

Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Slide Comparison Final Exam

****NO RESEARCH**** OTHER THAN YOUR NOTES FROM LECTURES, SECTIONS, CLASS READINGS, AND DISCUSSIONS

Use your own words. If you quote from a reading, cite the author and page number in parentheses.

Type your name and student number at the top of your document, with your section information.

Please use Calibri 11, or Times New Roman 12. Single-spacing is fine. Include word count for each essay.

Write two essays, 800-1000 words each, comparing the paired works on the following 2 slides.

Include a brief title for the comparison.

Identify both works on each slide (date, title, artist/architect, medium) in the first paragraph.

Make a plan; avoid repetition; proofread.

Develop your ideas around a thesis statement and use paragraphs to order your discussion.

Strive for clarity of discussion. **Avoid generalizations**

Use visual and material evidence to support your analysis by comparing the objects' similarities and differences.

Your essays may consider a combination of the following details, if known:

theme/subject matter, medium/format, original location/site, function, patron, and relevant artistic, social and historical considerations.

Because this is a comparative essay, it is important that you do ***not*** discuss one object, and then the second.

Proofread. Correct punctuation, spelling, and grammar count! Upload to your TA's CCLE site by **December 8 at 10pm** PST





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ART HIS 22

8 December 2021

Final Comparison: *Las Meninas* and *Self-portrait at the Easel*

In 1656, Diego Velazquez painted *Las Meninas*, a huge oil on canvas portrait of a Spanish princess and her attending servants, as well as the artist himself beside them in the shadows. In 1556, Sofonisba Anguissola painted her *Self-portrait at the Easel*, which is also an oil on canvas. In her self-portrait, Anguissola depicts herself painting a scene of Mary and Jesus. *Las Meninas* and *Self-portrait at the Easel* differ in their main subjects and their animation, but both artworks use details to elevate the artist's social status and identity.

The two paintings differ in their main subjects. In *Las Meninas*, Velazquez uses light and shadows to focus the attention on the royal family, especially the princess. The maids are standing in a circle around the princess, so their faces are all half-shrouded in shadow. The princess directly faces the light source, making her the only fully illuminated figure in the painting. In the background, the mirror is highlighted by the reflection of light, so the image of the king and queen stands out among all the other paintings on the wall. The use of light not only emphasizes the importance of the royal family, but also symbolizes their enlightenment. In *Self-portrait at the Easel*, the main subject is Anguissola herself. She takes up the entire right side of the painting. Her left shoulder is foreshortened and protruding towards the viewer, which makes her body seem even larger. Anguissola's face is also captivating. The contrast between her pale skin, black clothes, and dark green background, as well as the chiaroscuro on the left side of her

face, makes it especially stand out. Her eyes are looking directly out of the painting at the viewer, which draws attention to her face due to the psychological inclination to meet people in the eye.

Another difference is that *Las Meninas* is animated, while *Self-portrait at the Easel* is still. Velazquez depicts each figure in the middle of an action: the maids are curtsying, the artist himself is in the process of painting, the nun in the background is engaged in conversation, and the girl on the far right is stepping on the dog. There is hardly anyone in the portrait standing still. The various activities make the painting animated, and it portrays a lively household revolving around the princess. This increases her authority even as a young child and also humanizes the princess by showing an everyday scene of her life. On the other hand, *Self-portrait at the Easel* is a rather still painting. Anguissola is looking away from her easel, and her right hand is resting on her maulstick, as if she is pausing her work in order to study her subject more closely. Additionally, Anguissola's neatly tied-up hair, formal dress, and straight posture all make her portrait look stiff. Unlike in *Las Meninas*, animation is less essential in her self-portrait, since it is meant to depict a person in a pose, not a natural scene of life.

Both paintings share the goal of increasing and legitimizing the artist's social status. Despite the main visual focus of *Las Meninas* being the princess, the painting is also about Velazquez. First and foremost, the fact that Velazquez is depicted along with the royals is a statement of his high social position. It also shows that his artistic skill is high enough to be valued by the royalty. In addition, the red cross on Velazquez's chest is the symbol of the Order of Santiago, an honor which he had received from the King of Spain. This is another assertion that painting should be considered a noble pursuit, since the Order of Santiago was not given to manual workers, and artists were not well-respected in Spain at the time. Besides symbolism, Velazquez's artistic skill is also employed in the diverse textures and details throughout the

painting: the dogs soft fur, all the different colors and textures of the dresses, the girls' long wavy hair, and the detailed ornaments on the girls' hairs. This legitimizes his skill as a royal artist. In *Self-portrait at the Easel*, Anguissola's depiction of herself painting demonstrates her pride in her artistic profession. The lighting, which selectively highlights her hands, maulstick, paintbrush, and palette—basic tools of every artist—emphasizes her profession through a visual synecdoche. In the self-portrait, Anguissola is painting a scene of Mary and Jesus, which has a twofold effect. First, it shows that her work adheres to Christian values, which helps to legitimize her work, especially in the strongly Catholic Spain. Second, the intimate scene of Mary caressing Jesus relates to her own gender as a woman, and shows that Anguissola embraces both her profession and the societal expectations for her to be caring and motherly.

Las Meninas is an animated scene of royal life which focuses on the royal family, while *Self-portrait at the Easel* is a still self-portrait. Despite the visual differences, both paintings have a common goal of elevating and legitimizing the artist's social status.

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Final Comparison: *Four Rivers Fountain* and *The Ditchley Portrait*

From 1648 to 1651, Gian Lorenzo Bernini sculpted the *Four Rivers Fountain*, a travertine and marble sculpture of an obelisk and four men representing the Danube, Ganges, Nile, and Rio de la Plata rivers in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas respectively. In 1592, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger painted *The Ditchley Portrait*, an oil on canvas portrait of Queen Elizabeth I standing over a map of England. The *Four Rivers Fountain* and *The Ditchley Portrait* both incorporate symbols of enlightenment and demonstrate colonialism, but they differ in the genders of their subjects.

Both pieces symbolize enlightenment in their own way. In *Four Rivers Fountain*, the obelisk is a symbol of civilization, enlightenment, and Christianity. The poses of each of the four rivers can be understood as a reaction to the obelisk. The Danube directly faces the obelisk, with his arms reaching out towards it, symbolizing how Europe has embraced Christianity and civilization. The Nile's head is veiled, shrouding its head in darkness, and the Ganges is turned away from the obelisk, which symbolize both Africa and Asia's refusal of European ideas. Finally, the Rio de la Plata faces the obelisk, but is in a cowering position, which symbolizes how Europeans forcefully converted Native Americans to Christianity, and thus enlightened them. In *The Ditchley Portrait*, the light and dark clouds on either side of Queen Elizabeth represent enlightenment and chaos respectively. Elizabeth is positioned at the intersection of light and dark, and her white face and jewel-studded white dress makes her seem like a light

source. Meanwhile, she faces the enlightened half of the sky while turning her back on the darkness. This shows how she brings order to chaos and enlightens the ignorant.

Another similarity is how both pieces demonstrate colonialism. The dove which sits on top of the *Four Rivers Fountain* is a symbol of the Pamphili family, who was not only a powerful family in Rome, but also connected to the Church via Pope Innocent X. The ease with which it rests on top of the huge obelisk, the personifications of the four rivers, and even the papal tiara shows how confident the family was in their domination of the world and the Church. In addition, the personification of Rio de la Plata has many symbols of slavery, which was widely practiced throughout the Americas. A metal brace surrounds his ankle, representing the physical chains which held African and Native American slaves in bondage. His laid down position and arm raised as if to ward off a blow evokes imagery of the physical abuse towards slaves. Beneath his body is a pile of coins, a reference to the silver mining that slaves were used for in the Americas. In *The Ditchley Portrait*, Queen Elizabeth stands on a globe, specifically on top of England. The map of England is enlarged, covering almost the entire globe instead of the small island it actually is. This represents the British Empire's worldwide influence. The map also depicts tiny ships, a symbol of the British Empire's naval superiority, which was important in establishing its many overseas colonies. Elizabeth's dress is extremely wide and flows down over the map of England, and this shows how her imperial power encompasses all parts of the empire.

A major difference between the two pieces is the gender of the subjects. In *Four Rivers Fountain*, the rivers are personified as idealized, muscular men. These men are carved out of white marble in the classical style which embodies the Greek and Roman civilizations. Also, since the earliest civilizations were formed around rivers, the male personifications imply that men were the source of civilization. Because of the strong connection between the theme of

civilization and masculinity, the sculpture celebrates the role of men and male achievements throughout the course of history. Furthermore, the details such as the papal tiara and the Pamphili family's dove both represent powerful patriarchal institutions, which only emphasizes the idea of male power. *The Ditchley Portrait*, on the other hand, is of a female monarch. Queen Elizabeth's face and body cannot be fictionalized, but almost everything else is idealized in order to present her as a divine monarch. Her white cape is shaped like wings, giving her an angel-like appearance over the world. Ornaments such as her earring, which is an armillary sphere representing the Earth and the Sun, and the jewels on her dress, which seem like stars, emphasize her heavenly appearance. Her size in the portrait, with her feet on the ground and head among the clouds, shows that she connects the earth and the heavens. Unlike a male figures of *Four Rivers Fountain*, who celebrate mens' achievements through symbolism, Queen Elizabeth uses her appearances to legitimize her position as a female monarch.

Four Rivers Fountain and *The Ditchley Portrait* both depict enlightenment through the use of posture and contrast, and they also both contain references to colonialism, such as slavery and symbols of the British Empire. However, the two pieces differ in the genders of their subjects. The men depicted in *Four Rivers Fountain* celebrates male achievement, while Queen Elizabeth in *The Ditchley Portrait* legitimizes her power as a female monarch.

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