

THE USE OF FANTASY BY EUROPEAN ARTISTS
FROM 1250 TO 1650 A.D.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND PROCEDURE

Introduction

This study will trace the development of fantasy in European painting from 1250 to 1650 A.D. Fantastic paintings are usually thought to be of the twentieth century and associated with such artists as Klee, Chagall and Kandinsky. But no twentieth century Surrealist has been able to devise imagery as riotous or as surprising as that of Hieronymus Bosch, Piero di Cosimo, and other painters of the period approximately 1250-1650 A.D. This period includes the late Middle Ages when religious stories were the main subject of the artist, and it extends into the High Renaissance when the Greek culture was being reborn in stories illustrating every possible myth and allegory. The church in the Middle Ages had been the main patron of the arts; but when the merchant and middle class emerged, they in turn became patrons. Thus, there was a demand for art to decorate homes of the newly prosperous and also public buildings. Throughout the period artists continued to use both religious and mythological subject matter. The religious painters were able to justify almost any subject matter if it were given a religious title. Thus, if one wanted to paint what a Greek would have entitled

"Apollo," one did a Saint Sebastian and added a few painless arrows. After the period of the strict formula for painting religious scenes it must have been a great relief to the artist of the fifteenth and later centuries to be able to deal with human nature in non-religious terms and to find not only themes which would make one's choice seem reasonable, but also themes which would suggest new combinations of the human form.

Scope of the Problem

The use of fantasy by the artists of the period 1250-1650 A.D. will be discussed under five categories.

1. Fantasy was used by artists in religious paintings, which served as a visual book to be viewed by the people. The artist used fantasy to show or illustrate events or miracles which could not be logically explained.

2. Fantasy was used by the artists to portray Greek and Roman mythological subjects and events.

3. Fantasy was used by the artists to present allegorical figures and ideas.

4. Fantasy was used to illustrate dreams or visions.

5. Finally, fantasy was used to create and present all kinds of fantastic creatures and monsters of the subconscious or dream world.

Procedure and Method

Chapter I serves as an introduction to the study.

Chapter II will present the background of the period 1250-1650 A.D. The influence of the church on art, the re-birth of Greek and Roman culture, and the Reformation are examined in the light of their effect on thought and ideas.

Chapter III will consider the use of fantasy by the Italian artists.

Chapter IV will analyze the use of fantasy by the Northern European artists.

Chapter V will summarize the study and present conclusions.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are from Webster's New International Dictionary.¹

Fantasy is defined as "act or function of forming images or representations, whether in direct perception or in memory; also an image or impression derived through sensation, hallucination; also a phantom; apparition . . . recombining elements found in reality."

Mythology is defined as "collective myths describing the gods of a people, especially demigods and legendary human beings in stories which involve supernatural elements.

Allegory includes the "description of one thing under the image of another, the veiled presentation in a figurative

¹Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (Springfield, Mass., 1951).

story, of a meaning metaphorically implied but not expressly stated."

Imagination is the word which includes the "power to form mental images of things not before one . . . the power to represent the real more fully and truly than it appears to the senses and in its ideal or universal character."

Dream may be defined as "a state of mind of one who is abstracted or lost in imaginary visions; reverie; daydreaming."

Characteristics of Fantasy

Fantasy is the mentally reproducing of objects seen, but it is no longer used to define complete recall. Fantasy has come to mean things seen in the real world, but put together in such a way as not actually to exist in the real world. The human-animal combinations never really existed except in the imagination of the creative artist.

Herbert Read states: "It is only at the approach of the fantastic, at a point where human reason loses its control; that the most profound emotion of the individual has the fullest opportunity to express itself; emotion unsuitable for projection in the framework of the real world and which has no other solution in its urgency than to rely on the external solicitation of symbols and myths."²

²Herbert Read and others, Surrealism (New York, n.d.), p. 106.

There are three characteristics of fantasy as used by the artist to express his reaction to experiences from the real world. They are personal interpretation, the imaginary world, and the inventiveness of the artist.

Each painter gives a personal interpretation of his subject matter. He draws his subject matter from many sources, but nature is the great reservoir from which he draws his objects and the materials of his art; but the final act of creation pertains to his imagination. No one else has exactly the same experience as the artist. Delacroix said in a letter dated August 8, 1856: "The finest works of art are those which express the true fantasy of the artist . . ."³

The second characteristic is that fantasy belongs to the imaginary world as opposed to the real world. This is the world created within the artist, which may express the dream world. A dream may be, and usually is, acutely vivid. When painters have set about exploring this other world, they have usually chosen to do so in forms of exceptional clarity, sharper than reality, so that the fantasy and unreality of the visionary forms are intensified. This is opposed to the cloudy vapor of nothingness associated with dreams. Huyghe states that imagination is the foundation of dreams and artistic creation alike.

³Delacroix, Letter of August 8, 1856, cited in Joseph Chiari, Realism and Imagination (London, 1960), p. 35.

Imagination (used here in the strict sense of the act or power of creating mental images) is thus the foundation of dreams and artistic creation alike. Spontaneous, well-nigh animal in dreams, elaborated and intellectualized in art, in both it is the act or power by which the mind secretes, in the form of images, certain inner contents that press upon the subconscious and eventually overflow into the conscious mind. These active and still formless contents seem to emerge from the incandescent core of the psyche--the unconscious--and, pressing outward, meet and merge with consciousness. There they are condensed, so to speak, and take on mental form, to be embodied in images or ideas. Pressing ever outward, they take on externalized existence in the form of concrete works and acts. Imagination is what first gives them body, however obscure; with the act of creation alone they take on solid material body, such as others can see--as works painted on canvas or carved out of wood and stone. The imagination merely prepares the inner contents to become visible, borrowing from the appearances of the outer world. . . . However, what gives real substance to the inner contents--at once concealing them and making them graspable as such--what gives shape to the inner contents, is the artist. Thus, the inner and the outer worlds converge and are indissolubly united in the work of art.⁴

In imaginary situations the events or characters do not have to correspond in any way to life or life situations. The artist is free to indulge his whims or fantasy. The only obligation he is under is to order and arrange his ideas to express the story he relates and not to confuse the observer intentionally.

Murray's theory of personality states that one's environment is in his head and is unique to each person. Thus,

⁴ Rene Huyghe, Art and the Spirit of Man (New York, 1962), p. 136.

there is no standard way of seeing a thing; it is as it appears to each individual.⁵

The third characteristic of fantasy is that the artist must be inventive. The artist is free to take from nature and feed his imagination and to produce creations which, whatever the subject and theme, are both human and supra-human. This inventive quality varies with each artist. He may combine parts of reality with the fantastic. He may choose to use a man's body and put some other object on his shoulders for a head to picture a dream or idea. Or he may use part of a man's body and part of an animal's body. Satyrs, mermaids, and centaurs are examples of this type of inventiveness of the artist that has flourished in the past. It is a desire that all people have to create a fantastic world, a fairyland, or a world of make-believe. This type of art in the twentieth century is called Surrealism. The artist must be inventive to create fantastic or imaginary scenes.

Sources of Data

The library of North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, was used for research. Reproductions of paintings used for illustrative purposes in this study were obtained from several sources. A large number of these was purchased from University Prints. Others were purchased from the

⁵Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindsey, Theories of Personality (New York, 1957).

National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Frick Collection of New York, the Yale University Art Gallery, and the New York Graphic Society were the sources for single pictures.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PERIOD FROM 1250 TO 1650 A.D.

The Late Middle Ages witnessed a renewed interest in classical literature, painting, sculpture, and decorative design which reflected the spirit of the Renaissance man. People are always eager to beautify practical objects. To do this they must use their imagination, and what they create is in the truest sense part of their lives. Their art shows in many ways what they think of themselves, the world, and their destiny, and it cannot be understood without a knowledge of the religious and intellectual life of the age in which they lived. The art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance reveals as much about the religious thought and social conditions of the time as does its literature.¹

The chief patron of Medieval art was the church, and most of the subject matter was religious in nature. Art depicted the life of Christ, lives of saints, miracles, and dogma. Art was not appreciated of its own sake but for the message it conveyed. Medieval art was unnatural, stiff, and lacking in facial expression. The soul, not the body, was the preoccupation of the church; and since the church had

¹Henry S. Lucas, The Renaissance and the Reformation (New York, 1934), p. 155.

almost a monopoly in the patronage of the arts, the arts themselves abandoned their concern with the beauty of the world in order to explore the soul of man and his destiny.

There were two opposing points of view at the close of the Middle Ages: the ascetic attitude and the new Humanism which emphasized man's life in this world. Humanism represented a revolt against many features of medieval society. The center of life had shifted from the manor to the town. The ancient agrarian economy based upon the manor was replaced by a new money economy supported by trade and industry and urban population. Capitalism had come into existence by which the bourgeoisie replaced the nobility and the clergy as the leading members of society.

While Northern European artists were continuing the mystical tradition of the Middle Ages, the Italians were rediscovering the world around them, investigating it as scientists, and finding a new relationship with classical antiquity. Their new joy in life and their fervent curiosity about the nature of the world led them to an understanding of the pagan Greeks and Romans. They believed that Greek and Roman life was the source of all true culture. "They studied ancient philosophers and poets with new sympathy, revived their traditions, emulated them, brought the Olympian gods back from exile, and by the end of the century had come close to the perfect harmony and order that was the classical ideal in art and thought."²

²John Canaday, Venus Revisited: Classical Myths in the Renaissance, Portfolio D, Metropolitan Seminars in Art (New York, 1959), p. 5.

Even though the Greeks had discovered that the human being was an individual and not a cog in the state machine, the development of that individual in Greek art was not in the direction of character or personality, but of physique. "What slowly evolved in Greek art from the archaic statues of the seventh century to the mature sculpture of Phidias and, later, Praxiteles, was a canon of physical perfection which came to dominate the art of the Mediterranean area for centuries to come."³ The Greeks invented a physical ideal that was serene and graceful even in tragic situations.

Like the Greeks the men of the Renaissance wanted to know everything, to understand everything; like the Romans they loved display, power, and luxury; as Christians, they drew upon the emotionalism that had revealed new depths in the mystery of darkness and new intensities in the radiance of light.⁴

Out of this new intensity, love for display and power, a new age was born which had its beginning in religion and extended to every area of man's very existence.

The Reformation was not inaugurated by Martin Luther nor the representatives of the New Learning. It began much earlier. Martin Luther's posting of his "Ninety-five Theses" on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg merely lighted the fuse that set the events in motion. The word "Reformation" is applied to the religious upheaval of the sixteenth

³Eric Newton, The Arts of Man (Greenwich, Conn., 1960), p. 34.

⁴Canaday, op. cit., p. 5.

century which shattered the unity of the Christian faith in western Europe. There were many causes of the Reformation: decline of papal prestige, needed reform of religious practices, the rise of a secular state of mind, and particularism of the townsmen.

Because of the transformation in economic activity during the Late Middle Ages, life became more and more mercantile, industries grew, capital accumulated, and towns expanded rapidly. National states, which were powerful because of their ability to tax subjects, maintain armies, and organize staffs of officials, came into existence. Many of the religious practices needed reform. There was much superstition, and witchcraft was common. The average man clung to many unchristian beliefs and practices even though he was sincerely Catholic. Many of the priests, bishops, and abbots were named to their offices through lay influence. Although there were many sincere priests, the lack of genuine vocation was often apparent. Often men entered the clerical state for bread and butter reasons alone, with the result that they were quite uneducated; and this clerical ignorance lessened the efficiency of the priesthood. The moral condition of the priests, sin, and superstition are shown in the paintings of the Northern European painters--Bosch, Brueghel, and others. So long as society was composed of uneducated laymen and poorly trained clergymen, much of the lax religious life escaped comment. But when a refined bourgeoisie came into

existence and produced the culture of the Renaissance, much criticism resulted. Laymen soon became the intellectual equal of clergymen, and began to find fault with clerical morals, emphasis on pilgrimages, and other practices. All this produced a dangerous state of mind which could be triggered off at any time. This was an age that produced new heresies and new attacks on the church.⁵

⁵Lucas, op. cit., pp. 419-421.

CHAPTER III

THE USE OF FANTASY BY ITALIAN ARTISTS OF THE PERIOD FROM 1250 TO 1650 A.D.

The subjects and themes of the Italian artists of the period from 1250 to 1650 A.D. were religious, mythological, and allegorical. Each of the paintings in this chapter will be discussed as it is related to these subjects and themes. Where two of the categories overlap each other in one painting, the painting will be discussed under its specific title. The paintings will be discussed as they relate to religion, as they relate to mythology, and lastly, as they relate to allegory.

Since religion more than any other subject dominated man's thoughts during the last centuries of the Middle Ages, the art of those days was a faithful expression of dogma and popular religious life. The church was the patron of the arts. The subjects of the paintings were sacred and they were meant to be materialized theology and as much a part of the liturgy as music. The themes of this art often illustrated the dramatic incidents of the story of man's fall and redemption. From the Old Testament were drawn such subjects as the creation of Adam and Eve, the fall of man, the expulsion from Paradise, the flood, the building of the Tower of Babel, and others. But more numerous were the episodes drawn

from the earthly career of the Saviour. Countless examples can be found of the Nativity, presentation in the temple, flight into Egypt, teaching in the temple, and baptism. Certain scenes from Christ's suffering were popular such as the kiss of Judas, the temptation on the mountain, the descent into Limbo, and the resurrection. Another popular subject was the last judgment and the rejection of the damned.

Besides these central themes there were many others. Catholicism derived its teaching not only from Scripture but also from ancient tradition. The Virgin was popular, especially at the height of the Middle Ages. The scenes of her activities became popular themes in art. Artists often depicted her birth, assumption, Annunciation, coronation, purification, and immaculate conception. "The church boasted a large number of saints, holy men and women who had sealed their faith with the blood of martyrdom or who had lived lives of eminent Christian virtue."¹

The artist showed by visible means in his painting how an event or miracle might have taken place. With his imagination he used religious fantasy to show events or miracles which could not be logically explained.

Duccio di Buoninsegna (1255-1319) illustrated the "Temptation of Christ" by the use of religious fantasy. The picture depicts the early event in Christ's ministry when he was tempted by the Devil (see Figure 1). The picture is in two

¹Lucas, op. cit., p. 158.

parts. The figures of Christ and the angels are placed on the white miniature mountains which signify their purity. In contrast to this, the Devil, his color representative of sin and darkness, is standing with his clawlike feet on a brown or dark mountain. The artist has shown in visible form the figure of a man to give the Devil real form. The figure of the Devil is fantastic because no one has ever seen such a creature as this. The head of the Devil is beastlike; he has pointed ears and his feet are claws. His huge wings indicate rapid flight on this earth and from it. His color also sug-



Fig. 1--Duccio, "Temptation of Christ."

gests the blackness of sin, and the darkness and doom of the region which he inhabits. The figure of Christ is of the real world but he is placed in a setting of unreality. The cities of the world are shown as miniature groups of Gothic buildings which are actual reflections of contemporary Sienese architecture rather than the cities of Jesus' day. The mountain on which Jesus stands is more like a huge rock than a mountain.

A fourteenth-century artist painted a scene of the "Descent of Christ into Limbo," a place of oblivion or confinement (see Figure 2). In this painting Christ is shown as he greets other inhabitants of this place. These figures wear halos while other sinister creatures, with horns, bat-like wings, and queer bodies peer between the jagged rocks of another room. The artist used religious fantasy to show



Fig. 2--Fourteenth-century Artist, "Descent of Christ into Limbo."

that the saints were kept safely from the evil about them as they waited for the Saviour to come. Their purity may be seen with glowing faces as they look toward their Lord. In contrast, the evil beings scowl and are visibly disturbed by the arrival of Christ. This artist has pictured how such a place as Limbo might look if it actually existed.

Stefano di Giovanni Sasseta (1392-1450) pictured Temptation as a young girl with small, ribbed bat-like wings in his "Temptation of St. Anthony" (see Figure 3). St. Anthony's famous temptations struck the imagination of the artists of Europe. St. An-

thony was the pious son of rich Christians. After his parents' death St. Anthony gave his money away to lead a life of piety. Devilish temptations in the form of evil



Fig. 3--Sasseta, "The Temptation of St. Anthony."

thoughts, lusts, and desires of

all kinds soon disturbed him. The Devil even used the most seductive feminine form to shake his resolve, but without success.

The old hermit, wandering back to his cell along the stoney path that leads through a typical little valley among the hills that surround Siena, stops suddenly at the sight of the young girl who has just materialized at his side. The two confront each other with a mysterious mutual antagonism, although the saint cannot see the little bat's wings that betray her identity.²

²Newton, op. cit., p. 34.

The attractive girl represents the other world, the evil or temptation. Sasseta used the short, stubby, pointed wings attached to a pretty girl's shoulders to portray temptation. The small wings indicate flight down or close to the ground. The popular idea of the location of hell was that it was beneath the earth's crust. The use of the colors in Sasseta's "Temptation of St. Anthony" are also of an unreal nature. The hut or dwelling on the left is pale red, the temptress' dress is pale pink, her skin is black-green, a deathlike color which is also used for the trees and mountains. The effect of the scene is of deepening twilight, entirely appropriate to the mood of a clash of wills between an elderly saint and the young, beautiful little temptress who suddenly appears to him.

Artists used wings attached to the human form to give visible form and explanation to the angels. Fra Anglico's (1387-1455) "Annunciation" shows an angel with very large, brightly colored wings like those of an exotic bird (see Figure 4). Very early in the Mediterranean world there were stories of human beings with wings, but no one had ever actually seen a human form with wings. The artist has used elements from the real world such as the large wings to designate a being from the spiritual world. He has combined these two things to give a logical explanation as to how the angel arrived on earth and departed from it. He has also shown how the appearance of the angel to Mary might have looked. An indication of the great distance from heaven is further indicated by the large



Fig. 4--Fra Angelico, "Annunciation"

powerful wings. The artist not only used color and wings to exploit the fantastic idea in painting, but he attempted to explain the destructive forces of nature.

Giovanni di Paolo (1423-1482) explained a miracle which took place as a result of a destructive storm at sea in his "Miracle of St. Nicholas of Tolentino During a Storm at Sea" (see Figure 5). Upon a stormy sea, which Giovanni depicts as a field of uniform hills, an ornamental ship is being torn apart by a storm. Masts and sails fly into the air; they twist and flutter against a dark sky in patterns suggesting birds or serpents. The victims kneel in prayer on the spotless deck, which is uncluttered by the storm. Above this group Saint Nicholas appears in the sky as their savior. Although he has no apparent means to indicate his ability to fly, he remains suspended in the air. The vertical lines, obscuring his feet, show that his movement is supernatural. The viewer has a cross section view of the scene. One can see clearly inside



Fig. 5--Giovanni di Paolo, "The Miracle of St. Nicholas of Tolentino During a Storm at Sea."

the ship, above the ship, in the sky, and underneath the ship in the water. "The most astonishing part of the picture is the naked sea goddess who swims gracefully beneath the water with trailing long golden locks."³ This is a curious pagan participant in the Christian story. The religious painters were able to justify almost any subject matter if it were given a religious title.

An example of this justification of subject matter may be seen in Domenico Veneziano's (ca. 1400-1461) painting, "St. John in the Desert" (see Figure 6). This painting reveals the expanding spirit of the early Renaissance when Italy was beginning to understand that physical beauty did not cancel out spiritual meanings, but had not yet realized that nature was also deserving of study. Veneziano has chosen the subject of the ascetic St. John, the Baptist, to be the Christian equivalent of a Greek Apollo; he selected the moment when the saint rejected his clothing in favor of a suit of camel skin as a pretext for painting the male nude.

The lonely naked figure of a young man unexpectedly wearing a halo, standing in a little valley hemmed in by pale precipitous mountains that suggest a landscape on the moon, strikes us at once as furiously romantic; and when we come to analyze the reasons for this romantic atmosphere we find them in the dreamlike contradiction between the figure and the landscape. The former is a descendant of the pagan Apollos of pre-Christian Greece, the latter an echo of the fantastic Byzantine formula for landscape, based on nothing that the human eye had ever seen in nature.⁴

³Canaday, op. cit., p. 25.

⁴Newton, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

The use of fantasy is obvious in the god-like figure of the Baptist. The artist has used fantasy to combine physical and moral strength to emphasize the ascetic nature of the saint and to show the destitute character of



Fig. 6--Veneziano, "St. John in the Desert."

the wilderness where he lived. The Baptist rises above it all with the physical strength of the Greek god, Apollo, rather than the quiet strength of Christian character.

The creation of fantasy was not limited to the use of one figure. Luca Signorelli's (1441-1523) painting, "Condemned," shows the use of a religious subject as an opportunity to paint the nude body (see Figure 7). The catastrophic events of the last days was a popular subject of the artists. This event could not have been executed or even conceived until Signorelli's marvelous mastery of the nude and of the anatomy of movement had been obtained.⁵ "Signorelli combines a sense of pagan values with a rigid orthodoxy, evident in his realistic images of Doomsday, the Resurrection, of Heaven and Hell, and other

⁵Vernon Lee, Renaissance Fancies and Studies (New York, 1919), p. 80.



Fig. 7--Signorelli, "Condemned"

scriptural subjects."⁶ The naked demons, with powerful wings, shoot through the air as they tie up the damned. The damned huddle together on the floor of hell to try to escape the wrath of God. The place of hell is shown as beneath the earth's crust. Such was the concept of hell at the beginning of the Renaissance.

The Renaissance was not so much a rebirth as a change in the direction of thought. Man began to see himself as an individual who controlled his own destiny rather than a soul who must serve a dangerous earthly testing period to determine whether he would spend eternity in bliss or damnation. The

⁶Lucie Simpson, The Greek Spirit in Renaissance Art (New York, 1953), p. 136.

world ceased to be a divine miracle to be accepted on faith and explained by theology and became, instead, a natural phenomenon to be explained on its own terms. The special character of the Renaissance was that it fused Christian and pagan elements in its nature, adding to them the objective curiosity that was the genius of modern scientific investigation.⁷

Although religious themes continued to be popular subjects of the Renaissance painters, the mythological and allegorical subjects were in abundance because of the influence of the Humanists and also patrons who were interested in Greek culture.

The patrons of the Renaissance were despots of city states and townsmen who had grown wealthy from trade and industry. These wealthy patrons had the leisure that was necessary to cultivate new ideas. The Medici family was one of the most distinguished patrons of the Renaissance. This family was the patron of such artists as Botticelli and Michelangelo.

Artists faced the difficulty of having no tradition on how to design a mythological subject. The result was that the artist merely based mythological subjects on earlier religious design. Could states that Sandro Botticelli's (1444-1510) "Birth of Venus" is based on the religious subject of the Baptism (see Figure 8).

The transformation of Christ (invariably in the centre, His body outlined by the water behind Him) into Venus, of the Baptist (invariably on the right and with his arm raised) into the attendant nymph, and of the angels (invariably on the left) into Zephyrs has disguised only superficially the origin

⁷Canaday, op. cit., p. 5.

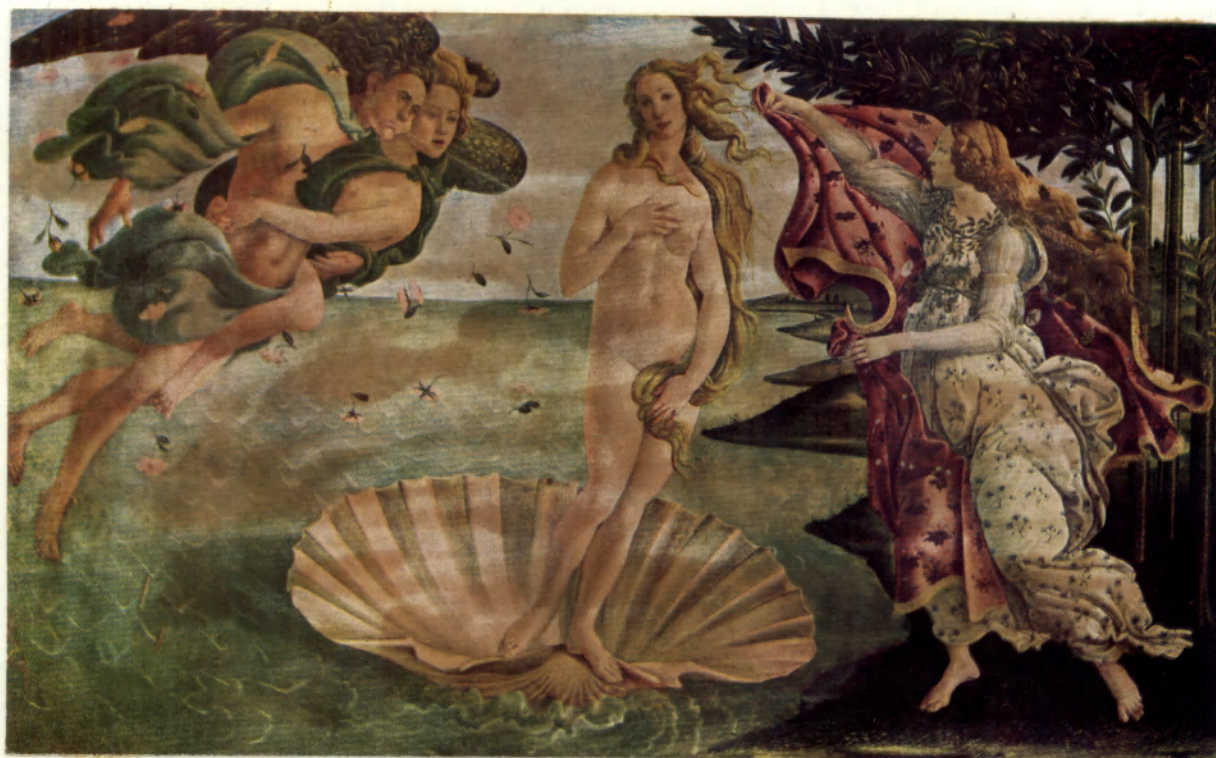


Fig. 8--Botticelli, "Birth of Venus"

of the design. One must assume that Botticelli, faced with the lack of precedent for a picture of the "Birth of Venus," thought first of the water behind the main figure and connected it with the traditional representation of the Baptism.⁸

The pagan characters in this painting are Venus and the nymph. The zephyrs are the Greek personification of the west wind. The nymph is one of the inferior divinities of nature, always represented as a beautiful maiden dwelling in the forests. According to an old Greek legend, Venus was born of the foam of the sea, and she was wafted by zephyrs to the shore. She was the goddess of beauty, spring, and love. The distortion and abstraction help to place the "Birth of Venus" in

⁸Cecil Gould, An Introduction to Italian Renaissance Painting (London, 1957), pp. 48-49.

the category of fantasy. Fantasy is used to express the unreality of the arrangement to give the effect of over emphasizing certain portions of the picture for the desired effect. The left arm of Venus is attached at the shoulder in an impossible way. The legs are jointed to the body in an unnatural way. Even the flowers are not planted in the soil. Robb sees a spiritual quality in Botticelli's "Birth of Venus."

Not is it only in his human figures that his love of remote spiritual beauty shows itself. He could impart to anything he drew some of the same dream-like quality. His flowers, exquisitely natural, yet suggest that they are no growth of mortal soil. . . . He delighted in drawing all objects responsive to the power of the wind . . . trees, grasses, water, hair, filmy draperies. . . . His works are full of this wind-born movement which shivers through the outer world and communicates itself to the dancing figures that look almost as if they were poised for flight. . . . Swift light movement has always been pre-eminent among symbols of spiritual life and above all spiritual joy . . .⁹

The mythological characters of the "Birth of Venus" take on human form of the real world, yet they do not take their places firmly on the soil. They are not limited to the real world but they may soon vanish as they are posed ready for flight.

In Botticelli's religious paintings his Madonnas and female saints continued to have the face of his Venus. On the whole, Venus was not the perfect subject for the scientific realists, who were more interested in investigating the body as a structure of bone and muscle than as an ideal

⁹Nesca A. Robb, Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance (London, 1935), p. 219.

form. Therefore, artists took delight in illustrating the mythological strong men of unlimited physical power. Hercules was one of these strong men who was perpetually engaged in strenuous activities.

Antonio Pollaiuolo (1429-1498) painted a series of pictures representing some of the labors of Hercules. There were twelve feats of strength by which this hero was to achieve immortality by promise of the gods. One in the series is



Fig. 9--Pollaiuolo, "Hercules Slaying the Hydra."

entitled "Hercules Slaying the Hydra" (see Figure 9).

"Hercules Slaying the Hydra" shows Hercules in combat with the nine-headed monster who grew two new heads for each one that was cut off, a circumstance discovered by Hercules only after he had begun his struggle. Faced with a dilemma, by which the monster's power increased in geometric progression with

every wound, Hercules retired. He returned with a torch to cauterize each neck after severing the head, and thus he finally did away with even the ninth head, which was supposed to be immortal.¹⁰

In this mythological story the intellectual power as well as the physical power of Hercules is revealed. Although fantasy developed both creatures, the man and the beast, logic is used to dispose of the dilemma. Other painters have used this idea.

Another example of the strong super man is Raphael Sanzio's (1483-1520) "Saint George and the Dragon" (see Figure 10). Saint George is one of the most popular of Christian saints.

According to legend, this dragon infested a marsh outside the walls of a city and, with his fiery breath, could poison



Fig. 10--Raphael, "Saint George and the Dragon."

all who came near. In order to placate the monster, the city furnished him with a few sheep every day. But when the supply

¹⁰Canaday, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

of sheep was exhausted, the sons and daughters of the citizens became the victims. The lot fell one day on the princess, and the king sadly sent her forth to the dragon. Saint George happened to be riding by and, seeing the young girl in tears, dedicated himself to God and killed the dragon with his spear.¹¹

The artist reveals his Christian background by showing the white horse of Saint George. White horses are symbols of both power and purity. Raphael even painted the innocent face of a sheep on this white horse to give the desired effect. The size of the dragon is not impressive; it only furnished a subject to reveal the strength and courage of Saint George.

Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) used mythological animals for another purpose in his engraving, "The Battle of the Sea Gods" (see Figure 11). He shows the sea as the habitation of his creatures in the picture. The mounts of his sea gods are creatures equipped with fins, and they are a combination of dragons, horses, and fish. Since horses were the chief means of land travel, the artist naturally used the thing he understood best to express his idea. Mantegna used fantasy to present creatures which were a mixture of land and sea animals and combined with the mythological dragon. Other

¹¹"Mellon Collection," National Gallery of Art Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), p. 2.



Fig. 11--Mantegna, "Battle of the Sea Gods"

creatures were portrayed with bodies which were part human and part animal.

The centaurs were mythological creatures with the body of a horse and the torso, head, and shoulders of a man. Sandro Botticelli's (1444-1510) "Pallas and the Centaur" has shown the sad face of the centaur as he realizes that his love and desire for the beautiful Pallas can never be satisfied because of their physical differences. The painting reveals the great strength of the centaur, but it also shows the sadness that he suffers (see Figure 12). On the other hand, Raphael used these same mythological pictures to show a scene of gaiety.

"Spring."²³ Even though the theme is a satisfying fusion of allegory and mythology; the treatment of the subject is by no means classic; the treatment of the figure of Flora reflects traces of the "International Gothic" style with her angular figure heavily patterned with brocaded flowers.²⁴

Giulio Carlo Argan states that Botticelli's use of mythological fantasy is accomplished with great skill.

As in medieval painting, the use of archetypes (of the human figure, in the case of Botticelli) calls for great skill and refinement on the artist's part if he is to represent them with any originality. He must be able to make us feel that his model is both old and new, both ancient and contemporary; that it belongs at the same time to the world of visual reality and to the world of ideas; that it is both itself and another, many others. Hence the discontinuous rhythm of Botticelli's line; first it suggests a continuity of movement that denies the figures any stable position in space, then it breaks off so repeatedly and abruptly that it reverses our initial impression and even creates a doubt in our mind as to the material existence of the image.²⁵

Botticelli's use of the delicate line to indicate the suggestion of clothing gives to the figures both a human and a spiritual quality. The Three Graces, lightly dancing, with thin veils floating over their bodies, are neither nude nor clothed.

It is impossible to say whether the movement of the figures is defined by the bodies or the veils, or whether the veils respond to the motion of the dance or the motion of the wind. These are airy figures, clad in the gauze of the atmosphere, just as the figure of Flora, standing beside them is wreathed in flowers, is both woman and garden.²⁶

²³Giulio Carlo Argan, Botticelli (Skira, 1957), p. 27.

²⁴Newton, op. cit., p. 118.

²⁵Argan, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁶Ibid., p. 29.



Fig. 12--Botticelli,
"Pallas and the Centaur."

Raphael Sanzio

(1483-1520) painted a picture called "Galatea," using mythological centaurs, cupids, and nymphs (see Figure 13). Galatea is riding in a chariot drawn by two dolphins. She is in the center of a gay group of centaurs and nymphs that are laughing and milling around her. Through the use of these figures the artist has portrayed the myth of "cupid's bow" as well as

the free intermixing of the centaurs and women. Although the nymphs are also mythological beings, they are painted as nude women with normal human bodies. The cupids are normal appearing little boys except for the tiny wings sprouting from the shoulders. However, these wings do not seem to be the means by which they fly. Their movement through the air seems to be the result of weightlessness rather than motion. The wings are always lifted as though they were in flight even when the cupid is seated. The painting is an interweaving of human and mythological figures to express the beauty of love.



Fig. 13--Raphael, "Galatea"

love affair with a mortal, was to appear in disguise. This time he appeared to Europa as a white bull. He paraded before her and her maidens, and she was so pleased that she sat on his back. He went away with her to an island where three sons were born to them. The events are shown in sequence. The artist shows Europa in the foreground as she gets onto the bull; then she is shown again in the middle ground and also in the distance.¹² "The Rape of Europa" has the same

Paolo Veronese
(1528-1588) approached the problem in a different way. He made use of both animal and human figures in his "Rape of Europa" rather than a combination of both (see Figure 14).

Europa, the daughter of the King of Tyre, was the object of one of Jupiter's numerous love affairs. His custom, when engaged in a

¹²Canaday, op. cit., p. 28.



Fig. 14--Veronese, "The Rape of Europa"

appeal as the fairy story of "Beauty and the Beast," where the beast or animal is really the handsome prince.

Another interesting group of mythological beings was Pan and the satyrs. The satyr was a sylvan deity, a dweller of the forest, which was often represented with the tail and ears of a horse and given to riotous merriment and lasciviousness. Pan, a god of Arcadia, player of pipes, hunter, and protector of flocks, was the son of Hermes. He was usually represented with a goat-like face, the legs and horns of a goat, and sometimes with a tail. Pan and satyrs appeared much alike, with the result that in Renaissance and modern times the types have become almost indistinguishable.¹³

¹³The Greek Tradition (author not given) (Baltimore, 1939), p. 60.



Fig. 15--Bellini, "The Feast of the Gods."

Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1430-1516) made use of classical mythology for his painting, "The Feast of the Gods" (see Figure 15). The subject of the painting follows quite literally Ovid's account of the origin

of an ancient festival at which an ass was sacrificed to Priapus, god of fertility.

In a woodland dell the gods are gathered to feast and drink. Cybele, as hostess, is seated in the center, with a bowl of fruit before her. Other deities are identified by their attributes; Zeus, for example, by his eagle; and Neptune, by his trident. Priapus, having waited until the revelers are drowsed by wine, stealthily approaches the sleeping Vesta, goddess of chastity. But at this moment Silenus' ass brays, rousing the gods, who laugh at Priapus' discomfiture. Angered by the joke, as Ovid tells us, Priapus demanded the yearly sacrifice of an ass.¹⁴

"The beauty of the picture lies in its transmutation of sensuous experience into dream, through the creation of a magical world in which nature and the godlike figures express a state of ideal being."¹⁵

¹⁴Fern Rusk Shapley, Later Italian Painting in the National Gallery of Art (Washington, D. C., 1960), p. 30.

¹⁵Canaday, op. cit., p. 30.

"Orpheus" is the title of another mythological painting by Bellini in which he uses a satyr (see Figure 16). Orpheus was a musician who played with such charm that even the rocks and trees were moved. He went into Hades to seek the release of his wife, Eurydice. Orpheus won her back by the consent of Pluto on the

condition that he was not to look back. He looked back; so he lost Eurydice. Hades is pictured as a pleasant place. The satyr is a my-



Fig. 16--Bellini, "Orpheus"

thological figure who dwells in Hades and has been victorious over Orpheus. The scene shows both the act and result of Orpheus' effort to win Eurydice back to himself.

The "Bacchus and Ariadne" of Tiziano Vecelli Titian (1477-1576) makes use of the satyr as a childlike figure who is echoing the merriment of the other figures (see Figure 17). The subject was a scene from the story of the love of Bacchus for Ariadne, who had been deserted by Theseus on the island of Naxos. Ariadne, lamenting her sad fate on the shore, was overtaken by Bacchus, who leaped from his chariot to the ground to console her. Behind him the little band of girls



Fig. 17--Titian, "Bacchus and Ariadne"

and satyrs sweeps forward out of the forest, clashing cymbals and carrying the dismembered limbs of goats.¹⁶ The satyrs and other mythological figures were sometimes used in allegorical paintings to express the painter's feeling.

The "Allegory" painted by Lorenzo Lotto (ca. 1480-1556) was a cover for Bernado Rossi's "Bishop of Treviso" portrait (see Figure 18). Covers on portraits, usually attached by hinges, were not uncommon around 1500. The allegory shows the choice of virtue as opposed to vice. On the side of vice a wine-guzzling satyr is sprawled among his jugs in a flowering meadow. The clouds gathering above him and the floundering ship add to the mood of the picture on the side of vice.

¹⁶Newton, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

Virtue is represented as a naked child who is picking up instruments. The compass, square, and flute refer to cultural pursuits, which for the Renaissance man represent virtue. The left side is lighted by the bright sunlight. This is the side of virtue, and Rossi's coat of arms is also on this side. High to the left a winged cupid chases up the path of a steep hillside. The basic meaning of the allegory is clearly a moral warning of good and evil based on the virtues and vices.¹⁷



Fig. 18--Lotto, "Allegory"

Andrea Mantegna (1431-1505) painted "Wisdom Triumphant over the Vices," a stage-like presentation, which was a victory of good over evil (see Figure 19). Mantegna pictures Minerva charging in from the left to clear out a crowd of monsters from the Grove of Virtue. Some of the monsters bear standards symbols such as the centaur, which means brutish sensuality. "The Mater Virtutum imprisoned in the olive tree to the left helpfully describes the general nature of

¹⁷Shapley, op. cit., p. 26.

of the scene; in the sky at the upper right three virtues await the outcome of the housecleaning."¹⁸ The theme, of course, is the triumph of moral force or wisdom, personified by Minerva. In its complete didacticism the picture reverts to the medieval type of allegory, but Mantegna has given a fine forward rush to the figure of the goddess and the vices who flee before her. The swamp in the foreground with the Bosch-like figures presents some imaginary details such as the figures without arms, the satyr, and the centaur. The



Fig. 19--Mantegna, "Wisdom Triumphant Over the Vices."

¹⁸Canaday, op. cit., p. 26.

clouds forming human faces to the left of the virtues in the sky reveal the power of Mantegna's fantasy.¹⁹ The landscape with its low horizon and ancient rocks at the left which glow into a volcanic outbreak have a strange effect of foreshadowing twentieth century Surrealism.²⁰



Fig. 20--Piero di Cosimo, "Allegory"

(see Figure 20). In Piero's "Allegory" every level of life

The "Allegory" of Piero di Cosimo (ca. 1462-1521) does not picture the mythological figures of the centaurs or satyrs, but his creatures are the illustration of a theory seriously held by his contemporaries; that in primitive times, when man existed so nearly at the level of a beast, promiscuous mating produced such hybrids

¹⁹Newton, op. cit., p. 117.

²⁰Ernest T. DeWald, Italian Painting (New York, 1961), p. 333.

is depicted. The primitive sea life has become fused and joined to the human form. The animal life is shown by the horse as he stands on level ground with the being that is both human and divine. Animal strength is shown in the hind quarters of the horse. Human beauty is revealed in the nude breasts and face of the figure while divine power is represented by the wings. This is an allegory of life from the primitive fish to the divine creature who is not earth-bound but flies as well as walks.



Fig. 21--Botticelli, "Allegory of Spring"

Sandro Botticelli (1444-1510) painted the "Allegory of Spring," also entitled "La Primavera," for one of the Medicean country houses (see Figure 21). The mythological subject was

taken from a poem by Lorenzo's favorite poet, Poliziano. The participants in the picture are both mythological and allegorical. "The pregnant figure of Spring stands . . . static yet lithe in the center of the picture. On the right, Flora and a nymph pursued by the wind move inward and forward through the thicket; on the left, the Three Graces dance in a close circle. Mercury turns his back on them. Overhead a flying Eros discharges an arrow."²¹

In the "Allegory of Spring" Christianity and paganism have met and fused. The artist merely reached back into the religious iconography to illustrate his subject matter. Spring, the central figure of the painting, is derived iconographically from the Virgin in an "Annunciation" by Baldovinetti (see Figure 22).²² The Virgin with her gestures and position is merely lifted from the religious setting to the allegorical scene and takes her place as



Fig. 22--Baldovinetti, "The Annunciation."

²¹Newton, op. cit., p. 118.

²²Gould, op. cit., p. 26 (Tracing made of "The Annunciation").

In the "Allegory of Spring" Botticelli has indulged in allegorical and mythological fancy and created another world which is convincingly real.

A different use of allegory was made by Giorgione da Castelfranco (ca. 1478-1510) in "The Tempest." The original meaning of "The Tempest" has been lost, but it is so provocative to the imagination that it can have meaning for anyone who wishes to indulge in it (see Figure 23). This allegory



Fig. 23--Giorgione, "The Tempest"

is dreamlike in nature and not quite so clear as the "Allegory of Spring." The scene has the fantastic inconsequence of a dream. Phillips relates "The Tempest" to Surrealism.

And this dreamlike apparitional fantasy of a nude woman nursing her child in wild weather and the strange details like the twin columns, meaning we know not what, all the incongruous imagery sets up in the beholder what is analagous to, although probably innocent of, our ultra modern 20th century preoccupation with the subconscious as it has recently permeated pictorial art.²⁷

"The Tempest" could be a dream such as anyone might have experienced, or it may have been an illustration for a poem.

The Italian artists used fantasy to express their reaction to experiences from the real world through personal interpretation, imagination, and inventiveness.

²⁷Duncan Phillips, The Leadership of Giorgione (Washington, 1937), p. 26.

CHAPTER IV

THE USE OF FANTASY BY THE NORTHERN EUROPEAN ARTISTS OF THE PERIOD FROM 1250 TO 1650 A.D.

The main subjects and themes used by the Northern European artists were religious and secular. There was not so much interest expressed in mythological subjects by the Northern European artists as by the Italian artists. The Northern European artist was more interested in religion and religious manuscripts than he was in the gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome. Religious art was expressed in the use of sacred subjects and in the presentation of the evil effects of sin. The secular life of the people was also a popular subject for the artist. Fantasy was used to present all kinds of beastly, grotesque, and apparitional creatures of the imagination and dream world. Allegory was used by the artist, but it will not be discussed separately. The artists' presentation of fantasy was a result of the period and influences under which they lived.

In the Late Middle Ages every class of society received its views on life from the teachings of the church. Besides these official religious doctrines there existed a rapid growth of superstition. Magic flourished during the fifteenth century. It was inherited from the pre-Christian beliefs of

Germans, Celts, Slavs, and classical peoples, and dated back to paleolithic times. The church found it impossible to stamp out these primitive notions. This was to be expected because many priests came from homes where the truth of magic was firmly believed, and they could not completely free themselves from this environment. Even educated theologians and philosophers believed in the existence of evil spirits and in the ability of witches to use the evil spirits for wicked purposes. The efforts of the church to put down heretical teaching increased in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but heresy and magic gained ground because the clergy did not increase in the effectiveness of their work.¹

Such was the virility of the belief in witches that when lay influences began to dominate the life and thought of western Europe a regular cult of witchcraft grew up. It was thought by many that as God was creator of all things beneficent, so the devil, His opposite, possessed a corresponding power over evil. Small wonder that the people called upon the devil to aid them against their enemies, real or fancied! The worship of the evil one was carried on in many communities by groups of witches or warlocks, called covens. Witches were active agents of the devil. They conducted meetings known as sabbats, to which they were said to fly through the air on broomsticks. In their ritual there were singing, dancing, and ceremonies in which the devil, as either a man or an animal, preferably a goat, was worshiped with disgusting rites. Witches possessed all sorts of power to do extraordinary things. They could cause rain or hail, blight fields or make them fertile, cause babies to be stillborn, and make invalids of children. Strange sexual irregularities occurred, such as the union of men with succubi and women with incubi. The offspring was half devil, half human.²

¹Lucas, op. cit., pp. 140, 151.

²Ibid., p. 151.

These vulgar practices were opposed by the Catholic Church. Church tribunals condemned warlocks. This resulted in the famous bull Summis Desiderantes being issued in 1484-92, which condemned the practice of witchcraft in Rhenish Germany and adjoining countries. The paintings of the Northern European artists reflect the idea of the belief in superstition and magic. Vernon Lee comments that "they have also a beastly love of horrors. . . . gruesomeness of lewd, warty devils, made up of snouts, hoofs, bills, claws, and incoherent parts of incoherent creatures; of perpetual skeletons climbing in trees."³

The nine paintings to be discussed in this chapter consist of one mythological subject, one religious allegory, one sacred religious fantasy, five other religious paintings which are a combination of religious subject matter of good and evil, and one scene from the secular life of the people.

The example of mythology is seen in a tapestry called "The Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestry" (see Figure 24). This tapestry was done by a French or Flemish late fourteenth-century artist. The unicorn is a symbol of purity. He has the body of a horse, the hoofs of a stag, the tail of a lion and one horn in the center of his forehead. The unicorn in its early interpretations was a symbol of Christ, but here it becomes also a symbol of courtly love. The change came about through a series of reinterpretations. The unicorn

³Lee, op. cit., p. 14.



Fig. 24--"The Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestry" (Detail).

taken alive. As the legend grew the belief developed that the unicorn could be conquered by a virgin; confronted by a pure maiden, he would lay his head in her lap. But in the early Middle Ages the eternally fascinating tales were adapted to the Christian symbolism of the Virgin Mary and Christ. By the time of the tapestry shown here the symbolism had reverted to one of courtly love, but intermingled with its religious meaning.⁴

Another picture which was more of a religious nature is the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (see Figure 25). The German artist, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), published the book of the Revelation of St. John on Patmos in 1498. The text was illustrated with woodcuts and "The Four Riders of the

has been a remarkably persistent mythological beast, one which many writers claimed to have seen with their own eyes. Four centuries before Christ it was described in Greek literature as a powerful animal that no creature could overtake. In the first century after Christ the Roman Pliny described it as a beast that could not be

⁴Canaday, op. cit., p. 26.

Apocalypse" is one of the illustrations that was appropriate to the troubled times through which Germany was passing at the end of the fifteenth century. The horsemen of Death, Famine, War, and Plague were riding destructively through the land. Dürer invented an imagery for the people that was as vivid as St. John's written words.



Fig. 25--Dürer, "The Four Riders of the Apocalypse."

"The combination of riotous symbolism, mystery, and allegory in the text would . . . be impossible to translate into visual terms, yet Dürer seems to manage it with ease."⁵ The figures in Dürer's woodcut are the most important aspect of the picture,

⁵Newton, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

but landscape is even more important in relation to figures in a painting by Massys.

Cornelis Massys (1531-1553), a Flemish artist, painted a landscape called "The Arrival in Bethlehem" (see Figure 26). For many years this painting was called an "Imaginary Landscape" because of its slight emphasis on the religious theme.



Fig. 26--Massys, "The Arrival in Bethlehem."

The story is told in separate episodes. It begins in the left foreground, where Mary and Joseph lead their tired beasts along the road to Bethlehem. The figure on the bridge is no biblical character but a traveling scholar such

as might be met on any road in the artist's time. At the right, in the inn yard of Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph kneel with shepherds beside the new born child to whom the people of the town bring gifts. The landscape is a landscape of fairyland and fancy where everything happens at once. "In the center a river winds through the rich land to the sea, past fantastic, tower-crowned crags. From the middle of this river rises a castle, its lord welcoming a lady crossing the drawbridge. Outside its walls a hunter shoots at a heron in the moat; a woman washes clothes in the river and lays them to dry on the grass."⁶ Massys has taken a biblical event and placed it in

⁶The Metropolitan Museum of Art Miniatures (author not given) (New York, 1951), p. 10.

a Flemish setting of the time. Other Flemish painters departed from the sacred religious subjects to more fantastic portrayal of religious ideas.

The most fantastic, grotesque, and apparitional art was produced by Flemish painters in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Bosch is the outstanding artist of this group. The subjects and ideas of his painting are religious or have religious implications yet "he mixes the local realism with fantasy and invention, the sacred with the obscene, the accurately truthful portrait with the caricature, a primitive 'distortion' with amazingly sensitive exactitude, the amusing with the sublime."⁷ Canaday expresses Bosch's fantasy this way: "Bosch puts the logic of the visible to the service of the invisible . . . and he organizes and articulates his inventions into something more vivid than the . . . mortal eye can see."⁸

"While our present-day Surrealists explore the subconscious mind for their fantasies, the nightmare, of course, in Bosch's late-Medieval day was provided by religion. His horrors, while in detail the product of his imagination, pictured a plausible Hell to the people of the Middle Ages, and were of general interest to everybody."⁹ Bosch's unnatural yet

⁷Sheldon Cheney, A New World History of Art (New York, 1959), p. 445.

⁸John Canaday, The Artist as a Visionary, Metropolitan Seminars in Art, Portfolio 12 (New York; 1959), p. 12.

⁹"New Books" (Book Review of Howard Daniel's Hieronymus Bosch), American Artist (Nov., 1947), pp. 40-41.

material beings, pieced together with artistic rather than natural logic, were a perfect vehicle for his severe, moralizing exaltation of basic Christian ideals.¹⁰



Fig. 27--Bosch, "The Garden of Worldly Delights"

Hieronymus Bosch's (ca. 1460-1516) "Garden of Worldly Delights" best illustrates his fantastic imagery (see Figure 27). The painting, in three parts, is a triptych. The "Garden of Eden" and "Hell" are the left and right panels. The panels tell respectively of man's creation in innocence and of his consequent damnation. The left panel, "The Garden of Eden," tells of Adam and Eve's creation shown in a garden

¹⁰Charles D. Cuttler, "The Temptation of St. Anthony," The Art Bulletin (June 26, 1957), p. 122.

where the animals of the earth wander at peace with one another. The large central panel, "The Garden of Earthly Delights," shows the pleasures of the flesh but with full consciousness of the medieval connotations of the sinfulness of fleshly indulgence.

In the third panel, "Hell," all delights are abandoned in a vision of pure evil where logic and illogic are indistinguishable from one another. Although this is a hell where some physical tortures take place, these tortures are the smallest part of a hell where the real torture is spiritual, where corruptions, deformities, monstrous growth, mutilations, and agonizing transformations are the norm. The damned soul is wracked less by physical pain than by its existence in a world where all reason and order have been grotesquely transmuted by some cancerous misdirection of divine order.¹¹

The right panel, "Hell," is selected to point out some specific examples of fantasy (see Figure 27). Bosch defies the law of nature, ignores the barriers between man and beast, between human works and the works of nature. "Hell" is a nightmarish circus where swarms of naked bodies are mixed with evil grotesqueries. Even though one can recognize parts of beings which belong to the real world, they are put together in such a way as not actually to exist in that combination. In the upper left part of the panel there is a pair of very large human ears with a blade-like piece of metal between them. This figure looks like a modern-day rocket which is about to be launched. Just below this figure, right in the midst of Hell glaringly illuminated, in sharp

¹¹Canaday, The Artist as a Visionary, p. 12.



Fig. 28--Bosch, "Hell" (Detail)

jagged outlines, stands a monster. Franger vividly describes this creature:

Its feet are shod in large boats, and its two legs are withered, rotten tree-trunks. A hybrid joint, half knee half elbow, leads to the shoulder, out of which bulges a gigantic broken egg-shell, the monster's rump. The egg-shell, pallid as a corpse, is pierced by the withered branches of the leg-stumps. The head is turned back to look over the shoulder. Out of the want, melancholy face the eyes, which do not meet our gaze, look out into the night of Hell. As head-gear the monster wears

a disc on which is a pink bagpipe with hooded, lecherous couples ceremonially prancing around it. The inside of the egg is a Nobiskrug; a fantastic tavern lit by flickering flames, where three guests sit before a jug on a bare table, while the hellish hostess fills another vessel from the barrel. A man who has grown tired of this spectral hospitality is leaning over the edge of the egg-shell, gazing at the icebound water in which the two boats, the monster's feet, are frozen fast.¹²

The head of the monster is that of a real person, but it is combined with unreal parts to make this monster of hell.

In the lower section of the picture there is a mammoth night jar with luminous eye and human arms and hands (see Figure 28). A naked man has been thrust head first down its gullet. A hooded pig caresses its human companion. A pale-faced ape joins a group of agonizing people and chatters above their heads. "Other creatures, wild, domestic, credible, and fantastic; beast, fowl and reptile, mingle with the hapless men and women in the seething activity of Hieronymus Bosch's Hell."¹³

The musicians' corner of the panel, the lower left portion, presents a victim with outstretched arms strung on the wires of a harplike instrument which projects from a large lute. There is a shield worn by a being resembling a white rat, with a hand severed at the wrist and stuck with a pruning knife, but balancing half a pair of dice on two fingers.

¹²Wilhelm Franger, The Millennium of Hieronymus Bosch (London, n.d.), p. 68.

¹³"New Books," op. cit., pp. 40-41.

Bosch's paintings have unearthly horizons, with their dreamlike beauty and their surrealistic detail. His colors are startlingly clear and jewel-like; which contributes greatly to the psychological atmosphere of his works (see Figure 29 for an example of his color).

The people in Bosch's paintings stand like accessories in front of the landscape, not really within the landscape space, nor surrounded by air. "His large but geographically visualized landscapes have a very high horizon and seem to be surveyed from a tower, the figures on the other hand have their own lower-lying horizon, are upright and seen without foreshortening." Bosch does not attempt to produce the illusion of reality by careful and painstaking study of the human figure.

The use of dream world figures was made by Pieter Brueghel, another Flemish painter. There is much similarity between some of Brueghel's paintings and those of Bosch. "Both artists



Fig. 29--Bosch,
"Death and the
Miser."

¹⁴Max J. Friedlaender, Early Netherlandish Painting from Van Eyck to Bruegel (London, 1956), pp. 57, 58.

crowd their canvases with imagery, and both are compelled by the riotous quality of their visual imagination to invent a vast expanse of landscape filled with small figures."¹⁵ But whereas Bosch's world is the world of dreams inhabited by monsters, Brueghel's is the world of everyday life, sometimes twisted by his temperament into a pattern of absurdity.



Fig. 30--Brueghel, "The Temptation of St. Anthony."

Pieter Brueghel's (ca. 1525-1603) "Temptation of St. Anthony" is an example of his fantastic rendering of hellish apparitions (see Figure 30). The creatures in this painting are composed of human and animal bodies or parts of bodies, and even of all sorts of other objects; so that the saint is relegated to one side, and seems almost of secondary importance.

¹⁵Newton, op. cit., p. 159.

The principal figure, St. Anthony, appears twice without being in the least conspicuous. A concealment of the real subject is thoroughly characteristic of Brueghel.

On the one hand, we see the Saint withdrawn into quiet seclusion near the wood, in the dark of the hermit's cave in the rocks, roofed in wild rough-hewn boards, beset by only a few apparitions; by beings half-devil, half-animal. The numerous other scenes of grotesque fantasy that are to be discerned in this beautiful landscape literally baffle description.¹⁶

As fantastic as Brueghel painted the scene, Martin de Vos was more extreme in his presentation of it.



Fig. 31--Martin de Vos, "Temptation of St. Anthony"

¹⁶Gustav Gluck, Pieter Brueghel the Elder (London, 1916), p. 23.

"The Temptation of St. Anthony" by Martin de Vos (1523-1603), of the Netherlands, shows a more dramatic presentation of the event (see Figure 31). There is every conceivable kind of combination of beast, animal, and man. They are attacking St. Anthony with all possible force and intensity in the temptation. Since the horrors of hell have always defied verbal description, Martin de Vos, through the use of fantasy,



Fig. 32--Floris, "Fall of the Angels."

presents a living, vivid description of the battle between St. Anthony and temptation. Another battle of good and evil is expressed in a painting by Floris.

The "Fall of the Angels" by Frans Floris (1516-1570), of the Netherlands, pictures the battle between the rebel angels and Michael and his

band of angels (see Figure 32). The wicked angels are seen in the clouds, already in the form of monsters, being cast down headlong by Michael. "Here St. Michael as the leader has hurried on in front to his companions and stands, fighting among the bodies of the fantastically-formed, multitudinous rabble of Hell, that drifts down from the open Heavens in a long stream, followed and chased by a band of angels fighting with swords and spears."¹⁷ Not all fantasy is as dreadful as this.

Pieter Brueghel (ca. 1525-1603) uses fantasy in a humorous way in his "Land of Cockaigne" (see Figure 33). The "Land of Cockaigne" uses fantasy to show Brueghel's world of everyday life, twisted by his temperament into a pattern of amusement. The theme here is satiation, of gluttony. Three men in the garb of soldier, farmer, and clerk show that such folly occurs without discrimination. They are fed to the gills and spread out beneath a tree near which an egg with a spoon in it walks about on legs to aid its own consumption. In the background a pig with a slice cut out of his back and a knife tucked through the skin of his side moves happily along. On the tree overhead is a circular tray or table with vessels for food on top. The table is tilted in such a way that if it actually existed this way in real life, the vessels and food would fall off. The tilting of the table enables one to see a top view with all the contents clearly.

¹⁷Gluck, op. cit., p. 26.



Fig. 33--(After Brueghel, the Elder), "The Land of Cocaighe."

This is the kind of view that Cezanne and later the Cubists presented to show more than the eye could see in perspective. From under the roof of a penthouse on which tarts are growing, a knight looks out, while a roasted fowl flies into his mouth. A roasted fowl lies ready on a plate. In the background a man with a spoon is eating his way through a mountain of butter. The use of fantasy here is very effectively demonstrated by the artist. He has even used round shapes to emphasize the theme of overeating.

The fantasy of the Northern European artists was primarily religious, although it was expressed in many cases in

the form of grotesque beings. The extraordinary fantasies of Bosch and others provided a precedent for the Surrealist painters of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The period following the close of the Middle Ages was rich with painting, sculpture, and decorative design, which revealed the spirit of the people. The art of that period revealed the influence of the church upon the minds of the people. The art of the age further revealed the common existence of the people with their hopes and fears about both the present and the future life.

To show what the future life would be like was most difficult because there could be no firsthand knowledge of it. Since the "revival of learning" had placed new emphasis on the gods of Greece and Rome, these gods were easily incorporated into the art of the day with varying significance attached to them. They became confused with the deities of the church.

Religious subjects were used by every artist of the period, 1250-1650 A.D., but religious fantasy was expressed differently by the Italian artists and the Northern European artists.

Fantasy was expressed by the Italian artists through the use of religious, mythological, and allegorical subjects. These three subjects were sometimes used in one single

painting, and they were also used individually and separately from each other. From the period 1250-1400, a period of intense religious interest followed. The artist used religious fantasy to show how an event or miracle might have taken place. He further used religious fantasy to explain logically the destructive forces of nature. By mixing fantasy with religious subjects, the Italian artists were able to show what they thought the life hereafter would be like. A combination of reality and absurdity produced fantasy that would express feeling about the unknown powers of the devil, and at the same time the artist was showing the beauty of heaven and the purity of Christ. By the use of wings on both the "good" and "evil" subjects, the painter explained how they moved about. He mixed religious and mythological figures such as John, the Baptist, and the Greek god, Apollo, in a character of moral purity and physical beauty. The Italian artist used mythological subjects in his paintings. Fantasy was used to relate the subject from the real world to those from the world of mythology. Allegory was used to present the triumph of Good over Evil. Even the dream world provided fantasy for the painter's expression. The Italian artists were influenced more by the culture of Greece and Rome; therefore, they used mythological subjects more than the Northern European artists.

The Northern European artists used religious subjects combined with fantasy which revealed the common life of the

people and the influence of religion upon it. The dread of the judgment of hell was a favorite subject and it lent itself well to the use of fantasy. The horrors were shown by the grotesque beings of human bodies and demon heads. Even the sins that were supposed to have resulted in judgment upon man were shown by the use of fantasy. And fantasy was used in a comical way to show the result of some of the degrading habits of contemporary society.

The use of a combination of religious, mythological, and allegorical subjects by the Italian and Northern European artists of the period 1250-1650 A.D. showed the thinking of the people of their day. Only by the use of fantasy were they able to bridge the gap between the real world in which they lived and the unreal world that they supposed to be all about them.

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