A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AN OLD MAN:

MICHELANGELO'S *RONDANINI PIETÀ*

IN LATE-LIFE DEVELOPMENT

By

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To my beloved wife Elena, without whose steady light,
this work would have been an unusual shadow

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Above all, I am grateful to a Higher Power of my understanding, or lack thereof, whom I choose to call God. I thank my guru, my professors, my parents,[1] and my wife, all of whom were constant companions, introjected or otherwise, as I wrote. I do not have words to thank them adequately here or, perhaps, anywhere, so I offer them the fewest words, hoping that anything they enjoy in this work is a hint of my appreciation.

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[1] Though my parents deserve thanks for too many things to enumerate here, I want at least to mention a few: My mother, who believed this dissertation was possible, offered her unwavering encouragement, grace, and support; and my father, who received his doctorate years ago, offered long hours of careful reading, suggestions, and insight. Also my sister, an artist herself, deserves thanks for putting the writing into perspective. In the years of working on this, I have learned to appreciate each of them all the more.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure   Page

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[2] The following citation applies to all photos of the *Rondanini Pietà* in this work:
Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Rondanini Pietà*. Castello Sforzesco, Milan, Italy. Personal photograph by author, May 2006. Personal photograph with a hand by Elena Jones and author, November 2008.

[3] Michelangelo Buonarroti. *Pietà*. St Peter's Basilica, The Vatican. Photo: Stanislav Traykov. Used by permission. Available from: Wikipedia.org
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Michelangelo%27s_Pieta_5450_cropncleaned.jpg#filelinks> (accessed 4 November 2008).
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Of all Michelangelo's works, perhaps of all works of art, the most difficult to deal with adequately is the Rondanini Pietà.

—John W. Dixon[4]

There on that scaffolding reclines
Michael Angelo.
With no more sound than the mice make
His hand moves to and fro.
Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.

—W.B. Yeats[5]

dying Michelangelo
moribund but Christly spry
through his crucifying nails
springing stone to life[6]

Ancora imparo

—Michelangelo[7]

[4] John W. Dixon, Jr., *The Christ of Michelangelo: An Essay on Carnal Spirituality,* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1994), 145.

[5] Quoted in George Bull, *Michelangelo: a biography* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1996), xxiii. In the original poem, "Long-Legged Fly," the final two lines are italicized.

[6] A poem of mine, 2003 or 2004, here with some apology for putting it next to Yeats.

[7] "I am still learning," circa 1562 or 1563, a phrase notable enough that it can be found, at the time of this writing, miles above the earth, on a bronze-covered plaque available in the SkyMall Catalog on some airlines.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Michelangelo Buonarroti wrote in his later years: "No one has mastery / Before he is at the end / Of his art and his life."[8] By such reasoning, Michelangelo's art at the end of his life would be the closest to his sense of mastery, and the focus of this dissertation is what approaches this most closely: the final expression of his art and the final stage of his life.[9] In considering the final part of Michelangelo's life along with the final part of his art, the core question of this dissertation emerges naturally: Are there parallels between the final stage of Michelangelo's life and the final expression of his art? The essential answer is yes, and these parallels include the thematic juxtaposition of birth with death, unity with disunity, and integration with disintegration.

In many ways, Michelangelo is an unusual case, a statistical outlier in his achievements, but his long life, his huge creative output, and the abundance of his biographical data also make him a good case study. Michelangelo (1475-1564) lived to be nearly eighty-nine, so he lived well into senescence and the passages of late-life development. Further, in those final years and days of Michelangelo's long life, at a time when the common tendency for many individuals at this stage of life is to withdraw from strenuous tasks, Michelangelo was still motivated to work

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[8] *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters of Michelangelo,* trans. Creighton Gilbert (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), no. 323, pg. 173.

[9] Given the *Rondanini Pietà*'s relative obscurity, such a statement might seem odd, especially for an artist whose works include *David* and the ceiling of the *Sistine Chapel*, both of which he created as a young man. Still, it is worth considering Michelangelo's own view of his final years and final art, and that is one reason this dissertation focuses on his late-life.

long hours on an enigmatic crescent-shaped marble sculpture now known as the *Rondanini Pietà*, an artwork considered more fully in chapters below.[10]

Michelangelo led not just long life but a long and an extremely prolific life that spanned many decades and many disciplines.[11] Michelangelo's creativity was so enormous that trying to understand him better is bound to shed light on the phenomenon of creativity itself. Along such lines, some organizing questions are these: As Michelangelo approached the end of his life, what were the developmental issues he was facing? Further, how does his final art shed light on his late-life development? After considering various themes that developed throughout the artist's long and prolific life, the proposition is that there are parallels between his late-life artistic themes and the late-life developmental themes that emerge from his extant biographical data. One major conclusion is that these themes include a conflict between integration and disintegration, a conflict to which he may have achieved some resolution in both his art and in his life. In the extant data on Michelangelo's life and in iconographic themes of Michelangelo's art, integration and disintegration are woven throughout, but it is at the end of his life and art that these themes are most apparent.[12] [13]

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[10] Thanks to Volney Gay for lifting up the idea that while there is for many elderly individuals a natural tendency to pull in or withdraw, Michelangelo produced this work. For the application of the term "enigma" to the *Rondanini Pietà*, see Gerda Frank, "The Enigma of Michelangelo's Pietà Rondanini," *American Imago* 23:4 (Winter 1966).

[11] Just as psychologists tend to consider extreme cases to formulate their theories, it can be helpful to consider an extreme, almost pathological, case of creativity.

[12] Just days before he died, Michelangelo was radically revising the *Rondanini Pietà*, so if art is also a type of communication—an issue explored also in the field of critical theory—whatever themes concerned him in these final days would be reflected in the themes of this sculpture. In this period, there is evidence of the themes of integration and disintegration—or similarly "unity" and "disunity"—so it is also fitting that unity is a unifying theme of this dissertation.

[13] Some of the previous paragraphs have edited material from my dissertation proposal. In general, this dissertation includes some sections that are newly reworked and revised versions of my writing and ideas from my unpublished papers done for graduate work.

While the recent decades in religion and personality have included more work on gender and ethnicity, there remains relatively little work on late-life issues and geriatric development. Given America's increasing geriatric population, the dearth of sustained and methodological research on geriatric development suggests a lost opportunity, so part of the hope here is to take a step toward increasing the body of literature and obtaining greater awareness of elder development.[14]

It is important to consider geriatric development from a variety of different perspectives, and while it is hardly an exhaustive set of perspectives, I have chosen to include those from psychology and art history. These discourses frame this dissertation's core example: a case study of the elder Michelangelo using the fruit of his long life and career, in which his final piece was the *Rondanini Pietà*.[15] The choice of these fields is not entirely arbitrary, as the discourse of art history frames a deeper

Figure 1 The *Rondanini Pietà*

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[14] Some of my most cherished experiences are from working with the elderly, and I am struck that often we do not include their late-life perspectives in pastoral care and in religion and personality. Quoting the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, Joan Erikson writes that, "Lacking a culturally viable ideal of old age, our civilization does not really harbor a concept of the whole life." Joan Erikson then continues with her own observations:

> As a result, our society does not truly know how to integrate elders into its primary patterns and conventions or into its vital functioning. Rather than be included, aged individuals are often ostracized, neglected, and overlooked; elders are seen no longer as bearers of wisdom but as embodiments of shame. (Erikson, 114)

Joan Erikson published this passage when she herself was a nonagenarian—not much older than Michelangelo in his latest years—so her words carry the weight of the lived experience of nearly a century. One hope of this dissertation is to move past the shame Erikson describes and to lift up their decades of life with an openness to learn through them. (Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development by Joan M. Erikson* (New York: Norton, 1997).)

[15] Just as studies in religion and personality focus upon early and mid-life issues, popular and scholarly studies of Michelangelo focus on his early and mid-career creations. In his last sculpture, the *Rondanini Pietà*, there is the final product of Michelangelo's long life and experience. Sadly, the public and even some scholars usually undervalue or neglect this and other of his later works, which is like watching a great film and missing the end, so the hope here is to look at Michelangelo's late-life development in a new way.

understanding of his art, while the discourse of psychology frames a deeper understanding of his life.

a. The structure of this dissertation

The framework of this dissertation is Volney Gay's "Syllabus on Methods," in which he proposes a stepwise method for analyzing texts, such as "theological treatises, philosophical papers, and psychoanalytic books."[16] This is the method used here for analyzing and contextualizing a wide range of academic work. Such a wide range includes texts outside the humanities, such as scientific work, though this dissertation is primarily situated within the humanities. This method offers a way to structure such multiple disciplines in a single work. Further, there is a stepwise procedure by which readers may dissect a given text, beginning with "facts," then the "fact-value distinction," then "metaphors and models," then "types of theory," and finally "emic and etic points of view."[17] This dissertation includes such considerations and takes a text as a whole, disassembles it up systematically, and considers the pieces carefully.

Further, in a case study of Michelangelo, who is a figure of history, it is important to offer correlations in lieu of causal theories.[18] This echoes the statistical dictum that, "Correlation is not causality," yet the correlation considered here is not a correlation in the statistical sense, which could imply statistical inferences about empirical data. Rather, as with many works in the

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[16] Volney P. Gay, "GDR 3054, Syllabus on Methods," unpublished article , "GDR 3054, Seminar: Method and Evaluation," Vanderbilt University (spring 2005), 1.

[17] These are sections Gay includes in his course syllabus for "GDR 3054, Seminar: Method and Evaluation," spring 2005; Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 1.

[18] With a proposed correlation between the iconographic themes late in the development of the *Rondanini Pietà* and psychodynamic themes late in the development of Michelangelo's life, these themes can be seen to have parallels in early childhood where specific traumata can make a child prone to fearing psychic disintegration and its ilk.

humanities, the evidentiary data in this dissertation comes from historical texts and previous scholarship.

The first chapter emphasizes facts. The second chapter emphasizes values. The third chapter emphasizes hypotheses. This is a fact-value-hypothesis model. The movement in this structure is from relative certainty toward relative speculation, where the first chapters provide a foundation for novel ideas in the later chapters.

Within the chapters, there is a movement from generality toward particularity. For instance, the section on the art history of Michelangelo begins with a general introduction to art historical methodology, moves to general considerations of Michelangelo's art in particular, moves to an more particular consideration of his three pietàs, and then on to even more particular considerations of the *Rondanini Pietà*.[19]

Throughout this dissertation the reader will see themes of integration and disintegration, which are evocative when considering Michelangelo as a sculptor because sculpting in marble requires fragmenting and disintegrating the stone to form an integrated final piece. Integration and disintegration are both necessary parts of the process. Similarly, this dissertation draws upon at least two different disciplines—psychology and art history—to form an integrated picture of the crucial developmental period before the end of Michelangelo's life.[20] [21]

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[19] Evidence gathered is from biographical, psychoanalytic, and art historical perspectives on Michelangelo. This discursive-hierarchical form of discourse includes historical and theoretical material from other scholars as the basis for developing and refining new theories.

[20] Because these events occurred within a historical context that included the beginning of the major cultural and ideological shifts of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, this context was also influential. Given the such individual and contextual factors, Michelangelo is considered as a case study also in this regard.

[21] The previous page is reworked from the dissertation proposal.

b. The fact-value-hypothesis model

One might ask why this dissertation employs the fact-value-hypothesis model and whether it is a plausible approach to the work's thesis. Again, the thesis is that there are parallels between the final stage of Michelangelo's life and the final expression of his art, and these parallels include the thematic juxtaposition of birth with death, unity with disunity, and integration with disintegration. The most compelling reason to use the fact-value-hypothesis model is that the thesis is fairly complex, and the chosen model offers a way to begin with relative simplicity and work toward relative complexity. This offers the reader a more stable entry into the theoretical superstructure of the work. Earlier chapters provide foundation for later chapters, providing strength for the structure built upon them.

The fact-value-hypothesis model is plausible because it is allows the reader to see parallels more readily by beginning with the foundation and only then building upon it. A comparison of the final stage of Michelangelo's life and the final expression of his art is a comparison that requires subtlety, and that subtlety becomes more plausible when it is based on some degree of certainty, such as the facts of the artist's life and work. Methodologically, this dissertation is a hermenutic reconstruction, and a project like that benefits from having a stable foundation, though to understand this more clearly, it is helpful to define some key terms in the method—such as "fact," "value," and "hermeneutic reconstruction."

c. The methodological orientation of this work

A chapter below, Chapter II, considers some of the facts about Michelangelo's life and work, but the concept of a "fact" can be difficult to define. Thus, Gay suggests this five-stage approach:

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"A fact'" is what is stated in a factual proposition. A proposition is "factual" if it has the following features:
> a. It is stated within a fixed domain of discourse. That is, it occurs within a language game or life form that can be learned (even if not taught). This life form or language game is based upon some kind of rules (stateable or not). (L. Wittgenstein)
> b. It is not reducible into simpler propositions.
> c. It is not deduced from other propositions.
> d. It is not contradicted by other propositions.
> e. It may become the subject of other propositions. For example, speakers may use other propositions to "explain" or "interpret" a factual proposition.

This five-stage definition provides fixed criteria for determining facticity. A "fact" in this dissertation is based on these criteria, wherein a fact is something within a discourse that is non-reducible, non-deducible, non-contradictory, and subject to explanation and interpretation.[22]

A value, however, is different than a fact. Gay refers to Humean and Jamesean philosophies, in which "value" is partial in at least two senses of the term: Value is *partial* in terms of its being a matter of taste (Hume). Further, value is *partial* because the universe, as we experience it phenomenologically, is pluralistic, and "we must 'recognize the fact that we live in partial systems.'" (James)[23] More particularly, in the Humean phenomenology, moral judgments or values are based upon "secondary impressions."[24] They are "mediated," they "arise in the mind," they are "based upon the passions," and they "originate in reflection."[25] Thus, value is a mediated, secondary, and emotionally-based mental phenomenon, all of which sets value apart from fact.[26]

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[22] Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 1.

[23] James quoted in Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 5.

[24] Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 4.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 3-5.

The "fact-value distinction" arises from the array of distinctions between the definitions of fact and value.[27] A value might occur within a discourse, but not all aspects of that discourse would necessarily be rule-based or learnable. A value, which in Humean terms is "based upon the passions," is unlike a fact.[28] [29]

Value is also the organizing concept of the central parts of this dissertation, which begins with a section on facts, but like many works in the Humanities, moves then into a longer section on values. This section on values is the work of many theorists and their value-laden theories. It is, in this regard, a review of the literature.[30]

The third section of this dissertation explores hypotheses. Like a value, a hypothesis is also a value-laden statement and thus, would perhaps be more appropriately considered under the rubric of "value." Hypotheses, however, get their own chapter in this dissertation because there is a key difference between the values and hypotheses in this work: As the terms are used here, a value is another author's value-laden statement, while a hypothesis is this author's value-laden

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[27] Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 3 ff.

[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Despite lacking facticity and despite being based upon the passions—and arguably due to lacking facticity and due to being based upon the passions—value is valuable. As Gay quotes Falk, it is more of a matter of taste "than like doing detective work." (Gay, 4) Analyses would be functional but flavorless without value-laden, full-bodied concepts, theories, and descriptions. For instance, a food critic's salmon is all the more interesting for being more than simply a "pink thing on a plate" but having "an ashen crust with the irreverent redolence of butter, sweetlime, and lemongrass." Value has value.

[30] This move from the section on fact to the section on value also signals a shift from knowledge to belief. To the extent that knowledge can be shared and agreed upon, facts are knowledge. Facts are knowledge because they occur within learnable, rule-based discourses, in which certain rules and laws yield a set of shared data—data that is learnable, and once it is learned, it is known. Values differ from this because they are also a matter of taste, based upon and influenced to some degree by emotions, and in this way, they are closer to belief than knowledge, though this would not negate the value of value. Thus, as facts are more like knowledge, and values are more like beliefs, the rubric of the first section is "Facts: What We Know," while the rubric of the second section is "Values: What We Believe." The first section reviews some relevant facts in the literature, reflecting scholarly knowledge, and the second section reviews some relevant values in the literature, reflecting scholarly beliefs. The third section of this work moves even further into the realm of values, crossing then into hypotheses.

statement.[31] Thus, this chapter on hypotheses, Chapter IV, addresses the contributions of this

dissertation directly. Etymologically, a "hypothesis" is "a placing under,"[32] and the last parts of

this dissertation are placed upon its hypotheses, lifted up for the reader's consideration.

Also as Gay suggests, discourses may be incommensurate, and the ideas here come from

distinct discourses, and they may be incommensurate.[33] The incommensurate nature of

ideas—and their respective discourses—could conceivably strain the structural integrity of the

text, and although this strain would not invalidate the text, it would limit its provability. So, the

work here limits itself to the academic domain of the humanities rather than the social or natural

sciences. Also, although this project includes more than one discourse, it is integrated by an

ongoing focus and interest in one person's development as seen in one work of art.

The project here concerns a case study, instead of a client. Michelangelo's life has

already been lived, and all the artwork he will ever complete has been completed; thus, by

necessity, attempts at understanding Michelangelo and his work more deeply are all attempts that

occur post facto:

> When psychodynamic theorems are advanced post facto they are the first kind of
> proposition: attempts to bring order and pattern to behavior that has occurred. . . . Post
> facto reasoning is not illegitimate, but it sometimes falls into post hoc ergo propter hoc
> claims [after that therefore because of that] which are not valid. [That rain fell after a rain
> dance was performed does not prove the efficacy of rain dances.] [34]

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[31] The terminological distinction—value versus hypothesis—is in deference to other authors' and their work, which
is already part of the body of literature either in Religion, Psychology, and Culture, or in Art History. In deference
to them, what once may have been considered a hypothesis is here considered more of a value.

[32] E.g., http://www.dictionary.com, s.v. "hypothesis."

[33] E.g., Volney P. Gay, "Four Discourses and Psychology: Science and Religion."

[34] Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 10.

This is similar to the dictum, mentioned above, that correlation is not causality. Here too is a reminder that causal claims are tricky and can lead to specious reasoning. Thus, this dissertation attempts to avoid such causal claims or explanations, sticking instead to the realm of understanding and using psychodynamic theorems as "attempts to bring order and pattern to behavior that has occurred."[35]

An important way to describe the project here is as a hermeneutic reconstruction: "We can distinguish hermeneutic reconstruction from causal explanation. . . . Hermeneutics is the attempt to find a coherent pattern, post facto."[36] Thus, in attempting to understand more deeply and coherently the patterns of Michelangelo's late-life development centuries after the artist lived, this is a hermeneutic reconstruction in its "attempt to find a coherent pattern, post fact."[37]

A hermeneutic reconstruction is different from a causal explanation:

> Explanations for why one finds a particular behavior and not another, require one to assign motives to the actors, e.g., God banished Adam and Eve because they lied about eating the fruit. To explain is to offer an analysis of motives. . . .[38]

The "why" Gay mentions is a moot question here, as speculation about why Michelangelo might have done one thing or another is too uncertain and would require an eisegetical interpretation of his extant artwork and biographical data.[39] The goal here is not, however, to discover or explain

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[35] Once again, Michelangelo's life and work has occurred, so it is all post facto now, and now what is possible in this work is to understand him and his art more deeply.

[36] Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 10.

[37] The first part of this dissertation's title—"A Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man"—is a passing homage to A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man, James Joyce's remarkable portrayal of a young man's religious and artistic experiences in the earlier stages of life, and at the end of Joyce's great work, even though the reader might not be able to explain the young man's behavior fully, the reader may be able to understand the young man's experience much more deeply. Here too, the hope of this dissertation is not to explain our subject scientifically but to understand our subject deeply, though the subject here, however, is not a fictional young man in Ireland but a nonfictional old man in Italy.

[38] Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 11.

[39] This work hopes for exegesis, hoping to stop short of eisegesis; Michelangelo's "motives" died with him.

Michelangelo hidden motives but instead to understand him more fully in a psychodynamically-informed "hermeneutic reconstruction."

Similarly, the core of the method here is not in uncovering Michelangelo's hidden motives; instead, this work seeks patterns toward building a "hermeneutic reconstruction" that is enhanced by the lessons of psychoanalysis, all toward the goal of understanding more deeply Michelangelo as a case of late-life development.

In terms of L.C. Hawes's types of theory, this dissertation is type 2, discursive-hierarchical, as described:

> Major statements are formulated as distinct propositions but major concepts are not operationalized and while the author assigns hierarchical importance to certain fundamental propositions, the argument as such is held together by semantic-literary connections which obtain between key concepts. Such theories do not make succinct predictions and do not offer one immediate access either to an analysis of their assumed "facts" nor to refutations of their abstract categories.[40]

The "major statements"—such as the proposed correlation between Michelangelo's late-life development and his late-life artworks—"are for formulated as distinct propositions," stated and existing in certain sections of this work. Furthermore, the main propositions have "hierarchical importance"; for instance, the proposed correlation between Michelangelo's art and life is fairly high in the hierarchy of propositions, while some of the later and more speculative particular symbolic interpretations of Michelangelo's art have a lower place in the hierarchy because they are not as essential to the central claims. Still, the connections among the key concepts are semantic-literary instead of strictly operationalized or mathematically rigorous. Also making this a type 2 discursive-hierarchical work, there is also a "theory superstructure" in which there is a premise, assumptions, data/facts, the argument, and then conclusions.[41]

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[40] Gay, "Syllabus on Methods," 2 and 12.

[41] Gay, lecture, "GDR 3054, Seminar: Method and Evaluation," Vanderbilt University, 4/12/05.

Concerning "emic and etic points of view,"[42] this work is largely emic because it is full of ideas that are culturally-specific, discovered, and require immersion in a certain "world view" or *Weltanshauung*.[43] If this work were primarily etic, it would be cross-cultural, include created classifications, and have analyses that are external, absolute, and structural.[44] There may be etic features to this work,[45] but, based on Gay's "Syllabus on Methods," mostly this dissertation is an emic attempt to understand Michelangelo's late-life development and art more deeply through a psychodynamically-informed discursive-hierarchical hermeneutic reconstruction. That is this work's methodological orientation.[46]

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[42] "Syllabus on Methods," 12.

[43] Ibid., 12-13.

[44] Ibid., 12.

[45] For instance, having a thesis is etic, as it is a "created," "universalized" writing structure. (The term "created" comes from Gay's "Syllabus on Methods," 12; the term "universalized" comes from Gay's lecture, GDR 3054, 4/12/05.)

[46] Though now with major additions and editions, some of the previous pages include reworked material from a paper on Evon Flesberg submitted during my graduate work at Vanderbilt. Also, some of these previous pages include revised material from a paper on Arieti submitted in my graduate work at Vanderbilt.

CHAPTER II

FACTS: WHAT WE KNOW

a. Facts about Michelangelo's individual context: biographical data

The psychoanalytic theorist Gerda Frank notes that there is little biographical data about

Michelangelo's early life:

> We have no documentary reports pertaining directly to Michelangelo's childhood. . . .
> But we have such a wealth of documentary evidence on Michelangelo's adolescent and
> adult years, that a close study of these writings in conjunction with Michelangelo's
> artistic productions may afford us, here and there, some glimpses into his earliest
> childhood.[47]

Analyses of "Michelangelo's artistic productions" come much later in this dissertation, but what

follows in this section is a sample of the "wealth of documentary evidence" surrounding his life

and work.

i. Early life

The second son of Lodovico di Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni and Francesca di Ser

Miniato del Sera, Michelangelo[48] di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni was born in the village of

Caprese, in the Tiber valley, at 4 or 5 o'clock on a Monday morning, March 6, 1475. [49] [50] Within

a month, the family moved to Florence.[51]

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[47] Gerda Frank, "The Enigma of Michelangelo's Pietà Rondanini," *American Imago* 23:4 (Winter 1966):295.

[48] A variant is "Michelagnolo." (Bruno Nardini, *Michelangelo: Biography of a Genius,* trans. Catherine Frost (Florence, Italy: Giunti, 1999), 10.)

[49] Nardini, 10-11.

[50] A chronogram related to this date and the subject of this dissertation is that *Michelangelo's Childhood Developmental Lines eXhibit eXceptional Variability.*

Michelangelo's biological mother, Francesca, was somewhat aristocratic,[52] so as was

customary for families of their class[53]—and also perhaps due to Francesca's serious health

problems[54]—when her son Michelangelo was only about a month old,[55] he was taken off to a wet

nurse, who raised him for probably the first two or three years of his life.[56] His wet nurse lived

in Settignano, and although her name has been lost to history, there is record that she was a

stonemason's daughter who became another stonemason's wife.[57] According to the

psychoanalytic theorist Robert S. Liebert, these wet nurses were "generally lower-class women,

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[51] Nardini, 10.

[52] For more on Francesca's, and thus Michelangelo's possibly noble lineage, please see Nardini, 148, in addition to footnotes fifteen pages below on the subject of Michelangelo's self-descriptions as a nobleman.

[53] Robert S. Liebert, M.D., *Michelangelo: a Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and Images* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 14.

[54] Among others, the Michelangelo biographer George Bull raises this issue of Michelangelo's mother's health, but Bull also acknowledges the commonality of the practice of wet nursing among some Florentines: "This fostering may have been because of poor health on the part of Francesca, but for many years Florentines had followed the practice of putting their infant children out to a salaried nurse." (Bull, *Michelangelo*, 9)

[55] There is some scholarly disagreement about the exact age, but he is likely to have been about one month old, a figure that comes from the time that Ludovico's term in Caprese expired (e.g., Nardini, 10). Nardini implies that Michelangelo was about a month old, but he is not explicit (ibid.) Ludwig Goldscheider, an art historian by training and Michelangelo scholar who would presumably know as well as anyone, asserts that Michelangelo was "one month old" when he was taken off to the wet nurse, but Frank, a psychoanalyst by training, asserts that Michelangelo was nearly six months old at the time. (Frank, 297) On such a matter, scholarly weight would probably have to go with the Michelangelo scholar Goldscheider and his lower figure of Michelangelo having been just "one month old."

[56] Consistent with some other biographers, Bull writes: "Michelangelo was not taken back into the family till he was two or three years old (the date is unknown)." (Bull, 9) Bull also writes: "By the time he was ten he was living mostly at the family house in Florence." (ibid.) This begs the question: With whom was he living between the age of two (or three) and then ten? A footnote, several below, addresses this question somewhat as well, but one possibility supported by some biographies (including Bull's, e.g., Bull, 9) is that Michelangelo was in the home of his biological father and stepmother, with the possibility of having still spent some time also in Settignano, where his father owned property, perhaps having the opportunity to visit or stay in the home of his former wet nurse.

[57] Nardini, 10.

either grieving the loss of, or concurrently nursing, their own infants. They nursed on a business basis…."[58]

As Michelangelo's wet nurse happened to come from a stonemason's family, Michelangelo wrote, "if I am good for anything it is because I was born in the good mountain air… and suckled among the chisels and hammers of the stone cutters."[59] In that context, mother's milk was said to have formative—almost magical—properties. Gerda Frank points out that Michelangelo "had two mothers: the aristocratic woman who gave birth to him, and the stonecutter's wife."[60]

The infant Michelangelo was then taken from his wet nurse and transplanted into his biological home. Liebert offers this bleak summation of Michelangelo's early nurturance:

> [Michelangelo] was boarded with a wet nurse of unknown character for perhaps as long as two years. His weaning was then associated with an abrupt separation from this mothering woman. At this time he returned to his mother and father, both of whom were relative strangers to him, as he was to them. His reentry into his mother's life, particularly as her second son, probably elicited minimal emotional investment on her part, inasmuch she was subsequently pregnant for half of the four years that remained to her.[61]

As this passage suggests, she died only four years after Michelangelo came to live with his biological family. So, in Michelangelo's early childhood, he had two female primary caregivers—a wet nurse and his biological mother—and he lost both of them by the age of six.[62]

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[58] Liebert, 14. While these conditions Liebert mentions do not rule out the possibility of nurturance, neither do they suggest it.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Frank, 298.

[61] Liebert, 15.

[62] There has been suggestion that Michelangelo stayed with or returned to his surrogate family in the stonecutter's home during and after the time of his biological mother's long illness and death, e.g., as in a Wikipedia entry, s.v. "Michelangelo," cited on October 19th, 2008, that claims that "At later times, during the prolonged illness and after

His father Lodovico remarried, so Michelangelo acquired a stepmother, Lucrezia degli Ubaldini, although Michelangelo's feelings toward her are unknown.[63]

As he aged, Michelangelo was subject to "beatings" by his father and uncles, especially once Michelangelo began to draw and paint in Domenico del Ghirlandaio's workshop around the age of twelve.[64] Michelangelo wrote, "My father and my father's brothers beat me hard and often, ashamed to think that art was entering the family."[65] It was an older friend—about eighteen years old compared to Michelangelo's twelve—who introduced him to the workshop, and Michelangelo persisted despite the beatings. When Michelangelo was thirteen, his father agreed to apprentice him to Ghirlandaio, and Michelangelo learned so quickly that Ghirlandaio said, "This one is really a better artist than I am!" and is reported to have replied to an inquiry about a drawing by the teenaged artist, "By Michelangelo? Of course, it's his too, but it does come from my workshop."[66]

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the death of his mother, Michelangelo lived with a stonecutter and his wife." The latter entry cites "Clément, 5" as its source. There is also suggestion that he returned to his paternal home later, around the time he was ten (e.g. Frank, 297), but as seen in Bull's work on Michelangelo (Bull, 9), this age likely demarcates the time when Michelangelo finally spent most of his time at the family home in Florence. Frank's work has weight to it, but Clément's work is over a century old, has errors (e.g., Clément, 5), cites astrology (e.g., Clément, 6), and appears generally out of date. Further, it appears that the Wikipedia entry, perhaps unsurprisingly, is in error, as the citation in Clément suggests nothing of Michelangelo staying with the stonecutter's family during his biological mother's illness or death; Clément writes that "Ludovico's office having expired, he returned to Florence, and put the child to nurse at Settignano, where he had a small property, with the wife of a stone carver." (Clément, 6) There is nothing about the stone carver or his wife at all on the putative citation of "Clément, 5," and Clément says also writes nothing about the stone carver or his family in relation to Michelangelo's biological mother's illness or death. Perhaps even more oddly, Clément does not even mention Michelangelo's biological mother's death and mentions her only to say that she fell off a horse while pregnant without injuring the unborn Michelangelo (Clément, 6), a story that appears to be apocryphal.
(Q.v., Charles Clément, *Michelangelo* (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, ltd.: London, 1892) 5-6.)

[63] Nardini, 11. Also, if one were to consider his biological mother and then his wet nurse were "two mothers" for the boy, Lucrezia could be considered his third mother.

[64] Liebert, 14, and Nardini, 11.

[65] Nardini, 11.

[66] Ibid., 12.

Apparently aware enough of his skill, the adolescent Michelangelo mocked his fellow students, including older ones, with Florentine sarcasm, which continued until one of them, Torrigiani reacted. Benevenuto Cellini retells Torrigiani's own tale in this way:

> This Michelagnolo [*sic*][67] and I were going to learn as boys in the Church of the Carmine at the Chapel of Massaccio, and since Buonarroti used to mock everybody who was drawing, one day, when he was bothering me as well as the others, I was provoked more than usual and I grabbed his hand and gave him such a blow on the nose that I felt the bone crumble and the nose collapse under my fist like a doughnut; and he was marked for the rest of his life.[68]

Many years later, Michelangelo's closest biographer Ascanio Condivi writes that the young artist "was carried home like a dead man."[69]

It was not long before this event that Lorenzo the Magnificent had taken the young Michelangelo under his wing, at first to the consternation of Michelangelo's father Lodovico but then to his obsequience.[70] Lorenzo the Magnificent not only agreed to take in Michelangelo like a son but also offered to help Lodovico secure the job of his choice.[71] In Lorenzo the Magnificent, Michelangelo acquired a benefactor so close that one of Michelangelo's modern biographers, Bruno Nardini,[72] describes Lorenzo as having become a "new father" to Michelangelo.[73]

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[67] This is an alternative spelling of his name. From hereafter in this dissertation, when Michelangelo's name is quoted with alternative spellings, the "*sic*" is omitted.

[68] Nardini, 9-10.

[69] Ibid., 10. This event roused the anger of Lorenzo de' Medici—known also as Lorenzo the Magnificent—but Torrigiani, who came from a wealthy family, was not ostracized. (Ibid., 14.)

[70] Ibid., 10 and 14.

[71] Ibid., 14.

[72] Michelangelo has many biographers and biographies, so compiling all of them would be a formidable and perhaps scarcely possible task; thus in the interest of space, convenience, and thematic unity, this section of the dissertation is unified primarily by the work of one of these biographers, the modern Italian art historian Bruno Nardini, and in many places, this section also supplements his work with the work of several other of Michelangelo's many biographers. The choice of Nardini, as opposed to the countless other biographers, is based upon primarily two

Under his eminent patron's care, Michelangelo encountered many new schools of thought, taking especially those of the neo-platonic school.[74] For instance, there are echoes of the idea of Platonic and neo-platonic "forms" in Michelangelo's poem years later, in which he writes, "Even the finest artist has no concept / That the marble block itself does not contain / To release that form . . . ," and this same a concept could be found a millenium before Michelangelo's time in Book IV of the *Enneads* by Plotinus, a major Neoplatonist philosopher.[75] This period in Michelangelo's did not last for too many years, however, because in 1492, Michelangelo's *de facto* adoptive father Lorenzo de' Medici died of gout at the age of forty-three.[76] His doctor then threw himself or was thrown into a well.[77] Michelangelo had to go back to his father Lodovico's house and is said to have grieved so profoundly that he could not work for weeks—but the young artist is also said to have worked through this grief by buying and

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things: first, he is a native speaker of Italian and thus more likely to be able to compile the large catalog of contemporaneous accounts of Michelangelo's life, most of which are written in a dialect of Nardini's native tongue; and second, Nardini's biography is fairly recent, having been published in 1999, which is within a decade of this dissertation's writing. In his biography, Nardini often quotes at length those who observed and interacted with Michelangelo first-hand—those such as Ascanio Condivi, Giorgio Vasari, and Daniele da Volterra—so, despite the likelihood of including some apocrypha, this section emphasizes their contemporary reportage.

[73] Nardini, 15. Nardini also describes Lorenzo as more of a "real father" and "guardian angel." (22) Thus if Michelangelo had what some have called two, or even three, "mothers" (Frank, 298), at this point he acquired what others have called a second—or if one were to make the less likely inclusion of Ghirlandaio, then even a third—"father." (Nardini, 15.) Parental language aside, even in his infancy and youth, Michelangelo had an assorted and revolving set of primary caregivers, from the anonymous stonemason's wife to the highly prominent and influential Lorenzo the Magnificent.

[74] Nardini, 17.

[75] Ibid., 17-18.

[76] Ibid., 19.

[77] Ibid., 21.

working on a large block of marble, which later became his *Hercules*: a sculpture, now lost, which was last seen in the early 18th century.[78]

Michelangelo was invited to return to live at the Medici palace in Via Larga, where once again among the Medicis, Michelangelo was treated as the family's genius.[79] By night, he began frequently to visit the Augustinian monastery of Santo Spirito, where, in an forbidden act known only to the Prior, and which, if he had been caught, would have been considered sacrilege, he would "skin corpses" from the monastery's hospice to study their anatomy.[80] In gratitude, the young sculptor created a wooden crucifix for the monastery, his only known wooden sculpture and his first known sculptural representation of Jesus.[81]

In late September of 1494, when Michelangelo was nineteen, Michelangelo's close friend Poliziano died.[82] In addition to this, several days later, there was sufficient disagreement with "Piero the Fatuous" that Michelangelo and two of his friends fled the palace—and Florence—to Venice.[83] Venice turned out to be too expensive, so he and his friends traveled to Bologna, where they were imprisoned for not obeying a local tax ordinance. Michelangelo then stayed in that city for one year with the man who paid for his release from prison.[84] Fairly or not, Michelangelo was said to have a fearful disposition and to be disinclined to engage in a fight; for instance, many years later, a detractor even said publicly, "This Michelangelo may be a great

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[78] Nardini, 22-23.

[79] Ibid. As Nardini states, Michelangelo won the respect of the regnant Medici—known later derisively as "Piero the Fatuous"—by, at his request, sculpting a statue made of snow. (ibid.)

[80] Ibid., 23.

[81] Ibid., 23-24.

[82] Ibid., 26.

[83] Ibid., 24-26.

[84] Ibid., 28-29.

sculptor, but for me his is too suspicious and fearful."[85] When he received actual death threats from a rival sculptor apparently jealous of his work, the young sculptor also fled Bologna and returned to Florence.[86]

Back in Florence, and after the French occupied the city for two years, another Lorenzo—cousin to Lorenzo the Magnificent and, like him, a humanist—was back in charge of the city. This Lorenzo asked Michelangelo to sculpt for him: One of the works was a young *Saint John*, which pleased Lorenzo but which is now lost; another work was a young *Cupid* lying down in sleep, who was said to be the size of a six-year-old child.[87] So, Michelangelo sculpted these two children, one of whom represented a six-year-old, which, significantly or not, happened to be Michelangelo's own approximate age when his biological mother Francesca died.

The young *Cupid* changed hands several times and, like Michelangelo's sculpture of the young *St. John*, eventually it too was lost.[88]

A series of incidents in which Michelangelo thought the latter sculpture was undervalued—as well as another incident involving a frivolous request for a sculpture by the exiled "Piero the Fatuous"—left Michelangelo idle and relatively isolated.[89] Although for most of the rest of his life, he eschewed idleness, he ended up retaining this tendency toward isolation.[90] According to Nardini, from then on, he tended to be solitary and "keep to himself."[91]

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[85] Nardini, 119.

[86] Ibid., 28-29 and 35.

[87] Ibid., 35.

[88] Ibid., 42.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

While still a young artist with a growing reputation, Michelangelo made the acquaintance of a Roman banker and art lover, who offered him a room in his home and for whom Michelangelo sculpted a *Bacchus* and then another *Cupid*.[92] This same Roman banker then also secured a commission for a work, which he promised, in writing, would be "the most beautiful work in marble to be found in Rome and no master will make a better one."[93]

Figure 2   The *Vatican Pietà*

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[91] Nardini, 42.

[92] Ibid., 43-44.

[93] Ibid., 44.

The banker's words, while apparently so hyperbolic, turned out to be prophetic, as Michelangelo then proceeded to sculpt his first and most famous Pietà[94], which compositionally, includes Mary holding her recently deceased son Jesus in her arms. He began the work in 1498, at the age of twenty-three, and completed it in 1499 or 1500. [95]

Here ends the description of Michelangelo's childhood and early youth, which, despite his influential friends and benefactors, was still a period of relative anonymity; after his first Pietà, however, he became famous. Thus, the events of his life and work thereafter are much better documented and could fill, and have filled, volumes. Therefore, the remainder of this section focuses now even more closely on events and contemporary descriptions that reflect something of Michelangelo's personality, especially those characterological features that lead up to his late-life development and the *Rondanini Pietà*.

ii. Mid-life

Consider, for instance, Michelangelo's occasional rivalry with Leonardo da Vinci. The two had earlier vied for the marble that eventually became Michelangelo's *David*, and then, when Michelangelo was twenty-nine and Leonardo fifty-two, they were commissioned to fresco opposite sides of Florence's Hall of the Great Council.[96] Leonardo chose to paint the *Battle of Cascina* and Michelangelo chose the *Battle of Anghiari*[97], though neither artist was ever able to finish their respective frescos; Michelangelo now his cartoon for the wall—now lost—and Leonardo, who also completed his cartoon—also now lost but preserved somewhat in a

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[94] Nardini, 44.

[95] Frederick Hartt, *Michelangelo's Three Pietàs* (Japan: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 25.

[96] Nardini, 64-67.

[97] Ibid., 64.

copy—got as far as painting the wall but his oils ran, ruining his painting.[98] During this time, however, encounters between the artists, however, include illustrative descriptions of their behavior.

Even their appearance communicates something of the differences between the two artists. According to one early biographer, Leonardo was "attractive of person was Lionardo [*sic*], well-proportioned, graceful and of goodly countenance."[99] Further, "he wore a rose-hued garment short to the knee, when long jerkins were the fashion. He had thick hair down to the middle of his chest and he went adorned with rings and well-composed."[100] Leonardo and Michelangelo were different from each other, in many ways unlike each other: Leonardo would rest up and attend philosophical discourses, while Michelangelo wore "rough artisan clothing" and, at least in his adult life, did not frequent such discourses;[101] or, as another modern art historian puts it less delicately, Leonardo was "handsome and extravagant, well-dressed and refined," while compared to him, Michelangelo was "ugly, shabby, and neglected."[102] Then there is this more detailed description of the younger artist:

> [Michelangelo] was small in stature, bow-legged, with a big head on a fragile body, a nose crushed like a prize fighter's, curly black hair, tangled and "never washed" according to the advice of Messer Lodovico, a dark beard, string big hands with wide-spread fingers that knew how to shape the marble so skillfully, now grasping the heavy chisel, now the most delicate of tools.[103]

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[98] Nardini, 64-67 and 79.

[99] An apparently contemporary but anonymous source quoted in Nardini, 65.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Robert Mode, notes on the lecture, "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 1/22/04.

[102] Nardini, 65.

[103] Ibid., 57-58.

This "advice" refers to a letter Michelangelo's father had written him, which apparently the artist heeded; his father wrote, "…and above all take care of your head, keep it moderately warm and never wash yourself; have yourself rubbed but don't wash."[104]

Similarly, much later in life, when Michelangelo was in his sixties and painting the *Last Judgment* on the Sistine Chapel's altar wall, he injured his leg and had to have his boots removed—which, in the fervor of painting and also due to cramps, he rarely if ever removed—so the unwashed flesh had fused to the boot leather so fully that the skin came away "like that of a serpent."[105]

Returning to the subject of the rivalry between Leonardo and Michelangelo, however, the latter artist was still a relatively young man, quick to take offence, and if the artists' appearance begins to describe them, an account of the following incident may describe even more. As they were competing against each other by painting, perhaps fittingly, battle scenes, Michelangelo was growing more "surly and withdrawn."[106] One day, when he chanced upon Leonardo and some "worthy men" who were asking Leonardo for his interpretation of an excerpt of Dante's poetry, when the elder artist, who knew of Michelangelo's reputation for knowing Dante's verse so well, offered Michelangelo a sign of respect by saying to his friends, "Ask it of him, for he will tell you much better than I can." Michelangelo taking this as an affront, replied in anger, "Tell them yourself, that you made a horse to cast in bronze and you could not cast it and for

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[104] Lodovico Buonarroti, quoted in Nardini, 50.

[105] Nardini, 134.

[106] Ibid., 66.

shame you abandoned it!" Michelangelo walked off in fury, while Leonardo blushed

indignantly, walking away with his friends in silence.[107]

Incidentally, this "horse to cast in bronze" that Michelangelo mentioned in his latter

insult to Leonardo refers to a statue, approximately twenty-four feet tall, which Leonardo had

once intended to cast in bronze. Due to delays caused by his exacting standards and the inherent

difficulties of casting such a large piece, the process was delayed, at which time French archers

attacking Milan destroyed Leonardo's monumental clay original. [108] All of this was just a few

years earlier than Michelangelo's insult, and only a few years after the insult, however,

Michelangelo learned how difficult it can be to cast in bronze, when he himself encountered

similar difficulties casting a bronze statue only a quarter the size of Leonardo's horse.[109] So, for

no known reason relevant to what he had been asked about Dante, Michelangelo insulted

Leonardo, the young artist insulted him, for all of reasons, this horse. As a side note and a bit of

a twist of fate, Leonardo's clay horse happened to be destroyed in the courtyard of Milan's

Castello Sforzesco—the very same building that ended up housing Michelangelo's own

Rondanini Pietà so many centuries later. [110]

After this incident with Leonardo, Michelangelo, apparently also exhausted by his labors,

had what one modern biographer describes as a "breakdown," during which he immersed himself

in writing poetry.[111] His exhaustion also came on the heels of an intensely prolific period

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[107] Nardini, 66.

[108] The destruction of Leonardo's horse is described in my class notes, so Prof. Mode appears to have described the destruction in his Leonardo lecture on 1/29/04. (Robert Mode, notes on the lecture, "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219) Nardini describes this incident as well. (Nardini, 64)

[109] Nardini, 86.

[110] Robert Mode, notes on the lecture, "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 1/29/04; and Nardini, 64.

[111] Nardini, 66.

following the completion of *David*. After completing *David*, Michelangelo agreed to do a second one, along with agreeing to many other sculptures—over sixteen separate sculptures on many different contracts—plus a painting his did in his spare time: "Now Michelangelo was like Briareus of the hundred arms. It was not enough, this second David…."[112] Further, even while sculpting his first, most famous, and only extant *David*—as the second is now lost—Michelangelo is reported, perhaps with some hyperbole, to have spent the first three months of the project working incessantly, day and night.[113]

As exemplified in the incident with Leonardo, Michelangelo was known for his fiery temper, or *terribilita*. For instance, in a relatively short span of time in this same period, he had disagreements also with Pope Julius II, as well as more heated disagreements with fellow artists, echoing his earlier years in Ghirlandaio's workshop. Concerning the Pope, several times in one week, having unexpectedly been denied meetings with his client, a pope who really was avoiding him, Michelangelo replied in this way:

> "You can tell the Pope", cried Michelangelo indignantly, "that if he wants to see me from now on, he will have to come and look for me!". And he stalked out slamming the door behind him.[114]
> Upon arriving home he ordered his two assistants to sell all the furniture and meet him in Florence. Then by post, never pausing at an inn but changing horses at every stop, he arrived at Poggibonsi, a castle of defense for the Florentine Republic, at two o'clock in the morning. There, feeling safe at last, he rested.[115]

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[112] Nardini, 59-60.

[113] Ibid., 54.

[114] Ibid., 75.

[115] Ibid., 76.

So, Michelangelo had this disagreement with the Pope and fled Rome; spurning the Pope,

however, turned out to be difficult with Pope's repeated demands for Michelangelo's return, so,

as he was ultimately unable to remain in Florence, he returned to Rome and was forgiven.[116]

Additionally, and probably around this same time, Michelangelo had a "violent

argument" with an artist known as Perugino. The latter artist repeatedly criticized

Michelangelo's art for its nudes, describing them as "scandalous," so one day, Michelangelo

approached Perugino in public, grabbed him by the collar, and shouted that his art was "crude."

[117] Insulted, Perugino even summoned Michelangelo before a local legal authority—"the

Magistrate of the Eight"—but Michelangelo was acquitted.[118] Then, another time with another

artist then said to be the finest in Bologna, Michelangelo got into an argument occasioned by the

lukewarm appraisal of his work, which led to heated words on both sides, and culminated in

Michelangelo "grabbing him roughly" and yelling, "Go to the bordello . . . you blunderers in

art!" [119] Then, a few days later, upon meeting the latter artist's son, Michelangelo quipped, with

a caress, "I see that your father makes more beautiful figures alive than painted. Tell him I said

so."[120]

Still, even on the heels of such incidents, the *de facto* head of Florence wrote the

following illustrative character reference, and to the pope no less, on Michelangelo's behalf:

> "We certify Your Signoria that he is a good young man and his art is unique in Italy,
> perhaps in the universe. We can more precisely recommend him: his character is such

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[116] Nardini, 77-82.

[117] Ibid., 79.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., 86.

[120] Ibid., 87.

that for gentle words and caresses, he will do anything. You must show him love and do him favors and he will make things to cause those who see them marvel….”[121]

So, Michelangelo made some enemies, but he also had some fervent supporters.

As suggested, Michelangelo tended to be solitary but also had friends; what, then, about lovers? The evidence is mixed. While in Bologna, Michelangelo wrote an enigmatic sonnet on the back of an envelope to a girl with garlands of flowers adorning her blond hair and a dress “That binds the breast, then billows out” and asked in verse, “Now what then will my arms hold?”[122] Much later in life, wrote poems and letters to a reputedly handsome young man, Tommaso de’ Cavalieri, such as the letter in which Michelangelo writes, “I can only write you to come back soon, because in coming back you will free me from prison, since I flee bad company and, desiring to flee it, I can stay with no other but you.”[123] Another example is, “If vanquished and captured I must be blessed, / No marvel is it if, naked and alone / I remain the prisoner of a Cavalier in arms.”[124] In letter to Tammaso Cavalieri, Michelangelo writes, of the “very great, rather, immeasurable love I bear you,” and that, “. . . I can sooner forget the food I live on, which only nourishes my body unhappily, than your name, which nourishes body and soul, filling both with such sweetness, that I can feel neither pain nor fear of death. . . .”[125]

Then, when Michelangelo was in his early sixties, he forged a connection with the Marchioness of Pescara, Vittoria Colonna, a widow in her mid-forties who, after losing her

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[121] The Gonfalonier of Florence, Pier Soderini, as quoted in Nardini, 81.

[122] Nardini, 88.

[123] Ibid., 135.

[124] Michelangelo quoted in Nardini, 164.

[125] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 254.

husband at a young age, chose to live in a nunnery.[126] Over the years, they grew close, and

Michelangelo composed many devotional letters and poems in her honor, such as, "A man in a

woman, nay a God / Through her mouth speaks, / Were I to hear her / Am so made that never

more will be mine. . . ."[127] After more than a decade of knowing each other, when Michelangelo

was seventy-two and she was fifty-six, Vittoria Colonna died, after which a contemporary

biographer observed the following:

> So great love did he feel for her that I remember hearing him say that his only regret was
> that, on going to see her when she was dying, he did not kiss her on the forehead or the
> face but kissed instead her hand. For her death he seemed at times stunned, almost
> insensate.[128]

Incidentally, while his position puts him the scholarly minority, Nardini makes an argument that

the year of her death, 1547, is the same year that Michelangelo began working on his *Rondanini*

Pietà.[129]

As mentioned, Vittoria Colonna was the Marchioness of Pescara and thus, a

noblewoman, which raises the issue of Michelangelo's own status, as Michelangelo described

himself frequently as having noble lineage as well.[130] In his letters to this Leonardo—of which

there are many, especially during Michelangelo's senescence—are filled with avuncular advice

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[126] Nardini, 136ff.

[127] Ibid., 136.

[128] Ibid., 140.

[129] Ibid., 185.

[130] In 2004, while visiting Vanderbilt's Art History Department as a guest lecturer in Robert Mode's course on "Italian Renaissance Art after the 1500s," the renowned Michelangelo scholar William Wallace described Michelangelo's self-perception as an aristocrat. The reasonable question may arise, "So he described himself as a nobleman, but was he?" There is, however, no simple answer to such a fair question, and the interested reader is advised to refer to William Wallace's excellent and extensive recent work on the subject.

According to Nardini (148), at least, there is some evidence of this nobility in a letter written to Michelangelo by Count Alessandro di Canossa, who calls Michelangelo his "honorable relative" and welcomes him for a visit "to know your family and your home."

on whom the young man should marry, and this advice often revolves around the subject of their family's nobility. For instance, Michelangelo advises his nephew to "choose a wife who is noble but poor, not to ennoble yourself, because we have no need of it, but to have a companion worthy to bear our name and without too many flighty ideas in her head."[131] He also writes that "it is known that we are ancient citizens of Florence and noble above all else. . . ."[132]

Considering himself a nobleman, the renowned artist even preferred not to self-identify or be labeled as an "artist," "sculptor," or "painter" at all. Late in life, he exhorted his young nephew Leonardo, "when you write me, do not write on the letter, Michelagniolo Simoni, nor sculptor; it is enough to say, Michelagniol Buonarroti—Rome."[133] Elsewhere, Michelangelo again asks not to be addressed as "Michelagnolo sculptor"[134] and continues with the following reason:

> . . . I am known here only as Michelagniolo Buonarroti, and if a citizen of Florence wants to have an altarpiece painted, he must find a painter, for I was never [a] painter nor sculptor like one who has a workshop. I have always kept myself from this for the honor of my father and my brothers, although I have served three Popes, and it was hard.[135]

Then an old man himself, Michelangelo's fealty is for his father who, as mentioned above, beat his young son for having a budding interest in making art.[136]

Another thing Michelangelo writes to his young nephew is that "if you should not feel, of the health of the person to take as your wife, it's better to manage to go on living than to kill

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[131] Nardini, 148.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 149, italics removed. Similarly, his aforementioned lecture, William Wallace described this as well.

[134] Nardini, 154, italics removed.

[135] Ibid., 154.

[136] As above, Liebert, 14 and Nardini 11-12.

yourself to make others."[137] Further, if his nephew were not to marry at all, and thus jeopardize

the continuation of family name, Michelangelo notes that "it would not be the end of the

world."[138] Michelangelo seems to have taken is own advice, as he himself never married and

may have also remained chaste, although as mentioned above, evidence for the latter is mixed.

Again as a young man back in Rome, in 1508, Michelangelo, at the pope's insistence,

began painting the ceiling of the *Sistine Chapel*, a project that revealed this artist and his

personality pushed to extremes. At first, he employed several of his Florentine friends who were

also painters—including two from Ghirlandaio's workshop—but when their work was below his

standards, he overturned some paints, scraped off their work, and locked them out of the chapel

without explanation, leaving his friends offended and himself alone with the massive project.[139]

There he spend a year eating and sleeping on that scaffolding, from which he was unable to

descend. [140] Constantly looking up contorted his back and neck to such an extent that he had to

lean back just to read a letter.[141]

Another example of Michelangelo's solitude comes from a somewhat friendlier rivalry

with another Renaissance artist: Raphael, who was several years Michelangelo's junior, though

he happened to die long before the older artist. One time, Raphael was walking, accompanied by

an entourage, when Michelangelo asked him, "Where are you going Raphael, accompanied like a

Monsignor?" to which the latter replied, "And you, alone as a hangman?"[142] Also once, upon

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[137] Nardini, 155.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid., 92-93.

[140] Ibid., 94.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid., 100.

receiving a dinner invitation with some of his friends, Michelangelo replied, "If I dined with you, I [would] rejoice too much; and I do not want to rejoice over much."[143] Further, on the same occasion, Michelangelo is reported to have said the following:

> Oh you make me laugh, that you want to dance. I tell you that in this world, there is that to make us weep. . . . Know that I am the man most inclined to love persons, that ever in any time was born. Whenever I see anyone who has some virtue, who shows some skill, who knows how to do or say something better than others, I am obliged to fall in love with him; and I am so taken with him that I am no longer mine but all his.
>   If then I were to dine with you, all of you being adorned with virtues and courtesy, in addition to what each of you three had robbed of me here, each of those who dined with us would take a part of me. . . . So that I . . . would entirely surrender myself and be lost; so that for many days I would not know in what world I was.[144]

Michelangelo could have said such a thing simply to avoid an unwanted invitation politely, though it is also possible that his reply reveals some of his reasons for often choosing solitude, including his need not to have parts of himself taken by others.

In 1520, while Michelangelo was stranded at the Carrara marble quarry, news reached him from Rome that Raphael had died on the young painter's own birthday, Good Friday, at the age of thirty-seven.[145] Leonardo da Vinci had just died a year earlier[146], and just a year after Raphael's death, Pope Leo X—a Medici who had been raised almost as a brother with Michelangelo for some time with Lorenzo the Magnificent—also died.[147] So, within a relatively short span of time, Michelangelo lost these confreres and occasional rivals: one older than he,

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[143] Nardini, 144.

[144] Ibid., 145.

[145] Ibid., 112.

[146] Ibid., 184.

[147] Ibid., 112.

one of a similar age, and one even younger than he.[148] A decade later, in a time when war, famine, and plague struck Florence simultaneously, Michelangelo was surrounded by over 44,000 of the dead—so many that some of those who were unburied lay even on walls and roofs—and in this time, Michelangelo held his own brother Buonarroto, plague-stricken and in his arms, as he too died.[149] Also, as mentioned above, Michelangelo encountered death and loss as early as his childhood and adolescence, including the death of his mother and then his good friend. In one of his letters, Michelangelo writes, "I have no thought that has not been shaped by death."[150]

iii. Late-life

Michelangelo's poems also reflect his awareness of his own mortality. For instance, in one poem he writes, "What kind of biting file / Makes you tired carcass shrivel and decrease, / Sick soul, forever?" and further, "Lord, in the final hour, / Stretch out thy pitying arms to me, take me / Out of me, make me one that pleases Thee."[151] In a poem from his later years, he writes, "No one has mastery / Before he is at the end / Of his art and his life."[152] In a similarly late poem, he writes, "There's no painting or sculpture now that quiets / The soul that's pointed toward that holy Love / That on the cross opened Its arms to take us."[153] And even later, he

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[148] It is, then, perhaps, timely that, as one scholar suggests, Michelangelo spent the last forty years of his life—which would be from the 1520s onward—dying or at least preparing for his own death. (I encountered this scholar's idea years ago and have been unable to locate the reference since.)

[149] Nardini, 120 and, for some of the lineage, 149.

[150] Giovanni Papini, *Michelangelo: His Life and His Era*, trans. Loretta Murnane (U.S.A.: E.P. Dutton, 1952), 508.

[151] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 106.

[152] Ibid., 173.

[153] Ibid., 159.

writes, "The thorns and nails, the left and the right palm, / Your face, benign, humble, and filled with pity, / Pledge that for great repentance there is mercy, / To the sad soul give hope You will redeem."[154]

Especially towards the end of Michelangelo's long life, there was another significant person not yet mentioned here: his servant Francesco Armadori, known as Urbino, whose death taught Michelangelo even more about mortality. Before Urbino's death, Michelangelo allowed him to marry, to bring her into Michelangelo's house, to have children, to hire a maid for all of them, and to live more comfortably by giving him a huge sum of money. In a letter to the contemporary biographer Vasari, Michelangelo writes the following:

> You know how Urbino died, to the infinite grace of God, but to my great loss and boundless grief. The grace was that where in life he helped me to live, in dying he has taught me to die, not with displeasure, but with a desire for death. I kept him for twenty-six years and found him most true and faithful. And now that I have made him rich and thought he would be my staff to lean on in old age, he is gone; nor have I any hope but to see him again in Paradise. And of this God sent me a sign in the most happy death he gave him. Much more than at the thought of dying I am grieved at being left alive in this treacherous world with all its cares; although the better part of me has gone already, there being left to me only infinite misery.[155]

It can be noted here, and for later reference, that once again, Michelangelo speaks of himself in parts.

Speaking of Urbino and "parts," Michelangelo's faithful servant also finds himself in another story from Michelangelo's later years, in which the sculptor shattered one of his final works into many parts or shards of marble. The sculpture Michelangelo shattered is now known commonly as the *Florentine Pietà*,[156] described more fully in a later section, but suffice it to say that this was his penultimate pietà, coming before his final one, the *Rondanini Pietà*. The

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[154] Nardini, 162.

[155] Ibid., 161.

[156] Another, less common, name for this sculpture is the *Bandini Pietà* (e.g., Nardini, 188).

following account of the *Florentine Pietà*'s destruction comes from Antonio,[157] then Urbino's

assistant before his death, and through yet another of Michelangelo's assistants, Antonio relates

the tale in this way, quoted here at length for reasons more apparent later in this dissertation:

> [Michelangelo] had to work with a heavy chisel. . . . If he stopped working his health
> suffered for it. The more he worked, the better he felt. But that marble was extremely
> hard, and full of veins. Michelangelo was old, but he made the chips fly faster than three
> [sculpting] boys put together. You can't imagine how the sparks were flying! . . .
>   Then one day, in the fury of polishing it, he gave the Madonna elbow a blow that
> broke off too much marble. At least he thought it was too much, although you couldn't
> really see it. It was a beautiful group, with the dead Christ supported by his Mother,
> assisted by Nicodemus and the Magdalene: four figures, in full relief, with a hooded
> Nicodemus whose good, sad face looks so much like that of our own Messer
> Michelangelo.
>   "We will give it to some church, perhaps Santa Maria Maggiore", he [that is,
> Michelangelo] often said, "and we will make sure that it serves for my tomb as well." . . .
>   But that blow on the elbow so enraged him that in his anger he took the hammer
> and began to strike it like a madman, saying that it had turned out bad because that pest
> Urbino was always under his feet annoying him. So I found the courage to ask him not to
> destroy that group, to be content with having spoiled it, and to give it to me. And now it
> is mine.[158]

Later, Michelangelo is said to have watched his assistants reassemble and modify the piece,

much of which occurred under his supervision, suggestions, and then with his approval.[159] There

are several details to note in the latter tale, which are more useful to explicate later in this

dissertation, in sections reserved for theories and hypotheses. Such details include these:

Though Michelangelo was then quite old, he worked on the marble with such intensity that he

sent sparks and marble chips flying faster, according to description, than three young boys could;

after becoming "enraged," Michelangelo describes Urbino, whom he praised so highly after his

servant's death, as a "pest" always "annoying him"; again, he was so "enraged"—perhaps in his

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[157] Antonio calls the Pietà a "Deposition," (Nardini, 166ff.), and, while there is some iconological overlap between these two terms, their differentiation is described below, in this dissertation's section on the "Iconology of the Pietà Theme."

[158] Tiberio Calcagni quoting Antonio, found in Nardini, 167-168.

[159] Nardini, 168.

terribilita—that a witness describes him striking the sculpture "like a madman"; his servant says that Michelangelo had to work with the heavy chisel for his health, and the more he worked, the better he felt; in his servant's opinion, Michelangelo included a figure in the group who looked like him; this figure in the sculpture who looked like Michelangelo had a "good, sad face"; Michelangelo was willing enough to destroy one of his own works, though also willing enough to help it be restored; and finally, Michelangelo is reported to have intended this pietà—again, not the penultimate one—for his own tomb.

Michelangelo's poetry contains similar themes. In one undated fragment, he writes, "They have no other pleasure / In living where I am deceased and dead, / Indeed, indeed, of nothing I am made."[160] In another undated fragment, he writes, "Two dry eyes, they are mine, make the world sad."[161] Also, in one of his later poems, from 1554, he observes that, "the passionate fantasy, which made / Of art a monarch for me and an idol, / Was laden down with sin, now I know well, / Like what all men against their will desired"; in the same poem, he writes, "as toward two deaths I move," "There's no painting or sculpture now that quiets / The soul that's pointed toward that holy Love / That on the cross opened Its arms to take us."[162] Michelangelo describes himself in another late poem as "Loaded down with my years, and filled with sin, / Bad habits having roots in me. . . ."[163] Further, in another poem from his later years, he speculates, "I think, I know, some sin, to me a secret, / Is driving my spirit to great grief. . . ."[164] Similarly, a few days before Michelangelo's own death, in his very last spoken will, he

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[160] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 170.

[161] Ibid., 172.

[162] Ibid., 159; cf., Nardini, 165.

[163] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 163.

[164] Ibid., 162.

encouraged others to, "meditate upon the sufferings of Jesus."[165] Then, on February 18th, 1564,

Michelangelo Buonarroti died.[166] [167]

iv. Final days

Evidence suggests that Michelangelo's ultimate admonition to "meditate upon the

sufferings of Jesus" is exactly what he himself did in those days leading up to his death, as it was

during this time that he continued to work on the *Rondanini Pietà*, a depiction of Jesus so

recently after his "sufferings." So, despite being nearly eighty-nine years old and close to his

own end, he was still working diligently.
Additionally, the working conditions for the old
artist were relatively severe. As mentioned
above, the inventory drawn up by the notary and
judge who came to Michelangelo's house shortly
after his death indicate that he had few
possessions and little luxury, especially
considering that by the standards of his time, the
artist was quite wealthy.[168] Nevertheless, he
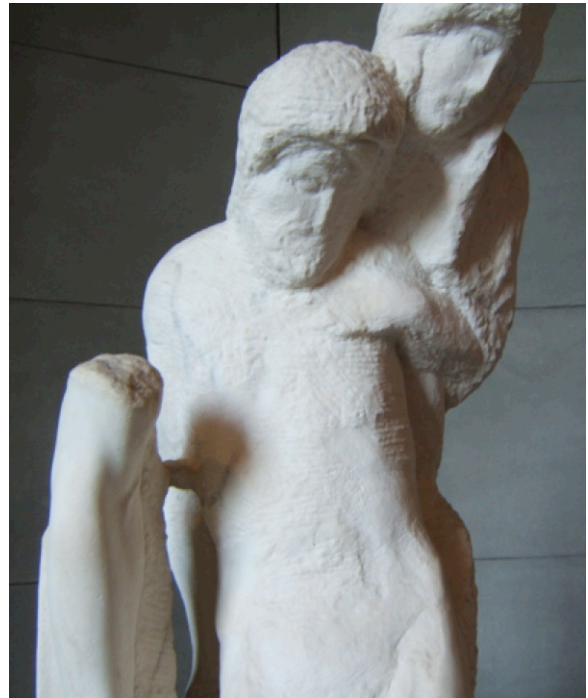
Figure 3   The *Rondanini Pietà*

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[165] Papini, 513.

[166] *The Complete Poems,* lvi.

[167] A chronogram related to this date and the subject of this dissertation is that *Michelangelo Died Leaving eXpressively Impassioned Verse*.

[168] In 2004, while visiting Vanderbilt's Art History Department as a guest lecturer in Robert Mode's course on "Italian Renaissance Art after the 1500s," the renowned Michelangelo scholar William Wallace mentioned Michelangelo's financial status.

lived in relative poor conditions for what he could have afforded.

In a poem from his last few years, Michelangelo describes himself as "poor, old and a slave in others power."[169] Especially as he had more than ample financial resources by that time of his adult life, it may be surprising that he describes himself as "poor," but he himself acknowledges this apparent discrepancy in a statement to his closest biographer, Ascanio Condivi, when he says, "Ascanio, though I have been rich, I have always lived in poverty."[170] Thus, almost right up to the end, the moribund artist kept working diligently, beset not only by the challenges of age but also by the challenges of a self-imposed poverty.

Evidence of his poor living conditions comes also in his many vivid descriptions of the house in which he lived for the final decades of his life, in a Roman area with the evocative name of *il Macello de' Corvi*—"Raven's Place."[171] In poem the just mentioned in which Michelangelo describes himself as "poor, old and a slave in others power," he also describes his house as a "dark grave" where he is "shut away from the pith / from the bark, here poor and alone / like a spirit penned up in a bottle," surrounded by chamber pots, cats, and dead animals.[172] Adding to the macabre scene, Michelangelo painted himself a *memento mori* at the head of the stairs in the form of a skeleton carrying a coffin under its arm, under which he had inscribed this poem:

> I say to you, that the world has given
> Soul and body and spirit all together:
> In this dark case is your true place.[173]

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[169] Maria Teresa Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini* (Milan, Italy: Electa, 2004), 13.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Nardini, 159-160.

[172] Fiorio, 13.

[173] Nardini, 159, italics removed.

Concerning the details of Michelangelo's "place" while he yet lived, the conditions were spare. It was a narrow five-room loggia with few furnishings, and his bedroom, for instance, included these: for his clothing and linens, he had a 'big cupboard made of boards"; for his money and drawings, he had a "big walnut chest locked with a key"; and for himself, "an iron bed with a straw pallet."[174] Further, to a friend, Michelangelo described the alleyways around the house as having a stench of urine even worse than a latrine.[175] This, however, is where he chose to live for more than thirty years, during part of his fifties, all of his sixties, all of his seventies, and all of his eighties up to his death.[176]

Despite living in such seemingly squalid surroundings, still, in the summer before the winter in which Michelangelo died, he wrote this letter in reply to his nephew Leonardo's concerns that Michelangelo was living in difficult conditions and maybe even being robbed:

> As for being miserable because of the way I am being looked after and the other things you write me, I tell you I couldn't be living better, nor more faithfully looked after in everything; as for being robbed by the one I think you mean, I tell you I have people I can trust and be at peace with in the house. So attend to living, and don't think of my affairs, because I know how to watch out for myself if I have to, and am not a child. Keep well.[177]

It is difficult or impossible to know whether or not Michelangelo was overstating his degree of comfort to reassure his nephew or have him mind his own affairs, but the artist says plainly, "I couldn't be living better." This letter is dated August 21st, 1563, so it comes almost exactly half a year before his death, and yet, despite being near the end of his years while living in the poor conditions described in the previous paragraph, Michelangelo says he has people whom "can

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[174] Nardini, 160 and 178.

[175] Ibid., 160.

[176] Ibid.

[177] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 316-317.

trust and be at peace with" and who are looking after him "faithfully." So either Michelangelo was overstating the comfort of his external conditions in the final months, or he really did have some measure of peace—in his surroundings at least.

Concerning the challenges of Michelangelo's aging body, as stated, he was nearly eighty-nine years old when he died, and though he was spry for his years, he also had some health problems, especially with the use of his hand. Half a year before Michelangelo's death, one observer wrote that the artist "is stooped and has difficulty raising his head and yet he keeps on working with the chisel while at home."[178] Making matters worse, his hand had been trembling since April of the previous year—and two years before his death—so this means he was still sculpting despite having a trembling hand.[179] Incidentally, scholars are silent about which hand it was that was trembling, but logic suggests that the trembling would have been in his left hand, if not also his right one, because by the December preceding the February of his death, he had almost lost use of his writing hand, and Michelangelo was left-handed.[180] Concerning the extent of his ability to use his hand, Michelangelo's last letter written in his own hand was the one sent on December 28, 1563, which is just six lines long, including these: "I cannot use my hand; but from now on I will get someone else to write and I will sign. There is nothing else."[181] He dictated his final letter to Daniele da Volterra but signed it himself in an irregular and uncertain manner, and this letter was sent from Rome just four days before his death.[182] So, in his last two

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[178] Fiorio, 40, endnote.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Fiorio, 24, 40 endnote, and Angelo Tartuferi, *Michelangelo: Painter Sculptor and Architect* (Rome, Italia: A.T.S., 1993), 11.

[181] Fiorio, 24.

[182] Ibid.

years—and especially in the last two months—Michelangelo's weakening health had taken away

the steadiness of his hand, at least for the purpose of writing letters.

The biographer Maria Teresa Fiorio raises the idea that with such trembling hands,

Michelangelo might not have been actively sculpting the *Rondanini Pietà* in his final few days,

despite Daniele da Volterra's observation that the artist "worked all day Saturday," six days

before his death—and "he worked standing up."[183] Incidentally, the modern biographer

Giovanni Papini states that Michelangelo worked on *Rondanini Pietà* even later, as late as

February 16th, just two days before his death,[184] but the evidence does not support this, as Daniele

da Volterra, who reportedly spent Michelangelo's last few days attending to him, states: "His

illness lasted five days, two sitting by the fire, and three in bed. So that he expired on Friday in

the evening, in peace as we may surely believe. . . ," and that Friday was February 18th.[185] The

exact number of days aside, Fiorio acknowledges the weight of Daniele's first-hand observation,

but she also notes that Daniele writes that Michelangelo was "studying that group of the *Pietà*,"

which leaves room for the possibility that instead of actually chiseling upon or otherwise

changing the piece, Michelangelo may simply have been studying it without changing it.[186] [187]

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[183] Fiorio, 24.

[184] Papini, 499.

[185] Daniele da Volterra as quoted in Nardini, 177.

[186] Fiorio, 24.

[187] Incidentally, Fiorio seems to prefer the idea that in those final few days, Michelangelo was working on the cartoons for the Pietà rather than the sculpture itself (q.v., Fiorio, 24), but there are at least two problems with this theory: (1) Michelangelo was standing up, which, given his ailing health, would have been conceivable but not necessary were he simply drawing instead of sculpting, and (2) we already know that Michelangelo was almost entirely unable to write, so his ability to draw would have almost certainly been similarly impaired. For one who has sculpted stone, it is much more imaginable to me, at least, to hold a hammer and chisel with trembling hands than to manage the fine and light work of charcoal and paper because the heft of the hammer and the chisel can have a steadying effect.

This is logically possible, though there is also the evidence mentioned above that in the two years prior, Michelangelo had a lesser tremble in his hand and also maintained his daily ability to use the hammer and chisel.

Further, Michelangelo, on one cold and rainy day in that February, Michelangelo went for his a horseback ride that preceded, and maybe even precipitated, the illness that led to his death; however, prior to this ride and directly before the illness that "lasted five days," his servant Antonio is reported to have tried to discourage him by saying, "Messer Michelangelo, it's no weather to be out in today. It's cold and raining. And then last night I heard you hammering, you must be tired."[188] So, Antonio is said to have heard Michelangelo still "hammering" approximately six days before he died, which would mean that Michelangelo, as Daniele had put, would have "worked" on the sculpture at that time—apparently even hammering despite his trembling hands—so the final artwork he was recorded to have worked upon is this, the *Rondanini Pietà.*

b. Facts about Michelangelo's communal context

Citing her husband Erik Erikson, Joan Erikson writes that "an individual life cycle cannot be adequately understood apart from the social context in which it comes to fruition."[189] Similarly, in his book on creativity, the psychoanalytic theorist Silvano Arieti writes, "Any creative product has to be considered from two points of view: that is, as a unity, in itself; and as part of a culture."[190] Thus, in such a concept, there is not just the artwork to consider, but there is

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[188] Antonio quoted in Nardini, 176.

[189] Erikson, 114.

[190] Silvano Arieti, *Creativity: the Magic Synthesis,* New York: Basic Books, 1976, 5.

also its cultural context. Similarly, there is not just the artist to consider, but also the artist's

cultural context. Likewise, hermeneutics has the phrase *sitz im leben*, literally "a sit in life" or

"life situation,"[191] which refers to the context or situation in which a work was created. Toward

developing a fuller perspective on Michelangelo and his art, the following section considers the

data of his context, including his political and religious context.

i. Political context

As stated in a previous section, Michelangelo was raised among some of the most

influential individuals of the Italian Renaissance, especially during those years when Lorenzo de'

Medici—Lorenzo the Magnificent—took the adolescent artist into his home and under his wing.

Lorenzo himself was the *de facto* ruler of Florence, but his Medici relatives left their mark on

that era like perhaps no other family. Later, as an adult, Michelangelo was well-acquainted with

many fellow artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, but he also knew important

Renaissance figures in other fields; for instance, "documents of the time clearly show that"

Michelangelo and Machiavelli were "well acquainted and frequently in contact."[192] Also, during

that part of his teen years while Lorenzo the Magnificent was still alive, Michelangelo lived in

the palace on Via Larga, where he broke bread not only with then and future political leaders,

such as Lorenzo the Magnificent and Piero the Fatuous, but also with future religious leaders,

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[191] Translations are Elena Jones's and mine.

[192] Nardini, 78.

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such as Pope Leo X and Pope Clement VII.[193] As mentioned above, Lorenzo was known as

humanist and had Michelangelo educated in the humanities, with an emphasis on Neoplatonic

philosophy; humanism was not Michelangelo's only ideological exposure, however, as he also

encountered the fire and brimstone soteriology of Savonarola.

ii. Religious context

When Michelangelo was in his teens, the Catholic reformer Friar Girolamo Savonarola

became popular in Florence, and apparently with Michelangelo too, because reportedly

throughout Michelangelo's long life, his most consulted readings were the Bible, the verse of

Dante, and the writings of Savonarola[194]; further, and even decades after the friar was gone,

Michelangelo is said to have included him in an honored place in one of his fresco of the *Last

Judgment*.[195] Even further, Michelangelo's own brother Leonardo was among Savonarola's

inner circle, having become so active that he was almost his deputy.[196] In May of 1498 in

Florence, however, when Michelangelo was still just twenty-three, Savonarola and two of his

fellow monks were executed.[197] Also during this time, both a plague and famine struck the city,

and it was said that, "All the heads of households, from 20 to 50 years of age, died, and not the

youths and the women."[198] It is unlikely that "all" the heads of household died, but this gives a

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[193] Nardini, 183-184.

[194] Ibid., 115.

[195] Ibid., 133.

[196] Ibid., 37. Here, Nardini writes "Lionardo," but "Leonardo" is a usual alternative spelling.

[197] Ibid., 48.

[198] Ibid., 46.

sense of the times during which the Florentines executed Savonarola and his fellow monks. To give a further sense of the times, here is a description of their execution—and caveat lector, the following sentence includes some gory details: First all three were hanged, and then the executioners "fired the powder and thus burned the structure in an uproar of crackling and flares, and in a few hours they were burned, so that their arms and legs fell off in pieces; and as parts of the bodies remained sticking to the chains, stones were thrown at them to make them fall. . . ."[199] Michelangelo, however, did not witness this, as he was, at that time, quarrying marble for his first and most famous Pietà, the *Vatican Pietà*.[200] [201] Thus the same year that Michelangelo's apparently favorite preacher was executed, Michelangelo was beginning to work on a sculpture of an executed Jesus Christ, the first known time he had ever explored this particular theme.

Michelangelo lived long enough, nearly eighty-nine years, to have had the potential for experiencing major changes in the culture around him; Michelangelo was a self-professed Catholic, and Catholicism was undergoing reform. Consider, for instance, the sculpture mentioned in the previous paragraph, the *Vatican Pietà*, which Michelangelo created slightly before the beginning of the sixteenth century. By the time he sculpted the *Rondanini Pietà* in the mid-sixteenth century, Michelangelo was more than half a century older and living in a cultural context that was different as well.

Sixteenth century Christianity was the era of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, and during this time, Michelangelo's role was complex. At the inception

[199] Nardini, 48 and 182.

[200] The translation of Nardini's text, by Catherine Frost, actually says Michelangelo was quarrying for the "*Deposition*" instead of the "*Pietà*," but this is apparently just a mistranslation based on what was presumably Nardini's iconological linkage between a deposition and a pietà. Supporting this is the evidence, which Nardini himself notes on page 182, that in August of the same year, Michelangelo signed the contract for this, his first "*Pietà*."

[201] Nardini, 48 and 182.

of the Protestant Reformation, the Pope was Leo X—the "little Cardinal," who was a reputedly

plump and affable man, née Giovanni de' Medici, with whom Michelangelo had lived at the

palace on Via Larga [202]—and when he acceded to the throne in 1513, the Vatican coffers were

relatively empty; so, in 1517, Leo X promoted the practice of granting indulgences.[203] That same

year in Germany, an Augustinian monk and teacher of theology and philosophy at the University

of Wittenberg, Martin Luther, who objected to some questionable practices in granting

indulgences, posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of his local castle's church, a seminal

event in the Protestant Reformation.[204] In Heidelberg, Luther defended his claims successfully

before five doctors of theology, and then Leo X, who had called these issues as "the bickering of

monks," excommunicated the monk.[205] Meanwhile, unlike Raphael who was more of a confidant

to Leo X, Michelangelo remained relatively aloof from these Church matters during this period,

as he was quarrying for marble for what was to be a massive and expensive tomb.

Here, Michelangelo's role is complex: On the one hand and as mentioned in the previous

section, throughout his life Michelangelo displayed great interest in the early Catholic reformer

Savonarola's work and was further connected through Michelangelo's brother's close

involvement with the friar's cause; on the other hand, Michelangelo's grandest and most

lucrative commissions came from the Church, and many of the Protestant Reformers' strongest

objections stemmed from policy of selling indulgences, which had been designed to bail out the

Church's ailing budget. Still, in the cinquecento, the Church was the greatest benefactor, and

even then, Michelangelo was considered one often greatest living artists; furthermore, the

[202] Nardini, 103 and 107.

[203] Ibid., 103 and 107-108.

[204] Ibid., 108.

[205] Ibid., 109.

Church was a powerful benefactor, and refusing a Pope had already proved difficult and dangerous for Michelangelo in his younger years, as illustrated in the troublesome incident, also mentioned in the previous section, when Michelangelo had a disagreement with Pope Julius II, fled Rome, and was ultimately unable to find safe harbor elsewhere in Italy. So, Leo X instituted the sale of indulgences to fill of the Church coffers, and Michelangelo's projects were among the Church's many expenses; nevertheless, many of the popes themselves had chosen to commission the artist, and even is Michelangelo had wanted to avoid taking the Church's commissions—of which there is also no evidence at that time—there is ample evidence that refusing a Pope has already proven to be difficult thing for the artist. So, again, Michelangelo's role at the inception of the Protestant Reformation was complex.

Years later, beginning in the mid-1530s, Michelangelo's growing friendship with Vittoria Colonna exposed him to her circle of friends, many of whom were sympathetic to—and eventually some of whom became openly supportive of—Luther's cause.[206] Also, as mentioned above, Michelangelo was a close reader of Savonarola's work, and although Savonarola and Luther differed in many ways, originally both figures shared the similar goal of Church reform. Michelangelo participated in the meetings with Vittoria Colonna and her friends, which became the lay equivalent of Ignatius of Loyola's Company of Jesus—later known as the Society of Jesus or more commonly, the Jesuit order—a major part the Catholic Reformation.[207]

Still, even at this time, Michelangelo remained close enough to the Pope—and by this time it was Paul III Farnese—that the artist is reported to have said the following about their

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[206] Nardini, 138.

[207] Nardini, 138; and Robert Mode, Nikolaus Newman's notes on the lecture, "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 4/20/04.

relationship to the Portuguese painter Francesco de Hollanda: "I must tell you that my great

calling at times gives me such license that, while I am speaking with the Pope, I use with him

maximum frankness and thoughtlessly I put my felt hat on my head. . . ." Thus, he and Paul III

maintained this level of familiarity.

Also, despite Michelangelo's lay involvement in Catholic reform and even despite any

possible sympathies he may have had with Luther's teachings, the evidence points to

Michelangelo having maintained adherence to Roman Catholic Church doctrine. For instance,

when his younger brother Giovan Simone died, Michelangelo asked about "what kind of death

he had made, and if he had died confessed and communicated with all of the things ordered by

the Church . . . because if he had . . . I would feel less passion."[208] Finally, Michelangelo himself

was eventually buried, in Santa Croce, which is Franciscan[209], an order that began with its own

attempts at Church reform, as exemplified by its founder's chosen poverty, but which ultimately

was integrated in the mainstream of Roman Catholicism. According to the official site for Santa

Croce, this church was also involved with aspects of the Counter-Reformation:

> Later, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Santa Croce was involved in an
> architectural and iconographic programme inspired by the principle of the
> Counter-Reformation, involving the erection of large altars embellished with
> paintings by the greatest Tuscan artisans of the time.[210]

The Counter-Reformation was a movement within the bounds of the Catholicism, and similarly,

Michelangelo was born and died within the bounds of his religion, even to the extent that the

Pope wanted him buried in Saint Peter's— arguably the central bastion of the faith, a building

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[208] Nardini, 153.

[209] Thanks to Bob Mode for pointing me in this direction. Q.v.,
http://www.santacroce.firenze.it/english/storia%5Farte/sguardo/

[210]http://www.santacroce.firenze.it/english/storia%5Farte/sguardo/

Michelangelo himself had helped design, and reputed burial place of the Apostle St. Peter, bellwether of the Church.[211]

Still, it is noteworthy that even while he was well and then again when he was ill, reportedly just two days before his death,[212] Michelangelo expressed his wish to be buried in his native Florence, instead of in or near the Holy See. Thus, upon his death, his nephew carried out these wishes by smuggling the body out of Rome and into Florence by concealing his coffin in a "bale of wool" and transporting it along with "bales of merchandise."[213]

iii. Selected global context

The previous several paragraphs, then, are selective survey of Michelangelo's context in his regions of Italy. To gain a slightly wider perspective of the time and frame it in the historical record, it may be helpful to consider who was alive and what was happening elsewhere. As this dissertation is written primarily for the North American and English-language context, here are a few germane people and events from Michelangelo's era. What follows, then, is an extremely small sample of world events that occurred during Michelangelo's life.

For instance, the year that Michelangelo's *de facto* adoptive father Lorenzo de' Medici died, 1492,[214] is the same year the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus made his first voyage from Spain to what he proclaimed as a region of Asia near India, but which was actually the

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[211] Nardini, 178.

[212] Ibid.

[213] Ibid., 179.

[214] Ibid., 19.

Bahamas.[215] Speaking of Spain in 1492, that is when and where Columbus' provision contractor

Amerigo Vespucci[216]—also an explorer and cartographer now most known as America's

namesake—who was from Michelangelo's native Florence, had just arrived in Seville to work in

a firm with close ties to the Medici family.[217] Earlier, upon the death of Vespucci's father, the

extended Medici family had taken Vespucci under their wing as a steward to live with them in

Florence,[218] [219] and even though Vespucci was much older than Michelangelo when he was taken

into the care of the extended family, this is somewhat reminiscent of Michelangelo's being taken

into their care. Further, not only was Vespucci connected in this way to Michelangelo's *de facto*

adoptive family, but when America's namesake was a young man of about nineteen, he was

painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio, the master under whom Michelangelo was apprenticed.[220] [221]

In England, meanwhile, Michelangelo's closest well-known contemporary may have

been Sir Thomas More, who was born in 1478, just three years after Michelangelo, but who died,

however, in 1535, twenty-nine years before Michelangelo.[222] As stated above, Michelangelo

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[215] Galen Rowell, *North America the Beautiful* (Vercelli, Italy: White Star, S.p.A., 2006), 202.

[216] Ibid.

[217] *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v., "Amerigo Vespucci," at http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15384b.htm

[218] Ibid.

[219] This was through Lorenzo Pierfrancesco de' Medici, who was a cousin of Michelangelo's *de facto* adoptive father, Lorenzo de' Medici, also know as Lorenzo "the Magnificent." Besides taking Amerigo Vespucci into his palace as a steward, this same cousin, Lorenzo Pierfrancesco de' Medici, protected Michelangelo in a time after Lorenzo "the Magnficent"s death.
(See http://en/wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_di_Pierfranceso_de'_Medici for the information in this footnote only.)

[220] http://www.notablebiographies.com/Tu-We/Vespucci-Amerigo.html

[221] Vespucci's portrait is included in Ghirlandaio's *Madonna della Misericordia*.
(See http://en/wikipedia.org/wiki/Amerigo_Vespucci for the information in this footnote only.)

[222] In what follows in this section, the years of the dates can be found in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, 1988). Where given, the particular days of the year are cited separately.

died on February 18th of 1564[223]; in that same year, on or near the 23rd of that same month in

England, the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe was born, therefore just five or so

days after Michelangelo died.[224] Only two months later, April 23rd of that very same year is the

estimated day that William Shakespeare was born.[225] So, Michelangelo was last working on the

Rondanini Pietà—and died—in the late winter, and about two months later in the springtime,

Shakespeare was born.[226]

Not so many years later, in 1572, John Donne, who like Michelangelo also wrote highly

devotional religious poetry, was born as well, and bringing the connections full-circle, Donne

was a descendant of Michelangelo's contemporary in England, as mentioned above, Sir Thomas

More.[227]

c. Facts about Michelangelo's art historical context: icono*logy* of the pietà theme

The art historian Laurie Schneider Adams describes iconology as "the approach related to

iconography [that] refers to the study of the larger program (if any) to which the work

belongs,"[228] and this section of the dissertation does just that: It places the pietà them within a

chronologically longer art historical context.[229] As a visual theme, the pietà has an elaborate

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[223] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., lvi.

[224] *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* vol. 1, 7th ed., ed. M.H. Abrams (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 970.

[225] Ibid., 1026.

[226] Some of the previous pages include reworked material from work submitted in graduate school.

[227] Norton, 1233.

[228] Laurie Schneider Adams, *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996), 37.

[229] This chapter is a revision of the work I submitted to Professor Ljubica D. Popovich in the fall of 2005.

iconological history. It is a history that reaches across centuries, across textual and visual

sources, and across the East and the West and finds expression in much of Christian art.

Pietà is an Italian word that means "pity" or "mercy." In painting and sculpture, "pietà"

refers to a depiction of the dead Jesus, who is with the Virgin Mary, or, less frequently, with

some angels, and even less frequently, with St. John. The pietà is thematically a derivation of

representations of Christ's deposition from the cross—known as the "Deposition"—and Mary's

lamentation over her dead son—known as the "Lamentation."[230] Often, the pietà is thematically

very simple: consisting only of Jesus on the Virgin's lap,[231]

The pietà theme developed from the deposition theme and became popular in Italy as

private Italian devotional practices flourished.[232] The pietà theme was not, however, popular or

well-known in all circles, as, for instance, the French cardinal who commissioned

Michelangelo's first pietà had to describe what he wanted in the composition and did not even

call it a "pietà."[233]

There is no biblical story or narrative of the pietà in the canonical Bible, but this theme

has its origins in pietistic textual devotional practices.

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[230] Peter and Linda Murray, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 391.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid.

i. Textual history of the pietà

1. Biblical sources of the pietà theme

The pietà theme—of the Virgin Mary holding her dead son—is noncanonical, although there are biblical referents for the events that surround it. In a synoptic account of the Gospels, the following biblical pericopes are relevant for this theme of "The Descent from the Cross": Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-55; and John 19:38-42.[234] Here are verses 57-61 of the Matthean passage, from the King James version of the Bible:

> When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.[235]

The other synoptic Gospel accounts vary in the telling, but the story remains similar: Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, received the body, wrapped it in a shroud, took it to the tomb, and buried the body there, with Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" both being present. The Johannine account varies the most, as it lacks the Marys and adds Nicodemus. Nowhere in these accounts is there any mention of Mary, mother of Jesus, holding her dead son.

Thus, there is little biblical support for the pietà theme, which is, therefore, noncanonical. This popular iconic theme has its origins outside the Bible.

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[234] Ljubica D. Popovich, "Christ," class handout for AHST 215, "Christian Images," Fall 2005, Vanderbilt University.

[235] Mt. 27:57-61, *The Holy Bible, King James Version* (Nashville: National, 1978), 1028.

2. Apocryphal sources of the pietà theme

Dramatic depictions of Mary mourning the death of her son have some textual support in apocryphal sources.   One of these apocryphal sources is the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which describes how the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Joseph of Arimathea all grieved over the loss of Jesus. The Virgin grieves: "This sword now pierces my soul. O my sweet child, who will now silence my tears? Only if thou risest after three days, as thou hast said thou wilt."[236] Here, there is some textual support—albeit, apocryphal textual support—for Mary grieving over her dead son.[237]

Often the words of Mary said to her dead son were sung.[238] A later variation is the 13th century song, *Stabat Mater*, which is a song that refers more particularly to Mary's wailing words at and around the crucifixion.[239] More generally, such songs are a type of threnody (*threnos*), which is a song of mourning, grief, or lament.[240]

There is another pietistic quotation relevant to the pietà theme of Mary cradling her dead son in her lap as a child. The quotation comes from an author whom the art historian Gertrud Schiller quotes but leaves unnamed, and the author writes in the voice of Mary, "As a child thou hast often slept and dreamed on my lap, now thou liest here in the sleep of death." If these

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[236] *Gospel of Nicodemus* quoted in Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 2 (Greenwich, CT: Lund Humphries, 1971). 175; see also, Gabriel Millet, *L'iconographie de l'Evangile: recherches sur l'iconogrpahie de l"evangile aux XIVe, Xve et XVIe siecles d'apres les monuments de Mistra, de Macedoine et de Mont-Athos*, 2nd ed (Paris: Editions E. de Boccard, 1967), 489.

[237] Schiller, 175.

[238] Ibid.

[239] Ibid., 179.

[240] E.g., Millet, 489, ff.

writings are contemporary with the early medieval writings of George of Nicodemia, they predate the later medieval popularity of the iconic theme of the pietà.

Given the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the 9th century writing of George of Nicodemia, and Schiller's unnamed pietistic author, several sources of textual representations of the pietà theme predate the visual representations of the theme by at least several centuries.

3. A practical devotional source of the pietà theme

Like contemporaneous sculptural groups of Jesus and John—the so-called *Johannesmine*—the very first visual representations of the pietà has its origins in a German convent. The theme is said to have arisen from the German nun St. Methilde's contemplation of Christ and his suffering during the Transfiguration, which is the spiritual transfiguration of Christ described, for instance, in the Gospel of Matthew 17,1-9. According to her own account, St. Methilde of Hackeborn, 1241-1289, was spending one afternoon meditating on the wounds of Christ as he lay in the Virgin's lap. This afternoon happened to be a Good Friday, considered an appropriate day to meditate on this time of the Passion. Again, according St. Methilde's account, at the Virgin Mary's behest, received by St. Methilde in prayer, the nun was encouraged to meditate not on the Virgin's lament but instead on "adoration of the Redeemer."[241]

The word *Vesperbild* is derived from its association with the Vespers, or evening mass, on Good Friday.[242] During worship services, these images of the *Vesperbilde* sat on secondary altars near the congregation.[243]

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[241] Schiller, 179.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Ibid.

Iconologically, this theme of the pietà was an innovation—a new theme in visual art. When it first came into existence, the name Germans gave it a name—*Vesperbild*—that still applies to the German pietà images. These images have their strongest origin in the devotional practices of one German nun.

ii. Visual history of the pietà

1. *Andachtsbild*

An *Andachtsbild* is an extra-biblical devotional image, popular in 14th century Germany.[244] In modern German, the word *Andacht* usually means "devotion," or, in the context of a church service, "prayers,"[245] and more secular definition of the word is, "the concentration of thoughts on a certain thing,"[246]; the word *Bild* usually means "a painting" or "a picture,"[247] but it can also mean, "a scene that one sees in a certain situation," "an idea of something that one can imagine," and can even mean "a metaphor."[248] Thus an *Andachtsbild* is literally a "devotional picture," but the modern semantic range includes "a concentration of one's thoughts on a certain scene that one sees in a certain situation," or even "a concentration of one's thoughts on a certain

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[244] Murray, *Oxford*, 16-17.

[245] The previous two definitions come from the *Collins Gem German Dictionary* (Glasgow: HarperCollins and Omnia Books, 1999), s.v. "Andacht," 14.

[246] This is my wife Elena's translation from the entry, s.v. "Andacht," in the German dictionary *Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (Berlin: Langenscheidt, 2002), 42.

[247] The previous two definitions come from the *Collins Gem German Dictionary*, s.v. "Bild," 55.

[248] Translations are Elena Jones's with additional reference to *Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch* , s.v. "Bild," 168.

metaphor."[249] The iconic history of such images comes from mystical writers of Northern Europe, and Italian and Byzantine artworks of the 12th and 13th centuries.[250]

Unlike an icon, which is supposed to holy by being a reproduction of the divine original (such as the *acheiropoietos* type), a devotional image is meant to be venerable in itself. As such, the formal elements of an icon's composition may remain relatively static over several centuries, but the form of a devotional image may be more dynamic. In other words, there is more variety and change among the types of these *Andachtsbilde*.[251]

The pietà is one type of *Andachtsbild*. Other types include other scenes from the Passion, such as the Man of Sorrows, the Sorrows of Mary, and the Dead Christ in the Tomb, but the thematic focus here is the pietà, which has its own particular epigenesis, which is described below, in the "Theories on Michelangelo's art historical context" section of this dissertation, using the value-laden description of Schiller, et alii. [252]

2. Michelangelo and the pietà theme

As suggested in previous sections, Michelangelo Buonarroti worked with the pietà theme several times over the course of his long life. His began his first pietà when he was still a young man in his mid-twenties, and worked on his final pietà until just few days before his death at the age of eighty-nine. The former is his *Vatican (*or *Roman) Pietà* and the latter is his *Rondanini Pietà*.

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[249] Conflations mine.

[250] Murray, *Oxford*, 16-17.

[251] Murray, *Oxford*, 17.

[252] Ibid.

Compositionally, the *Vatican Pietà* is highly consistent with the German *Vesperbild* composition described above: there are just the two figures of Jesus and Mary; Jesus' lies on Mary's lap; his head is to her right. This *Vatican Pietà* was his first and most famous pietà.[253]

3. Iconology of the *Vatican Pietà*

Michelangelo sculpted his first pietà when he was still a young man in his twenties. He began the sculpture in 1498 and completed it in 1499 or 1500. Located in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, this marble sculpture stands five feet, eight and a half inches tall. Modern scholars often distinguish it from Michelangelo's other pietàs by referring to his first pietà as the *Vatican Pietà,* the *Rome Pietà,* or *Roman Pietà*. Many people call this sculpture simply "the *Pietà*."[254] (Figure 2, page 21)

Being a pietà, this sculpture depicts the Mary holding Jesus before his entombment. She is cradling him like an overgrown child in her lap. Pictures of Mary holding Jesus—adult or infant—predate the *Vatican Pietà* by well over a millennium. One tradition in Eastern Christianity maintains that St. Luke the Evangelist painted three icons of the Mary. Two of these icons portray the Virgin and child.[255] As in these icons, depictions of Mary cradling or even nursing her lively infant son are common.[256]

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[253] With the *Vatican Pietà*, Michelangelo apparently popularized the pietà theme, as after this work appeared, many more artists began to explore theme; the pietàs that came after Michelangelo, however, are outside the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, Titian is notable for having also created a *Pietà*, and thanks to Prof. Robert Mode in Vanderbilt's Art History Department for referring me to this work.

[254] Frederick Hartt, *Michelangelo's Three Pietàs* (Japan: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 25.

[255] Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon: Volume 1,* Anthony Gythiel, trans. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1992), 60-62.

[256] Some of the previous paragraphs include reworked material from work submitted in graduate school at Vanderbilt.

4. Iconology of the *Rondanini Pietà*

The *Vatican Pietà* and the *Rondanini Pietà* are generations apart. The latter sculpture comes literally several generations later: at least half a century. Its composition is very different from the *Vesperbild* type. In the *Rondanini Pietà,* there are still just the two figures of Mary and Jesus—that much remains the same—but Mary stands and holds Jesus upright, with both figures facing the viewer.

Although the *Rondanini Pietà* was one of Michelangelo's major works, it remains relatively unknown. As recently as a hundred years ago, many art historians thought Michelangelo's final work of art was gone.[257] In 1952, it reemerged more publicly and was then sold to the Municipality of Milan, where it is now displayed in the Castello Sforzesco.[258] Because the sculpture had been relatively lost for most of the many centuries of its existence, its iconological impact has been limited mostly to the latter half of the 20th century and now, the beginning of the 21st century. Still, several modern artists, such as the German-born Israeli painter and sculptor Igael Tumarkin have taken up the iconographic theme, creating their own versions of the *Rondanini Pietà*.[259]

d. Facts about Michelangelo and the *Rondanini Pietà*

As suggested in the introduction, this dissertation uses Michelangelo as an extended case study, and the dissertation considers one sculpture in particular, the *Rondanini Pietà*, as an

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[257] Some of my writing in this brief introductory section on the *Rondanini Pietà* has appeared in other papers of mine. Of the small part that I had already written, I reworked and edited it, so even this part is different.

[258] I do not know who orchestrated this sale to the municipality.

[259] An full exploration of such modern pieces that have been clearly influenced or even named according to the *Rondanini Pietà* is outside the scope of this dissertation.

extended example in the case study. In the interest of clarity, then, here are some facts about the

latter sculpture.

The *Rondanini Pietà*, now on permanent display at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, is a

marble sculpture that stands at 195 centimeters, or approximately six feet plus four and three-

quarters inches.[260] It depicts two figures—commonly identified as the dead Jesus and his mother

holding him upright from behind. A rough scalar estimation made for the purposes of this

dissertation is this: If measured separately and straightened to a fully upright posture, Mary

would stand at approximately 155 cm or about five-foot-one, and Jesus would stand at

approximately 170 cm or about five-foot-seven, thus putting both of them in a range of

potentially life-sized representations. The marble is crescent-shaped, and, although most of

Michelangelo's marbles came from the Carrara quarry in Tuscany, the exact quarry from which

this particular marble comes is unknown, while some scholars say the marble "came from an

ancient marble column."[261] Until having a recent thorough cleaning, it was weathered from

being exposed to the elements over the centuries, at least part of which time it had been standing

between columns in the courtyard of the Rondanini family, from which it derives its name. Like

the majority of Michelangelo's sculptures, the *Rondanini Pietà* remains unfinished, which is

evident from the chisel marks (known as "*gradina*") that cover most of it. [262] [263] The sculpture

was unfinished at the time of his death and was to be his final pietà, and according to various

accounts, the eighty-nine year old Michelangelo—moribund but still spry—worked on this pietà

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[260] Tartuferi, 75.

[261] George Lise quoted in Paolo Monti, *La Pietà Rondanini di Michelangelo Buonarroti* (Milano, Peppi Battaglini, 1977), ii.

[262] Liebert, 222-223.

[263] The previous paragraphs include some reworked material from work submitted in graduate school at Vanderbilt University.

at a feverish pace, working late into the nights up to a few days before his death in 1564.[264] As such, this sculpture was his final artistic statement, his swan song, and after Michelangelo's death, what became of the sculpture was almost entirely unknown.

i. Contemporaneous accounts

Until recently, actually, accounts of the work have been few and far between. Even while Michelangelo was still alive, there was almost no record of it, except for one document dated August 21, 1561—a few years before Michelangelo's death on February 18, 1564—states that Michelangelo gave his servant Antonio two marble sculptures, including one of "Christ dead."[265] The accounts that follow, however, that even if it was a gift to his servant, Michelangelo continued to work on the piece.

After Michelangelo's death, news traveled quickly and the pope spared no time in taking an inventory of the artist's estate, which, despite his wealth, included very few things but among which a "statue was found begun for a Christ with another figure above, attached together, roughed in and left unfinished," which matches the *Rondanini Pietà*.[266]

Then, in ensuing months and years, as contemporary biographers gathered accounts of the artist's final days, they received accounts that suggested that Michelangelo was working feverishly on what became known as the *Rondanini Pietà* in the last few days before his death. In letter dated March 17 of the following year, Daniele da Volterra wrote the renowned renaissance biographer Giorgio Vasari and described the aforementioned work as a "Pietà in the

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[264] Papini, 499.

[265] Fiorio, 14.

[266] Ibid., 13.

arms of Our Lady."[267]   In describing the few works in the inventory of Michelangelo's house

upon his death, Michelangelo's disciple Daniele da Volterra also describes a drawing for "a Pietà

which he had begun, from which only the attitudes of the figures can be understood, since it was

left unfinished."[268]   In fact, the judge and notary sent by the pope had also cataloged ten drawings

in the room in which Michelangelo died, including "one in large format, 'a drawing of a

Pietà.'"[269]   Thus, Michelangelo's few belongings included two things that his contemporaries

described as a drawing a drawing and a sculpture of a pietà.

Writing to Michelangelo's nephew Leonardo in a letter dated June 11, 1564, Daniele da

Volterra sheds more light on Michelangelo's final days.[270]   Nearly eighty-nine, the artist was

working "two days by the fire, and three in bed," where he became ill and died.[271]   Daniele adds

that, "I do not remember whether in everything I wrote I mentioned that Michelangelo worked

all through the Saturday before the Sunday of Carnival and worked standing up, studying that

group of the Pietà."[272]

Giorgio Vasari, for whom Daniele da Volterra was considered to be a prime source of

information in writing about Michelangelo's last days, adds another element to the story. After,

as mentioned in a section above, Michelangelo had partially destroyed another Pietà—now

known often as the *Florentine Pietà*—"it was then necessary to find another block of marble so

that he could spend some time every day carving away." What Vasari then adds supports the

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[267] Fiorio, 13.

[268] Ibid.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Ibid., 13-14.

[272] Ibid., 14.

idea that "another block of marble" was the *Rondanini Pietà*, as Vasari writes, "So another piece of marble was brought, where another Pietà had already been roughed out, different from that one [that is, the *Florentine Pietà*] and much smaller."[273] This fits also because the *Rondanini Pietà*, which is 195 centimeters tall and includes just two full figures, really is smaller than the *Florentine Pietà*, which is 226 centimeters tall and includes four full figures.[274]

ii. Centuries of silence

Following the time shortly after Michelangelo's death, there was almost total silence about what became known as the *Rondanini Pietà* for hundreds of years. In 1652, almost a century after previous word of the sculpture, there is an oblique reference to a Pietà by Michelangelo, different from his first two, which could very well have been the *Rondanini*.[275] An even less reliable reference comes then almost a hundred years later in 1739 in the vague description of a "petite et admirable" group of *Joseph of Arimathea Supporting the Dead Christ* attributed to Michelangelo.[276] Given the unfinished nature of the *Rondanini Pietà,* it is conceivable that one can see the Mary figure as Joseph, but in addition to this departure from the

Figure 4   The *Rondanini Pietà*

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[273] Fiorio, 14.

[274] Tartuferi, 38.

[275] Fiorio, 14.

[276] Ibid.

common reception of the sculpture, the 1739 description is too brief to apply it reliably to the

Rondanini Pietà.[277] In 1807 the Pietà quietly resurfaced, this time in an inventory of the

collection of the Rondanini family[278] from which the sculpture now derives its name, but even

when it reemerged, it was grossly undervalued, it was considered to have been the work of

unknown artist—and this, despite its received attribution to Michelangelo—and it was

misidentified as a Deposition from the Cross rather than a Pietà.[279] At this time, at least, there is

no scholarly dispute about whether this sculpture was the one that later became known as the

Rondanini Pietà because the piece remained in the courtyard of the Palazzo Rondanini well into

the twentieth century, when it became known to art history world at large. How the piece wound

up with the Rondaninis, however, remains unknown and is the subject of current research; it is

known, at least, that it came to the family only after 1744, when there was an exhaustive

inventory of their collection that leaves no mention of anything like the Pietà.[280] Michelangelo's

last work sat there, however in the courtyard, exposed many decades of weather, and according

to one twentieth century observer—with, perhaps, a flair for hyperbole—the sculpture "was

continuously exposed to the weather, so that it had become covered with lichens and took on a

greenish tinge on rainy days."[281]

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[277] Fiorio, 14.

[278] Perhaps interestingly, at that time the correct spelling of this well-known Roman family was actually slightly different—"Rondinini"—but the name later changed. (Fiorio 14, 38 endnote) For the sake of clarity though, here and throughout, this dissertation uses the modern spelling.

[279] Fiorio, 14.

[280] Ibid., 16 and 38, endnote.

[281] Ibid., 41, endnote.

iii. Resurfacing

In the early twentieth century, the sculpture resurfaced, this time more publicly. It is noteworthy that the *Rondanini Pietà* makes a full appearance in the history of art only less than a century ago, long after Michelangelo sculpted it, leaving a relative lacuna of three and a half centuries.[282] When the sculpture did finally come on to the art scene, it did so amid some controversy and dispute.

During the nineteenth century, it remained undervalued and questionably attributed, but shortly after the fin de siècle, its attribution, if not its full value, became clearer: The scholarly community became aware of the piece and mostly accepted it as the last part of Michelangelo's long and diverse opus, so it was as if the lost work was rediscovered, though even then, the reception was without fanfare. For the first half of the twentieth century, the sculpture remained in private hands, but the public was allowed to see it according to a limited schedule.[283] In 1947, the owner of the Pietà died, leaving four sons, three of whom wanted to keep it in the family and one of whom wanted to sell it for his share of the profits.[284] For five years, a legal battle raged for reasons too labyrinthine to discuss here[285]—for even at that time, selling a Michelangelo, even a grossly undervalued one, was a legally complicated thing to do. There was even some talk of Americans acquiring the work—once by President Truman's envoy to the Holy See and once by a group of American Catholics interested in gifting it to Pius XII—but by 1952, it was sold to Milan for the equivalent of $160,000, a relatively small sum even then and also,

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[282] Fiorio, 28.

[283] Ibid., 16.

[284] Ibid.

[285] Those who care to know more of the details are advised to consult Fiorio's explication of the matter and her extensive bibliography.

incidentally, less than half of what the Americans had offered.[286]

Still, the lost Pietà was continuing to resurface, gaining a small degree of notoriety amid the controversy. Still, the work remained generally undervalued. One critic called it a *salma* or "corpse."[287] Further, between 1952 and 1955 there was contention about where to place the sculpture--with debate that got so heated that there was talk of the "rape of Michelangelo" and "Pilate reincarnated!"—but the sculpture found its home finally in Milan's Castello Sforzesco, where it resides today.[288] As mentioned above, an interesting side note to the current location of the *Rondanini Pietà* is that it is a stone's throw from the Castello Sforzesco's courtyard in which French archers destroyed a large clay horse sculpted by his occasional rival Leonardo da Vinci, whom Michelangelo had so pointedly insulted about this statue.[289] So, the Castello Sforzesco is where the *Rondanini Pietà* has now found its most prominent home, although even to this day, there remains controversy about how best to exhibit the work.[290]

The sculpture's scholarly reception has also been fairly subdued. After the reemergence of this, Michelangelo's final work, one might have expected scholars, especially art critics and historians, to seize upon the piece as a boon to the study and interpretation of Michelangelo's life and art. As recently as a century and a half ago, the world had heard nothing about Michelangelo's final work of art for such a long time that it was considered entirely lost. Upon its rediscovery, and even though the *Rondanini Pietà* was one of Michelangelo's major works, it

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[286] Fiorio, 39, endnote.

[287] Ibid., 19.

[288] Ibid., 16-20.

[289] Robert Mode, notes on the lecture, "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 1/29/04; and Nardini, 64.

[290] Q.v., François Burkhardt , "Workshop Michelangelo," *Domus* , no. 824, (Mar 2000), p. 89-96. This is a report on the three day workshop about the possibility of moving the *Rondanini Pietà*. The report includes several proposals about of how it might best be displayed.

still remained relatively little known. Oddly, in the decades since its rediscovery, there has been little critical work on the *Rondanini Pietà*.

iv. Recent news

In sum, scholarship on the *Rondanini Pietà* has been relatively scattered and sparse, making the facts about it difficult to compile—that is, until recently, when no later than June 2003[291], the City of Milan along with several organizations and insitutions came together on project to do some "maintenance work" on the sculpture that had become so weather-beaten and shrouded in mystery over the centuries.[292] The project, however, went beyond mere maintenance and became a major project to research, refurbish, and describe the Pietà. The findings of this major project became available as a book in Italian in 2004 and English in 2005 under the guidance and primary authorship of the then director of Milan's *Civiche Raccolte d'Arte Antica*, Maria Teresa Fiorio.[293] This book and the project that inspired it mark something of a milestone in the history of Michelangelo's final sculpture. Not only did a team of experts research and compile their findings, but they also cleaned the sculpture meticulously. Further, her book provides more facts about the Pietà than any other because it is, so far, the most complete recent collection of information on the piece; thus, this section of the dissertation in particular relies upon the work of her and her many colleagues who researched and restored the sculpture so meticulously. Though the main phase of the latter project is now complete, there are still

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[291] Fiorio, 110.

[292] Ermanno A. Arslan in Fiorio, 9.

[293] Ibid.

ancillary ongoing projects associated with it, so the history of the *Rondanini Pietà* remains unfinished, much like the sculpture itself.

This, then, has been overview of some of the sculpture and its history as it was known until recently. Further, here ends the review of germane facts, especially concerning Michelangelo's biography and context that relate to his late-life development. The next section builds upon these facts with value-laden theories from a selection of scholars.

CHAPTER III

VALUES: WHAT WE BELIEVE

a. Theories on Michelangelo and the *Rondanini Pietà*: An introduction

With a methodological orientation based on Volney Gay's "Syllabus on Methods,"[294] as stated, this dissertation is an emic attempt to understand Michelangelo's late-life development and art more deeply through a psychodynamically-informed discursive-hierarchical hermeneutic reconstruction. That is this work's method. Part of such a method that uses a hermeneutic reconstruction is that there is interpretation involved, and interpretation is value-laden. Thus, the following major part of this dissertation explores value-laden understandings of general late-life development, Michelangelo's particular late-life development, and Michelangelo's late-life art, particularly his latest work, the *Rondanini Pietà*.

The previous major part of this dissertation—structurally, the first third of the work—introduces the subject and presents the data. The following major part of the dissertation—structurally, the middle third of the work—gives special emphasis to the value-laden understandings of established scholars, and it is the subsequent and final major part of the dissertation—structurally the final third of the work—that may break new ground; this section, however, is more closely built upon the foundation laid by theorists such as Freud, Erikson, and Winnicott. Here, then are some of their value-laden understandings, which are so fundamental to this work.

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[294] For instance, having a thesis is etic, as it is a "created," "universalized" writing structure. (The term "created" comes from Gay's "Syllabus," 12; the term "universalized" comes from Gay's lecture, Methods course, GDR 3054, 4/12/05.)

b. Theories on the psychology of the elder Michelangelo

i. General psychoanalytic underpinnings

If, in the central part of this dissertation, the value-laden understandings by established

theorists have laid the foundation for the work, then Sigmund Freud's work may be the

foundation stone. He is the first to lay the groundwork upon which many of the other theorists in

this dissertation have built. So now, we turn to Freud and the field of psychoanalysis.

1. Freud on the primary and secondary processes

Psychoanalysis, of which Sigmund Freud is a father, provides a valuable theoretical

framework for exploring the idea of the artistic process. As the artistic process is complex,

examining the dynamics of process this tends to necessitate a closer look of the subtler aspects of

the psyche. Along such lines, psychoanalysis has spent more than a century examining and re-

examining the workings of the unconscious mind, so we turn now from a survey of

Michelangelo's biographical data to a survey of psychoanalytic theory. In switching discourses,

however, it is necessary to include the language of the new discourse.[295] More precisely, it is

now important to incorporate two phrases from the language of psychoanalytic theory: "primary

process" and "secondary process."

What are the "primary process" and the "secondary process"? In brief, primary process

is our primary (primal) kind of thinking, and secondary process is our secondary (rational) kind

of thinking. Although the literature on these terms can be difficult, the psychoanalytic insights

are unique and compelling. With the hope of gaining a greater understanding of a few dynamics

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[295] Cf., Volney P. Gay's work on the incommensurability of discourses.

of the artistic process, this dissertation now defines and considers the terms "primary process" and "secondary process" much more fully.

Early on, Sigmund Freud discovered that our unconscious thoughts are governed by different rules than our conscious thoughts. This difference is so dramatic that Ernest Jones wrote that "Freud's revolutionary contribution to psychology was not so much his demonstrating the existence of an unconscious . . . as his proposition that there are two fundamentally different kinds of mental processes."[296] Freud called these two kinds of mental process the primary process and the secondary process.[297]

Freud believed that the primary process is present at birth, but the secondary process develops later with time and experience.[298] Thus Freud uses the terms "primary" and "secondary" to designate the processes' developmental chronology, not necessarily their relative importance.[299]

A century since the advent of psychoanalysis, modern psychoanalysis continues to recognize the two different kinds of thinking, and, like Freud, it still calls them the primary and secondary processes. Modern psychoanalysis, however, defines its terms more closely than Freud defined them. The chief attributes of primary process thought are "concretism, condensation, displacement, visual imagery, and symbolism." The primary process is associated with visual imagery and symbolism, which are two key aspects of art. Art is tied to the primary

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[296] Ernest Jones quoted in Phyllis Tyson and Robert L. Tyson, *Psychoanalytic Theories of Development: an Integration* (New Haven: Yale, 1990), 165.

[297] Tyson and Tyson, 165.

[298] Ibid.

[299] Ibid., 164, footnote. Italics removed.

process. Because the primary process is mostly unconscious, art is associated with these hidden aspects of the psyche.

The primary process may be mostly unconscious, but we can see it come to the surface in a variety of ways, such as "conscious and unconscious fantasy, fantasy play, day and night dreams, magical thinking, slips of the tongue, jokes, and artistic and creative activity."[300] The primary process reveals itself in "artistic and creative activity." Once again, art is associated with the primary process: a primarily hidden process.

In Freud's formulation, the primary process is "the language of the Unconscious and . . . it functions according to the pleasure principle."[301] In the "incommensurate discourse"[302] of philosophy, the medieval Scholastics distinguished art from rational thought through art's ability to be pleasing—that is, to be pleasurable.[303] In the discourse of psychoanalytic theory, however, the primary process functions according to "the pleasure principle," and art is notable for its ability to appeal to the primary process through being pleasurable. Being a partly unconscious process, however, the precise ways in which art is pleasurable remain somewhat mysterious to the one enjoying it.

The primary process serves "the unconscious inner world of subjective reality," but the secondary process serves "external reality."[304] Secondary process thought is a lot easier to notice

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[300] Tyson and Tyson, 164.

[301] Ibid., 165.

[302] Q.v., Gay, e.g., "Four Discourses and Psychology," class handout, "Post Freudian Theory and Religion," RS 234/GDR 3061, Vanderbilt University, fall, 2003.

[303] Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages,* trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale, 1986), 106.

[304] Tyson and Tyson, 173.

and describe, because it is largely conscious.[305] We notice its "rationality, order, . . . logic" and a heavy reliance on "verbal symbolism."[306] The secondary process is a developmentally later kind of thinking associated with speech.[307] The secondary process covers most verbal communication, while the primary process covers most nonverbal communication.

Even Freud emphasized that the essential difference between the primary process and the secondary process is the connection of visual images with words, which occurs only later in development with the secondary process. Freud wrote, "Thinking in pictures is, therefore, only a very incomplete form of becoming conscious."[308] In this sense, Freud favored the secondary process, which he considered to be more complete than the primary process alone. We have seen that art is a product of the primary process, but he secondary process is crucial to art as well. The primary (primal) process inspires art, but the secondary (rational) process organizes art in communicable ways. Art, like most successful mental processes, lies in equilibrium, balanced between the primary and secondary processes. Both the primary and secondary processes are necessary to art. Like the primary and secondary processes themselves, the impact of the experience of art is somewhat mysterious and somewhat manifest.[309] [310]

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[305] It is important to note, however, that secondary process thought can also be unconscious.

[306] Tyson and Tyson, 164.

[307] Ibid., 164, footnote. Italics removed.

[308] Freud (1923) quoted in Tyson and Tyson, 166.

[309] Tyson and Tyson, 166, 169-170.

[310] Some of this an edited version of my previous writing at Vanderbilt.

2. Arieti on the tertiary process

Beyond the primary and secondary processes, the late Italian-born psychoanalytic theorist Silvano Arieti proposes a "tertiary process." In *Creativity: the Magic Synthesis* (1976), Arieti writes that this third process is "a special combination of primary and secondary process mechanisms."[311] Arieti claims that creativity is the result of a kind of "magic synthesis" between primary and secondary processes, a "magic synthesis" for which he applies the phrase "tertiary process."[312] The primary process is unmediated by conscious thought, while the secondary process is conscious and deliberative, but the tertiary process is a synthesis of the primary and secondary processes.

In addition to "tertiary process," Arieti creates another helpful description when he coins the word "endocept." Related to "amorphous cognition," an "endocept" is a cognition that occurs "without being expressed in images, words, thoughts, or actions of any kind."[313] The word "endocept" is a metaphorical invention. As he acknowledges, Arieti derives the word "endocept" "from the Greek *endo*, inside."[314] The "-cept" part comes from the Latin *capere,* "to take." Thus, an endocept is something taken inside. The etymology that Arieti plays upon is also metaphorical. An endocept is part of the creative process, Arieti's proposed "tertiary process."[315]

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[311] Silvano Arieti, *Creativity: the Magic Synthesis* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 12.

[312] Arieti, 13.

[313] Arieti, 54.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Interestingly, "concept" has the same etymological origin and meaning as "endocept' (both meaning literally "that which is taken inside"), but Arieti uses "concept" and "endocept" differently. (*Webster's,* 271, 272)

Concepts such as the "tertiary process" and "endocept" are interesting to note as possible descriptions of key factors in the creative process, but given their relatively obscure nature in the annals of psychoanalytic theory and practice, this dissertation simply notes them as possibilities, without making them central concepts. The concepts in the following section are more central, especially in the later sections on depression and bipolarity. So, we turn now to a survey of one of Freud's most influential works, "Mourning and Melancholia."

4. Freud on "mourning and melancholia" with parallels in the biographical data

Further methodological considerations: This section is a reading of Sigmund Freud's seminal paper "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), particularly in light of some of Michelangelo's biographical data mentioned in previous sections. This section considers Freud's work in the order in which Freud himself presents his paper, while pointing out features of Freud's work that may seem relevant to the data on Michelangelo. The organization here is to present a small excerpt Freud's work followed by a small excerpt of Michelangelo's parallel biographical data, with Freud's work and Michelangelo's data presented in alternating segments. It is as if we were holding up two pictures, one in each hand, and looking back and forth between them: One, a portrait of a melancholic given through Freud's analysis, and the other, a portrait of Michelangelo given through his biographical data. This section lifts up these pictures for the reader to glance back and forth between them, noticing similarities and differences between the two.

There needs to be a caveat here, however, in that while looking back and forth between the portraits, the intention here is not to assert a one-to-one correspondence between the two; in other words, the point here is not to say, "Those portraits look similar, and therefore, they must

be the same exact person," or, "Michelangelo must have been a melancholic, precisely as Freud describes." While it would be all too easy to jump into psychobiographical diagnostic claims or explanations, the point here is not to assert a direct correspondence between Freud's claims and Michelangelo's life but instead to lift up potential parallels between Freud's claims and Michelangelo's life. As elsewhere in this dissertation, such parallels are intended for understanding and edification rather than diagnosis or explanation. Here, it is as if we were looking back and forth between two portraits and noticing similarities but holding back from speculations based on these similarities that the two individuals portrayed must necessarily be cousins, brothers, or even the same exact person.

The goal here is a deeper understanding, and if nothing else, comparing the portraits of Freud's melancholic to the portrait of Michelangelo encourages us to look more closely at each portrait, as if in appreciative contemplation of an artwork, noticing the details.

a. Freud on "mourning and melancholia"

Freud's caveat

Freud begins "Mourning and Melancholia" with his own caveat: a "warning against any over-estimation of the value of our conclusions."[316] The irony of this warning is that Freud's work in general—and this work in particular—has been so influential on psychoanalytic theory.

To explain his primary reason for including his caveat, Freud cites the broadness of the term "melancholia," which may refer to cases that are psychogenic and/or somatic. Even today, the debate still continues as to whether or not depression—the modern cognate to

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[316] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Psychodynamic Understanding of Depression: The Meaning of Despair,* edited by Willard Gaylin (New York: J. Aronson, 1983), 50.

melancholia—is primarily a chemical imbalance (and hence, "somatic"). Freud, however, focuses upon psychogenic cases of melancholia.

The "-genic" aspect of psychogenic melancholia suggests that causality is important to Freud and his science. Using Volney Gay's terminology, psychogenesis is part of "causal theory."[317] To inquire into the psycho*genesis* of melancholia is to inquire into its causality, which is part of causal theory. Even the causal theory Freud uses is not necessarily simplistic, because in the caveat mentioned above, Freud drops any claim to the "general validity" of his causal theories regarding melancholia.[318]

Although causal theory plays a role in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud also integrates "clinical theory" into his paper. [319] Freud integrates clinical theory in distilling and reflecting upon his clinical observations.

By avoiding simplistic causal theory and by including clinical theory, Freud's presentation of melancholia sidesteps the kind of simplistic causal arguments Gay warns against in his "tomato speech." In his tomato speech, Gay explains how causal explanations about the growth of a tomato, may include long lists of causes (even opposing causes) that most people can accept. The sun and the soil and a dozen or so other causes make obvious contributions to the growth and development of a tomato. Which cause is the true cause? They all may be. Because tomato growth is nonhuman and morally neutral, the causal theory of a tomato may be comfortably complex.[320]

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[317] Volney P. Gay, class handout, "Critical Issues in Psychotherapy: Causal theory, clinical theory, technique," spring 2004.

[318] Freud, 50.

[319] Gay, class handout, "Critical Issues in Psychotherapy: Causal theory, clinical theory, technique," spring 2004.

[320] Gay, class notes, REL 3755, "Critical Issues in Psychotherapy: The Borderline Personality Organization," spring 2004.

The causal theory of the mind, however, is rarely so comfortably complex. When the mind is the issue at hand, causal theory often falls into dyadic explanations of causes. A human mind may be the result of parenting, genetic hardwiring, and dozens of other obvious causes. Which cause is the true cause? It could be scarring on the brain, it could be emotional intelligence, or it could be rickets. What matters most is that there is *one* explanation, however simplistic this one explanation may be.[321]

To his credit, Freud avoids the simplicity Gay warns against in his "tomato speech." Freud presents a more complex set of causal theories, and he also presents some clinical theory. Similarly, analyses of Michelangelo and his art may also avoid oversimplification.

"Environmental influences"

After the caveat mentioned above, Freud continues his "Mourning and Melancholia" with the following observation: "The correlation of melancholia and mourning seems justified by the general picture of the two conditions."[322] The two conditions of mourning and melancholia have so many similarities that it makes sense to correlate them. These similarities include their apparent causal factors, including influences from the child's proximate environment. Freud claims that "the exciting causes due to environmental influences are, so far as we can discern them at all, the same for both conditions."[323] If both conditions have the same observable causes, then correlating mourning and melancholia may make sense.

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[321] Gay, class notes, "Critical Issues in Psychotherapy: The Borderline Personality Organization."

[322] Freud, 51.

[323] Ibid.

Freud writes of "the exciting causes due to environmental influences"; in terms of these factors, what, then, in the portrait of Michelangelo given through his biographical data is most parallel to the portrait of the melancholic given through Freud's criteria? In this case, we are looking for biographical data parallel to environmental influences that excite psychodynamic responses, such as anxiety driven defenses. Selecting the data is itself a matter of judgment, but here is a brief review of Michelangelo's early childhood difficulties:

1) Shortly after birth, Michelangelo was taken from his biological mother placed with a wet-nurse, who was the wife of a stonemason. [324]

2) Probably having had to nurse many children who would then be taken from her, the wet-nurse may or may not have been emotionally distant.

3) Around the time he was two, Michelangelo was taken from the wet-nurse, who was the only 'mother' he had known. [325]

4) He moved back in with his biological family, but these people were almost strangers to the infant Michelangelo. [326]

5) His biological mother continued to have many children, so her attention toward Michelangelo would have been divided at best. [327]

6) Michelangelo's father was physically, emotionally, and verbally abusive. [328]

7) Michelangelo's family placed a high emphasis on their aristocratic identity. Even though they did have very distant familial ties to the prominent Medicis (through Michelangelo's

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[324] Robert S. Liebert, M.D., *Michelangelo: a Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and Images* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 14.

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid., 15.

[327] Ibid.

[328] Ibid.

mother), the Buonarrotis were actually from a merchant class. Michelangelo received strong expectations of success. [329]

8) Presumably adding to his sense of being different, Michelangelo was apparently more intelligent than average.

9) Michelangelo's biological mother died when he was about six years old. [330]

These nine biographical features of Michelangelo's young life are all "environmental influences" that may have acted as "exciting causes" of Michelangelo's psychodynamic development. Knowing about this data is helpful in fleshing out a picture of Michelangelo and the parallel picture of a melancholic (and possible maniac) in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia."

"Features of melancholia"

Freud continues his paper listing the "distinguishing mental features of melancholia."[331] These are Freud's criteria:

i.   a profoundly painful dejection

ii.   cessation of interest in the outside world

iii. loss of the capacity to love

iv.   inhibition of all activity

v.   a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterances in self-reproaches and self-revilings

vi.   delusional expectation of punishment[332]

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[329] William Wallace, guest lecture in "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 3/2/04.

[330] Liebert, 15.

[331] Freud, 51.

At first, it appears that Michelangelo's data is parallel to these criteria only loosely. Contrary to criteria "ii" and "iv," Michelangelo was a prolific sculptor, painter, poet, and architect. He had an astounding seventy-five years of artistic productivity.

It is perhaps surprising at first that almost all of Michelangelo's most famous work comes from the first two decades of his seventy-five years of creativity. Michelangelo did not necessarily experience bouts of "inhibition of all activity," but he did seem to lose interest in certain types of creativity. Late in his life, Michelangelo gave up painting and sculpture almost entirely, focusing instead on architecture and poetry. Consider also that he never completed the majority of his sculptures.[333] One might speculate that Michelangelo chose to leave most of his sculptures unfinished for aesthetic reasons, or one might speculate that mood swings caused him to lose interest in these sculptures; regardless, either of these speculations would be causal claims and would, therefore, be problematic in this context. Similar to Volney Gay's assertion in his "tomato speech" and also in his "Syllabus on Methods" as described above, Michelangelo may have had any number of reasons for what he did, and "post facto," we may never know "why" he did them. Instead, as above, the goal here is to foster a deeper understanding of both the portraits of Freud's melancholic as well as the portrait of Michelangelo, lifting up some nuances of each.

Concerning Freud's diagnostic criteria "i" and "v" above, there are parallels in Michelangelo's biographical data, seen most clearly in his macabre writings. He wrote about death often, and as mentioned earlier, in one of his letters, Michelangelo wrote, "I have no thought that has not been shaped by death."[334]

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[332] Freud, 51.

[333] Liebert, 222-223.

[334] Giovanni Papini, *Michelangelo: His Life and His Era*, trans. Loretta Murnane (U.S.A.: E.P. Dutton, 1952), 508.

Similar to Freud's criterion "iii," Michelangelo may have had an impaired "capacity to love," at least in terms of his society's norms. He may have never had a sustained romantic relationship—though the evidence is mixed—and he may have died a virgin. Further, even his close family ties were often tense.

Finally, what about Freud's final criterion ("vi") that a melancholic will have a "delusional expectation of punishment"? As noted, Michelangelo wrote often about death, but in his art, there is even more of an apparently delusional expectation of punishment. This is evident in Michelangelo's self-deprecating and even gruesome depictions of himself in his art. Most notably is his representation of himself in his *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel. In this fresco, Michelangelo represents himself as the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew—hanging empty, limp and frowning. Although he depicts himself as a saint, he chooses a saint who has been punished in a particularly grisly manner. In sum, there are some parallels between Michelangelo's life and Freud's diagnostic criteria for melancholia.

Loss of a loved object

Freud puts the loss of a loved object at the heart of melancholia. In the realm of clinical theory, Freud deduces that "in one set of cases it is evident that melancholia too may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object."[335] Michelangelo's most dramatic losses in early childhood were the loss of his wet-nurse and the loss of his biological mother.

Michelangelo may have been aware of these losses, but Freud writes that it is "reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost."[336] Given

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[335] Freud, 53.

[336] Ibid.

Michelangelo's awareness of his grave losses, would not extended "mourning" be a better description Michelangelo's mood disturbances? Not necessarily. Freud claims that "even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, [the patient may know] *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him."[337] Freud makes the point that even if a patient attributes his or her despondency to a specific loss, the patient may not be aware of the extent of the loss. Being able to name the loss may be only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The rest of the loss remains inaccessible to the patient, and therefore, the loss continues to cause disturbances the patient below the surface of his or her consciousness.

In terms of Michelangelo's losses, Michelangelo may have realized that his biological mother died, but he may not have been aware of what she really meant to him. Further, he may not have been aware of the lesser influence of this death compared to the loss of his wet-nurse. Michelangelo lost his wet-nurse when he was just two years old.[338] It is as if the wet-nurse was Michelangelo's first 'mother.' Therefore, Michelangelo's loss of the wet-nurse may have been even more important to his development than the death of his biological mother. Because the wet-nurse continued to live (albeit away from Michelangelo), it is possible that the infant may experienced his abrupt weaning as the death of the wet-nurse. To an infant, an abruptly absent primary caregiver may as well have died.

Compared to Freud's criteria for "mourning," Freud's criteria for "melancholia" are more reminiscent of Michelangelo's data :

> The melancholic displays something else besides what is lacking in
> mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an

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[337] Freud, 53.

[338] Liebert, 15.

impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world
which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.[339]

For an example of Michelangelo's possible sense of emptiness, consider again his self-

representation as the flayed and empty skin of St. Bartholomew. What a dejected self-appraisal:

Michelangelo lacks internal integrity of muscle and bone, and he is only the external slackness of

skin—lacking its content and thus, formless and full of nothing. Michelangelo's fragment of a

poem, mentioned above, may be recalled here: "Indeed, indeed, of nothing I am made."[340]

Sleeplessness

Freud cites another diagnostic criterion for melancholia: "sleeplessness."[341] Sleeplessness

is also a diagnostic criterion for mania (considered below). As noted above—especially in the

data surrounding his creations of the *David,* the *Sistine Ceiling*, and the *Last*

Judgment—Michelangelo often slept little, working furiously through the night.

Self-exposure

Freud observes that shame is "lacking" or at least "not prominent" in the melancholic;

there might even be "insistent communicativeness" or "satisfaction in self-exposure."[342] Being a

famous artist is a communicative profession, which requires high degrees of self-exposure.

Beyond the self-exposure inherent to his profession, Michelangelo exposed himself further by

depicting himself—albeit subtly—in a few of his own sculptures and paintings—as, for example,

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[339] Freud, 53-54.

[340] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 170.

[341] Freud, 54.

[342] Ibid., 55.

St. Bartholomew mentioned above. Moreover, Michelangelo included full nudes in his paintings more often than was customary for his time. Michelangelo's may have painted the nudes beautifully, but aesthetic considerations aside, Michelangelo's nudes required a degree of audacious exhibitionism.

The loved object internalized

According to Freud, losing the loved object (through death, disappointment, or other means) entails a shattering of the object relationship.[343] Contrary to the mourning, however, much of the loss the melancholic feels remains hidden below the surface of his or her consciousness (again, like an iceberg). The melancholic cannot see the extent of his or her loss to relieve themselves of it. Instead, the melancholic's libido, which had been attached to the loved object, withdraws into the ego. [344] This process serves to "establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged . . . the forsaken object."[345] In this way, "object-loss" becomes "ego-loss." [346] In these terms, then, one might speculate that Michelangelo's object-loss of his wet-nurse (and/or biological mother) precipitated his own ego-loss, but such a reading is interesting enough to mention but still too speculative to maintain.[347]

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[343] Freud, 57.

[344] Ibid., 58.

[345] Ibid.

[346] Ibid.

[347] The curious reader is referred also to the work of Gerda Frank, who talks explicitly about how the trauma of mother-loss and his stunted mourning process fueled Michelangelo's creativity (and/or mania). Frank's work is included in sections later in this dissertation.

"Narcissistic identification"

Freud associates this process of internalizing the object loss with "narcissistic identification of the object."[348] The budding melancholic must have a "strong fixation on the loved object," but "the object-cathexis must have ... little power of resistance."[349] Being so young as an infant, most children Michelangelo's age would have had few strong ego defenses to protect him against the traumata of his losses. As such, regression into narcissism would be an understandable ego defense: "The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict [or loss] of the loved person the love-relation need not be given up."[350] Needless to say, the melancholic loves the loved object. When the loved object goes away, this love does not just dissipate but becomes directed inward, making a narcissistic contribution to the ego.

As an interesting side note, the art historian Bruno Nardini's theory is this: "Humility and greatness do not resemble, but are at times the contrary, of modesty and conceit. Michelangelo was often humble, never modest; always aware of his own greatness, and never conceited."[351] Still, the narcissism about which Freud is speaking is not the modern diagnostic classification but is akin to something more universal among infants at a certain stage.

Freud links this narcissistic process to the "oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development" in which the ego wants to incorporate the loved object into itself "by devouring it."[352] Absent such nourishment, an individual prone to melancholia could be led to devour

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[348] Freud, 58.

[349] Ibid.

[350] Ibid.

[351] Nardini, 41.

[352] Freud, 58-59.

himself through melancholia.[353] A parallel piece of biographical data is that in his writings

mentioned earlier, Michelangelo was fond of pointing out that, "if I am good for anything it is

because I was born in the good mountain air… and suckled among the chisels and hammers of

the stone cutters."[354] Michelangelo expressed this deep affection for his wet-nurse—thus, a

possible primary love object—and as a nursing infant, he was "devouring" her quite literally.[355]

Hating the loved object

Both in mourning and melancholia, love for the loved object is ambivalent; the mourner

or melancholic hates the loved object as well. In both cases, "the loss of a love-object is an

excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come

into the open."[356] A mourner, for instance, may consider that he or she "is to blame for the loss

of the loved object, i.e., that he [or she] has willed it."[357] This is why it is often important to tell

a child mourning the death of a parent that the child is not responsible for that parent's

death—that magical thinking cannot kill.

As Joseph Weiss and Harold Sampson note, "a child's having been hostile to a parent

may or may not play a part in his developing constricting pathogenic beliefs after the death of the

parent."[358] There is not a strict one-to-one causal relationship between such hostility and later

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[353] We might also consider Freud's discussion of the orality of this narcissistic regression in relation to Eriksonian stages of childhood development. (Freud, 59 etc.)

[354] Liebert, 14.

[355] Michelangelo was fond of pointing out that, "if I am good for anything it is because I was born in the good mountain air… and suckled among the chisels and hammers of the stone cutters." (Liebert, 14)

[356] Freud, 60.

[357] Ibid.

[358] Joseph Weiss et al., *The Psychoanalytic Process: Theory, Clinical Observations, and Empirical Research* (New York: Guilford, 1986), 75.

pathogenic beliefs, such as what Freud calls melancholia. Weiss and Sampson do claim, however, that the child's former hostility may contribute to later pathogenic beliefs. These analysts are just careful to be clear that the child's hostility does not necessarily lead to or account for such pathogenic beliefs. Given Freud's causally non-reductionistic caveat at the beginning of "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud might agree with the latter causally non-reductionistic theory.

Continuing with "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud writes that unlike a mourner, a melancholic will internalize his or her ambivalent feelings of love and hate toward the loved object. The melancholic—or the melancholic's "superego"[359]—applies these feelings to the ego, thereby loving the ego (narcissistically) as well as hating the ego (sadistically).[360] The superego may objectify and abuse the ego to the extent that the melancholic commits suicide. The "ego can kill itself only if ... it can treat itself as an object."[361]

Returning to the portrait of Michelangelo, this artist did not kill himself, but he did objectify himself in self-abasing ways (such as depicting himself as the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew). During Michelangelo's lifetime at least one renowned Italian artist—the Mannerist painter Rosso Fiorentino—did kill himself (in 1540). Michelangelo was, however, a devout Catholic, and suicide is one of the gravest sins a Catholic can commit. This is not to say that devout Catholics do not kill themselves, but even if Michelangelo was inclined to consider suicide, his culture presented him with strong inhibiting factors. It may be significant that Rosso killed himself in France. France was also Catholic, but France was still far from being Rosso's

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[359] Gay, class handout, "Critical Issues in Psychotherapy, Rel 3755: Notes on Otto Kernberg and Object Relations Theory," 2.

[360] Freud, 60.

[361] Ibid., 61.

cultural home. When Rosso killed himself, the Italians reported his death as if being in France were the reason for his death. Despite the Italians' questionable reportage, there may be something to the idea that being away from his native culture made Rosso more vulnerable to acting upon his suicidal urges, but determining this would require an over-reaching causal theory.[362]

Fear of poverty

Michelangelo was born into a family with aristocratic ambitions (and distant aristocratic ties), but the Buonarrotis had not been wealthy had not been wealthy for a couple generations. Through shrewd investments in land and through his almost obsessive attention to detail in business matters, Michelangelo amassed a large amount of wealth. By the time he died, he was the equivalent of a multimillionaire.[363]

Despite his wealth, Michelangelo lived frugally and expressed fear of poverty. Similarly, according to Freud, fear of poverty is another hallmark of melancholia.[364] [365]

b. Freud on melancholia and mania

Another common variant of melancholia is what Freud calls "circular insanity," which similar to what modern psychologists would call "bipolarity."[366]   When discussing Freud's

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[362] Robert Mode, lecture notes, "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 4/15/04.

[363] William Wallace, guest lecture in "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 3/2/04.

[364] Freud, 62.

[365] Freud links this fear to "anal eroticism which has been torn out of its context and altered in a regressive state." (Freud, 62) Erikson too works on similar developmental stages.

[366] Freud, 63.

"Mourning and Melancholia," this section tries to stick with terminology Freud would have used or recognized, and therefore, bipolarity is not "bipolarity" or "manic-depression." In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud maintains that mania and melancholia are distinct disorders, but he also correlates them. In support of this correlation, Freud cites the term "circular insanity."[367] Freud's inclusion of this term shows that he understood that at least in some cases, melancholia can lead to mania, which can lead to melancholia, and so on in repeating cycle.

Freud also cites "the impression of several psycho-analytic investigators . . . that the content of mania is no different from that of melancholia, that both disorders are wrestling with the same complex."[368] His causal theory for the difference between these two disorders is that "in melancholia the ego has succumbed to the complex whereas in mania it has mastered it or pushed it aside."[369] More specifically, in mania "the ego must have got over the loss of the object," which leads to a burst of anticathectic energy.[370] Thus mania is a kind of internal victory, even though the victory of mania is often a highly destructive pyrrhic one. Freud calls the latter causal theory "indefinite," and it is unclear whether Freud considers this recovery from loss to be superficial.[371] In many cases, this energetic triumph over the loss must remains incomplete, because in such cases, the mania leads to further melancholia.

It is noteworthy that in the case of melancholia, Freud claims that "what consciousness is aware of . . . is not the essential part of it, nor is it even the part which we may credit with an

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[367] Freud, 63.

[368] Ibid.

[369] Ibid., 64.

[370] Ibid., 65.

[371] Ibid.

influence in bringing the ailment to an end."[372] Because mania is wrestling with the same complex as melancholia, mania may also have its greatest influence at a level below consciousness. Doing away with the mania alone may not eliminate its root causes. Without treating mania at levels below consciousness, mania would be likely to return. To return to the metaphor of the iceberg, if one chops the top off an iceberg, the entire berg will rise, creating a newly visible manifestation of the problem.

Ameliorating the problem of mania (and its counterpart melancholia) requires the treatment of the entire complex below the level of consciousness. Freud recommends struggles of ambivalence around the loved object, "which loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it."[373] [374] For instance, conscious object representations the loved object would become more and more consciously ambivalent. The melancholic might even be able to denigrate the object without feeling pangs of guilt. The object would become de-idealized, and the libido would lose its incapacitating grip upon the object.

Returning again to the portrait of Michelangelo, there are some, but only some, parallels between the portrait of an individual with circular insanity given through Freud's theories and the portrait of Michelangelo given through his biographical data. In terms of the process of de-idealization of the loved object, Michelangelo's art became literally rougher as he aged—as he left chisel marks on many of his later works—and so too are the portrayals of the Mother Mary rougher as well. For instance, the contrast between the depictions of Mary in his first versus his

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[372] Freud, 68.

[373] Ibid.

[374] In his chapter of *Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain*, Don Capps refers to the Hindu goddess Kali as a wonderfully detestable goddess. Hinduism allows its practitioners room to feel ambivalent toward a goddess. According to Capps, this allowance fills a psychological need lacking in the West, which tends to portray its holy women as too pure for ambivalent feelings. This idea is discussed more extensively in a chapter later in this dissertation.

last pietàs, reflect a marked change.   The first Mary (in the *Vatican Pietà*) appears young and smooth; the last Mary (in the *Rondanini Pietà*) appears old and rough.   Still, whether this signifies a de-idealized maternal figure or de-idealized love object is an enticing possibility but impossible to determine here.

There are, however, other, more concrete parallels between Freud's portrait of mania and the portrait of Michelangelo in his biographical data. The biographical data that is parallel to mania is essentially that Michelangelo had a fiery temper (his *terribilita*), he slept little, and he had a huge creative output. If Michelangelo were alive as a patient on the couch, this biographical data alone would not be enough to make a diagnostic determination, but such data would probably be enough to begin wondering more about the possibility of mania. Actually asserting it though, even with a living, breathing patient, would be hasty without much more input.[375]

c. Klein on depression and hypomania

For the sake of clarity, continuity, and simplicity, we have kept this section mostly in Freud's domain, but before concluding this section, let us go afield a bit just to see whether a related domain may be even more helpful in considering Michelangelo's biographical data.

The modern psychoanalyst Otto F. Kernberg presents another that may suit Michelangelo as well: that is, the area that a previous psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein, charts in her psychoanalytic theories on mourning:

> In essence, then, for Klein, the internal mechanisms of pathological
> mourning are expressed directly in severe depression and indirectly in

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[375] Some of this material was excerpted and edited from a paper of mine submitted at Vanderbilt.

secondary defenses against depression represented by hypomanic or paranoid-schizoid regressions.[376]

It is interesting to note that what Freud calls "melancholia," Klein calls "pathological mourning." Were a modern analyst alive in Michelangelo's time to treat him, the artist may or may not have met the criteria for severe depression, but it is neither possible nor appropriate to make this diagnosis retrospectively. Given Michelangelo's temperament and creative output, however, it is much easier to see his biographical data being reminiscent of depression when one includes Klein's possibility of pairing the depression with the secondary defense of hypomania. Michelangelo does not seem to have had many features of paranoid-schizoid regression, but taking this position firmly would require a thorough explication that is outside the scope of this dissertation. The possibility (in Kleinian language) of Michelangelo's data matching a primary depression and secondary hypomania is a possibility that is just as plausible as the possibility (in Freudian language) of Michelangelo's data matching melancholia with "a tendency to change round into mania."[377] Actually, these possibilities use different terminology (Freudian versus Kleinian), but the possibilities are similar.

Michelangelo's biographical data is parallel both to Freudian and to Kleinian portraits: melancholia and mania (Freud) or pathological mourning expressed in depression and hypomania (Klein). Lifting up either set of portraits leads to a relatively consistent picture that looks similar to many features of Michelangelo as seen through his data. It is possible, however,

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[376] Otto F. Kernberg et al., *Psychodynamic Psychotherapy of Borderline Patients* (BasicBooks, 1989), 139-140.

[377] Freud, 63.

that other diagnostic portraits could fit Michelangelo just as well. Who and what, then, was

Michelangelo? In the words of the artist himself, "*Ancora imparo*." ("I am still learning.")[378] [379]

The previous section was the beginning of the "hermeneutic reconstruction" described in

the section on this dissertation's methodological orientation. The reconstruction began with

laying the groundwork by introducing several psychoanalytic concepts germane to the creative

process, particularly the primary process and the secondary process. There was also a brief word

about the tertiary process as a variation of such concepts. Having established some of this

foundation on the creative process, this work then began to build the ground floor with Freud's

theories on mourning, melancholia, and mania, also including a variation from Klein. The

previous section lifted up and compared two portraits: one of a melancholic, and sometimes

maniac, as suggested through the work of Freud and Klein; and another portrait of Michelangelo

as suggested through his biological data. The comparison was more for edification than

explanation, and as such, such a comparison avoids post facto diagnostic determinations about

Michelangelo. Still, there are similarities and parallels between the portraits, which have

occasioned a closer look at each, with the hope of deepening our understanding. So, to deepen

our understanding of Michelangelo's life and work in another way, we continue now to set of

concepts from a more recent theorist, Erik Erikson, who was not only grounded in

psychoanalysis but also happened to be an artist. It is then, even more fitting that in the

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[378] "I am still learning," circa 1562 or 1563, a phrase notable enough that it can be found, at the time of this writing, miles above the earth, on a bronze-covered plaque available in the SkyMall Catalog on some airlines. Also, the phrase is "inscribed next to an image of Father Time in a child's carriage, as quoted in *Curiosity's of Literature* (1823) by Isaac Disraeli" (the renowned British PM Benjamin Disraeli's father) (See http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Michelangelo_Buonarroti only for the latter sentence in this footnote)

[379] Many of the previous pages are reworked material from a paper submitted in graduate school at Vanderbilt University.

following section, we lift up and compare two portraits: Michelangelo as portrayed through his biographical data, and the human development as portrayed through Erikson's stage theory.

i. General developmental psychology

1. Erikson on stages of development

This section marks a transition from looking at classical psychoanalysis to considering one of the theory sets that is an outgrowth of analysis: developmental psychology. In brief, developmental psychology proposes that a human personality develops in stages, usually marked by different stages and transitions in that human's life.

Developmental theory has even pre-Freudian, pre-psychoanalytic roots in the arts, as seen in a Shakespearean excerpt quoted by the seminal developmental psychologists Erik and Joan Erikson:

> All the world's a stage
> And all the men and women merely players:
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
> Mewling and puking in his nurse's arms.
> And then the whining school boy, with his satchel
> .... And then the lover,
> .... Then a soldier,
> .... And then the justice,
> .... The sixth age shifts
> Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
> With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
> .... Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing.
> —As You Like It, *act II, Scene 7, 139*[380]

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[380] William Shakespeare, quoted, apparently by Joan M. Erikson (Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 2-3).

Note the pun: For Shakespeare, all the world is a "stage," which could mean all the world is a stage as a 'platform on which actors perform,' or it could also mean that all the world is a stage as a 'discrete part of a process.' This latter sense especially is the one that is the subject of developmental psychology.

Freud and the founders psychoanalysis also proposed that humans progress in stages of development. As the modern psychoanalytic theorists Phyllis and Robert Tyson put it, "Freud distinguished psychoanalysis from a simple analysis of composite psychological phenomena by declaring that it 'consists in tracing back one psychological structure to another which preceded it in time and out of which it developed.'"[381] With a grounding in psychoanalysis, Erik Erikson took this developmental psychology of the individual person's "psycho-sexual" development and expanded it to include the "psycho-social" developmental lines as well.[382] He took these developmental stages and, as an artist himself, organized them into a visually well-ordered chart of human development, and his theories and presentation became seminal in the field of developmental psychology.[383] What follows in this section is based, then, upon the work of Erik Erikson and his wife Joan Erikson. Their work provides a portrait of human development against which we lift up and juxtapose a portrait of Michelangelo as presented through his biographical data.

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[381] Tyson and Tyson, 7-8.

[382] Erikson, 15, 25.

[383] Ibid., 32-33.

a. Issues in two early life stages

The data stated earlier suggests that Michelangelo returned home to live with his biological mother when he was about two years old, and then, when he was about six years old, his biological mother died. In the parallel portrait of human development offered by Erikson in his chart on the stages of development, a six year old is likely to be "school age" and in the psychosexual mode of "latency."[384] In the Eriksonian formulation, such a child in this latency stage makes things and struggles with industry versus inferiority. Some parallel biographical data for Michelangelo is that as an adult, he was hugely industrious, with creative output that is vast not just in its amount but also in its breadth. In the Eriksonian schema, such an individual could have had such unresolved latency issues. Also, Michelangelo's mother died during a time period that would have been the latency stage for an individual developing along normal Eriksonian lines. Michelangelo, however, may or may not have developed along such lines, and as above, it is not possible to determine this post facto or post mortem.[385]

It is relevant to consider an earlier stage of development as well: the phallic-motor stage, in which oedipal issues often develop most clearly. As suggested through Michelangelo's biographical data, he would have lived with his biological mother from around the time he was two to around the time he was six. This was the only time he really got to know his biological mother. In the Eriksonian formulation, ages two through six encompass the "play age" and the "infantile-genital, locomotor" psychosexual mode.[386] In this phallic-motor stage, the child is "on the make" and struggling with initiation versus guilt. Some parallel data for the matter of

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[384] Erikson, 32-33. Thanks also to Don Browning of the University of Chicago for his chart that is more specific with how each stage corresponds to specific ages.

[385] Class handout, "Post Freudian Theory and Religion," GDR 3061, Vanderbilt University.

[386] Ages three though five, as described in Browning's chart on Erikson's stages. Q.v., Erikson, 32-33.

97

"initiation" is that Michelangelo may well have been a virgin when he died. He might not have

consummated his romantic conquests.[387] Similar to the Eriksonian sense of "guilt" is

Michelangelo's frequently self-disparaging writings. An developmental psychological

explanation for an adult who struggles with guilt versus initiation might be that the adult has

achieved an insufficient resolution to his phallic-motor developmental crisis.[388]   Along such

lines, one might consider crises during that time, the "play age," in that person's life. One piece

of parallel data for Michelangelo is that his mother died at that time, but it is important to

remember that we do not know whether Michelangelo was at this phallic-motor stage at that

age—and, even if he was, whether the death of his mother would have caused such a

developmental crisis. Still, the data reveals a similarity between the person describes in the

Eriksonian portrait and the person described in Michelangelo's biographical data.

As the oedipus complex springs most clearly from this phallic-motor stage, it is important

to consider these oedipal issues.[389] In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson states the following:

> Psychoanalysis verifies in daily work the simple conclusion that boys
> attach their first genital affection to the maternal adults who have
> otherwise given comfort to their bodies and that they develop their first
> sexual rivalry against the persons who are the genital owners of those
> maternal persons.[390]

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[387] Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), 90.

[388] Class handout, "Post Freudian Theory and Religion," GDR 3061, Vanderbilt University.

[389] Ibid.

[390] Erikson, *Childhood*, 87.

In light of this quotation, we might recall that there were at least three maternal/paternal pairs in Michelangelo's biographical data. These three pairs are: (Pair 1) wet nurse/stonemason, (Pair 2) wet nurse/biological father, and (Pair 3) biological mother/biological father.[391]

In the following paragraphs on these "pairs," the term "the infant" is used frequently in place of "the infant Michelangelo" to get some distance from the idea that these are explanatory or causal claims about the actual—and no longer available—infant Michelangelo. The phrase "the infant" is used to describe a developmental psychological case who would have similar early biographical data as Michelangelo, in the rest of this section, it is easier to describe the somewhat more general cases on "the infant" or also even more generally "an artist," which refers not only to Michelangelo but to any adult man or woman who makes their living by creating art.[392]

Returning to the pairs mentioned above, Pair 1 would be the wet nurse and the stonemason. In Eriksonian terms, one might say the infant can attach his first genital affection to a wet nurse. The genital owner of a wet nurse would be her husband or other partner—a stonemason in the data—so the infant can consider him a rival. Worse yet, a wet nurse's husband may be emotionally neglectful toward the infant an infant who is not his own. The problem with considering this pair to be the infant's primary source of oedipal conflicts is that the data suggests that the infant is removed from them about a year before entering the phallic-motor play age of ages three though five.[393]

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[391] Michelangelo's stepmother is another possible partner in these pairings, but we omit her for the sake of simplicity and because she entered Michelangelo's life slightly later.

[392] Phrases such as "the infant" or "an artist" may also sound a bit artificial or anonymous at first, but naming them would easily lead to causal or diagnostic claims this work is not proposing. So, this work accepts a little bit of stylistic awkwardness in favor of accuracy.

[393] Again, thanks to Browning's chart for specifying the ages.

Pair 2 would be the wet nurse and the infant's biological father. Although the infant's father is not the genital owner of the wet nurse, the father does take the infant away from the wet nurse, to whom he may have a genital attachment. Therefore, even if he does not consider his father's actions to be those of a rival, he may consider his father's actions to be those of an enemy. This is how oedipus treats his own father: as an enemy and as a stranger. Oedipus kills the stranger at the crossroads, and the infant may want to kill his father (a relative stranger) at this crossroads of his young life. The problem with supposing Pair 2 to be a valid maternal/paternal pair is the same problem with assuming Pair 1 to be valid: The events in data occur a year prior to what the Eriksonian developmental lines suggest as a time when the oedipus complex is a major developmental concern. Then again, this is not a usual case, and we are only looking at similarities, not diagnostic criteria. In terms of similarities, there are some, but the timing is slightly off.

Pair 3 would be the infant's biological mother and his biological father. From ages two through six, the infant may develop a genital attachment toward his mother. His father, a stern man who beats him, could be the primary rival. The infant's mother may be preoccupied or emotionally unavailable to him because she is absent during his first years, she is pregnant much of the time that the infant knows her, and then she dies.[394] Of Pairs 1, 2, and 3, Pair 3 seems most likely in the Eriksonian formulation to cause problems with the oedipus complex: The infant is with them during his phallic-motor years, and having an abusive father coupled with a potentially distant (and then dead) mother can leave the infant with significantly unresolved oedipal issues in adulthood.

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[394] In the case of Michelangelo, there is further evidence of his mother's emotional unavailability in his art, such as the *Vatican Pietà*, but that evidence will have to wait until the final sections of this dissertation.

The infant may also blame his father—and he may blame himself—for not being able to keep his mother from dying. In this case, the infant can bear great guilt at not being able to save his mother, and guilt is part of the primary developmental crisis in this phallic-motor stage. This guilt can add to the "secret guilt" he may harbor due to any violently oedipal wishes he may have.[395] Erikson writes about "secret guilt":

> This secret guilt… also helps to drive the whole weight of initiative and the power of curiosity toward desirable ideals and immediate practical goals, toward the knowledgeable world of facts and to methods of making things….[396]

An adult artist's life's work is in "making things"; in developmental psychological terms, one may say the artist feels guilty about his oedipal wishes, so he directs himself toward art. Even disregarding its reductionism, such an argument is problematic, because Erikson writes that this movement toward making things (which occurs in the latency stage) presupposes a "lasting solution" to the conflict between guilt and initiation. As suggested above, the infant did not necessarily develop such a lasting solution to this developmental conflict. How then does one understand such a drive toward making things? One way to understand such a drive in the terms Erikson provides is to focus on the phrase "desirable ideals" in the block quotation above. An extremely prolific artist's voracious appetite for creation might not be considered "desirable" or healthy by normal standards. Especially if the drive toward making things is almost unprecedented, a developmental view might say an unhealthy resolution of the phallic-motor conflict could be leading him to the practice of making things stemming from the latency stage.

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[395] Erikson, *Childhood*, 90.

[396] Ibid.

Detailing latency issues in any artist's development is beyond the scope of this work, but in his phallic-motor stage, an infant may develop some significantly problematic oedipal issues.[397]

Here for the remainder of this section, we set aside the biographical data—Michelangelo's data in particular or a sample case of "the infant" or "artist" in general—to focus even more closely on the Erikson's theory set. Parallels with Michelangelo's biographical data come later in this work in the sections on "gero-integration." In the meantime, here are some of Erikson's theories on late-life development.

b. Issues in two late-life stages

In the stage of adulthood, Erikson asserts that the "psychosocial crisis" is "generativity" versus "self-absorption and stagnation."[398] In Erikson's use of the term, "generativity" includes three powers: "procreativity, productivity, and creativity."[399] According to Erikson, these include "the generation of new beings as well as of new products and ideas."[400] So, in this developmental stage theory, creativity—so essential to the artist—stems from generativity in the stage of adulthood.

Erikson encapsulates this stage well in the following "story of an old man who was dying":

> As he lay there with his eyes closed, his wife whispered to him, naming every family member who was there to wish him shalom. "And *who*," he suddenly asked, sitting up abruptly, "*who is minding the store?*"[401]

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[397] Some of this is edited from my writing while at Vanderbilt.

[398] Erikson, 32-33; and 67.

[399] *Also a Mother*, 42-43, and Erikson, 67.

[400] Erikson, 67.

[401] Ibid., 66, italics Erikson's.

Following this anecdote, Erikson comments that, "This expresses the spirit of adulthood which

the Hindus call 'the maintenance of the world.'"[402] Thus, in maintaining the world in this stage,

generativity—including creativity—is a major issue.

In the book *Also a Mother,* the feminist pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore

points out that the use of the term generativity may be problematic, because men have "come to

think about and value generativity largely in terms of *producing*."[403] Like productivity, creativity

has value in a patriarchal society, although the extent of this value is not clear.[404] What is clear is

that such a society devalues the procreativity.[405] Thus, by devaluing procreativity, Erikson's

term "generativity" reflects the sexism of our society.[406] Built upon a patriarchal foundation,

Erikson's view of generativity is, for Miller-McLemore, too individualistic and too

materialistic.[407] Still, in considering Michelangelo, an individual whose creations were material,

generativity is relevant consideration.

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[402] Erikson, 66.

[403] *Also a Mother*, 51.

[404] Miller-McLemore does not treat artistic creativity—male or female—as a second-class striving. Miller-McLemore observes that the pregnant mother is "one of the most powerful symbols of human creativity and transformation." (*Also a Mother*, 46). Miller-McLemore raises the comparison (and notes the tension) between human creativity and human procreativity, but in doing so, she does not deprive artistic creativity of its worth. Miller-McLemore considers creativity to be part of generativity, which is shared, albeit differently, by both women and men.
(Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).)

[405] Further, men's inability to participate fully in the procreative process may motivate some of them to devalue it. Such men may believe, "If I can't do it, it's not worth doing."

[406] Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 51.

[407] The previous paragraph is reworked from a paper submitted in graduate school at Vanderbilt University.

In Erikson's next stage—"old age"—the "psychosocial crisis" is "integrity" versus "despair."[408] Of the dystonic trait, which is "despair," Erikson writes the following: "Here, the dystonic element may seem more immediately convincing, considering the fact that the top line [of Erikson's chart] marks the total end (unpredictable in time and kind) of this, our one given course of life."[409] Of the "syntonic trait,"[410] which is "integrity," Erikson has this to say:

> This in its simplest meaning is, of course, a sense of *coherence* and *wholeness* that is, no doubt, at supreme risk under such terminal conditions as include a *loss of linkages* in all three organizing processes: in the Soma, the pervasive weakening of tonic interplay in connecting tissues, blood-distributing vessels, and the muscle system; in the Psyche, the gradual mnemonic coherence in experience, past and present; and in the Ethos, the threat of a sudden and nearly total loss of responsible function in generative interplay. What is demanded here could be simply called "integrality," a tendency to keep things together."[411]

In this, Erikson describes "integrity" in terms of his triadic Soma-Psyche-Ethos structure, which constitute a person's "organizing processes" that could also be described in terms of body, mind, and a connection to community. As these three dis-integrate, integrity is defined as a "tendency to keep things together." How then, given the inevitability of the deterioration and dis-integration of one's body, one's mind, and one's communal ties, does Erikson maintain his theory of integration? Besides a simple attempt to hold together a disintegrating system, Erikson suggests that in the stage of old age, "integration" may be something more; it may be this:

> It is a comradeship with the ordering ways of distant times and different pursuits, as expressed in their simplest products and sayings. But there emerges also a different, a timeless love for those few "Others" who have become the main counterplayers in life's most significant contexts. For individual life is the coincidence of but one life cycle with

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[408] Erikson, 32-33.

[409] Ibid., 61.

[410] Ibid., 64.

[411] Ibid., 64-65, italics Erikson's.

but one segment of history; and all human integrity stands or falls with one style of integrity of which one partakes.[412]

Thus, Erikson suggests that in old age, an individual may take a wider view, experiencing integration with other places and times in human history. Of those "Others" for whom the senescent person may feel "a timeless love," Michelangelo could presumably be one of these for some people, as he too was one of the "main counterplayers" in his "significant" context. Besides these main counterplayers, however, Erikson also lifts up the potential "comradeship" across time and space with life's simple things.

c. Issues in the ultimate stage

When they actually entered their own eighties and nineties, Erik and Joan Erikson postulated an additional, ultimate stage—the "ninth stage"—in which the primary syntonic trait is "gerotranscendence." To define this word, Joan Erikson quotes Lars Tornstam, et alii, from Uppala University in Sweden:

> . . . we suggest that human aging . . . encompasses a general potential towards gerotranscendence. Simply put, gerotranscendence is a shift in meta perspective, from a materialistic and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction.[413]

Tornstam and his colleagues found in their studies that this less materialistic, less rational "meta perspective" yields more "life satisfaction."

Although this perspectival shift is towards a more "cosmic" and more "transcendent" vision, this new vision is not, however, necessarily a religious one. Tornstam's study continues:

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[412] Erikson, 65-66.

[413] L. Tornstam, "Gerotranscendence: A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration," in L. E. Thomas and S. A. Eisenhandler, eds. *Aging and the Religious Dimension* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993), as quoted in Erikson, 123.

Depending on the definition of "religion," the theory of gerotranscendence may or may not be regarded as a theory of religious development. In a study of terminal patients Nystrom and Andersson-Segesten (1990) found a condition, peace of mind, in some patients. This condition is in many ways close to our concept of gerotranscendence. They did not, however, find any correlation between this state of mind and the existence of a religious belief or practice in the patients.[414]

Whether or not the patients believed in a religious system or maintained any particular religious practice, many experienced the perspectival shift toward gerotranscendence or "peace of mind."

Above, Tornstam's writes that "the theory of gerotranscendence may or may not be regarded as a theory of religious development," and further, the report is published in a collection with the name *Aging and the Religious Dimension*, so there is reason to see that this study crosses over from secular developmental psychology to the psychology of faith development.[415] Along such lines, Tornstam and his colleagues also refer to the renowned psychoanalyst Carl Jung and findings similar to his in their study:

As in Jung's theory of the individuation process, gerotranscendence is regarded as the final stage in a natural process towards maturation and wisdom. It defines a reality somewhat different from the normal mid-life reality which gerontologists tend to project on old age. According to the theory [that is, Tornstam's], the gerotranscendent individual experiences a new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space, life and death, and a redefinition of the self. This individual might also experience a decrease in interest in material things and a greater need for solitary "meditation."[416]

These then, are some findings from the study conducted by Tornstam, et alii, from the Swedish university, which, even if not described specifically as crossing over into the field religious development, at least crosses over into the field of faith development, which leads us now to a brief examination of that field.

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[414] Tornstam, as quoted in Erikson, 123.

[415] James W. Fowler pioneered the stage theory of faith development, parallel to Erikson's systematization but with a more explicit religious and/or spiritual developmental line. His work is discussed in the subsequent section.

[416] Tornstam, as quoted in Erikson, 123-124.

2. Fowler on faith development

The developmental psychologist and pioneer in the field of faith development, James W. Fowler, takes Erikson's developmental lines and includes explicitly a developmental line for faith. Erik and Joan Erikson's ultimate and penultimate stages included the syntonic traits of gerotranscendence and integrity, respectively. These stages and traits, especially Joan Erikson's "ninth stage" with its gerotranscendence, are in some ways—and only some ways—similar to the final two stages in Fowler's stage theory.

The final two stages in Fowler's theory are what he calls "Stage 5. Conjunctive Faith" and "Stage 6. Universalizing Faith."[417] In Fowler's classification, while Stage 6 is actually called "universalizing," Stage 5 also has its universalizing aspects, albeit conflictedly:

> Stage 5 can see injustice in sharply etched terms because it has been apprehended by an enlarged awareness of the demands of justice and their implications. . . . It sees the fractures and divisions of the human family with vivid pain because it has been apprehended by the possibility of an inclusive commonwealth of being. Stage 5 remains paradoxical or divided, however, because the self is caught between these universalizing apprehensions and the need to preserve its own being and well-being. . . . Stage 5 acts out of conflicting loyalties.[418]

Thus, an individual in Stage 5 has apprehended the universal in some way or to some degree but remains conflicted.

A person in Stage 6, however, is more fully universalizing, even in name, as this is Fowler's "Universalizing Faith" stage. While "Stage 5's perceptions of justice outreach its readiness to sacrifice the self,"[419] Stage 6 resolves this conflict, which Fowler calls a "paradox":

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[417] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), 184 and 199.

[418] Fowler, 199-200.

[419] Ibid., 200.

The transition to Stage 6 involves an overcoming of this paradox through a moral and ascetic actualization of the universalizing apprehensions. Heedless of the threats to self, to primary groups, and to the institutional arrangements of the present order that are involved, Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, activist incarnation . . . of the imperatives of absolute love and justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions.[420]

Having resolved the conflicts of Stage 5, a person at Stage 6 is fully universalizing, even beyond self-preservation: "Their heedlessness to self-preservation and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent moral and religious actuality give their actions and words and extraordinary and often unpredictable quality."[421] They "typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria for normalcy."[422]

By shaking things up in this way, they depart from the Eriksons' sense of "integrity" or "integrality"—"a tendency to keep things together"[423]—or even perhaps Tornstam's sense of "gerotranscendence"—"peace of mind."[424] Maybe it is just that Tornstam's patients were too old to be very active, but Fowler's description of individuals in Stage 6 makes them sound more radically revolutionary than Tornstam was describing; Fowler writes:

In their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice. In their penetration through the obsession with survival, security, and significance they threaten our measured standards of righteousness and goodness and justice. Their enlarged visions of universal community disclose the partialness of our tribes and pseudo-species. And their leadership initiatives, often involving strategies of nonviolent suffering and ultimate respect for being, constitute affronts to our usual notions of relevance.[425]

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[420] Fowler, 200, italics removed.

[421] Ibid., 200.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Erikson, 65.

[424] Tornstam, as quoted in Erikson, 123.

[425] Fowler, 200.

Fowler also writes that individuals in Stage 6 often become "martyrs" for their causes, which sounds very little like Erikson's or Tornstam's formulations. The universalizing aspects are reminiscent of integrity and gerotranscendence but the activist qualities do not seem to apply.

Such a lack of applicability may be less surprising when Fowler notes that "Stage 6 is exceedingly rare,"[426] and he offers Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa as examples of individuals in this ultimate stage of faith.[427] Tornstam's gerotranscendent patients were not necessarily average—as they were extremely old or terminal—but neither were they as uncommon as the figures Fowler lifts up as examples. Still, it is conceivable that if such gerotranscendent individuals had their physical health that they would resemble the Gandhis, Kings, and Teresas of the world, but this is unknown. There is, at least, this description of Stage 6 by Fowler that is reminiscent of both integrity and gerotranscendence:

> The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. . . . [They] have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us. Their community is universal in extent. Particularities are cherished because they are vessels of the universal. . . . Life is both loved and held to loosely.[428]

This is similar to Tornstam's assertion that, "the gerotranscendent individual experiences a new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space, life and death, and a redefinition of the self."[429] A difference is that Tornstam's gerotranscendent

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[426] Fowler, 200.

[427] Ibid., 201.

[428] Ibid., 200-201.

[429] Tornstam, as quoted in Erikson, 124.

patients are often moribund and meditative, while Fowler's "Universalizers" are often mobile and martyred.[430]

It is unknown, however, whether the difference is one of quality or ability; maybe those Fowler describes as Universalizers—such as Gandhi, King, and Mother Teresa—are uncommon not just for their actions but also for exemplifying something like gerotranscendence well before becoming actually geriatric. As with Michelangelo, those individuals are gone, so post facto and post mortem, we cannot make such an assertion. Still, an interesting study would be to find some living Stage 6 Universalizers who are not yet geriatric and then see if they can also be adequately described as something like gerotranscendent before their time. Another interesting study would be to find those like Tornstam's terminal, gerotranscendent patients and see if they would be more active with some universalizing cause if they still had the stamina. Such studies may have to wait, but in the meantime, it is possible to assert that there are some similarities—and also some differences—between the developmental psychological senses of "integrity" and "gerotranscendence" and the faith developmental sense of "universalizing faith."[431]

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[430] Tornstam, as quoted in Erikson, 124; Fowler, 200-201.

[431] As noted of Stage 6 individuals, Fowler writes, "Their enlarged visions of universal community disclose the partialness of our tribes and pseudo-species" (Fowler, 200), so it may make sense to wonder more about those partial tribes and pseudo-species and how they fit with Fowler's faith stage theory. Along such lines, a possible study would be to apply Fowler's faith stage theory to larger systems, such as nations, political parties, and even denominations and religions themselves. Such belief systems are inherently complex, so applications of Fowler's theories would also have to be necessarily complex—and would have to remain so—to prevent them from slipping into reductionism, but if we were to leave plenty of room for the complexity, the results could be informative.

For instance, one might survey large numbers of Americans who identify as Rupublican or Democratic and then ask them questions based on Fowler's faith stage theory. Surely there would be a variety of stages represented in each group (and potentially even within each individual), but the statistical breakdown could be elucidative. If there are differences, they would be interesting, or if approximately the same number of Republicans and Democrats are at the same stages, that too would be interesting.

iii. General relational dynamics

a. Object Relations Theory

Object relations theory, hereafter called "ORT," offers a diverse and helpful set of perspectives for considering the intrapsychic world. Considered in the life of an artist, ORT is an especially interesting set of theories because it deals primarily with the relations between the "self" and "objects," which are concepts that, consciously or not, the creative artist faces in his or her creations. The distinction between self and object is especially relevant for artists—possibly including Michelangelo—who depict themselves in their art, as these artists blur the line between self and object. In the case of Michelangelo, it is primarily his biographical data that provides some of the most useful parallels for ORT and is the focus of this section, which elaborates on few of these biographical elements, expanding upon each element, often several times and doing this in the context of different major ORT systems. Before picking up these systems' tools, however, it is important to have a similar caveat as in previous sections: When the subject is a historical figure instead of a living client on the couch or in the chair, the theories drawn about that historical figure's life are intended here to be edifying instead of conclusive. Sigmund Freud wrote psychobiographies, including an interesting one about Michelangelo, but this dissertation hopes to hover above such conclusions, particularly diagnostic ones. Caveat aside, ORT turns out to be a surprisingly useful tool for appreciating Michelangelo's life and work in new ways, and as each perspective considered approaches ORT in an innovative way, this section considers these variations with the extant biographical information about this great artist's early—and as a marble sculptor, fittingly rocky—life.[432]

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[432] Some of this is edited from my writing from Vanderbilt.

i. Winnicott on creativity and play

The first object relations theorist considered here is D. W. Winnicott, the great English child psychologist, whose seminal work is *Playing and Reality* (1971), which, like Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*, was Winnicott's swan song, and he died shortly after its completion.[433] In this work, Winnicott's theory set yields a portrait of object-relatedness against which this section juxtaposes the portrait of Michelangelo seen in his biographical data.

In this work, Winnicott proposes that a child deprived of the breast can develop a "crippled capacity to be":

> Either the mother has a breast that *is,* so that the baby can also *be* when the baby and mother are not yet separated out in the infant's rudimentary mind; or else the mother is incapable of making this contribution, in which case the baby has to develop without the capacity to be, or with a crippled capacity to be.[434]

In the parallel biographical data, it may be recalled that Michelangelo experienced this kind of unavailability of the breast in several ways. The most explicit unavailability occurred when Michelangelo was removed from the wet nurse and returned to his biological family. Although he was returned to his biological mother, typically this would not have been the woman who suckled him. As was customary with those in his socioeconomic class, Michelangelo's biological mother relegated early nurturance, including suckling, to a lower-class woman. Furthermore, Michelangelo's writings, as above, indicate his strong cathexis toward the wet nurse, and also in his writing, he does not express similar sentiments toward his biological mother.

Further, for the reasons listed in previous sections, even the wet nurse may have been emotionally distant and not always available to him. Such women often suckled several infants,

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[433] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 1971), back matter.

[434] Winnicott, 82.

and if his wet nurse was like many others and available only inconsistently, then this inconsistency could have traumatized any infant for whom she was the primary caregiver.

Also, if the wet nurse did have many children to suckle, it is questionable whether she would have forged a full emotional bond to each child. In this case, an infant could have been just another hungry mouth, and she was paid to give her breast, not her heart.

Some of Michelangelo's art suggests a nursing motif, which could indicate many things, but one of them is an unfilled or interrupted wish for nursing in infancy. As Volney Gay has mentioned,[435] lots of art is about the "nursing pair," and Michelangelo's art is no exception. The most explicit instances of this idealization occur in his beatific portrayals of the Madonna and child. Michelangelo's three pietàs may also portray nursing pair, although if so, they would have the macabre twist of having the infant in the nursing pair be an adult male who has died. With the predominance of this motif in his art—and though there could have been many other reasons for Michelangelo repeating variations the nursing pair in his art—we may recall that even if he actually had a stable and relatively untroubled bond with his wet nurse, he was torn from her abruptly.

Evidence suggests that Michelangelo was separated from his wet nurse when he was between one and three years old. Revisiting the Eriksonian stages mentioned above, this would have been the "early childhood" stage for an average child, though there is no reason to believe Michelangelo's psychological development was necessarily average. Nevertheless, the early childhood stage is the "anal-urethral-musculator" stage. The primary developmental crisis in this stage is "autonomy vs. shame and doubt." Positive resolution to this conflict leads to "will." Parallel to this formulation, Michelangelo's biographical data suggests that he was strong-willed,

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[435] E.g., in class discussion ("Post Freudian Theory and Religion," GDR 3061, Vanderbilt University), 11/10/03.

but his will was reputedly overblown and often unstable. As mentioned above, Michelangelo

was known for having a fiery temper (his *terribilita*), which sounds in some ways similar to an

infant's temper tantrum in its flaring up quickly, violently and then dissipating. With an average

adult, such behavior could suggest that she or he did not have a positive resolution to the primary

developmental crisis of the anal stage of development, and in part, may be stuck in the early

childhood stage of anality.[436]

In discussing anality and the arts, Ernest Becker adds credence to the possibility that

artists in general, and not necessarily Michelangelo in particular, have developmental difficulties

with anality: "The artist and the madman are trapped by their own fabrications; they wallow in

their own anality, in their protest that they really are something special in creation."[437] The artist

struggles in a world of his or her own creation. In making something special, the artist wants to

be something special:

> It all boils down to this: the work of art is the artist's attempt to justify his
> heroism objectively, in the concrete creation. It is the testimonial to his
> absolute uniqueness and heroic transcendence. But the artist is still a
> creature and he can feel it more intensely than anyone else. In other
> words, he knows that the work is he, therefore "bad," ephemeral,
> potentially meaningless—unless justified from outside himself and outside
> itself.[438]

Like the sadly quixotic heroism of tilting at windmills, the heroism attempted in the artist's work

is an attempt at doing or creating something special, and therefore being someone special—a

hero, who is, therefore, good. Such heroism is poignant, because it is, ultimately, futile. Even

the greatest artists, including Michelangelo, ate, defecated and died. Further, even the greatest

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[436] Erikson, 32-33; and class handout, "Post Freudian Theory and Religion," GDR 3061, Vanderbilt University.

[437] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 172.

[438] Becker, 172, [italics removed].

works of art fade, fall apart, and are forgotten. Consider, the endless attempts to preserve and restore great art: some subtlety always gets lost; something always fades away. Even more commonly, the life and work of minor artists is an even more troubling case, if they are truly searching for eternity through their creations, as they and their art are almost always forgotten.

There is also a more graphic way of considering the artistic process—and caveat lector, although the following two paragraphs reveal a unique perspective on the artistic process, they also may be a bit unsettling, so sensitive readers may prefer skipping slightly ahead. In this psychological view, an artist seeking eternity through his or her creations is like a child playing with his or her feces. According to W.R.D. Fairbairn, the earliest psychological significance of excretory activities to the child is "that of creative activities."[439] Fairbairn goes on to say that excretory activities "represent the first creative activities of the individual; and their products are his first creations—the first internal contents that he externalizes, the first things belonging to himself that he gives."[440] Perhaps oddly, in this view, even the great Michelangelo's first work of art would not have been his *Madonna of the Stairs* but his first urination or defecation.

Further, although Michelangelo preferred working in stone, he did, at times, work in clay. There are salient material similarities between an adult playing with clay and a child playing with its own feces. Winnicott attributes such play to a search for self:

> It is a frequent experience in clinical work to meet with persons who want help and who are searching for the self and who are trying to find themselves in the products of their creative experiences. … It is as if we are looking at a baby in the early stages and jumping forward to the child who takes faeces or some substance with the texture of faeces and tries to make something out of this substance.[441]

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[439] W.R.D. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 14.

[440] Fairbairn, 14.

Winnicott maintains that finding the self in this way is, however, ultimately impossible.

Concerning this limitation in the artist's search, Winnicott writes:

> In a search for the self the person concerned may have produced
> something valuable in terms of art, but a successful artist may be
> universally acclaimed and yet have failed to find the self that he or she is
> looking for. The self is not really to be found in what is made out of
> products of body or mind, however valuable these constructs may be in
> terms of beauty, skill, and impact.[442]

It is not that such art is worthless. Art can be deeply fulfilling, but it may not bring the artist the

kind of fulfillment he or she truly desires:

> If the artist (in whatever medium) is searching for the self, then it can be
> said that in all probability there is already some failure for that artist in the
> field of general creative living. The finished creation never heals the
> underlying lack of sense of self.[443]

The poignancy lies in the artist's unrelenting pursuit of an unattainable goal. It is common for an

artist to say he or she creates art not out of desire but out of necessity. In this way, the act of

creation is an attempt to satisfy some underlying imperative. According to Winnicott, this

imperative is the search for self, which must always remain unfulfilled by the artist's specific

creations.

It is important to note, however, that Winnicott's idea of "creativity" is more universally

human than his idea of "creations":

> It is true that a creation can be a picture or a house or a garden or a
> costume or a hairstyle or a symphony or a sculpture…. It would perhaps
> be better to say that these things could be creations. The creativity that
> concerns me here is universal. It belongs to being alive.[444]

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[441] Winnicott, 54.

[442] Ibid.

[443] Ibid., 54-55.

"Creations" are things that a person might create, but "creativity" refers to "a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality."[445] Creativity is akin to Winnicott sense of playing, which is "an experience, always a creative experience, and it is an experience in the space-time continuum, a basic form of living."[446] Winnicott relates playing and creativity in this way: "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self."[447] Here again, Winnicott refers to the search for the self—that elusive entity, which, according to Winnicott,[448] the artist seeks so ardently. Thus, in terms of Winnicott's sense of playing and creativity, the artist who creates "creations" is not participating successfully in creativity. The misguided artist, who is really seeking the self, can still learn to play more effectively.[449]

The following section introduces another concept from ORT—"splitting"—which plays an important role in this work, especially in the later, more hypothetical sections on the proposed themes of integration and disintegration in Michelangelo's late-life art and development. So, we turn now to the concept of "splitting."

ii. Grotstein on splitting

What is splitting? According to a glossary prepared by Volney Gay, splitting is "a major and ubiquitous ego defense in which one 'splits' images of another or of oneself into acceptable

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[444] Winnicott, 67.

[445] Ibid., 65.

[446] Ibid., 50.

[447] Ibid., 54.

[448] Q.v., Winnicott 54, etc.

[449] Some of this is adapted from my writing at Vanderbilt.

parts (the 'good' images) and unacceptable parts (the 'bad' images)."[450] Important splits occur in

infancy, and according to J.S. Grotstein, "In infancy and childhood, when there is difficulty in

establishing a clear-cut, discrete internal world, the unconscious experience of being split

predicates a high degree of identification with objects into which the splits are projected."[451]

Such "objects" are often people, but in the case of an artist who often represents people in

art, "the objects into which splits are projected" could include the artist's *objets d'art*. For

instance, in Michelangelo's fresco *The Last Judgment*, Michelangelo portrays many people

suffering in hell. One of the damned is generally acknowledged as a man who bowdlerized

Michelangelo's work—including the *Last Judgment* itself—by forcing one of his protégés to

paint over some of the full nudity Michelangelo had painted. If this represented an intrapsychic

split—which is impossible to determine post mortem—then the split could validly be represented

in the art.

Regardless of the type of object into which a person projects a split, splitting spreads that

person's sense of "oneness" across many objects.[452] Thus, the self is fragmented. This idea of a

fragmented self is reminiscent the passage several paragraphs above, in which Winnicott claims

that through his or her art, the artist participates in a misguided search for the self. If Grotstein is

right that the oneness of the self is spread across many objects, it may be that the attempt to find

the self in such objects is not so misguided after all. It may be that the artist would be wise to

broaden his or her horizon to include people among the objects in which the artist seeks the self,

but given the ubiquity of splitting, the perceptive artist is bound to find fragments of the self in

his or her artistic objects.

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[450] Class handout, Volney P. Gay "Post Freudian Theory and Religion," GDR 3061, Vanderbilt University, 8.

[451] J.S. Grotstein, *Splitting and Projective Identification* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1985), 11.

[452] Grotstein, 11.

Further, Grotstein's ideas of "oneness" and what he calls "at-one-ment" provide an illuminating context in which to understand an artist's creations: "Our sense of primal at-one-ment (primary identification) receives its first blow with mental birth, which may be experienced as a divisive thrust from pristine serenity."[453] As Gay has said, a lot of art is about the "nursing pair."[454] Also, a lot of art represents (symbolically or explicitly) the ideas of birth and expulsion from the womb (or Eden). Moreover, plenty of art reveals a longing for oneness or at-one-ment. The ubiquity of these themes is not surprising if there is any truth to Grotstein's claim that "'At-one-ment' is not only the goal of analysis; it is also the goal of life. Yet it must remain our aim, never our achievement."[455] In its own way, art grapples with such issues as the goal of life, including the at-one-ment that a person (such as an artist or an analysand) desires after experiencing the self as split.

Grotstein also writes that "those who have not achieved a normal resolution of the oedipus complex . . . will experience being split to a greater degree."[456] A thorough explication of the dynamics between the oedipus complex and splitting is beyond the scope of this section, but the attentive reader may recall the possibility of an artist's unresolved oedipal issues, as mentioned in Erikson section above.

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[453] Grotstein, 12.

[454] Volney P. Gay, class comment, "DIV/REL 3061, Post-Freudian Theories and Religion," Vanderbilt University, fall semester, 2003.

[455] Grotstein, 18.

[456] Ibid.

Also, without discussing Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà* here at length, it is interesting to note that splitting is especially interesting in the context of this section, because this sculpture depicts the physical splitting and, to use Grotstein's term, "at-one-ment" of Mary and Jesus. In the *Rondanini Pietà*, "the slender, unfinished Christ is fused with the incomplete Mary."[457] Michelangelo depicts both the physical splitting and the physical fusion of Mary and her son. Whether this physical splitting signifies the kind of psychological splitting discussed in ORT is an undecided matter. If there is a correlation between the physical splitting and the psychological splitting, it might be like this: In identifying with Jesus, the artist is trying to reintegrate formerly disavowed aspects of himself (represented by Jesus) to his true self (represented by Mary), and he represents this attempt at at-one-ment as the physical fusion of Jesus into Mary's torso or womb. This, however, is just one of many possible interpretations, but it is an interpretation in keeping with Grotstein's concept of "splitting."[458]

Figure 5   The *Rondanini Pietà*

b. Attachment theory

i. Fonagy on disorganized attachment

Similar to ORT—with its emphasis on the importance of early relational dynamics with the primary caregiver—is attachment theory, which

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[457] Liebert, 409.

[458] Some of this is adapted form my writing while in graduate school at Vanderbilt.

has its roots in behavioral observations of children and describes the importance of having an early stable attachment in the primary relationship. The main theorist mentioned here is Peter Fonagy, who "straddles the worlds of attachment theory and psychoanalysis."[459]

Of the object relations theorists considered in this dissertation, most mention an creativity or artistic sensitivity, at least in passing, and Fonagy is no exception when he writes that "While regressions in the ego are generally considered pathological, Kris (1952) emphasized that they may serve adaptive functions in, for example, artistic or creative sensitivity."[460] Thus, artistic sensitivity is an adaptive type of ego regression. By this way of thinking, artistic endeavors are a way of living out developmental problems in a manner that enriches the culture.

In his interpretation of John Bowlby, Fonagy explores the interplay between psychoanalysis and attachment theory. In this exploration, Fonagy touches upon the epigenesis of developmental issues as they relate to attachment theory. In one such part of Fonagy's *Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis*, Fonagy summarizes Bowlby's belief that an infant needs to develop a secure attachment to its mother:

> Bowlby's critical contribution was his unwavering focus on the infant's need for an unbroken (secure) early attachment to the mother. He thought that the child who does not have such provision was likely to show signs of *partial deprivation*—an excess need for love or for revenge, gross guilt, and depression—or *complete deprivation*—listlessness, quiet unresponsiveness, and retardation of development, and later in development signs of superficiality, want of real feeling, lack of concentration, deceit, and compulsive thieving (Bowlby 1951).[461]

The infant who does not develop a secure attachment to the mother is prone to a host of problems. If the infant suffers "partial deprivation," the infant might exhibit symptoms such as

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[459] Jeremy Holmes, quoted in Fonagy, back matter.

[460] Peter Fonagy, *Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Other, 2001), 54.

[461] Fonagy, 7.

"gross guilt" and "depression." If the infant suffers "complete deprivation," the infant might exhibit symptoms such as "retardation of development," "signs of superficiality," and "want of real feeling." Given the presence of maternal figures in Michelangelo's early life—however problematic these figures may have been—he still had maternal figures in his life. Thus, Michelangelo's biographical data leaves room for his having suffered probably only partial deprivation of secure attachment to the wet nurse and/or his biological mother. Further, the thematic prevalence of guilt and death in Michelangelo's poetry and letters—as mentioned in a previous section—leaves room for the possibility of his having struggled with "gross guilt" as well as "depression," all of which would be consonant with Fonagy's description of the infant who suffers partial deprivation.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, especially for one who had maternal figures in his life, at least partially, Michelangelo's biographical data also runs parallel with Fonagy's description of the infant who suffers complete deprivation. These symptoms of complete deprivation include "retardation of development," "signs of superficiality," and "want of real feeling." Some parallel biographical data is that Michelangelo had difficulty forging stable relationships, romantic or otherwise. Nevertheless, it would be odd to suggest that the reportedly passionate Michelangelo suffered from "want of real feeling." Thus, Michelangelo's biographical date is more consonant with the symptoms of partial deprivation much more clearly. A case of partial—as opposed to complete—deprivation, would make more sense because being torn from a wet nurse and losing a biological mother could both prompt a loss of attachments, but these would be attachments the infant would have had the opportunity to develop at least partially. The scant information we have suggests that Michelangelo was not completely deprived.

Take again, however, the case of a hypothetic infant who is similarly situated to Michelangelo as suggested through his data. An interpretation of a hypothetical but similarly situated infant as partially deprived remains puzzling, because the infant's separation from the wet nurse, could be like death in the infant imagination, and the actual death of his mother are forms of complete deprivation. Seen in this way, it remains unclear why Michelangelo did not exhibit more signs of complete deprivation. Thus in this case, the hypothetical but similarly situated infant and Michelangelo's biographical data do not quite match. Despite this difficulty, Bowlby's attachment theory remains helpful in considering the development of the infant Michelangelo.

Stated more generally, Fonagy interprets Bowlby as saying that the child who suffers separation from the mother goes through a process of "protest → despair → detachment."[462] Similarly, throughout his life, Michelangelo exhibited signs of protest (in his temper or *terribilita*), despair (as seen in some of his art and poetry), and detachment (as seen in his dearth of romantic relationships). Thus in this case, Bowlby's theory set and Michelangelo's data are akin, which leaves room for the possibility that Michelangelo repeatedly cycled through the process (even as an adult) of protest → despair → detachment, a process that Bowlby applied specifically to children's separation from the mother. If there is any credence to this theory, then the adult would be stuck in a childhood cycle, endlessly repeating the suffering of his childhood.

As suggested, Michelangelo developed in an environment in which he was exposed to the 'death' of two mothers; the first death was his separation from the wet nurse, and the second death was the actual death of his biological mother. Even without these deaths, the young Michelangelo was exposed to potentially countless traumata, including paternal abuse, thereby

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[462] Fonagy, 7.

opening the door for difficulties in forging secure attachments. Further, being nursed by the wet

nurse could have been traumatic in itself: "It is self-evident that the vulnerable infant is better

protected in close proximity to a genetically related caregiver, and thus its chances of survival to

reproduction are increased,"[463] and for the first two years of his life, Michelangelo was raised by

the wet nurse, who was not a "genetically related caregiver." It was not even a case of adoption,

in which the caregiver would have been more likely to forge a stable emotional bond with the

child; a wet nurse would almost certainly have know that suckling the infant was temporary.

Even if she was a compassionate woman, the wet nurse probably would have been disinclined to

give the nurturance she would have given one of her own children. If the wet nurse was not a

compassionate woman, then her emotional distance could have been traumatic.

In his biographical data, however, Michelangelo's idyllic reflections upon this stage in

his life suggest some degree of compassion or kindness from the wet nurse. Consider

Michelangelo's statement that "if I am good for anything it is because I was born in the good

mountain air… and suckled among the chisels and hammers of the stone cutters."[464] A further

interpretation of the data, however, suggests that the case is not so simple.

Michelangelo's vivid description of being suckled in the good mountain air among

chisels and hammers is a reminder that that nurturance can have elements of both severity and

nurturance. This reflection upon his infancy is at once both delicate and severe. He was born and

suckled in the good mountain air. That may sound gentle and pleasant. This infant idyll,

however, contrasts strongly with Michelangelo's further description: he was suckled among the

"chisels" and "hammers" of stone "cutters." The forcefulness of these images is impossible to

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[463] Fonagy, 8.

[464] Liebert, 14.

ignore. Although hammers and chisels were the tools of Michelangelo's trade—and so he may have had fond associations with such violent images—such tools are forcefully divisive and potentially violent in their function and through their symbolic associations.

Again, particular to attachment theory, Fonagy writes that M.D.S. Ainsworth observed in older children that, "it is not the mother's absence but rather her apparently arbitrary behavior that accounts for the child's distress and the relief occasioned by her return."[465] Again, given an infant with data similar to Michelangelo's, if the infant's wet nurse herself embodies such an inconsistency, then the infant would be prone to experience distress. As suggested, there are reasons that a wet nurse would be likely to maintain emotional distance with a child she is paid to suckle. She may be emotionally inconsistent. Having no idea that his surrogate mother is being paid to suckle him—and therefore having no idea why she is being so emotionally inconsistent—the infant may feel confused and rejected.   According to Fonagy's interpretation of Bowlby, "a child whose internal working model of the caregiver is focused on rejection is expected to evolve a complementary working model of the self as unlovable, unworthy, and flawed."[466]

Returning specifically to the case of Michelangelo in his biographical data, throughout his life, Michelangelo represented himself in this way. For instance, in the *Last Judgment*, mentioned above, Michelangelo martyrs himself by portraying himself as the skin—limp and ugly—of St. Bartholomew. Michelangelo considered himself ugly, because his nose, which had been broken in a fight, healed awkwardly.[467] A man more secure in his self representations, in

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[465] Fonagy, 11.

[466] Ibid., 12-13.

[467] E.g., Nardini, 9-10.

the ORT sense, would not have placed such emphasis on his nose. Contemporary portrayals of

Michelangelo—even if such portraits flatter his appearance—show that he was a relatively

handsome man. If Michelangelo's self representations in his art are at all similar to his own self

representations in the ORT sense, the artist would have considered himself to be somehow

flawed or grotesque, like the flayed skin. In terms of attachment theory, such an artist as an

infant could have focused on rejection by the caregiver.

More particularly, such an artist as an infant could have developed a disorganized

attachment to his caregiver and/or caregivers:

> Disorganized/disoriented attachment is marked… by displays of
> contradictory behavior patterns sequentially or simultaneously, undirected,
> incomplete, or interrupted movements, stereotypes, anomalous postures,
> freezing, apprehension regarding the parent or disoriented wanderings
> (Main and Solomon 1986, 1990). Main and Hesse's (1990) now classical
> contribution linked disorganized attachment behavior to frightened or
> frightening caregiving: infants who could not find a solution to the
> paradox of fearing the figures who they wished to approach for comfort in
> times of distress (Main 1995).[468]

It is not hard to imagine that an infant's wet nurse could be both "frightened" (as subject to the

demands of the birth family) and "frightening" (as stretched thin by the demands of her own

family). Furthermore, if she happens to be emotionally inconsistent, this inconsistency could

increase the infant's tendency toward disorganized attachment.

While discussing disorganized attachment and aggression, Fonagy says the following:

"…studies have identified links between disorganized controlling attachment and aggression."[469]

Parallel to this in Michelangelo's biographical date in particular, his known temper (or

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[468] Fonagy, 36.

[469] Ibid., 40.

terribilita) was a type of "aggression." In a more general case, Fonagy goes on to solidify the

link between aggression and developmental difficulties with attachment:

> High levels of negative affectivity, emotional outbursts, inattentiveness, and low frustration tolerance predict long-term peer relation problems and negative social outcomes. The regulation of emotions depends on an understanding of internal experience, which is most likely to arise in the context of an early dyadic (caregiving) relationship (Gergely and Watson 1996).[470]

Again returning Michelangelo's biographical date in particular, the artist had such "emotional

outbursts" with his *terribilita*. For an attachment disordered individual, such a temper can

suggest a problem the early dyadic relationship—such as with a wet nurse and/or with a

biological mother. If attachment disordered individual develops a disorganized attachment at

this time an in such a way, the individual may have more than a temper; the individual may have

had a tendency toward dissociation.

Would an attachment disordered individual with periodic emotional outbursts be likely to

be dissociative as well? At the very least, the individual would be prone to having dissociative

experiences: "Individuals with unresolved trauma or loss experiences as measured by the AAI

are demonstrably more prone to dissociative experiences (Hesse and Main 1999)."[471] Another

thing to look for in such a case would be the conditions for sustaining "unresolved trauma or loss

experiences," which is also potentially consistent with the parallel data for Michelangelo in

particular as well. In a more general case, in attachment theory, the tendency toward having

dissociative experiences is linked with disorganized attachment:

> In the most comprehensive follow-up of the Minnesota sample, scores on the dissociative experiences scale were only shown to be elevated for those individuals with disorganized attachment histories who had suffered

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[470] Fonagy, 42.

[471] Ibid., 43.

a major trauma, such as death of an attachment figure or extended
separation from the mother before 54 months (Ogawa et al. 1997).[472]

Again returning to the particular case of Michelangelo as seen through his parallel biographical data, he was a candidate for having dissociative experiences prompted by a disorganized attachment, because he meets the criterion of having experienced the "extended separation from the mother before 54 months": As stated earlier, not long after birth, he was separated from his biological mother, and later, he was separated from his beloved wet nurse. Furthermore, the actual death of his biological mother occurred not long after the 54 month criterion, quoted above. Thus, whether or not he actually had dissociative experiences, Michelangelo or any other individual with a similar set of possible attachments would have been prone to having them.[473] What can be said here is that an individual in those or similar conditions may develop a disorganized attachment in the early dyadic attachment (or attachments), thereby rendering the individual vulnerable to having dissociative experiences.

Before concluding this section, it is important to include a caveat. Using attachment theory, or any other ORT theory, to analyze Michelangelo's or any other creative individual's creative impulses runs the risk of slipping into reductionism, which would devalue the life and work of artists beyond limited developmental categorization. Volney Gay has raised the concern that geniuses may have their own developmental line, which is definitely worth noting.[474] The Michelangelos, Newtons, and Freuds of the world may be beyond the scope of common interpretative lenses. This consideration is worth considering at length, and this section claims

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[472] Fonagy, 43.

[473] It would be interesting to explore the issue of artistic creation as a type of dissociative experience, but that will have to wait.

[474] E.g., class discussion ("Post-Freudian Theory and Religion," GDR 3061, Vanderbilt University), 11/10/03.

that Michelangelo's biographical data is an interesting subject for ORT but not that his

biographical data fits neatly into this or any other categorization.[475] Also, based on in this

section, it would be interesting to apply the preceding ORT interpretations of Michelangelo's

childhood development to Michelangelo's adult creations, such as the *Rondanini Pietà*, and these

considerations come later in more hypothetical sections of this work.

Still, Michelangelo's life appears remarkably dynamic and vivid through the lens of

ORT, which enhances details and helps them come to life. Even the scant data on

Michelangelo's early childhood makes more sense when considered in the wider context

provided by Erikson, Grotstein, Fairbairn, Winnicott and other theorists significant to ORT.

Especially for those people who wonder about Michelangelo's life and work and are interested in

developmental theories, the ORT lens helps Michelangelo appear more fully formed and three-

dimensional.[476]

iv. Particular contextual psychology

In contextual psychology, many theorists assert that cultural considerations, such as

gender and ethnicity, are key factors that influence the psychological development. Just as

gender and ethnicity are rooted in particularity, this section roots its exploration of the latter

question in a particular case of Michelangelo. Both the theory sets and the data support the

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[475] Even geniuses may have significant blind spots with regard to their own developmental issues. Also, even if the genius has the good fortune to experience the "good breast" of an emotionally consistent caregiver, the precocious child may develop significant problems simply by being so smart. By definition, being a genius sets that person apart from most people, and being set apart can make a person feel like a pariah. Thus, it is with some caution, that this dissertation can claim that Michelangelo's biographical data has proven to be a remarkably consonant with the work of so many ORT theorists.

[476] Much of this section is a reworked version of one of my papers submitted during coursework.

possibility that cultural and other contextual factors influence psychological development, including the psychological development of creativity.

Seen from a contextual perspective, Michelangelo was not only one of the greatest sculptors, painters, poets, and architects ever to have lived; he was also Italian and a man. In this way, Michelangelo was one of a kind, but he was also one of many. Michelangelo was one of many Italian individuals, and Michelangelo was one of many men. It is tempting to focus on Michelangelo extraordinary individuality, because Michelangelo was such an extraordinary individual. This section pursues a different tack by focusing on elements that define Michelangelo in his greater ethnic and gender contexts. It is impossible to understand Michelangelo's greatness without considering his gender and ethnicity.

One conceptual framework used here comes from the pastoral theologian Emmanuel Y. Lartey in his work on interculturality. Lartey proposes a "'Trinitarian' formulation of human personhood,"[477] in which "every human person is in some respects (a) like all others (b) like some others (c) like no other."[478] Michelangelo is no exception to this concept. Category "(a)" acknowledges features an individual shares with all humanity, category "(b)" acknowledges features shares with her or his cultural context, and category "(c)" acknowledges features that are unique to each individual.[479]

For instance, historically, the older forms of classical psychoanalysis tended to emphasize categories (a) and (c), which focus on general humanness and specific individuality, respectively. For instance, Freud's topographical model may be a way in which a person is "like all others,"

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[477] Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: an Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling,* 2nd ed. (New York: Jessica Kingsley, 2003), 34.

[478] Ibid., 171, emphasis removed.

[479] Ibid., 171ff.

because almost everybody has an unconscious. Conversely, psychoanalysis tailors its general theories every individual. For instance, some therapists are reluctant to diagnose their clients, because they see the DSM-IV's diagnostic categories as reductionistic and essentializing. Thus, some psychology focuses on Lartey's categories (a), "like all others," and (c), "like no other."

Lartey's third category, however—category (b), "like some others"—is his category that acknowledges "social and cultural forces."[480] With notable exceptions such as intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis and systems theory in general psychology, psychology has not always done much to acknowledge the influence of "social and cultural forces." This section is an attempt to acknowledge these forces *and* psychoanalytic insights. In its first half, this section explores the social and cultural forces of Michelangelo's Italian ethnicity, and in its second half, this section explores the social and cultural forces of Michelangelo's masculinity.[481]

1. Family systems theory: Giordano and McGoldrick on ethnicity

What is the significance of Michelangelo's ethnicity? Michelangelo was born in the Northern Italian region of Tuscany.[482] What is the significance of being born in this region? Recently, family therapists have done some substantial work in exploring the impact of ethnicity in family systems. Joe Giordano and Monica McGoldrick are two theorists in this field who focus on Italian ethnicity in a chapter in *Ethnicity & Family Therapy,* which they edit with John K. Pearce. Given the centuries between Michelangelo's birth and Giordano and McGoldrick's work, it is questionable whether there is value in using contemporary cultural analyses to explore

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[480] Lartey, 173.

[481] The previous several pages are reworked from a paper submitted while in graduate school at Vanderbilt University.

[482] Saying "Italy" may be misleading, because quattrocento Italy was a loose aggregate of dukedoms.

the significance of ethnicity for an individual who lived so long ago—during a time in which there is not enough contextual psychological data. Doubtless there have been many ethnic shifts in the intervening centuries, so this work proceed only in the hope that there may be some longstanding ethnic traits that have weathered time—traits such as the centrality of family in Italian culture.

Giordano and McGoldrick: Systems Theory and Italian Ethnicity

According to Giordano and McGoldrick, "While all cultures value family, for Italians, family is an all-consuming ideal."[483] Parallel to this in Michelangelo's biographical data is evidence that family was extremely important to him as well. While he neither had children nor married, Michelangelo maintained strong connections to his extended family throughout his long life. Michelangelo even remained loyal to his father, who doled out "beatings" to his children.[484]

Similarly, according to Giordano and McGoldrick, in modern Italian culture, "Traditionally, the father has been the undisputed head of the household, often authoritarian and rigid in his rule setting and guidelines for behavior."[485] Parallel to this, hundreds of years ago in his Italian context, Michelangelo stuck to his father until his father sent him off to an apprenticeship. Even as Michelangelo aged, he remained reticent about the abuse he suffered as a child. As Giordano and McGoldrick put it, "Family members must never do anything to hurt (disgrace) the family. . . . Secrets are maintained among family members to protect personal

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[483] Joe Giordano and Monica McGoldrick, "Italian Families," in *Ethnicity and Family Therapy,* Monica McGoldrick, et al., eds., 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 1996), 567.

[484] Robert S. Liebert, *Michelangelo: a Psychoanalytic Study if His Life and Images,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 14.

[485] Giordano and McGoldrick, 572.

boundaries."[486] Michelangelo remained loyal to his family, even his abusive father, but

Michelangelo's relationship to his mother, or mothers, is perhaps even more tragic.

As stated, when he was about two years old, Michelangelo was torn from his wet nurse,

who was the only "mother" he had known up to that time, and even if Michelangelo then

developed a bond with his biological mother, she died shortly thereafter, when Michelangelo was

about five. According to Giordano and McGoldrick, in modern Italian culture, mothers play a

key role in offsetting any patriarchal abuse, where the mother is a source of "emotional

sustenance," who "acts as a buffer between her husband and her sons."[487] Similarly, so long ago,

for most of his childhood, evidence suggests that Michelangelo lacked this buffer and suffered

under his father directly.

Yet again according to Giordano and McGoldrick, in modern Italian ethnicity, "cross-sex

ties are strongest, particularly the mother-son bond."[488] In his context, for so many years,

Michelangelo such a crucial bond. It is interesting—and fodder for later, more speculative

sections—that Michelangelo spent so many years later in life focusing on the mother-son bond of

Mary and Jesus. Also in later sections, it will be interesting to note that in Michelangelo's final

piece, the *Rondanini Pietà*, the mother-son bond reaches the level of being physical: Mary and

Jesus are literally fused together in stone.

Also as Giordano and McGoldrick put it, sexual proficiency also plays a role in modern

Italian culture: "Sexual proficiency is especially important, not only to fulfill the masculine

image, but also to exemplify a sense of mastery in interpersonal relations—a core Italian

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[486] Giordano and McGoldrick, 571.

[487] Ibid., 572.

[488] Ibid., 573.

value."[489] Thus, in this theory, the Italian emphasis on the importance of sexual proficiency stems from the Italian emphasis on family. There seems to be a disjuncture, however, between Giordano and McGoldrick's ethnic model, and the evidence we have of Michelangelo so long ago. Michelangelo's apparent—although debatable—lack of sexual practice would seem to contravene Giordano and McGoldrick's normative model. Michelangelo was consistent with what would be modern Italian culture in taking care of his extended family, but he deviated from this model by not creating a family of his own. Michelangelo pursued creativity over procreativity. In this pursuit, the portrait we have of Michelangelo through his biographical data is similar in some ways to Giordano and McGoldrick's portrait of a modern Italian individual but not simply so.

Italian Perspectives on Death

Another factor in a cinquecento man's development may have been his perspectives on death, perspectives that tend to be culturally informed, so we consider them here in light of modern Italian perspectives on death. Giordano and McGoldrick highlight the significance of death in Italian families: "Throughout the life cycle, they think of relationships from an extremely inclusive perspective, and their primary life cycle difficulties have to do with stages involving separation, in particular . . . death."[490] Given the strong relational emphasis in Italian families, issues of separation and individuation can be especially challenging. The most challenging separation of all is death: "Separation from the family is not desired, expected, or easily accepted. The most difficult life cycle phase is that involving death of a family

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[489] Giordano and McGoldrick, 573.

[490] Ibid., 574.

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member."[491] Parallel in Michelangelo's biographical data, losing not just one but two maternal figures left the infant to cope with these separations.

Commonly, the early death of a mother can be traumatic to any infant, and in families that emphasize relationality, such as many modern Italian families, the experience of this loss may be particularly difficult. Concerning Italian families, Giordano and McGoldrick claim that with "profound experiences of pain and loss," the "most intense may be the pain of the loss of a mother."[492]

Also, the infant who loses the mother will probably need an emotionally supportive environment to deal with the pain of mother-loss. Traditionally, modern Italian families grieve in an emotionally expansive manner: "Because separation is the most painful experience for Italian families, generally they deal with death emotionally, with much expression of feeling and profound experiences of pain and loss."[493] The death of a mother, however, is particularly difficult in such families, because the mother is often the family's emotional touchstone.[494] Losing this emotional touchstone may deprive the family of its emotional facilitator—the cherished family member who teaches them to "deal with death emotionally." In the case of Michelangelo losing his biological mother so many centuries ago, he was left with his father, and we may recall in the biographical data that his father was abusive, which calls into question his capacity to have provided adequate emotional support.

The previous few pages of this section represent an attempt to use family systems theory in an attempt to honor individual psychodynamics with an awareness of the wider impact of the

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[491] Giordano and McGoldrick, 574.

[492] Ibid.

[493] Ibid.

[494] Ibid., 572.

individual's ethnic context. In other words, this section explores dynamics of the individual as well as the culture. As stated above, Michelangelo was one of a kind, but he was also one of many. The second half of this section now turns from Michelangelo's rootedness in culture to his rootedness in gender.[495]

2. Psychology of gender: Horney, Miller-McLemore, Dittes, and Capps

Michelangelo as a Man

The psychologist and pastoral theologian James E. Dittes observes that "all too frequently, writing about men takes its agenda from women."[496] This sentiment is ironic, because historically, writing about women took its agenda from men. Such biases do not, however, necessarily render these bodies of literature entirely worthless, as eschewing a perspective, even a biased perspective, deprives us of whatever potential insights may be there as well. Therefore, this section includes writing about men that takes its agenda from men, but this section also includes "writing about men" that "takes its agenda from women." Both perspectives have their biases, and both perspectives have their insights. To quote Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "If scholars in practical theology are not willing to engage seriously a new body of scholarship on gender, sexuality, and women, then they ought not to theorize about the nature of human development and fulfillment in practical theology."[497] As creativity is an aspect of "human development and fulfillment," this work must take this new body of scholarship seriously. In discussing Michelangelo's masculinity, the second half of this section looks at

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[495] The previous several pages are reworked from a paper submitted during my graduate work.

[496] James E. Dittes, *Driven by Hope: Men and Meaning* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1996), xi.

[497] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Research Survey: Feminist Studies in Psychology: Implications for Practical Theology," *International Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 4 (2000): 108-109.

masculinity through the eyes of two women—Horney and Miller-McLemore—and this section concludes by looking at masculinity through the eyes of two men—Dittes and Capps.

Horney: Insights from a Female Psychoanalytic Theorist

While Sigmund Freud postulates that women suffer from their lack of a penis, which is 'penis envy,' Karen Horney postulates that men suffer from a lack that is at least as powerful. Lacking a womb, men suffer from the inability to procreate; men suffer 'womb envy.'

In "The Flight from Womanhood," Horney calls this womb envy by a different name: "masculine envy."[498] Of this masculine envy, Horney writes that "from a biological point of view woman has in motherhood . . . a quite indisputable . . . physiological superiority."[499] In treating her male clients, Horney noticed "the intensity of this envy of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood, as well as of the breasts and of the act of suckling."[500] Parallel in Michelangelo's biographical data, recall, for instance, his idealization of suckling in the aforementioned quotation: "If I am good for anything it is because I was born in the good mountain air… and suckled among the chisels and hammers of the stone cutters."[501]

As a case study, the hermeneutic reconstruction of Michelangelo as seen through his biographical data may be a particularly useful case study for womb envy, because Horney correlates the masculine desire to create with the more fundamental masculine desire (and relative inability) to procreate:

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[498] Karen Horney, "The Flight from Womanhood," in *Feminine Psychology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), 61.

[499] Horney, 60.

[500] Ibid.

[501] Liebert, 14.

> Is not the tremendous strength in men of the impulse to creative work in every field precisely due to their feeling of playing a relatively small part in the creation of living beings, which constantly impels them to an overcompensation in achievement?[502]

In other words, men exert so much energy in creating things, because they cannot create people. Consider the ancient Jewish myth of Golem and the modern tale of Dr. Frankenstein as examples of this male striving. Men want to make people. As Horney might have seen it, Michelangelo's immense creativity was a second-best substitute for what he never achieved: procreativity.

Miller-McLemore: Psychological Insights from a Feminist Maternal Theologian

In addition to the psychological features of Horney's position, there are important pastoral theological claims about male creativity. To explore these issues in light of the contributions of feminism, this section considers some of the work of the pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore.

Miller-McLemore calls upon her readers to "see life anew."[503] [504] She writes, "If one half of the population is omitted from psychological and theological research on human well-being and sexuality, people will not be able to see the whole picture."[505] I might add that including research on women not only helps us see "the whole picture" but the whole sculpture as well.

In *Also a Mother,* Miller-McLemore recognizes the ways in which classical psychoanalytic theory has devalued women. Similar to Horney, Miller-McLemore criticizes Freud's androcentric formulation of 'penis envy':

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[502] Horney, 61.

[503] Miller-McLemore, "Research Survey: Feminist Studies in Psychology: Implications for Practical Theology," 131.

[504] Theologically, for Miller-McLemore, a fuller understanding of women is indispensable to a fuller understanding of God's creation.

[505] Miller-McLemore, "Research Survey: Feminist Studies in Psychology: Implications for Practical Theology," 131.

> Freud conflates the generic with the masculine and mistakes the woman's lack of a penis as an inborn defect. . . . A woman's pleasure in pregnancy and children can be none other than a desire to have a penis. To the ears of the mother caught up in the fullness of her pregnancy, or those of women with other creative talents, this sounds absurd.[506] [507]

"A woman's pleasure in pregnancy in children" is not a derivative pleasure; it is fully human.[508]

Miller-McLemore raises another important objection to the patriarchal biases in psychoanalytic theory: "The mother, when she appears in psychoanalytic theory at all, is primarily an 'object' or 'self-object' in the child's psychological world."[509] Consider this very dissertation, which discusses Michelangelo's mother as his primary love object. This dissertation barely mentions her name, Francesca, until now. We also know she was young—in her mid-twenties when she died. Sadly, there is little more we can say about her, because even Michelangelo's contemporary biographers knew little about her. As mentioned, this does not even begin to describe the "mother" who may have been Michelangelo's primary love object: the wet nurse who suckled him for the first two years of his life. About this woman, we know nothing, except that she was a stonemason's wife. We do not even know her name.

Because the focus of this dissertation is Michelangelo, Francesca and the nameless wet nurse's psychoanalytic role *is* that of his love object(s), but one of Miller-McLemore's points seems to be that the language of "object" is, itself, sexist. As long as we consider Francesca and the wet nurse psychoanalytically, we consider these women through a patriarchal lens. As

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[506] Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 45.

[507] Unlike Horney, however, Miller-McLemore voices a theological objection to Freud's formulation of penis envy. Miller-McLemore writes, "Freud's interpretation gives no more credibility to a woman's ability to develop as an autonomous, rational individual . . . than did the early church Fathers, Aristotle, Aquinas, and other classic figures."[507] For Miller-McLemore, Freud's formulation of penis envy is not only psychologically unsound; it is theologically unsound.

[508] Theologically, this process can be argued to be approaching the divine.

[509] Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 46.

Miller-McLemore quotes Juliet Mitchell, "[P]sychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one."[510] Thus consideration about Francesca and the wet nurse remains limited both by the dearth of extant biographical information about these women as well as the patriarchal constraints of the psychoanalytic tools employed here. While retaining important insights from psychoanalytic theory, Miller-McLemore's theory attempts to be inclusive of gender considerations.

Again unlike Horney, Miller-McLemore does not treat artistic creativity—male or female—as a second-class striving. Miller-McLemore observes that the pregnant mother is "one of the most powerful symbols of human creativity and transformation."[511] Miller-McLemore raises the comparison between human creativity and human procreativity, but in doing so, she does not deprive artistic creativity of its worth. Just as Freud may be incorrect to attribute female creative talents wholly to penis envy, Horney is incorrect in attributing male creative talents wholly to womb envy. Horney may be correct in recognizing the existence of womb envy, but this envy cannot explain away the inherent pleasures of artistic creation. Horney, however, makes this assertion. To adapt a sentence from Miller-McLemore's block quotation, above, "To the ears of the artist caught up in the fullness of artistic creation, this sounds absurd." Miller-McLemore does not appear to make the same reductionistic assertion that Horney does.

Miller-McLemore considers creativity to be part of generativity, which is shared, albeit differently, by both women and men. The term "generativity" refers to Erik Erikson's usage of the term, which was meant to include three powers: "procreativity, productivity, and

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[510] Miller-McLemore, "Research Survey: Feminist Studies in Psychology: Implications for Practical Theology," 114.

[511] Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 46.

creativity."[512] Miller-McLemore points out that the use of the term generativity may be problematic, because men have "come to think about and value generativity largely in terms of *producing*."[513] Like productivity, creativity has value in our patriarchal society, although the extent of this value is not clear. What is clear is that our society devalues the procreativity. Perhaps men's inability to participate fully in the procreate process motivates them to devalue it. Men may believe, "If I can't do it, it's not worth doing." Thus, by devaluing procreativity, Erikson's term "generativity" reflects the sexism of our society.[514]

As a corrective, Miller-McLemore suggests that we need to transform our view of generativity to include a fuller valuation of procreativity—female, but also male procreativity. Concerning one of Don Browning ideas, Miller-McLemore writes that generativity implies also "*taking care of* what (although not particularly who) one has produced." This includes, but is not limited to, the idea that a father's responsibility extends past insemination and into nurturing and rearing the child.[515] Miller-McLemore suggests that these activities are inherently valuable, and we, as a society, need to value them.[516] Instead, according to the research of the psychologist Daniel J. Levinson, a man's family often takes a back seat to his single-minded occupational pursuits; it is common to sacrifice family for "the Dream" of vocational achievement.[517] Miller-

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[512] Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 42-43.

[513] Ibid., 51.

[514] Ibid.

[515] As a corollary to Don Browning's idea of taking care of the products of one's generativity, we might ask, "What is the ongoing responsibility of the artist to his work?"

[516] Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 194.

[517] Ibid., 51-53.

141

McLemore calls us to notice and change this single-mindedness; Miller-McLemore calls us to "walk against the current."[518]

Dittes: Psychological Insights from a Male Pastoral Theologian and Psychologist

The pastoral theologian and psychologist James E. Dittes spent a large part of his career studying men, and many of his conclusions point to ideas similar to Levinson's idea, above: Men are driven by a dream—often an unattainable pipe dream—of vocational fulfillment. In his book *Driven by Hope*, Dittes touches upon this drive that motivates men. Dittes begins his book with the following statement:

> Men are expectant. . . . Is that all there is? He knows it isn't; he knows it is. Chronically destined. A man looks ahead beyond the horizon of visible reality to the reality of the almost visible, and he burgeons with hope. Chronically destined. A man learns to live with the constancy of the in-between. A man learns how to live in the shadow of his own destiny.[519]

In Dittes' view, men are, by their very nature, chronically destined. Men live with this feeling. Sometimes they avoid this feeling, but it returns—returns and defies them, returns and *defines* them. Rather than decrying this essential feeling of masculinity, Dittes celebrates it.

Above, we saw that Miller-McLemore encourages men to "walk against the current" of the patriarchal flow toward bias and oppression. At first blush, Dittes might seem to be calling men to walk *with* the current: "Authenticity for men . . . is to be found

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[518] Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 195.

[519] Dittes, 3.

within those modes of living that appear most characteristic to men, not in being shamed or coached out of those modes."[520] Dittes values men as men.

Dittes may value men as men, but as the latter quotation continues, we see that Dittes values men for certain qualities, none of which include the sexist leanings of masculinity: "The modes of masculinity that hold the most hope are often painful and difficult, the modes of faith and hope and love."[521] We see that Miller-McLemore and Dittes would be in agreement on this point: men need to engender in themselves a greater appreciation of the qualities that lead to healthy relationality: faith, hope, and love.

For Dittes, the key is to nurture the most life-affirming attributes of masculinity: faith, hope, and love. These attributes are not, of course, exclusively masculine, but they grow out of masculinity when men practice them.

Dittes claims that these attributes stem from men's feeling of being chronically destined. Human creativity, therefore, also stems from this feeling of being chronically destined. Creativity stems from this feeling, which Dittes names through the question, "Is that all there is?"[522]

Capps: Insights from a Male Pastoral Theologian and Psychologist of Religion

Donald Capps, a protégé of James Dittes, describes a common and culturally conditioned psychological phenomenon that he calls male melancholia. Capps works off of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," specifically the idea that some people have a libidinal fixation

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[520] Dittes, 142.

[521] Ibid.

[522] Ibid., 3.

upon an internalized object, which is often an idealized internalization of her or his mother. To recover from this condition of melancholia, Freud emphasizes the importance of being able to denigrate this internalized object. This denigration helps shake loose the libido's hold on the internalized object—often the internalized mother.[523]

Male melancholia is a modern understanding of Freud's theories about melancholia. Male melancholia is a condition particular to men, but Freudian melancholia is a disease found in both men and women. Despite this gender specificity, male melancholia is much more common than Freudian melancholia. Capps describes male melancholia as a condition that is part and parcel of being a man in the Christianized West. Male melancholia includes a chronic sense of longing, expectancy, and drivenness.[524]

In his article, Capps includes the following intriguing suggestion about a boy's and/or man's sense of loss and abandonment he feels upon the loss of his idealization of his mother:

> This abandonment leads to the internalization of the lost mother, and from there to self-hatred. If religion is to serve as compensation and consolation for the loss he has experienced—if it is to be truly reparative—it needs to do more than assuage his longings and yearnings. It needs to enable him to project his internalized self-hatred beyond the everyday domain in the form of an ambivalent mother, against whom he is given license to hurl the kinds of curses and invectives that primitive religions manifest but Christianity (in its opposition to "mother bashing") disallows.[525]

Characterizations of women in the Christian West tend to be unidimensional. In much Christian art, women are either virgins or harlots—angels or beasts. This bifurcation is related to the psychoanalytic concept of "splitting"—mentioned in the Grotstein section above—which is

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[523] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Psychodynamic Understanding of Depression: The Meaning of Despair,* ed. Willard Gaylin (New York: J. Aronson, 1983), 68.

[524] Q.v., James E. Dittes, *Driven by Hope*.

[525] Donald Capps, "Male melancholia: guilt, separation, and repressed rage," in *Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 157; q.v., his citation of Kristeva 1987a: 42-43; 1987b: 243-63.

something that can compel a culture toward reductionism, such as the oversimplification of female identity. Capps suggests that this oversimplification discourages men from having complex notions about their mother goddesses, such as the Virgin Mary. Men are discouraged from doing what Freud recommends in his 1917 paper, which is to denigrate their internal object of libidinal attachment, which is the mother goddess. Therefore, with such discouragement, men in the Christianized West are trapped in male melancholia.[526] [527]

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[526] Capps goes on to write, "Put another way, we have nothing comparable to the Hindu goddess Kali—that bloodthirsty goddess who hates her children—in the Christianized West, only a highly idealized Virgin Mother who is without sin and harbors no evil thoughts." (Capps, 157) According to him, Hinduism offers an alternative—the goddess Kali. Iconographically, Kali holds a sword and a severed head, and the psychoanalytic hindologist Jeffrey J. Kripal writes, "Whereas [Kali's] two right arms promise boons and freedom from fear, her two left arms promise and indeed deliver death—the top holds a sacrificial sword, the bottom a (male) decapitated head." (Kripal, 261.) Kripal correlates "symbolic castration" with "decapitation of male animals associated with sexuality" in the religious practices devoted to Kali. (Kripal, 263.)

Perhaps surprisingly, Western Christianity too has a figure similar to Kali: This is the biblical figure of Judith, who is said to behead Holofernes. (Jdt. 13:1-10a, *HarperCollins Bible, NRSV*, 1460; Hopkins, 285.) Like Kali, she is usually depicted with a sword and a decapitated male head. She is an ancillary and apocryphal figure in the Bible, but many esteemed artists have portrayed her, including Mantegna, Botticelli, Donatello, Correggio, Cranach the Elder, Caravaggio, and our case study in this dissertation, Michelangelo. (http://www.sepulchritude.com/chapelperilous/decollete/judith-ren.html) (Also, it may be interesting in some future book or article to consider Michelangelo's *Judith and Holofernes* in the *Sistine Ceiling* and the significance of this fresco in light of the developmental psychology of his early childhood.) To account for her iconological popularity, Hopkins offers one explanation when she writes, "Artists have been particularly fascinated with the decapitation scene, for the loss of Holofernes' head and sword represent symbolic castration." (Hopkins, 284.) This is similar to what Kripal sees in Kali.

Also, the mysterious popularity of representations of Judith slaying Holofernes may have roots in the Christianized West's need to have more complex representations of femininity. As Capps suggests above, a culture that lacks a compellingly complex female deity, such as Kali, is prone to becoming a culture that fosters male melancholia. So, it is possible that images of Judith and even a few modern images of Mary have acted as substitutes in the Christian tradition for images of Kali in the Hindu tradition, substitutes that have the potential to heal the damage wrought by what Capps describes as male melancholia in the West.
(Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Re-membering a presence of mythological proportions: psychoanalysis and Hinduism," in *Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain* (New York: Routledge, 2001); *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1460; Denise Domkowski Hopkins, "Judith," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. eds., expanded edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 285.)

[527] The material in the preceding several paragraphs is excerpted and edited from a paper submitted during my graduate work at Vanderbilt.

Conclusions from this Contextual Section

According to Giordano and McGoldrick, being Italian can exacerbate the death of a mother, and presumably similarly, this also applies to an abrupt and permanent separation from a mother figure, such as a wet nurse who is an infant's primary caregiver. Further, being from an abusive home would almost certainly exacerbate this pain. From a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, as seen with Horney, being a male can cause its own psychic distress, as part of the male's lack may be womb envy; thus, after the developing male's maternal figures die or are otherwise gone, some of his lack may also become his mothers' physical absence. Miller-McLemore lifts up the idea that although a man's creativity is valuable on its own merits, he may benefit by valuing procreativity. Dittes suggests that creativity can stem from a sense of absence, which is similar to the feeling of being "chronically destined." Capps puts forward the notion of male melancholia, so endemic to the Christianized West.

Finally, to echo Lartey's concept, if Michelangelo shared any of these contextual features put forth by Horney, Miller-McLemore, Dittes, or Capps, then he was like many other men, before and after him. Michelangelo's uniqueness—the ways in which according to Lartey's formulation that he was "like no other"—remain a mystery outside the scope of this section but which are explored later in more hypothetical section of this work. Here, this section has taken the work of several eminent psychological theorists and explored how culture may influence development with regard to a particular context of ethnicity and gender, with parallels to the theories evident in the case of Michelangelo.[528] As suggested, the theories and the data both agree with the claim from

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[528] While edited and rewritten heavily, the previous several pages are revised from a paper submitted while in graduate school.

146

contextual psychologists that culture and other contextual factors influence the psyche, which also includes creative development.

v. Particular psychological perspectives on Michelangelo

Some of the previous sections and subsections have described the work of several theorists in general and described their relation to the particular biographical data only through lifting up parallels between the theory set and the data. Another method here has been to describe how the theory set compares to a hypothetical infant with a similar set of data. As the whole of this work is a hermeneutic reconstruction, these methods distinguish parallels and hypothetical cases from speculations about the actual Michelangelo, long since dead and thus long since unanalyzable as a dynamic client. In a word, this dissertation hopes to include hermeneutic exegesis, while avoiding hermeneutic eisegesis.

Also, in an attempt to avoid eisegesis, these methods of lifting up parallels and comparing a more general hypothetical case have been helpful because the theorists included say little, or in some cases nothing, about Michelangelo in particular.[529] What follows is a departure from this relative silence from theorists about this artist in particular. The theorists that follow in the next several sections take bold steps that this dissertation needs to avoid: These theorists speculate about who Michelangelo really was.

Labeling Michelangelo with one diagnosis or another is, in itself, not necessarily edifying. Scholars have spilled a lot of ink engaging in this kind of speculative psychology. What may be interesting is what such speculative psychological labels may reveal about the artist

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[529] There are some exceptions, as for instance with Freud on Michelangelo, but these theories have been omitted for the sake of space and focus.

and the art. The value of their theories is for the reader to determine, but as in previous sections, this work suggests that regardless of the accuracy or verifiability of what amounts to other scholars' psychobiographies, there remains value to the hermeneutic reconstruction, which becomes more three-dimensional with the addition of each plausible theory set.

1. Organic psychology: Jamison on bipolarity and creativity

The first theorist discussed here who speculates particularly about Michelangelo's psyche is Kay Redfield Jamison, M.D., an expert on bipolarity, who, perhaps not surprisingly, groups Michelangelo among a long list of other historical figures who are supposed to have suffered a form of bipolarity or depression. Jamison lists Michelangelo among several hundred famous "writers, artists, and composers with probable cyclothymia, major depression, or manic depressive illness."[530] According to her research, statistically speaking, there is a correlation between Michelangelo's creativity and the possibility of his having been bipolar. As Jamison reports, when one compares artists to a control group representing the general population, there is "ten to forty times the rate of manic-depressive illness and its milder variants."[531] Unfortunately for the curious reader, Jamison also does not specify precisely which condition she thinks Michelangelo might have had: whether it was "cyclothymia," whether it was "major depression," or whether it was "manic depressive illness" otherwise known as bipolarity.

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[530] Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free, 1993), 267, 270.

[531] Jamison, 88-89.

For his part, the biographer Bruno Nardini describes Michelangelo specifically as "melancholy."[532] "Melancholy" would more commonly fall under the rubric of "depression" in modern terminology, and of Michelangelo's first six decades, Nardini writes that Michelangelo "lived for sixty years melancholy and alone."[533] Nardini is neither a psychologist nor diagnostician of any sort, but it is unclear whether Nardini is describing Michelangelo with a kind of lay attempt to diagnose or whether Nardini is simply describing the artist and poet in similarly poetic terms. Still, Nardini chooses the term "melancholy"—similar if not identical to what would be the more clinical term "depression"—but even if he is correct, then this would not exclude the possibility of Michelangelo having been not just depressive, which is sometimes considered a unipolar disorder, but also manic-depressive, which is bipolar disorder.

Further, as Jamison is a renowned expert on bipolarity, and most of the book in which she includes her list is a discussion of the prevalence of bipolarity and its variants among creative individuals, one might expect that her inclusion of Michelangelo on her list is suggestive in Jamison's estimation that Michelangelo had a form of bipolarity. Regardless, Jamison considers Michelangelo to have had a unipolar major depression or instead bipolarity of some kind when she includes him on her list of highly renowned creative individuals "with probable cyclothymia, major depression, or manic depressive illness."[534]

Also unfortunately for the curious reader, Jamison does not specify precisely which part of Michelangelo's biographical data prompted her decision to include Michelangelo in her list. The attentive reader might, however, recall several things from earlier sections of this

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[532] Nardini, 140.

[533] Ibid.

[534] Jamison, 267, 270.

dissertation that might point to Jamison's theory. One might recall, Michelangelo's prodigious artistic output, coupled with periods of breakdown and withdrawal.

For instance, Nardini writes the following:

> If the beauty of Michelangelo's work has, for centuries, been breathtaking to those who view it for the first time or the hundredth time, the sheer bulk of it, measured in time and space, is not just amazing but awesome. For this reason all of Michelangelo's biographers and commentators have employed adjectives and superlatives that seem prodigiously exaggerated and rhetorical; seem so, but are not. They are attempts to define the indefinable, since Michelangelo was truly, when measured by our standards, a titan, a superhuman prodigy. By his own standards, instead, he was only a passionate seeker after beauty and truth, a man always defeated by his own greatness.[535]

On the one hand, such an output is not uncommon among those suffering a prolonged manic episode, but on the other hand, there have been many manics and only one Michelangelo. The artist might simply have been extraordinarily prolific, but the data supporting Jamison's possible theory of his having suffered bouts of mania mounts when one considers not just what he produced but how he produced it. It will be recalled that Michelangelo often slept with his boots on, and that he would wear them so long that the cloth occasionally fused to his flesh. He worked like mad and sometimes slept little, so sleeping in his boots was a matter not only of warmth but of convenience. He could sleep by his work, wake up, and continue where he left off. Further, Michelangelo's emotional life was marked by both a grim fixation on death and an unpredictable series of furious outbursts (again, called his *terribilita*). Consider also the account of what Nardini calls Michelangelo's "nervous breakdown" after feuding with Leonardo da Vinci:

> Here again is a Michelangelo who is hard to define, not merely surly but rude and insulting. Jealousy had overcome him. At the sight of Leonardo he had lost control of himself, replying to an outstretched hand with a bite.

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[535] Nardini, 60.

> Then, all at once, he broke down. Having completed the Madonnas, roughed out the figure of an apostle, painted the Doni tondo, and prepared the cartoons for the battle of Cascina, he suddenly felt he had asked too much of himself. The wear and tear of the immense effort that, from the start of the David, had continued unbroken to that day, was beginning to tell. Today it would be called a nervous breakdown. But instead of taking a vacation or dosing himself with medicine, Michelangelo took refuge in poetry and cured himself with verses.[536]

Again, Nardini is neither a clinician nor a diagnostician, but the data he describes remains consistent with a manic episode followed a depressive episode, a sort of crash or hangover that commonly follows mania. Michelangelo's biographical data does fully validate Jamison's theory—as post mortem, it cannot—but the data and her theory are fairly consistent.

If we were, however, to agree with Jamison and claim outright that Michelangelo was majorly depressed, cyclothymic, or bipolar, it would not be hard to make simplistic causal explanations about Michelangelo's life and work. As mentioned, the goal of this dissertation does include possible causal explanations about Michelangelo's life and work, and this work does not assert the completeness of Jamison's theory. In fairness to Jamison, though, neither does she assert the completeness of her claims about highly creative historical figures and her theory of their bipolarity. Further, it would be one thing to suggest that Michelangelo's possible bipolarity would have influenced his exceptional life, but it would be quite another thing to assert that Michelangelo's undeniable bipolarity is the obvious cause of his genius, which neither this dissertation nor Jamison's work seem to do.   She does make diagnostic claims this dissertation does not, but even if there are hermeneutic problems inherent in this, her theory still manages to flesh out the hermeneutic reconstruction of Michelangelo in edifying ways.

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[536] Nardini, 66.

vi. Particular psychodynamic interpretations of Michelangelo's life and work

This section marks the beginning in this dissertation of psychological and art historical theorists who not only discuss Michelangelo in particular but even more particularly his final artwork, the *Rondanini Pietà*. To begin with, however, this section lifts up some salient points in one scholar's theory set on Michelangelo's developmental psychology. The scholar takes much of Michelangelo's biographical data, already mentioned here, but views it anew through his own interpretive lens. Thus, this dissertation's hermeneutic reconstruction of Michelangelo's early and late-life developmental psychology benefits from the interpretations of the following scholar, Robert S. Liebert, M.D.

1. Liebert on psychodynamic development

In his book *Michelangelo: a Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and Images,* the psychoanalytic theorist Robert Liebert reminds the reader that Michelangelo was born to an aristocratic mother, Francesca, and as was customary for families of their class,[537] he was almost immediately taken off to a wet nurse to be raised for what was probably the first two years of his life. As Liebert states, these wet nurses were "generally lower-class women, either grieving the loss of, or concurrently nursing, their own infants. They nursed on a business basis…."[538] Although this does not rule out the possibility of genuine nurturance, neither does it suggest any.

At an early age, Michelangelo was torn from his wet nurse and transplanted into his biological home, and Liebert offers this bleak summation of Michelangelo's early nurturance:

> [Michelangelo] was boarded with a wet nurse of unknown character for
> perhaps as long as two years. His weaning was then associated with an

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[537] Liebert, 14.

[538] Ibid.

abrupt separation from this mothering woman. At this time he returned to his mother and father, both of whom were relative strangers to him, as he was to them. His reentry into his mother's life, particularly as her second son, probably elicited minimal emotional investment on her part, inasmuch she was subsequently pregnant for half of the four years that remained to her.[539]

As this passage suggests, she died only four years after Michelangelo came to live with his

biological family, when he was only six. Add to this the "beatings"[540] his father doled out, and it

is clear that Michelangelo was exposed repeatedly to potential traumata.[541] This, then is a sample

of Liebert observations about Michelangelo's early life. We turn now to a much later period.

Liebert takes his interpretation of Michelangelo's biographical data and applies it to some

of Michelangelo's artwork, including his ultimate one, the *Rondanini Pietà.* As mentioned,

Michelangelo worked on this piece right up to a matter of days before his death, and many

scholars who receive it see it as unfinished, including, apparently Liebert, though Liebert takes

this unfinished aspect and suggests that it has significance:

> [Michelangelo tried] transforming stone to life, [yet] two-thirds of his statues were never completed…. A central factor was that, for Michelangelo, to complete a statue was also to sever his bond with the block of stone…. He turned instead to the next project, and the next, and finally, in the last fifteen years of his life, to one theme, the union of Son and Mother in the Pietàs."[542]

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[539] Liebert, 15.

[540] Ibid., 14.

[541] Some of this is edited from my writing at Vanderbilt.

[542] Liebert, 222-223.

Thus, like a mother reluctant to separate her child from union with her womb, Michelangelo often left his sculptures unfinished.

The sculpture, however, not only appears unfinished, but Michelangelo also evidently worked on it until there was little marble left, thereby literally unifying the subjects of its portrayal: Jesus and Mary—which is a unification or fusion whose significance Liebert also considers. Michelangelo sculpted two or three distinct versions of this, his last Pietà, some of which are still discernible. With so little marble left by the time of his last version, Michelangelo had to sculpt his Jesus out of a previous version of Mary. As the upper part of Jesus is actually sculpted out of his grieving mother, "the slender, unfinished Christ is fused with the incomplete Mary,"[543] and Liebert gives this fusion between Christ and Mary an almost poetic interpretation:

> [An] ambivalent and tormented struggle in Michelangelo, embodied in his Marys and dead Christs, drove him, in the Rondanini, to his final transcendent image of the fusion of the Son and Mother, each consisting of parts carved out of the other, in which even the forces of gravity are disregarded, boundaries are obliterated, and the two are timelessly reunited.[544]

Figure 6   The *Rondanini Pietà*

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[543] Liebert, 409.

[544] Ibid., 412.

Just as Jesus came from the womb, Michelangelo's dead Jesus appears to be returning there. There are some classically Oedipal issues here, which are most evident in Michelangelo's symbolic portrayal of a son returning to the womb and being reunited with his mother.[545] The psychoanalytic implications of this maternal reunification highlight the importance of considering Michelangelo's psychosexual development, which has been considered in some ways in earlier sections but is also considered in the following section about the interpretations of another psychoanalytic theorist, Gerda Frank.[546]

2. Frank on the *Rondanini Pietà*

In an article in *American Imago*, the psychoanalytic theorist Gerda Frank appears to be the first scholar to describe Michelangelo as having two mothers, when she writes that he "had two mothers: the aristocratic woman who gave birth to him, and the stonecutter's wife, who in Michelangelo's phantasy gave birth to him as a sculptor. The result was a lasting trauma."[547] Thus, Frank theorizes that having two mothers and losing each them was traumatic for the young artist.

Frank: Creativity as a Response to Trauma

In Frank's conceptualization, Michelangelo tried to fill this sense of absence and grief with his immense creativity. She proposes that mother-loss—which in Frank's theory is

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[545] The art historian Leo Steinberg has many relevant things to say on this subject, e.g., in "The Metaphors of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's Pietàs" (*Studies in Erotic Art*. (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 231-284), and his work is considered more in an art historical section below, "Interpretation of Michelangelo's Pietàs: Steinberg on Love and Birth."

[546] The previous paragraph is reworked from a paper of mine submitted while at Vanderbilt University.

[547] Gerda Frank, "The Enigma of Michelangelo's Pietà Rondanini," *American Imago* 23:4 (Winter 1966): 298.

Michelangelo's biological mother Francesca's death in particular—may have fueled his creative genius, which Frank understands as a stunted process of mourning:

> At that young age [of six], the psychic apparatus has not yet reached the degree of maturity required to carry through a successful mourning process…. The key factors in that process are: 'To be able to deal with… fears of weakness, helplessness, frustration, rage, pain, and anger; to be able effectively to re-invest new objects or ideals with energy, and to re-establish different, but satisfactory relationships'… Michelangelo carried out only part of the mourning process through successfully: that of investing new ideals with energy. This fact is amply shown by his towering creativity and his almost continuous prolific work.[548]

Frank goes on to claim the trauma of mother-loss—and his stunted mourning process following her death—"catapulted his creative gifts towards productions of gigantic heights and depths, that testify to the enormous amounts of energy that could be mobilized in the service of his genius."[549] In this view, unfinished grieving left Michelangelo with some rough edges to his personality, which are analogous to the rough edges of most of his sculptures, again, most of which he left unfinished. The rough or unfinished edges of Michelangelo's personality may have influenced—and conceivably, could have even helped—his sculpture, but, as mentioned for instance in his feud with Leonardo da Vinci, there is ample contemporaneous data that suggests that his rough personality also hampered his relationships, with relation difficulties that echo troubles and loss in his early childhood relationships that, in Frank's formulation, stimulated Michelangelo's immense creativity.[550]

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[548] Frank, 298-299.

[549] Ibid., 313.

[550] Some of this is edited from my graduate school writing.

Invoking object relations theory (ORT), which is described in an earlier section of this dissertation, Frank writes:

> In Michelangelo, the effect of early mother-loss was not an inhibition of functioning in the usual sense of the word. While his ability to form ego-object relations remained unimpaired, the trauma seems to have catapulted his creative gifts toward productions of gigantic heights and depths, that testify to the enormous of energy that could be mobilized in the service of genius.[551]

In her ORT explanation, which also happens to be a causal theory, Frank appears to marvel at what is possible based on such a seemingly simple intrapsychic dynamic as this response to mother-loss. What was a simple loss resulted in a vastly complex result.

Frank's explanation for Michelangelo's creativity is interesting, but it is only a limited causal explanation. Many people suffer mother-loss and have difficulty investing new ideals with energy or establishing satisfactory relationships, but still, there was only one Michelangelo.[552] Then again, sometimes trauma is not what happens to an individual, but trauma is how that individual experiences what has happened.[553] Trauma is the aftermath. If the traumatized individual does not have an emotionally supportive environment in which to process painful events, that person may have a difficult time processing these events in a manner that is not traumatic. Thus, Michelangelo's loss of his mother could have been painful, but a more empathic father could have minimized the potential for Michelangelo to experience the loss as traumatic. Instead, as noted, his father is reported to have been stern and abusive. In such an environment, Frank's postulate is that the young Michelangelo had to develop "creative" responses to his deep grief.

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[551] Frank, 313.

[552] The previous few paragraphs are reworked from a paper of mine while at Vanderbilt University.

[553] I have heard this idea somewhere recently, but I do not remember where.

Again, we come back to what remains unexplained because many people suffer mother-loss *and* an abusive father and subsequently have difficulty investing new ideals with energy or establishing satisfactory relationships, but yet again, there was only one Michelangelo. Why he should have reacted in such a special manner remains unexplained—and ad hoc and post mortem, his unique reaction is perhaps not only unexplained but inexplicable.[554]

It should be noted, further, that Frank offers a causal explanation but does not claim a full understanding of Michelangelo's phenomenal creativity or its source. She writes that "whether Michelangelo's artistic output would have been equally remarkable without mother-loss, we do not know."[555] She also writes that "we can only guess at the frustrations of the young child, torn from his mother at such a tender age"[556]; she knows it is a guess, but the apparent hope is that hers is a good guess, whose worth can be estimated here by its ability to provoke thought and add to the overall hermeneutic reconstruction.

Frank on the Rondanini Pietà: Enigma Solved and Conflict Resolved

Frank puts forth her theories about the epigenesis Michelangelo's in an article that deals specifically with the *Rondanini Pietà*, which she used to illuminate aspects of Michelangelo's psyche, particularly in his late-life. As mentioned above, Frank notes that Michelangelo had, in effect, two mothers, and Frank speculates that this maternal duality itself led to some degree of intrapsychic conflict. Frank interprets the sculpture of the dead son held in his mother's arms to mean that this intrapsychic conflict found some resolution in Michelangelo's late-life: "The

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[554] The previous several pages include work revised from a paper of mine submitted in graduate work.

[555] Frank, 313.

[556] Ibid., 297.

conflict is resolved, the dual mother-figure has become one, the ultimate mother, Death, in

whose lap he will lay himself down to eternal rest, and who will never leave him."[557] Thus, she

interprets this sculpture to signify that in death, there is a re-union with a greater maternal

figure—death who, in a macabre turn, is the ultimate caregiver who neither leaves nor becomes

divided—which had been dual in life but becomes one in death. Also, as Michelangelo was

evidently an observant Catholic, death would also have soteriological significance, and in Roman

Catholic theology, Mary plays a more central role than in many other Christian denominations.

Thus, in this religious context, death signifies not just oblivion but a possible entry into heaven,

wherein the maternal figure Mary awaits. Also, as mentioned in the previous section on Liebert

section, the *Rondanini Pietà* portrays Jesus and Mary fused quite literally.

Frank also writes that there is an enigma surrounding this sculpture, which has less to do

with Michelangelo's creation of it than how it has been received. She asks, "Why has the Pietà

Rondanini been ignored for so long, and why is it still practically unknown to the general

public?"[558] To answer what is also a contextual question, she uses an psychoanalytic

interpretation:

> If we now look again at the Pietà Rondanini, reflect on her history and fate and review it
> all in the light of psychoanalytic interpretation, we find that the Enigma is solved. This
> perhaps most profound and intriguing of all sculptures of Western civilization has
> remained unknown precisely because of its depth and its disquieting
> qualities—disquieting, because the Pietà Rondanini deals with death and mourning. . .
> and suggests the utter finality of death.[559]

Thus, in the years since its rediscovery, the *Rondanini Pietà* has remained largely unknown

because it deals with death, which makes people uncomfortable. Faced with death and its

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[557] Frank, 311.

[558] Ibid., 290, italics removed.

[559] Ibid., 311.

finality, "the beholder perceives this message, perhaps only on an unconscious level, and he turns away, or he protests."[560]

There are some things about Frank's interpretive answer to her own question, however, that are themselves questionable and make the article, published in 1966, appear like a product of its time. For instance, she writes that in "the light" of psychoanalytic interpretation, the enigma "is solved," which is a reminder that 1966 was still a time when psychoanalysis was relatively in vogue. Frank also interprets the sculpture to signify the "finality" of death, but Michelangelo's biographical data, including many devoutly religious poems, show that he himself did not describe death merely as a finality, but also as a soteriological steppingstone. She also uses the pronoun "her" to describe the sculpture, which might be read either as nicely quaint or uncommonly feministic, but instead this is more likely to be an artifact from Frank's mother tongue, probably German, in which the word for sculpture is feminine.

Still, regardless of some possible limitations imposed by Frank's context, her theory remains plausible, as the *Rondanini Pietà* may have somewhat more known to the general public in the intervening decades, but if so, it is not much. Even today it is rare to find an individual who has heard of Michelangelo's final work, so across the centuries, then in Frank's time, and now in ours, there are factors keeping this artwork relatively unknown. These factors have crossed cultures and centuries, so they appear to be more than culturally or temporally specific causes. A discomfort, anxiety, or fear of death would be one such cross-cultural factor that spans time and place.[561] Similarly, concerning this human discomfort with the macabre, Frank writes that "we can thus understand why the general public has not acclaimed the Pietà Rondanini as

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[560] Frank, 311.

[561] Q.v., e.g., Ernest Becker's analysis of this fear in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Denial of Death*.

the great work of art that it is."[562] The work's subject—at least with the morbid kind of

interpretation it has received most commonly so far—tends to make people consciously or

unconsciously unsettled. In more hypothetical sections, this dissertation explores less deathly

significance and meaning in this sculpture—looking toward the hope seen in its creation

imagery—but these interpretations come later.

So, this section on Frank is the final part of the larger section on the psychological

reception of some of Michelangelo's art and biographical data. In the next few sections, what

follows is the art historical reception of some of Michelangelo's art and biographical data. Thus,

this is a transition from the discourse of psychology to the discourse of art history, which this

work acknowledges as incommensurate discourses.[563]

c. Theories on the art of the elder Michelangelo

This section marks a major transition in this dissertation in which we move from the

discourse of psychology to the discourse art history. As mentioned earlier, Volney Gay posits

that discourses may be incommensurate. As such, this transition is a bit like moving from one

country to another, where each country has its own untranslatable features—its inside jokes, its

folk wisdom, its poetic language—and where each set is incommensurate with that of the other

country. Also as mentioned earlier, such untranslatable things are the "emic" features of a given

cultural or academic domain.

This transition into art history begins with an overview of art historical methodology. As

in the introduction to this dissertation, the methodological section comes first because before

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[562] Frank, 312.

[563] As above, q.v. Gay, "Syllabus on Methods."

beginning the practice of the given discipline, it is important both to have and to acknowledge a reasonable method. So, this section describes the art historical methodology used in this work.[564]

i. General art historical methodology

Art history offers a methodological plurality of approaches to any given art work, and several different types of art historical methods can approach the same artwork in several different ways. Different people not only see the same sculpture differently, but they also talk about the same sculpture differently. So, like many roads up a mountain, there are different ways to pursue an art historical understanding of an artwork. Further, different art historical views of the same sculpture can also reveal different views about art historical methodology itself. This section examines the methodology of three different scholars writing about the same sculpture: the *Rondanini Pietà*. The conclusion of this analysis is this: compared to an early-career art historian, or compared to a non-art historian writing outside of her primary field, a late career art historian may have a more nuanced and complex art historical methodology. In other words—and here is the thesis—the older, more experienced art historian has more resources and uses them freely. Toward the end of this section, this simple organizing point may lead to some surprising conclusions.[565]

Before describing methodology and then examining the evidence for this section's organizing point, it is important to introduce the sculpture about which the three scholars are writing.

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[564] While many sections throughout the dissertation contain edited versions of my own previously submitted unpublished writing and ideas, this section on genral art historical methodology has been edited but still remains close to its original form, which was submitted to Professor Leonard Folgarait at Vanderbilt University.

[565] Most of this chapter comes from the work I submitted to Professor Leonard Folgarait in the fall of 2005.

The methods

Art history is a wide and complex field with many methods at its disposal. Art historian Marcia Pointon writes, "There exists no single line of enquiry we can label art history. This much will have become evident."[566] This is also view maintained in this section: art history methodology is inherently—and perhaps happily—multiple.[567] There are many approaches to art history, but no single method is the exhaustive, definitive method. There is no single road up the mountain. The first road or "line of enquiry" described here is formalism.

The art historian Laurie Schneider Adams describes *formalism* succinctly: "Formalism is the approach to art that stresses the significance of form over content as the source of the work's subjective appeal."[568] Form concerns the way something looks, and not its meaning. A formalist approach may concern the style, design, or aesthetic execution of a given work of art. Adams continues: "A formalist analysis of a work of art would consider primarily the aesthetic effects created by the component parts of the design."[569] In a formalist critique, an artwork is important by the way its parts are composed, juxtaposed, and presented to the viewer as stylistically significant.

Iconography gives the artwork a different valuation; in iconography the artwork is primarily an expression of meaning. Again, Adams writes: "The iconographic approach to works of art primarily considers the meaning of subject matter."[570] Iconographic approaches ask,

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[566] Marcia Pointon, *History of Art: A Student's Handbook,* 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 1997),.51.

[567] This is to say that Art History *methodology* is multiple, but then, there is also the question of whether Art History itself is a multiple entity. This is a question for later….

[568] Laurie Schneider Adams, *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996), 16.

[569] L. Adams, 17.

[570] Ibid., 36.

"What does the artist mean to communicate in this artwork? What does the piece say?" In this perspective, art is concerned with the conveyance of meaning. Iconography considers content. In some sense, iconography, which emphasizes content over form, is the antithesis of formalism, which emphasizes form over content: "In an iconographic analysis of a work, it is possible, although not always advisable, to ignore the formal qualities. Nevertheless, as a general rule, iconographic studies focus on content rather than on form."[571] Put simply, iconography considers content, while formalism emphasizes form.

Closely related to iconography is *iconology*. Adams describes iconology as "the approach related to iconography [that] refers to the study of the larger program (if any) to which the work belongs."[572]   This "larger program" could refer to many things, but for the purpose of this section, the larger program refers to the history and development of the icon as an icon. For instance, icono*graphy* might describe a certain type of composition as a pietà, but the pietà has a position in the larger program of many other depictions of the pietà, which is a position icono*logy* might describe.

Social-historical approaches to art history rose in the twentieth century with rising interest in egalitarian politics and gender studies. As Adams describes this movement, "The two most recent art historical methodologies that consider the economic and social context of art are those which have been influenced by Marxism and feminism."[573] More generally, "social-historical"[574] and "contextual approaches"[575] are those that "consider the economic and social

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[571] L. Adams, 36.

[572] Ibid., 37.

[573] Ibid., 58.

[574] Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 142.

[575] L. Adams, 58.

context of art" that includes political issues, gender issues, and other issues that surround the art and the artist.[576] Adams acknowledges that the interest in contextual issues predates the twentieth century: "At least since the time of Karl Marx, scholars and writers have tried to understand art. . . in terms of how we actually spend our lives and occupy our time, and of where we find ourselves situated in the social order."[577] The twentieth century innovation, by art historians such as T.J. Clark, was to give contextual approaches a firm foothold in art history.

Biography and autobiography are two related methods that describe not only the art but also the life of the artist: "The biographical method of art history approaches works of art in relation to the artist's life and personality."[578] In this approach, a better understanding of the artist's life grants the viewer a better understanding of the artist's work. This approach is especially common with scholarship about the *Rondanini Pietà,* because the events surrounding its production are so dramatic: 'This crescent-shaped marble is the swan song and final bow of an artistic genius who was so great that he was apotheosized even in his own time'—such is the type of dramatic biographical thing one might say about the *Rondanini Pietà*, which may be interesting, but is such writing art history or is it biography? Is such writing even biography, or is it drama? Such questions get missed sometimes—and there are no easy answers presented here—but they are worth asking, lest the artwork get lost in its own mystique. Nonetheless, biographical approaches to the *Rondanini Pietà* may shed light upon some otherwise inexplicable elements inherent in the work itself. For instance, it may be more than a coincidence that the moribund Michelangelo was working on a sculpture depicting death just

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[576] L. Adams, 58.

[577] Minor, 142.

[578] L. Adams, 101.

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days before his own death. Biographical approaches to art history are helpful in weighing the merit of such claims.

Another interesting art historical method lies in the relationship between art history and *literary history*. Marcia Pointon describes this connection: "There are many close ties between Art History and Literary History. . . . [Friendships] are known to have existed between artists, writers and musicians. . . . There are also the poet-painters or painter-poets like William Blake whose work demands to be considered as a whole."[579]

This art historical approach is a meeting of worlds: a meeting of the art world and the literary world. Literary criticism has its own methods of analyzing written work, which, when combined with Art history, creates an innovative approach to understanding visual work. Because Michelangelo was an accomplished poet, a greater understanding of his written work can shed light on his visual work. Otherwise, we would have at least two Michelangelos—Michelangelo the artist and Michelangelo the poet—which is a strict distinction he may not have maintained in his own self-understanding. Considering Michelangelo as a reasonably sane[580] and reasonably integrated individual requires considering some of his poetry along with his artwork. This means literary history is a potentially helpful discipline in the study Michelangelo's art. Because there is relatively little comparative literary historical and art historical work in Michelangelo studies, this is an area that can benefit by further research in the future.

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[579] Pointon, 55-57.

[580] To have radically and internally separate identities would mean Michelangelo would have vertical splits in his psyche, splits that would be consistent with psychotic-level diagnoses, such as dissociative identity disorder (commonly known as multiple personality disorder), which are diagnoses that are highly inconsistent with known biographical data.

Psychoanalysis is another method used in art history. Adams writes, "The psychoanalytic approach to art history deals primarily with the unconscious significance of works of art."[581] Grounded in theories of the unconscious, which were first systematized by Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalytic approach to art history "is a complex method, which involves not only the art itself but also the artist, the aesthetic response of the viewer, and the cultural context."[582] Far from being strictly formalist, the psychoanalytic approach is more contextual. It requires contextual considerations similar to those found in the biographical approach to art history, which also inquires about the life of the artist. The psychoanalytic method goes one step further in considering the subconscious dynamics expressed in the artwork.

Psychoanalytic approaches to art history may not only consider the unconscious dynamics expressed in the artwork; psychoanalytic approaches may go one step further and speculate about the unconscious dynamics in the artist herself or himself. The latter approach is known as *psychobiography*. Adams writes that psychobiography "examines the artist's psychological development in relation to his art,"[583] but Pointon cautions that "there are obvious dangers in imagining that an artist, long dead, can be, as it were resurrected for the analyst's couch."[584] Psychobiography may be interesting—and even Freud used it on Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and others—but when practiced injudiciously, it runs the risk of being overly speculative.

As with the productive interplay between art history and literary history, art history and *theology* are two other disciplines that may be used together. Art history and theology are not,

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[581] L. Adams, 179.

[582] Ibid.

[583] Ibid.

[584] Pointon, 53.

however, well developed as an integrated and fully formed method. There are no well-formed disciplines of "art historical theology" or "theological art history." "Theological aesthetics" is a subdiscipline of theology, but aesthetics and art history are not tantamount. In the articles that follow, at least two of the art historians rely upon theology, but no one cited in this section uses art and art history to nuance or 'flesh out' any theological point. Theology is treated as a static subject, a given.   If, instead, theology is actually a living subject, art historians could benefit by engaging theology as such—by dancing with it, rather than dancing around it. Such a dynamic art historical understanding of theology will have to wait for a future work.

Because there are so many useful interdisciplinary methods in art history, art history may by its nature be interdisciplinary. The abundance of methods in art history suggests the usefulness of fostering an interdisciplinary interdependence with cognate disciplines, such as literary history, psychoanalysis, and theology, mentioned above. Pointon frames the importance of being interdisciplinary in this way:

> One manifestation of the development of Art History as a discipline during the second half of the twentieth century is the ever-widening range of material which the art historian is expected to discuss and interpret. Another is the lively debate about how this material ought to be used by art historians and by those specializing in other disciplines like Sociology, Psychology, History, and Anthropology.[585]

This leads to what Pointon calls the "interdependence of the humanities disciplines as well as the breadth of Art History."[586] Art history has depth, but by necessity, it has a lot of interdisciplinary breadth as well. In the following section, the extent of this breadth becomes evident upon examining art historical scholarship in terms of the methods outlined above.

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[585] Pointon, 52.

[586] Ibid., 53.

Textual examples of the methods

The purpose here is not to examine and critique the content of these scholars' assertions, but rather the purpose is to examine and critique the scholars' methodology. Because examining methodology requires a significant amount of textual evidence, the work of three scholars is quoted at length in the following pages. Of these three scholars, one is an early-career art historian, one is, arguably, a non-art historian, and one is a late-career art historian.

Case #1: the early-career art historian—Maria Lena Hobson, "Michelangelo's Rondanini Pietà *Reconsidered"*

Maria Lena Hobson submitted "Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà* Reconsidered" in 1987 as her Master's thesis for Virginia Commonwealth University. Currently, she works as an associate professor of art history at Mary Baldwin College, so she is now a professional art historian. At the time she wrote this work on the *Rondanini Pietà*, however, she was still a budding art historian, very early in her career.

She organizes her Master's thesis into four main sections, two of which are especially relevant to art historical methodology. Her first section, "CHAPTER I: PIETÀ THEME,"[587] explores the theme of the pietà, and methodologically, it is primarily iconographic. Her second section is irrelevant to us here. Her third section, "CHAPTER III: MICHELANGELO AND THE REFORMATION,"[588] explores contextual issues around the pietà, and as such, Hobson uses social-historical methodology. Her fourth section is a conclusion that weaves together the

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[587] Maria Lena Hobson, "Michelangelo's <u>Rondanini Pietà</u> Reconsidered" (Master's thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1987), ii.

[588] Ibid., ii.

iconography, the social history, and several other art historical methodologies. What follow are long excerpts from her work, with minimal commentary:

The following quotations are all iconographic, because they all describe the meaning of the sculpture: "A seated and introspective Virgin cradles her dead son in her lap,"[589] and, "The Florence Pietà . . . includes the figures of Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea, the Virgin Mary and Christ,"[590] and quoting Gertrude Schiller, Hobson writes, "[The] representation of Christ lying in His mother's lap symbolizes 'surrender, union and trust in the mystical sense,'"[591] and finally, referring here to Schiller's interpretation of the *Florentine Pietà*, Hobson writes, "The Virgin, horrified at the sight of Christ in her arms, presents him with a gesture of despair and resignation."[592] Because they deal with the content and meaning of the pietà, these are iconographic quotations.

The first section of Hobson's Master's thesis also has several iconological assertions, which are assertions that explore the icon in its larger program of the history of pietà iconography, such as: "[The] earliest Pietà by the master adheres to the theme as it originated in Germany, and was depicted by Italian painters such as Botticelli and Perugino. . . ,"[593] and, "The origin of the Pietà as a visual image is uncertain. It is, however, generally accepted that it first appeared in Germany around 1300. By the mid-fourteenth century, sculptures illustrating the theme had become prevalent,"[594] and, "It was not until the late fifteenth century that the Pietà

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[589] Hobson, 1.

[590] Ibid.

[591] Ibid., 2.

[592] Ibid.

[593] Ibid., 1.

[594] Ibid., 2.

enjoyed a similar popularity in Italy."[595] These quotations all explore the icon in its larger

program, and are, therefore, iconological.

Hobson has, apparently, organized the first section of her Master's thesis to focus on the

iconography and iconology of the pietà. This first section does not, however, rely on just one

method, because there are examples of other methods, such as the following social-historical

example, which occurs in Hobson's first section: "Originally intended as meditation pieces for

German convents, these sculptural groups came to be known as "Vesperbilder," referring to the

Good Friday Vespers."[596] Thus Hobson's first section is not completely simple in its

methodology, but it is largely reliant on the dual methodologies of iconography and iconology.

The third section of Hobson's work is largely social-historical, as seen in the following

example: "Although [Martin] Luther's Ninety Five Theses created a disturbance in Rome,

reformist ideas were not new to Italy. By the time of the Roman Inquisition in 1542, groups of

Catholic reformers had been in existence for many years."[597] Some other social-historical

examples in this section of Hobson's paper combine more than one art historical method, such as

the following excerpt that uses social-historical, biographical, and theological methods:

> A devout and enthusiastic reformist, [Reginald] Pole had considerable sympathy
> for Luther's doctrine of justification. He shared his beliefs with those who
> assembled around him. Notably Vittoria Colonna, who, one can assume, related
> these teachings to her friend Michelangelo. Their common intent and shared
> desire for the minimization of the importance of doctrinal issues led away from a
> rigid and dogmatic theology, toward a more spiritual approach to Christianity.[598]
> Colonna and Michelangelo shared the belief in Justification by Faith.[599]

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[595] Hobson, 2-3.

[596] Ibid., 2.

[597] Ibid., 23.

[598] Ibid., 26.

[599] Ibid., 27.

Luther's "doctrine of justification," also known as "justification by faith," is a theological issue—a full description of which lies outside the scope of this dissertation[600]—the friendship between Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna is a biographical issue, and the context of religious reform is also a social-historical issue. Here, Hobson touches upon at least three methods in art history. It could be argued, however, that theology, biography, and social-history are all contextual approaches. Thus, Hobson's first section was primarily iconographic, and Hobson's third section is primarily contextual.

By the time she reaches her fourth and concluding section, however, Hobson's methodology is not as neatly divided into sections; by the end of her paper, her methodology has become more complex. For instance, in the following quotation, she combines the iconography of her paper's first section with the social-historical and theological methods of her paper's third section:

> The <u>Rondanini Pietà</u>, his final sculpture, appears to be an exemplification of the Reformation belief. . . in the value of faith over good works as a means of salvation. The emaciated figures are far removed from the Renaissance tradition of the heroic man and rather seem to reflect the Reformation period beliefs in human helplessness and divine love.[601]

This quotation begins by describing contextual issues and ends by connecting the social-historical, theological *context* to the iconographic *meaning*. This is more methodologically complex than the writing in earlier sections of Hobson's paper.

Toward the end of her Master's thesis, she gets even more methodologically complex. Here is an excerpt that includes at least five art historical methods—a sort of royal flush:

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[600] Here, concerning Volney Gay's concept of incommensurate discourses Hobson is combining discourses that may be incommensurate.

[601] Hobson, 33.

> The ideals of the Renaissance, represented in the <u>Rome Pietà</u>, suffered the ravages of invading armies and a corrupt and unstable Church. Michelangelo, a devoutly religious man sought security in the friendship of Vittoria Collona [*sic*]. Through her he was exposed to the teaching of the "Spirituali" and the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone.[602]

The quotation above includes social-historical, iconographic, biographical, theological, and perhaps even psychoanalytic art historical methods. Some of these methods are more manifest than others; for instance, Hobson introduces psychoanalytic thought into her discourse when she speculates about Michelangelo seeking relational security. This, however, is a minor reference to psychoanalytic thought, especially compared to the work of psychoanalytic theorists, such as Gerda Frank, who is discussed below. Hobson just touches upon a psychoanalytic understanding, perhaps even unintentionally.

Hobson is an extremely early-career art historian—an art historian still in training, perhaps with the methodological categories of art history still fresh in her mind from an art history course on methods—so, until her concluding section, Hobson keeps her methods fairly well separated in clear categories. The first section is mostly iconographic, and the third section is mostly contextual. She has the clarity and simplicity of a young scholar.

Gerda Frank also keeps her methods fairly distinct but does so for slightly different reasons. She appears to be a novice to art historical methodological complexity, because her primarily role is not as an art historian.

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[602] Hobson, 38.

Case #2: the non-art historian—Gerda Frank, "The Enigma of Michelangelo's Pietà

Rondanini"

What is a "non-art historian"? Is it someone who is not an art historian, or is it someone

who is a historian of "non-art"? I suggest that Gerda Frank's primary role is that of a "non-art

historian" in both senses: she is not primarily an art historian, and she is primarily a historian of a

"non-art," which in her case is the psyche. More than exploring the history and meaning of

Michelangelo's artwork, she explores the history and meaning of Michelangelo's psyche. Can

non-art historians write art history? Do they then become art historians to some degree? Perhaps

yes. Perhaps they do, but as the following excerpts of Frank's work suggest, she avoids—or

predates—many important art historical methods and is primarily, though not exclusively, a

psychoanalyst writing in the field of psychobiography.

Frank spends the first part of her article presenting "the sculpture, its history, and the

scholarly comments available on the subject."[603] She spends the rest of her article "interpreting"

the *Rondanini Pietà* with a "psycho-analytic approach."[604] The first part of her article is art

historical—literally so—as it describes in detail the history of the *Rondanini Pietà*. The

psychoanalytic part of her article is less clearly art historical, because it describes the person of

Michelangelo more than it describes his sculpture.

In the latter part of Frank's article, most of her observations are biographical,

psychoanalytic, or psychobiographical. Biography and psychobiography have a causal relation:

psychobiography relies upon and builds upon biography. Because there is such compelling and

dramatic biographical data surrounding the *Rondanini Pietà*, one might guess that the

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[603] Gerda Frank, "The Enigma of Michelangelo's Pietà Rondanini," *American Imago* 23:4 (Winter 1966)., 294.

[604] Ibid., 294.

psychobiography of this piece is similarly dramatic, which it is. For example, here are several

dramatic selections from Frank's article that are specifically psychoanalytic, psychobiographical,

or at least biographical:

> When Michelangelo was nearly six months old. . . his father's term of office
> expired, and Michelangelo was "given out to a nurse" in nearby Settignano. His
> foster-mother, who nursed him, was a stonecutter's wife and daughter.[605] We can
> only guess at the frustrations of the young child, torn from his mother at such a
> tender age.[606] Michelangelo. . . had two mothers: the aristocratic woman who
> gave birth to him, and the stonecutter's wife, who in Michelangelo's phantasy
> gave birth to him as a sculptor. The result was lasting trauma.[607] Michelangelo
> carried only part of the mourning-process through successfully: that of investing
> new ideals with energy. This fact is amply shown by his towering creativity and
> his almost continuous prolific work.[608] The conflict is resolved, the dual mother-
> figure has become one, the ultimate mother, Death, in whose lap he will lay
> himself down to eternal rest, and who will never leave him.[609]
> In Michelangelo, the effect of early mother-loss was not an inhibition of
> functioning in the usual sense of the word. While his ability to form ego-object
> relations remained unimpaired, the trauma seems to have catapulted his creative
> gifts toward productions of gigantic heights and depths, that testify to the
> enormous of energy that could be mobilized in the service of genius.[610]

Frank's psychoanalytic, psychobiographical approach to Michelangelo is dramatic: it is a drama,

and she is telling a story, a story of Michelangelo's intrapsychic life. The story may be

compelling, and it may even correspond with whatever was going on inside the person of

Michelangelo four hundred years before she wrote her article, but Frank's psychobiography is a

story. There are times when her story is speculative—more eisegetical than exegetical—such as

her causal explanation of his creative genius. As mentioned in a section above as well,

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[605] Frank, 297.

[606] Ibid.

[607] Ibid., 298.

[608] Ibid., 298-299.

[609] Ibid., 311.

[610] Ibid., 313.

describing the cause of Michelangelo's creativity may be like a scientific lecturer trying to describe the flavor of strawberries to an audience through chemical formulae.

Even Frank knows she cannot explain away Michelangelo's talent, because she writes, "Whether Michelangelo's artistic output would have been equally remarkable without mother-loss, we do not know."[611] She shows some analytic reserve.

So, if Frank is telling a psychobiographical story, and maybe even a good one, is she any different from any other art historian who weaves a yarn around the artwork? Surely a good iconographic art historian knows how to weave meaning into a compelling story. The difference lies not in the dramatic qualities of the writing, because arguably all writing can have its poetic, subjective side; the difference lies instead in the subject matter of Frank's psychobiography. An iconographic art historian would focus on the meaning in the *sculpture*, but Frank focuses on meaning in the *sculptor*. As such this makes her role that of a non-art historian. Her main subject is non-art; her main subject is Michelangelo's psyche.

Case #3: the late-career art historian—Jean-Pierre Barricelli, "Michelangelo's Finito: *In the Self, the Later Sonnets, and the Last* Pietà*"*

Frank uses psychoanalysis or psychobiography, but Jean-Pierre Barricelli introduces a different art historical method to the studies of the *Rondanini Pietà*: Barricelli introduces Literary History. In fact, the name of the journal for which Barricelli writes the article at hand is "New Literary History: A Journal of Theory & Interpretation," so there are some literary historical element to his theories in this article.

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[611] Frank, 313.

At the time he wrote this article in 1993, Barricelli was already a late-career art historian who taught at the University of California at Riverside. He died only a few years later, in 1997.

The Maria Lena Hobson paper comes from the beginning of her career as a art historian, but the Barricelli paper comes from near the end of his career as an art historian: the new kid versus the old pro—the methodological differences should be illuminating.

Some parts of Barricelli work are relatively simple, methodologically speaking. For instance, the following sentence has elements of just two methods—iconography and literary history: "The notion of *pietra viva* or 'living stone' occurs frequently in Michelangelo's writings. The *Rondanini Pietà*, therefore, is a 'living image.'"[612] By contrast, most of Barricelli's writing is much more methodologically complex.

Instead of focusing on methods in many different quotations, here we consider the many methods in one particularly illustrative quotation.   Methodologically, the following passage in Barricelli's article is remarkable: it contains at least eight art historical methods—formalism, social-history, theology, literary history, iconography, psychoanalysis, biography, and psychobiography—all in just half a paragraph:

> For him, the form related to the modes of strictures, a mode related in spirit to the philosophy of the Counter-Reformation which attempted to countermand the enfranchising impulses of the Reformation with constraining reaffirmations of dogma. Michelangelo struggled for liberation: liberation posits struggle: and the *non finito* came as close to liberation as possible. In many instances, the rigorous sonnet shrank expressively to a few verses: eight, six, four, three. Suggestion was reduced to a hint. If one follows the process closely, using the *Rondanini Pietà* as indicator, a different notion of beauty emerges, one which encompasses the unfinished self no differently from the way it encompasses a fragmentary poem or sculpture. . . .[613]

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[612] Jean-Pierre Barricelli, "Michelangelo's *Finito*: In the Self, the Later Sonnets, and the Last *Pietà*," *New Literary History: a Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 24:3 (Summer 1993): 611.

[613] Barricelli, 612.

Outside the context of Barricelli's paper, this quotation may be hard to decipher, but this passage discusses some "form" of formalism, some social constraints of social-history, some "dogma" of theology, some sculptural and poetic comparisons of literary history, some artistic meanings of iconography, and finally some of Michelangelo's intrapsychic and artistic struggles for liberation, which provide evidence of psychoanalysis, biography, and psychobiography. It is hard to imagine a quotation that is as methodologically thick.

There are many other passages in Barricelli's article that are almost as methodologically thick, but to quote them here would probably obscure the main point here: Barricelli is a late-career art historian who is methodologically very complex. He has many methodological resources at his disposal, and he uses them freely.

Conclusions

Of the three scholars cited here, the early-career art historian and the non-art historian integrate their methods the least. They keep their method distinct, which helps with clarity, but this simplicity may also limit the range of their expression. They might not be as comfortable with their methodological resources, so they may use them more cautiously and less gracefully.

By contrast, late-career art historian combines and integrates his methods the most. He provides the most methodologically complex art historical analyses, and he makes points with art historical subtleties that the other scholars mentioned here do not approach. To return to the metaphor of art history as a mountain and methods as roads up the mountain, the late-career art historian is able to navigate steep and subtle paths up the mountain that may daunt his younger or less experienced peers.

178

Admittedly, up to this point, this is not a very complex idea: late-career art historians have a more complex understanding of their discipline. At its face value at least, this neither a very complex idea in itself—that is, until one considers it more deeply.   Above, this section quoted Marcia Pointon writing, "There exists no single line of enquiry we can label art history. This much will have become evident."[614] Indeed, this has become evident—the three works quoted above give ample evidence of the methodological complexity of art history. This section makes the assertion that art historical *methodology* is inherently multiple, but what about the discipline itself? Is art history itself an inherently multiple discipline?

To expand the mountain metaphor, if art historical methods are the many roads up a mountain, are these roads leading up to the same mountaintop? If art history is the mountain, how many mountains are there? How many "art histories" are there? It is possible that art history refers not to a single entity but to an aggregate: not a mountain but a mountain *range*.

If this were true, it would not necessarily be a bad thing. Certainly, a mountain range is more efficient at covering ground than a single monolithic mountain. An aggregate discipline would be more flexible and inherently interdisciplinary. One drawback to a range—mountain range or a disciplinary range—is that communication is more difficult for those who have reached the end of separate paths. Once you are at the end of your road and the top of your mountain, you may find yourself separated from your friends. Thus, if art history is a range, we would expect *intra*disciplinary cohesion and communication to be difficult at times.

Furthermore, if there are multiple art histories—connected but multiple—how can we say they all refer to the same artwork? Would not multiple roads up multiple mountains lead the viewers to widely different understanding of the same sculpture? How, then, could one rightly

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[614] Pointon, 51.

say or prove that there is, in some putatively objective reality, a single sculpture at all? For

instance, in the writings above, three scholars use many, many methodological roads to lead the

readers to three different understandings of the *Rondanini Pietà*. How then, can we assert that

with such divergent understandings, there is just one sculpture. Instead it would be more prudent

to assert that there are multiple *Rondanini Pietà*s, each the product of walking one or many roads

to the top of one or many mountains and looking in one or many directions. As the metaphor

falls apart under its own weight, we are left with the understanding that there is no single, simple

understanding, and, perhaps, no single, simple sculpture in the first place. The idea of a single

art historical path up a single art historical mountain becomes as mythical as the idea of a single

artist communicating a single clear idea to a single-minded audience. Instead, art and art history

remain richer for their variety.[615] [616]

ii. Theories on Michelangelo's art historical context: iconology of the pietà theme

The previous section explores several methods of art history. This exploration provides a

more nuanced understanding artwork, such as the *Rondanini Pietà*, in a wide art historical

context. If there is a mountain range of art historical methods, climbing any one of these

mountains can provide a view of the artwork. Now, in this chapter, the methodological mountain

chosen is iconology. As noted in the previous section, Laurie Schneider Adams describes

iconology as "the approach related to iconography [that] refers to the study of the larger program

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[615] This may be like question marks ("?")—which are far more pregnant in their shape and their function than their counterpart exclamation marks ("!")—and likewise, unanswered questions may say far more than statements about an unfinished sculpture.

[616] The previous several pages are reworked from a paper of mine submitted while at Vanderbilt University.

(if any) to which the work belongs."[617] In terms of the metaphor of an art historical mountain

range of methods, iconology provides the long view of a given artwork. Iconology is a grand,

sweeping vista, looking across many places and times. Because the primary artwork considered

in this dissertation is the *Rondanini Pietà,* understanding the iconology of this piece requires

taking the long view of the pietà theme.

As the following section is in the "Values" greater chapter of this dissertation, the

iconology that follows here is value-laden iconology, as opposed to the iconology that came

earlier, which was presumably more simply factual. The scholars quotes in the this section, then,

use their own interpretive lenses, adding to the overall hermeneutic reconstruction of

Michelangelo's life and final work.

Iconological origins in devotional necessity

To reiterate, in the words of the art historian Gertrud Schiller, the pietà is that image that

depicts "the Mother of God with the dead Christ in her lap."[618] There are other closely related

images, but this one with Christ in Mary's lap in the main one emphasized here.

Also, as stated, the pietà theme of the Virgin Mary holding her dead son is noncanonical,

but there are biblical referents for the events that surround it, such as the following Matthean

passage that mentions, besides Mary Magdalene, an additional "Mary":

> When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea named Joseph,
> who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of
> Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had
> taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new
> tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door

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[617] L. Adams, 37.

[618] Schiller, 179.

of the sepulcher, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.[619]

There is, however, no mention of Mary, mother of Jesus, holding her dead son. Who, then, is "the other Mary" mentioned in this pericope: Is this the Virgin and mother of Jesus? According to one biblical commentator, "the identity of this Mary is unknown."[620] There is Mary who is mentioned as a witness to the crucifixion, for example in Matt. 27: 56, in which she is called "Mary the mother of James and Joses [or "Joseph"], and the mother of Zebedee's children,"[621] but again, according to a biblical commentator, "James and Joseph are probably not Jesus' brothers."[622] Who then is this Mary? Modern scholars are not in agreement, but the consensus of modern scholarship may not be the most important point here. What may be a much more relevant question is: Who did contemporary artists of the pietà think this Mary was? If they thought this "other Mary" was the mother of Jesus, then they could have thought there was ample textual support for the pietà theme. When the pietà theme was most in vogue, it would have been very easy to suppose that this "other Mary" and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, were both actually Mary the mother of Jesus.

Apparently the first pietistic textual source comes from the German nun, St. Methilde's, who reported receiving the pietà theme in prayer, and at the Virgin Mary's behest the nun was encouraged to meditate not on the Virgin's lament but instead on "adoration of the Redeemer." Thus, the thematic shift was from lament to adoration—from grief to grace.[623] Her

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[619] Mt. 27:57-61, *The Holy Bible, KJV,* 1028.

[620] *The HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV,* 1912f.

[621] Mt. 27:56, *The Holy Bible, KJV,* 1028.

[622] *The HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV,* 1912f., italics removed.

[623] Schiller, 179.

contribution—perhaps a prayerful conveyance of the Virgin's divine contribution—sparked the iconic paradigm in the North and subsequently throughout Europe and the world, where pietà became a somewhat popular artistic subject, taking shape as the aforementioned *Andachtsbilde* or "contemplative images." Although separated from biblical referents, these images are highly devotional and pietistic in character.[624]

There is another pietistic textual source for the pietà theme of Mary cradling her dead son in her lap as a child. This comes from an unnamed author whom Schiller quotes, with the author writing in the voice of Mary, "As a child thou hast often slept and dreamed on my lap, now thou liest here in the sleep of death." This passage compares youth and death. Also this passage compares sleep and death, often considered the longest sleep. If these writings are contemporary with the early medieval writings of George of Nicodemia, they predate the later medieval popularity of the iconic theme of the pietà.[625]

Schiller, however, also discounts the idea that the pietà has its origins in the apocryphal textual sources. She writes:

> The sculpture is derived neither from the new miniatures of the Lamentation of Mary in thirteenth-century manuscripts, nor from the painting of the full Lamentation with its many figures which was scarcely known in Germany in *c.* 1300; it was created out of a new need to objectivize in image a quality that cannot be explained rationally. The concept 'lying in his mother's lap' is an expression of trust, faith, surrender and union in the mystical sense.[626]

Writing about these pietistic and theological points, Schiller continues, "in a period of mysticism the word *pietàs* signified a religious attitude that was imbued with self surrendering love of God

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[624] Murray, *Oxford,* 16-17.

[625] Schiller, 174-179

[626] Ibid., 179-180.

and reverence and sought mystical union with Christ."[627] This particular imagery has a specific pietistic and theological thrust that emphasizes a reverential and surrendering devotion to God that carries the hope that this devotion will encourage some form of Divine union. In Christianity, this goal is commonly directed toward Christ, who, in post-Nicene Christian theology, is tantamount to the Divine.

The pietà fulfills this devotional necessity—this necessity of having a symbolic representation of the suprarational assertion of God's redeeming love given in the person of the Jesus, who in Christianity is considered to be God's only beloved son. Mary looks at her son while she is aware both of the horror of his suffering as well as his unimaginable mercy (*pietà*) embodied in his absolute self-sacrifice. Mary's otherwise inexplicably pacific physiognomy in some *pietàs* makes sense in this context: in the artist's rendering, Mary's face can be at peace because she knows he is more than a dead man, but her pacific expression represents some knowledge of his putative Godhood.[628]

In the art historians' Peter and Linda Murray's formulation, Jesus is on Mary's lap, much like a child would be cradled by its nursing mother, and because this is a representation the dead Jesus and his mother, there are the iconographic parallels between Jesus' infancy and his eventual death. This association, along with St. Methilde's Good Friday revelation, link the pietà theme even more closely with the last parts of the Passion narrative. The pietà is meant to remind the pious faithful of Christ's redemptive suffering and death, symbolized so powerfully

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[627] Schiller, 179-180.

[628] Ibid., 180.

in the plain figures of a mother holding her dead son in her lap, as if nursing him like a little child. The power of this image is meant to evoke the power of Christ's redemptive love.[629]

There are variations on this theme of Mary gazing at the dead Christ, such as some in which she gaze out at the viewer, but the overwhelming majority of the images emphasize the moment between the mother and her son.[630] Schiller: As time went on, the pietà imagery changed somewhat and expanded. Schiller describes this development:

> The compact two-figure group was not only expanded in the course of later development, it was also loosened. The body now lies at Mary's feet, with the head slightly raised and leaning against Mary's knee. If Mary is seated low, Christ's head sometimes lies in her lap. This image is common mainly in the Baroque period. . . .[631]

As the theme developed formal strictures upon it loosened, and as will be recalled from above, an *Andachtsbild*, such as the pietà, does not have the same necessary adherence to its formal past as an acheiropoietic icon would. There is more compositional latitude with the pietà. Christ's head can turn this way or that; he can lie on her lap or at her feet; and as Schiller suggests, even the two-figure requirement is not an absolute. There can be more than just Mary and Jesus in the composition, but usually, scenes with the dead Christ and many other figures are scenes that are more accurately described as images of the lamentation than images of the pietà.

The pietà versus the lamentation

Like the pietà, the lamentation involves Mary lamenting the death of her son. There are, however a few key differences between the lamentation and the pietà.

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[629] Peter and Linda Murray. "S.v., Pietà." *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 391.

[630] Schiller, 180.

[631] Ibid., 181.

One common difference involves the number of figures in the composition. In the lamentation composition, there may, for instance, also appear Mary Magdalene and three lamenting women.[632] Also, according to Schiller, "Mary does not always appear in the Bearing of the Body, but in the Lamentation the expression of grief is largely concentrated in her figure."[633] Thus, the Virgin Mary remains a focal point, but she is not the only other figure in the composition besides Christ.

Besides differing in the number of figures usually included in the composition, the pietà theme and the lamentation theme also differ in their iconographic tone. As mentioned above, the pietà theme is more reflective and meditative than theme of the lamentation.[634] Unlike the deposition and lamentation themes, the pietà is distinguished by being more of a reflective, contemplative, and meditative moment that does not focus on the horror of the dead Jesus in his mother's lap.[635] This difference may reflect another idea mentioned above: St. Methilde's divinely received injunction to shift her focus from the Lamentation of the Virgin to the adoration of the Redeemer.[636]

Michelangelo and the pietà theme

Through the popularity of his first pietà, Michelangelo's work strengthened the iconic status of the pietà theme and made the term "pietà" much more common. Between his first pietà—often called the *Vatican Pietà* when distinguishing it from the others—and his final

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[632] Schiller, 174.

[633] Ibid.

[634] Murray, *Oxford,* 391.

[635] Ibid.

[636] Schiller, 179.

pietà—the *Rondanini Pietà*—there are one or two intervening works that some scholars label

pietàs and attribute to Michelangelo. Mostly, however, we ignore them here for these reasons:

One because of the sculptures is a piece that Michelangelo himself rejected—the so-called

Florentine Pietà—and the other sculpture is widely considered not to be Michelangelo's—the

so-called *Palestrina Pietà*.[637] There is also said to have been another Pietà, so arguably a fourth

or fifth one, which Michelangelo sculpted for Vittoria Colonna, but along with a pair of other

sculptures made for her—"magnificent works, report his biographers"—all traces are now lost.[638]

Though for centuries, many art historians thought the *Rondanini Pietà* was also entirely lost, the

twentieth century saw the work resurface into wider scholarly awareness, and an expert on this

sculpture, Maria Teresa Fiorio, notes that "the *Pietà Rondanini* makes its appearance in the

history of art only in the twentieth century."[639]

iii. Interpretation of Michelangelo's Pietàs: Steinberg on love and birth

In "The Metaphors of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's Pietàs," the art historian Leo

Steinberg presents two main theories: First, there is love imagery between Jesus and Mary in

Michelangelo's pietàs, and second, there is birth imagery between Mary and Jesus in

Michelangelo's pietàs.[640] In later works after the publication of the aforementioned article,

Steinberg stirred the art world with similar claims and extended claims in the book *The Sexuality

of Christ*, but the article is where he first publicly addresses such imagery in Michelangelo's

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[637] E.g., Tartuferi, 25, 38.

[638] Nardini, 138.

[639] Fiorio, 28.

[640] Leo Steinberg, "The Metaphors of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's *Pietàs*," in *Studies in Erotic Art,* edited by Theodore Bowie and Cornelia V. Christenson (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 231-284.

pietàs in particular. The first claim, that there is an erotic element between Mary and Jesus finds support in aspects of Michelangelo's first, most famous pietà.

In the *Vatican Pietà*, Mary is anachronistically young, hardly the mother of an approximately thirty-three year old Jesus. (Figure 2, page 21) She looks no older than thirty, or maybe in her mid-twenties, which was the estimated age of Michelangelo's own mother when she died.[641] Mary's youth has unsettled observers for centuries, as recorded in 1537 and maybe even earlier.[642] Michelangelo explains this anachronism himself, albeit through his personal biographer Ascanio Condivi:

> Are you not aware ... that chaste women maintain themselves much more
> fresh than the unchaste? How much more so a virgin in whom there had
> never arisen the least lascivious desire that might have affected her
> body?[643]

Michelangelo's own explanation is illuminating, but the artist could have had private reasons as well, reasons that he himself may not have known. Steinberg calls Michelangelo's explanation a "defensive screen"[644] and describes the sculpture in a different light, as "a smooth marble group which, under cover of a devotional theme, displayed an exceptionally beautiful naked youth in the lap of a girl"[645] and as "a grown man that lies mysteriously banked on the young woman's lap."[646]

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[641] Liebert, 13.

[642] Steinberg, 234.

[643] Ibid., 236-237.

[644] Ibid., 237.

[645] Ibid., 231.

[646] Ibid., 235.

Seeing an erotic or at least romantic bond between Mary and Jesus might seem inflammatory, but Steinberg reminds us that "there is nothing new or heretical" about such an interpretation and that "the Virgin had been extolled as the bride of Christ since the twelfth century."[647] For instance, in the 9th century and particular to the pietà theme, George of Nicodemia writes in the voice of Mary speaking to Jesus, "I kiss thy silent mouth, the motionless lips of him who has created all visible nature. I kiss the closed eyes of him who has restored sight to the blind,"[648] though from this passage could easily suggest storge and agape as well. Art historian Bruno Nardini sees an equation between the Mary and a beloved in Michelangelo's poetry, in which in many cases "the figure of the beloved woman could hardly be distinguished from that of the Madonna."[649] At least regarding the issue of Mary's comely appearance in the *Vatican Pietà*, Michelangelo's contemporary biographer Vasari rallies to the artist's defense and seconds his view that Mary's youth signifies chastity, but as Steinberg notes, Vasari himself then quotes the following anonymous poem about the pietà pair: ". . . thy spouse, son and father, / Thou his only spouse, daughter and mother."[650] Around that time, it had become common poetically to equate Mary with the Church—"Mary-Ecclesia, the Virgin as Church"—and by itself, the Church already had biblical support as standing for the bride of Christ.[651] So, even if one of Michelangelo's reasons for giving Mary such a youthful physiognomy was to highlight her chastity, there was also ample historical precedent for a more romantically charged reading.

[647] Steinberg, 237.

[648] George of Nicodemia as quoted in Schiller, 175.

[649] Nardini, 137-138.

[650] Anonymous poet according to Vasari as quoted in Steinberg, 237.

[651] Steinberg, 237 and 270.

This "love" symbolism is the subject of the first part of Steinberg's article, and the second part revolves around "birth" symbolism.

While all of Michelangelo's pietàs portray Jesus near or emerging from Mary's lap, nowhere perhaps is the birth symbolism clearer than in the pietà upon which Steinberg focuses, Michelangelo's drawing of a pietà for Vittoria Colonna. The *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*, or *Colonna Pietà*, represents Jesus supported between Mary's legs, and Steinberg describes configuration as "the symbolic parturience of Madonna's spread thighs."[652] Thus, in Michelangelo's pietàs, Steinberg finds not only what some might call symbolic prurience—spousal "love" between the mother and son—but also symbolic parturience—"birth" of the son from the mother. Either interpretation of love or birth, however, may be unsettling also because Jesus is dead. Just as Steinberg offers historical precedent for the spousal love symbolism between Mary and Jesus, Steinberg gives historical precedent for the birth or womb being related to Christ's death: "The Church Fathers had dwelled continually on the similitude of Christ's unused grave and the uneared womb of his Mother, two earthy tabernacles chosen to house the divine."[653]

For Steinberg, this *Colonna Pietà* includes symbolism of birth and death, unified in the moment: "All duration collapses; the span of life from birth to entombment shrinks into a sign."[654] Even temporality collapses in the moment when this sign of both birth and death are unified.

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[652] Steinberg, 268 and 270.

[653] Ibid., 268.

[654] Ibid.

Steinberg saw similar themes also in Michelangelo's final pietà: "To this work, the

Colonna Pietà, Michelangelo returned more than thirty years later to conceive from it the *Pietà*

Rondanini."[655] Steinberg notes that the sculpture had multiple phases, and in an earlier phase

evident in the lower part of the sculpture where Christ's legs are separate from Mary's, Steinberg

writes that "we seem to be witnessing some aboriginal separation."[656] Concerning the latest

version of the *Rondanini Pietà*, where Michelangelo was carving Christ literally out of the

marble of Mary's body, Steinberg offers the following interpretation:

> This effect of absolute fusion came at the end. It came with the last mutilating revisions
> Michelangelo made. Cutting away the whole upper portion of the completed Christ
> figure, he tried to make the loved form issue again from the diminishing core of the stone.
> At the cost of the work itself, he tried once more to enact the Incarnation from Mary's
> body. And in this final happening, which still absorbed him in the week of his death, he
> brought about those destructive changes which reduced the near-finished group to its
> present abbreviation. . . .[657]

In describing "this effect of absolute fusion," Steinberg's interpretation too displays a fusion of

the themes woven throughout his article: themes of love, birth, and death. Jesus is the "loved

form"—not only loved by Mary but as Steinberg seems to suggest, loved by Michelangelo also.

In a further fusion, Mary gives symbolic birth to her child, but Michelangelo gives birth to the

sculpture, also a product of his body in some ways. This is the act of creation that is mimetic of

procreation, as described in earlier sections on Erikson and Miller-McLemore. Finally, the

theme of death is the third theme that is fused, as Jesus is represented to be dead, but also, as

stated several times and as Steinberg notes, Michelangelo continued working on the piece into

"the week of his death." The sculpture—and Steinberg—not only fuse themes but there is also a

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[655] Steinberg, 270.

[656] Ibid., 271.

[657] Ibid.

fusion between what Jesus and Mary embody and what Michelangelo actually did: He gave birth to the sculpture in some way, expressed love for its subject, and then he died.

At one level, what Steinberg calls the "absolute fusion" is the fusion between Mary and Jesus, but at other levels, Steinberg either notes, implies, or lays the groundwork for various other kinds of symbolic fusions in Michelangelo's pietàs, which culminating in the *Rondanini Pietà*. Symbolically birth, love, and death come together, but in this, there is also the temporal "collapse" that brings birth and death together into one moment. Further, Jesus and Mary are fused in spousal love. Further still, Steinberg notes Michelangelo's involvement in trying to enact the Incarnation, an act that itself implies a identificatory fusion either with Mary the biological mother or with God the Creator and putative biological father of Jesus, and either identification on Michelangelo's part suggests another layer of fusion.

Nevertheless, Steinberg does not describe most of these potential fusions as "fusions" at all, and nor does he explore the multivalent symbolic aspects systematically. He does, however, lay the groundwork for building a mulitvalent understanding of Michelangelo's pietàs, especially concerning their iconological significance. He does not specify exactly how the layers of meaning fit together, but that may be part of the point, part of the fusion. The pietà theme as Michelangelo expresses it is something where iconological multivalency comes to a point—where this iconological theme carries many symbols simultaneously—and Steinberg recognizes much of this.   For him, the symbolism of birth, love, and death are all present in Michelangelo's pietàs.

iv. Interpretations of Michelangelo's non finito *work: Nardini, Barricelli, and Carabell*

Despite the high finish of many of Michelangelo's most famous works, the majority of them are—or at least appear—*non finito*, or literally "unfinished."[658]   Often the phrase *non finito* refers to stone sculpture that is left unfinished, with some parts of the block remaining uncarved or roughly carved. For instance, concerning his pietàs, only the first and most famous one can be considered definitively to have been finished, and Michelangelo put so much effort into refining the finish that it shines. Most of his other sculptures, however, lack this high finish. Several art historians have written about this unfinished quality in most of work, and three of them are presented here: Bruno Nardini, Paula Carabell, and Jean-Pierre Barricelli.

Nardini

The Italian art historian Bruno Nardini writes that such artworks may be "called unfinished by some critics," but instead, he takes the position that "it was instead the artist's precise intention to leave them like this, between finished and unfinished. . . ."[659] For instance, regarding one of Michelangelo's early paintings, Nardini asserts that the work was left unfinished "to heighten the plastic emphasis of the main figures."[660] For Nardini, the unfinished quality serves a formal function.

Similarly, Michelangelo also left much of his poetry unfinished according to the conventional standards of his time, but of this Nardini offers readers the following interpretation:

> Michelangelo's poetry, like his painting, has no landscapes, but always and only a thought on which the entire poetic discourse hinges. When this thought had been fully

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[658] Liebert, 222-223.

[659] Nardini, 61.

[660] Ibid.

expressed, even in a few lines, he felt the composition to be finished, although it might form an imperfect sonnet.[661]

This suggests that Michelangelo was intentional in leaving so much work unfinished, and Nardini implies the parallel between Michelangelo's unfinished poems and unfinished visual art. Michelangelo left such works unfinished because at some deeper level, they were finished; they had served their function and expressed an idea clearly.

Nardini's interpretation hinges upon the concept, however, that Michelangelo was trying to express some "idea" in his work, a concept that not all artists would accept about their work, but Michelangelo's biographical data supports Nardini's claim in some ways. Not only is Michelangelo's poetry full of ideas quite explicitly, but as mentioned in a previous section, Michelangelo was still an adolescent when he cut his teeth on Neo-Platonic philosophy. Thus, the idea of the importance of an idea had a place in his formative education, an education that Nardini himself describes thoroughly in his biography about Michelangelo.

Although Nardini suggests the intentionality and purpose of Michelangelo's leaving artworks unfinished, the art historian also leaves room for the possibility that the artist may have left some work unintentionally incomplete. Specifically, in the chronology at the end of Nardini's book, he writes that when the artist died, he left the *Rondanini Pietà* "unfinished."[662] This exception would fit the biographical data at least, as Michelangelo continued working furiously on the piece until right before his death. There is no biographical data about whether in the moments before the time of his death Michelangelo himself considered this particular seemingly unfinished work to be complete. There is, however, the evidence that as late as a few days before his death, the artist implied its incompleteness by continuing to work on it. When he

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[661] Nardini, 163.

[662] Ibid., 186.

did finally put down his chisel in those last few days, it is impossible to know with any certainty whether he was physically unable to continue or whether he was physically able to continue a little while longer but felt the piece was good enough. Given, however, the evidence that he spent his very last days bedridden, the evidence would seem to point to Michelangelo's having reached a physical limit, rather than an artistic resolution with his final piece, and Nardini implies something similar.

Carabell

Paula Carabell is another art historian who writes about the *Rondanini Pietà* being unfinished, but rather than seeing the work merely for its biographical importance, she focuses on the importance on the work itself. Of those few scholars who have written about the *Rondanini Pietà*, most scholarship about this sculpture has been more about Michelangelo than about his final piece of art, and many have treated the sculpture as an afterthought that does little more than stand as a reminder of Michelangelo's death: "Interest in the master's final sculptural project has remained idiosyncratic, centering on its perceived autobiographic, rather than artistic, significance"[663]—including the work of most of Michelangelo's most eminent biographers, such as Vasari and de Tolnay—but Carabell continues, "Accounts have adhered to romantic notions of artistic expression and to a view of the unfinished that privileges actualization over disjunction."[664] Even if the *Rondanini Pietà* is unfinished, we need not privilege actualization over disjunction, for to do so would be to adhere to romantic notions. So, even though

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[663] Carabell, Paula, "Image and Identity in the Unfinished Works of Michelangelo," 83.

[664] Ibid.

traditionally, unfinished works have been considered inferior to finished ones, Carabell lifts up the contextuality of such notions.

Further, the unfinished aspects of the *Rondanini Pietà* may be appreciated more in the modern world because, as Vanderbilt art historian Robert Mode has put it, in the modern world, an artist's unfinished product is appreciated because we like to see the process.[665] So, although in the past, much of the material written about the *Rondanini Pietà* focuses on the sculpture as a sort of sad biographical footnote to Michelangelo's artistic legacy, a few more modern art historians can see the sculpture has inherent significance not only despite its being unfinished but because of it.

Barricelli

Another art historian who acknowledges the value of *Rondanini Pietà* for being unfinished, while also taking contextual factors in to consideration is Jean-Pierre Barricelli.

Taking into account Michelangelo's quattrocento and cinquecento contexts, Barricelli writes: "To understand Michelangelo's reality, one must look not only at the artwork itself, not only at his travailed life primarily during his later years, but also at his position between Reformation and Counter-Reformation.[666]" Barricelli looks toward Michelangelo's religious context to gain a greater sense of the artist's reality, which according to Barricelli, hinged upon a desire for spiritual liberation. This desire for liberation found partial expression in the *non finito* aspect of his works:

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[665] Class notes, Prof. Robert Mode, Leonardo lecture on 1/29/04, in "Italian Renaissance Art after the 1500s," Vanderbilt University, spring semester 2004.

[666] Jean-Pierre Barricelli, "Michelangelo's *Finito*: In the Self, the Later Sonnets, and the Last *Pietà*," *New Literary History: a Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 24:3 (Summer 1993): 612.

> For [Michelangelo], the form related to the modes of strictures, a mode related in spirit to the philosophy of the Counter-Reformation which attempted to countermand the enfranchising impulses of the Reformation with constraining reaffirmations of dogma. Michelangelo struggled for liberation: liberation posits struggle: and the *non finito* came as close to liberation as possible.[667]

Thus, caught between the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Barricelli supposes that Michelangelo struggled for liberation from the strictures such a religious and cultural upheaval imposed. Also, Barricelli sees the unfinished works as an expression of this desire to become free.

Barricelli sees something in these works that is an attempt to be liberated in some way, as if the sparseness of expression was in itself an expression of this attempt:

> In many instances, the rigorous sonnet shrank expressively to a few verses: eight, six, four, three. Suggestion was reduced to a hint. If one follows the process closely, using the *Rondanini Pietà* as indicator, a different notion of beauty emerges, one which encompasses the unfinished self no differently from the way it encompasses a fragmentary poem or sculpture. . . .[668]

Part of the expression is then not simply bucking tradition but more than that, leaving the poems or artworks unfinished is an expression of the "unfinished self," where the *non finito* aspect represents the unfinished sense of liberation. This concept is part and parcel of the theological anthropology of Michelangelo's context, in which human beings are seen as fallen and, in this way, never entirely finished while still alive. Recall for instance, Michelangelo's poem quoted earlier, in which he writes, "No one has mastery / Before he is at the end / Of his art and his life."[669]

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[667] Barricelli, 612.

[668] Ibid.

[669] *The Complete Poems*, no. 323, pg. 173.

As in the block quotation above, Barricelli draws a comparison between Michelangelo's late-life unfinished poetry and his late-life unfinished *Rondanini Pietà*, and similarly, he writes that "Michelangelo addressed . . . issues in his poetry—poetry, however, that in mood and mode underscored the power and primacy of sculpture.[670]" So, though sculpture has primacy for the artist, both are forms of Michelangelo's expression but to what end? In Barricelli's conception, both poetry and visual art express Michelangelo's wish for religious or spiritual liberation:

> What are now identified as Michelangelo's "trembling hand sonnets" form intertextually verbal analogues to the spirit of the *Rondanini Pietà*, an autobiographical contemplation of death in marble whose aspiration for freedom affirms his art's attempt at a direct communion with God.[671]

This striving toward freedom is an expression of Michelangelo's seeking a "direct communion with God," apparently a liberating spiritual experience of some kind, whether then in life or foreshadowing his hopes for what may come after death. For Barricelli, the *Rondanini Pietà* has special place in this, especially because it came at the end of Michelangelo's life and was unfinished.

Further, he suggests it is unfinished to reflect the necessarily unfinished struggle to experience the divine:

> [The *Rondanini Pietà*] was created for [Michelangelo's] soul which, like the unfinished self—that endless aspiration to make direct contact with the divine—struggles toward freedom from form and all it implies. The body—imperfect matter—is always unfinished, as is the soul, so long as the body enslaves it.[672]

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[670] Barricelli, 602.

[671] Ibid., 604.

[672] Ibid., 610-611.

Barricelli suggests that Michelangelo saw the body as something enslaving the soul, and along similar lines, Barricelli quotes another eminent art historian and translator of Michelangelo, James Saslow:

> One of the recent translators of his poetry, James Saslow, remarks that while Michelangelo's primary concern was the salvation only God could provide, "his ultimate desire [was] to free his soul from the restraints and failings of the body so that it may in time ascend to heaven."[673]

In such passages, however, Barricelli and to some extent Saslow may be overstating Michelangelo's theological adherence to the idea of a strict dichotomy between the divine and the human. After all, Michelangelo was clearly willing to portray his religion's primary divinities in a portraits of humanity, not only in the *Rondanini Pietà* but in his many depictions of Jesus and even God the Father. Also, with its rough and apparently unfinished features, the *Rondanini Pietà* is a particularly gritty depiction of the dead Christ, which makes the representation a far cry from the situation in early Christian art over a millennium earlier, when there was "some reluctance to represent the crucifixion realistically."[674] Michelangelo sculpts Christ gracefully but realistically.[675]

Still, Barricelli's main conclusion is that Michelangelo was striving toward some religious or spiritual liberation, and his late-life poems and late-life sculpture both reflect this striving. Barricelli even goes so far as to describe the *Rondanini Pietà* Michelangelo's "culminating piece of his ultimate worldview."[676] Having considered several art historians'

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[673] Barricelli, 600.

[674] Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 152-153.

[675] The previous paragraph is revised from a paper of mine while at Vanderbilt University.

[676] Barricelli, 597.

interpretations of the unfinished aspect—the *non finito*—of much of Michelangelo's work, we turn now to even more about this unfinished yet "culminating piece," the *Rondanini Pietà*.

v. Interpretations of the Rondanini Pietà*: Murray, Dixon, and Hobson*

Murray and Rousseau

Of Michelangelo's sculptures, the sculptor Victor Rousseau says, "You could roll them down a mountain and no piece would come off."[677] Here, Rousseau highlights the remarkable formal and structural integrity of Michelangelo's artistry. While Rousseau's memorable assertion holds true for most of Michelangelo's sculptures, even the *non finito* ones, his observation simply is not true of the Rondanini Pietà. In the larger program of Michelangelo's work, there is something especially fragile and vulnerable about his final work. Part of this fragility has to do with a vestigial arm, a remnant of an earlier version of the work. (Figure 7) This is arm makes the sculpture literally fragile, and were it to be rolled down a mountain, the arm would undoubtedly be the first to go.

The vulnerability has also to do with some of the figures' surprising nudity. First, Jesus is fully exposed, but this was a common trope for Michelangelo that also had a long iconological precedents in secular sculpture, especially those of Greek and Roman sculpture that Michelangelos had studied. Second, and perhaps more surprising, is the vulnerability

Figure 7   The *Rondanini Pietà* (vestigial arm)

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[677] Linda Murray, *Michelangelo: His Life Work and Times,* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 216.

shown in Mary's exposed calf. (Figure 8) This is so unusual in depictions of the Virgin that some art historians, including Linda Murray, doubt whether this second figure was originally intended to be Mary at all:

> …the figure behind Christ must originally been intended as a man, since it is inconceivable that the Virgin should ever have been represented with one stalwart leg bare to the knee. Moreover, the proportions of the Virgin, if this leg could be believed to be hers, are totally wrong; the leg is too short for the body.[678]

Thus, the idea is that maybe Christ is held not by a woman but by a man, possibly Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea as in the so-called *Florentine Pietà* or *Deposition*.[679] This idea that Murray raises—of a man holding Jesus—is especially interesting when one recalls the iconological identity of Michelangelo and Mary that was mentioned above in the Steinberg section. So, both Murray and Steinberg leave room for the idea that a male figure is holding Jesus, either indirectly through an iconological identification or directly as a representation.

If, however, the second figure in the *Rondanini Pietà* is meant to represent Mary or perhaps a figure of ambiguous sex—and whether or not an earlier version was a representation of a man—then the figure's bare calf and knee is iconologically unusual and a clear indicator that the figure is more exposed or vulnerable than usual.

With its vestigial arm, the fully nude

**Figure 8   The *Rondanini Pietà*
(Mary's calf on the right)**

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[678] Murray, *Michelangelo*, 202.

[679] E.g., Hobson, 1.

Jesus, and with the second figure's exposed calf and knee, the *Rondanini Pietà* is noticeably more fragile and vulnerable in some ways than the bulk of Michelangelo's other sculptures, which as Rousseau quips, could be rolled down a mountain.

Dixon and Hartt

In addition to the *Rondanini Pietà*'s relative fragility and vulnerability—aspects that would seem to have more to do with living things than stone sculptures—this work is also sometimes described metaphorically as living thing that Michelangelo gave life. Jean-Pierre Barricelli also describes "The notion of *pietra viva* or 'living stone' occurs frequently in Michelangelo's writings. The *Rondanini Pietà*, therefore, is a 'living image.'"[680] Nardini writes that throughout Michelangelo's long life, "the Old and the New Testament . . . were to provide daily comfort for his solitude and nourishment for his thought,"[681] so it is perhaps not too surprising that the concept of *pietra viva* is reminiscent of both the Genesis account of God creating man by breathing life into what was dust—"then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"[682]—and it is also reminiscent of the Jewish myth of the *golem*—a mythical creature born of clay.[683] The art historian John Arthos lifts up this concept of Michelangelo giving life to his stone sculptures, and Arthos comments on the theological significance:

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[680] Barricelli, 611.

[681] Nardini, 115.

[682] Gen. 2:7, *The HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV*, 8.

[683] Q.v., "'unformed substance' or embryo (Ps. 139:16)", *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, s.v., "Golem," available at http://www.answers.com/topic/golem; and "unformed substance," Ps. 139:16, *The HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV*, 928.

Michelangelo says that the sculptor gives life to stone…. The love that has urged the artist towards his work is part of the great dynamism of the universe, conceiving and creating into eternity. The creation of the artist is indeed a continuation of the creation of God—the impulse is the same, the informing purpose is the same.[684]

In this view, Michelangelo's belief that he in some way gave life to the stone has some religious or spiritual significance too, as the artist's creativity imitates God's creativity, "conceiving and creating into eternity." As Barricelli puts it, "The *Rondanini Pietà* . . . is a 'living image,'"[685] so to conflate the theories of Arthos and Barricelli, his final work is a vibrant example of the artist, urged on by love, continuing God's universal creativity.

Art historian John Dixon too describes the *Rondanini Pietà* in religious or spiritual terms, though he openly acknowledges the difficulty of unpacking the work's layers of meaning. Dixon writes, "Of all Michelangelo's works, perhaps of all works of art, the most difficult to deal with adequately is the *Rondanini Pietà*."[686] Part, and only part, of the difficulty has to do with understanding earlier versions of the work, remnants of which still remain, as Michelangelo left them visibly on the sculpture. Further, the multiple versions left so little marble for him to carve that the forms are fused, and, as Dixon put it, "Where bodies had once been presented emerging from the formless mass of matter, here bodies emerge from bodies."[687]

Similar to Leo Steinberg's finding womb symbolism in this fusion, Dixon notes that Mary protects and envelops her son in her mantle.[688] Referring to Michelangelo's first pietà, the

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[684] John Arthos, *Dante Michelangelo and Milton* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1963), 59.

[685] Barricelli, 611.

[686] John W. Dixon, Jr., *The Christ of Michelangelo: An Essay on Carnal Spirituality,* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1994), 145.

[687] Dixon, 145.

[688] Ibid., 146.

art historian and Michelangelo scholar Frederick Hartt writes that it is Mary especially who

cradles Christ, which is another allusion to the son as a baby and similar to Steinberg's birth

metaphor.   Hartt goes on to say that "the Virgin's enveloping mantle [is] always a symbol of

heavenly protection,"[689] which again highlights the work's spiritual or religious significance.

Steinberg, Hartt, and Dixon share this interpretation of Mary bearing or cradling her child.

A further one of Dixon's interpretations of the mantle does not contradict the latter one,

but he sees something also akin to Steinberg's love metaphor, where Dixon writes, "Death and

love have come together in absolute peace."[690]   Thus, this interpretation of the fusion of death

and love is common to both Steinberg and Dixon, especially in this case relating to the fused

bodies and the Mary's protecting mantle.

Concerning death and love coming together in this way, Dixon elaborates upon his point,

especially in light of Michelangelo's frequent mention of death:

> This old man, always obsessed with death and on the verge of his own death, here
> achieved one of the final, definitive statements or manifestations of his Christian faith, a
> death that is, at the same time, a *resurrection*, the triumph and peace out of the pain.[691]

Thus, it is not just birth, but re-birth. Michelangelo manages to suggest the Resurrection in the

pietà. Hartt even goes so far as to say that the *Rondanini Pietà* is less a pietà than a

Resurrection.[692]

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[689] Hartt, 150.

[690] Dixon, 146.

[691] Ibid., 147.

[692] Hartt, 187.

Hobson

The final art historian to write about the *Rondanini Pietà* and to be considered here is

Maria Lena Hobson. Like Hartt, describes Jesus cradled Mary's lap in Michelangelo's first

pietà. She writes, "A seated and introspective Virgin cradles her dead son in her lap."[693] Further,

quoting another art historian Gertrude Schiller, Hobson writes, "[The] representation of Christ

lying in His mother's lap symbolizes 'surrender, union and trust in the mystical sense.'"[694]

Similarly, and here referring to Schiller's interpretation of the *Florentine Pietà*, Hobson writes,

"The Virgin, horrified at the sight of Christ in her arms, presents him with a gesture of despair

and resignation."[695] So, Hobson too notes the spiritual aspect in Michelangelo's pietàs, but

Hobson also highlights Mary's sense of surrender. Where Steinberg focuses on Mary's youthful

physiognomy, Hobson focuses on her spiritual sense of union and surrender.

In such interpretations, Hobson also takes Michelangelo's religious context into account.

For instance, Hobson writes about the religious context that preceded and surrounded

Michelangelo's creation of the *Rondanini Pietà*:

> Although [Martin] Luther's <u>Ninety Five Theses</u> created a disturbance in Rome, reformist
> ideas were not new to Italy. By the time of the Roman Inquisition in 1542, groups of
> Catholic reformers had been in existence for many years.[696]

So, there was reformist sympathy in Italy at that time, and such reformist sympathizers included

those in Michelangelo's circle of friends and acquaintances, as Hobson writes,

> A devout and enthusiastic reformist, [Reginald] Pole had considerable sympathy for
> Luther's doctrine of justification. He shared his beliefs with those who assembled around

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[693] Hobson, 1.

[694] Ibid., 2.

[695] Ibid.,

[696] Ibid., 23.

him. Notably Vittoria Colonna, who, one can assume, related these teachings to her friend Michelangelo. Their common intent and shared desire for the minimization of the importance of doctrinal issues led away from a rigid and dogmatic theology, toward a more spiritual approach to Christianity.[697]

Key among the doctrinal issues with which they sympathized was the Lutheran concept of "Justification by Faith"—which is a theologically and historically complex doctrine that implies that human beings can be justified and assured in their salvation through faith.[698]

For Michelangelo, this doctrine was an aspect of his relationship with the relatively young widow Vittoria Colonna. Hobson writes that "throughout the year of 1538, they met on Sundays with other followers of Pole to discuss topics such as religion and art,"[699] and moreover, "Colonna and Michelangelo shared the belief in Justification by Faith."[700] For Michelangelo, we may wonder—and be left simply to wonder—about how his affection for Colonna was enmeshed with his theology. For instance, considering the nature of their relationship and Michelangelo's poetry, Bruno Nardini writes, "…[in his poems] the figure of the beloved woman could hardly be distinguished from that of the Madonna. And with the Virgin he purposely identified the Marchioness of Pescara [Vittoria Colonna], in the face and the emotion of the Madonna in the *Last Judgment*."[701] Biographical evidence points to his having

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[697] Hobson, 26.

[698] Justification by faith does not, however, necessarily imply the much more Lutheran concept of justification by faith alone, *sola fide*. See, for example, <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/apologetics/ap0027.html>.

[699] Hobson, 27.

[700] Ibid.

[701] Nardini, 137-138.

loved her deeply, though whether that love was agapic, erotic, filial, or some combination of these, we may never know.[702]

Still, this doctrine of justification by faith that developed in his relationship with the marchioness and became something of apparently pressing importance to him, and according to Hobson, "Michelangelo had become increasingly concerned with the concept of justification" in the 1530s and 1540s.[703] In considering this context, Hobson contrasts the *Vatican Pietà*—also known as the *Rome Pietà* and sculpted at the turn of the century—with Michelangelo's work that came much later in the middle of the cinquecento:

> The ideals of the Renaissance, represented in the Rome Pietà, suffered the ravages of invading armies and a corrupt and unstable Church. Michelangelo, a devoutly religious man sought security in the friendship of Vittoria Collona [*sic*]. Through her he was exposed to the teaching of the "Spirituali" and the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone.[704]

It was in this context and not long thereafter that Michelangelo began his late works.[705]

Hobson connects such doctrinal and theological matters explicitly to the creation and meaning of the *Rondanini Pietà*:

> The Rondanini Pietà, his final sculpture, appears to be an exemplification of the Reformation belief. . . in the value of faith over good works as a means of salvation. The emaciated figures are far removed from the Renaissance tradition of the heroic man and rather seem to reflect the Reformation period beliefs in human helplessness and divine love.[706]

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[702] If we take C.S. Lewis' categorization in account, we may add "storgic" as a possibility.

[703] Hobson, 29.

[704] Ibid., 38.

[705] Theologically, we might also consider *analogia fidei* versus *analogia entis* and how his later work may be more like analogies of faith than analogies of being.

[706] Hobson, 33.

Far from the relatively hale and hearty Jesus represented in the *Vatican Pietà* that exemplified the heroism of an earlier period, the emaciated Jesus in the *Rondanini Pietà* represents something closer to a Reformation belief in our utter helplessness and the divine saving love. Hobson sees how Michelangelo's early and late pietàs embody the contrast between justification by the heroic strength in good works and justification by the utter surrender in faith. So, coming full circle, we come again to a theory that the *Rondanini Pietà* expresses a kind of fragility, vulnerability, or spiritual surrender as a material expression of Michelangelo's faith.

CHAPTER IV

HYPOTHESES: WHAT MIGHT BE TRUE

This dissertation is like a *non finito*[707] sculpture: the type mentioned above that presents a figure shrouded in stone, with some parts revealed and some parts hidden, as if emerging. The previous sections are like the emergent body parts, which on their own, may or may not resemble other body parts. Considered separately, a partially revealed elbow might not seem to have anything to do with an emerging thigh, but taken together, a portrait of the whole begins slowly to appear. Similarly, in previous chapters of this work, discourses as incommensurate as psychology and art history may sometimes seem difficult to reconcile if considered entirely separately, but when left as they are but considered in conjunction, they begin to reveal a more fully-formed *non finito* portrait. The portrait—the emerging figure—is a hermeneutic reconstruction of our ongoing case study, Michelangelo.[708]

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[707] As above, the term *non finito* literally means "unfinished," but there is a further sense of the intentionality and power of seeing the work emerging.

[708] The preceding sections of biographical data and theorists interpretations of the data and artwork are all part of this attempt to hermeneutically reconstruct some portrait of the artist, but I cannot claim that Michelangelo knew he was dying and used his final artwork consciously to be a last message to the world. Given his biographical data, one could make the case that many of his artworks not just from his final days or years but actually from his final decades are an expression of how Michelangelo was coming to terms with death. Morbid themes in art and poetry precede his death by many decades, which suggests that he started preparing for death long before he actually died. In those final days, maybe he knew he was dying, but then again, maybe he did not: The biographical data is silent. So, my theories do not hinge upon his having foreknowledge of *when* he would die—instead my theories hinge upon his having foreknowledge *that* he would die.   It is true that his final sculpture includes death, but then again, so do many of his artworks, extending back even to his youth. Also, as we have seen, there many interpretations of the work that also suggest creation and procreation. His last work has even been called a Resurrection. (Hartt, 187) It is quite possible that death came unexpectedly, but even if so, his writings suggest he had been expecting it for a very long time. As such, the Rondanini Pietà is a somewhat arbitrary cutting point on the timeline of Michelangelo's long and productive career. So, the issue here is not how his final sculpture marks a point of arrival. It may be more interesting to ask what was happening with him at the farthest reaches of his long journey, and by most standards, he got very far in his life. The hope here is that the hermeneutic reconstruction may say more about how he was and who he was at the farthest reaches.
Frederick Hartt, *Michelangelo's Three Pietas,* (Japan: Harry N. Abrams, 1975).

Methodologically, in terms of Hawes's types of theory noted above, the previous chapters and sections are not just literary-discursive but discursive-hierarchical, as sections build upon each other in some ways. The hierarchy is, however, not entirely rigorous, as one might expect to see in some other of Hawes's theory types. In our hermeneutic reconstruction, although there is also some arbitrariness about which elements are used to create it and how the elements are approached, there is still some overall hierarchy in how the elements are arranged. We have moved from a methodological introduction, to a chapter on facts, to a chapter on values, and now we are entering a chapter on hypotheses. Further, even within each chapter, the focus tends to move from generality to particularity. Thus, taking the metaphor of a *non finito* sculpture, there may be some arbitrariness about whether the sculptor begins from the left or the right, the top or the bottom, but nevertheless, the sculptor remains rule-bound to begin chipping away from the outside in.

So, now that some of the marble is chipped away and our figure is starting to emerge, the goal here in the following chapter is not to finish the sculpture and bring it to a high polish. There would be something artificial to trying to make a portrait of this complex figure seem simple and easily describable. Instead, the goal is to continue chipping away at the marble, maybe polishing some parts but also allowing for the work to emerge in process: *non finito* as Michelangelo himself chose to leave the majority of his works.

Thus, the value of this work may be the experience of having understood Michelangelo's life and work a little more deeply, and neat conclusions sometimes have little to do with a deeper understanding. Whatever value there may be in this process will never fit neatly into an abstract, and that is both the tragedy and the triumph of a hermeneutic reconstruction: Given the

hermeneutic circle, the process is always subject to interpretation and interpretation of the interpretations, endlessly.

So, the hope is that in describing the *Rondanini Pietà* this dissertation may also be like the *Rondanini Pietà*: a *non finito,* available always for more interpretation. This is potentially a lively process.

a. My psychological theories

Psychological theories on integration and disintegration

As noted, one time when Michelangelo received a dinner invitation from a few of his friends, he replied, "If I dined with you, I [would] rejoice too much; and I do not want to rejoice over much."[709] Also, at the same time, he is said to have explained himself more:

> Oh you make me laugh, that you want to dance. I tell you that in this world, there is that to make us weep. . . . Know that I am the man most inclined to love persons, that ever in any time was born. Whenever I see anyone who has some virtue, who shows some skill, who knows how to do or say something better than others, I am obliged to fall in love with him; and I am so taken with him that I am no longer mine but all his.
> If then I were to dine with you, all of you being adorned with virtues and courtesy, in addition to what each of you three had robbed of me here, each of those who dined with us would take a part of me. . . . So that I . . . would entirely surrender myself and be lost; so that for many days I would not know in what world I was.[710]

If his words here are sincere, Michelangelo's wish not to rejoice too seems melancholic or depressive.[711] Recall that in Freud's formulation of melancholia, the lost loved object is

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[709] Nardini, 144.

[710] Ibid., 145.

[711] What about the possibility Michelangelo being bipolar? In addition to inherent and insurmountable problems with *ad hoc* psychobiographical diagnosis, the biological data pointing to toward the possibility of Michelangelo's having been manic may be persuasive, but it is not overwhelmingly compelling: Michelangelo had a fiery temper (his *terribilita*), he slept little, and he had a huge creative output. He might well have been bipolar, but such traits as these could also be attributed to other factors, including his enormous creative genius that might not be subject to

internalized. Michelangelo already lost his mother figures, and whatever cathexis he may had

had with them may have turned inward in this way. It would be little surprise then that he would

express a with to avoid a social engagement for fear of falling in love with someone and having

that loved object rob him of a piece of himself. In terms of object relations theory, that piece

would be the loved object itself, and he had already known various form of object loss in

childhood and throughout his long life. He expresses explicit fear of losing pieces of himself and

in surrendering to something like that, becoming lost.

A psychoanalytic term for a similar fear is fragmentation anxiety, [712] in which the ego

fears becoming fragmented, coming to pieces, and becoming annihilated or nothing. Along

similar lines, Michelangelo express his fear of being robbed of pieces of himself, and there is

also Michelangelo's poetic fragment in which he writes, "They have no other pleasure / In living

where I am deceased and dead, / Indeed, indeed, of nothing I am made."[713] In his self-

representation of being deceased and dead, this may brings to mind melancholia or depression,

but more than that, he puts forth a self-representation of himself as nothing.

There is something to Michelangelo being nothing, but what? Instead of just seeing the

anxiety being nothing may elicit, pastoral psychologists also lift up the benefits of the experience

of facing one's potential nothingness. In the paper "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief

Recovery," Bruce Vaughn quotes Jerome Miller writing, "…it is only in finding our own

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reductionistic categorization. The partial evidence of mania considered in conjunction for the greater evidence of depression makes bipolarity seem plausible, though a bipolar substrate would be another possibility.

[712] Q.v., Heinz Kohut, *The Psychology of the Self: A Casebook*, Edited by Arnold Goldberg (International Universities Press, 1978), 4; and Volney P. Gay, *Freud on Sublimation: Reconsiderations* (SUNY Press, 1992), 233-236.

[713] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 170.

nothingness and embracing it that we realize God exists,"[714] and in the same paper, Vaughn writes, "This is where anything that deserves the name life must begin—in the void, in the darkness of chaos."[715] Thus, in terms of the psychology of faith development, there is an appeal not only to integration but also to disintegration—a draw toward both unity and disunity. With an appeal to both, there may result a push/pull dynamic, which is an intrapsychic conflict.

Similarly, though not necessarily the same, consider the drive theory of Freud's late-life. Though he is more famous for attributing so much human behavior to the libido or sexual drive, later in life he proposed a further, conflicting drive: the mortido or death drive.[716] The sexual drive is procreative and integrative, but the death drive is destructive and disintegrative. Sex brings bodies together, while death breaks them apart. Freud's formulation is more complex than this, but in his late-life drive theory, he proposes an intrapsychic conflict between two drives, one of which is more unifying and the other of which is more disunifying.

Recall too the following passage Michelangelo wrote in a letter to one of his contemporary biographers Vasari, where the artist writes of the death of his longtime helper Urbino:

> You know how Urbino died, to the infinite grace of God, but to my great loss and boundless grief. The grace was that where in life he helped me to live, in dying he has taught me to die, not with displeasure, but with a desire for death. . . . And of this God sent me a sign in the most happy death he gave him. Much more than at the thought of

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[714] Jerome A. Miller, "The Way of Suffering: A Reasoning of the Heart," *Second Opinion* 17, no. 4 (April, 1992): 31, quoted in S. Bruce Vaughn, "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief Recovery," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2003): 41-42.

[715] S. Bruce Vaughn, "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief Recovery," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2003): 39.

[716] Q.v., Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*. Translated by John Reddick (London ; New York : Penguin Books, 2003).

dying I am grieved at being left alive in this treacherous world with all its cares; although the better part of me has gone already, there being left to me only infinite misery.[717]

In addition to Michelangelo's obvious grief issues, there are two relevant themes here: First, Michelangelo openly writes about a "desire for death," which may be a death drive; and second, when he uses the phrase "the better part of me," he is again speaking about himself as if in parts—as if he has been taken apart or somehow dis-integrated.

A later psychoanalytic theorist J.S. Grotstein puts forth another sort of intrapsychic conflict between integration and disintegration. As noted, he describes the concept of splitting and proposes that its counterpart is "at-one-ment," and this is a particular kind of integration. The pre-conscious internal world of a baby may be less boundaried and more unified with the external world, but then the internal world becomes fragmented. As Grotstein puts it, "Our sense of primal at-one-ment (primary identification) receives its first blow with mental birth, which may be experienced as a divisive thrust from pristine serenity."[718] Faced with the realities and frustrations of the external world, however, splitting spreads the infant's sense of primary identification or "oneness" across many objects.[719] The infant's experience of the world becomes split into good parts and bad parts—it becomes disunified.

There remains, however, a pull toward the converse of splitting—primary identification or at-one-ment—but in life, he sees this as unachievable. Grotstein writes, "'At-one-ment' is not only the goal of analysis; it is also the goal of life. Yet it must remain our aim, never our achievement."[720] Having the goal, always striving toward it, and never being able to attain it

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[717] Nardini, 161.

[718] Grotstein, 12.

[719] Ibid., 11.

[720] Ibid., 18.

may be frustrating. They may be conflict between toward the ego defense of splitting—a

disunifying force—and the ego integrative state of at-one-ment—a unifying force.

We might, then, wonder whether there is evidence of a such a conflict for Michelangelo.

Integration and disintegration have some clear relevance to Michelangelo's vocation: His

expertise was in taking a whole block of marble, fragmenting it skillfully, and leaving both

pieces and a new, remaining whole. His job was to take an integrated thing, disintegrate it

somewhat, and leave another integrated thing.[721] *Non finito* sculpture in particular leaves

evidence of all of these phases in integration and disintegration, as there is usually evidence of

the originally unified shape of block, there are chisel marks suggesting the sculptor's disunifying

process, and there is the more fully-rendered figure that appears to be emerging as a unified

whole from the marble.[722]

As the relational psychologist David Richo shows, it is possible to find such themes of

integration and disintegration even in Michelangelo's highly finished works such as the *Vatican

Pietà*:

> Part of [the] experience of being in a healthy relationship or with a healthy person is that
> you have the feeling that you can fall apart occasionally—you can dis-integrate—and the
> arms of the other person will gather you and hold you so that you won't keep dis-
> integrating but will rather re-integrate. . . . We can see an image of this in the *Pietà* by
> Michelangelo, where you see Mary holding the dead body of Christ and feeling such
> grief as she does this but his dis-integrated self is gathered to her living strength, and so
> she is, as it were, the midwife to his resurrection. By holding him in his broken wounded

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[721] To consider Grotstein's work on splitting in this light, the unsculpted block is like the baby, which is rended from its original oneness, but then in its mature form, there is the possibility of striving once again to a new sort of at-one-ment as seen in the emerging figure. The move is in three stages: integration to disintegration and on to a new integration. *Non finito* sculpture expresses all three.

[722] In a *non finito* sculpture these themes coexist, though not always peacefully; there is an apparent conflict. Consider his series of captives, prisoners, or slaves that now stand outside the *David* in Florence, who appear to be captive or enslaved to the marble and struggling against it.   By representing the captives appear as if they are struggling against the unfinished marble, it is as if the conflict here has a material expression. Here, the conflict includes the conflict between the unfinished marble and the nearly finished figures inside, where also being unfinished is analogous to disintegration and being finished is analogous to integration.

state, she participates in the process whereby he will soon be re-constituted, come back together, re-establish himself in a new and even more flourishing wholeness than he ever had before.[723]

This is a thematically rich passage—touching even upon themes such as resurrection and relationship—but the main ones to note here are those of a falling apart and coming back together. Further, it is not just disintegration and integration, but it is this process that is boundaried in relationship with an other and done in service of health. It is not known whether Michelangelo was what we might call psychologically healthy, but Richo notices that his sculpture expresses a process possible in healthy relationship.[724] In Richo's interpretation, Michelangelo's sculpture offers a powerful visual example of boundaried disintegration done in survive of healthy integration.

Psychological theories on the pietàs *in comparison*

Concerning relationality and Michelangelo's pietàs, comparing the first and the last one may reflect a process of de-idealization of an internalized loved object. The contrast between the depictions of Mary in his first versus his last pietàs, reflect a marked change.[725] (Figure 2, page 21) The Mary of the *Vatican Pietà* appears young, smooth, and her affect is somewhat flat, but Mary of the *Rondanini Pietà* appears old, rough, and her affect is more empathic. This transition between these Madonnas is from the transcendent to the terrene—from emotional distance to

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[723] David Richo, How Relationships Work *[audio lecture series]*, "8A How to Set Personal Boundaries," (minute marks: 6:38 – 11:41).

[724] We cannot conclude whether or not healthy relationship was part of the adult Michelangelo's ongoing experience, nor can we conclude whether his understanding of healthy relationship would have been a conscious or an unconscious one. Maybe he had a memory of healthy relationship, or maybe he had an ideal of one.

[725] Changes in his art may reflect changes in his orientation to himself, which includes changes in his orientation toward his losses. Michelangelo changed and so did his art, and considering such changes may say something about Michelangelo's changing attitudes, including those toward his early losses.

emotional vulnerability. Michelangelo's representations of Mary reflect his object representations of his mother figure, or figures. The transition between the two Madonnas, from emotional distance to emotional vulnerability, reflects the development of Michelangelo's ability to criticize his loved object—his beloved mother figure. Michelangelo's final depiction of Mary in the *Rondanini Pietà* is morally ambiguous: her face is gentle but rough; her body supports Jesus, but she holds him awkwardly. By the end of his life, Michelangelo's libido may have loosened its fixation on his loved object, as represented by the developments of his representations of Mary.

Moreover, whether or not the *Rondanini Pietà* represented a past loved object, he seems to have been fascinated by the piece in itself. Michelangelo lived with it and worked on it for about ten years, and even just a few days before his death, it still interested him enough to keep working on it. His feverish, almost obsessive, devotion to the piece of marble suggests that something about it represented a love object for him. Even so, whatever he cathected about the *Rondanini Pietà* may still have had more to do with what it could have represented: a final, healing fusion between the suffering son and his primary maternal caregiver.[726]

Psychoanalytic theories on Michelangelo's sexual development

Michelangelo's lack of a mother during most of his sexual maturation may have disrupted his sexual development, especially if Michelangelo blamed himself for the death of his mother. Because his biological mother died during what may have been his first Oedipal crisis at around five years old, Michelangelo may have thought that his overwhelming libidinal drive toward his mother killed her. The boy would already have developed a superego based on his

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[726] The previous paragraph is modified from my writing at Vanderbilt.

inability to win her from his powerful father, and the superego produces a lot of guilt. Guilt is a kind of aggression toward the self, and the young Michelangelo may have thought his intense feelings somehow killed his mother. This would have been magical thinking. Thus Michelangelo would view his desire toward his mother in particular, and women in general, as extremely dangerous. Upon this supposition, it is interesting to note that Michelangelo may have been a virgin all his life.[727]

Conversely, an opposite but related possibility is that at a later stage, Michelangelo developed guilt around an Oedipal triumph manifested in his artistic prowess. His mentor Ghirlandaio was the budding artist's first vocational father, so consider his exclamation that "This one is really better than I am!" What a possibly unsettling Oedipal triumph this may have been for the boy. Also as noted, William Wallace has done extensive work on Michelangelo's self-identification as an aristocrat, and one possible explanation for this would be that he needed to identify with something that avoided an Oedipal triumph. As long as his sense of worth hinged upon his aristocracy, he was still his father's son, the fruit of his blue-blooded loins, and valued for his place within the familial hierarchy. If, however, Michelangelo were to identify primarily as an artist, the intrapsychic stability of the familial hierarchy would necessarily be shattered: As an artist, Michelangelo was magnificently better than his father, and this would be something like an Oedipal murder, which could in turn lead to gross guilt. Avoiding this guilt, Michelangelo seems instead to have chosen an identity that left his father and family's life and

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[727] Because such theories are necessarily speculative, let us entertain a somewhat wilder speculation: Maybe Michelangelo did not think he killed his mother; maybe he thought he actually introjected her corporeally. Introjections usually entail a degree of intrapsychic abstraction, and the introjection is second best to actually obtaining our love object. At a time when Michelangelo would have been internalizing his love object, his mother, she actually disappeared. Maybe he thought that he achieved his most cherished desire: union with his love object. Upon this such a speculation, it would be little surprise that Michelangelo's culminating work, the *Rondanini Pietà*, is a material expression of a mother-son union.

worth intact: He was an aristocrat in a line of aristocrats, and being an artist was socially

incidental.

This aside, psychoanalytic theory also discusses the second Oedipal crises that a

developing child experiences during adolescence.[728] During what could have been

Michelangelo's adolescent Oedipal phase, Michelangelo lacked a mother. Thus, Michelangelo

lacked the opportunity to develop his genital maturity in the presence of an actual woman.[729] His

primary attachments to women were to women who were idealized Michelangelo's wet nurse

came from a stone mason's family, and again, as Michelangelo was fond of pointing out, "if I am

good for anything it is because I was born in the good mountain air… and suckled among the

chisels and hammers of the stone cutters."[730] As noted, in his culture, mother's milk was said to

possess formative and almost magical properties. Michelangelo idealized and introjected his wet

nurse. An actual, corporeal woman would allow Michelangelo to develop some kind of active

sexuality. Instead, Michelangelo may have maintained, even through adolescence, a strong

attachment to his abstractions or idealizations: his introjected love objects.[731]

It may be that Michelangelo expressed his libido most fully in the abstractions of his

sculptures, paintings, and poetry, and other than the passion of his art, biographical data suggests

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[728] E.g., Tyson and Tyson, 65.

[729] Older people often develop internal resources that help them cope with painful events, with or without an emotionally supportive external network of family and friends. Young children, however, may not yet have developed the internal resources necessary to navigate difficult circumstances on her or his own. Imagine a toddler at the helm of a large wooden ship in stormy waters: It is a troubling and absurd image. Just as it would be absurd to expect a toddler to pilot an unwieldy ship through a hurricane, it would be absurd to expect a toddler to have the internal resources necessary to handle the death of her or his primary love object. When the ship is foundering, it needs a competent captain. Michelangelo's captain, his father, was demanding and abusive.

[730] Liebert, 14.

[731] As noted, Frank suggests that Michelangelo was capable of "investing new ideals with energy." This may be the same phenomenon in which trauma and broken trust creates a psychic hole, which only a substitute, such as art, might fill.

that Michelangelo's erotic passions remained either frustrated or nonexistent. Michelangelo, the creator of such erotically charged art, was himself, possibly asexual in practice.[732] For Michelangelo, sexual proficiency was either an unimportant value, or it was a repressed one.[733]

Given the tremendous libidinal thrust in Michelangelo's artwork, repression is a more likely possibility. Michelangelo's sculptures stretch and twist with sinew and muscle. They are flesh—fully flesh—teeming with life and vitality. If the libido is an outward, expansive, creative drive, the creator of these sculptures must have had a monumental libido. How, then, do we make sense of his lack of active sexuality? It is quite possible that Michelangelo's developmental upsets and fixations disrupted his sexual development. Through repression and sublimation, Michelangelo could have pushed down and diverted his tremendous libidinal energy, turning to material creativity where he lacked the capacity for interpersonal creativity.[734] This represents a conflict between repressing his libido and expressing it overtly, and this also represents a frustration of a libidinal move toward integration.[735]

Although famous for art, Michelangelo was infamous for his fiery temper, his *terribilita*. Classical sublimation theory would suggest that at these times, he was directing his passions outward—both in his art but also in emotional outbursts—instead of directing his passions toward the object of his love and lust.[736] The language of love and lust may be appropriate in this

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[732] Some of the previous paragraphs are modified from my writing at Vanderbilt.

[733] Here, the reader may recall Giordano and McGoldrick's work on the importance of sexual prowess to masculinity in modern Italian ethnicity. In this way, were he alive today, Michelangelo would have deviated from modern Italian cultural norms.

[734] In a sense, Michelangelo chose creativity over creation.

[735] Parts of these previous paragraphs are edited from my graduate student writing at Vanderbilt.

[736] There is a terminological coincidence here: In chemistry, the word "sublimation" refers to the phase change of a solid turning directly into a gas (while skipping over the liquid state entirely), and the converse change of a gas becoming a solid happens to be called "deposition." The reader may recall that in iconology, the *Rondanini Pietà* is

case because, as Bruce Vaughn writes, "To grieve means to be haunted by love, by unfinished love."[737] Whom did Michelangelo love and lose? Perhaps even before the physical death of his biological mother, the wet nurse was his first mother and is, therefore, the more likely to have been Michelangelo's first true beloved. So, Michelangelo had some of the signs, as evidenced in his *terribilita*, of having suffered some key developmental difficulties, and one such difficulty may have been his abrupt separation from his wet nurse, whom he idealized, though not unambiguously.[738]

Recall, for instance, the earlier quotation that "If I am good for anything it is because I was born in the good mountain air… and suckled among the chisels and hammers of the stone cutters."[739] This description of his infancy is at once both gentle and harsh—like the *Rondanini Pietà* itself: smooth and rough. Though he was born and suckled in the good mountain air, and that sounds idyllic, this infant idyll contrasts strongly with Michelangelo's further description that he was suckled among the chisels and hammers of stone cutters. Such words as "chisel, "hammer," and "cut" carry certain a level of violence. Hammers and chisels were the tools of Michelangelo's trade, which may have prompted some gentler associations with such violent things, but these tools are violent in their function and in their symbolism. Hammers and chisels are divisive. They break things, and in this sense, they are disintegrative.

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also sometimes called a Deposition—and those who are poetically inclined may even wonder how this sculpture is like some rarefied element manifested as a solid mass.

[737] S. Bruce Vaughn, "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief Recovery," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2003): 41.

[738] The *Rondanini Pietà* may symbolize what Michelangelo might have wished for as a child: a resolution to the painful separation from his mother figure or figures. Crises of separation—especially separation prompted by the death of a mother—may be painful in all cultures, but as discussed by Giordano and McGoldrick above, these crises may be particularly painful in modern Italian families, which may bear resemblance to Michelangelo's context (and his plight).

[739] Liebert, 14.

They perform violence upon the stone, which is often marble—soft and white, presumably like the skin of her who nursed him. It is as though the hammers and chisels were masculine and the stone were feminine. Chisels are ithyphallic, and at its best, marble is soft, white and yielding. Recalling the oedipally significant maternal/paternal dyad of the wet nurse and the stonemason, Michelangelo may have associated the stonemason with his hard, masculine chisels and hammers. Likewise, Michelangelo may have associated the wet nurse and her breast with the soft, feminine marble. In terms of integration and disintegration, his union with the wet nurse could represent a soothing type of integration, and Oedipal challenge from the stonemason could represent a fearsome type of disintegration.

Further, Michelangelo may have even tasted the marble dust on her nipples, because as those who have sculpted stone will report, the dust has a tendency to get everywhere. If this were true, he suckled marble along with the milk, potentially creating a lifetime of deeply intimate associations with the soft, white marble.[740] If this was his experience, it would be little wonder that Michelangelo not only spent much of his life breathing in and tasting marble dust but also that many of the things he represented in the marble were variations of the nursing pair—representing a time when a baby is said to live and breath in a primordial state of integration with the caregiver.

b. My contextual theories

Besides perhaps, Lena Marie Hobson's contextual art history described above, the study and contextualization of Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà* is an almost entirely unexplored area of research. Having a thorough understanding of Michelangelo's religious and cultural milieu is

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[740] The previous two paragraphs are modified from myVanderbilt writing.

essential, and its significance to religion and culture is an area in which the *Rondanini Pietà* has the potential to find greater renown. Because Michelangelo's last work was, for most intents and purposes, lost to the world for several centuries, this piece's significance to religion and culture can be divided into two periods: the period in which created the sculpture, and the relatively recent period since its rediscovery during which the art world has received the sculpture.

Concerning the *Rondanini Pietà'*s past context, the first period is significant for the religious and cultural context in which Michelangelo sculpted it. After nearly eighty-nine years, Michelangelo lived long enough to experience major changes in the culture around him; what were these changes? Besides cultural shifts during Michelangelo's lifetime, there were religious changes too. Michelangelo was a faithful Catholic, and Catholicism was undergoing reform. Michelangelo's art may reflect some of these changes, both cultural and religious. Consider, the contrast between Michelangelo's *Vatican Pietà* (1497-1499) and the *Rondanini Pietà* (1555-1564). By the time he sculpted the *Rondanini Pietà,* Michelangelo was more than half a century older and living in a different kind of world. His cultural and religious context had transformed, and his work reflects this. The *Rondanini Pietà* is darker and more complex than the beatific *Vatican Pietà*. Like the cultural and religious changes around him, his art too shifted from the kind of transcendental idealism exemplified by the *Vatican Pietà* to the gritty complexity exemplified by the *Rondanini Pietà.*

Concerning the *Rondanini Pietà*'s present context, the second period of great cultural and religious significance to it is the modern period since its rediscovery. In particular, it is interesting to consider why it remains largely neglected, among specialists and non-specialists alike. There may be a constellation of reasons surrounding the continued neglect of this sculpture, but Gerda Frank is probably correct that much of it stems from a cultural anxiety over

223

death. According to previous interpretations of the *Rondanini Pietà,* the sculpture is about death. It depicts the dead Christ held by the grieving Mary, and Michelangelo himself died before he could finish it. The marble is somewhat rough and weathered. As such, it may be a material reminder of decay and death. This is part of why it does not have the popular appeal of more optimistic sculptures such as Michelangelo's young and strong *David*. In our Western culture, which ostracizes its elderly, the neglect of *Rondanini Pietà* also reflects our cultural ageism.

To resurrect interest in the *Rondanini Pietà* and overcome such cultural biases, it may be more helpful to explore the livelier creation imagery in the *Rondanini Pietà*. This pietà includes symbolism and imagery of both life and death, but few, such as Steinberg, have explored the creation imagery. Among other things, the art historical section of this chapter does just that.[741]

c. My art historical theories

In terms of the art historical methodology described earlier, this section uses primarily iconographic interpretations, which are augmented by a few psychoanalytic art historical interpretations. Given the use of iconography here, one might wonder to what extent Michelangelo's opus can be reasonably subject to such interpretations. Some artists consciously build their work with symbolic layers of meaning, while others do not. Consciously, Michelangelo may or may not have intended his work to have layers of symbolic meaning, but for the viewer, his artwork may hold multivalent meanings. Interpretation is inevitable. There is, however, that Michelangelo himself intended his works to carry meaning beyond their clear referents. For example, the modern biographer Bruno Nardini writes that Michelangelo gave his own *Bacchus* "allegorical meanings" and described these allegorical meanings to his

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[741] The previous paragraph is reworked from my work submitted while at Vanderbilt University.

contemporary biographer Condivi, who then recorded them.[742] Further, the art historian Howard

Hibbard maintains that given Michelangelo's unusually great expertise with human anatomy,

anatomy itself held meaning for the artist: "For Michelangelo, anatomy was destiny…."[743]

Whether dissecting or depicting, the human form was always Michelangelo's chief subject and

area of expertise. So, with this in mind, we now approach Michelangelo's late-life artwork and

offer up a few symbolic interpretations, with special attention to the symbolism of

Michelangelo's greatest subject: the human body.

A visual integration of death and birth

One possibility is that the *Rondanini Pietà* is a symbolizes of what the artist may have

wished for as a child: a resolution to the painful separation from his mother.[744] Such a final wish

for a resolution to this crisis of mother-loss is similar to a wish to be re-born or un-born.

Whether intentionally or not, this would also have been a last wish because he was working on

this sculpture soon before his death. Fittingly, the *Rondanini Pietà* contains powerful symbolism

of both birth and death.

As suggested in some ways by others, including Steinberg, the *Rondanini Pietà*'s

symbolism includes the symbolism returning to the womb. A return to the womb is also a return

to birth for the figure of Jesus, but there is a problem in that Jesus is dead. Therefore, for Jesus,

this return to birth is also a return to non-being. The boundaries are eliminated between Jesus

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[742] Nardini, 43.

[743] Hibbard, 30.

[744] Besides these thematic parallels between "Jesus and Mary" and "Michelangelo and Michelangelo's mother,"
there is art historical evidence that the *Rondanini Pietà* represents Michelangelo and his mother: Jesus has a short
beard and flat nose, much like Michelangelo himself. Michelangelo's Jesus is frail: rib cage roughly hewn away to
be the size of a boy's, chest grossly disproportionate to lanky legs. Michelangelo has sculpted Jesus as an old man.
As some such as Liebert have noted, Michelangelo has sculpted himself.

and Mary, but the boundaries are also eliminated between birth and death.[745] This is a powerful

symbol of integration.[746]

      As noted, in one of his letters, Michelangelo wrote, "I have no thought that has not been

shaped by death."[747] Given this and the representation in pietàs of a dead man, of one might

guess that the *Rondanini Pietà* is simply macabre. Actually, the sculpture is macabre, but not

simply so. As we might expect from Michelangelo, the *Rondanini Pietà* is not anything simply.

Even compared to other works of Michelangelo, this sculpture is complex, and as noted, Dixon

observes that "Of all Michelangelo's works, perhaps of all works of art, the most difficult to deal

with adequately is the Rondanini Pietà."[748] The moribund Michelangelo sculpted into the cool

marble a complex, fragmented representation of the dead Christ. From this mass of death

emerges the symbolism of an entirely different kind: the symbolism of creation. In his final

work, Michelangelo represents creation through at least two symbols: the womb and the hand.

Womb symbolism

      Just as is coming from the womb, Michelangelo's dead Christ appears to be returning to

the womb. Michelangelo sculpted two or three distinct versions of the last Pietà, some of which

are still discernible. As Michelangelo worked on each version, he chiseled deeper and deeper

into the marble, each time having less and less to work with. By the time of the last version,

Michelangelo had to sculpt his Christ out of a previous version of Mary. The upper part of

Christ is actually fused with his grieving mother: "the slender, unfinished Christ is fused with the

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[745] Q.v., Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Death, Sin, and the Moral Life*.

[746] Some of this is modified from myVanderbilt writing.

[747] Papini, 508.

[748] Dixon, 145.

incomplete Mary."[749] As many such as Steinberg have noted, there is birth imagery seen at

Christ's death. Michelangelo presents death as the reversal of birth; Jesus was born from the

womb and then returns to it. Michelangelo presents circularity, where one could even imagine

Christ's *un*-birth leading to re-birth—which would end in un-birth, and so on into eternity. In the

move from un-birth to re-birth, Michelangelo manages to suggest the Resurrection in the Pietà.

Frederick Hartt goes so far as to say that the *Rondanini Pietà* is less a Pietà than a

Resurrection.[750] Birth and death meet in the Christ of the *Rondanini Pietà*.

Referring to the two or three versions of the *Rondanini Pietà* sculpted into the same

marble and still visible, John Dixon says, "Where bodies had once been presented emerging from

the formless mass of matter, here bodies emerge from bodies." (Dixon, 145) Michelangelo left

enough evidence of the earlier versions that bodies really do appear to emerge from bodies. The

Rondanini Pietà presents Marys emerging from Marys, Christs emerging from Christs, and odd

combinations of Christs and Marys. The combinations of Christ with Mary are particularly

significant to womb symbolism. Christ is merging with Mary in death and emerging into life.

The artist gives birth. Like a mother reluctant to separate her child from the warm union of her

womb, Michelangelo often left his sculptures unfinished:

> [Michelangelo tried] transforming stone to life, [yet] two-thirds of his statues were never
> completed…. A central factor was that, for Michelangelo, to complete a statue was also
> to sever his bond with the block of stone…. He turned instead to the next project, and the
> next, and finally, in the last fifteen years of his life, to one theme, the union of Son and
> Mother in the Pietàs."[751]

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[749] Liebert, 409.

[750] Hartt, 187.

[751] Liebert, 222-223.

Near the end, Michelangelo's hands were still unable to release the *Rondanini Pietà*, as he kept working on it. In this pietà, Christ is half-combined with Mary, which may represent half-birth in the womb imagery. So, Christ is fused with Mary as if emerging from the womb.

Symbolism of the nudity

Another thing that a viewer might notice at first is that Christ is completely nude—nude as a newborn. The nudity of Christ's is reminiscent of the depictions of a few key biblical figures, such as Jonah and Daniel, in early Christian art. The symbolism of baptismal nudity in early Christian art may be relevant to Michelangelo's portrayal of Jesus. According to Robin Jensen, baptismal nudity had "three symbolical values": "First, it symbolized the stripping off of the old 'self,' second it represented the original state of Adam and Eve in paradise ... and third it is the way children are born from their mother's wombs."[752] Every one of these three symbolic values may be symbolically significant to the interpretation of the *Rondanini Pietà*. First, Christ may be seen to have been in the process of "stripping off" his mortal self, thereby acquiring his divine self in a state of nudity. Second, Christ may be seen as the second Adam.[753] Third, Christ is being reborn into his resurrection, and as noted, Jesus appears to be emerging from Mary's womb.

Thus, it would appear that the symbolism of baptismal nudity is highly applicable to the *Rondanini Pietà,* but how does one account for baptismal symbolism on such an apparently *symbolically* sepulchral sculpture? Much of the baptismal symbolism in early Christian art survives on sarcophagi, which are *literally* sepulchral. The idea is that in death, there is hope for

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[752] Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 175.

[753] E.g., Jensen, 179.

rebirth in Christ.[754] The symbolic significance is similar in the *Rondanini Pietà*, in which the symbolism of death and birth find expression together, fused in this final artwork.

They are integrated, though perhaps only half-integrated, as Jesus and Mary are not entirely fused. Just as the Pietà's Christ appears to be half-birthed from Mary, so too is the entire sculpture half-birthed from Michelangelo.

A symbolic boon in the non finito *technique*

Like the majority of Michelangelo's sculptures, the *Rondanini Pietà* is unfinished, which is particularly evident when one sees the vestigial arm to the right of Jesus, apparently a relic of an earlier version. Some people—especially those who have seen Michelangelo's *David,* his *Vatican Pietà* or the *Sistine Ceiling*—must grieve to themselves when they see this, his last work. They might think, "The poor old man, almost eighty-nine… He must have been blind or frail or mad." Instead, biographical data suggests that just days before his death, he was spry, sharp-sighted and as focused as an acetylene torch. He had lived with this sculpture—literally at times—for ten years. As those visible fragments earlier versions prove, he continued to re-imagine it. His revisions were re-visions. For some reason this incredibly busy man never gave up on this piece, leaving it in a state that looks incomplete. Why? As was proposed about the majority of his *non finito* work, there was probably some purpose to this.[755]

As seen in Michelangelo's other seemingly unfinished sculptures, this incompletion does not necessarily diminish the quality of the piece. If anything this incompletion suggests that

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[754] Jensen, 181.

[755] Some of the previous several pages are adapted from my writing as a graduate student.

Michelangelo put a great deal of thought into the *Rondanini Pietà*, as he was dwelling on it until shortly before he died. There is even evidence that the sculpture's thematic subject followed him nearly to his death, as in his very last spoken will, he encouraged others to, "meditate upon the sufferings of Jesus."[756]

Like any good sculptor—let alone a great one—Michelangelo surely knew his work intimately, and his data also suggests that he visual his sculptures clearly even while examining an unsculpted marble block. So, after years of actually living with the sculpture, Michelangelo surely knew the angles and details of the *Rondanini Pietà* quite well. Michelangelo's almost certain awareness of every angle of this piece makes one particular angle stand out: Seen from some angles the *Rondanini Pietà* looks like a hand.

Hand symbolism

To have the best angle for viewing this hand, a viewer might stand at the left side of the sculpture, which is Jesus and Mary's right side. The hand has its fingers together, pointing upward, and it is formed by the vestigial arm of Christ as the thumb and Christ and Mary's heads plus Mary's left shoulder as fingertips. With the crescent shape of the marble, the hand follows this curve and appears to be slightly cupped or cradling.[757]

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[756] Papini, 513.

[757] Once seen, the hand is not all that subtle, so we might wonder why there is no previous mention of it before in the literature. One reason for this may be that it is not a widely known sculpture to begin with, and in books, almost the only angle we ever see is some variation of a frontal angle. Michelangelo, however, as a sculptor, lived and worked with the piece from many more angles than a book would tend to reveal.

Figure 9   The *Rondanini Pietà* as a hand

Figure 10 The *Rondanini Pietà* as a hand (rear view)

Figure 11 The Rondanini Pietà as a hand (right view)

The dangling arm mentioned above—which is the thumb to this symbolic hand—is left over from the first version of the *Rondanini Pietà*, and there is some mystery about why he left the appendage. The severed arm sticks out oddly near Christ's right side. Michelangelo chiseled away most of the rest of this earlier version, but for some reason, he kept this arm attached. Some scholars contend that Michelangelo was bound to have removed this arm sooner or later. Given that Michelangelo radically and perhaps violently altered the *Rondanini Pietà*, he could have easily chipped of this arm. Even without rolling it down a mountain—as Victor Rousseau wrote that one could probably do safely to Michelangelo's sculptures in general—the arm looks like it could fall off anyway. It even needs support to stay connected, so Michelangelo left a small stone bridge connecting the arm to the rest of the sculpture. Rather than creating this small

and delicate bridge, it would have been easier simply to remove the arm, so Michelangelo must have left the awkward appendage attached for a good reason. One possible reason is that he wanted to use the arm as a model for a future pietà.[758] Another possible reason, however, is that Michelangelo wanted to retain the arm as a symbolic thumb.

A historical curiosity further supports the theory of the *Rondanini Pietà* as a hand. The Pietà as a hand would represent not just a hand but a left hand in particular, and it is interesting to note that "Michelangelo was left-handed."[759] [760] Thus not only is there the potential that Michelangelo presented himself in the persons of Jesus, Mary, or both, but there is also the possibility that he represented his own left hand in the form of the entire sculpture.

As a sculptor, the importance of hands may have been on his mind throughout his life, but his hands became pressing issues for him in late-life when, as noted, in the last two years of his life, Michelangelo developed a trembling hand. It trembled so much that in his final months, he was unable to write with a steady hand.

For the artist, hands are the seat of creation. Michelangelo's hands, rough and powdered with marble dust, gave birth to his art. Here we may recall that his wet nurse's breast and body could have been covered in marble dust, like his hands, his own life-giving body part. The breast

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[758] This idea of Michelangelo's declared intention supposedly came from Michelangelo himself, but I encountered this assertion from an Internet source years ago. Since then, I have looked but never been able to find a reputable scholarly source for this attribution.

[759] Tartuferi, 11.

[760] Recorded as far back as classical times, there was a bias against left-handedness, which was associated with *gaucherie*. (Q.v., e.g., Plutarch's *Morals*) For instance, especially with the German *Vesperbilde*, the pietà theme is remarkably consistent, and the dead Christ's head is always at Mary's right. (Murray, *Michelangelo,* 216) This may reflect an ancient and cross-cultural preference for right-handedness, which in Christian iconography comes to represent goodness or righteousness. Stylistically, the *Vatican Pietà* is far more polished and technically advanced than any *Vesperbild*, but their composition is fundamentally similar. In terms of the contextual bias, Christ is on Mary's better side.

Therefore, with the Christ of the final two pietàs facing left, Michelangelo may have identified with being *gauche*, being mala*droit*—being an outcast of some kind. If so, in psychoanalytic terminology, this would be a case of projective identification. (q.v., Grotstein)

gives or at least supports life for a nursing infant, so there is this additional parallel with the dust-covered hands of his adulthood.

If the *Rondanini Pietà* is a also hand, there is quite a bit of symbolic significance, and given the religious subject of the piece, there are particularly religious layers of interpretation. Scripturally, God's hands are associated with creation and birth.[761] Sotierologically, Christ's are associated with birth too. In many Christian traditions, Christ gives mankind salvation in his self-sacrifice on the cross. In a sense, by receiving nails—or spikes—through his hands, Christ gave all of us the opportunity for eternal life.

Further, Michelangelo was no stranger to spikes, as the chisel used to remove the largest chunks in stone sculpture is a chisel with a pointed head—this chisel looks something like a pointed rail tie. This kind of chisel is used when the sculptor wants to remove very large chunks of marble, and given the drastic changes in the different versions of the *Rondanini Pietà*, Michelangelo almost certainly used this chisel at times. His tools were a hammer and something that looked like a crucifying nail, and moreover, he was hammer them into a figure of Christ. So, as he was chiseling into the marble, it is as if Michelangelo was also crucifying the

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[761] As noted, Michelangelo is reported to have read the Bible frequently throughout his long life, so he may have encountered the following passage in Isaiah, in which God asks, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands." (Isa. 49:15-16, *Oxford Bible, NRSV*, 934) The womb suggests a kind of maternal divine compassion and nurturance. The womb here is also an eternal memory, a remembrance and connection, where just as we are cradled in the womb, so our names are cradled in divine hands. In the sense of this pericope from Isaiah, a God whose hands may have shaped human beings—as a womb would—cradles humanity in those hands. In such a conceptualization, both in death and in life, people are in the hands of a Creator.

   Also as noted, artists may create in imitation of the Divine, and we may recall the following quotation that the artist breathes life into the art:

   > Michelangelo says that the sculptor gives life to stone…. The love that has urged the
   > artist towards his work is part of the great dynamism of the universe, conceiving and
   > creating into eternity. The creation of the artist is indeed a continuation of the creation of
   > God—the impulse is the same, the informing purpose is the same. (Arthos, 59)

Seen in this way, the relationship between the artist and the art is incredibly vital, as the artist is part of the grand creative and even procreative urge, and symbolism of the hand is tied into such a creativity.
(*The New Oxford Annotated Bible,* New Revised Standard Version, Edited by Bruce Metzger et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 934.)

marble Christ.[762] The human creator was crucifying his child, much like the Creator offering up his Son to be crucified.

The *Rondanini Pietà* might represent not just any hand, but also Christ's crucified hand in particular. If the hand is specifically Christ's, there is an unsettling bit of symbolism in the place in which Christ's hand is crucified. Traditionally—if not historically—Christ is crucified through the fleshy center of the hand. If the *Rondanini Pietà* is Christ's hand, then the stigma lines up with Christ's seemingly mutilated genitals. In death, although Christ's physical procreativity is stunted, his spiritual procreativity is vast. Christ is said to give salvific birth to humankind. This may be a symbolic reason for aligning Jesus' genitals with the stigma, as the stigma is formed during the act of crucifixion, which is said to precipitate this second birth not only of Jesus but also humanity in whole.[763]

The *Rondanini Pietà* is not Michelangelo's only sculpture that gives hands great importance. For instance, *David*'s powerful hands are proportionally larger than life, apparently because he was intended to be displayed at a great height, at which such proportions look better.[764] An additional reason for Michelangelo emphasizing the hands may be that hands are a seat of action, and these are the hands that slew the giant. In the *Rondanini Pietà*, however, the hand is even bigger. It is not just part of the sculpture that represent this seat of action; it is the entire sculpture that outlines a hand. Thus, one interpretation would be that in representing the

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[762] It is a surprise that the literature appears to be silent about this symbolism also because the similarity between the events of sculpting and crucifixion is, well, striking. It may be that I simply have not yet encountered the idea elsewhere, or it may be that few people who sculpt write extensively about the symbolism of their process.

[763] Further, a stigma as a fleshy hole bears some vague resemblance to the vagina, which then brings us again to the womb and birth symbolism—except here, not only Mary but also Jesus is the creative/procreative maternal Divine.

[764] Q.v., e.g., the BBC's documentary *The Divine Michelangelo* (2004) with William Wallace as principal consultant. For more about the documentary, see IMDb: < http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0437713/>.

Mary and Jesus pair, Michelangelo is portraying these whole figures as a seat of action—perhaps the action of salvation embodied in the sacrifice of Jesus.

It is also possible to interpret the position of the hand, which is cupped or cradling. If seen as both the Mary/Jesus dyad as well as the hand somehow simultaneously, Jesus is cupped or cradled in Mary's arms: "…the Virgin's enveloping mantle [is] always a symbol of heavenly protection."[765] As with the womb symbolism, the mother protects and envelops the son. The hand cradles the child, and if his poetry is any indication, ultimately Michelangelo gave himself into what he described as the arms of God: "Lord, in the final hour, / Stretch out thy pitying arms to me."[766] Also, just a few days before he died, Michelangelo was still giving himself to work on the *Rondanini Pietà*, in which Mary holds Jesus in her arms.[767] Also in his late-life poetry, Michelangelo wrote, "The thorns and nails, the left and the right palm, / Your face, benign, humble, and filled with pity, / Pledge that for great repentance there is mercy, / To the sad soul give hope You will redeem."[768] Citing a different translation of this poem, the art historian Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle writes, "The promise of the grace of repentance and the hope of salvation resided for Michelangelo in 'your nails and both of your palms.'"[769] Using his nail-

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[765] Hartt, 150.

[766] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 159.

[767] As noted, Michelangelo claims, "No one has mastery / Before he is at the end / Of his art and his life." (*The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 323.) It is possible that in those very last days, Michelangelo was working tirelessly, not out of frustration, but out of mastery. Maybe he wanted to honor his Creator with creation, as represented in the womb and in the hand.

[768] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 162.

[769] Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Senses of Touch: Human Dignity and Deformity from Michelangelo to Calvin* (Brill Academic Publishers, 1998), 198.

like chisels, the old sculptor may have given us this: a representation of the palm of the

Divine—a final symbolic hand.[770]

From outward in: Michelangelo's late-life aesthetic revolution

Depictions of Mary cradling her dead adult son can be unsettling. The overwhelming

beauty of the *Vatican Pietà* may lull the viewer into forgetting the abject horror of the scene

Michelangelo has depicted. (Figure 2, page 21) Jesus has just died a horrible death, and his

mother is holding him, her dead son. How, then, is the *Vatican Pietà* so irenic? The smoothness

of the marble undoubtedly contributes to this sculpture's peaceful presence. Unlike most of

Michelangelo's sculptures, the *Vatican Pietà* is finished. Michelangelo polished the marble

finely. The lack of rough edges allows the eye to flow over the sculpture as smoothly as oil over

flesh. Even with this potential visual sensuousness, the *Vatican Pietà* appears aloof from flesh,

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[770] The interested reader may be curious to encounter additional writing on hand symbolism:
   "Like the hand and its fingers, men are differentiated for the purpose of working together." (Plutarch, *Morals*, my antique edition, 68.)
   Also, it is not that we are reasonable because we have hands, but it is that we have hands because we are reasonable. (Ibid.)
   We have a hand in our Fortune. You don't just expect clay to turn itself into bricks. (Plutarch, *Morals*, in the short De Fortuna section.)
   O'Rourke Boyle cites Plutarch: "'Thus, the ancient thinker Anaxagoras was led to ascribe human wisdom and understanding to the hands." Galen, who was to compose the ultimate teleology of the hand, also cited Anaxagoras." (O'Rourke Boyle, 35.)
   "While many reproached Thomas, the incredulous disciple with the bold finger, other devout persons dared to press their entire bodies right into the wounds of Jesus." (O'Rourke Boyle, 199.)
   "The symbolism of hands as grace, for social favor toward social bond, depended on their primary sense as executors of power." (O'Rourke Boyle, 209.)
   "As Calvin explained, the phrase "'the hand of God,' as is well enough known is taken by metonymy for power." (O'Rourke Boyle, 214.)
   "The concept of will was also expressed in terms of handedness: not only in whose palm—divine or human—was the power to act but also in which hand it was—right or left as symbolic of good or evil." (O'Rourke Boyle, 211.)
   "In Christian iconography that branching [between right (good) and left (evil)] was superimposed on the cross, with Jesus inclining his head in his redemptive death voluntarily toward the right, or the good." (O'Rourke Boyle, 212.) [N.B., in the *Rondanini Pietà*, Christ's head inclines toward the left.]
   "Handedness not only symbolized choice but also fate, its reverse." (O'Rourke Boyle, 213.)

not suggesting suffering so much as peace. Michelangelo presents the *Vatican Pietà* as an immaterial ideal.

Michelangelo sculpted this, his first and most famous pietà, when he was still in his mid-twenties. His attention to detail and mastery of form resemble classical Greek and Roman sculpture, and the high finish makes the marble look cool and clean. The sculpture suggests piety and antiquity. However breathtakingly beautiful it may be, Michelangelo's first pietà remains a visual idealization.

Michelangelo accomplishes a great measure of this idealization through his portrayals of Jesus and Mary as visual ideals. As Mary holds Jesus Christ, she is holding a figure who is truly more "the Christ" than he is "Jesus." Michelangelo has sculpted a man, but Christ is no man in particular. Mary is similarly idealized. Mary and her son lack the distinctive features by which people are recognizable. Instead, with their soft features, smooth skin, and delicate physiognomy, Mary and Christ are almost invisible. As Christ is so idealized that he becomes both an everyman and a no-man, Mary becomes an everywoman and no-woman. Michelangelo's Mary and Jesus are undeniably beautiful, but they lack some degree of warmth.[771]

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[771] A further and probably more controversial interpretation has us begin by looking back to consider the Mary of the *Vatican Pietà*. Notice once more that she is an anachronistically young Mary—hardly the mother of an approximately thirty-three year old Jesus. In the Steinberg section above, we have considered various reasons why Michelangelo may have depicted her in this way—ranging from Michelangelo's own explanation that her youth represents chastity to Steinberg's interpretation that her youth suggests spousal love. A further interpretation, which psychoanalytic theorists have framed in various ways, is that whether or not he knew it consciously, the Marys in the pietàs re-presented his lost mother or mothers, and this theory is supported by her anachronistic youth. (For an excellent list of such scholars, see footnote 80 on page 513 of Moshe Arkin's article, "One of the Marys…": An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Michelangelo's Florentine Pietà," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp. 493-517.)

There is also another possibility that is bound to cause some discomfort: Conscious or not, Michelangelo may have conflated his ideas of chastity with his ideas of castration. In other words, he may have considered Mary to be a feminized eunuch. As a conscious thought, this idea of Mary as a "female eunuch" might even appear unusual, but unconscious associations between chastity and castration are almost unavoidable. (The phrase "female eunuch" comes from the title of a book by Germaine Greer.)

This is one of the paradoxes of beauty: a woman or a man can be so beautiful that she or he appears plain.[772]   For instance, a woman may be so conventionally beautiful that she is not only somewhat plain but even somewhat unappealing or surprisingly invisible. The same might be said for Mary and Jesus of the *Vatican Pietà*, who are so idealized that they become somewhat plain.

Two related sculptures whose dates of completion span six and a half decades—the *Vatican Pietà* and the *Rondanini Pietà*—reveal how Michelangelo's art changed over the course of his long life. If we compare the two pietàs, we notice at once how different they are.[773]

There is plausible material evidence to support the theory of a Marian eunuch. Michelangelo was a master anatomist, so he would have noticed something that was common knowledge among the Italian upper class: men castrated at a young age developed oddly. The Italian upper class would have known about this odd maturation because male castration was an institutional practice used to produce male singers for the higher vocal registers: the *castrati*. Such young men grew unusually tall but had legs that were disproportionately long compared to their torsos. Also, their heads often appeared both disproportionately small and disproportionately young compared to the rest of their bodies, and this odd proportionality is reminiscent of another feature of Mary in the *Vatican Pietà*: she is huge. (*see fig. 2*)

Mary's body is bigger than her small, youthful head. Steinberg writes that "what the sculptor has done is to place the head of a delicate girl upon the frame of an earth mother." (Steinberg, 234) Steinberg calls Mary's proportions "the conjunction of maiden features and pylon limbs fronting a cavernous lap." (Steinberg, 235) It is Mary's legs in particular that are so disproportionate. Long legs, big body, small young head: these features describe the physique of a castrato. It is also the physique of Mary in the *Vatican Pietà*. The idea is that there is a similarity between the physiques between Mary and the castrato, thus we have the symbolism of Mary as a castrato. Further, a eunuch may symbolize disintegration, as he is disunified from a defining aspect of physical masculinity.

[772] Consider, for instance, the model Cindy Crawford's signature mole. Without this mole on her face, it may be difficult to remember her features.

[773] In the *Rondanini Pietà*, the symbolism of castration falls more on Jesus than Mary. Though it was iconologically common to de-emphasize genitalia, Christ's genitals here are especially unpronounced. Given that the sculpture is *non finito*, the genitals appear so roughly formed as to be mutilated. Michelangelo presents Jesus as fully nude but emasculates him simultaneously. His sexuality is overt but hidden too. Also, we have a further example of symbolism of integration in the full nudity and disintegration in the near castration. (*see fig. 9)*

The obvious discomfort the conscious or unconscious thought of castration can elicit may be another reason for the *Rondanini Pietà*'s unpopularity. If the comparatively popular *Vatican Pietà* has any castration symbolism, it is very subtle, but with the *Rondanini Pietà*, it is explicit. Understandably enough, there is a special challenge to finding a wide audience, especially among men, for a work with symbolism that can tap into such a powerful anxieties. Psychoanalytically, this would be "castration anxiety," and there could be creative works that find an audience and portray this disturbing subject consciously and undeniably. With the *Rondanini Pietà*, however, the audience might remain unconscious of the source of its discomfort and would then be unable to process the anxiety easily—thereby rendering wide acceptance of the artwork less likely. Acceptance of an artwork with explicit castration symbolism is also complicated by involving such a highly cathected religious figure. Still, in the *Vatican Pietà* at least, there is historical precedent for an unsettling subject to become an extremely well-received artwork.

The Christ of the first Pietà is limp, but he still appears strong enough to wake up and walk out of St. Peter's. By contrast, the Christ of Michelangelo's last Pietà is frail: rib cage roughly hewn away to be the size of a boy's, chest grossly disproportionate to lanky legs.[774] Michelangelo has sculpted Christ as an old man—an old man like Michelangelo. As several scholars, such as Dillenberger, have observed, Michelangelo identifies himself with Christ.[775]

Compared to the *Vatican Pietà*, Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà* is downright gritty. Stylistically, he latter sculpture may look better suited to the Museum of Modern Art in New York than to a fortified castle in Milan, and the *Rondanini Pietà* is arguably more akin to a modern art than to its Renaissance contemporaries. Perhaps less anachronistically, one could compare its style to Mannerist pieces of the day. Nevertheless, it may be hard to imagine how two such different works could be from the same artist. The Christ of Michelangelo's first pietà is smooth and clean; he looks like some fragile prince overcome by sleep. By contrast, the Christ of Michelangelo's last pietà is gaunt and abused: a world-worn beggar who could just have easily died on a curb as on the cross.

As suggested above, the *Vatican Pietà* was, among other things, a lament for lost mother-love. The mother-love that Michelangelo substituted was cool, distant, and absolutely transcendent. The *Rondanini Pietà,* however, is notable for the warm union between Christ and Mary. If Michelangelo identified with Christ, as Dillenberger suggests, Michelangelo may have found a very personal solution to the dilemma of finding heavenly fulfillment on earth. By identifying with Christ, Michelangelo may have established a surrogate bond with Mary and—by

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[774] These odd proportions also echo those seen in Mary of the *Vatican Pietà*, so like Mary in the Michelangelo's first pietà, the Jesus in his last pietà too may contain such castrato symbolism.

[775] John, Dillenberger, *Images and Relics: Theological Perceptions and Visual Images in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 147.

extension—his lost mother. While the *Vatican Pietà* may reflect Michelangelo's mournful

estrangement from love as child, the *Rondanini Pietà* may reflect his final resolution to such

estrangement by identifying with Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary.

Further, Michelangelo portrays the Son of God as vulnerable—as human—and the

gradina of the unfinished marble contributes to this sense. Real people have rough edges: a

thousand tiny vulnerabilities, and often a major awkwardness or two. The rough edges of the

Rondanini Pietà and its awkwardly vestigial arm may remind the viewer of its subject's full

humanity.[776] While most of the marble is covered with *gradina*, some parts of the sculpture,

such as Christ's lanky legs and the vestigial arm, are smooth.[777] The sculpture does not portray

Jesus as distant and flawless but instead as intimate and irregular.

Symbolism in the pietàs of integration and disintegration

The symbols of the womb and the hand each have relevance to the themes of integration

and disintegration, or unity and disunity. The womb may symbolize integration, as a child in the

womb is integrated into the person of the mother; nevertheless, if birth is occurring, the womb

may have the opposite significance, as after parturition, the baby and mother are more disunified.

The hand may symbolize either integration or disintegration depending upon its function: A

grasping hand unifies while a striking hand disunifies. With such potential symbolic

significance, the *Rondanini Pietà* is interesting for simultaneously containing such multivalent

meanings. It pushes and pulls, grasps and releases, integrates and disintegrates.

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[776] The previous several pages are revised from an unpublished paper of mine submitted while at Vanderbilt University.

[777] This is typical of Michelangelo's technique, because he would start sculpting at one point and finish areas as he went along. Michelangelo's technique was unusual. When sculpting marble, it is much more common to have the whole sculpture roughly hewn before finishing any one part.

This multivalence and ambiguity too imbues it with even greater sense of power and vitality. As noted, Aristotle's Law of Non-contradiction is essentially that the same thing cannot both be and not be in the same way at the same time and place, yet here is this sculpture, a visual paradox, that would seem to question the law. Its symbolic resonance does not really make sense according to regular logic, but maybe it make sense according to dream logic, while Aristotle's still fast asleep.

This is where psychoanalytic work on the Unconscious comes to the fore. The *Rondanini Pietà* is powerful not for what is explicable about it but chiefly for what is inexplicable about it.[778] There is symbolism of both integration and disintegration but never simply so, never explicably so.[779]

As art historian Robert Mode suggests, with the *Rondanini Pietà* Michelangelo moved beyond the aesthetic idealism of his youth to declare in a final artistic statement that external physicality, power, and beauty are not paramount, but what is inside is the most important.[780] If this is true, then disavowing external beauty in this way is a fairly radical thing for Michelangelo

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[778] The same might be said for the mysterious smile of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, which has so captivated modern visual culture. Her power is in her knowing silence, which would appear to speak volumes but is not at all easily definable. Fittingly, just as the *Rondanini Pietà* was with Michelangelo in the years and days before his death, so too did the *Mona Lisa* accompany Leonardo in the days and years before his death. These may have been something like *memento mori* to the artists, but the sense is that there was something indefinably more about these works that captivated not just us but the artists themselves. To fascinate even them so deeply and for so long, there must be quite a lot worth considering about these pieces. While the *Mona Lisa* and her enigmatic aspects have become wildly popular in the modern world, yet as noted, the seemingly unfinished *Rondanini Pietà* has remained virtually unknown—*non finito* and *incognito*.

       Frank may be right that the macabre aspects of the Michelangelo's final work have scared off the public, but it may also be that the work has not yet found its audience or its time, and surely time will tell. Consider Picasso's *Guernica*, which is an unsettling macabre work that has also found a public. It is possible that the *Rondanini Pietà* too will find its audience.

[779] For those working in religion and psychology, Dittes offers the following: "The vocation of tracking the Spirit must be freed of baggage as the Spirit itself, and as ready to move on, to move beyond," and it is in this vocation's necessary "tentativeness" that one may find its excitement and sacredness. (James E. Dittes, "Some Accidents, Coincidents, and Intents: A Vocational Narrative," in *Pastoral Psychology,* Vol. 52, Nos.1/2, November 2003, p. 13.)

[780] Robert Mode, Nikolaus Newman's notes on the lecture, "Italian Renaissance after 1500," AHST 219, 4/20/04.

to have done. He was, after all, the sculptor of *David*, one of art's greatest examples of physical beauty, power, and prowess.

In terms of integration and disintegration, this is in some ways a move from the integrity of physical health toward disintegrity of physical decay. At another level, however, physicality is always subject to disintegration sooner or later, and Michelangelo's apparent shift from emphasizing externality toward emphasizing the internality is also a shift toward whatever it is that does not disintegrate, usually termed the soul in the Christian formulation. In this sense, the shift toward the internal was a shift toward physical disintegration but also perhaps a shift toward spiritual integration.

So in sum, the womb and the hand both have powerful symbolic resonance. Also, Michelangelo may have popularized the pietà theme with his first and most famous pietà, but he revolutionized the pietà theme with his last and most neglected one. We may wonder what other types of shifts were occurring along with this late-life aesthetic revolution, so we now consider the elder artist's faith development.

d. My faith developmental theories

Above, in the section about the developmental stage theory, we saw similarities among the variously described phenomena of Fowlerian "universalizing faith," Eriksonian "integrity," and Tornstamian or Eriksonian "gerotranscendence." In light of these concepts, we might then speculate about the possibility of syntonic disintegration and gero-integration, which would be defined along similar lines.

For instance, the concept of gerotranscendence arose with Tornstam's dealing with terminally ill and dying patients. To a greater or lesser degree, their bodies were literally

disintegrating, so the transcendent and universalizing aspects of the peace they reported could not have resulted from a strong identification with their bodies because their bodies were not at peace but mortally ill. Thus, their increasing sense of integrity was not an increasing physical integrity. They had, instead, physical disintegrity. Their integrity may be termed gero-integrity, as it is an internal integrity and coming to peace with the physical and mental disintegrity that accompanies late-life.[781] Still, not just despite of but also somehow along with this physical disintegrity, they reported a having "peace of mind."[782]

There is a further possibility concerning gero-integrity and syntonic disintegration, and that is this: It may occur not only through the process of physical disintegration, as in terminal physical illness, but also through mental and emotional disintegration, as in terminal types of mental deterioration seen in Alzheimer's and dementia. I have lived with the latter population, and noticed that in two of my clients, the stripping away of their minds left them at peace, almost radiantly so. In one case, my client was a recovering alcoholic who had been sober for decades; Twelve Step recovery often includes meditation and a disidentification with certain characterological features, so her disidentification with her mental state appeared to be an easier transition for her. In the other case, my client's mental state had deteriorated to such a degree that he regressed into the near innocence of a child, perhaps returning to an infantile sense of primary identification or oneness, though it was impossible to know. In both cases, however, there appeared to be a syntonic element not only to their physical disintegration but also their mental disintegration. In this, they exuded what might be described as a bubbly joyfulness, which was also a stark contrast to the rest of the patients, most of whom dwelled in what I used

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[781] "Gero-integration" refers to the process and "gero-integrity" refers to the result.

[782] Tornstam, as quoted in Erikson, 123.

to call worry loops, where they were both perseverative and anxious. Seemingly little affected by this unhappy context, however, there were also these two apparently gerotranscendent, gero-integrated, and mentally syntonically disintegrated clients.[783]

As above, Tornstam writes that this gerotranscendent stage is "regarded the final stage in a natural process towards maturation and wisdom," and in this ultimate stage, the gerotranscendent patients reported experiences that included "a new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space, life and death, and a redefinition of the self."[784] Furthermore, as noted, Tornstam and his colleagues discovered no apparent correlation between religiosity and gerotranscendence. This is not to say that their gerotranscendent individuals were necessarily irreligious but just some were religious and some were not. One thing, however, that was a common feature was that the gerotranscendent "might also experience a decrease in interest in material things and a greater need for solitary 'meditation.'"[785]

As for Michelangelo in his late-life, his biographical data reveals a decreased interest in material things, except often for business matters, which he maintained, but without evidence of having relished this maintenance. In the art historical reflections in the previous section, we saw too that among other things, the *Rondanini Pietà* represents an aesthetic shift away from esteeming materiality.[786] Still, there is inadequate evidence even to speculate that Michelangelo necessarily achieved the an exalted state of gerotranscendence.

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[783] Michelangelo's prodigious mind, however, appears to have remained sound right up to the end, so with him, we look more toward his physical and possibly emotional deterioration.

[784] Tornstam, as quoted in Erikson, 123-124.

[785] Ibid.

[786] This shift away from materiality also opens up a theological possibility. Representational art depicts (or "re-presents") the material world, and thus, representational art is limited to representing (even in fantasy) the objects if

Instead, the evidence, other theorists' interpretations, and my interpretations of Michelangelo's life and art have pointed to the thematic presence of both integration and disintegration. From an Eriksonian point of view, this might have to do with trying to finding some resolution to the "psychosocial crisis" in old age between that stage's syntonic element, which is integrity, and that stage's dystonic element, which is despair.[787] [788] This possibility would be relatively consonant with the biographical data, but another consonant possibility is this: In the artist's late-life, the themes of disintegration may have indicated a syntonic release from overidentification with his weakening physicality—a process of syntonic disintegration and gero-integration.

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this physical universe. (Cf., David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*) Often, art theorists will contrast representational art to nonrepresentational or abstract art, and in general, abstract art tries to make visible the invisible, re-presenting that which was never presented in the first place. Abstract art is not bound by the constraints of representing the materiality of the physical universe, so in theory, at least, abstract art is free to explore subtle spiritual aspects that might not have materiality. Similarly, some types of theology attempt to represent and explain the material world explicitly and these might be termed representational theologies. Like representational art, representational theology has the potential to display great beauty, but in its degraded forms, representational theology also has the potential to become dogmatic, joyless, and overly determined. Thus, in contrast to overly representational theologies, an abstract theology would be more apophatic, joyful, and humble. An abstract theology might have more in common with ecstatic poetry than it would with systematic theology.

[787] Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed,* 32-33, 112-114.

[788] In previous chapters, we have entertained the similarities between Michelangelo's biographical data and the psychological diagnoses of bipolarity, depression, or depression's precursor melancholia. These are mental illnesses that are classified as organic, having a strong biological basis. In other words, they are relatively hard-wired. What about despair? One way to distinguish depression from despair is to say that one may be depressed about nothing in particular, but one who despairs is despairing about something. (Vaughn) This is similar in some ways to the Freudian formulation of mourning, for which there is a specific object. A person mourns the loss of a particular person or thing, and this is a known person or thing. Clinically, if a client is mourning the loss of a loved one who died a few weeks ago, a therapist would be unlikely to consider it depression; if however, the client is in a similar state years or decades later, then depression might be something to consider. Similarly, depression becomes generalized, while despair has an object.
In Michelangelo's life, he suffered repeated losses of those close to him, from his wet nurse and Francesca in childhood to other family, mentors, and close friends throughout his life. He had many particular occasions to grieve or despair. Still, in his writings and artwork, the evidence points more toward a generalized persistent dissatisfaction with life and focus on death. It would seem, then, that depression is more similar to such factors than despair, but there is another thing about despair that makes it a possibility: The object of despair can be life itself. Often called angst, it is despair about existence.
(Bruce Vaughn, course lecture, "Hope and Despair," Vanderbilt University, fall 2003 or spring 2004.)

The syntonic disintegration and corresponding gero-integration may occur when the person in late-life comes to terms with the eventual total disintegration of their physical integrity, reminiscent of the phrase in Genesis, "you are dust and to dust you shall return."[789] Michelangelo was not only reportedly very familiar with the Bible, but he was also a stone sculptor, well familiar with having dust on his hands. A return to dust is almost a return to nothingness, and we may recall also that in one of his poems points, he writes, "They have no other pleasure / In living where I am deceased and dead, / Indeed, indeed, of nothing I am made."[790] Further, we recall Bruce Vaughn quoting Jerome Miller, who says, "It is only in finding our own nothingness and embracing it that we realize God exists."[791] Vaughn elaborates to say, "This is where anything that deserves the name life must begin—in the void, in the darkness of chaos."[792] [793] Such a condition might seem frightening or bleak, but whether he experienced it or not, Michelangelo was faced with the syntonic possibility of fully accepting his eventually disintegrated condition to attain a sense of gero-integrity, a numinous state of ultimate acceptance. Given the consciousness with which Michelangelo describes his nothingness, this was a real possibility, and would have been a major step in faith development toward a final reconciliation in the conflict between integration and disintegration. It would have been gero-integrity.

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[789] Gen. 3:19, *HarperCollins Bible, NRSV,* 10.

[790] *The Complete Poems,* Gilbert ed., 170.

[791] Jerome A. Miller, "The Way of Suffering: A Reasoning of the Heart," *Second Opinion* 17, no. 4 (April, 1992): 31, quoted in S. Bruce Vaughn, "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief Recovery," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2003): 41-42.

[792] S. Bruce Vaughn, "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief Recovery," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2003): 39.

[793] The previous several sentences adapted from my Vanderbilt writing.

Figure 12   The *Rondanini Pietà*

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We now have a discursive-hierarchical hermeneutic reconstruction of Michelangelo's late-life and ultimate work.

First, we introduced our case study, Michelangelo, and his final artwork, and then we continued with a methodological orientation that described the structure of the reconstruction: a tripartite hierarchical structure starting with facts, then building values upon them, and then building hypotheses upon these.

Second, we moved into the chapter on facts, which summarized some of Michelangelo's salient biographical data, especially from his early and late-life. These facts moved from a section on data about Michelangelo's individual context, to a section on data about his communal context, to a section on data about his art historical context, and finally to data about him and his final work.

Third, we moved into a chapter on the value-laden work of other theorists in the fields of our central discourses: psychology and art history. In this third chapter, a common method was to compare Michelangelo's biographical data to a given theory set to see what parallels might emerge, where in lieu of diagnosis the ongoing hope was to gain a deeper understanding of our case study. In this way, we encountered the theories of many eminent psychologists—including Erikson, Freud, and Grotstein—and considered their work as it related to the hermeneutic reconstruction. After an art historical methodological introduction, we entertained the theories of psychoanalysts writing with an artistic sensibility—Frank and Liebert—and art historians writing

with a psychoanalytic sensibility—Steinberg. Most of the art historians included in this chapter wrote about artwork germane especially to Michelangelo's late-life, such *non finito* sculpture or the pietàs—Barricelli and Murray. Whether psychological or art historical, the interpretations of each theorist were offered to contribute something to the overall hermeneutic reconstruction.

Fourth, we moved into a chapter of my theories, in which there were new psychological theories about marble dust on the wet nurse's breast and Michelangelo's self-identification as an aristocrat, there were new art historical theories about symbolism of the hand and the symbolism of the sculptor's chisel as a crucifying nail, and there were new the faith development theories about syntonic disintegration in the elderly leading toward gero-integrity. Like others theories in this work, these were offered in the hope of enhancing the hermeneutic reconstruction, which was itself built to enhance our overall understanding of Michelangelo's late-life and work.

Now at the end of this work about ends, we see something similar to what we have seen in the *Rondanini Pietà*: The end is also a beginning because there remains the possibility of endless interpretations—interpreting each other and back *ad infinitum*—so much like a hermeneutic circle, the reconstruction is endless. With the hermeneutic reconstruction now at an end without end, it too is now part of the hermeneutic circle, and so scholarship continues. Like two-thirds of Michelangelo's sculptures, this reconstruction is necessarily *non finito* and, one may hope, the better for it.

Poised between integration and disintegration, Michelangelo's late-life and work remain fascinating for their mystery. Standing upright and as a pair, Mary cradles Jesus in the hollow of her body, and the interpretive layers of death, birth, unity, and disunity all come together in the final aesthetic moment Michelangelo ever offered. It has been many years now since Michelangelo spoke to anyone or created the reverberating clang of chisel on marble—the

marble is now quiet and Michelangelo is long since dust—yet even in the unbroken silence of

centuries, we are moved to listen. Likewise, in working with the elderly, they taught me a great

secret: Well beyond my attempts at meaning-making, there was a deep integrity to their often

extended silence, and though their words are long since lost to me, those holy

moments—unexplained—somehow still remain.

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