

TENSION AND RESOLUTION  
THE BAROQUE STYLE REFLECTS  
A CHANGED UNIVERSE

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During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the rise of individualism made the scientific discoveries which occurred during that period possible. The scientific discoveries, particularly those of the astronomers Copernicus, Kepler, Brahe, Galileo and Newton forced a change in metaphysical thinking.

The theories and beliefs of such ancients as Pythagoras, Ptolemy, Plato and Aristotle which described the universe were continued and developed in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance by the Christian church. The aesthetic style of the Renaissance was balanced and orderly. When the reasons which bolstered man's faith were undermined, literature and the arts responded by developing a style radically different from that of the Renaissance. At first this style showed concern and tension, but was later resolved by new attitudes and suitable forms to express these new attitudes.

These changes formed the High Baroque style which expressed an exuberant rejoicing in the abundance and goodness of nature or matter. It spiritualized this materialism by seeing it as a gift from God and by giving matter a vitality comparable to the quality of energy. Artistically, it created devices which equated, visually or verbally, speed with sound, light and space. Matter and energy were linked in artistic symbolism as the God given force.

This paper describes in some detail the literary and artistic response to the new knowledge gained by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries scientific discoveries, particularly those in astronomy and it shows the correspondences between various art forms, including poetry, that reflected the new concepts.

The rise of individualism not only made the scientific discoveries possible, but was in part responsible for the Protestant revolution. This paper describes how Catholic art dealt with the Protestant threat. It also describes how Protestant art, as well as Catholic art, organized itself as a vehicle of persuasion to capture the hearts and imagination of men. All of theological man was endangered by the new knowledge and the schism. Thus the primary intention of baroque religious art was to teach and persuade. This it did, by exhibiting a new concept of the way in which God had created his universe and by using a new symbolism, new forms and new dramatic devices.

Although secular baroque art was perhaps not as didactic as the religious art, it nevertheless proclaimed the same point of view that God's world was good because of its vitality and abundance. It therefore used the same artistic devices to achieve its expressive style which is called baroque.