



< "The Plague at Ashdod" (1630) ^ "Eliezer and Rebecca" (1648)

Two Biblical Themes of the Jewish Past Adapted by Nicolas Poussin in his Paintings

Tuesday, February 23

12:00PM – 1:00PM

RSVP for Online Access

In this talk I will discuss Nicolas Poussin's adaptation of two biblical narratives in two masterpieces: "The Plague at Ashdod" (1630) inspired by an episode in 1 Samuel, namely the theft and desecration of the Arc of the Covenant by the Philistines; and "Eliezer and Rebecca" (1648) inspired by the episode in Genesis in which Abraham sends his servant Eliezer on a mission from Canaan to Babylonia to find a bride for Isaac, his son. In these paintings, Poussin is willfully unfaithful to important aspects of the biblical texts that inspired him, and he freely invents characters and details that are central to his purposes, and yet not present in the biblical texts. In the case of "The Plague at Ashdod" Poussin transforms the theme of the "wrath of God" against infidels into a meditation on human suffering and compassion; and in the case of "Eliezer and Rebecca" the French painter transforms the theme of the marriage proposal from private to a public event, in which the offer is not made to the bride's male relatives, as in the biblical text, but directly to the young woman herself. In the talk I'll discuss these transformations of the biblical passages into paintings, and speculate on their significance.



Efraín Kristal is Distinguished Professor and Chair of UCLA's Department of Comparative Literature. Kristal specializes in Latin American literature and intellectual history in comparative contexts from the 16th century until the present. He is also interested in aesthetics and works on the role of translation in the creative process of writers who translate, as a creative process in its own right, in the transmission of culture, and as a practice with philosophical implications. He is the author of over one hundred scholarly articles and several books including *Temptation of the Word*, *The Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa* and *Invisible Work*. *Borges and Translation*. Kristal is a Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and an honorary professor at the Universidad del Pacífico in his native Lima, Peru.