

Poussin, Titian and tradition: *The Birth of Bacchus* and the genealogy of images

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For Samuel Sachs II

The Birth of Bacchus, now in the Fogg Museum at Harvard, is one of Nicolas Poussin's strangest paintings (figure 1).¹ It was executed in 1657 for Jacques Stella, a follower of the artist, who was then living in Paris. Giovanni Pietro Bellori — Poussin's close friend, and a major theorist of seventeenth-century classicism — gives the following description in his biography of the painter:

The baby whom Mercury presents to that Nymph is the newly-born Bacchus. The nymph is Dirce, daughter of the river

Achelous, who receives him joyfully and admires the divinely born child. She is embraced about the shoulder by another Nymph, who points out the infant to the accompanying Naiads, who, seated in the water, turn in curiosity and gaze admiringly at him. Behold Jupiter in the clouds above, reclining in bed where he gave birth to the child, and with him Hebe ministering ambrosia to him as a restorative. But it is the cave by the river that is wholly prodigious, for it is clothed in new vine leaves and new grapes interlaced with ivy, born at the birth of Bacchus. The god Pan sits on the hill above, joyfully



Figure 1. Nicolas Poussin, *The Birth of Bacchus* (*Bacchus Reborn*), oil on canvas, 1657. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Art Museums. Photo: Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of Mrs Samuel Sachs in memory of her husband, Samuel Sachs.

blowing on the sonorous reeds of his pipes, and the same image was also painted by Philostratus. The other figures in the corner of the painting are not part of this fable, because the painter, following the description and sequence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, continued with another fable, that of Narcissus, who through love of himself ended in death, and the painting shows him dead next to the water in which he used to mirror himself. He lies crowned with the flowers into which he was changed, and Echo sits nearby him, miserably enamored, who, leaning on her upper arm, by her harsh pallor perfectly appears transformed into stone.²

A preparatory study for this painting survives; at one time in the possession of the painter Girodet, it too is now in the Fogg (figure 2). This drawing differs from the finished product in several ways, most significantly in its inclusion of Apollo's solar chariot rising behind the hill in the background.³ Radiographs of the finished canvas indicate that Poussin did in fact begin by painting the Apollo, but subsequently omitted the figure. The chariot appears also in an engraving of the composition by Giovanni Verini, apparently made sometime prior to the completion of the painting. Verini also included a reclining Venus in the upper right, instead of Jupiter: unlike the chariot, she seems to have been the engraver's own invention.⁴ When the painting

was finished, Poussin's brother-in-law Jean Dughet made a second engraving: it is a straightforward copy of the Fogg canvas.

In his *ecphrasis*, Bellori identifies a central interpretive difficulty: why did Poussin juxtapose two seemingly unrelated mythological narratives? His response is noteworthy. Bellori connects the two stories by means of a text: Poussin, he says, is 'following the description and sequence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*'. Although this particular explanation has not met with much success — for one thing, the two stories do not actually succeed one another in the *Metamorphoses* — the basic strategy has remained popular.⁵ Twentieth-century art historians continue to relate the two narratives by means of written sources. All the usual suspects of iconology — philosophical treatises, antique poems, and emblem-books — have at one time or another been put forward as mediating terms to connect the two depicted narratives.

Such texts have their uses. They provide viewers (historians included) with crucial background information. Beyond that, however, it is not clear that they have any bearing on the picture. The present essay derives from the conviction that Poussin's *visual* sources are more easily documented, and more interpretively relevant, than any learned disquisition in the libraries of his patrons. Its central

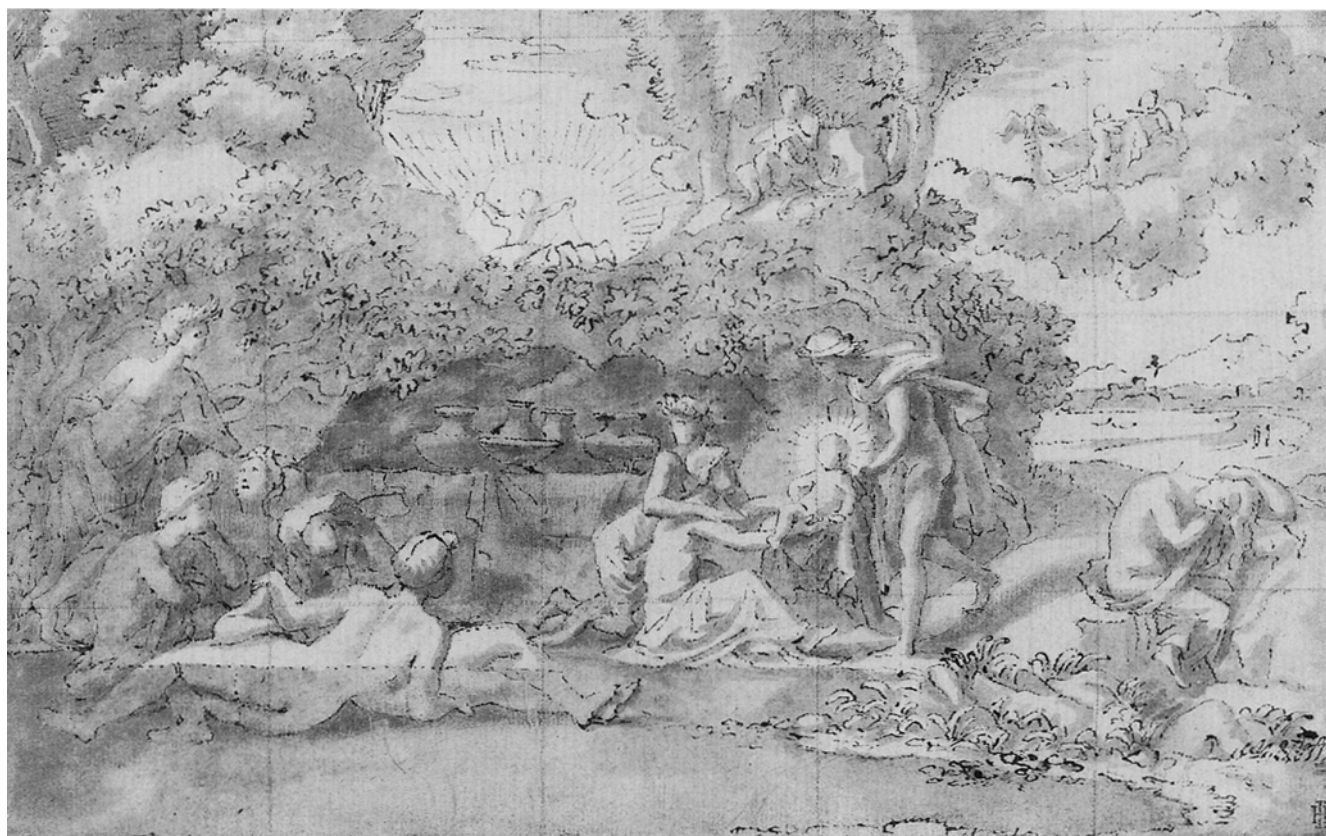


Figure 2. Nicolas Poussin, Preparatory study for *The Birth of Bacchus (Bacchus Reborn)*, pen, brown ink, brown wash, 1657. Cambridge, Harvard University Art Museums. Photo: Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Stralem.

claims are two. First, that *The Birth of Bacchus* is, in effect, a pastiche: its basic compositional framework, and several of its figures, derive from earlier pictures. Second, that this pedigree is meant to be noticed by the beholder: it has interpretive relevance. Such eclecticism was not unusual in the wake of the Carracci 'reform,' and indeed the citation of past art is the stock-in-trade of classicism in general and Poussin in particular.⁶ Yet *The Birth of Bacchus* takes this allusive structure as its central thematic.⁷ It acts out two modes of replication: the specular economy of the mirror-image, and the relational structure of allegory. This configuration, in turn, opens out onto a set of propositions about imitation, authority, and desire which constitute the picture's primary meanings or contents. The theme, it is worth noting, is singularly appropriate to a work destined for Stella: a painter whose own style was formed in conscious imitation of Poussin.

ICONOLOGIES

From Bellori onwards, all commentators on *The Birth of Bacchus* have relied upon at least one written 'source' to guide interpretation: the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. Art historians frequently invoke texts in this way, to provide the 'story' or 'order of occurrence' of which a narrative picture is a particular 'discourse' or 'order of telling.'⁸ Yet even this innocent maneuver may well concede too much importance to texts. It tends to obscure the way that paintings actually invent their own 'stories.' The events do not exist outside and prior to the telling: just the reverse. The narrative posits the events, retrojects them, in order to present itself as the narration of a notionally fixed sequence.⁹ 'The real narrative situation is pretended to — and this pretense, or *simulation* ... is precisely what defines the work of fiction.'¹⁰ Thus there is a danger of oversimplifying matters if we simply use the *Metamorphoses* to read off the events on the canvas. Text and image might better be seen as artifacts of a much longer sequence of revisions and retrojections. After all, it was not Ovid, but his own particular reading of a translation of Ovid, that was available to Poussin: a reading that, in its turn, would have been subject to ongoing revision and distortion in the act of recollection. It is not just a question of something being lost and added in transmission. Rather, we are faced with a sequence of individually discrete and novel objects (texts, readings, memories, pictures) each of which presents itself as the redaction of its predecessor. *The Birth of Bacchus* and its pen-and-ink study are fossils of this process: Poussin continually revised the composition as he worked, adding some figures, omitting others, and so on. His narrative derives its authority, and to some extent its intelligibility, from Ovid: but it is not Ovid's narrative. For this reason, appeals to the poem are essentially heuristic. They enable historians to construct hypotheses about the 'story' that a given picture is retrojecting; for example, that Poussin's evolving reading of Ovid coincides with the beholder's own

to such an extent that the depicted narratives are comprehensible *as such*. The hypothesis is unprovable: perhaps, as certain psychoanalytic readings might suggest, the true 'story' of this picture has nothing to do with Ovid and everything to do with oedipal desire and fantasy. Perhaps the figures are not 'really' Mercury, Bacchus, and so on, but other characters drawn from some idiosyncratic and hermetic iconography of Poussin's own devising. But in so far as there is any public meaning to this depiction, as distinct from the idiolect of fantasy, such a working hypothesis is permissible. The poem is taken to provide a set of rules or conventions, according to which beholders and painters alike are understood to play.

Modern, iconological readings of *The Birth of Bacchus* take this heuristic appeal to Ovid as a model. They multiply the number of texts, but the basic reasoning remains the same: in order to decode the picture, one must use a written source.¹¹ The resulting interpretations fall into two broad categories. One group of scholars employs neo-stoic writings as a cipher; another uses Philostratus. The work of Sir Anthony Blunt exemplifies the former tendency. For Blunt, *The Birth of Bacchus* translates the doctrines of the Theatine philosopher Tommaso Campanella by way of the Natale Conti's *Mythologia* of 1605. Thus: 'The nurture of Bacchus by the nymphs is primarily an allegory for the infusion of form into matter, linked with the idea of fertility.'¹² The sun, on this view, is the source of all life; the water-nymphs are raw, earthly matter; and the infant god represents the movement of the former into the latter. Narcissus and Echo provide a counterpoint to this theme: 'Whereas the Birth of Bacchus means vitality, the frustrated love of the other two figures means sterility and death.'¹³ More recently, Sheila McTighe has mounted a similar argument, replacing Campanella with a broader range of Seicento thinkers whose ideas the painting is supposed to symbolize: 'Poussin's image ... is a *libertin* vision of the junction between natural process and human ethics.'¹⁴

Such interpretations present two difficulties. First, as Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf observes, *The Birth of Bacchus* is simply inconsistent with the doctrines of Conti, Campanella, *et al.*¹⁵ While the neo-stoic reading requires the rising sun to be the source of all life and all form, Poussin went out of his way to include Jupiter as the parent of the infant deity, and he systematically effaced the solar chariot. It is hard to see, therefore, how the divine sun could be the source or origin of the infant Bacchus, as Blunt's reading would predict.¹⁶ Second, familiarity with the writings of Campanella, or Conti, or the *libertins* in no way affects the representational content of the painting. With or without the philosophical texts, the canvas depicts the same things: Bacchus, Narcissus, a pool, nymphs, Mercury, Jupiter, and so on. There may still be, as Erwin Panofsky said of Titian's allegories, 'an abstract and general significance behind the concrete and particular spectacle that enchants our eyes.'¹⁷

Yet the hypothesis that such significance exists, to be useful, must be able to show how that significance registers on the marked surface.¹⁸ Otherwise, the allegory is nothing more than a critical conceit: there is no visible evidence to suggest that the ‘particular spectacle’ really does have ‘abstract and general significance.’ This, then, is the chief problem with both neo-stoic and *libertin* readings: whether we believe in them or not, these allegories make no perceptible difference to the experience of looking at the picture. While it is plainly not the case that no text is ever relevant to any picture, still it is doubtful that any text is ever relevant in the way that Blunt hopes.

The second interpretive tendency eschews philosophy in favor of the *Imagines* of Philostratus, which Poussin read in the translation of Blaise de Vigenère. Bellori had cited this text already as a source for *The Birth of Bacchus*. In an important article, Dora Panofsky pointed out that Philostratus also described a *Death of Narcissus*; and, what is more, he stated clearly that Narcissus’ pool was the very one in which Bacchus was raised.¹⁹ The Fogg canvas does not correspond in its particulars to either of Philostratus’ *ecphrasis* (nor, for that matter, to Gaspard Isac’s illustrations to de Vigenère’s edition) (figure 3). For Panofsky, however, the connection was enough to explain the composition: Poussin is conflating two long-lost ancient paintings, one of Bacchus and one of Narcissus. The question still remained, however, as to

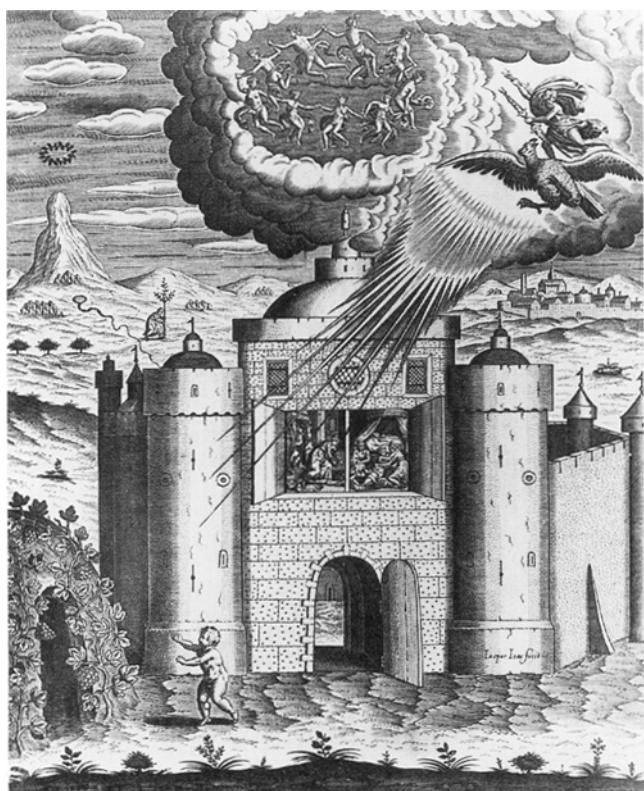


Figure 3. Gaspard Isac, *The Death of Semele and the Birth of Bacchus*. Illustration from Blaise de Vigenère, *Les Images de Philostrate* (Paris, 1629). Photo: author.

just why he should have done so. It was left to Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey to provide the necessary rationale. ‘The theme of Poussin’s painting,’ they suggest, ‘... is comprised of an extended poetic meditation upon the primal magic of a particular ancient, and very sacred place.’²⁰ *The Birth of Bacchus*, on this view, is fundamentally about the Pool of Dirce and its mythical history. This reading is by far the subtlest and most convincing to date. Unlike neo-stoicism and *libertinage*, these texts make a difference to the beholder: they tell us that it is not just any pool but, specifically, the Pool of Dirce that we see. Where Blunt offers cryptography, Panofsky, Cropper, and Dempsey offer an interpretation grounded in iconographic data.

Still, to call the Fogg canvas a painting *about* the sense of place seems to overlook the prominence of figures and events in the composition.²¹ After all, the Pool of Dirce is only recognizable as such through the narrative actions that occur along its banks. Bacchus, Narcissus, and the others identify the Pool: they transform it from an indefinite setting into a specific locale. In the case of the Fogg painting this process is particularly explicit, for the topography itself is entirely formulaic. The shady hillock descending in steps from left to right, overlooking a pool, with a crescent of sandy shore at lower right, is in fact Poussin’s standard landscape repoussoir.²² The *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* and the *Landscape with Diogenes*, both of 1648, are only two of the best known paintings to incorporate this feature (figure 4).²³ With regard to the former, John Shearman has shown that Poussin developed the landscape elements in a series of drawings, each of which, significantly, includes different staffage figures and therefore narrates a different story (or no story at all).²⁴ It seems, therefore, that the grotto-and-pool has no intrinsic significance, but is a stock token from Poussin’s repertoire, continually revised and renamed. Indeed, instead of taking each version individually it might be better to think of a landscape *series*: an open-ended process of revision and repetition. The painter reworks the same terrain over and over, infusing it each time with a new significance: and who is to say which is the final, definitive version? Certainly not *The Birth of Bacchus*, for Poussin revisited the grotto two years later, in 1659, in *Landscape with Two Nymphs and a Snake*.²⁵ As will become clear, this rhetorical structure of the topography (how it is continually reconstructed from prototypes) is of far greater significance to the Fogg picture than any semantic content (which particular landscape it is, what it connotes, and so on).

Such adaptations of earlier paintings and drawings are visible for all to see. Unlike books of philosophy and *ecphrasis*, the pictorial sources are neither obscure nor abstruse (at least, not for painters like Poussin and Stella); and the fact that they are woven into the very armature of the picture confirms their interpretive relevance.²⁶ But they are not the only prototypes for *The Birth of Bacchus*. Its chief visual source is, in fact, a painting by Titian.



Figure 4. Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, 1648. London, National Gallery. Photo: after Blunt (1967).

TITIAN

During Poussin's early years in Rome, all four of Titian's great Este bacchanals — *The Feast of the Gods* (begun by Giovanni Bellini); *The Worship of Venus*; *Bacchus and Ariadne*; and *The Bacchanal of the Andrians* (figure 5) — were available for his inspection. Their influence on the young painter has been noted many times.²⁷ Direct copies of the first three have been attributed to him (not, however, without some controversy).²⁸ A *Bacchus and Ariadne* in the Prado and an *Andrians* in the Louvre both freely adapt Titian's originals (figure 6).²⁹ *The Worship of Venus* provided Poussin with a new model for the representation of putti.³⁰ And the sleeping nude in *The Andrians* seems to have made a particular impact. Variants appear in no less than seven paintings and one drawing, all works of the 1620s and '30s.³¹ Somewhat later, Poussin undertook a series of bacchanals for Richelieu, in which direct borrowings from Titian are again plentiful.³²

Poussin once remarked that, 'Novelty in painting does not consist above all in choosing a subject that has never been seen before, but upon a good and novel disposition and expression, thanks to which the subject, though itself ordinary and worn, becomes new and singular.'³³ His re-use and revision of Titian conforms to this program. In the Louvre *Andrians*, for example, the young painter systematically reworks the cinquecento original (see figures 5–6). Both paintings allude to Philostratus, who describes a picture in

which Bacchus arrives on the Aegean isle of Andros; as he does so, a river of wine springs up from the earth, provoking revelry among the inhabitants.³⁴ In the right background of the Titian there is an aged rivergod who presses grapes with the weight of his own body: the wine flows down the hillside, to emerge in the foreground where it is consumed by the Andrians. Poussin moves this figure to the left foreground, and instead of a reclining old man, he shows a young Bacchus pressing the grapes, with a pose derived from that of Mercury in the Titian/Bellini *Feast of the Gods*.³⁵ In similar fashion, Poussin transforms Titian's sleeping nude into a peculiarly sensuous infant, and places him at left center instead of lower right. Lastly, in the foreground of Titian's *Andrians* there is a reclining woman, clad in blue, who holds a cup in her upraised left hand; her body is perpendicular to the picture plane. A similarly posed male figure occupies the foreground of Poussin's version; his body, however, is parallel to the plane.³⁶ Poussin, in other words, rotates Titian's figure by ninety degrees, and in the process changes its sex. This transposition may seem odd, but it is not without precedent in Poussin's work. As Candace Adelson has shown, a centauress in one of the Richelieu bacchanals — *The Triumph of Silenus* — is a right-to-left, mirror-image reversal of the wine-pourer from Titian's *Andrians*.³⁷ One might add that such rotations and alternations are predictable byproducts by Poussin's famous working method.



Figure 5. Titian, *Bacchanal of the Andrians*, oil on canvas, 1518–19. Madrid, Prado. Photo: Alinari/Art Resource.

'He made little wax figures in the nude in the proper attitudes,' says one early biographer, '... and set them up on a smooth board marked out in squares.'³⁸ One result of this procedure was that Poussin was able to use a given figure-type as often as he wished, presenting it each time from a different angle: he had simply to reposition the relevant figurine on the 'smooth board.' Something of the sort seems to have occurred with the foreground figure in the Louvre *Andrians*: the original has been retained, but decisively altered. Poussin shifts, revises, and transforms recognizable figures in order to make an 'old and worn' subject appear 'new and singular.'

Although Poussin famously renounced Venetian naturalism in the middle years of his career, adopting instead the austere

classicism for which he is known, the lushness of the early bacchanals returns in the late mythological landscapes. This return to Venice is particularly evident in *The Birth of Bacchus*, for that canvas is, in fact, another reworking of Titian's *Andrians*.³⁹ *Reworking*, not *copy*: the pictures share but a single figure in common. But compare the two, starting at upper right. There, in the background, Titian shows an old, reclining man, the source of a river of wine; in the same place, Poussin shows the bearded, reclining Jupiter, who has just given birth to Bacchus, the wine-god. In the main scene, Titian shows the wine arriving among the Andrians, who rejoice as grape vines wind spontaneously around the tree trunks; for his part, Poussin shows Bacchus handed over to nymphs, accompanied by a 'wholly prodigious' growth



Figure 6. Nicolas Poussin, *Bacchanal of the Andrians*, oil on canvas, c. 1625–30. Paris, Louvre. Photo: Reunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource.

of new vines. In the lower right, Titian shows a sensuous, reclining nude, fast asleep; Poussin shows an equally sensuous youth, who is not asleep but dead. At the top of the canvas, at center right, Titian has a peacock; in the corresponding place, Poussin shows Pan. Even Poussin's Mercury freely adapts the central, rose-clad dancer of Titian's scene. In short, the basic compositional structure is the same; the basic narrative progression is the same (the arrival of wine on the one hand, the arrival of Bacchus on the other); but Poussin shifts the whole conceit into a symbolic register, such that Titian's literal representation of a river of wine is replaced with an abstract personification of wine in the figure of Bacchus.⁴⁰ This form of copying is not imitative, in the sense that no figure is reproduced directly. Rather, it is paradigmatic, based on a system of substitutions.⁴¹ In his youth, the painter had assiduously copied Titian, but the late *Birth of Bacchus* stands in a more complex relation to its original. It does not simply reproduce *The Andrians*: it refigures it.

Significantly, however, Poussin incorporated other works as well. The *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* and its many

companions have already been mentioned as prototypes of the Pool of Dirce; but is it not alone (see figure 4). The reclining nymph seen from behind, for example, recalls the similarly posed reveler from Poussin's own *Andrians* in the Louvre; she appears as well in a drawing of a *Bacchanal before a Temple* (see figure 6).⁴² Even more important is a drawing of 1626–28, known as *The Origin of Coral* (figure 7).⁴³ It shows Perseus washing the blood of the sea-monster from his hands: the head of Medusa petrifies the blood and transforms it into coral, while Mercury and Minerva observe from a cloud. Many commentators have noted the similarity between this cloud-platform and the one in *The Birth of Bacchus*.⁴⁴ None, however, has mentioned that Poussin reused the blood-stained Perseus for the figure of Mercury in the preparatory drawing for the Fogg painting (see figure 2). Although in the end he changed the pose, the salient point is that *The Birth of Bacchus* is something of a pastiche, cobbled together from Poussin's own drawings, paintings, and recollections.⁴⁵ This point may seem unexceptional, but it has far-reaching consequences for the painting. It suggests, first of all, that Titian's *Andrians* is significant less for its particular content

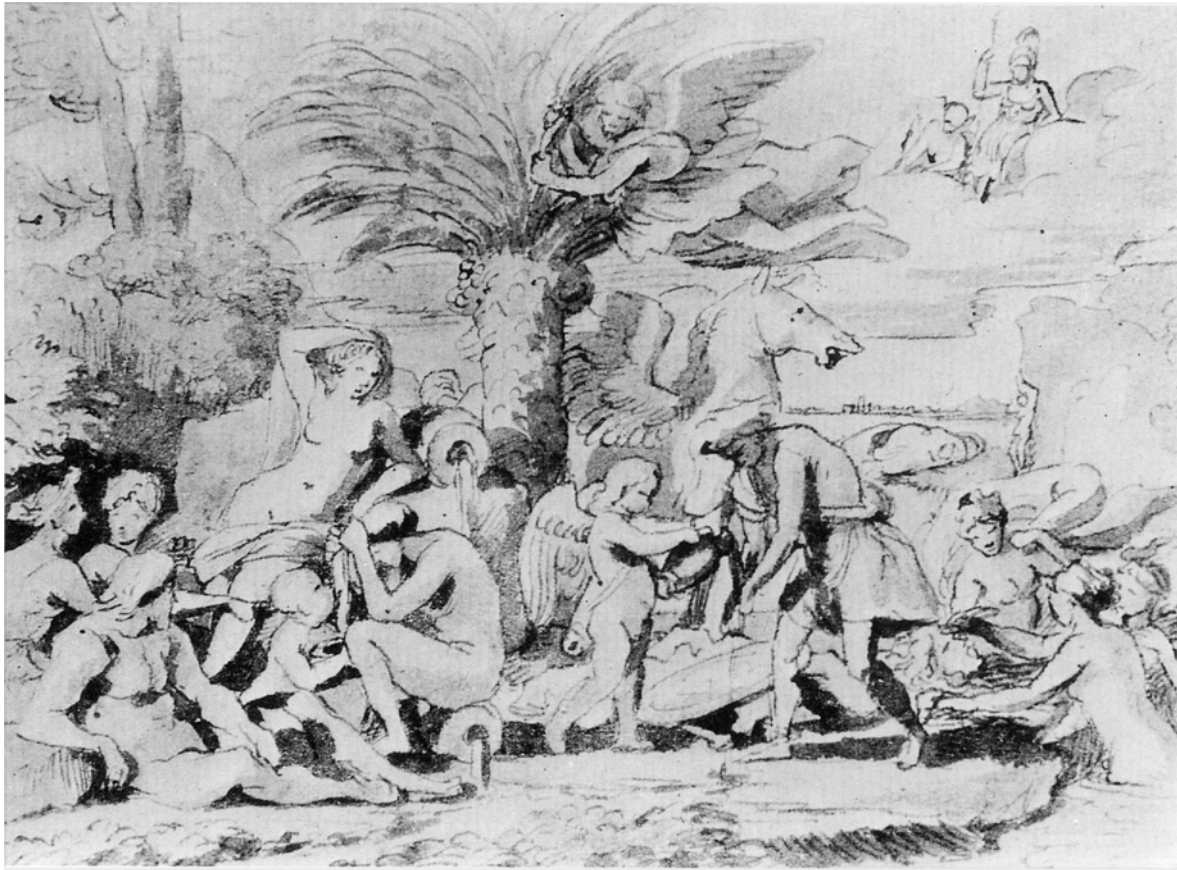


Figure 7. Nicolas Poussin, *The Origin of Coral*, pen, brown ink, brown wash, c. 1627. Windsor, Royal Library. Photo: after A. Blunt, *The French Drawings in the Collection of his Majesty the King at Windsor Castle* (Oxford, 1945).

than for its dominant position within a system of selective revision. The Fogg canvas reworks earlier pictures: and, far more than any single antecedent or type, this recursive process is the painting's guiding thematic.⁴⁶

COPIES AND IMITATIONS

What, then, was Poussin's view of copying and citation? The reuse and revision of past images is the very stuff of his art: it is part of what makes him a classicist. As expounded in his letters, his views on the subject are much in keeping with the theories current in his Roman milieu: the writings of Bellori and Félibien are especially pertinent.⁴⁷ The chief ambition of those authors was, as Panofsky argued, to find a middle way between Cinquecento Mannerism and the realist impulses of Caravaggio and the Dutch.⁴⁸ Bellori, for example, disdained what he called 'two opposing extremes, one entirely subject to the natural, the other to the imagination; . . . the former simply copied bodies as they appear to the eyes, indiscriminately; the latter did not consider the natural at all, following freedom of instinct.'⁴⁹ If *la maniera* was thought to have no connection with nature, realism was thought to be *nothing but* nature.

Within this framework Poussin, like many of his contemporaries, made a sharp distinction between the rational *imitation* of the world in paint, and the unthinking *copying* of it.⁵⁰ The former is positively valued, the latter negatively. So, for example, Poussin was able to define painting as 'an Imitation with lines and colors on any surface of all that is to be found under the sun,' even as he declared that he 'despised those who are only capable of copying nature as they see it.'⁵¹ Where imitation involves an intellectually motivated alteration (or elevation) of the object in the act of depiction, copying is a mere reproduction of appearances. The one is an exercise of man's rational faculties, the other entails the loss of a certain essential humanity. In one of his frequent polemics against the Caravaggisti and the Dutch, Poussin says:

A painter is not a great painter if he does no more than copy what he sees, any more than a poet. Some are born with an instinct like that of animals which leads them to copy easily what they see. They only differ from animals in that they know what they are doing and give some variety to it. But able artists must work with their minds . . .⁵²

Realist painters are guided by ‘instinct’ rather than ‘their minds’; they leave the realm of humans to become mere ‘animals’, unreasoning elements of the natural order. As Louis Marin has shown, it was precisely this conflation of painting and nature that Poussin attributed to Caravaggio when he said that the latter had come into the world ‘to destroy painting’.⁵³ Copying is the death of art. Likewise, in a letter of 1647, Poussin laments the fact that ‘poor painting has been reduced to the print, or better yet to the sepulchre (if, besides the Greeks, anyone has ever seen it alive)’.⁵⁴ Like Caravaggesque realism, printmaking is deplorable because it is nothing more than the unthinking reproduction of an original. Yet where realism transforms its practitioners into animals, printmaking is a ‘sepulchre’, a marker of absence and death.

The opposition between naturalistic copying and idealistic imitation underwrites some of Poussin’s basic ideas about painting. In a famous letter of 1642, for instance, he divides the act of seeing into two kinds, which he calls *Aspect* and *Prospect*. Though the substance of the text derives from Daniel Barbero’s *La pratica della prospettiva* of 1568, the guiding metaphors are consistent with Poussin’s other pronouncements.

You must know . . . that there are two ways of seeing objects, one of which consists in simply seeing [*voyant simplement*], and the other in considering with attention [*considérant avec attention*]. Simply to see is nothing other than to receive naturally in the eye the form and resemblance of the thing seen. But to see an object while considering it is quite different from the simple and natural reception of the form in the eye, as one seeks with particular application the means to know this same object well: thus we may say that the simple Aspect is a natural operation, and that which I am calling the Prospect is an office of reason, which depends upon three things — knowledge of the eye, of the line of sight, and of the distance between eye and object — and this is the knowledge in which it is to be hoped that those who purport to give their judgement [of pictures] should be well instructed.⁵⁵

Poussin’s ostensible subject in this passage is the representation of objects in space. ‘Prospect’ simply translates the Italian *prospettiva*, ‘perspective’: hence the importance of the eye, the line of sight, and the distance between eye and object. More fundamentally, however, the difference between Aspect and Prospect is between nature and reason, resemblance and knowledge, passive and active. It is a trivial, ‘natural operation’ to receive ‘the form and resemblance of the thing’. By contrast, the exercise of reason plays itself out in seeking ‘to know well’, *bien connoître*. The motivating intelligence of the enlightened man allows him to understand nature — to seek its Prospect with ‘particular application’ — even as, in so doing, it marks him as distinct from nature and mere resemblance — from the Aspect of things. Briefly put, Prospect is analogous to imitation, Aspect to copying.

For Poussin, in short, painting must distinguish rigorously between a representation and the thing it represents. Understanding entails a certain apartness or spacing: in a word, a *perspective*. A painting that merely copied the appearance of its subject-matter would not, in fact, be a representation at all: lacking the crucial, ‘perspectival’ interval, it would be nothing more than the unthinking Aspect of the world, a ‘sepulchre’ and not a picture.⁵⁶

ALLEGORY OF IMITATION

Although Poussin’s writings do not qualify as ‘sources’ of his pictures, they do provide a set of terms — a working vocabulary — that may usefully be brought to bear upon them. With regard to *The Birth of Bacchus*, for example, they bring out the way in which the depiction of Echo and Narcissus assimilates copying to nature, death, and unreason. The narrative or *matiera* is about replication: or, more precisely, the failure to recognize replications as such.⁵⁷ Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection — which Poussin shows in the still waters of the pool — even as Echo helplessly reproduces the voices of others. In each case, copying is a curse, and its result is death: death figured, moreover, as a total union with nature.⁵⁸ Echo fades into a rock; Narcissus literally sinks into the ground. The mirroring surface of the water underlines the point: just as mechanical reproduction is the ‘sepulchre’ of painting, just as pictorial realism turns artists into animals, so here the sterile mimicry of Narcissus and Echo results in the loss of both life and humanity. The metaphor is a familiar one: already in *De pictura*, Alberti had made Narcissus the inventor of painting (‘What is painting, but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?’).⁵⁹ Poussin, however, figures the dying youth as a negative model for ‘able artists’: a cautionary tale of the failure to recognize the disjunction between image and nature, mind and instinct. ‘Narcissistic’ pictorial realism is a kind of death, the sepulchre of an art which has been dead ‘since the time of the Greeks’.

In ‘elegiac’ paintings like *The Arcadian Shepherds* or the Berlin *Self-Portrait*, Poussin had been content to mourn thus at the tomb of ‘poor painting’.⁶⁰ In *The Birth of Bacchus*, however, he integrates the theme into a larger, contrapuntal framework. As Blunt and others have insisted, the Fogg picture is organized around a contrast between life and death, Bacchus and Narcissus. Where Narcissus fails to distinguish Copies from Imitations, and therefore assimilates to the natural world and dies, Bacchus is taken to the bosom of the Nymphs, and lives. He thus provides an alternative to specularly and death. Put differently: if Narcissus is captivated by the surface of the water, Bacchus and the Nymphs actually inhabit the welling spring. And as Narcissus is to Bacchus, so Echo is to Pan: according to Blaise de Vigenère — whose translation of Philostratus Poussin employed — Pan’s ecstatic cry is, precisely, the sound that Echo copies.⁶¹

It is her original. So again, life is opposed to death, mimicry to music: wholesale metamorphosis to Pan's divine grafting of goat and man, bestial and human.

In this situation, the narrative of divine birth is fraught with significance. The brief of the Fogg painting is to remake a lost Greek painting described by Philostratus: to resurrect a cadaver that, like 'poor painting' itself, has been in its sepulchre since the time of the Greeks. It is therefore fitting that the picture's main scene should depict a scene of resurrection and rebirth. Although the Fogg canvas is known conventionally as *The Birth of Bacchus*, the title *Bacchus Reborn* would actually be more appropriate. For the moment depicted follows immediately upon the little god's *second* birth. He has already been born once, prematurely, from the womb of his mother Semele when she was reduced to ashes by the brilliance of Jupiter.⁶² The Father of Gods and Men, who reclines in the background, has gathered up the remains and sewn them into his thigh; whence, after a period of gestation, Bacchus has been *reborn*. He is, in Ovid's phrase, 'twice-born', *bis genitus*.⁶³ It begins to seem as though there might be a reciprocity of sorts between the picture's narrative, its programmatic effort to resurrect Greek painting, and its citation of various originals and prototypes. The story of Bacchus' rebirth relates clearly

to Poussin's effort to renew painting through the imitation (not the copying) of the past, both Antique and recent. But how exactly do these various strands come together?

Here again, the painter's visual sources are of crucial importance. For Poussin has drawn the figure of Jupiter in a distinctive fashion (figure 8). The god reclines upon a couch, his right leg bent, and looks out at the viewer *en face*; a drinking-cup of Greek style (a *kylix*) hides his mouth. Poussin painted other reclining banqueters — for instance, those in the *Penitence* and *Eucharist* from his second series of *Sacraments* — but none quite like this one: the face, frontal to the viewer and half-obscured, is striking. The only commentator to have noticed the figure is Rossholm Lagerlöf, who, however, can only remark that it is 'slightly absurd'.⁶⁴ Yet the pose has an ancient pedigree. It is a distinct and recognizable figural type drawn from ancient Greek vase-painting (figure 9). Greek pottery was imported into Italy in vast quantities during Antiquity, and was produced also by the Greek cities in the southern half of the Peninsula. Painted vases had been known to Italian artists and humanists since the fifteenth century at least.⁶⁵ For his part, Poussin was better positioned than any painter of his age to see and study such material. It is no exaggeration to say that the modern rediscovery of Greek vase-painting was initiated in his immediate milieu.



Figure 8. Detail of figure 1.

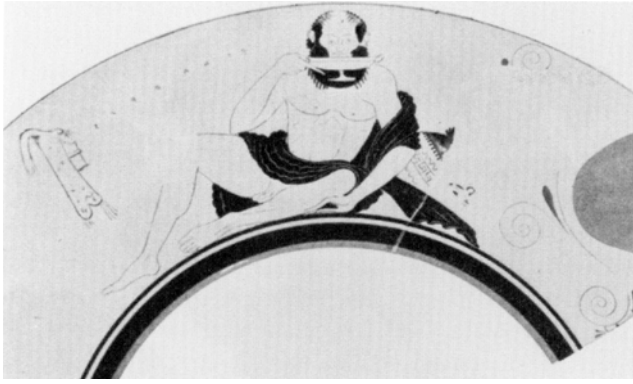


Figure 9. Drawing of the 'Gotha Cup' (detail), an Athenian *kylix* of c. 500 BCE. Gotha, Schlossmuseum. Photo: after A. Furtwängler and K. Reichold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, vol. 3 (Munich, 1932).

The earliest known drawings of Greek painted pottery — aside from those which turn up from time to time in Renaissance paintings — are those included in the *Museo Carateo* of Poussin's patron, Cassiano dal Pozzo.⁶⁶ Likewise, the earliest documented collector of Greek vase-painting was none other than Giovanni Pietro Bellori, the painter's biographer and close friend.⁶⁷ The French sculptor Girardon acquired a number of such vases while visiting Rome in 1650; by 1667, the *poussiniste* Charles Alphonse Dufresnoy was praising Greek painted pottery in his *De arte pingendi*.⁶⁸ Given Poussin's strong antiquarian interests and his connections to the collectors involved, it is likely that he knew at least some of this material. Although there is no independent evidence that he ever saw a vase bearing the motif in question, it is by no means implausible that he should have done so; and the hypothesis, unproved though it may be, usefully accounts for Jupiter's 'slightly absurd' pose. If it is correct, moreover, then the passage from background to foreground, from parent to child, is not simply the narrative of Bacchus' rebirth. It is also the rebirth of 'poor painting' itself, a movement from Greek paternity to modern life. The painting's narrative thereby recapitulates its underlying thematic. Poussin effects a rebirth of his art — he brings it back from the sepulchre it has occupied 'since the time of the Greeks' — by depicting the rebirth of a god. He has, in theory at least, returned painting to the condition it occupied during the age of the Antique masters.

Bacchus Reborn thus displays a set of hierarchically arranged binaries: Aspect and Prospect, copy and imitation, animal and human, death and life, sepulchre and painting. Through the articulation of these binaries, moreover, it simultaneously *narrates* and *effects* a rebirth. It tells the story of the infant Bacchus' return to life, and it does so by re-working prototypes from the Antique past and Poussin's own career (a lost painting described by Philostratus, *The Origin of Coral*, the landscape prototypes, Titian's bacchanal, and, apparently, a Greek vase). The story occurs as a horizontal movement

from background to foreground. The Death of Narcissus and Echo provides a counterpoint to this drama, opposing death to life, Aspect to Prospect, copy to imitation. Their story is pressed up close to the picture plane, as though it were inimical to depth, to *prospettiva*.

Yet, as will be recalled, the entire composition is itself a systematic reworking of Titian's *Andrians*. This general act of revision and imitation subsumes both halves of the binary pair. Unlike the stories of Bacchus and Narcissus, it does not occur *within* the depicted space. Rather, it structures the depiction itself. It occurs on the vertical surface of the canvas, which Poussin treats almost like a grid on which he can plot his substitutions: Jupiter for the river-god, Bacchus for the wine, Narcissus for the dreaming nude, and so on. The elaborate contrapuntal structure of the narratives, the entire system of binaries, exists in and through this systematic revision of the Cinquecento master. Nothing in the painting exists outside this economy of imitation, not even the opposition of imitation and copy, Bacchus and Narcissus. On the contrary, it is only through this originary or primal imitation that Poussin can even articulate the distinction between imitation and copy in the first place.

By means of this double system, Poussin follows the ideas expressed in his letters to their logical conclusion. Painting, he had suggested, always has a certain *apartness*, an internal disjunction or perspective, which distinguishes it from mere specularly or Aspect. This disjunction is a necessary condition of the art, in so far as it is performed by people who 'work with their minds,' and not by mere animals, or Narcissus, or the Caravaggisti. Because painting cannot 'mirror' its objects, because it is not Copy but Imitation, the relay of every image through other, prior images is its defining characteristic. For just this reason, it can always only be *re-born*, as the recursive synthesis of a stipulatively absent original. It is never the first version, never original, but always already at one step removed even from itself. Like Bacchus, painting is *bis genitus*. *Bacchus Reborn*, accordingly, does not merely set up a binary between imitation and copy. Rather, by refiguring Titian it shows how *even the articulation of that binary must, itself, be an imitation*. The picture's narrative thus recapitulates its function: *Bacchus Reborn* effects the rebirth of painting by telling a story of rebirth. Like a Chinese box, it encloses its allegorical narrative within an equally allegorical rhetoric.

The result is not, however, an endless regress or deconstructive deferral. On the contrary, *Bacchus Reborn* posits a coherent point of origin to the series. It might seem as though Jupiter should play this role within the depicted narrative, and Titian's *Andrians* in the allegory: both are originary, even paternal paradigms. But the picture organizes itself around the premise that both Jupiter and *The Andrians* are but special links in a sequence leading back *yet further* to an absolute point of origin. In the case of Jupiter, *Bacchus Reborn* depicts only a veiled form of the true deity. The

picture's narrative presuppose the tale of Semele, mother of the infant god, who demanded to see Jupiter in his 'true' aspect, and was reduced to ashes when she did so. This preliminary episode provides the rationale for Jupiter's birthing of Bacchus. The story was actually included in Philostratus' *ecphrasis*, and illustrated by Gaspard Isac in de Vigenère's translation (see figure 3). Poussin omits it. The Jupiter in the Fogg picture is not the dazzling, incandescent power, but a cloaked and mediated godhead: a feature suggested pictorially, perhaps, by the way the cupbearer veils his body with her robe. This hiding is the premise of the narrative itself. It sets everything in motion, and for just this reason Poussin does not show it directly. With regard to *The Andrians*, likewise, the painting's structure of allusion suggests a primal source behind 'the concrete and particular spectacle that enchants our eyes'. Not only is *Bacchus Reborn* a revision of *The Andrians*, but *The Andrians* itself transcribes an *ecphrasis* in Philostratus (see figures 5 and 9).⁶⁹ Just as there is a 'true' Jupiter behind the one in the narrative, so there is a 'true' painting behind both *Bacchus Reborn* and its pictorial source: the lost original described by Philostratus. In each case, the operative paradigm is itself the replication of some earlier exemplar: an exemplar we cannot see, but must infer if we are to make sense of the tableau.

It may be useful — though not strictly necessary — to cast this atavistic structure in terms of the Neoplatonic theory of *mimesis* current in Poussin's Roman milieu. Indeed, it is likely that Poussin's picture borrows some of its authority from the prestige of that doctrine. In the *Ion*, Socrates asserts that all art is a chain of imitations descending in successive links from the absolute reality of the Idea; and the authority of the initial link in the chain (which Socrates suggests is the poetry of Homer) is guaranteed by divine revelation.⁷⁰ Adapting this model to the visual arts, many Seicento theorists urged a return to certain privileged links in the mimetic chain: in particular, to what Bellori called the '*buoni maestri*,' painters such as Raphael and Titian and, behind them, the Ancients.⁷¹ These exemplars, like the Homer of the *Ion*, were said to stand in a special proximity to the Ideal, and could therefore serve as starting points for new chains of new imitations. They are not identical to the Idea itself; for the Idea is, stipulatively, that which is neither copy nor imitation, and it cannot be represented without losing something of its essence.⁷² Instead, the relationship of one link to another is genetic and hierarchical. Bellori, for instance, condemns those painters who fail to grasp this point and merely 'copy the ideas of others, creating works that are not legitimate children of nature, but bastards'.⁷³ Each imitation ought to stand in a filial relation to its original, and the first, the paternal origin, is the Idea or Form itself.

Both Jupiter and Titian are analogous to this inaugural link. They are originary *mimeseis*, the quintessential '*buoni maestri*'. *Bacchus Reborn* posits an absolute original — an Idea or Form — that it does not represent, and it narrates

this theory in the tale of Semele's vision of the unclad Jupiter, which the picture likewise presupposes but does not show. Indeed, it is precisely as the aftermath of this primal scene that Bacchus is reborn, and the inaugural link in the chain of imitations thereby forged. Painting, in a sense, begins with the hiding of Jupiter. Poussin routes this story through an allusive structure, a chain of paradigmatic substitutions each link of which depends from a previous figure. The resulting genetic sequence goes back to Antiquity, and to Philostratus' inaugural, *ecphrastic* representation of a lost painting: a painting which is, like Jupiter, always posited and always invisible. In this way, narrative once again recapitulates rhetoric: the latter is the allegory of the former.

And yet, inevitably, this absolute point of origin is posited only in retrospect. The radiography of the Fogg painting reveals as much. As noted earlier, Poussin was initially committed to a very different composition, one that included Apollo's solar chariot in the background (see figure 2). Had Apollo survived into the final version, he would have provided a counterweight to Jupiter. The movement from right background to left foreground — from Jupiter's couch to the Pool of Dirce — would have been balanced by an equally powerful movement from left background to right foreground — from Apollo in his chariot to Narcissus dead. Instead of one axis to the picture there would have been two; instead of a straight linear progression from father to son, a chiasm. The status of Jupiter as an absolute progenitor would therefore have been compromised, and the composition would not have related so clearly to Titian. Poussin declined this option, just as he declined to represent the 'true,' dazzling body of Jupiter as Gaspard Isac had tried to do (see figure 3). In the effacement of the solar chariot, we can see the retrospective consolidation of Jupiter's status in the picture, and with it, the privileged status of the Ideal, of the *buoni maestri*, of the Antique.

These narratives of rebirth and replication seem unaccountably abstract when paired against the sheer lushness of the painting. But the contrast is only superficial. Poussin's elaborate allegorical structure is not merely or trivially formalist. Rather, the brief of this painting is to suggest just what is at stake in the rhetoric of depiction. *Bacchus Reborn* does, after all, figure the rebirth of painting as the entry of a small boy into a moist grotto populated by seven half-naked surrogate mothers. The father is a watchful presence in this scene, yet he is essentially absent, or at least cloaked; and the condition of the happy infant stands in marked contrast to the more conspicuously erotic — and deadly — reciprocity of Narcissus and Echo. Desire is as much a theme as the opposition of death and rebirth: desire which, apparently, can be either licit or profane. Semele's vision of Jupiter unclad resulted in an annihilation so complete that it cannot be depicted; Narcissus' failure to distinguish imitation from reality resulted in metamorphosis and death. Bacchus, by contrast, is a 'legitimate child' of Jupiter, the 'good master'.

The result is a gratification licensed by paternal authority, as the contented, sleeping child is handed off into a fantasy world of maternal sexuality: a world in which the reflections on the surface of the pool (*la source*) are dazzling, and yet do not result in 'Narcissistic' error.

This is not to say that *Bacchus Reborn* is ultimately the material correlate of a fantasy, that its complex web of allusion is in fact a means of discharging some unconscious oedipal wish. On the contrary, just as the 'story' of a picture is not given in advance but posited in the telling, so the family romance of this painting cannot be seen as a pre-existing sequence (or 'fantasy') that the picture simply transmits. The organizing principle of *Bacchus Reborn* is that rhetoric should recapitulate narrative. That is, the pictorial narratives articulate structures of depiction: the relations of a set of marks to the sources they posit in nature and in art. There is a palpable pathos to the depicted scenes, a quality which does not detract from Poussin's rhetorical *conchetto* but, on the contrary, is inseparable from it. In this painting, the dramas of paternity, legitimacy, loss, and desire are no more *and no less* than revisions and elaborations of an eminently figural relation. These dramas, the painting suggests, are the stuff of rhetoric. *Bacchus Reborn* rings the changes on a genetic metaphor, the retrojection of an inaugural, paternal source to ground the painting's imitative structure. The picture, one might say, is all about the shoring up of an ideal authority which, like the unclad and dazzling body of Jupiter, like the original of *The Andrians*, like its own narrative emplotment, is always posited after the fact, as a pure anteriority.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the J. Paul Getty Trust, for supporting me in 1999–2000 with a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in the History of Art; and to the University of Chicago, for allowing me to spend that year on leave from the Department of Art History. I also would like to thank Leslie Kurke and Joel Snyder for comments on earlier drafts, and Erika Dudley for conversations in the Fogg.

NOTES

- 1 – P. Rosenberg, ed., *Nicolas Poussin 1594–1665* (Paris, 1994), cat. no. 228.
- 2 – G. P. Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, e architetti moderni* (1672, repr. Turin, 1976), pp. 460–1.
- 3 – Rosenberg, ed., *Nicolas Poussin*, cat. no. 229. The drawing also gives a nimbus to Bacchus.
- 4 – X-rays: A. Mongan, 'The Infant Bacchus Entrusted to the Nymphs by Poussin', *Fogg Art Museum Annual Report 1958–59* (1960), pp. 29–37. For the Venus as Verini's invention, see Rosenberg, ed., *Nicolas Poussin*, p. 500, cat. no. 229.
- 5 – The story of Tiresias intervenes between the Birth of Bacchus and the Death of Narcissus in Ovid.
- 6 – For discussions of the phenomenon see, e.g., D. Mahon, 'Eclecticism and the Carracci: Further Reflections on the Validity of a Label', *Journal of*

the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 16 (1953), pp. 202–41; E. Cropper, 'Tuscan History and Emilian Style', in *Emilian Painting of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Symposium*, ed. H. Millon (Bologna, 1987), pp. 49–62.

7 – On citation, quotation, and related issues in Poussin, see the important discussion in R. Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, 1987), ch. 4; also D. Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings: A study in Art-Historical Methodology* (University Park, 1993), ch. 6; and, more recently, F. Graziani, 'Poussin mariniste: la mythologie des images', in *Poussin et Rome. Actes du colloque à l'Académie de France à Rome et à la Bibliotheca Hertziana 16–18 novembre 1994*, eds. O. Bonfait, C. Luitpold Frommel, M. Hochmann, and S. Schütze (Paris, 1996), pp. 367–85.

8 – Story/discourse: S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca, 1978); J. Culler, 'Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative', in *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca, 1981), pp. 169–87; M. Bai, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Minneapolis, 1985); G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca, 1988). Orders of occurrence and telling; N. Goodman, 'Twisted Tales; or, Story, Study, and Symphony', in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1981), pp. 99–115.

9 – The point is argued more fully in Culler (1981); and W. Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), pp. 234–55.

10 – Genette (1988), p. 15. Italics in the original.

11 – For a critique of this practice, with special reference to *The Birth of Bacchus*, see H. Damisch, 'D'un Narcisse l'autre', *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, 13 (1976), pp. 109–46, at pp. 134–9.

12 – Quotation: Blunt 1944, p. 166.

13 – A. Blunt, 'The Heroic and the Ideal Landscape in the Work of Nicolas Poussin', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 7 (1944), pp. 154–68, at p. 167.

14 – S. McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories* (Cambridge, UK, 1996), pp. 162–71 (quotation, p. 169). McTighe's specific textual source is Lucas Holste's edition of Porphyry. See also F. Grillo, *Tommaso Campanella nell'arte di Andrea Sacchi e Nicola Poussin* (Cosenza, 1979), pp. 73–8.

15 – M. Rossholm Lagerlöf, *Ideal Landscape: Annibale Carracci, Nicolas Poussin, and Claude Lorraine* (New Haven, 1990), pp. 69–71; M. Rossholm Lagerlöf, 'Poussin's Use of Rhetoric in the Birth of Bacchus', *Word & Image*, 10 (1994), pp. 170–89, at p. 178.

16 – Unfortunately, Rossholm Lagerlöf's own thesis is equally reductive: 'It is all a question of fertility symbolism,' she says. More specifically, 'We are being shown . . . how the energy emanating from light and warmth is reflected in the continual alternations in nature between awakening and slumber.' Quotations: Rossholm Lagerlöf (1994), pp. 176, 180. Surely the fact that neither Narcissus nor Echo will ever awake from their slumber ought to cast doubt on this thesis.

17 – E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago, 1955), p. 147.

18 – It is worth recalling Panofsky's own views on the interpretive relevance of allegorical meaning: 'Such superimposed meanings either *do not enter into the content of the work at all*, as is the case with the *Ovide Moralisé* illustrations, which are virtually indistinguishable from non-allegorical miniatures illustrating the same Ovidian subjects; or they cause an ambiguity of content, which can, however, be overcome or even turned into an added value if the conflicting ingredients are molten in the heat of a fervent artistic temperament as in Rubens' "Galerie de Médicis"' (Panofsky [1955], p. 29 n. 1, emphasis added). Elsewhere Panofsky gives an example of information that does 'enter into the content of the work'. If we fail to take Renaissance conventions for the depiction of apparitions into account, he observes, we may mistake a picture of a man having a vision of the infant Jesus for one of a man watching a live baby hurtle through the air by his head (Panofsky [1955], pp. 33–5; cf. Wollheim [1987], pp. 90–3). The information affects the perception of what is depicted (flying baby or vision?). Seventeenth-century *apophrasais* often give just this sort of information. For example, in Rubens's account of his own allegorical painting, *The Horrors of War*, each and every detail is fraught with significance; what is more, the depicted narrative is incomprehensible without prior knowledge of this significance. A typical

- sentence reads, 'The grief-stricken woman clothed in black, with torn veil, robbed of all her jewels and other ornaments, is the unfortunate Europe who, for so many years now, has suffered plunder, outrage, and misery' (R. S. Magum, ed., *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* [Evanston, 1955], pp. 408–9, letter no. 242). Such allegorical exegesis is, in effect, a kind of iconography: it tells the beholder what is going on. It is in this respect analogous to the Ovidian narrative (or 'story') in Poussin. Not so Blunt's neo-stoicism, which imputes a cryptic meaning behind the visible tableau.
- 19 – D. Panofsky, 'Narcissus and Echo: Notes on Poussin's *Birth of Bacchus* in the Fogg Museum of Art', *Art Bulletin*, 31 (1949), pp. 108–20. The pool, says Philostratus, is 'not unadorned with what pertains to the rites of Bacchus, since it is that which he produced for the benefit of his ministering Nymphs'. Quotation: English translation by Dora Panofsky of Blaise de Vigenère's French translation of Philostratus, *Imagines* 2.23 (see Panofsky [1949], p. 120). Against this reading, see C. Del Bravo, 'Lecture di Poussin e Claude', *Artibus et Historiae*, 9 (1988), pp. 151–70, at 164, n. 13. For Poussin, Philostratus, and Blaise de Vigenère, see also E. Panofsky, 'Poussin's *Apollo and Daphne* in the Louvre', *Bulletin de la Société Poussin*, 3 (1950), pp. 27–41; McTighe (1996), pp. 162–71.
- 20 – Cropper and Dempsey (1996), pp. 162–71.
- 21 – On the distinction between landscape and action in Poussin see L. Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Stanford, 1999), chs. 1 and 2.
- 22 – For documentation of Poussin's constant recycling of his own images, see H. Brigstocke, 'Variantes, copies et imitations. Quelques réflexions sur les méthodes de travail de Poussin', in *Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). Actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel du 19 au 21 octobre 1994*, ed. A. Mérot, 2 vols. (Paris, 1996), pp. 201–28.
- 23 – *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*. London, National Gallery. *Landscape with Diogenes*: Paris, Louvre.
- 24 – J. Shearman, 'Les dessins de paysages de Poussin', in *Actes du colloque internationale Nicolas Poussin*, ed. A. Chastel, 2 vols. (Paris, 1960), pp. 179–88.
- 25 – Chantilly, Musée Condé inv. 302. For the date, D. Mahon, 'Réflexions sur l'art de Poussin', *Art de France*, 1 (1961), pp. 119–32.
- 26 – For the contrast between textual and pictorial quotation, cf. N. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, 1978), pp. 47–50, 55–6.
- 27 – For general discussions of Poussin and Titian, see: D. Mahon, 'Nicolas Poussin and Venetian Painting: A New Connexion', *Burlington Magazine*, 88 (1946), pp. 15–20, 37–43; M. Friedlaender, *Nicolas Poussin: A New Approach* (London, 1966), p. 26; A. Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (Washington, 1967), pp. 66–9, 73–5, 83, 123–5, 146–7. For this period in the artist's career, K. Oberhuber, *Poussin: The Early Years in Rome* (Fort Worth, 1988), especially pp. 37, 82–4; S. Alloisi et al., ed., *Intorno a Poussin: dipinti romani a confronto* (Rome, 1994), cat. nos 8–9. For Poussin in the Ludovisi collections: Bellori (1672/1976), p. 426.
- 28 – The locations of the three copies are: Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland (Blunt [1967], pl. 94); Rome, Accademia Nazionale di S. Luca (Alloisi et al. [1994], cat. no. 8); Rome, Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant'Angelo (Alloisi et al. [1994], cat. no. 9).
- 29 – For Poussin and *Bacchus and Ariadne*, see Mahon (1946), p. 38; Wollheim (1987), pp. 198–201, 366, n. 15. For the Prado picture, see O. Bonfait, 'Poussin au carrefour des années 1660', in *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Rosenberg, pp. 106–16, at p. 115, with further references. For Poussin and *The Andrians*, see: Blunt (1967), pp. 123–4; Wollheim (1987), p. 201. For the Louvre picture see *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Rosenberg, cat. no. 16.
- 30 – A. Colantuono, 'Titian's Tender Infants: On the Imitation of Venetian Painting in Baroque Rome', *I Tatti Studies*, 3 (1989), pp. 207–34.
- 31 – Paintings: *The Andrians* (Paris, Louvre); *The Nurture of Bacchus* (Paris, Louvre); *Midas before Bacchus* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek); *Mercury, Herse, and Aglaurus* (Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts); *Venus Spied upon by Shepherds* (Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen); *Venus Spied upon by Satyrs* (London, National Gallery); *The Triumph of Ovid* (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Corsini; for attribution see Oberhuber 1988, Alloisi et al. 1994). Drawing: *Theseus and Ariadne*. (Florence, Uffizi, inv. 5740 S). Also the *Triumph of Silemus* (Tours, Musée des Beaux-Arts), on which see the following note.
- 32 – On the Richelieu bacchanals and Titian see C. Adelson, 'Nicolas Poussin et les tableaux du Studiolo d'Isabelle d'Este', *Revue du Louvre*, 4 (1975), pp. 237–41, at 239–40; *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Rosenberg, p. 226, with further bibliography.
- 33 – Quoted in Blunt (1967), p. 365. See also O. Bätschmann, 'Les interprétations de Poussin', in *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Rosenberg, pp. 94–7; Graziani (1996).
- 34 – On the subject, see E. Panofsky, *Studies in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York, 1969), pp. 20–1, 99–102 and n. 26. The source is Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.25.
- 35 – For the pose, cf. Blunt (1967), p. 123.
- 36 – A similar figure appears also in a drawing of a bacchanal: Paris, Louvre, inv. M.I. 1103.
- 37 – Adelson (1975), p. 240.
- 38 – Joachim Sandrart, quoted in Blunt (1967), p. 242. Bellori records that Poussin modelled *The Worship of Venus* in just this fashion: Bellori (1672/1976), p. 426. On the figurines see, most recently, A. Arikha, 'De la boîte, des figurines, et du mannequin', in *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Rosenberg, pp. 44–7, with earlier references.
- 39 – To my knowledge, the dependence of *The Birth of Bacchus* on *The Andrians* has not previously been discussed. At times Friedlaender seems to have had the connection in the back of his mind, though he never stated it explicitly; indeed, he is concerned to emphasize the differences between the two pictures. See Friedlaender (1966), pp. 26, 128. More recently Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf has pointed to the affinity between the Narcissus in the Fogg painting and the dreaming nude woman in the Prado (Rossholm Lagerlöf [1994], p. 179), but she does not pursue the matter.
- 40 – Titian's painting may have had allegorical significance of its own, but what matters is not the *Bacchanal of the Andrians per se* so much as its value relative to *The Birth of Bacchus*. See below.
- 41 – On the importance of paradigmatic substitutions in Poussin, see Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *Regarder, Écouter, Lire* (Paris, 1993), ch. 11.
- 42 – Windsor Castle, inv. RL 1910. The basic type, as noted earlier, is a ninety-degree rotation of a figure from Titian's *Andrians*. There seems to be a smooth progression from the early adaptation in the Louvre *Andrians*, through the drawing, to the Fogg canvas: the left arm gradually descends, and the figure reverts to its original gender.
- 43 – Windsor Castle, royal Library inv. 11984 (*Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Rosenberg, cat. no. 15).
- 44 – Compare also the *Blind Orion* of 1658 (New York, Metropolitan Museum).
- 45 – Looking farther afield, a group of carousing Egyptians from the Palestrina mosaic — reproduced in the *Museo Caracteo* of Poussin's friend and patron, Cassiano dal Pozzo — may lie behind the group of nymphs in the foreground of *The Birth of Bacchus*. Though the similarity is by no means exact, the nude, intertwined bodies of the revelers, lying under a grape arbor on the banks of the Nile, are remarkably similar in conception to those in the Fogg painting. The illustration from the *Museo Caracteo* is Windsor, Royal Library inv. 19219. On Poussin and Cassiano see H. McBurney, 'Poussin et le *Museo Caracteo* de Cassiano dal Pozzo', in *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. Rosenberg, pp. 58–60; F. Solinas, 'Poussin et Cassiano dal Pozzo. Notes et documents sur un collaboration amicale', in *Nicolas Poussin*, ed. A. Mérot, pp. 287–336; F. Solinas, "'Giovani ben intendenti del disegno': Poussin e il Museo Caracteo", in *Poussin et Rome*, eds. Bonfait et al., pp. 215–40, all with further references. Poussin certainly turned to the Palestrina mosaic for the eponymous serpent of the *Landscape with Two Nymphs and a Snake* mentioned earlier: see P. Rosenberg, ed., *Nicolas Poussin: La collection du musée Condé à Chantilly* (Paris, 1994), p. 60, where it is noted that Poussin also used the mosaic for *The Holy Family in Egypt* (St Petersburg, Hermitage).
- 46 – In addition, the standing nymph at far left derives from the Aldobrandini Wedding, but Poussin used the figure so often — e.g. in the drawing *Venus at the Fountain* (Louvre, RF 762) — that it seems unlikely that borrowing had any special significance in the present instance.

- 47 – Such texts are not, of course, *sources* for Poussin's imagery: rather, they thicken the basically rhetorical description offered below.
- 48 – E. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (Columbia, SC, 1968), pp. 104–5.
- 49 – Bellori (1672/1976), p. 32.
- 50 – Poussin was not always consistent in his terminology, but the underlying binary runs through his writings. For this distinction in general see Panofsky (1968), ch. 6. For the distinction in Poussin: J. Thuillier, 'La théorie de l'art au xvii^e siècle: André Félibien', *Annuaire du Collège de France 1982–1983* (Paris, 1983), pp. 708ff; J. Thuillier, 'L'image au xvii^e siècle: de l'allégorie à la rhétorique des passions', *Word & Image*, 4 (1988), pp. 88–89, at pp. 92–3; Brigstocke (1996). For its afterlife in Winckelmann, see M. Fried, 'Antiquity Now: Reading Winckelmann on Imitation', *October*, 37 (1986), pp. 87–98.
- 51 – Painting as imitation: letter to Freart de Chambray, 1 March 1665: quoted and translated in Blunt (1967), pp. 371–2. Despised copying: Blunt (1967), p. 220, n. 9.
- 52 – J. Thuillier, 1960. 'Pour un "Corpus Poussinianum"', in *Actes du colloque internationale Nicolas Poussin*, ed. A. Chastel, vol 2 (Paris, 1960), pp. 49–238, at p. 81. Also Y. Delaporte, 'André Félibien en Italie (1647–1649). Ses visites à Poussin et Claude Lorrain', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1958), pp. 193–214, at pp. 202–3; Blunt (1967), p. 220.
- 53 – Cf. L. Marin, *To Destroy Painting* (Chicago, 1995).
- 54 – 'La pauvre peinture [en fût] réduite à l'estampe, je pourrais dire mieux à la sépulture (si, hors de la main des Grecs, quelqu'un l'a jamais vue vivante).' In C. Jouanny, ed., *Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin publiée d'après les originaux* (Paris, 1911), p. 354. Evidently, these views did not stop Poussin from allowing prints to be made of his works: indeed, a print was made from a preparatory drawing for *The Birth of Bacchus*.
- 55 – A. Blunt, ed., *Nicolas Poussin: Lettres et propos sur l'art* (Paris, 1964), pp. 62–3, trans. Author. Barbero: C. Goldstein, 'The Meaning of Poussin's Letter to de Noyers', *Burlington Magazine*, 108 (1966), pp. 233–9, at p. 234, n. 8. On aspect and prospect see: Jouanny (1911), pp. 139–47; Goldstein (1966); Blunt (1967), p. 225; O. Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting* (London, 1990), p. 35; Marin (1995), pp. 34–5; Cropper and Dempsey (1996), p. 210.
- 56 – Cf. Marin (1995).
- 57 – On the myth of Echo and Narcissus in Poussin, see O. Bätschmann, 'Poussins *Narziss und Echo* im Louvre. Die Konstruktion von Thematik und Darstellung aus den Quellen', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 42 (1979), pp. 31–7.
- 58 – On Poussin and nature see M. Kitson, 'The Relationship between Claude and Poussin in Landscape', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 24 (1961), pp. 142–62; C. Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin and the Natural Order*, dissertation, Princeton, 1963; Wollheim (1987), ch. 4.
- 59 – Alberti, *De pictura* 2.26 (L. B. Alberti, *On Painting* [New York, 1991], p. 61).
- 60 – On this theme in Poussin, see especially: Cropper and Dempsey (1996) ch. 8.
- 61 – Blaise de Vigenère, quoted in Cropper and Dempsey (1996), p. 299.
- 62 – As told in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3. Cf. Bellori: 'Behold Jupiter in the clouds above, reclining in bed *where he gave birth to the child . . .*'
- 63 – Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3, 315.
- 64 – Rossholm Lagerlöf (1994), p. 177.
- 65 – M. Greenhalgh, *Donatello and His Sources* (New York, 1982), pp. 18–20; B. Sparkes, *The Red and the Black* (New York, 1996), pp. 37–55.
- 66 – C. Vermeule, 'Aspects of Scientific Archaeology in the Seventeenth Century', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 102 (1958), pp. 193–214; D. M. Bailey, 'Small Objects in the dal Pozzo-Albani Drawings: Early Gatherings', *Quaderni Puteani 2. Cassiano dal Pozzo's Paper Museum*, 1 (1992), pp. 3–30; R. M. Cook, *Greek Painted Pottery*, 3rd edn (New York, 1997), p. 276.
- 67 – Cook (1997), p. 276.
- 68 – Ibid.
- 69 – For the nineteenth-century debate as to whether Philostratus' *ecphraseis* referred to real or imagined paintings, see O. Schönberger, ed., *Philostratos: Die Bilder* (Munich, 1968), pp. 26–37.
- 70 – Plato, *Ion* 533e–d, 535e–536b.
- 71 – Bellori (1672/1976), p. 460. The phrase is from Bellori's heading to remarks attributed to Poussin.
- 72 – A Neoplatonic commonplace which finds its canonical expression perhaps in Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 1.2.
- 73 – Bellori (1672/1976), p. 21: 'copiano l'idee altrui, fanno l'opere non figliuole, ma bastarde della Natura'.