Velázquez's *Fable of Arachne* (*Las Hilanderas*): A Continuing Story*

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ABSTRACT: In contrast to Velázquez's most debated painting, *Las Meninas*, no consensus has yet coalesced around the interpretation of his *Las Hilanderas*. On the one hand this is due to the fact that this painting defies iconographical classification, and on the other hand to the favored method of interpretation which excludes formal elements. The starting-point of art-historical interpretation should be the indivisibility of form and content. As the author demonstrates in his article this approach produces surprising as well as convincing results.

As early as 1959 Ernst Gombrich in his *Art and Illusion* demonstrated convincingly that the creation of images which satisfy certain specific demands of versimilitude is achieved in a secular process of trial and error. According to him art does not start out by observing reality and trying to match it. It starts out by constructing "minimal models" which are gradually modified in the light of the beholder's reaction till they "match" the impression that is desired. In this process the resources which art lacks, such as movement, have to be compensated for by other means till the image satisfies the requirements made on it. This was why critics could believe that it was in pictorial vividness of representation that the poet resembled the painter, and that conversely one could speak of the image as a "speaking picture".

Paintings that defy iconographical classification tend to attract theories like a candle-flame does moths, particularly when they are by a famous artist. They pose an iconological challenge which is taken up anew by each successive generation. Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and *Las Hilanderas* (Figures 1, 2, 2a, 2b) fall into this category, although since the publication of Jonathan Brown's absorbing essay, "On the Meaning of *Las Meninas*", a consensus seems to have coalesced around his interpretation of Velázquez's most debated painting.[1]

Brown found the key for his exegesis in the prime source for our knowledge of classical art, Pliny's *Natural History*, of which Velázquez owned two different editions, as we know from the inventory of his library.[2] In Book 35 Pliny describes the remarkable relationship between Alexander the Great and Apelles, the prince of classical painting. He tells of Alexander's regular visits to the artist's studio, to whom he granted the exclusive right to paint his portrait. As an exceptional mark of his favour Alexander also presented Apelles with his favourite concubine, the beautiful Campaspe, who had fallen in love with the

Argumentation **7**: 29–43, 1993.

Fig. 1. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*. Madrid, Museo del Prado

artist while posing for him. From the fifteenth century onwards this expression of Alexander's boundless admiration for his court painter became an important element in the theoretical debate conducted by painters in their efforts to have their craft elevated to the status of a noble, liberal art, which would enhance

Fig. 2. Diego Velázquez, *Las Hilanderas* (*The Fable of Arachne*). Madrid, Museo del Prado.

their social standing. Their reasoning was that an art that enjoyed the patronage of kings and emperors is *ipso facto* a liberal art, because such august beings only bestow their favour and presence on activities which accord with their high rank. In *Las Meninas* Velázquez plays the role of Apelles, and Philip IV, seen in the mirror in the background, that of Alexander the Great visiting his court painter in his studio. The parallel becomes even stronger when we remember that Velázquez, like Apelles, had been awarded the sole right of portraying his ruler. Thus, according to Brown, "*Las Meninas* would appear fundamentally to be the record of a unique relationship between Velázquez and Philip IV, a relationship that guaranteed the noble status of the painter's art".[3]

I am convinced that Brown's interpretation, given here in the briefest outline, will not readily be contested. Why, one wonders, does it appear so much more convincing than all the other theories about *Las Meninas*? Its elegance lies above all in the fact that it is neither forced nor unduly complex, but on the contrary stands out because it is self-evident and simple, and yet clarifies so much. *Las Hilanderas* is a very different case. While all are unanimous in their

Fig. 2a. Detail of Figure 2.

praise of Velázquez for his technical skill in creating the illusion of movement and activity in his painting, there is still no consensus on any one interpretation, despite the many publications that it too has generated. The reason, as I see it, is that the commentators have failed to give due weight to this key aspect of apparent motion. So long as no agreement is reached, articles on *Las Hilanderas* will continue to appear. That justifies the following interpretation of this intriguing painting, one which includes many ingredients supplied by earlier authors. As we shall see, Pliny's *Natural History* also played a vital role in the genesis of *Las Hilanderas*.

On 18 October 1641, the feast of St Luke, the Leiden painter Philips Angel delivered an eulogy to his colleagues entitled *Tot lof der schilder-konst* (In Praise of the Art of Painting). The probable reason for this rather unusual way of

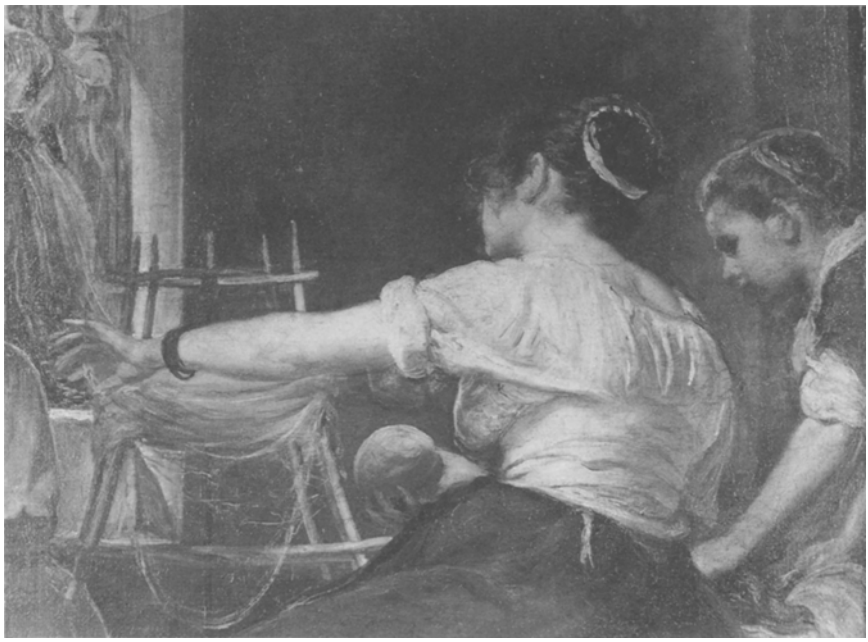

Fig. 2b. Detail of Figure 2.

marking the birthday of the patron saint of artists – a day which usually passed in a drink-befuddled haze – was the unregulated legal status of Leiden painters, who were not united in a guild or corporation, and were consequently exposed to fierce competition from out-of-town artists. When Angel's address was published the following year an ordinance was passed which banned any dealing in paintings, prints or drawings by artists from outside Leiden, the only exception being made for the annual fairs. Angel's discourse, in which the legend of Alexander making Apelles a present of Campaspe is held up as prime evidence for the noble status of painting, has only received the attention it deserves in the past few years.[4] It has been pointed out that unlike Franciscus Junius in his *De pictura veterum* of 1637 (the Dutch edition of which, *De schilder-konst der oude*, appeared in 1641), Angel was no great theoretician, and had little impact on later writers on art. However, this in no way implies that contemporary artists were likewise so unimpressed by his eulogy that it had no effect on their work, or that it does not reflect the ideals that were cherished by the painters of Leiden at the time.

Completely at variance with contemporary thinking, Angels's ideal painter aimed at a totally impersonal realism, which faced him with the impossible task

of imitating nature so closely that even his personal style was no longer discernible. It is understandable, then, that Angel should make such a point of the need for accurate observation, because in his view this was a failing of which even the greatest masters were guilty. Referring to scenes of the Rape of Proserpine (which may be an allusion to Rembrandt's picture of the subject; Figure 3),[5] Angel criticised both "battle painters" and "history painters" for giving static wheels to carriages which were being pulled along at full speed by galloping horses.

> Whereas they had correctly observed all the natural properties, they could have avoided this error if they had paid closer attention to natural movement, presenting us with the form as it truly appears, for whenever a cartwheel or a spinning-wheel is turned with great force one sees that, because of the rapid rotation, no spokes are really seen but only an uncertain shimmer of them, yet although I have seen many pictures in which carriage wheels are depicted, I have never seen this imitated properly, but with each spoke drawn or painted in such a way that the carriage did not appear to move, such that there was no distinction between a stationary carriage and one that was supposedly in motion.[6]

It is highly questionable whether Angel would have noticed this lack of apparent movement in paintings if he had not read Pliny, for there cannot be the slightest doubt that it was this source that opened his eyes to this shortcoming on the part of his colleagues. A pointer in this direction is supplied by his contemporary, the painter and writer Samuel van Hoogstraeten, in the following passage in his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* of 1678.

> If you intend depicting carriages moving at great speed, or chariots racing for prizes in the Olympic games, pay heed to your intention, for *Aristides* makes the wheels of carriages appear to turn, and our *Dou* has done the same in a whirling spinning-wheel.[7]

Van Hoogstraeten took his information from Pliny's biography of the second most famous classical painter, Aristides, or rather from Karel van Mander's adaptation of Pliny, *Het leven der oude antijcke doorluchtighe schilders* (1603), which Angel must also have used. Van Mander, who relied on the sometimes very free translation of Pliny by Antoine du Pinet, said of Aristides:

> He also made four-horse carriages, and so lifelike were they that one would swear that the wheels turned and rolled along.[8]

It is quite possible, of course, that Gerard Dou, who as a Leiden painter would undoubtedly have been among the audience in 1641, decided to take up the challenge posed by Angel and, if we are to believe Van Hoogstraeten, painted a spinning-wheel turning rapidly. If not a *topos*, however, this would have been more in the nature of an isolated demonstration of his skill, and not a regular practice. There is certainly no trace of any such illusionism in his surviving paintings, but that is hardly surprising, since creating such an illusion of movement would have required an almost "impressionistic" manner totally at odds with Dou's well-nigh invisible brushwork and "neatness", as Angel put it.[9]

Even if Van Hoogstraeten was mistaken in associating Dou's name with the

Fig. 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Rape of Proserpine*. Berlin, Gemäldegalerie SMPK.

depiction of movement, Angel certainly struck a chord with his call for the accurate observation of motion in turning wheels for the purpose of pictorial illusionism. One of the direct responses, to my mind, is the whirring spinning-wheel in Nicolaes Maes's *Woman Spinning* of c. 1655 (Figure 4).[10] Although Maes's style is meticulous it is never polished, and his use of blurring outlines was ideal for suggesting stroboscopic effects.

Another source, apart from Van Mander, which prompted Angel's appeal for the observation and depiction of movement was undoubtedly Junius's *De pictura veterum* of 1637.[11] Junius, like Angel, sketches a picture of the ideal artist. One of the "five principal points" to which he should pay special attention

Fig. 4. Nicolaes Maes, *Woman Spinning*. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

if he aspires to perfection is "Motus, et in eo Actio et Passio",[12] which Junius renders in his English translation as: "Motion or life, and therein Action and Passion". He continues:

> or, to put it more clearly, in the accomplished rendering of the properties one observes in inanimate objects, as well as in the natural expression of the motions perceived in animate things, when they do or undergo something notable.[13]

In this context Junius singles out two classical painters for their skill in recreat-

ing the appearance of motion and holds them up as models for the contemporary artist: Aristides, naturally (although it should be noted that Junius, who stays close to the Latin of Pliny, makes no mention of rotating carriage wheels), and Antiphilus. Of the latter he writes, with Pliny as his authority:

> He is likewise commended for a picture of spindle worke, wherein the threads of every spinning woman seem to make very great haste.

Pliny himself wrote:

> Antiphilus who is praised [...] for his Spinning-room, in which all the women are busily plying their tasks.[14]

I do not think it is a coincidence that Pliny's description of this famous classical painting could equally well be applied to the spinning-room in *Las Hilanderas*, where the suggestion of motion has always appealed so strongly to the imagination of historiographers, from Carl Justi to Jonathan Brown. In his monumental *Diego Velazquez und sein Jahrhundert* of 1888 Justi even described *Las Hilanderas* as Velázquez's most "animated" painting,

> [...] a picture in which the representation of motion in the motionless could scarcely be carried further. This impression is even heightened by the forms and lines. That network of stiff parallel lines in the Meninas is here replaced by circular lines, as in the scheme of the groups [...] in the implements of the craftswomen. And as after a certain point motion becomes audible, the picture seems filled with the most marvellous concert of sounds, the whiz [sic] of the spinning-wheel, the creaking reel, the purring cat and the subdued chatter of the ladies in the distant background.[15]

A century later one finds the master described in admittedly less prosaic terms, but the admiration for the movement and action in the scene has not abated. In the words of the artist's latest biographer, Jonathan Brown, for instance:

> The five women who labor at the menial chores of a tapestry workshop bring the picture to life. With unprecedented brilliance of technique, Velázquez depicts the restless work required to transform bundles of wool into threads for weaving. In the softly lit space, the woman card, spin, and wind the treads with the absent-minded industry induced by the performance of a routine task. Yet this humble activity is magically transformed into a brilliant artistic illusion. At the left, a woman works at a whirring wheel, the spokes of which fuse into a blur of motion. Velázquez nurtures this sublime effect by placing soft, vaporous highlights within the circumference to suggest the play of fugitive reflections on the nearly transparent surface. On the right, a second woman winds the spun thread into balls. Her fingers are a flurry of brushstrokes which convey the impression of a rapid, fluttering motion. In the center, there is a third figure, sunk in half-shadow, who bends to reach for scraps of wool to supply her carding tool. At her feet, a watchful cat sits, seeming to stare ahead.[16]

For a long time iconologists deliberately excluded formal elements from their interpretation of works of art. After all, it was Panofsky's credo that "iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form".[17] A consequence of this one-dimensional approach was that the formal aspects of a picture were automatically disqualified as potential signifiers and thus as aids to deciphering meaning. Abandonment of this false distinction between form and

content opens up new perspectives for the interpretation of *Las Hilanderas*.

The problem with which all students of this picture have wrestled is its curious division into two parts, "each section constituting a distinct scene of itself – one a broad, half-darkened plebeian, the other a radiant, aristocratic scene, with heightened lights, like pit and stage", as Justi put it, and the relationship between these two parts.[18] This problem remained even after the convincing demonstration that *Las Hilanderas* depicted the *Fable of Arachne*. If anything it may actually have become more intractable, because since then scholars have made an even greater effort to explain the scene in narrative terms, but now with the Arachne myth to guide them.[19]

Arachne, a young woman of Lydia, was so skilled in the art of weaving that she challenged Pallas Athena to a contest to show that she was the goddess's equal at the loom. She succeeded, but this so infuriated Athena that she turned the girl into a spider. The myth is the archetypal story of artistic rivalry, a much-discussed theme in classical antiquity if we are to believe Pliny, and one which has been the driving force behind artistic progress since the Renaissance, as Gombrich has shown.[20] It is in this context that the Athena/Arachne myth is explained in the most detailed standard work on mythology from the Spanish Renaissance, Juan Pérez de Moya's *Filosofia secreta*, of which Velázquez owned a copy.

> Ovid's [story] is cast in the form of a fable, that is to say that it is fictionalized, in order to recount the transformation of Arachne who, defeated by Minerva, was turned into a spider. [The purpose] is to point out the knowledge of both Minerva and Arachne in the art of weaving. This transformation provides us with an exemplary lesson about a person [Minerva] who, although very learned in one art, is followed later by another [Arachne] who then excells the first artist by adding various novelties, such as is done in all the professions and all the sciences. In this manner, the newer generations add to the preceding because Time is the Great Master who augments intellectual endeavors. As Aristotle stated, "*Tempus bonum cooperatur est horum, et per tempus artium additamenta facta sunt.*" This means that: "Time is the good helper of these things [the Arts], and with Time the arts were augmented."[21]

As we shall see, Velázquez followed in Pérez de Moya's footsteps by applying the Athena/Arachne myth to his own day. In his painting the mythological story appears in the background as an isolated history painting. Here he appears to have drawn on a device which he had earlier used in his *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*. What is striking is that he departed from the standard iconography by depicting the moment *before* Arachne is turned into a spider, when it becomes clear that her tapestry of Europa and the bull rivals that woven by the goddess. The tapestry in Velázquez's picture is of course a copy of Titian's *Rape of Europa*, which for a long time was the pride of the Spanish royal collection.[22] Moreover, as noted elsewhere, this quotation is not without significance.

> By inserting a quotation of this famous work into the composition, Velázquez implies his belief in the nobility and transcendental value of the art of painting. Titian is equated with Arachne, and Arachne could 'paint' like a god.
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> Velázquez' homage to Titian has another dimension because Titian was the favorite

> painter of Charles V and Philip II, by whom he had been rewarded with honours and presents. Charles had made Titian a knight of the Golden Spur and Philip II had given him a liberal pension. Therefore, Titian provided an artistic and social paradigm for the elevated status of painting at the court of Spain. By paying tribute to this distinguished predecessor in a style that is profoundly Titianesque, Velázquez claimed a place in the succession of the Venetian master, just as he had done by installing his paintings in the Hall of Mirrors.[23]

The significance of the Athena/Arachne myth, however, goes beyond this. It is not just Titian who is competing here in the role of Arachne, the rivalry is with Velázquez himself, for with *Las Hilanderas* he was in turn attempting to outshine the "divine" Titian.

This is the *raison d'être* of the painting. Velázquez was in a position to challenge Titian because he had contributed an innovation of his own to the art of painting, namely the illusion of movement. As the vehicle for his discovery he selected a hallowed picture from antiquity into which he breathed new life – *The Spinners* by Antiphilus, a work which had itself been admired in classical times for its suggestion of motion. On top of that, the scene enabled him to exploit the iconography of the Arachne myth. This explains why the spinning-room, "in which all the women are busily plying their tasks" is accorded the greatest space and the prime position in the picture. *Las Hilanderas*, seen in this light, is not just an allegory of rivalry, but above all a carefully planned product of the continuing story of rivalry.

It was Ernst Gombrich, in *Art and Illusion*, who made a connection between Philips Angel and Velázquez. The former, he said, was well aware that the sight of the spokes of a wheel destroyed the illusion of movement, "but there is no evidence that he found a remedy".[24] That is not being entirely fair to Angel, for he certainly did suggest how the effect could be achieved, albeit in general terms.[25] It is not known whether he himself ever succeeded in creating a convincing illusion of movement in one of his own paintings, but what is more important is that he drew his fellow-artists' attention to the phenomenon, and from there it would not have been difficult for a good craftsman to suggest the motion of a turning wheel. Angel's address also shows that the representation of movement was a real point of discussion among painters, and one that cried out for a solution. There is not the slightest reason to believe that Velázquez was aware of contemporary developments in Dutch painting, let alone that he could have turned them to his own advantage. So Gombrich is right when he says that "it needed the imagination and skill of a Velázquez to invent a means of suggesting that 'uncertain glimpse' in the spinning wheel of the *Hilanderas*, which appears to catch the so-called 'stroboscopic effect', the streaking after-image that trails its path across the field of vision when an object is whizzing past".[26] When we consider that the whirring spinning-wheel in *Las Hilanderas* is just one of the devices whereby Velázquez set his picture in motion, we realise yet again what a great contribution he made to the progress of art with this picture.

NOTES

* This essay is based on a lecture delivered at the Institute for Art History of the University of Amsterdam on 26 April 1991 and was first pulbished in *Simiolus* 21 (1992) 296–305. I am indebted to the Instituto Olandese in Florence, Paul van den Akker and Liesbeth Helmus for assistance and advice. The text was translated from the Dutch by Michael Hoyle.

[1] Jonathan Brown, 'On the Meaning of *Las Meninas*', in idem, *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting*, Princeton 1978, pp. 87–110.

[2] F.J. Sánchez Cantón, 'La librería de Velázquez', in *Homenaje a Menéndez Pidal*, vol. 3, Madrid 1925, p. 401, no. 109: "[Historia Natural, del Plinio, en italiano.] *Istoria Naturale, di C. Plinio Secundo tradotta per Lodovico Domenichi*, Venezia, 1561, 1580, 1589, 1603, 4.°", and p. 404, no. 13:, "[Plinio, de Natural Historia, en latín.] *Plinii secundi Naturalis Historia, Venetiis*, 1535–1536, 4 vols., 8.°, Andrea Asulani."

[3] Brown, art. cit. (n. 1), pp. 93–94. For an elaboration of his interpretation see J. Brown, *Velázquez: painter and courtier*, New Haven & London 1986, pp. 253–264. A discussion of the perspective in *Las Meninas* will be found in John M. Moffitt, 'Velázquez in the Alcázar Palace in 1656: the meaning of the *mise-en-scène* of *Las Meninas*', *Art History* 6 (1983) 270–300. The author confirms Brown's interpretation of the meaning of the brilliant perspective composition of *Las Meninas* by trying to demonstrate that the purpose of the picture was to serve as a srupulous Albertian "dimostrazione" of scientific perspective. Because painting was firmly based upon mathematical principles, it was as scientific valid as the Liberal Arts.

[4] Philips Angel, *Lof der schilder-konst*, Leiden 1642. For the literature on Angel see the most recent study on him by Hessel Miedema, 'Philips Angels *Lof der schilder-konst*', *Oud Holland* 103 (1989) pp. 181–222, who lists the principal publications.

[5] For Rembrandt's *Proserpine* in Berlin see Albert Blankert, 'What is Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting. A Definition and its Limitations', in: H. Bock en T.W. Gaehtgens (ed.), *Holländische Genremalerei im 17. Jahrhundert. Symposium Berlin 1984*, (*Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, Sonderband 4), Berlin 1987, p. 20.

[6] Angel, op. cit. (n. 4), p. 41: "By aldien sy nu alle de eyghen natuerlicke dingen hadden met rechte op merckinge in goede achtinge genomen, soo soudeze foute door een scherper op-merckinge ontrent de natuerlicke beweginge hebben konne[n] voor komen, ons voor-stellende de eygen-schijnende gedaente, want dit sietmen wanneer een Wagerat, of Spinne-wiel met groote kracht beweecht wert, datmen door 't snelle om-draeyen geen sporte sal eygentlick konnen bekennen, maer een twijffelachtige schemeringe der selven, [het welcke ick] schoon ick al menichte va[n] stucken daer Wagen-wielen in gheschildert waren heb' gesien, soo en heb ickdat noyt eygentlicke naegebootst gesien, maer yder sport soo geteyckent of gheschildert als of de Wagen haer en niet scheen te beweghen, soo datter geen onderscheyt tusschen een stilstaende, en een schijn-rijdende Wagen gevonden en wert."

[7] Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst...*, Rotterdam 1678, p. 163: "Indienge voor hebt hollende wagens, of karren, die in d'Olympsche speelen om prijs loopen, neem acht op uw voornemen, want *Aristides* maekte de wagenwielen, als ofze omdraeiden, en onzen *Douw* heeft dit zelve in een snel om loopend spinwiel ook te weeg gebracht."

[8] Karel van Mander, *Het leven der oude antijcke doorluchtighe schilders* ..., in: *Het schilder-boeck* ..., Alkmaar 1603–1604, fol. 71v: "Hy maeckte oock Koetswagens/ daer vier Peerden waren aen ghespannen/ soo natuerlijck/ datmen soude gheseyt hebben/ dat de raders draeyden/ en voort rolden." The equivalent passage in Antoine du Pinet reads: "Il fit aussi des coches à quatre chevaux d'attellage, si bien faites, qu'on eust dit proprement que les rouës rouloyent." See *l'Histoire du monde de C. Pline second* [...] mis en François, par Antoine dv Pinet [etc.], 2 vols., Lyons 1584, vol. 2, p. 649. On Du

Pinet see Hessel Miedema, *Karel van Mander: den grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, 2 vols., Utrecht 1973, vol. 2, pp. 644–645.

[9] Angel, op. cit. (n. 4), pp. 55–56.

[10] Tatsushi Takahashi, 'Reflections on the Depiction of Wheels in Motion: Philips Angel's 'Lof der schilder-konst' and Contemporary Dutch Painting', *Bijutsushi, Journal of the Japan Art History Society* 112 (vol. 31, no. 2) (1982) 76–94 (with English resumé), mentions other instances of wheels depicted with visible spokes prior to 1640 and with blurred spokes after that date. He does not, however, draw the conclusion that this was due to Angel's eulogy. For the dating of the picture by Maes see Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 3, Landau/ Pfalz 1983, p. 2014, no. 1339.

[11] Franciscus Junius, *De pictura veterum libri tres*, Amsterdam 1637; idem, *De schilder-konst der oude begrepen in drie boeken*, Middelburg 1641. The English edition, *The Painting of the Ancients*, translated by Junius himself, appeared even earlier than the Dutch, being published in London in 1638.

[12] Junius 1637, op. cit. (n. 11), bk. 3, p. 130.

[13] Junius 1641, op. cit. (n. 11), bk. 3, p. 203:
"[...] ofte (om duydelicker te spreken) in de bequame afbeeldinghe der eyghenschappen die men in de onroerende dinghen verneemt, als oock in de levendighe uytdruckinghe der beweghingen diemen in de roerende dinghen speurt, wanneer deselvighe yet merckelicks doen of lijden." In the writings on art, movement is almost always discussed in the sense of emotions and passions that move the soul and are reflected in certain physical movements. To the best of my knowledge little or nothing is said about the movement of inanimate matter.

[14] The English is from Junius 1638, op. cit. (n. 11), bk. 3, p. 298. Pliny's Latin text reads: "[...] item lanificio, in quo properant omnium mulierum pensa", see Pliny, *Natural History*, with an English translation by H. Rackham (The Loeb Classical Library), vol. 9, London & Cambridge (Mass.) 1952, bk. XXXV, xl, 138–140, pp. 361–363. The Dutch version in Junius 1641, op. cit. (n. 11), bk. 3, p. 288: "Den selvighen Konstenaer heeft mede eenen grooten lof verworven inde Schilderye der wollen-wercksters, wantmen daer in ooghen schijnlick verneemt met wat spoedigheyd alle de vrouwen haer dagh-werck afmaecken."

The Italian version is: "Fece anche un lanificio, nelquale con gran prestezza i pesi di tutte le donne si lavorano"; see Pliny 1561, op. cit. (n. 2), bk. XXXV, ch. XI, pp. 1108–1109.

Van Mander, again relying on Antoine du Pinet's translation of Pliny, renders this as "Hy hadde noch ghemaeckt eenige Vrouwen die wolle sponnen/ en het scheen datmen haer spillen natuerlijck sagh draeyen"; see Van Mander, op. cit. (n. 8), fol. 85r.

The passage is also found in Vasari, of which Velázquez owned an edition (see Sánchez Cantón, art. cit. (n. 2), p. 400, no. 100: "<Vida de excelentes pintores, italiano.> *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori, escritte da Giorgio Vasari, pittore aretino*, Florencia, 1550–1568;"). I here quote from the edition edited by Paola Barocchi, Florence (n.d.), vol. 1, p. 200, "[...] medesimamente una bottega di lana dove si venggono molto femmine in diverse maniere sollecitar ciascuna il suo lavoro."

[15] The translation is from Carl Justi, *Diego Velazquez and his Times*, trans. A.H. Keane and revised by the author, London 1889, p. 432.

[16] Jonathan Brown, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 53.

[17] Erwin Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology: an Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art", in idem, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Harmondsworth 1955, p. 51. Cf. in this connection Gridley McKim-Smith, Greta Andersen-Bergdoll and Richard Newman, *Examining Velazquez*, New Haven & London 1988, p. 54ff.

[18] Justi, op. cit. (n. 15), p. 428.

[19] For the identification of the painting as the *Fable of Arachne* see especially Diego Angulo Iñiguez, 'Las Hilanderas', *Archivo Español de Arte* 21 (1948) 1–19.

Some authors accordingly identify the woman spinning in the left foreground as

Athena and the woman on the right, winding the wool, as Arachne. See, for instance, Angulo, p. 15, and recently John F. Moffitt, 'Painting, Music and Poetry in Velázquez's *Las Hilanderas*', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 54 (1985) 77–90. This creates a double problem from the narrative point of view. First, a secondary episode (and one that is not even mentioned in the fable) would then occupy the most important position in the painting. Secondly there would be a temporal displacement, unless one goes along with Moffitt, who associates this phenomenon with Spanish art of the Counter-Reformation, which reintroduced the anachronistic principles of temporal displacement by the device of a picture-within-a-picture. This, however, does not dispose of the first and most important problem; see John M. Moffitt, 'Francisco Pacheco and Jerome Nadal: New Light on the Flemish Sources of the Spanish "Picture-within-the-Picture"', *The Art Bulletin* 72 (1990) 631–638, although it is doubtful that the scene with Athena and Arachne in *Las Hilanderas* should be regarded as a painting-within-a-painting. I agree with Brown, op. cit. (n. 3). p. 303, note 42, that the women in the foreground are assistants. Brown, though (like Moffitt, for that matter) follows De Tolnay in believing that *Las Hilanderas* illustrates the contrast between art and craft. In this reading the painting is supposedly an allegory of the "progress of art", rising from base, mechanical origins into the prestigious ranks of the *artes liberales*; see Charles de Tolnay, 'Velázquez' *Las Hilanderas* and *Las Meninas*', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 35 (1949) 21–38; Brown, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 303, note 42; Moffitt 1985; see also John M. Moffitt, 'The architectural setting of Velázquez's "Las Hilanderas"', *Pantheon* 44 (1986) 43–49). This interpretation is unsatisfactory, because it would not have been very logical of Velázquez to place the compositional emphasis on the lower stage in the evolution of art. As explained below, "the progress of art" is indeed the theme of the painting, but in a very different way to that proposed by De Tolnay *cum suis*.

As matters stand, I see not the slightest reason to doubt the identification of Athena and Arachne, as is done by Madlyn Kahr, '*Las Hilanderas*: a New Interpretation', *The Art Bulletin* 62 (1980), 376–385 (see the criticism of her article by Brown, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 302, note 35, and Moffitt 1985, art. cit. (n. 19), p. 88, notes 9 and 12). Her analysis involves what I would call pictorial homonymy, involving superficial congruencies in form between print and painting, but not in meaning, a phenomenon that repeatedly crops up when emblems are used as *clavis interpretandi*; see Jan Baptist Bedaux, 'Fruit and Fertility. Fruit Symbolism in Netherlandish Portraiture of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in: idem, *The Reality of Symbols. Studies in the Iconology of Netherlandish Art 1400–1800*, The Hague and Maarssen, pp. 69–101). It is also found in Richard Stapleford and John Potter, 'Velázquez' *Las Hilanderas*', *Artibus et Historiae* 15 (1987) 159–181, where a print of the Three Fates by Giorgio Ghisi after Giulio Romano, serves as the point of departure for a most bizarre interpretation.

[20] E.H. Gombrich, 'The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and its Consequences', in idem, *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London 1966, pp. 1–10.

[21] J. Pérez de Moya, *Filosofia secreta*, 2 vols., Barcelona 1977 (ed. princeps 1584), vol. 2, pp. 65–66. I quote from Moffitt's English translation of this passage in Moffitt 1985, art. cit. (n. 19), p. 82. The *Filosofia secreta* is no. 61 in the inventory of Velázquez's library: "Philosophia secreta, de Moya [Madrid 1585]"; see Sánchez Cantón, art. cit. (n. 2), p. 396.

[22] This identification was first made by Charles Riquetts, *The Art of the Prado*, Edinburgh 1903, p. 86. Titian's *Rape of Europa*, which was in the Spanish royal collection until 1704, is now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. See Harold E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, vol. 3, *The Mythological and Historical Paintings*, London 1975, pp. 172–175; Arthur Pope, *Titian's Rape of Europe. A Study of the Composition and the Mode of Representation in this and Related Paintings*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1960; E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian; mostly Iconographic*, New York 1969, pp. 163–166.

[23] Brown 1985, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 253 and pp. 302–303, notes 40 and 41.
[24] E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: a Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London 1977[7] (first edition 1959), pp. 191–192.
[25] Angel, op. cit. (n. 4), pp. 41–42. It would perhaps be better to speak of the "impression" rather than the "illusion" of movement. For this terminological distinction see the interesting article by J. Miller, 'Moving Pictures', in: Horace Barlow, Colin Blakemore and Miranda Weston-Smith (eds.), *Images and Understanding*, Cambridge, New York etc. 1990, pp. 180–194.
[26] Gombrich, op. cit. (n. 24).