *The Finding of Moses*, 1647