

Edited by Daniel M. Unger

Titian's *Allegory of Marriage*

New Approaches

Amsterdam
University
Press

Titian's *Allegory of Marriage*

Visual and Material Culture, 1300–1700

A forum for innovative research on the role of images and objects in the late medieval and early modern periods, *Visual and Material Culture, 1300-1700* publishes monographs and essay collections that combine rigorous investigation with critical inquiry to present new narratives on a wide range of topics, from traditional arts to seemingly ordinary things. Recognizing the fluidity of images, objects, and ideas, this series fosters cross-cultural as well as multi-disciplinary exploration. We consider proposals from across the spectrum of analytic approaches and methodologies.

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1. Introduction: Poetic License

Daniel M. Unger

Titian's *Allegory of Marriage* (Plate 1), in the main hall of the Louvre's sixteenth-century-painting wing, attracts little notice these days. Compared to the fame of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in the centre of the gallery and the massive scale of Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* on the other side of the gallery, facing the *Mona Lisa*, which draw most of the visitors' attention, Titian's painting seems to fall short in terms of both its popularity and its size.

The label alongside the painting is ambiguous, reading: '*Allégorie Conjugale, dite à tort Allégorie d'Alphonse d'Avalos*' (*Allegory of Marriage* wrongly named *Allegory of Alfonso d'Avalos*). Moreover, although the exact date of the painting is unknown, the label notes that it was completed c. 1530/5. The short explanation represents the most common interpretation of the painting today: Titian created an image of a married couple with the spouses, who were figured as Mars and Venus, accompanied by the protective divinities of marriage: Cupid, Vesta, and Hymen, bearing their respective attributes—arrows, myrtle, and a basket of flowers and fruits. The crystal ball on Venus's knees is another attribute, which together with the melancholic facial expressions of the main protagonists suggests the loss of a life. The couple is destined to be parted in the future because one of the two will leave this world.¹ Viewers reading this label might easily come to the conclusion that Titian depicted a sad and rather uncommon marriage and may experience both perplexity and astonishment, even a sense of mystery—awakening one's curiosity as if standing before a riddle. Why would Titian have created a painting of such a sad marriage and who would have wished to commission such an uncommon theme?

At the same time, the use of the term 'allegory' calls upon us to look beyond a straightforward definition of what is depicted in the painting. This vein was explored in the nineteenth century by Abraham Hume in his 1829 *Notices of the*

¹ 'Titien crée dans cette oeuvre le prototype du tableau de mariage, un genre qui a fait fortune à Venise. Les époux sont travestis en Mars et Vénus, accompagnés des divinités protectrices du mariage: Cupidon portant des flèches, Vesta couronnée de myrte, Hymen tendant une corbeille de fleurs et de fruits. La boule de cristal tenue par la femme comme si elle voulait y lire l'avenir et les expressions mélancoliques des personnages ont fait interpréter la scène comme une allégorie de la Séparation après le départ ou la mort de l'un des deux époux'.

Life and Works of Titian, where he remarked on the difficulty in understanding the allegory represented in this painting.² Georg Gronau repeated this contention in 1900. He praised the painting, addressed its impenetrability, but admitted that: ‘The importance of the picture as a work of art will in no wise be diminished when we confess we cannot explain its meaning in words’.³ On a similar note, Hans Tietze wrote about ‘the pleasing picture in the Louvre’, which ‘in default of a better interpretation, we must continue to call by its makeshift name, the *Allegory of Alfonso d’Avalos*’.⁴ David Rosand elaborated on Titian’s poetics and the commissions he received from King Philip II of Spain, writing: ‘Such interpretations invariably present solid iconographic credentials, but we know that every mythological theme was subject to allegorization on multiple levels; the history of Christian accommodation and domestication of the pagan tales encouraged such readings’.⁵ Rosand went on to discuss the meaning of *Poesia*, noting that the artist set out to offer multiple views and understandings of a given figure or work of art, in accordance with what he referred to as ‘decorum of interpretation’.⁶

Venetian painting is known for the ambiguity of the scenes produced by the city’s most illustrious painters, and Titian’s painting is one of many works of art representing a sophisticated culture that favoured an open approach that allowed for different interpretations. Two famous examples that belong to the category of a painterly riddle are Giovanni Bellini’s *Sacred Allegory* (Figure 1.1) and Giorgione’s *Tempest* (Figure 1.2), both of which have been discussed by modern scholars in poetic terms. A third example is the *Fete Champêtre* or *Pastoral Concert* (Figure 1.3), previously attributed to Giorgione but now considered to be by Titian. In addressing Giorgione’s *Tempest*, almost forty years ago, Paul Barolsky and Norman E. Land encouraged art historians to be more open-minded about its artistic message and to abandon the search for a textual source. They argued that not every painting is

2 ‘The Allegory contained in this picture is not easy to be made out. He is in armour with his hand on the bosom of a female who is sitting, and holding in her hands a glass globe, her face turned towards a young girl crowned with laurel, supposed to represent Victory, and who appears to be rendering homage to Alphonso; a Cupid offers him an enormous bundle of arrows, and behind is a young person seen with a basket of flowers. Titian seems to have bestowed uncommon pains on this picture, which for suavity of colour and beautiful penciling cannot be exceeded. It is now in the Musée at Paris’. Hume, *Notices of the Life and Works of Titian*, pp. 80–81.

3 Gronau, *Titian*, p. 88.

4 Tietze, *Titian*, p. 32.

5 Rosand, ‘Ut Pictor Poeta’, p. 534.

6 Thomas Puttfarcken explained Titian’s *poesie* by saying that the painter chose the subject matter of his pictures himself and then sent them to his patrons. For Puttfarcken, Titian’s inventiveness rested on his ability to present several interpretations in a single work of art. See Puttfarcken, *Titian and Tragic Painting*, p. 145.



1.1. Giovanni Bellini's *Sacred Allegory*, 1485/8, Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi, © Photo: Ministero della Cultura, Gallerie degli Uffizi.

associated with a text and that in many works of art meaning resides elsewhere.⁷ In the wake of Patricia Egan's suggestion to rename the painting at the core of this book *Allegory of Poetry*,⁸ Titian's *Allegory* should be acknowledged as a poetic endeavour in which the painter decided to remain obscure and indeterminate for apparently artistic reasons in order to challenge a select audience of connoisseurs.⁹ In his 1662 *Trattato dello stile e del dialogo*, Francesco Sforza Pallavicino explained the idea of poetic license by contrasting an emotional response with truth: 'Now the emotions conceal the truth; having such great strength to alter the judgments, and to make them believe one way or the other'.¹⁰

Poetic license permits the artist to give his own interpretation to any subject, creating new connections, new definitions, new borders, and new interactions.

7 Barolsky and Land, 'The "Meaning" of Giorgione's *Tempesta*', pp. 59–60. For the importance of oral traditions and cultural practices, see also Camille, 'Mouths and Meanings', pp. 43–58.

8 Egan, 'Poesia and the Fete Champêtre', p. 304. In fact, modern scholars associated the term *poesia* with the development of Venetian painting at the beginning of the sixteenth century. They focused on both Giorgione and Titian and scenes of landscapes with shepherds and nymphs. See Puttfarken, *Titian and Tragic Painting*, pp. 9–12.

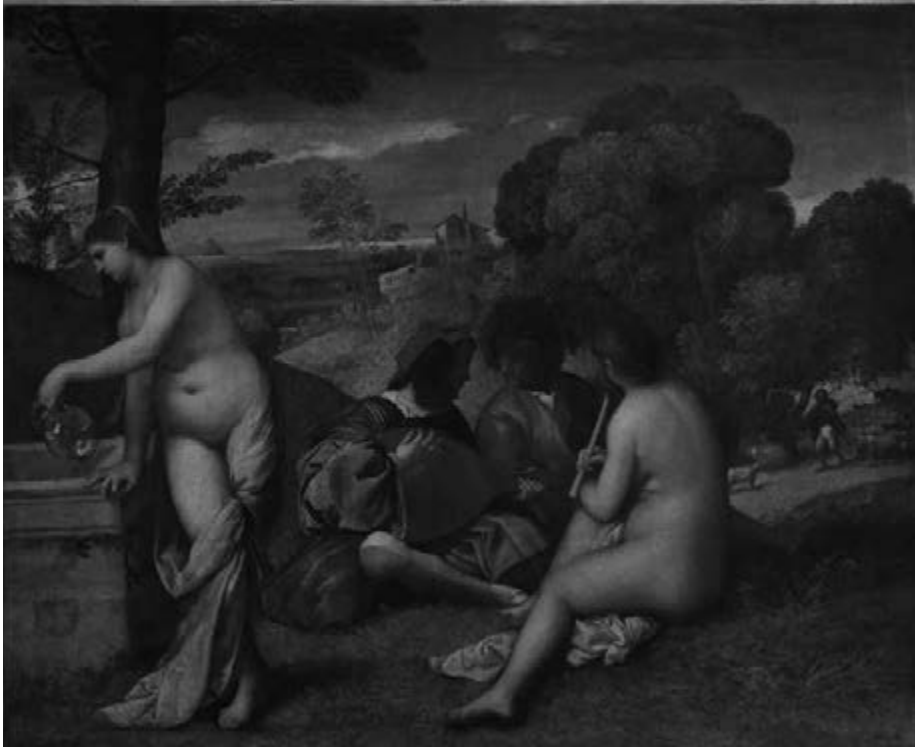
9 On poetic license in art, see Roman D'Elia, 'Niccolò Liburnio on the Boundaries of Portraiture in the Early Cinquecento', pp. 323–350; Puttfarken, *Titian and Tragic Painting*, pp. 27–32.

10 'Ora gli affetti occultano la verità; havendo eglino sì gran forza d'alterare i giudizij, e d'inchinarli à credere più l'una parte che l'altra, che con l'espressione di questa sola proprietà'. Sforza Pallavicino, *Trattato dello stile e del dialogo*, pp. 23–24.



1.2. Giorgione, *Tempest*, c. 1506/8, Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia, © Photo: G.A.VE Archivio fotografico, 'su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia'.

Giovanni Andrea Gilio describes three types of paintings—the poetic painting, the historical painting, and the mixed painting, a combination of the two other types: 'Because it should be understood that the painter is sometimes a pure historian (*puro storico*), sometimes a pure poet (*puro poeta*), and sometimes a mixture of the two (*a le volte è misto*). When he is a pure poet I think that it is legitimate for



1.3. Giorgione (or Titian?), *Fête Champêtre* or *Pastoral Concert*, Paris, Musée du Louvre, © Photo: RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre), Michel Urtado.

him to paint everything that his own imagination (*capriccio*) dictates'.¹¹ But what about the viewers' freedom of interpretation? Are they (or should I say we) allowed to explain the painting in their/our own terms? How should we approach these poetic artworks? Do we, as art historians or cultural historians, have the license to read them in a variety of ways? The answer is, surely, yes! Variety sets the tone of early modern culture, not only in terms of style and creativity, but also in terms of understanding and analysis. This is especially true in paintings such as the one by Titian that is at the centre of the present book.

Titian's painting (inv. 754, 123 × 107 cm) consists of five figures in a rather dense composition. At the centre, an armoured warrior stands in profile, his face turned towards the viewer and his left hand on the breast of a semi-exposed female figure to his left. Although the crystal orb is placed safely in her lap, the woman holds it with both hands, her head bent and her eyes registering a contemplative, distracted gaze. Situated on the right are three additional figures: a winged Cupid with a

¹¹ Gilio, *Dialogue on the Errors and Abuses of Painters*, p. 101. See also Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis* p. 39.

bundle of arrows, a woman crowned with a garland of myrtle, and another figure whose gender remains unclear, and who is raising up a basket of flowers. He or she is placed at the right edge of the painting, with only his or her face and hands visible. The figures all look very serious and self-involved, and do not seem to notice one another. Each of them is focused on his/her own thoughts or reflections.

A second characteristic of the painting relates to the figures and the attributes they hold, which at first glance seem to suggest their identities—an orb, a bundle of arrows, a garland of myrtle, and a basket of flowers. Moreover, the grouping of a man in armour and a beautiful woman with an exposed breast, together with a Cupid holding arrows, points to the two Olympian gods Mars and Venus. These easily identifiable attributes have led modern scholars to assume that the painting was meant to portray historical figures dressed in mythological outfits for the sake of expressing a contextualized current episode. One such explanation related to the theme of marriage. The point of departure in all these interpretations was that in order to reveal the idea conveyed by Titian and to eliminate the uncertainties regarding the depiction, one should determine the significance of the three figures on the right, which is not self-evident, for the couple on the left. There is a hierarchical relationship between the two figures on the left, who occupy most of the canvas and who were perceived to be the main characters, and the three figures on the right. It has been agreed that, apart from Cupid, it is necessary to first decipher the symbolic identity of the two personifications in order to understand the significance of the entire painting.

Titian's painting is generally believed to have been completed in 1530/5.¹² Jean Habert mentions a letter dated 11 November 1531, in which Alfonso d'Avalos wrote to Pietro Aretino that he wishes to be portrayed by Titian together with his wife and son.¹³ Although this letter assumes an aspiration on the part of the marquis rather than proof of the undertaking itself, Titian's painting was seen as the portrait of this famous military figure.

This identification of the male protagonist as Alfonso d'Avalos, Marquis of Vasto, is evident in the earliest reference to this painting, which dates to the seventeenth century, more than a hundred years after its creation. In his inventory of artworks belonging to the English King Charles I, completed in 1639, Abraham van der Doort mentioned the painting, writing that 'The Picture of the Marquess Gwasto Conteyning 5 halfe figures Soe big as ye life which ju M bought aufit an Almonedo in Spaine

12 Hans Tietze writes that the painting was completed at the same time as the *Venus of Urbino*. See Tietze, *Titian*, p. 32. See also Gronau, *Titian*, p. 284; Panofsky, *Problems in Titian*, p. 126; Wethey, *The Painting of Titian*, vol. III, p. 127; Humfrey, *Titian*, p. 140; Herrmann Fiore, 'L' *Allegoria coniugale* di Tiziano del Louvre', p. 411.

13 Habert, *Le Siècle de Titien*, p. 571. See also Humfrey, *Titian*, p. 140.

bin'.¹⁴ As suggested by Paul Johannides, one can interpret van der Doort's reference as 'owned by' rather than as 'representing', suggesting that Alfonso might have been the commissioner rather than the male figure in the painting. Almost thirty years later, in his *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, first published in 1666/8, André Félibien reaffirmed this identification stating that the warrior in the painting is the Marquis of Vasto, accompanied by a woman and the little Amour,¹⁵ referring to the same Alfonso d'Avalos, a general in the army of the Holy Roman Emperor Carl V. Later, in the nineteenth century, Joseph A. Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle described the painting as a visualization of the general taking leave of his wife, Maria of Aragon, on his way to fight the Turks in 1532, suggesting that d'Avalos approached the painter with this scene in mind after he returned from the battlefield. According to this account, he wanted to be depicted as taking leave of his wife in the presence of Hymen, the goddess of marriage; the personification of victory; and Cupid, a symbol of love.¹⁶

This explanation was still deemed valid at the beginning of the twentieth century, as can be seen in Florence Heywood's *The Important Pictures of the Louvre* (1923).¹⁷ Although both Hans Tietze and Erwin Panofsky objected to this identification of the warrior, Walter Friedlaender attested to its legitimacy in a short article about an obscure painting that he attributed to Niccolò dell'Abbate. He suggested that the male figure in Titian's painting is touching his wife in a rather intimate way and that the painting is thus an allegory of marriage. He identified the other three figures as Cupid, Vesta (gesturing beside his bundle of tied arrows, which points to his domestication), and Hymen, who holds a basket of flowers and whose blessing is needed for a successful marriage.¹⁸

14 Millar, 'Abraham van der Doort's Catalogue of the Collection of Charles I', pp. 1–245, p. 16, no. 10. The *Allegory* was copied several times after it entered the collection of Charles I (Shearman, *The Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen: The Early Italian Pictures*, nos. 277 and 278, p. 261). Probably the earliest British response was from Inigo Jones, who alluded to the supplicant girl in his pen sketch in Chatsworth Album X, p. 49, no. 234. For a discussion of the *Allegory*, see Wethey, *Titian*, vol. III, pp. 127–128. The fullest and most even-handed treatment of the picture and its under-drawing is by Jean Habert in *Le siècle de Titien*, nos. 163 and 164, pp. 570–572. During his stay, Charles also acquired Titian's *Girl in a Fur wrap*, now in Vienna, from the posthumous sale of the collection of Juan Tassis y Peralta, Count of Villamediana, assassinated in 1622 (see Brown, 'Artistic Relations Between Spain and England', pp. 41–68); Miguel Falomir has suggested to me that the *Allegory* may also have come from Villamediana's collection. I would like to thank Paul Joannides for this information. See also Brotton, 'Buying the Renaissance', pp. 9–26.

15 'Vous avez veû celuy où le Marquis du Guast est représenté avec une femme & un petit Amour, je ne crois pas que l'on puisse rien voir de mieux peint'. Félibien, *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, vol. I, pp. 658–659.

16 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Titian*, vol. I, pp. 373–376.

17 Heywood, *The Important Pictures of the Louvre*, p. 112.

18 Friedlaender, 'The Domestication of Cupid', pp. 51–52.

Louis Hourticq offered another interpretation, explaining the painting as a homage by the artist in memory of Cecilia, his deceased wife, who died in 1530. According to Hourticq, an armoured Titian stands beside his wife while Cupid with his bundle of arrows, Hymen with a crown of myrtle, and the personification of Fertility with her plate of fruit stand beside Cecilia. According to this account, Titian rendered himself in a position reminiscent of a painter looking in the mirror while depicting his own image.¹⁹

In his 1939 *Studies in Iconology* and again much more elaborately in his 1969 *Problems in Titian: Mostly Iconographic*, Panofsky proposed what is probably the most comprehensive attempt to explain this work, arguing that the bride and groom are depicted in the guise of Mars and Venus. Panofsky contended that the love between the two gods was acknowledged long before Titian became a painter and that the two deities were considered suitable figures for marriage chests (*cassoni*). According to Panofsky, Titian followed a tradition that can be traced back to classical times. Prior to Titian, both Botticelli (Figure 8.1) and Piero di Cosimo (Figure 8.2) depicted the two lovers with the same conclusive identifications, which pointed to a similar interpretation. In addition to the bride and groom, who are represented as Venus and Mars, the three other figures are easily identifiable and have special meaning associated with both the three theological virtues and marriage: Cupid symbolizes love, while his bundle of arrows symbolizes its unity. The young woman with her wreath of myrtle is an emblem of marital faith, and the female figure holding a basket of flowers is a symbol of hope and fertility.²⁰

A more recent interpretation is the one suggested by Kristina Herrmann Fiore. Taking Carlo Ridolfi's account of the painter and the many copies that were produced through the years as her principal sources, Herrmann Fiore argues that the central idea in the painting is that of divine providence and views the orb as a symbol of 'love conquers all' (*Omnia vincit amor*). Taking into account that every figure in the painting looks serious and unhappy, she argues that the composition was meant to relate to the eternal bliss that is to be expected in the afterlife. Herrmann Fiore rests her case on two facts. The first is the Galeazzo Relogio painting in Padua, which Ridolfi saw but is now lost. Ridolfi observed a figure of a baby in the crystal orb on the knees of the main female protagonist. The second fact relates to the many different interpretations given to the painting by later copyists, who introduced variations to the original painting, further validating this interpretation, which

19 Hourticq, *La jeunesse de Titien*, pp. 226–230. See also Reinach, 'La jeunesse de Titien by Louis Hourticq (book review)', p. 395; Valcanover, *All the Paintings of Titian*, vol. II, p. 86.

20 Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, pp. 160–163; Panofsky, *Problems in Titian*, pp. 127–129. See also, Tietze, *Titian*, p. 390; Humfrey, *Titian*, p. 140. For representations of Venus in wedding paintings, see Prater, *Venus at Her Mirror*, pp. 28–31.

is based on the Neoplatonic perception of the world as represented in Ficino's writings.²¹ Finally, Paul Joannides, in an earlier publication, assumes the seated female figure to be Venus, who is left behind by the man in armour as he departs for the battlefield. The painting, summarizes Joannides, is about the necessity of abandoning love, with all that it signifies, in order to embark on a military mission.²²

The curators at the Louvre have embraced an interpretation of the painting that combines the concept of an allegory of marriage with Mars and Venus accompanied by Cupid, Vesta, and Hymen. The following chapters present new ways of seeing the painting and new interpretations by nine contemporary scholars, each of whom engages with this creative task in an original way, suggesting his/her own reading of Titian's *Allegory*.

We begin our venture with Valery Rees, who offers a point of departure for our quest to understand the different backgrounds of poetic sensibility in Titian's time. Rees sets the cultural stage for multiple readings of a single allegorical work of art such as Titian's *Allegory of Marriage* by exploring the notion of love. Having Mars and Venus as the principal protagonists in Titian's painting, it seems almost natural to look for sixteenth-century poetic expressions on love, which is what Rees outlines in Chapter 2. Rees offers a detailed account of Titian's intellectual surroundings, focusing primarily on Florentine Neoplatonic ideas about love and beauty as expressed in Venice. She sees poetic perceptions of love as a key element for understanding the artistic notions embedded in Titian's allegories. Rees' overview is followed by Mary Pardo's chapter, which addresses Titian's painting in light of Boccaccio's view of poetry and sees it as offering access to Titian's poetic process as a combination of inventiveness and fantastic reflection and realization. Pardo finds the painting to be a true poetic endeavour that focuses on the love of the Olympian gods rather than on the creation of a memorial.

The chapters by Karen Watts and Esthy Kravitz-Lurie reinforce these perceptions of the sixteenth-century intellectual milieu by offering explanations as to why Titian's painting was first titled *Allegory of Alfonso d'Avalos* and why the male protagonist was mistakenly regarded as the portrait of that military leader. Watts explores the different types of armours used in the sixteenth century (for tournaments, parades, and battles). She focuses on the realistic depiction of the armour in Titian's painting, which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men must have recognized as belonging to an infantry man (foot combatant) such as d'Avalos.

21 Herrmann Fiore, 'L' *Allegoria coniugale* di Tiziano del Louvre', p. 412. For the many copies of this painting, see K. Bender's on Academia.edu: [file:///C:/Users/owner/Downloads/TIZIANOs_Allegory_of_marriage_1533_and_i%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/owner/Downloads/TIZIANOs_Allegory_of_marriage_1533_and_i%20(2).pdf). To date Bender has managed to find fifteen copies made as oil paintings, drawings, and engravings that were completed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

22 Joannides, *Titian to 1518*, p. 254.



Kravitz-Lurie addresses the notion of the poet-soldier of which d'Avalos was one of the most famous representatives. Both scholars show the kind of relationship that existed between Titian and d'Avalos, implying the misidentification of the main male protagonist in Titian's painting was due to the common knowledge of their acquaintance.

This first group of chapters clears the way for a new set of interpretations in terms of allegory. In this respect, Paul Joannides examines variants, copies, and adaptations of Titian's *Allegory*, tracking what might have been the painter's sources of inspiration and intentions and arguing that one may identify the principal female figures as Venus and Psyche. Joannides views the composition as a poetic interpretation of a classical tale that Titian actually depicted in another painting—*Psyche Offering Venus the Vase of Water from the River Styx*—and underscores Titian's flexibility in his representations of allegories and personifications. Daniel Unger focuses on the reflections that are evident in the painting, addressing the interconnectivity between the artist and his audience. Unger argues that Titian dialectically engages with the viewer, whose presence is represented by the blurred and shadowy figure in the crystal orb. Sara Benninga interprets the figure of Venus as the protector of peace, arguing that one can find in the painting an attempt to emphasize the fragility or ephemerality of peace.

The two final chapters engage with sixteenth-century issues that can be derived from the painting that refer to cultural phenomena. Geoff Lehman engages with the dialectic interplay between vision and touch. In this context, the visual connections among the figures and between them and the surrounding objects are inextricable from the texture and materiality of painterly surfaces. Yet, in contrast to the intimacy of touch, vision is associated with greater distance and with a process of inner reflection. This dichotomy between vision and touch also relates to the experience of the viewer, who both sees the painting and responds to it. Sergius Kodera interprets the glass orb as an external womb that transforms the entire composition into a representation of a divination. He regards the orb as a metaphor for pregnancy and the main female protagonist in Titian's *Allegory* as a sayer, who uses the crystal orb to predict the future. This reading of the painting is based on the popularity of crystallogancy at the time Titian created the painting and on the special perception of the crystal orb as an object that might contain divinatory forces.

Each chapter in the volume focuses on a different perception of Titian's *Allegory of Marriage*. Some scholars' attention is on a single figure or a single motive. Others are concerned with the entire composition and on the many attempts to imitate the painting. What enhances the present undertaking is that although the painting is not considered one of Titian's major works, it still bears the weight of numerous interpretations that add to the previous readings mentioned above. Here we see



how a single painting constructs meaning by asking diverse questions and giving attention to various facets of inquiry.

More than twenty years ago, Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press initiated the publication of *Masterpieces of Western Painting*—a series of books in which each one focussed on a single, universally acclaimed European masterpiece.²³ Among the paintings she addressed were Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Jacques Louis David's *The Death of Marat*, and Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, to name only a few. In his introduction to *Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, Paul Hayes Tucker discusses this methodological emphasis on presenting different approaches to a single work of art. He touches upon his difficulty in covering an entire range of perspectives on the painting:

Limitation of time and space prevented the inclusion of many other voices; every project has its boundaries. This collection, therefore, does not claim to cover all of the problems the picture raises or represent all of the methods presently used by art historians. It thus does not pretend to be the last word on the subject. The number of things we do not know about the picture should be sufficient caution about the latter.²⁴

As Hayes Tucker stresses in regard to Manet's painting, we, too, are limited in our knowledge about the painting and the circumstances in which it was created. However, we are fortunate enough to be able to address it in many ways, as demonstrated by the authors in the current volume.

The different attempts presented in this book thus join the earlier efforts by various art historians to solve the mystery of this painting—an erudite, yet enigmatic work of art whose layers of meaning merit more than one interpretation. As Rona Goffen suggests in the final paragraph of her 'Introduction' to *Titian's Venus of Urbino*, one of the books in the Cambridge University Press series, the definition of a masterpiece is that it always reveals new aspects of itself.²⁵ Taken together, the chapters in this volume represent an attempt to interpret Titian's painting based on in-depth scholarly knowledge of Venetian art and culture and they confirm the status of Titian's *Allegory* as a masterpiece. Offering different points of departure and emphasizing different factual issues, these multiple readings invite the reader to join in the game of interpretations and share the richness of early modern culture—as represented by a single artwork created by the most prolific and intriguing painter of his time.

23 Apart from the series, see also Collins, 12 *Views of Manet's Bar*.

24 Hayes Tucker, *Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, p. 6.

25 Goffen, *Titian's Venus of Urbino*, p. 18.

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