

THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE

Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait

Author(s): Erwin Panofsky

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 64, No. 372 (Mar., 1934), pp. 117-119+122-127

Published by: [The Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/865802>

Accessed: 12/09/2012 10:56

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

JAN VAN EYCK'S *ARNOLFINI* PORTRAIT BY ERWIN PANOFSKY



FOR about three quarters of a century Jan van Eyck's full-length portrait of a newly married couple (or, to speak more exactly, a man and a woman represented in the act of contracting matrimony)¹ has been almost unanimously acknowledged to be the portrait of *Giovanni Arnolfini*, a native of Lucca, who settled at Bruges before 1421 and later attained the rank of a "Conseiller du Duc de Bourgogne" and "Général des Finances en Normandie," and his wife *Jeanne de Cename* (or, in Italian, *Cenami*) whose father, Guillaume de Cename, also came from Lucca, but lived in Paris from the beginning of the fifteenth century until his death.² But owing to certain circumstances which require some investigation, this identification has been disputed from time to time.

The "orthodox theory" is based on the assumption that the London portrait [PLATE I] is identical with a picture acquired by Don Diego de Guevara, a Spanish grandee, and presented by him to Margaret of Austria, Governor of the Netherlands, by whom it was bequeathed to her successor, Queen Mary of Hungary. This picture is mentioned in two inventories of Lady Margaret's Collection (one made in 1516, the other in 1523), which give the name of the gentleman portrayed as "Hernoul le fin" and "Arnoul fin" respectively, as well as in the inventory of Queen Mary's property made after her death in 1558.³ From this we must conclude that she brought it with her to Spain when she left the Netherlands in 1555, and in 1789 it is still mentioned among the works of art adorning the palace of Charles III, at Madrid.⁴ As for the London portrait, we only know that it was discovered at Brussels in 1815 by an English Major-General called Hay and subsequently taken to England where it was purchased by the National Gallery in 1842.

As the subject-matter of the picture described

in the inventories (a man and a woman standing in a room and joining hands) is absolutely unique in northern fifteenth-century panel-painting, its identity with the London portrait seems to be fairly well established; moreover, considering that the picture formerly belonging to the Hapsburg princesses disappeared after 1789, and the London portrait appeared in 1815, it seems safe to assume that the latter is identical with the former and was carried off during the Napoleonic wars. In addition, the London portrait corresponds to the descriptions in several respects, particularly the date (1434) and the mirror reflecting the couple from behind.⁵

There are only two circumstances which periodically give rise to discussion and recently led Monsieur Louis Dimier⁶ to the conclusion that the picture in the National Gallery cannot be identical with the picture mentioned in the inventories: firstly, the enigmatical inscription on the London portrait: "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic"; secondly, the fact that, in Carel Vermander's biography of Jan van Eyck (published in 1604), the "Hapsburg picture" is described in the following manner: "... in een Tafereelken twee Conterfeytsels van Oly-Verwe, van een Man en een Vrouwe, die malcander de rechter handt gaven als in Houwelijck vergaderende, en worden ghetrouwt van Fides, die se t'samengaf." Translated into English, the passage reads: "On a small panel two portraits in oils, of a man and woman taking each other by the right hand, [note that, in reality, the man grasps the woman's right hand with his left:] as if they were contracting a marriage; and they were married by Fides who joined them to each other."

From this Monsieur Dimier infers that the "Hapsburg picture" not only showed a bridal pair as in the London panel, but also a *Personification of Faith* who fulfilled the same office as, for instance, the priest in the

¹ W. H. James Weale: "Hubert and John van Eyck," 1908 ("Weale: I"), p. 69 et seq.; W. H. James Weale, and M. W. Brockwell: "The van Eycks and their Art," 1912 ("Weale: II"), p. 114 et seq. Both with bibliography.

² For the Cename family and the personality of Giovanni Arnolfini cf. L. Mirot, "Etudes Lucquoises," Bibl. de l'Ecole des Chartes, XCI, 1930, p. 100, et seq., especially p. 114.

³ These inventories are reprinted in Weale: I, p. 70 and Weale II, p. 114. In Weale: II a third inventory of Lady Margaret's Collection, made in 1524 is also quoted. This is said to contain a similar description of the picture. As for Queen Mary's inventory, cf. R. Beer: "Jahrb. d. Kunstsgn. d. Allerh. Kaiserh.," XII, 1891, p. CLVIII, Nr. 85.

⁴ K. Justi: "Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst," XXII, 1887: "Otra pintura vara de alto y tres quartos de ancho; Hombre y muger agarrados de las manos. Juan de Encina, Imbentor de la pintura al oleo."

⁵ The fact that the picture is called a large one in the inventories (while, in reality, it is not larger than 0.845 by 0.624 cm.) is no obstacle. Mr. Weale is obviously right in pointing out that "large" and "small" are relative terms, and that the panel is set down as "large" in comparison with those preceding it in the inventory of 1516. In addition a picture which was "small" for a late sixteenth-century writer like Vermander, was "large" when judged by the standards of about 1400. As for the inventory of 1555/58 it is obviously based on an earlier one.

⁶ "Revue de l'Art," XXXVI, 1932, p. 187, et seq. and also November, 1932. Monsieur Dimier's statements were already contradicted, though not properly disproved, by Mr. M. Jirmounsky, "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," LXXIV, 1932, p. 423, and also December, 1932.

⁷ Carel Vermander: "Het Leven der doorluchtighe Nederlandsche en Hooghduytsche Schilders, ed. H. Floerke": 1906, I, p. 44.

Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait

versions of the Spozalizio, and he confirms this conclusion by quoting Joachim von Sandrart who, in 1675, qualifies Vermander's description by adding the statement that "Fides" appeared as an actual female ("Frau Fides" as the German version puts it): "Par quodam novorum coniugum, quos *muliebri habitu adstans* desponsare videbatur Fides."⁸

Now, Monsieur Dimier is perfectly right in pointing out that Vermander's "Fides" cannot possibly be identified (as was conjectured by some scholars)⁹ with the little griffin terrier or Bolognese dog seen in the foreground of the London picture. For although a dog occurs fairly often as an attribute or symbol of Faith,¹⁰ the Flemish word "tesamengeven" is a technical term equivalent to what "desponsare" or "copulare" means in Latin—a term denoting the action of the person entitled to hand over the bride to the bridegroom. Thus it is beyond doubt that not only Sandrart, but also Vermander actually meant to say that the couple portrayed in the "Hapsburg picture" were united by a *human figure embodying Faith*. The only question is whether or not Vermander is reliable. And this question must be answered in the negative.

Apart from the fact that a description as thorough as that in Queen Mary's inventory where even the mirror is mentioned would hardly omit a full-size figure, we must inquire from whom Vermander gleaned his information about a picture which, as mentioned above, he had never seen. Now it is a well-known fact (although entirely disregarded by Monsieur Dimier) that Vermander's statements as to the van Eycks are mostly derived from Marcus van Vaernewyck's "Spiegel der Nederlantscher Audtheyt" published in 1569, and (as "Historie van Belgis") in 1574. This was also the case with Vermander's description of the "Hapsburg picture," which is proved by the fact that he repeats Vaernewyck's absurd tale that Queen Mary had acquired the picture from a barber whom she had remunerated with an appointment worth a hundred florins a year—a tale which Sandrart took over from Vermander as credulously as the latter had taken it over from Vaernewyck. Thus Vaernewyck is the ultimate source from which both

⁸ Joachim von Sandrart: Acad. Germ., 1683, p. 203. In the German edition (Teutsche Akademie, 1675, ed. R. Peltzer: 1926, p. 55) the passage reads as follows: "Ein Mann und Weibsbild, so sich durch Darreichung der rechten Hand verheurathen und von der *darbey stehenden Frau Fides* vermählet werden."

⁹ See, for instance, Weale: "Notes sur les van Eyck," 1861, p. 26, et seq., and Floerke, p. 408.

¹⁰ Cf. Barbier de Montault: "Traité d'Iconographie Chrétienne," 1890, p. 196 or Cesare Ripa: "Iconologia," s.v. "Fedeltà." In the "Repertorium Morale," by Petrus Berchorius (middle of the fourteenth century, printed Nürnberg, 1489) the dog is interpreted as "vir fidelis" (s.v. "canis").

Vermander and Sandrart obtained their information, and his description of the "Hapsburg picture" reads as follows: "een cleen tafereelkin . . . waerin gheschildert was/een trauwinghe van eenen man ende vrouwe/*die van Fides ghetraut worden*,"¹¹ that is in English: "a small panel on which was depicted the wedding of a man and a woman *who were married by Fides*."

It is self-evident that Vermander's description is nothing but an amplification of this text, and we can easily see that he amplified it rather at haphazard. Since he was familiar with the usual form of a wedding ceremony, he ventured the statement that the two people took each other by the *right* hand (whereas, in the London portrait, the man proffers his *left*); and since, in his opinion, Vaernewyck's sentence "die van Fides ghetraut worden" (who were married by Fides) was lacking in precision he *arbitrarily added the adjectival clause* "die se t'samengaf" (who joined them to each other). So this adjectival clause, so much emphasized by Monsieur Dimier, turns out to be a mere invention of Vermander's.

But what did Vaernewyck mean by his mysterious sentence? In my opinion he meant nothing at all, but simply repeated (or rather translated) information which in all probability puzzled him as much as his translation puzzles his readers. We should not forget that Vaernewyck had not seen the picture either, for it had been brought to Spain by Queen Mary, and it is a significant fact that, in his earlier writings, he does not mention it at all.¹² Thus his description must be based on information gleaned from an unknown source, most probably a letter from Spain; and when we retranslate his sentence into Latin (using the passage of Sandrart as a model) we can easily understand how the confusion arose. This hypothetical text might have read; "Tabella, in qua depicta erant sponsalia viri cuiusdam et feminae *qui desponsari videbantur per fidem*," and a sentence like this would have been an absolutely correct description of the London picture. Only, it could easily give rise to a misinterpretation because, to an uninitiated mind, the expression "per fidem" might easily suggest a personification—while, in reality, it was a *law-term*.

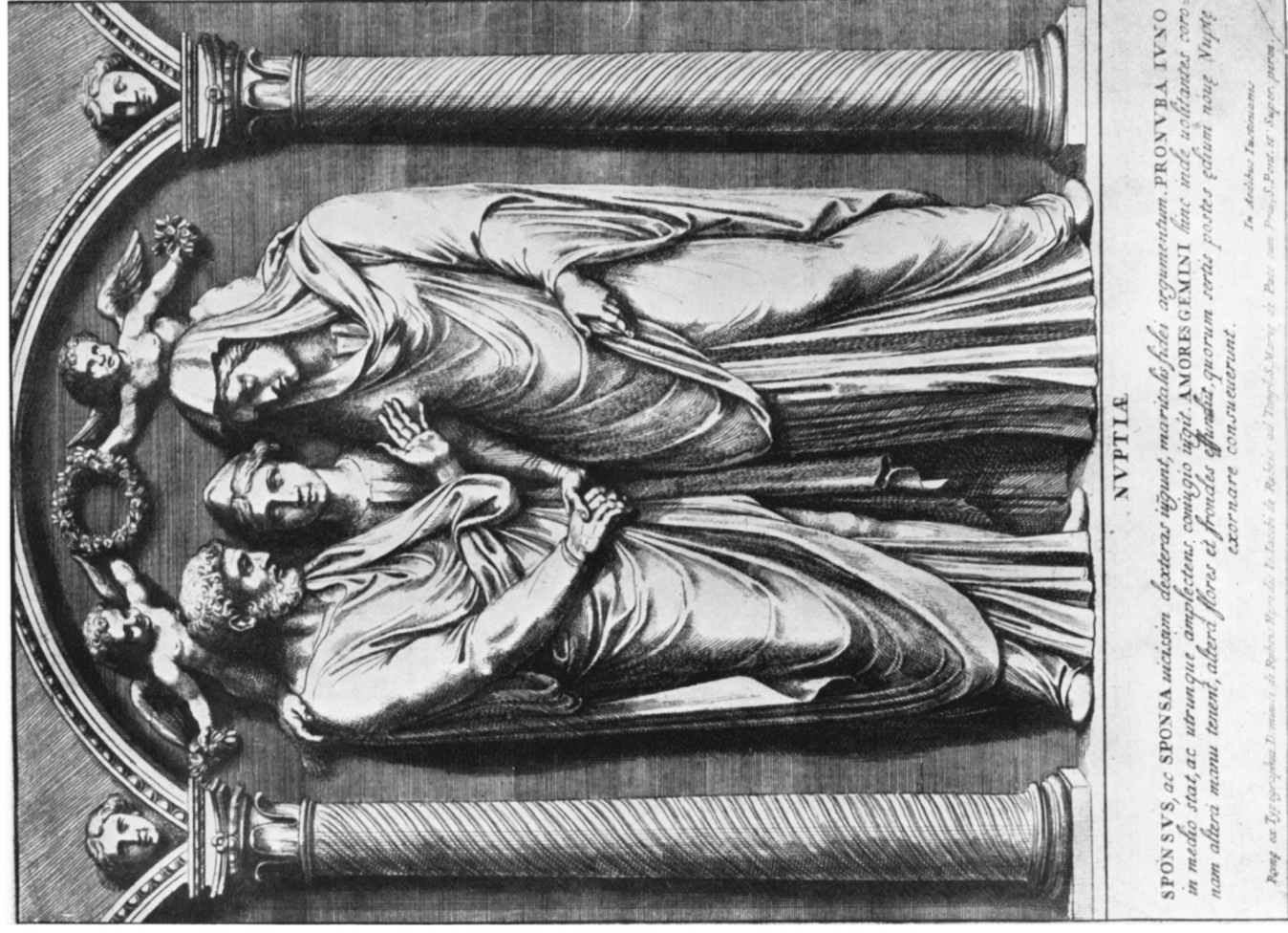
According to Catholic dogma, marriage is a sacrament which is immediately accomplished by the mutual consent of the persons to be married when this consent is expressed by words and actions: "Actus exteriores et verba exprimentia consensum *directe faciunt* nexum quendam qui est sacramentum matrimonii," as

¹¹ Weale: I, p. LXXXV. In the "Historie van Belgis" of 1574 the passage is to be found on fol. 119 verso.

¹² Cf. Weale: I, p. LXXXVI, et seq.



GIOVANNI ARNOLFINI AND HIS BRIDE, BY JAN VAN EYCK. PANEL, 83 BY 62 CM. (THE NATIONAL GALLERY)



Thomas Aquinas puts it.¹³ Even after the Council of Trent had prescribed the presence of two or three witnesses and the co-operation of a priest, the latter is not held to dispense the "sacramental grace" as is the case in the baptism of a child or the ordination of a priest, but is regarded as a mere "testis qualificatus" whose co-operation has a mere formal value: ". sacerdotis benedictio non requiritur in matrimonio quasi de materia sacramenti." Thus, even now, the sacerdotal benediction and the presence of witnesses does not affect the sacramental validity of marriage, but is only required for its formal legalization. Before the Council of Trent, however, even this principle was not yet acknowledged. Although the Church did its very best to caution the Faithful against marrying secretly, there was no proper "impedimentum clandestinitatis" until 1563; that is to say, two people could contract a perfectly valid and legitimate marriage whenever and wherever they liked, without any witness and independently of any ecclesiastical rite, provided that the essential condition of a "mutual consent expressed by words and actions" had been fulfilled. Consequently in those days the formal procedure of a wedding scarcely differed from that of a betrothal and both these ceremonies could be called by the same name "sponsalia," with the only difference that a marriage was called "sponsalia de præsenti" while a betrothal was called "sponsalia de futuro."

Now, what were those "words and actions" required for a legitimate marriage? Firstly: an appropriate formula solemnly pronounced by the bride as well as by the bridegroom, which the latter confirmed by raising his hand. Secondly: the tradition of a pledge ("arrha"), generally a ring placed on the finger of the bride. Thirdly, which was most important: the "joining of hands" which had always formed an integral part of Jewish marriage-ceremonies as well as those of Greece and Rome ("dextrarum iunctio") [PLATE II, A]. Since all these "words and actions" (comprehensively depicted in the London portrait) fundamentally meant nothing but a *solemn promise of Faith*, not only the whole procedure was called by a term derived from "Treue" in the Germanic languages ("Trauung" in German, "Trouwinghe" in Dutch and Flemish, whereby originally "Trouwinghe" could mean both "sponsalia de præsenti" and "sponsalia de futuro"), but also the various parts of the ceremony were called by expres-

sions emphasizing their relation to Faith. The forearm raised in confirmation of the matrimonial oath was called "Fides levata";¹⁴ the wedding-ring is called "la fede" in Italy up to our own times; and the "dextrarum iunctio" was called "fides manualis" or even "fides" without further connotation,¹⁵ because it was held to be the essential feature of the ritual. Also in heraldry a pair of joined hands is simply called "une Foi."¹⁶

Thus in medieval Latin the word "fides" could be used as a synonym of "Marital oath," more particularly "dextrarum iunctio." Consequently Jan van Eyck's London portrait could not be described more briefly or more appropriately than by calling it the representation of a couple "qui desponsari videbantur per fidem," that is to say: "who were contracting their marriage by a marital oath, more particularly by joining hands."

It is both amusing and instructive to observe how, in the writings of sixteenth and seventeenth-century biographers, this abstract law term gradually developed into a living, though allegorical, female figure. Vaernewyck opened the way to the misinterpretation by inserting the Latin word "fides" into his Flemish text and writing it with a capital F, but shrank from any further explanation. Vermader emphasized the personality of this rather enigmatical "Fides" by adding the adjectival clause "who joined them to each other," and finally Sandrart explicitly asserted that she was present as an actual woman, "habitu muliebri adstans." It is not difficult to understand the mental processes of those humanistic authors. To the contemporaries of Cesare Ripa, personifications and allegories were more familiar than to others, and they had in their minds all those Roman sarcophagi where the people to be married are united by a "Juno pronuba" [PLATE II, A]. But the case should be a lesson to us not to attempt to use literary sources for the interpretation of pictures, before we have interpreted the literary sources themselves.

To the modern mind it seems almost inconceivable that, up to the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church could acknowledge a marriage contracted in the absence of any priest or witness. Still this seeming laxity logically follows from the orthodox conception of matrimony—a conception according to which the binding force of a sacrament fulfilled by a spiritual "coniunctio animarum" did not depend upon any accessory circumstances. On

¹⁴ Du Cange: "Glossarium mediæ et infimæ latinitatis," s.v. "Fides."

¹⁵ Cabrol-Leclercq: "Dict. d'Archéol. Chrét.," l.c., col. 1895. Du Cange, l.c.

¹⁶ Didron: "Annales Archéologiques," XX, 1860, p. 245. Cf. also Andrea Alciati's famous "Emblemata," No. IX ("Fidei symbolum").

¹³ As for the theory of matrimony in Catholic theology, see Wetzler und Welte: "Kirchenlexikon," s.v. "Ehe," "Eheverlöbniß," "Ehehindernis." Also F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq: "Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie," s.v. "Marriage"; same authors: "Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique," s.v. "Marriage" (very thorough).

Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait

the other hand, it is obvious that the lack of any legal or ecclesiastical evidence was bound to lead to the most serious inconveniences and could cause actual tragedies. Medieval literature and papers dealing with law-suits are full of cases, partly tragic, partly rather burlesque, in which the validity of a marriage could be neither proved nor disproved for want of reliable witnesses,¹⁷ so that people who honestly believed themselves to be married found out that they were not, and vice versa. The most preposterous things could happen when the depositions of the people concerned contradicted each other as they often did; for example, in the case of a young lady who was to become the mother of no less illustrious a person than Willibald Pirckheimer. This young lady was originally on fairly intimate terms with a young patrician of Nürnberg, called Sigmund Stromer, but wanted to get rid of him when she had made the acquaintance of Dr. Hans Pirckheimer. Now the unfortunate lover asserted that she was his legitimate wife, owing to the fact that they had secretly performed the ceremony of "joining hands"; but this was exactly what she denied. So the bishop of Bamberg, to whom the case was submitted, could not but decide that the marriage was not proved, and she was allowed to become the mother of Willibald Pirckheimer while poor Stromer remained a bachelor all his life.¹⁸

Now, this state of affairs perfectly explains the curious inscription on the London portrait: "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic. 1434." In Monsieur Dimier's opinion, this sentence which, according to the rules of Latin grammar, cannot but mean "Jan van Eyck has been here," would make no sense if it was not translated by "this was Jan van Eyck," thereby proving that the persons portrayed were the artist and his wife. Setting aside the grammatical problem, Monsieur Dimier's interpretation (which, by the way, was suggested by several other scholars, but was emphatically opposed by Mr. Salomon Reinach some fourteen years ago)¹⁹ is contradicted by the simple fact that a child of Jan van Eyck had been baptized before the 30th of June, 1434. Thus, discarding suspicions which must be regarded as groundless by the fact that this child was held over the font by Pierre de Beffremont in the name of the Duke of Burgundy,²⁰ we must assume that Jan van Eyck and his wife were married in the autumn of 1433 at the very latest, so that they cannot be identical

¹⁷ Plenty of Literature in Cabrol-Leclercq, "Dict. de Théol. Cath.," I.c., col. 2223.

¹⁸ E. Reicke: "Willibald Pirckheimer," 1930, p. 10, et seq.

¹⁹ Sal. Reinach: "Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques," 1918, p. 85.

²⁰ Weale: I, p. XL; Weale: II, p. XXXVI.

with the bridal pair represented in the London picture. Furthermore, the phrase "Jan van Eyck was here" makes perfectly good sense when we consider the legal situation as described in the preceding paragraphs. Since the two people portrayed were married merely "per fidem" the portrait meant no less than a "pictorial marriage certificate" in which the statement that "Jan van Eyck had been there" had the same importance and implied the same legal consequences as an "affidavit" deposed by a witness at a modern registrar's office.

Thus there is no reason whatever to doubt the identity of the London portrait with the panel mentioned in the inventories: we can safely adopt the "orthodox theory" according to which the two people portrayed are Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne de Cename,²¹ all the more so because the circumstances of their marriage are peculiarly consistent with the unusual conception of the "artistic marriage certificate." Both of them had absolutely no relatives at Bruges (Arnolfini being an only child whose property finally went to a nephew of his wife, and Jeanne de Cename's family living in Paris),²² so that we can understand the original idea of a picture which was a memorial portrait and a document at the same time, and in which a well-known gentleman-painter signed his name both as artist and as witness.

Dr. Max J. Friedländer (who, by the way, already divined the meaning of the inscription without investigating the matter)²³ rightly points out that the Arnolfini portrait is almost a miracle of composition: "In it a problem has been solved which no fifteenth-century painter was destined to take up again: two persons standing side by side, and portrayed full length within a richly furnished room a glorious document of the sovereign power of genius."²⁴ In fact, to find an analogous composition in northern painting, we must go forward to Holbein's *Ambassadors*. However, taking into consideration the fact that the London picture is both a portrait of two individual persons and a representation of a sacramental rite, we can explain its compositional scheme by comparing it not only with specimens of portrait-painting, but also

²¹ As for the apparent family likeness between Jeanne de Cename and the wife of Jan van Eyck as portrayed by her husband in the famous picture of 1439 (a family likeness from which Monsieur Dimier concludes that the two portraits represent the same person, while Mr. Weale rather believes Jeanne de Cename to be the sister of Margaret van Eyck), we must bear in mind that in Jan van Eyck's pictures the women are much less "individualized" than the men, adapted as they are to a typical ideal of loveliness. As far as we can learn from documents, Jeanne de Cename had only one sister named "Acarde" (Mirot: I.c., p. 107 and stemma p. 168).

²² Mirot: I.c., p. 114.

²³ "Die Altniederländische Malerei," I, 1924, p. 18.

²⁴ "Van Eyck bis Breughel," second edition, 1921, p. 18.

with representations of marriage ceremonies to be found, for example, in the Bibles Moralisées²⁵ or, even more à propos, in a French Psalter of about 1323 (Munich, cod. gall. 16, fol. 35).²⁶ In it, the marriage of David and Michal, the daughter of Saul, is represented in a very similar way as that of Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne de Cename, only the bride does not act of her own accord, but is given away by her father who is accompanied by a courtier and carries a glove as a symbol of his tutelary authority.



The Marriage of David and Michal, from a French Psalter of
about 1323.

Apart from this difference, the two scenes resemble each other in that the ceremony takes place in absence of a priest and is accomplished by raising the forearm and joining hands, "fide levata" and "per fidem manulem." Thus the precocious apparition of a full-length double portrait can be explained by Jan van Eyck's adopting a compositional scheme not uncommon in the iconography of marriage pictures. But this adoption of a traditional scheme means anything but a lack of "originality." When the Arnolfini portrait is compared with the fourteenth-century miniature, we are struck by the amount of tender personal feeling with which the artist has invested the conventional gesture and, on the other hand, by the solemn rigidity of the figures, particularly that of the bridegroom. Van Eyck took the liberty of joining the *right* hand of the *bride* with the *left* of the *bridegroom*, contrary to ritual and contrary, also to all the other representations of a marriage

²⁵ Laborde: "Les Bibles Moralisées," 1911, pl. 86 and 154.

²⁶ Published by Hans Fehr: "Das Recht im Bilde," 1923, fig. 191.

ceremony. He endeavoured to avoid the overlapping of the right arm as well as the *contraposto* movement automatically caused by the "dextrarum iunctio" in the true sense of the term (see PLATE II, A). Thus he contrived to build up the group symmetrically and to subdue the actual movement in such a way that the "fides levata" gesture of the bridegroom seems to be invested with the confident humility of a pious prayer. In fact the position of Arnolfini's right arm would make a perfect attitude of prayer if the other arm moved with a corresponding gesture. There is something statuesque about these two figures, and I cannot help feeling that the whole arrangement is, to some extent, reminiscent of those slab-tombs which show the full-length figures of a man and a woman in similar attitudes, and where the woman is usually made to stand upon a dog, here indubitably used as a symbol of marital faith [PLATE II, B].²⁷ It would be an attractive idea to explain the peculiarly hieratic character of the Eyckian composition by an influence of those quiet devout portrayals of the deceased, such as may be seen on innumerable monuments of that period; all the more so because the inherent connexion between the incunabula of early Flemish painting and sculpture is proved by many an instance.

In the London picture, however, these statuesque figures are placed in an interior suffused with a dim though coloured light, which shows up the peculiar tactual values of such materials as brass, velvet, wood and fur, so that they appear interwoven with each other within a homogeneous chiaroscuro atmosphere.

²⁷ This type of medieval slab-tomb is the result of an interesting process which can be observed in a good many instances. The Bible is full of what we may call, "involuntary descriptions" of ancient oriental images, such as, for instance, the scape-goat tied to the Holy Tree as recently discovered in the Royal tombs of Ur which was the model of Abraham's ram caught in the bush, or the Babylonian astral divinity resuscitated as the "apocalyptic woman." Now the thirteenth verse of the 90th Psalm says "super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis et conculcabis leonem et draconem," thus describing the Babylonian type of a god or hero triumphing over an animal or a couple of animals (a type which also gave rise to the representations of St. Michael fighting the Dragon, the Virtues conquering Evil and so forth). We can observe how this motive which originally was used exclusively for the representations of Christ was gradually transferred to the Virgin, the Saints and finally to the slab-tombs, such as the monument of Bishop Siegfried von Epstein in Mainz Cathedral or that of Heinrich von Sayn in the Germanisches Museum, Nuremberg. From this we must conclude that the animals forming the "foot-rest" of the knights and princes portrayed on great medieval slab-tombs were originally no attributes denoting the praiseworthy qualities of the deceased, but symbols of Evil conquered by the immortal soul. Later on, however, the Lion which originally was meant to be the "leo conculcatus" described in the 90th Psalm was interpreted as a symbol of Fortitude, and when the statues of a married couple were to be placed on the same monument (so that the women, too, had to be provided with an animal) she was usually made to stand upon a Dog, conceived as a symbol of Marital Faith (cf. note 10).

Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait

Small wonder then that the Arnolfini portrait has always been praised as a masterpiece of "realistic" interior, or even genre, painting. But the question arises whether the patient enthusiasm bestowed upon this marvellous interior anticipates the modern principle of "l'art pour l'art," so to speak, or is still rooted to some extent in the medieval tendency of investing visible objects with an allegorical or symbolical meaning.

First of all we must bear in mind that what Mr. Weale simply calls "a Flemish interior" is by no means an ordinary living room, but a "Nuptial Chamber" in the strict sense of the term, that is to say, a room hallowed by sacramental associations and which even used to be consecrated by a special "Benedictio thalami."²⁸ This is proved by the fact that in the beautiful chandelier hanging from the ceiling, only one candle is burning. For since this candle cannot possibly serve for practical purposes (in view of the fact that the room is flooded with daylight), it must needs bear upon the marriage ceremony. In fact a burning candle—symbol of the all seeing wisdom of God—not only was and often is, required for the ceremony of taking an oath in general,²⁹ but also had a special reference to weddings. The "marriage candle"—a substitute for the classical "tæda" which had been so essential a feature of Greek and Roman marriage ceremonies that the word became synonymous with "wedding"—was either carried to church before the bridal procession, or solemnly given to the bride by the bridegroom, or lit in the home of the newly married couple; we even know of a custom according to which the friends of the couple called on them in the evening "et petierunt Candelam per sponsum et sponsam . . . sibi dari."³⁰ Thus we learn from the one burning candle that the "Flemish interior" is to be interpreted as a "thalamus," to speak in medieval terms, and we comprehend at once its unusual features. It is not by chance that the scene takes place in a bedroom instead of a sitting-room (this applies also to a considerable number of fifteenth and sixteenth century *Annunciations* in which the interior is characterized as the "Thalamus Virginis," as a liturgical text puts it), nor is it by accident that the back of the armchair standing by the bed is crowned by a carved wooden figure of *St. Margaret triumphing over the Dragon*, for this Saint was especially invoked by women in

expectation of a child³¹; thus the small sculpture is connected with the bride in the same way as the burning candle is connected with the bridegroom.

Now the significance of these motives is an attributive, rather than a symbolical one, inasmuch as they actually "belong" to a Nuptial Chamber and to a marriage ceremony in the same way that a club belongs to Hercules or a knife to St. Bartholomew. Still, the very fact that these significant attributes are not emphasized as what they actually are, but are *disguised*, so to speak, as ordinary pieces of furniture (while, on the other hand, the general arrangement of the various objects has something solemn about it, placed as they are according to the rules of symmetry and in correct relationship with the statuesque figures) impresses the beholder with a kind of mystery and makes him inclined to suspect a hidden significance in all and every object, even when they are not immediately connected with the sacramental performance. And this applied in a much higher degree to the medieval spectator who was wont to conceive the whole of the visible world as a symbol. To him, the little griffin terrier as well as the candle were familiar as typical symbols of Faith,³² and even the pattens of white wood so conspicuously placed in the foreground of the picture would probably impress him with a feeling of sacredness: "Solve calceamentum de pedibus tuis, locus enim in quo stas terra sancta est."

Now, I would not dare to assert that the observer is expected to realize such notions consciously. On the contrary, the supreme charm of the picture—and this applies to the creations of Jan van Eyck in general—is essentially based on the fact that the spectator is not irritated by a mass of complicated hieroglyphs, but is allowed to abandon himself to the quiet fascination of what I might call a *transfigured reality*. Jan van Eyck's landscapes and interiors are built up in such a way that what is possibly meant to be a mere realistic motive can, at the same time, be conceived as a symbol, or, to put it another way, his attributes and symbols are chosen and placed in such a way that what is possibly meant to

²⁸ Cf. Ildefons Herweghen: "Germanische Rechtssymbolik in der römischen Liturgie" (Deutschrechtliche Beiträge VIII, 4), 1913, p. 312, et seq.

²⁹ "Jurare super Candelam," "Testimonium in Cereo." Cf. Wetzer-Welte, l.c., s.v. "Eid" and Jac. Grimm: "Deutsche Rechtsaltertümer," fourth edition, 1899, II, p. 546.

³⁰ Du Cange: l.c., s.v. "Candela." Cf. Wetzer-Welte: l.c., s.v. "Hochzeit" and "Brautkerze."

³¹ Weale: I, p. 20 and Weale: II, p. 17. This belief has even led some scholars to suppose that St. Margaret is to be regarded as a substitute for the classical Lucina (F. Soleil: "La vierge Marguerite substituée à la Lucine antique," 1885).

³² With regard to the dog, cf. notes 10 and 27; with regard to the candle, see Didron: l.c., p. 206, et seq., and plate facing p. 237. Also E. Mâle: "L'Art religieux de la fin du moyen-âge en France," second edition, 1922, p. 334, and Ripa: l.c., s.v. "Fede Cattolica," where the motive is explained by a passage of St. Augustin which says "Cæcitas est infidelitas et illuminatio fides." Needless to say that "Fides" could always mean both "True Belief" and "Faithfulness," especially of wife and husband. Fides conceived as a theological virtue explicitly prescribes "serva fidem coniugum" (Didron: l.c., p. 244).

express an allegorical meaning, at the same time perfectly "fits" into a landscape or an interior apparently taken from life. In this respect the Arnolfini portrait is entirely analogous to Jan van Eyck's religious paintings, such as the marvellous *Virgin of Lucca* where many a symbol of virginity (the "aquæ viventes," the candlestick, the glass carafe and even the "throne of Solomon")³³ is "disguised" in a similar way; or the image of *St. Barbara* whose tower (characterized by the three windows alluding to the Holy Trinity) has been transformed into what seems to be a realistic Gothic church in course of erection³⁴; but, thanks to the formal symmetry of the composition, this building impresses us as even more "symbolical" than if the tower had been attached to the figure in the usual form of an attribute.

Thus our question whether or not the still

³³ As for the "aquæ viventes" cf. W. Molsdorf: "Führer durch den symbol. und typol. Bilderkreis," 1920, nr. 795. The comparison of the Virgin with a "candelabrum" is to be found in the "Speculum Humanæ Salvationis" (quoted by E. Beitz: "Grünwalds Isenheimer Menschwerdungsbild und seine Quellen," 1924, p. 25); in Berchorius' "Repertorium morale" the "candelabrum" is adduced as a symbol of Virtue and, quite logically, as "basis fidei," because the candle itself stands for Faith as mentioned in the preceding note). As for the carafe, which also occurs in Grünwald's Isenheim altar, cf. Beitz: l.c., p. 47.

³⁴ This is the reason why the picture was sometimes described as *St. Agnes* (Weale: I, p. 89; Weale: II, p. 129).

THE YOUNG TIEPOLO—II BY ANTONIO MORASSI

THE FRESCOES IN THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY
SACRAMENT IN UDINE CATHEDRAL.

TIEPOLO'S biographers and the historians of Udinese art¹ are in agreement on the subject of the attribution of these frescoes—hitherto unpublished—to Giambattista. No doubt is possible as, according to a document relating to the "Fabbrica del Duomo nuova" in the civic archives of the town of Udine (MS. FX. c. 53), on Tuesday, June 4, 1726, the deputies of the city of Udine—

osservata la supplica presentata dai Signori Governatori della Ven. Confraternita del Santo Sacramento . . . hanno concordemente con tutti voti permessa a' medesimi di poter abbellire con pitture sacre di mano del celebre Pittor Tiepolo interiormente la Cappella eretta dalla città al Santo Sacramento nella nuova fabbrica della d. Chiesa del Duomo, ecc.

In the petition of the governors to which

¹ P. Molmenti: "G. B. Tiepolo," Milan, 1909, pp. 82 and 117, where the text of this document is given; Edward Sack: "Giambattista Tiepolo," Hamburg, 1910; Fabio Maniago: "Guida di Udine," S. Vito, 1839, p. 30; Renaldi: "Della Pittura Friulana," Udine, 1796.

life-like accessories in our picture are invested with a symbolical meaning turns out to be no true alternative. In it, as in the other works by Jan van Eyck, medieval symbolism and modern realism are so perfectly reconciled that the former has become inherent in the latter. The symbolical significance is neither abolished nor does it contradict the naturalistic tendencies; it is so completely absorbed by reality, that reality itself gives rise to a flow of preternatural associations, the direction of which is secretly determined by the vital forces of medieval iconography.³⁵

³⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that a little dog, very similar to that in the Arnolfini portrait, occurred also in the famous picture of a naked woman taking her bath described by Bartholomæus Facius and apparently analogous to a painting which was formerly in the collection of Cornelius van der Geest (Weale: I, p. 175, et seq., Weale: II, p. 196 et seq.), where the motive has obviously nothing to do with marital Faith. Iconographical symbols, especially in medieval art, are almost always "ambivalent" (the snake can mean Evil as well as Prudence, and golden sandals can be an attribute of Luxury as well as Magnanimity, cf. Panofsky, *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bild. Kunst*, N. F., IX, 1932, p. 285, et seq. Thus, the equation Dog-Faith does not preclude the equation Dog-Animality, as shown on the reverse of the well-known Constantine-medal, where a little dog characterizes the personification of Nature in contradistinction to Grace. Consequently the griffin terrier "fits" into the bathroom picture as well as into the Arnolfini portrait, whether we regard it as a "symbol" or as a mere "genre-motif." When this article was in print, K. von Tolnai published a paper (*Münchener Jahrbuch* l.c., p. 320 et seq.) in which, I am glad to say, the problem of symbolism in Early Flemish art is approached in a similar way.

this document refers, it is stated that the Fraternity wished to embellish this chapel—"Coll' ornamento di Nobili Pitture da essere effigiate nel prospetto inferiore della Cupola per mano del Sig. Batta Tiepolo Pittore Celebre e Chiaro." There was no subsequent document annulling this proposal of the Fraternity. We may be certain, therefore, that the frescoes were indeed entrusted to Giambattista Tiepolo, probably the same year or shortly afterwards. They must be dated, then, about 1726-1727. Their style does not conflict with these dates, although there are certain details which, at first sight, appear rather curious.

We will only deal here with the figures in the cupola representing groups of angels, which have retained all their original freshness, and we will pass over the frescoes in chiaroscuro on the walls of the same chapel representing the mystery of the Most Holy Sacrament, which have been damaged by ignorant restorers.²

² P. Molmenti: Op. cit., p. 117, in which it appears from an article by Raffaello Sbuelz, published in "*Patria del Frinli*" (Udine, 18 June, 1908) that these "Storie" were restored by a certain Giacomo Lorio, who fortunately spared the angels on the cupola.