

chapter two

Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*: The Iconoclastic Backlash

THE PRECEDING CHAPTER FOCUSED on the fact that beginning in the nineteenth century men have found in Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* a way to displace the ambivalent feelings evoked by their loss of the loved object in early childhood, a loss that was central to their development of a *melancholy self*. In effect, she has become the focus—the iconic center—of the religious sensibilities that give expression to these ambivalent feelings. Because these feelings reflect considerable ambivalence toward the lost love object, men have viewed *Mona Lisa* as both attractive and threatening. In this chapter, I will focus on the fact that she became the target of iconoclastic actions, the types of actions the central icon of an established religion often evokes. However, we will also see how *Mona Lisa* has survived these attacks and has become more humanized, partly as a result of the attacks inflicted upon her but also because she is, after all, a painting.

I will begin with Freud's reflections on how Leonardo began to displace his emotional investment in his paintings, *Mona Lisa* among them, into a scientific curiosity about the real world around him. Such displacement is not normally considered an iconoclastic act. But, in this case, it was an initial stage in the process because it represented an emotional detachment from the icon itself.

THE DISPLACEMENT OF EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT INTO SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY

In the concluding paragraph of his essay on Leonardo, Pater refers to death as “the last curiosity,” thus implying that there were many instances of curiosity before this. This implication invites further consideration of Freud’s monograph on Leonardo because Freud was especially interested in Leonardo’s displacement of his emotional investment in the subjects of his paintings into a scientific *curiosity* about the natural world. In effect, this was a secondary displacement, for the first displacement was one in which the emotional investment in a painting’s subject, as in the case of *Mona Lisa*, was a displacement of emotions evoked by another person in his life, in this case, his biological mother.

Two points that Donald Sassoon makes in his discussion of the “discovery” of the *Mona Lisa* in the mid-nineteenth century are relevant to the relationship between this secondary displacement and the religious sensibilities of the *melancholy self*. The first occurs in his consideration of the fact that those who were attracted to the painting were overwhelmingly male. Very few women had much to say about the painting, and what they *did* say was not very favorable. For example, in his 1867 popular guide to the Louvre, Pierre Marcy cited an essay on *Mona Lisa* by George Sand (the masculine pseudonym of Amandine Dupin) but was highly selective in what he included in his citation and what he left out. He quoted this sentence from the essay: “What is disquieting about this image is the soul shining through, appearing to contemplate yours, with lofty serenity reading into your eyes while you vainly try to read into hers.” This citation, Sassoon notes, reinforced the dominant view of the woman in the painting. On the other hand, Marcy omitted the fact that “Sand began, daringly, to say what many have since thought—Lisa is not a beautiful woman: she has no eyebrows, her cheeks are too full, her hair too thin, her forehead too broad, her eyes do not sparkle, she is plump.” She also said that “there is an undertone of cold malice in her smile, a riddle in her expression difficult to forget.” So, she concluded, “The real secret lies not in the painting but in the painter: how he achieved an idealized portrait; how he instilled his powers of expression into it. What we see in the painting is the genius of the painter, the soul of a master, the hopes of a superior man.”¹ Sassoon notes that this attempt to discuss the work in terms of its creator was unsuccessful, and

1. Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 128–29.

Sand's conclusions—"Whoever looked at her for an instant cannot forget her"—were frequently quoted, but the rest of her essay has been forgotten.²

Clearly, male viewers were entranced by *Mona Lisa* herself and much less interested in how Leonardo "instilled his powers of expression into" the painting. There was little commentary—certainly none in Pater's two paragraphs—on Leonardo's techniques, such as his invention of the *sfumato* technique, which consisted in building up layers of paint from dark to light and allowing the previous one show through, thus achieving, through a play of shadows and light, the optical illusion of a relief. This technique, applied to great effect in the *Mona Lisa*, is evident in the blurring of the corners of her eyes and mouth (the main identification points of a facial expression), thus adding to the uncertainty surrounding the expression of her face.³

But these early discoverers of the *Mona Lisa*—these "apprehensive explorers"—were less interested in how Leonardo achieved these effects and far more drawn to the image itself—*she* was the object of their devoted gaze. It was *she* who held them in *her* thrall. Fictional stories written at the time depicted a man standing in rapture before the painting, quoting Pater from memory, while his female companion clutched at his coat sleeve, urging him to consider that there were many other paintings in the museum that were worthy of their attention. In effect, these stories recognized his companion's dilemma, as his ability to invest himself in *her* depended upon his ability to wrench himself away from the woman depicted in the painting. Thus, a real woman took upon herself the difficult task of pulling him away from the woman on the wall who evoked reveries of the lost loved object, whose own image he had internalized and carried in his heart throughout the intervening years. She was a formidable opponent.

Sassoon's second point occurs in his discussion of the fact that the mid-nineteenth-century cult of *Mona Lisa* began in France through the writings of art critic Theophile Gautier and in England through the essay by Walter Pater. It did not gain favor in Italy despite the fact that Leonardo was Italian. Sassoon notes that the painting was almost entirely ignored in Italy until Gabriele D'Annunzio published a poem about "La Gioconda" in 1889, and even then, the poem did not become widely known until he republished it in abbreviated form immediately after the painting was stolen from the Louvre on August 21, 1911. To Italians, Leonardo's *The Last Supper* was regarded as the greater work, and, except for D'Annunzio, who was

2. *Ibid.*, 129.

3. *Ibid.*, 37–38.

“essentially an imitator and an importer” of a “renaissance derived from [John] Ruskin and Pater,” Italians “sought to demystify their *Gioconda* as just a Florentine gentlewoman painted wonderfully well by a great painter.”⁴

This view of the painting by Italian art historians continued through the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. Sassoon does not attempt to explain why this was the case. No doubt, the reasons were multiple. But one important reason for this relative coolness toward the *Mona Lisa* was the fact that she was, in a sense, an iconic alternative to the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus. In Protestant England and post-Revolutionary France, the Virgin Mary had already been dethroned, which made it easier for *Mona Lisa* to become an iconic maternal figure in these two countries. Thus, it is significant that, as Sassoon points out, “the most popular interpretation of Leonardo in Italy was neither Gautier’s nor Pater’s but a positivist reading that emphasized Leonardo the scientist and the philosopher.”⁵ Recognition of the emotional appeal of *Mona Lisa* might have threatened the traditional Christian mythology with the Virgin Mary at its center.

On the other hand, the tendency of Italians to emphasize Leonardo the scientist over Leonardo the artist has direct bearing on Freud’s own view that Leonardo took recourse to a similar emotional disengagement from his paintings, including the *Mona Lisa*. This view of Leonardo also relates to our emphasis here on the development of the *melancholy self*. When Freud wrote his monograph on Leonardo, the issue that especially concerned him was Leonardo’s slowness in completing his paintings. For example, his difficulty finishing the *Mona Lisa* probably explains why the painting was still in his possession when he immigrated to France at the invitation of King Francois I to become a member of his court. Leonardo gave this and other paintings to the king, which also explains why it eventually ended up in the Louvre in Paris. Freud attributed this characteristic of Leonardo’s, which he referred to as his “inhibition,” thus suggesting that there were psychological conflicts relating to his identity as an artist, to the fact that Leonardo had an investigative mind, and his passion for investigation took precedence over the creative act itself. In Freud’s view, what interested Leonardo “in a picture was above all a problem; and behind the first one he saw countless other problems arising” as he had earlier done in his “endless and inexhaustible investigation of nature.” Thus, “he was no longer able to limit his demands, to see the work of art in isolation and to

4. *Ibid.*, 160.

5. *Ibid.*, 161.

tear it from the wide context to which he knew it belonged. After the most exhausting efforts to bring to expression in it everything which was connected with it in his thoughts, he was forced to abandon it in an unfinished state or to declare that it was incomplete.” In effect, “the artist had once taken the investigator into his service to assist him; now the servant had become the stronger and suppressed his master.”⁶

Freud traces Leonardo’s investigative proclivities to his early childhood, to the curiosity of small children that manifests itself in their untiring love of asking questions, and particularly to the period in which they engage in “infantile sexual researches.”⁷ But Leonardo had particular reason to sublimate his expressions of love into an investigative, inquisitive mind. After all, his was an illegitimate birth, and he was probably cared for by his birth mother for three to five years, and then became a member of his father’s household. And then, if Eissler is correct, he was shuttled back and forth between the two families. If emotional separation from one’s mother is the precipitating cause of the development of a *melancholy self* in a small boy, this loss may result in one of two kinds of quests, the quest for someone to take her place in his affections, or the quest for explanations as to why this loss occurred at all.

Freud’s Leonardo belongs to the second type (although it is certainly possible that he turned to this quest after an unsuccessful bid to find in his stepmother what he had lost in the case of his biological mother). Viewed retrospectively, Leonardo’s scientific mind—his inquisitiveness, his effort to unravel the mysteries of the natural world—may be traced to the emotional loss of his mother in early childhood. When he took on the *Mona Lisa* commission, he returned to the locus of his original hurt and its inevitable repressions. To cope with this return of the repressed, the scientific investigator would eventually “suppress” the artist who, after all, was emotionally invested in the subject matter—indeed, the subject herself—of the painting. Central to his difficulty in completing a painting—or declaring that it was in fact completed—was the internal struggle between the emotionally invested artist and the emotionally disinvested scientist.

However, there may be another factor in the specific case of the *Mona Lisa* painting that inhibited Leonardo from declaring that the painting was finished. This factor arises from the very fact that, whereas Vasari claims that

6. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 27.

7. *Ibid.*, 28.

the painting was unfinished, the painting certainly appears to be finished.⁸ This being the case, Leonardo may have used the claim that it was unfinished as a basis for keeping it in his possession, thus precluding a secondary loss of the maternal object. If, as Freud argues, this particular painting had succeeded in “representing the boy, infatuated with his mother,”⁹ it makes psychodynamic sense that he would be reluctant to part with it. To hand it over to Lisa’s husband, Francesco, would replicate the loss of the mother that occurred when his father took *him* away from Caterina and installed him in the house occupied by his father and his stepmother. Because the painter, not the patron, decides when a painting is finished, he can declare that the painting is unfinished and the patron has little recourse but to accept his claim. Since his failure to deliver a finished painting in a reasonable period of time would inevitably raise questions about his reliability (and risk the loss of future commissions), the very cost to his reputation testifies to his emotional investment in the painting itself. Still, Leonardo’s scientific curiosity represents one of the ways in which a man may “work through” his ambivalent feelings toward the lost love object. In a sense, it represents the more gradual therapeutic approach that Freud identifies in “Mourning and Melancholia” as it works by indirection—in Leonardo’s case, the withdrawal of emotional affect from the lost love object by employing the scientific curiosity he developed in the “endless and inexhaustible investigation of nature” in his vocation as a painter. There may, in fact, have been an association between his endless and inexhaustible scientific efforts to unravel the mysteries of nature and his declaration that he had not, as it were, completed his efforts to unravel the mystery of the woman—Lisa Gioconda—who was a stand-in for his mother.

THE THEFT OF *MONA LISA*

I would now like to turn to some of the ways in which *Mona Lisa* has evoked irreverent reprisals emanating from the *melancholy self*. I will begin with the theft of the painting on August 21, 1911. Freud could not have anticipated when he wrote his monograph on Leonardo that the painting would be stolen from the Louvre the following year. It remained in the possession of the thief, Vincenzo Peruggia, a thirty-year-old Italian painter-decorator, until early December 1913. Since Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” essay was

8. Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 181.

9. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 68.

published in 1917, it is not inconceivable that the theft of the *Mona Lisa* had some influence on his theorizing about the lost loved object, especially his suggestion that unlike the case of mourning, in which the absence of the lost object is due to physical death, the lost loved object in the case of melancholia “is usually to be found among those in his near neighborhood.”¹⁰ Until Peruggia arranged to hand the painting over to an Italian art dealer, which led to its recovery, it remained in his apartment in Paris, in the “near neighborhood” of the Louvre.

As Sassoon discusses at length, the theft inaugurated a new phase in the iconization of the *Mona Lisa*.¹¹ The numbers of visitors to the Louvre increased dramatically in the wake of the theft. In *Stealing the Mona Lisa* Darien Leader, a British psychoanalyst, quotes the following from a French newspaper account published when the Louvre reopened a few days after the *Mona Lisa* was discovered missing: “[The crowds] didn’t look at the other pictures. They contemplated at length the dusty space where the divine *Mona Lisa* had smiled only the week before. And feverishly they took notes. It was even more interesting for them than if the *Gioconda* had been in its place.”¹²

Sassoon adds that comments on the *Mona Lisa* “began to sound like obituaries,” as they made claims in regard to “the dear departed” that “would previously have appeared excessive.” For example, “the writer and Leonardo-idolater Josephin Peladan lamented the disappearance of what he called ‘The Painting,’ as the Bible is ‘The Book.’”¹³ If “The Book” was central to the iconoclasm of ancient Judaism—descriptive words replacing graven images—then “The Painting” challenges this iconoclasm. On the other hand, its disappearance nonetheless fostered obituaries whose very excessiveness may well reveal the ambivalent feelings toward the lost loved object that we have associated with the emergence of the *melancholy self* in early childhood.¹⁴

Leader acknowledges but resists the view that the “lost object” is the boy’s mother and that the *Mona Lisa* is therefore evocative of maternal ambivalence. Instead, he follows “the Lacanian argument” that “the crowds

10. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 173.

11. Sassoon, *Becoming “Mona Lisa”*, 195–219.

12. Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa*, 66.

13. Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 183.

14. In this regard, the obituaries may be viewed as expressions of *ekphrasis* as discussed in chap. 1. See Heffernan, *The Museum of Words*, 1.

that flocked to the Louvre after the theft of the *Mona Lisa* demonstrated the true function of the work of art: to evoke the empty place of the Thing, the gap between the art work and the place it occupies.”¹⁵ The “Thing” for Lacan is the void or empty space that designates the horizon of our desires and, as Leader explains, “it cannot be represented as a positive, empirical object since, at the level of representations, it is less an object than a place: and when objects go into this place, they take on new and peculiar properties.” Therefore, there is “a difference between the object and the space the object finds itself in, the special, sacred place of the Thing.”¹⁶ The importance of this distinction between the space and the object is supported by the fact that large crowds went to the Louvre to gaze upon the empty space that the object had occupied.

It is noteworthy, however, that it was the painting of a woman that had been stolen from the Louvre, and that it was a thirty-year-old man—exactly Pater’s age when he wrote his famous lines about the *Mona Lisa*—who tucked her under his coat and carried her out of the museum. Moreover, he was an Italian living in Paris, and his ostensible reason for stealing the *Mona Lisa* was his mistaken belief that the French had stolen *her*—as the spoils of military victory—and he would be the one who secured her release from exile and returned her to her rightful home.

I suggest, therefore, that the thief was attempting, in a symbolic manner, to reverse the loss that he and other young boys experience in early childhood when they are emotionally separated from their mothers. As if to acknowledge that this act *was* symbolic—that he really couldn’t have his mother back—Peruggia put the painting in the bottom of an old chest and didn’t take it out again until he made arrangements to hand it over to the Italian art dealer. Meanwhile, he placed a small postcard of the *Mona Lisa* on his mantel. This very action seems odd and went against the popular fantasy that a wealthy art connoisseur had arranged the theft so that he could gaze on the *Mona Lisa* whenever it pleased him to do so. However, from the perspective of the *melancholy self*, this was not so strange, as the *melancholy self* has learned to be content with replicas and vestiges of the lost object. After all, it does not believe that it can repossess the original. In fact, Peruggia’s act of secreting the painting into an old chest reenacts the

15. Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa*, 66.

16. *Ibid.*, 61.

internalization of the lost object that Freud describes in “Mourning and Melancholia.”¹⁷

From what is known about Vincenzo Peruggia, he seems to fit the profile of the melancholy male described in Freud’s essay. Sassoon notes that when the identity of the thief became known, there was a collective sense of disappointment: “Instead of the sophisticated international art thief celebrated in popular novels he was, quite clearly, a classic loser. Even his criminal record was trivial. Once he tried to rob a prostitute. Incompetent to the last, he failed miserably. She resisted (he was only five feet three inches tall), and he was arrested and jailed for a week.”¹⁸

We can imagine, therefore, that if he had been a patient of Freud’s, he would have engaged in the “self-abasement” common to melancholy males, and Freud’s caveat that the question of whether these self-reproaches are justified in the opinion of others is beside the point would have been applicable to him. As Freud points out, the point is that “he is correctly describing his psychological situation in his lamentations. He has lost his self-respect and must have some good reason for having done so.” Equally relevant would have been Freud’s observation: “In the clinical picture of melancholia dissatisfaction with the self on moral grounds is far the most outstanding feature; the self-criticism much less concerns itself with bodily infirmity, ugliness, weakness, social inferiority; among these latter ills that the patient dreads or asseverates the thought of poverty alone has a favored position.”¹⁹

As noted earlier, the very nature of these self-reproaches and the fact that they are exaggerated is, for Freud, evidence that they are directed toward the internalized lost object, and that the melancholic patient is largely unconscious of this psychological fact. However, this does not mean that the symptoms pointing to this underlying dynamic are irrelevant, and it is therefore significant and revealing that Peruggia would have reason to reproach himself on moral grounds—after all, he is an art thief—and that his rationale for having stolen the painting would have had to do with thoughts of poverty. Few contemporaries believed that he stole the painting for purely patriotic reasons; after all, he handed over the painting only after having been assured—falsely—that he would be paid a large amount of money for it.

17. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 170–73.

18. Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 187.

19. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 168.

Thus, Vincenzo Peruggia was not only “a classic loser,” but a “classic” melancholic as well. Even the fact that he had not originally planned to steal the *Mona Lisa* but changed his mind when he realized that the painting he was planning to steal (Andrea Mantegna’s *Mars and Venus*) was too large—it was ten times larger than the *Mona Lisa*—may be related to his melancholia, for this would suggest that unconscious motivations were at work, and that these were not unlike his attempt to steal money from a prostitute. As Freud notes, in some melancholic patients, there is a regular alternation of melancholia and mania, while in others “signs of mania may be entirely absent or only very slight.”²⁰ Surely, there is a manic element in the act of stealing a painting of a woman who reminds the thief of his mother (an Italian woman). Freud compares mania to instances “when a man finds himself in a position to throw off at one blow some heavy burden, some false position he has long endured,” and notes that all such situations “are characterized by high spirits, by the signs of discharge of joyful emotion.” In “complete contrast to the dejection and inhibition of melancholia,” mania “is nothing other than a triumph,” but one in which the real victim of this triumphant act remains hidden from the perpetrator.²¹ There is no evidence to suggest that Peruggia was aware, truly conscious, of the deeper reasons why he stole the *Mona Lisa*. After all, there were many other paintings in the Louvre that were small enough to hide under his coat.

Sassoon discusses the various theories that were put forward by the public concerning the identity of the thief or thieves, why he or they did it, and so forth. He also devotes several pages to the public’s imaginative “theories” as to why *Mona Lisa* allowed herself to be stolen or took it upon herself to come down off the wall and walk out of the museum. One “theory” was that she was pregnant and had gone away to bear her child. A popular postcard at the time depicted her sitting in a horse-drawn carriage driven by her husband and holding a baby in her lap. A popular interpretation of the painting also emerged at this time, one suggesting that the woman in the painting is pregnant, which explains her enigmatic smile (her secret), the way she is sitting, and the manner in which her hands are folded over her abdomen.²² As we saw in chapter 1, this view was reaffirmed by

20. *Ibid.*, 174.

21. *Ibid.*, 178.

22. Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 178–80.

Kenneth D. Keele in 1959 and is supported by recent infrared photographs of the painting.²³

The theory that she voluntarily left the museum to bear her child is also relevant to the emergence of the *melancholy self* in early childhood, as it suggests that the mother is not a helpless victim in the emotional separation between herself and her son, but has, it would seem, abandoned him. A mother going off to the hospital to bear another child is an event that is likely to evoke such feelings of abandonment. A postcard depicting three figures in the horse-drawn carriage—the expectant mother, her husband, and a small boy sitting next to or between them—would be a very different scenario. In any event, the “theory” that Mona Lisa was not stolen but took it upon herself to come down off the wall and walk out of the museum, where her husband was waiting for her in his horse-drawn carriage may have been more ostensibly comforting than the more likely theory that she had, in fact, been stolen. But it too could well have evoked repressed emotions relating to the experience of emotional separation from the mother in early childhood. In fact, the idea that she was taken away against her will would have been easier for the unconscious to accept, providing, of course, that she did everything in her power to resist it. But perhaps this is precisely where her enigmatic smile is especially relevant: for unlike the prostitute who resisted Peruggia’s attempt to steal money from her, can one know for certain that the woman in Leonardo’s painting would put up a similar fight? After all, if she is not Peruggia’s prostitute, neither is she the Virgin Mary!²⁴

23. *Ibid.*, 270.

24. I have argued that *Mona Lisa* serves as an iconic focus of the religious sensibilities that develop in response to the experience of emotional separation from one’s mother in early childhood, but in noting her potential rivalry with the Virgin Mary I have indicated that her appeal was primarily to men of Christian background. The 1987 play *Gioconda* by Wolf Mankowitz bears on this point. He has the Paris chief of police going to consult with Sigmund Freud in Vienna about the personality of the thief. The policeman asks: “Do you think it possible, Herr Professor, that the culprit would be a Jewish intellectual?” “I doubt it,” Freud snaps, biting his cigar, “The *Mona Lisa* is essentially a Christian mother. Jewish mothers are distinctly different” (see Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 204). Herr Professor Freud may simply be implying here that a Jewish thief would not mistake *Mona Lisa* for a representation of his own mother and would therefore not be disposed to steal the painting. There might also be the implication that a Jewish mother would not allow herself to be smuggled out of the museum under the coat of a thief for surely she would not have hesitated to call out to the guards and, if they were not around to hear, she would have turned on the thief and shamed him, “What would your mother think if she saw you stealing a painting from a museum?” In any event, the assumption is that the thief stole it because of its association with his own mother. Also, because she is a Christian mother, the religious sensibilities for which she serves as a symbolic

THE STONING OF MONA LISA

Peruggia's theft of *Mona Lisa* may be viewed as a symbolic attempt to reverse the effects of the small boy's emotional loss of his mother. In this sense, the theft may especially address the sadness that results from the loss, seeming to say that an ingenious boy can recover the lost mother. However, in order to do so, he must violate the very civilizing process that the emotional separation is designed to foster—his identification with his father and the social world his father represents—for theft, after all, is a criminal act. Yet, as Sassoon points out, Peruggia's defense lawyer “quite shrewdly explained that, in the end, no one had lost anything. The newspapers and postcard peddlers had boosted their sales. The Louvre had acquired even more renown. The return of the picture had improved the hitherto tense diplomatic situation between France and Italy.” His appeal was largely successful, for Peruggia was treated leniently: “The prosecutor had asked for a sentence of three years; he got twelve and a half months.”²⁵ This is some sixteen months less than the *Mona Lisa* herself languished at the bottom of an old chest. Had the painting been damaged, it would, of course, have been a very different story.

But Sassoon alludes briefly to an episode in which the *Mona Lisa* did suffer damage, and this episode reflects the darker side of male melancholia, that of anger and rage against the lost object for having abandoned her lovesick son. On December 30, 1956, Hugo Unzaga Villegas, a forty-two-year-old Bolivian, threw a stone at the *Mona Lisa*, slightly damaging her elbow. Two weeks later, a psychiatric report on Villegas found that he was suffering from a psychotic illness and heard strange voices. It added that he had intended to murder the Argentine dictator Juan Perón, but instead attacked the less well-protected *Mona Lisa*. Thus, as it had been in Peruggia's theft, *Mona Lisa* was a substitute for the original target.²⁶

This event was, of course, less newsworthy than Peruggia's theft. After all, whereas the theft evoked fears that the painting might be permanently lost, Villegas's act merely damaged it. Nonetheless, seven years later Salvador Dali, as Sassoon puts it, “provided his own ‘Freudian’ interpretation”

representation of the boy's mother are essentially Christian, not Judaic or any other of the world's religions. Thus, while it is true that *Mona Lisa* has become a global icon, my interests here center on her function and role as an icon with particular relevance for Christianity in general, and men of Christian heritage in particular.

25. *Ibid.*, 187–88.

26. *Ibid.*, 220.

of Villegas's act of vandalism.²⁷ As Sassoon summarizes Dali's interpretation: "Imagine, he wrote, a naïve Bolivian visiting the Louvre. He perceives the museum as a whorehouse full of naked, shameless statues—these Rubenses, this naked flesh. He notices, hanging on a wall, the portrait of his own mother. What is she doing in place like this? She too must be a whore. What's more, she's smiling ambiguously at him. He has two options: the first is to run away with the portrait and hide it, piously, where it cannot be found; the second is to assault it."²⁸

In effect, Dali's "Freudian interpretation" also provides an explanation for why Peruggia did what he did. He took the first option while Villegas adopted the second. Sassoon comments concerning Dali's interpretation of Villegas's action: "Dali has a point. It is difficult to imagine an attack on Raphael's *Baldissare Castiglione* (though he could look like someone's father). Usually, men who attack pictures attack those representing women." However, what Sassoon misses is Dali's explicitly "Freudian" suggestion that Villegas noticed "the portrait of his own mother."²⁹ Additionally, the very fact that he was mentally ill, suffering, it appears, from paranoid schizophrenia, means that he could act out the rage he felt against his mother—or her visual representation—that saner men, more inhibited, could not.

If so, Freud's argument in his essay on Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber that the delusions of a paranoid schizophrenic are "an attempt at recovery," is especially relevant to Villegas's stoning of the *Mona Lisa*. As Freud points out, while the delusions are bizarre, they are the sufferer's own attempt at self-recovery by undoing "the work of repression" and bringing back "the libido again to the people it had abandoned." In paranoia—which is almost certainly Villegas's form of schizophrenia—this is accomplished through projection, that is, "what was abolished internally returns from without."³⁰ By stoning the woman he took to be his mother, he undid the work of repression that was integral to his melancholia, which has taken the form of excessive self-reproach because he cannot bring himself to reproach his mother, especially in the form of the lost loved object who has, he feels, abandoned him.

27. Dali, "Why They Attack the 'Mona Lisa.'"

28. Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 221.

29. *Ibid.*, 221.

30. Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," 147.