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Iconography

The iconographic approach to works of art primarily considers the meaning of subject matter. The term comes from two Greek words—*eikon,* meaning "image," and *graphe,* meaning "writing." *Iconography* is thus the way in which an artist "writes" the image, as well as what the image itself "writes"—that is, the story it tells. In an iconographic analysis of a work, it is possible, although not always advisable, to ignore the formal qualities. Nevertheless, as a general rule, iconographic studies focus on content rather than on form.

An important group of scholars who took the iconographic approach to works of art were those associated with the Warburg Institute. Founded in Hamburg, Germany, the Warburg moved to London before World War II to escape Nazi persecution. Erwin Panofsky[1] was a leading member of the Warburg, and a pioneer of the iconographic method. He distinguished three levels of reading works iconographically. He called the first level the "pre-iconographic"—that is, the level of "primary, or natural, subject matter." In Christian art, the figure of a man on a cross described as a man on a cross would be an example of a pre-iconographic reading. Describing the same image on a secondary level, which is the level of convention and precedent, would refer to it as Christ on the

Cross, or the Crucifixion. In this reading, the image is identified with the story of Christ's death as recounted in the New Testament Gospels. At this level, a text underlies the image.

The third level arrives at the intrinsic meaning of the image. It takes into account the time and place in which the image was made, the prevailing cultural style or the style of the particular artist, and the wishes of the patron. This is a synthetic level of interpretation, one which combines data from various sources. It includes cultural themes, available contemporary texts, texts transmitted from past cultures, artistic precedents, and so forth.

The approach related to iconography, called *iconology,* or the "science" (*logos*) of imagery, refers to the study of the larger program (if any) to which a work belongs. The distinction between iconography and iconology was characterized by another Warburg scholar, Sir Ernst Gombrich, in 1972.[2] Iconology, according to Gombrich, involves the reconstruction of an entire program, and therefore encompasses more than a single text. It is contained within a *con*-text, which includes a cultural as well as an artistic setting.

If we review these classifications in regard to the popular cartoon character of Mickey Mouse, they may become clearer. A pre-iconographic consideration of Mickey would read the image as a mouse having a circular face and large round black ears, who wears red shorts with white buttons and yellow shoes. In a second-level reading, we recognize the identity of the mouse as Mickey, because we are familiar with his attributes. That is, we know the conventional representation associated with this particular character. We know his form, what he wears, and also that he stands upright like a human, and behaves and talks like a human. If we are watching a movie, and we see Mickey shaking hands with the conductor Leopold Stokowski or getting into mischief with a sorcerer's magic, we can identify the movie as *Fantasia.*

If we are doing a third-level iconographic study of the intrinsic meaning of Mickey, we research his original comic strips, watch his old movies, read what has been written about him, and look at the way he has been depicted by artists other than his original creator. We would also have to consider the nature of his conception and evolution in the context of the Hollywood movie industry—the fact that his large round ears were derived from the reels of the early

movie projector, and that his face evolved from the elongated form of a rodent to a round shape so that he would appear less sinister and more childlike.[3] Since Mickey Mouse has become something of a cultural icon, he has taken on many meanings. We would have to consider some of these meanings in the context of twentieth-century America, as well as investigate the appeal or lack of appeal of Mickey Mouse in the United States and elsewhere.

An iconological study of Mickey Mouse would include more than a single image or text. Entire "programs," such as a series of movies, comic books, T-shirts, and so forth, would have to be considered. In addition to individual film clips, such as Mickey shaking hands with Stokowski or reading from a sorcerer's book of spells, we would have to analyze the underlying meanings of *Fantasia*. These might include the role of the artist in relation to magic, and even the history of civilization (the prehistoric animals). We would also need to know when the film had been conceived and produced, its connection with contemporary events, its intended audience, and the ways in which it was financed.

In this chapter, we take three works of art from different times and places, and subject them to a brief exercise in iconography. All three works have a common content—namely, the birth of a baby. The earliest example is the Indian relief sculpture of the second to third century A.D., the *Birth of Buddha* [16]. Its pre-iconographic reading would be as follows: A woman, who is larger than the other figures, stands at the center of the relief. She raises her arms to grasp the branches of a tree behind her. At the right (her left) another woman puts her arms around her. A small figure seems to emerge from the right side of the central woman, and is received by the woman at her right (our left). At the far left, a woman with a circle around her head places her hands together, and at the far right, another woman holds a kettle. On either side of the tree, at the upper right and left of the relief, are two figures with their hands together and circles around their heads. All these figures wear long dresses, or robes, with curvilinear folds. The large central woman also wears a necklace and heavy, pendant earrings.

The iconographic key to this relief lies in the small figure emerging from the side of the central woman. If we know the

16. *Birth of Buddha*, second–third century A.D. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

story, or "text," of the birth of the Indian prince Siddhartha, we recognize the woman as Queen Maya, the mother of Buddha. Her dress and jewelry are consistent with her royal status. According to the traditional "text" of his birth, Buddha emerged from his mother's side as she stood beneath a tree in her garden. The woman receiving Siddhartha and the woman with the kettle, therefore, are midwives. And the remaining figures are praying, for they recognize the holy nature of the newborn prince. They also have halos (the circles around their heads), which identify them as potential boddhisattvas—holy figures who have temporarily renounced heaven (or, in Buddhist terms, *enlightenment*) in order to help others attain it. When Siddhartha himself attains enlightenment, which he does while meditating under the pipal tree, he becomes the Buddha.

The intrinsic character of this relief and its relationship to a wider context are elusive, because it has been removed from its original

site. Nevertheless, one could consider it as a product of Gandharan art (second–third century A.D.), situate it in time, and compare it with other products of the same time and place. It projects an image of the miraculous birth of India's new religious leader and founder of a major world religion. As such, the iconography of this relief appeals to the universal sense that an unusual beginning, or birth, contains significant implications for the future.

The same sense informs the birth of Christ, which is referred to as the Nativity. But in Christian art, the actual birth is never represented. Instead, artists follow the theological texts in focusing on the miraculous conception of Christ. The first event in which we see Christ's human manifestation is just *after* his birth, when a midwife presents him to his mother.

In Giotto's fresco of about 1305, which depicts the Nativity scene [17], we see a woman (the midwife) handing the swaddled baby to his mother (the Virgin Mary). Other elements in this scene include a shed and a mountain, a seated old man in the foreground, an ox and an ass, five white sheep and one black goat, two standing men at the right, and five winged figures over the shed. The winged figure on the far right seems to be talking to the standing men. This is the pre-iconographic description of Giotto's *Nativity.*

There are many possible texts from which Giotto might have selected his image. Just as the story of Buddha's birth can be found in Buddhist texts, commentaries on Buddhist texts, and in orally transmitted folktales, so the sources for Christ's Nativity are numerous. The basic text, however, is the Gospel of Saint Luke (2:7): "And she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

Once we have identified the text of the Nativity, we can proceed to the identification of certain motifs in the painted image. We can identify the old man as Joseph, because the Bible tells us that he married the Virgin Mary, who was much younger than he. The shed refers to the stable where Mary gave birth, because there was no room in the inn. The ox and ass are farm animals, and therefore associated with stables. But we have so far left out the right side of the picture and the flying figures over the shed. For these, we must read on in the Gospel of Luke:

17. Giotto, *Nativity,* c. 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua.

> And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night [2:8]. . . . And the angel said unto them, "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." [2:10]

Now it seems that the standing men at the right are shepherds guarding their sheep, of which we see five. The flying figures over the shed are the angels, who bring the news of Christ's birth to the shepherds in their fields at night. Giotto has thus condensed two events, which occur simultaneously but in different places, into a single space. He has also, if we look again, altered parts of the text. For Mary is neither swaddling Christ nor laying him in a manger. Instead, she lies down and turns as a midwife hands Christ to her.

This was a fairly conventional alteration, for it is more seemly to represent Mary at rest, and the infant being handed to her by a midwife, than for Mary to be fussing with the details of infant care right after she has given birth.

So far we have surveyed the most literal features of the textual basis for Giotto's scene, which constitute Panofsky's second level of iconographic reading. Panofsky's third, synthetic level opens up many additional avenues of discussion. For example, why does Joseph rest and his eyelids droop when Mary, who has done all the work, is wide awake? The dozing Joseph is a convention, which we understand through precedent and tradition. Because Christ's true father, according to the Christian texts, is God, and not Joseph, the earthly father symbolically withdraws from the event by going to sleep. In this regard, Giotto's Joseph differs slightly from the precedent, for he is not sound asleep, and his eyes remain slightly opened.

Giotto has not only condensed two events—the Nativity and the Annunciation to the Shepherds—he has also condensed the interior of the stable with exterior landscape. He accomplishes this by the openness of the shed, which, along with the ox and ass, denotes the stable. The ox stares at Mary and Christ, whereas the ass bends its head indifferently. This refers to the role of the ox as an enlightened creature, which recognizes that an important event is taking place. The ass, in contrast, fails to see what is happening, and thus becomes symbolic of ignorance and sin.

Ox and ass stand inside the stable, while the sheep and the goat are outside [17]. The latter are meant to be read with the shepherds, at some distance from the Nativity. But they are not just any old sheep, because they are accompanied by a goat. They are symbolic sheep, and their juxtaposition with the goat refers to the account of the sheep and the goats at the Last Judgment. This is described in the Gospel of Matthew (25:31–33):

> When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

The positive and negative connotations of right and left, respectively, are contained in Matthew's text. And in Giotto's image, the negative character of the goat resides in its blackness, in contrast to the whiteness of the sheep. The conventional Christian opposition of left and right, negative and positive, ignorance and knowledge, sin and salvation, dark and light are symbolized by Giotto in the formal opposition of black and white.

In the case of Giotto's *Nativity*, it is possible to undertake an iconological as well as an iconographic study, because it is part of a larger program. The fresco is located on the north wall of the Arena Chapel in Padua, and is one of twenty-five narrative scenes from the life of Christ. The entrance wall depicts a monumental *Last Judgment*. The *Nativity* is located in its chronological sequence between the *Visitation* to the left on the chancel arch and the *Adoration of the Magi* to the right on the nave wall. But the program of the Arena Chapel is more complex than a simple narrative sequence of events.

In a 1947 article, Michel Alpatov[4] analyzed the vertical parallelism of the Arena Chapel's iconological program. The *Nativity*, for example, is above the *Last Supper* [18], and therefore vertically aligned with it. Alpatov describes this parallel as follows:

> . . . the *Nativity* opens the story of Christ's childhood, the *Last Supper* that of his Passion. In the thirteenth century, pictures of the Nativity showing the Child in a manger on an altar alluded to Christ's future sacrifice. Both scenes represent the mystery of incarnation: in the first of them that of the Second Person of the Trinity into human flesh, in the second—the transformation of bread and wine into Christ's flesh and blood. Moreover, Giotto tried to emphasize the visual resemblance of both scenes. Despite the Byzantine tradition, Giotto re-established in his *Nativity* the shed of Early Christian iconography, with a parallel in the edifice of the *Last Supper*. Giotto placed Christ in the *Last Supper* and the Virgin in the *Nativity* at the left part of the composition and insisted upon their resemblance by emphasizing both the Virgin's and John's tenderness towards Christ.[5]

In addition to vertical parallelism, the iconological programming of the Arena Chapel frescoes includes an entire system of prophecy and fulfillment woven through the scenes. Several aspects of that system converge in the *Nativity*. The metaphor of Christ as both the

18. Giotto, *Last Supper*, c. 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua.

shepherd of a human flock and the sacrificial lamb, for example, is related to the prior story—depicted in the top register of the chapel walls—of Joachim and Anna, Mary's parents. Joachim is represented as a shepherd who, in the opening scene, hugs a lamb. He has offered the lamb at the temple as a prayer for a child. But the priest rejects the offering—on the grounds that Joachim is too old—and shoves him toward a void. The dejected Joachim returns to his flocks and dreams of a child. He goes again to Jerusalem and embraces Anna at the Golden Gate.

In the *Nativity* these motifs recur: the shepherds, the sheep, and the seated, sleeping or dozing, foreshortened figure of the elderly father, whose child has been miraculously conceived. The embrace of Joachim and Anna at the entrance of Jerusalem foreshadows Mary's embrace of Christ in the *Nativity.* The prayer embodied by Joachim's lamb, rejected from the temple as Mary and Joseph were rejected by the innkeeper, is answered with Mary's birth. That she

becomes the mother of Christ fulfills yet another prophecy. Likewise, elements of the Nativity are carried forward in time to later events of Christ's life depicted by Giotto. For example, the unseeing ass is recapitulated in the sleeping soldiers of the *Noli Me Tangere* (*Do Not Touch Me*), in which Mary Magdalen reaches out to the risen Christ. In this scene, sleep stands for ignorance—neither the soldiers nor the ass recognize the significance of what is happening.

The shed and the background rock in the *Nativity* refer back in time to earlier scenes, but they convey additional significance in the future. On a literal level, the shed represents the stable. But on a symbolic level, its wooden material refers to the wood of the Cross, and the rock, although a natural feature of landscape, can refer to the church building. In the Gospel of Matthew 16:18, Christ says:

> And I say unto thee, That thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.[6]

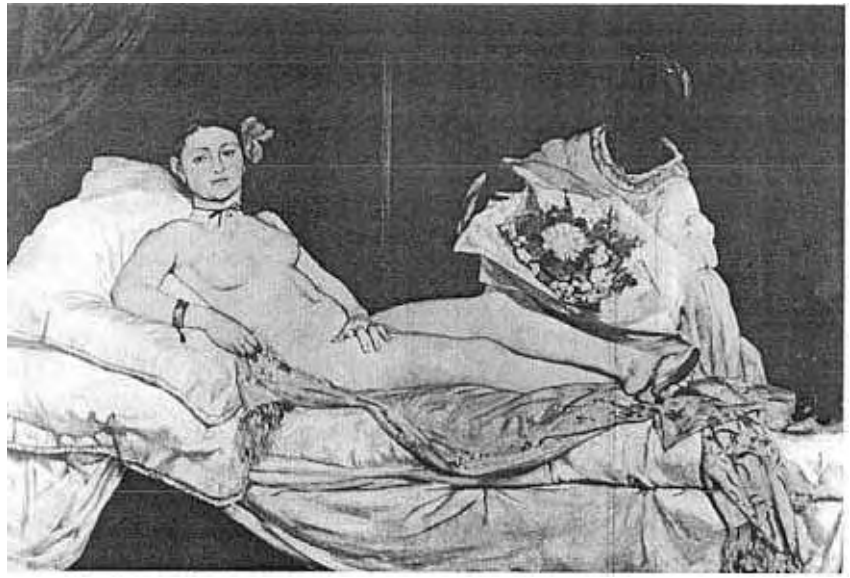
Together, the shed and the rock—wood and stone—constitute an architectural metaphor. Christ will lay the foundation of a new religion, the wooden Cross will be its central symbol, and the shape of the Cross will provide the standard outline for western church plans. The stone, on which Christ builds his Church, will last eternally—it will, in the words of the hymn, be "rock of ages." Metaphors of this kind direct our attention forward in time and are conventions of Christian iconography. They are based on the typological system of Christian thought, which created parallels between past, present, and future through paired events and personages. Giotto has incorporated all these parallels into the iconology of the Arena Chapel frescoes.

The late-nineteenth-century painting entitled *Te tamari no atua* (*The Child of God*) [19], by Paul Gauguin, shows a brown-skinned woman with her eyes closed, lying on a bed. She wears a blue cloth around her lower torso, and a cat sleeps at her feet. Seated at the far side of the bed is a woman in lavender holding a baby. Immediately on her right stands a figure with green wings. In the background at the right are several animals under a shed. Two vertical wooden forms seem to rise from the floor to the ceiling of a room. One is decorated with geometric designs, and the other is solid brown, with two diagonals that reach to the top of the picture. Thus the pre-iconographic reading.

19. Paul Gauguin, *Te tamari no atua*, 1895–96, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

Even without the title, there can be no doubt that the iconography of Gauguin's painting is related to the Nativity of Christ. The animals in the shed recall the site of Christ's birth. Both mother and child have golden halos. The winged figure by the seated woman can only be an angel. And the wooden post behind the seated woman evokes Christ's cross by virtue of its shape. All of these motifs more or less conform to the Christian texts. But there is much more to the iconography of this painting.

Gauguin has merged the Holy Land with the islands of the South Seas, where he spent the last years of his life, and Christian motifs with elements of Tahitian myth. For the other sources of *Te tamari no atua*, the iconographer has to turn to previous images and to the "text" of Gauguin's biography. The cat at the foot of the bed, for example, is related to Manet's *Olympia* of 1863 [20]. There, the cat denotes prostitution (a "cat house"), which is not exactly the case here. However, the woman on the bed is Gauguin's mistress, who was described by his art student in Tahiti as "a slovenly, lazy young woman of dubious moral character."[7] Manet's *Olympia* also refers to the Classical tradition of



20. Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

reclining females, with which Gauguin has merged his Tahitian mistress.

He also merged his mistress with the Virgin Mary, and this may allude to his personal connections to December 25. Significant events had occurred in his life around that time of year.[8] In 1877, his favorite daughter was born on December 24. His close friend Vincent van Gogh, with whom he had a stormy relationship, cut off his earlobe on December 23, 1888. Gauguin had a child by the mistress in this painting who was born within two weeks of Christmas, 1896. He therefore conceived the work around the time of his mistress's pregnancy. His related painting entitled *Be Be* (*Baby*) [21] has all the motifs of *Te tamari no atua* except for his mistress, her bed, the cat, and the totem pole. In *Be Be*, the angel is more prominent, and the woman holding the infant occupies the foreground. The iconography of these paintings is thus very much about the expected birth. But most of all, on a deeper level, the paintings are about Gauguin, and his identification with Christ.

For Gauguin, Tahiti was Paradise. In the Christian typological system, in which the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament, Mary is the new Eve, and Christ the new Adam, who redeems the

21. Paul Gauguin, *Be Be: Tahitian Nativity (Baby)*, 1896, Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

sins of the original Adam. Gauguin extends conventional iconography to include his own experience and relates it to the parallel between Tahiti and the Paradise that is refound through Christ's birth. Furthermore, the struggle between sin and salvation that runs through Christian history was a facet of Gauguin's personal struggle. He represented himself variously as a saint, as Christ, as a sinner, and as Satan.

In the bed, and the bedpost at the right, Gauguin has merged elements of the two cultures he knew well, Europe and the South Seas. Beds were used in Europe, but not in Tahiti. The painted decoration on the side of this bed is of the type used by Gauguin to depict floors in previous paintings.[9] He thus combines the notion of a floor (where Tahitians slept) with a bed (in which Europeans slept). The bedpost, which is a European feature, is nevertheless carved with "Maori architectural decoration."[10]

Finally, Gauguin juxtaposed the totem pole with the wooden

support that resembles the Cross. In this, he depicted the symbols that stood for the religious beliefs of the two cultures in which he lived. Both have an ancestral content, although they are expressed differently. That is, their "texts" differ, but their thematic content has points of commonality. The totem pole is literally an ancestral object, for the totem, usually in animal form, is the ancestor of a tribe. Gauguin's totem pole is carved in low relief and painted in the red and white geometric shapes typical of the South Seas.

The cross has a formal similarity to the totem pole in that it is thought of, and frequently represented, in conjunction with the image of Christ. In contrast to the totem pole, however, a human figure rather than that of an animal is depicted, or carved, on the cross. But the image of Christ on the Cross is also an ancestral motif, because (insofar as Christ is the Son) it mediates between God (the Father) and humanity (the children of God and Christ). Furthermore, there is a typological parallel between the Cross and the Old Testament Tree of Jesse.

The tree, and its wood, brings us back to Giotto's wooden shed in the *Nativity* and to the Gandharan relief showing the birth of Buddha. For Queen Maya gives birth to Buddha under a tree and, later, Buddha attains enlightenment while meditating under a tree. Trees were as symbolic in Indian religion as they are in the West. Long before Buddhism swept the Eastern world, tree cults had predominated, especially in India. They are found throughout early Mediterranean culture as well, and in both regions were connected with notions of a Cosmic Tree situated at the center of the universe. The tree is also a central symbol in Christianity: it bore the fruit that caused the Fall from Paradise, and it redeemed the Fall through the wood of the Cross. In all these instances, therefore, deeply buried as the implications of the tree and its wood may be, an iconographic interpretation that fulfills Panofsky's requirement of synthesis must take such implications into account.

The iconographic approach can also be applied to pictures and texts illustrating the myth of Arachne and Athena. In the mythical iconography of the tapestries woven by Arachne and Athena, the "text" was the myth itself. At first such texts are orally transmitted, and only later are written down, creating a kind of textual genealogy,

which can become quite complex as it extends through time and space. We can take as an example of this complexity the myth of the Rape of Europa, which Arachne depicted when she challenged Athena to the weaving contest. Europa was the daughter of King Agenor of Tyre. She was abducted by Zeus, who was disguised as a bull, and carried over the sea to Crete. There she gave birth to Minos and Rhadamanthus. Minos became king of Crete and, with Rhadamanthus, was made a judge in the Underworld.

The appearance of the myth in ancient Greece is evident from a scene on a red-figure vase of about 490 B.C. by the Berlin Painter [22]. Here, Europa grabs onto the bull's single horn and seems to rush along beside him. An early Greek source for this myth is Hesiod's *Catalogues of Women and Eoiae,* which is dated to about the late eighth to early seventh century B.C. It reads as follows:

> Zeus saw Europa the daughter of Phoenix [the Phoenician] gathering flowers in a meadow with some nymphs and fell in love with her. So

22. Berlin Painter, *Abduction of Europa,* c. 490 B.C., Museo Archeologico, Tarquinia.

> he came down and changed himself into a bull and breathed from his mouth a crocus [a sweet-smelling flower to entice Europa]. In this way he deceived Europa, carried her off and crossed the sea to Crete where he had intercourse with her. . . .[11]

Without the written text, it would be more difficult to identify the iconography of the scene on the vase. We would have to read it as a girl grabbing onto the horn of a bull and running alongside him. The myth of Europa was actually well enough known in antiquity to be mentioned and understood in passing references. For example, in the anonymous seventh-century B.C. Greek satire on epic warfare, *The Battle of Frogs and Mice,* Puff-jaw the Frog offers to carry a Mouse across the water on his back. The Mouse leaps willingly onto the Frog, wraps his paws around the Frog's neck, and settles down to enjoy the ride. But when black waves begin to rise up, he panics:

> He put out his tail upon the water and worked it like a steering oar, and prayed to heaven that he might get to land. But when the dark waves washed over him he cried aloud and said: "Not in such wise did the bull bear on his back the beloved load, when he brought Europa across the sea to Crete, as this Frog carries me over the water to his house, raising his yellow back in the pale water."[12]

In *The Anacreonta,* which are later than Hesiod, a lyric poet describes a painting of Europa's abduction:

> This bull, boy, looks like Zeus to me: he is carrying a Sidonian[?] woman on his back; he is crossing the wide ocean, and he cuts through the waves with his hooves. No other bull would have left the herd and sailed the ocean: he [i.e., Zeus] alone.[13]

The man who observes the ancient painting is in the same position as a modern iconographer. He confronts the unlikely image of a girl riding over the sea on the back of a bull. But, because he knows the "text" of the myth, he can match up the image with the words, and convey its meaning to the boy.

The story of Europa's abduction is most fully told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

> Majesty and love do not go well together, nor tarry long in the same dwelling-place. And so the father and ruler of the gods, who wields

in his right hand the three-forked lightning, whose rod shakes the world, laid aside his royal majesty along with his scepter, and took upon him the form of a bull. In this form he mingled with the cattle, lowed like the rest, and wandered around, beautiful to behold, on the young grass. His color was white as the untrodden snow, which has not yet been melted by the rainy south-wind. The muscles stood rounded upon his neck, a long dewlap hung down in front; his horns were twisted, but perfect in shape as if carved by an artist's hand, cleaner and more clear than pearls. His brow and eyes would inspire no fear, and his whole expression was peaceful. Agenor's daughter [Europa] looked at him in wondering admiration, because he was so beautiful and friendly. But, although he seemed so gentle, she was afraid at first to touch him. Presently she drew near, and held out flowers to his snow-white lips. The disguised lover rejoiced and, as a foretaste of future joy, kissed her hands. Hardly any longer could he restrain his passion. And now he jumps sportively about on the grass, now lays his snowy body down on the yellow sands; and, when her fear has little by little been allayed, he yields his breast for her maiden hands to pat and his horns to entwine with garlands of fresh flowers. The princess even dares to sit upon his back, little knowing upon whom she rests. The god little by little edges away from the dry land, and sets his borrowed hoofs in the shallow water; then he goes further out and soon is in full flight with his prize on the open ocean. She trembles with fear and looks back at the receding shore, holding fast a horn with one hand and resting the other on the creature's back. And her fluttering garments stream behind her in the wind.[14]

Ovid's version of the story is more elaborate than the Greek versions, but is essentially the same. They differ, however, in one important detail—in Hesiod it is the god who offers Europa a flower, while in Ovid, Europa offers *him* the flower. Most of the images that illustrate this myth do not depict the seduction, but represent instead the moment when the bull carries Europa over the sea. The iconographer, therefore, focuses on texts or parts of texts that describe Europa and the bull as they race across the sea.

In the *Fasti*, which explains the origins of the Roman calendar, Ovid also includes the story of Europa. This account roughly matches that of the *Metamorphoses*, except that there is more emphasis on the interaction between the girl and the bull while on the sea:

She held the bull's mane in her right hand, her drapery in her left; and her very fear lent her fresh grace. . . . Oft did she withdraw her girlish soles from the sea, and feared the contact of the dashing wave; often the god knowingly plunged his back into the billows, that she might cling the closer to his neck. On reaching the shore, Jupiter stood without any horns, and the bull was turned into a god. . . .[15]

In the *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods*, the second-century A.D. author Lucian elaborated on the activity accompanying the abduction. He relates the events through a dialogue in which the West Wind tells the South Wind what he has witnessed. He says that the sea became calm, that Cupids carrying torches "fluttered alongside just above the sea, occasionally just touching the water with their feet, . . . and singing the marriage hymn. . . ." Half-naked Nereids [sea nymphs] "rode alongside on dolphins. . . ." Tritons and other sea creatures danced around Europa, and the love goddess Aphrodite reclined on a shell. They went all the way from Phoenicia to Crete: "but when he set foot on his island, the bull was no more to be seen, but Zeus took Europa's hand and led her to the cave . . . blushing she was, and looking on the ground, for now she knew why she was being carried off."[16]

The iconography of Europa's abduction remained fairly constant for centuries, although its meaning occasionally varies. In Pompeian paintings and mosaics, there are several examples of Europa on the bull, and one in which Aphrodite and Cupid encourage the seduction beforehand. These are straightforward illustrations of the mythological text. In the Middle Ages, however, Ovid was "moralized," and brought into line with Christian allegory. Illustrations of the *Ovide moralisé* showing Europa on the back of the bull are allegories for Christ carrying off a human soul.[17]

In the Renaissance, with the revival of Classical texts, the story of Europa and the bull was taken up again by poets and painters. They shed the Christian gloss and returned to the mythological intent of the narrative. Ovid continued to be well known among humanist intellectuals, some of whom composed their own versions of his stories. In his long poem the *Giostra*, for example, the humanist Angelo Poliziano revived Ovid's account in two stanzas (1, 105, 106):

You can admire Jupiter transformed into a beautiful bull by the power of love. He dashes away with his sweet, terrified load, her

beautiful golden hair fluttering in the wind which blows back her gown. With one hand she grasps the horn of the bull, while the other clings to his back. She draws up her feet as if she were afraid of the sea, and thus crouching down with pain and fear, she cries for help in vain. For her sweet companions remain on the flowery shore, each of them crying "Europa, come back." The whole seashore resounds with "Europa, come back," and the bull looks round and kisses her feet.[18]

In addition to contemporary texts inspired by Classical mythology, the Renaissance produced new translations of the Classical texts. The Venetian humanist Lodovico Dolce translated the second-century A.D. Greek work of Achilles Tatius in 1546, and this was read by Titian.[19] Titian's *The Rape of Europa* [23] shows that he included the dolphins, Cupids, the distant mountains, Europa's companions on the shore, and Europa's pose from Tatius' text.[20] The painting was

23. Titian, *The Rape of Europa*, 1559–62, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

one of a series of so-called mythological *poesie* commissioned from Titian by King Philip II of Spain. The overall meaning of the iconological program of the *poesie* has so far eluded researchers. But the texts that informed the individual works, including the *Europa*, have been fairly well established.

Titian's *The Rape of Europa* became a "text" for Velázquez's painting entitled *The Spinners* [24]. As the court painter for Philip IV of Spain in the seventeenth century, Velázquez had access to the Spanish royal art collection, where he regularly saw Titian's work. In its role as "text," Titian's *Europa* was reinforced by Ovid's account of the weaving contest between Minerva and Arachne. Ovid's text reads as follows:

Arachne pictures Europa cheated by the disguise of the bull: a real bull and real waves you would think them. The maid [Europa] seems to be looking back upon the land she has left, calling on her companions, and, fearful of the touch of the leaping waves, to be drawing back her timid feet.[21]

24. Diego Velázquez, *The Spinners* (*The Fable of Arachne*), late 1650s, Prado, Madrid.

Here Ovid describes Arachne's picture, and we assume that his account was read by Velázquez as well as by Titian. When Velázquez depicted his own version of this event, however, he followed Titian's iconography more closely than Ovid's text. In *The Spinners,* Velázquez has painted a replica of Titian's *The Rape of Europa* in a complex scene that includes contemporary seventeenth-century women spinning in the foreground, and the mythological contest on a stage in the background. A copy of Titian's picture forms the backdrop of the stage.

Ovid's text, as we have seen in Chapter One, also describes the contest itself, and Minerva's rage at Arachne's skill. On the painted stage of *The Spinners,* Velázquez depicts the moment when Minerva strikes Arachne with the spindle:

> The golden-haired goddess was indignant at her success, and rent the embroidered web with its heavenly crimes; and, as she held a shuttle of Cytorian boxwood, thrice and again she struck Idmonian Arachne's head.[22]

In *The Spinners,* therefore, Velázquez juxtaposes Ovid's text with Titian's image. This, in turn, illustrates the point made in the Preface—namely, that a translation from one medium into another loses something of the original. In the case of Titian's painting, the image is "translated" from a sixteenth- to a seventeenth-century canvas: it is copied, and inserted into a new context. But the image itself is replicated. In the case of Hesiod, Ovid, Lucian, Achilles Tatius, and Poliziano, elements of text are changed or omitted. Since the translation from a written text to a picture is only more or less approximate, reading the image in the light of the text is never entirely complete. It invites further methodological approaches, which we consider in subsequent chapters.

NOTES

1. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York, 1962), ch. 1.
2. Ernst Gombrich, *Symbolic Images* (London, 1972), ch. 1.
3. Stephen Jay Gould, "Mickey Mouse Meets Konrad Lorenz," *Natural History,* May 1979, pp. 30–36.
4. Michel Alpatov, "The Parallelism of Giotto's Paduan Frescoes," *Art Bulletin* 29, no. 3 (1947): 149–54. Reprinted in *Giotto in Perspective,* ed. Laurie Schneider (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974); see pp. 111–12.
5. Ibid.

6. Note that "Peter," *petra* in Greek, means "rock."
7. Richard Brettell, "The Final Years: Tahiti and Hivaoa," in *Gauguin* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1988), p. 410.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. *Catalogues of Women and Eoiae* in Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Loeb ed. (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1982), p. 171; and p. 155: "Eoiae" refers to heroines who were introduced with the words ē oiē, "or like her."
12. *The Battle of Frogs and Mice*, in Hesiod, lines 70–80, p. 547.
13. *The Anacreonta*, in *Greek Lyric, II*, trans. David A. Campbell, Loeb ed. (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1988), p. 231.
14. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 844–75, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb ed. (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1984), pp. 119–21.
15. Ovid, *Fasti*, V, 608–17, trans. Sir James George Frazer, Loeb ed. (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1976), pp. 305–7.
16. Lucian, *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods*, trans. M. D. Macleon, Loeb ed., vol. VII (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1969), pp. 235–37.
17. Panofsky, fig. 15.
18. Ibid., pp. 29–30.
19. Harold E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, vol. III (London, 1975), p. 173.
20. Ibid. and p. 78.
21. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 103–7, p. 295.
22. Ibid., VI, 130–34, p. 297.