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# “Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini Portrait”: Business as Usual?

Linda Seidel

Pretend for just a moment that we are strolling through the painting collections of the National Gallery, London, and come upon this panel of an overdressed couple in a brightly lighted room: what exactly do we say to one another?<sup>1</sup> Do you ask me to tell you all about the artist who signed the painting in so conspicuous a manner, pressing me, as I speak, to comment on his celebrated devotional panels in Paris, Bruges, and Ghent for comparison? Or do I invite you to recite the story of this couple’s marriage as it has been reconstructed by Erwin Panofsky, a kind of spare Quaker ceremony in a well-appointed, spontaneously sanctified Flemish interior?<sup>2</sup> At what point does pure tech-

For Meyer Schapiro on his 85th birthday.

This paper is drawn from a longer work in progress on the Arnolfini Portrait. Parts of this project have been presented at the Institute of Fine Arts (New York University), the Medieval Academy Annual Meeting (1988), the University of Chicago, and Swarthmore College (the Lee Frank Lecture, 1989). I am grateful for the comments and criticism I received on those occasions and especially wish to thank Ann Adams, Hans Belting, Robert Nelson, Stephen G. Nichols, and Eugene Vance for their helpful suggestions at significant junctures in this work.

1. The panel measures two feet in width and just under three feet in height (62.5 × 84.5 cm). Its well-documented but not uncomplicated history is recounted in Martin Davies, “Corpus de la peinture des anciens pays-bas méridionaux au quinzième siècle,” *Les Primitifs Flamands: The National Gallery London* (Antwerp, 1954), pp. 117–18.

2. Erwin Panofsky’s initial comments on the painting were published as “Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini Portrait,” *Burlington Magazine* 64 (1934): 117–28. Revised remarks based on this paper were incorporated into his longer study of fifteenth-century paint-

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FIG. 1.—Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Giovanni (?) Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami (?)*. The National Gallery, London. Photo: Courtesy of the Trustees, The National Gallery, London. See note 4.

nical skill arrest our attention, inviting our eyes to inspect every centimeter of carefully painted surface, ultimately coming to rest on that marvel of craftsmanship, the convex mirror on the back wall? And what can we make of that? Shall I invoke Fazio and Filarete's contemporary testimony to Jan van Eyck's innovations in painting<sup>3</sup> while you inquire into the allusions that lie behind this convincingly portrayed reality, those references to the Passion and to virginity that transform a quotidian reflection into more transcendent meaning? Whatever our choices and however different the results, we use bits of received and remembered information to weave tales about the painter, the materials, or the event. Your myth begets mine; "let's pretend" becomes "once upon a time."

Scholars are special kinds of viewers, and the stories that we compose about paintings interest me here. Whether our model is the biography or the whodunit, those of us who write about works of art are engaged in the construction of a narrative about a picture, painter, patron, or tradition. Our stories may describe the production of a single work or document an entire oeuvre; they may attempt to reconstruct the intellectual or theoretical milieu in which an artist labored or attend to issues of how and what paintings mean. Whatever task we set for ourselves, we make choices as we proceed in an effort to define a pattern in the data we have assembled. The pattern we "find" is, of course, determined by the pattern we seek: as scholars we are caught up in a process in which the tales we have been taught shape the ones we write.

This essay had its beginnings in my desire to reexamine the Arnolfini portrait from the perspective of Giovanna Cenami, the demure young woman who stands beside the cloaked and hatted man on the fifteenth-century panel in London. Even though she shares formal prominence with the man in Jan van Eyck's unprecedented composition, she has been paid scant attention in the literature on the painting. I anticipated, as I began my work, that inspection of the female subject of the panel would, of necessity, amend the authoritative ac-

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ing in northern Europe, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 1:201–3; hereafter abbreviated *ENP*.

3. See *ENP*, 1:2 n.3 for information on Fazio and Filarete's testimony.

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count of the Arnolfini portrait that Panofsky first published in 1934. That narrative, which focused on the event portrayed, had been recited to me by my teachers as an example of interpretive truth; I had committed it to memory as a model of our discipline's search for meaning. I never dreamed back then that it might be "wrong." Yet, the material I encountered as I pursued my inquiry into Giovanna's life contradicted Panofsky's assumptions on several key points; amendment alone would not do. It seemed necessary for me to challenge the venerable interpretation others were starting to question,<sup>4</sup> even though two generations of students, including my own, had learned from it all they thought there was to know about "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait."

As I ordered my information into a narrative, I found myself returning with new interest to Panofsky's classic text. I now began to see how Panofsky had arranged his data in the service of a coherent narrative and how, in the process, facts had been made to fit a larger plan. Misstatements and oversights that had always been uncomfortable distractions in his story paled in comparison with the display of virtuosity that resided in his manipulation of material. My reverence for Panofsky's account as reconstructed fact was replaced by appreciation of it as consummate fiction. No longer did I see any need to decry errors in his material; my attention could turn instead toward connections between our projects—the ways in which my "plot" and "characters" intersected with his even as they moved in their own directions. The story that has been anthologized in numerous art history texts engendered the very different one I here tell.<sup>5</sup>

Although the London panel has an agenda of its own, it is difficult to retrieve it without recourse to Panofsky's argument. The painting represents an Italian cloth merchant, Giovanni Arnolfini, and his foreign-born wife, Giovanna Cenami, standing together and holding hands in a well-lit domestic interior where they are surrounded by personal belongings. A dog guards the foreground of their room and

4. See, for example, Peter H. Schabacker, "De Matrimonio ad Morganaticam Contracto: Jan van Eyck's 'Arnolfini' Portrait Reconsidered," *Art Quarterly* 35 (Winter 1972): 375–98, hereafter abbreviated "DM"; Lucy Freeman Sandler, "The Handclasp in the Arnolfini Wedding: A Manuscript Precedent," *Art Bulletin* 66 (Sept. 1984): 488–91, hereafter abbreviated "H"; and Jan Baptist Bedaux, "The Reality of Symbols: The Question of Disguised Symbolism in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*," *Simiolus* 16 (1986): 5–28, hereafter abbreviated "RS."

5. See H. W. Janson, *History of Art: A Survey of the Major Visual Arts from the Dawn of History to the Present Day* (New York, 1962), p. 292, and E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 11th ed., rev. and enl. (London, 1966), p. 174. My own project, in its attempt to construct a story around the pictorial representation, resembles the narrative genre of microhistory, which focuses on judicial records. See, for example, Gene A. Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986).

a mirror enlivens the background; both return the activity of the panel into the viewer's space. The artist, who is known to have been a member of the household of the Duke of Burgundy, affixed his name and a date, 1434, to the rear wall of the chamber in which the couple is seen, along with a terse comment affirming that he had been there (as though anyone acquainted with this manner of painting could fail to realize that). Following Panofsky, commentary has maintained that the male partner of this lonely couple in exile is making his marriage vow without benefit of a priest in accordance with customs that prevailed before the reforms of the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century. As part of the oath, he raises one hand and takes his bride's hand in the other. Since the couple had no relatives in Bruges, the argument continues, the painter acted as witness for the pair. For that reason, he incorporated his reflection in the mirror behind them. The reflection served as a guarantee of his presence, as did this grandiose signature; confronted with such independent evidence, neither party to the union would have been able to deny that agreement to the marriage had been sworn. Clues to the essentially religious nature of the depicted event are provided by the neatly displayed domestic objects that surround the couple; these, Panofsky asserted, would all have been seen as symbols of faith, purity, and salvation according to conventions of the time. In his interpretation, the dog, the shoes, the fruit, the mirror, and the bed transform "a well-appointed upper-middle-class interior" into a "nuptial chamber, hallowed by sacramental associations" (*ENP*, 1:203). For Panofsky, and for all who read his account, the Arnolfini painting is both altarpiece and portrait.

Panofsky's narrative stresses three compelling aspects of the painting: the handclasp, which unites the two figures into a single entity; the air of solemnity that pervades the bipartite symmetry of the panel; and the writing on the wall through which the otherwise invisible artist announces his attendance at the event portrayed. These are the elements that may well arrest any viewer's attention. In Panofsky's discussion of the panel, these aspects are enveloped into larger intellectual issues of marriage ritual, sacramental theology, and artistic identity; his story diverges in this way down paths others may not frequent in their own accounts of what they see. For example, Panofsky's study centers on the male member of the pair and on religious aspects of nuptial ritual; in my eyes, the woman's social standing and the domestic aspects of the marriage ceremony demand equal attention. The clasped hand gesture, which for Panofsky was a modification of an ancient Roman legal convention, has been read more recently as an undisguised reference to less regular contemporary practices.<sup>6</sup> And

6. See "DM" and "H." Kathleen Shelton generously shared with me her thoughts on the Roman tradition.

the signature invites inquiry into the status of images as documents in their own right, not merely as expressions of their artist's prominence.<sup>7</sup>

As I retrieved material that was omitted from Panofsky's consideration or subordinated within it, I was obliged to reformulate his questions and to question his formulations. Although his paper provided the template for my own, my choice of different materials and my altered attitude toward their handling mark my production and distinguish it from its predecessor. The story I have written about the Arnolfinis does not seek to be an exclusive version of the event that appears to be taking place; it is not a search for an "eyewitness" account or an attempt to reconstruct original intent. The goal I have in mind is an expansion of the issues on which inquiry into the painting may be based and an exploration of the ways in which we talk about what we see. If my story is amended by its readers and subjected to their own revised accounts, then those ends will have been realized. For I do not desire an enshrinement of my tale; what I seek, above all, in this rewriting of "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait" is to stimulate my readers into telling stories of their own.<sup>8</sup>

My story takes shape in relation to documentation about its subjects, its artist, and the event that has ostensibly brought them together, a marriage ceremony. Following Panofsky, I do not doubt who the couple is or what they are doing.<sup>9</sup> Since most of what we learn of

7. James H. Marrow briefly addressed the implications of the Arnolfini portrait as a *painting* in "Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance," *Simiolus* 16 (1986): 161-69.

8. Some of my "listeners" have already done that; I am grateful to James Blaetler, S.J., Joanne Lukitsh, and Laura Spitzer for helping me hear what I've said through their own interpretations.

9. A distinct body of writings on the painting rejects the identification of the couple on various grounds. These claim that (1) the woman resembles Jan's portrait of his wife and therefore must be Margaret at a younger age; (2) peculiarities in the man's physiognomy suggest that the artist used a convex mirror to paint Giovanni because he himself was the model; (3) the "irregularity" of the ceremony, especially the unorthodox left-right handclasp, would not have been appropriate for a couple of Giovanni and Giovanna's standing; (4) the inscription is later and ambiguous in construction, reading "This was Jan" rather than "Jan was here." For these positions, see Louis Dimier, "Le Portrait méconnu de Jean van Eyck," *La Revue de l'art* 61 (Apr. 1932): 187-93; Maurice W. Brockwell, *The Pseudo-Arnolfini Portrait: A Case of Mistaken Identity* (London, 1952); Jean Lejeune, *Jean et Marguerite van Eyck et le roman des Arnolfini*, documents et mémoires, fascicule XI (Liège, 1972), hereafter abbreviated *JM*. See also "DM" and "H." Michael Ann Holly quotes Panofsky's reaction to such a variant reading of the Arnolfinis' "real" identity: "'I was dumbfounded, my hair stood up, and my voice stuck to my mouth'" (*Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1984], p. 164).

The National Gallery in London accepts the identification of *an* Arnolfini as the male subject because of the reference to him as Hernoul-le-Fin in the earliest known mention of the painting, an inventory of the collection of Margaret of Austria in 1516. But because no Christian name is provided in the known inventories, uncertainty is indi-

them has to do with financial transactions,<sup>10</sup> it is impossible to construct any kind of story without focusing on economic matters, those activities that demanded and received careful record-keeping in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This information indicates that the Cenami family was the more prestigious and prosperous unit, and that it was established in Bruges by the 1380s. Although they were not natives of the city, the Cenami were in no way simple “foreigners” as Panofsky allowed;<sup>11</sup> and, in taking Giovanna as his wife, Giovanni certainly appears to have been marrying “up.”

The patriarch of the Cenami line was Giovanna’s grandfather, Giuffredo.<sup>12</sup> He made the journey westward from Lucca in pursuit of commercial success without ever losing touch with his homeland. Born around 1340, Giuffredo established counters in Bruges, Venice, and Paris for the sale of ribbons, buttons, and other accessories that enhanced the luxury fabrics Lucca exported across the continent. In 1376, he was chosen rector of the brotherhood of the *Volto Santo*, Lucca’s sacred icon of the Crucifixion, which was enshrined in the romanesque cathedral and which was at the heart of Lucchese religious devotion. In the same year, he was mentioned as Gonfalonier of Justice in Lucca, a position he held again in 1383 and 1391. Like so many Italian merchants, even in the decades before the Medici, Giuffredo branched out into banking. In 1381 he was listed as one of three partners of the Cenami House in Bruges, and, in the same year, he purchased property there. The company was a sizable one; it had eight other employees and ran a subsidiary office dealing with bills of exchange in both Bruges and Lucca.<sup>13</sup> It is not known when Giuffredo

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cated by the Gallery regarding the subject’s exact identity and, consequently, that of his wife. The Gallery’s catalogue entry concludes nonetheless: “It may be said that, in the present state of knowledge, Giovanni de Arrigo [Arnolfini, husband of Giovanna Cenami] is the most likely man” (Davies, *Early Netherlandish School*, 3d ed., rev. [London, 1968], p. 50).

10. The essential sources are Léon Mirot, “Études lucquoises: Les Cenames,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes* 91 (1930): 100–168, and Mirot and E. Lazzareschi, “Un mercante di Lucca in Fiandra: Giovanni Arnolfini,” *Bollettino Storico Lucchese* 12 (1940): 81–105, from which my narrative is drawn. Portions of this material were reiterated, though not without error, by Brockwell and Schabacker.

11. The Arnolfinis’ immigrant status in Bruges provided the explanation, for Panofsky, of both this otherwise unattended marriage ceremony and the exceptional representation that has been made of it. Panofsky’s own exile in 1933 is surely a significant, unspoken factor in his argument.

12. Also called Giusfredo, he is cited in the records of Lucca merchants in Bruges. See *Libro della Comunità dei mercanti lucchesi in Bruges*, ed. Lazzareschi (Milan, 1947), for example, p. 10.

13. Information on the Cenami business activities is drawn from the works of the historian of Bruges banking, Raymond de Roover. In this connection, see especially de Roover, *Money, Banking and Credit in Mediaeval Bruges: Italian Merchant-Bankers, Lom-*

married Philippa Raponi, niece of the powerful international banker Dino Raponi, another Lucchese who had migrated to Paris at an earlier date and established a successful trade both there and in Bruges. Five children were born of this marriage, four of whom were still living at the time of their father's death in 1413. Guglielmo, the eldest, had already engaged in transactions on his own; during the 1390s, he represented Dino, his mother's relative, in Bruges, and, in 1403, he sold cloth to Louis, Duke of Orleans, the King's brother. In 1416, when the Duke of Berry died, Guglielmo was one of the creditors who seized the Duke's property to cover his debts.<sup>14</sup> He is known to have sold precious stones and horses as well; with his Raponi relatives, he was a supporter of John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy from 1404 to 1417. Along with his brother Marco, Guglielmo continued to maintain the French branch of the business after their father's death. In 1423, Marco returned to Lucca and died there; he left two young children. At some point, Guglielmo married Jeanne Langlois, daughter of a Lucchese mother settled in Paris. They had four sons, three of whom gained control over a portion of the Raponi estate in a contested inheritance suit in 1442; their claim descended through their paternal grandmother, Giuffredo's wife Philippa. There were also two sisters: Arcade, who never wed, and Giovanna, who married Arnolfini.

Less information is available about Giovanni's immediate ancestors on his father's side; they too were natives of Lucca. His grandfather, Giannino, served as *Gonfaloniere* in 1391, two years before Giovanna's grandfather held that office for the second time. In 1399, Niccolao and Arrigo, Giannino's sons, testified to the fact that the latter had received four hundred florins as the dowry of his wife, Antonia. She was the daughter of Michele Guinigi, a member of the large, ruling family of Lucca. Their son, Giovanni, is thought to have been born a year or so after their marriage. His name shows up in the Bruges Archives on 1 July 1421, when he made a large sale of silks and hats. It appears again in the two following years, at which time he is called one of the foremost merchants of the city; his trade was primarily in luxury fabrics. In 1423, he received a considerable sum from the Duke for six tapestries with scenes of Notre Dame; the Duke in-

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*bards and Money-Changers, A Study in the Origins of Banking* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), p. 39; hereafter abbreviated *MBC*.

14. Jean de Berry, *Inventaires de Jean duc de Berry*, ed. Jules Guiffrey, 2 vols. (Paris, 1894-96), 2:198. The Raponi brothers were also listed among the creditors. Millard Meiss noted the prominence of Lucchese as well as Tuscan agents among the Duke's creditors in *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke*, 2 vols., Kress Foundation Studies in the History of European Art, no. 2 (London, 1967), 1:47.

tended to present these to the Pope.<sup>15</sup> Not much is heard of Giovanni again until 1446, when he made a significant loan to Philip the Good. Possibly in return, he was awarded income from property at Gravelines near Calais for a period of six years, which was later renewed.<sup>16</sup> In 1461, Giovanni became councillor and chamberlain to the Duke; in 1462 he was knighted and in 1464 he was naturalized. He died and was buried in Bruges in 1472. Two years later, Giovanna attempted to recover a loan Giovanni had made to Antoine, bastard of Burgundy. She had, as one author remarked, “a beneficiary interest in his estate” (“*DM*,” p. 381).

Their documented lives were about money and its exchange, even in connection with marriage: the testimony of Arrigo Arnolfini, in acknowledging receipt of his wife’s dowry payment from the Guinigi family, makes this clear. Dowries are, in fact, critical forms of monetary transfer on which families have long depended. In a variety of cultural situations, the bonding of families through such an exchange has been a central feature of marriage ritual. In Europe, what had initially been a “purchase” of the bride on the part of the groom became, over time, a long-term loan from the wife to her husband and his family.<sup>17</sup> The importance of the dowry in central Italian life of the fifteenth century in particular has been studied in many guises: as an economic tool, as a social contract, and as an agent of artistic production.<sup>18</sup> Evidence, in the form of tax records, household diaries, and, more obliquely, decorative panel paintings, indicates that, in Florence especially and in Tuscany more generally, marriage was an event of an essentially domestic rather than ecclesiastical nature; the transfer of the dowry was a significant activity in the construction of the ceremony.

15. There are other records of Arnolfini selling wool and luxury cloths of gold and silver in these years; his activities appear to be confined to the cloth trade. See Mirot and Lazzareschi, “Un mercante di Lucca in Fiandra,” pp. 84–86.

16. A lucrative tax on imported wool was collected at Gravelines. See John H. A. Munro, *Wool, Cloth, and Gold: The Struggle for Bullion in Anglo-Burgundian Trade, 1340–1478* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 120, 142, 150–54.

17. See David Herlihy, “The Medieval Marriage Market,” in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Dale B. J. Randall (Durham, N.C., 1976), pp. 3–27; Diane Owen Hughes, “From Brideprice to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe,” *Journal of Family History* 3 (Fall 1978): 262–96; and Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, 1983).

18. My work draws on studies in each of these areas: see Julius Kirshner and Anthony Molho, “The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early *Quattrocento* Florence,” *Journal of Modern History* 50 (Sept. 1978): 403–38, hereafter abbreviated “DF”; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “Zacharias; or The Ousting of the Father: The Rites of Marriage in Tuscany from Giotto to the Council of Trent,” *Ritual, Religion, and the Sacred*, Selections from the *Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, vol. 7, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (Baltimore,

An examination of Florentine household books of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries has brought to light the extensive body of middle-class practices that set off that city's merchant elite from other groups in Europe. These *ricordanze*, together with the statistics of the Florentine *Catasto* of 1427, tell a great deal about marriages and widowhood and the link between them, the dowry.<sup>19</sup> While Giovanni and Giovanna were not Florentine, their intimate ties to nearby Lucca, where close relatives held positions of public power, indicate that it is far from inappropriate to consider this body of material in connection with either them or their painting. Moreover, practices of the kind that are detailed in the Florentine accounts are known in northern and in western Europe as well, where they provided the essential preliminaries to the church ceremony. What is lacking in the Tuscan material is the attention to religious ritual that so absorbed Panofsky in his reading of the panel.

Marriage ritual had several parts to it. Preliminary negotiations between parents of future spouses would be kept secret until the pledged parties reached an appropriate age or the families accumulated a suitable dowry. The marriage ceremony proper began with a public meeting between male members of the families. A document, drawn up by a notary and stipulating the dowry and financial terms of the marriage, was presented; guarantors were appointed to implement the terms of the contract and to supervise its execution. This phase was binding; the bride, who was represented by her father, had no part in it. She was an absent object of her family's trade.<sup>20</sup>

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1986), pp. 24–56, hereafter abbreviated “Z”; Brucia Witthoft, “Marriage Rituals and Marriage Chests in Quattrocento Florence,” *Artibus et Historiae* 5 (1982): 43–59, hereafter abbreviated “MR”; Hughes, “Representing the Family: Portraits and Purposes in Early Modern Italy,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17 (Summer 1986): 7–38; and Catherine King, “The Dowry farms of Niccolosa Serragli and the altarpiece of the Assumption in the National Gallery London (1126) ascribed to Francesco Botticini,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 50 (1987): 275–78. See also the recent review of Renaissance marriage practices by Barbara B. Diefendorf, “Family Culture, Renaissance Culture,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (Winter 1987): 661–81, esp. pp. 668–75.

19. My narrative retells the wonderfully storified account in “Z,” pp. 27–38. See also the popularized summary by Charles de La Roncière, “Tuscan Notables on the Eve of the Renaissance,” in *Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. 2 of *A History of Private Life*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Georges Duby (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 290–94; La Roncière, however, gives less emphasis to the dowry.

20. Nicole Belmont has likened the position of a woman in marriage to “an object that is handed from one owner to another.” She claims, “It is probable that the many gifts and counter-gifts that used to circulate throughout the entire ritual of betrothal and marriage had the function, beyond their economic role, of representing and symbolizing the young woman, even if they were sometimes intended for her” (Belmont, “The Symbolic Function of the Wedding Procession in the Popular Rituals of Marriage,” in *Ritual, Religion, and the Sacred*, p. 2; hereafter abbreviated “SF”).

Sometime thereafter, the groom went to meet the bride at her house, in full daylight<sup>21</sup> in the company of their relatives and friends, both men and women. The presence of a notary was critical at this stage since it was his responsibility to ask questions regarding the couple's consent to their families' negotiations. After this had been done, the notary led the wife to her husband, who placed a ring, often a family heirloom, on her finger. The groom's gifts were presented to the bride, and she was designated thereafter as *pledged*; the notary recorded these occurrences. Marriage was considered to be complete when the community was notified of the couple's consent. This notification often took place as the bride was led to her husband's house in a ceremony of public proclamation and procession. In Florence, there was no stop at a church along the way, although in Rome there was such a pause. (In northern Europe, the exchange of vows often took place at the door of the church; when it occurred at home, the priest expected to bless the couple sometime thereafter.)<sup>22</sup> On arrival at the groom's house, the bride would be greeted with festivities; the physical union of the couple often followed the marriage feast. In the diaries Christiane Klapisch-Zuber cites, particularly those of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the words "leading the wife," in fact, came to imply consummation. The expression *menare donna* is understood in these accounts to indicate both the transfer of the bride to the new house and the consummation of the marriage ("Z," pp. 33–34).

Each segment of the marriage was punctuated by a promised or actual trade: the initial agreement set out the terms of the contractual exchange; "Ring Day" brought the presentation of gifts; the transfer of the bride to the new household and her reception there as a married woman concluded the sequence. It is not difficult to see in this set of events the phases of separation, liminality, and reintegration that Arnold van Gennep set out in *Rites of Passage* ("SF," pp. 2, 6). The parts adhere to and support a larger ritual pattern, one that makes use of both time and space. Above it all hovers the handing over of the dowry, the climactic element in the ceremonial sequence.

In the fourteenth century, the dowry was paid after the couple

21. See "SF," p. 4, for the church's objection to nocturnal weddings. Klapisch-Zuber comments on noontime marriages in "The Griselda Complex: Dowry and Marriage Gifts in the Quattrocento," *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago, 1985), p. 219.

22. For the northern European tradition and the room for slippage in those practices, see Michael M. Sheehan, "The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England: Evidence of an Ely Register," *Mediaeval Studies* 33 (1971): 228–63. The wedding procession on the Adimari Panel takes place in the public space of Florence, between the Baptistry and the Cathedral, but not at the door of either. See fig. 2.

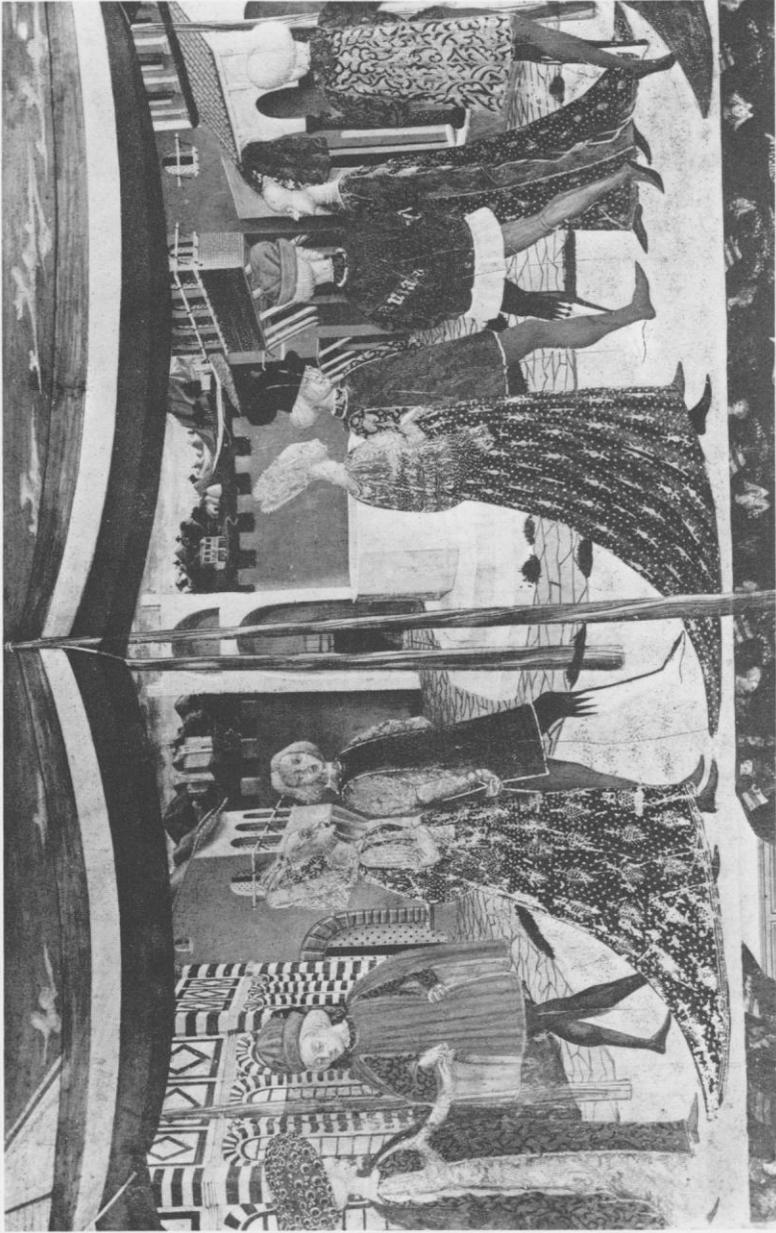


FIG. 2.—Detail of the marriage of Boccaccio Adimari and Lisa Ricasoli, Adimari Panel, Galleria Accademia, Florence.  
Photo: Archivi Alinari.

had given consent. The bride might then go on living in her parents' home for some time before the groom brought her to his house for the nuptial festivities that marked the beginning of their life together. By the middle of the fifteenth century, things had changed: whereas previously the payment of the dowry was the precondition for consummation, now consummation became the precondition for payment ("Z," p. 34).<sup>23</sup> The modification enhanced Ring Day when the exchange of the words of consent made the carnal union licit. As Klapisch-Zuber describes it, "Bright and early on the next morning the happy husband would rush to pay the tax he owed and then go to collect the sum owed him . . . or at least register his claim" ("Z," p. 35). With dowry in hand, the groom might then put off the wedding festivities at his house.

Tuscan marriage material, as recorded in family diaries, emphasizes the domestic ceremony in which "vows" were exchanged, followed by the handing over of the bride to her husband. The ritual was governed by the formalities of a contract guaranteed by a representative of the community, usually the notary; this agreement alone made the marriage valid. Indeed the only mention Klapisch-Zuber found of a priest in the diaries she surveyed occurred when the notary failed to show up ("Z," p. 37)! These legal and ceremonial formalities enshrined forms of conduct in which the woman was fundamentally a pawn. Such alliances and rituals were designed to enhance the male's standing, to secure political alliances, and to perpetuate economic success; they invariably depended on the money and prestige that the woman brought to the union.<sup>24</sup>

It is not difficult to see in the Arnolfini painting the conflated "reflection" of such a sequence of events. In the familiar context of practices such as those I have just discussed, this image would have stimulated its viewers to "read" its story in a particular manner.<sup>25</sup> We can readily imagine that it is Ring Day, around noon, and Giovanni has entered the house of Giovanna accompanied by family members. Their arrival is ascertained by the alert dog and is attested to as well by the mirror's images.<sup>26</sup> We know it is her room because her shoes are in the back near a prayer bench, while he has slipped off his well-

23. Klapisch-Zuber links the change to the establishment of the *Monte delle doti*, a state-run dowry fund, and to certain revisions in its structure in 1433.

24. On this last point, see especially Lauro Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, 1390–1460* (Princeton, N.J., 1963), pp. 57–62.

25. I follow here the "approach" outlined by Michael Baxandall in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford, 1972).

26. No one denies that the reflections capture the presence in front of the couple of some sort of witnesses or observers. See below and notes 47 and 62.

worn pattens at the door,<sup>27</sup> the location of which is suggested by the light that floods the foreground but is established more accurately by the reflection. Giovanni wears the purple tunic and fur cloak that are described in nineteenth-century folk manuals as customary to Italian marriage tradition; the oranges on the chest behind him allude to a popular Italian custom according to which "golden apples" were considered a declaration of love by medieval Tuscan youths.<sup>28</sup> He is promising with his right hand to uphold the terms of the prior negotiations his family has set;<sup>29</sup> his other hand is extended to his bride in order to lead her away. She responds by gathering up the train of her long dress so that she is able to follow him. The rich furnishings of the room provide an inventory of Giovanna's trousseau, which will accompany her in chests as she is led to her husband's house;<sup>30</sup> the ruby bedclothes additionally invoke for the viewer the site of the impending carnal transaction.<sup>31</sup> But the fur cloak and sumptuous dress she wears may be part of Giovanni's gift to her, an element in the unofficial countertrousseau that young men who were marrying above their station often provided in order to impress their bride's family.<sup>32</sup> In several cases that Klapisch-Zuber cites, a groom's gifts were bought on credit against the sum he expected to realize in his wife's dowry. Sometimes they were only "loans": the fancy dress and the hangings "to make the bed chamber" were returned soon after the ceremony.

27. On the ambivalence of the shoes, see Jacques Derrida's remarks in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago, 1987), pp. 349–50, kindly brought to my attention by Robert S. Nelson.

28. See "RS," pp. 13 and 22.

29. There is no disagreement about the significance of the raised hand over which Jan has worked so hard. For penitenti, see Davies, *Les Primitifs Flamands*, pp. 117–18 and plate 298.

30. On *cassone* usage, see "MR" and the studies of Ellen Callmann, *Apollonio de Giovanni* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 26–30, hereafter abbreviated A, and "The Growing Threat to Marital Bliss as Seen in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Paintings," *Studies in Iconography* 5 (1979): 73–92. The man customarily ordered a pair of *cassoni* at the time of betrothal for the transport of goods to the new home (Callmann, "The Growing Threat to Marital Bliss," p. 80).

31. The color of the red hangings in the picture came from kermes, a Spanish insect, and was the most expensive dyestuff. See Florence Edler de Roover, "Andrea Banchi, Florentine Silk Manufacturer and Merchant in the Fifteenth Century," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, vol. 3, ed. William M. Bowsky (Lincoln, Nebr., 1966), p. 243; hereafter abbreviated "AB." For information on the color red, see Munro, "The Medieval Scarlet and the Economics of Sartorial Splendour," in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E. M. Carus-Wilson*, ed. N. B. Harte and K. G. Ponting, *Pasold Studies in Textile History* 2 (London, 1983), pp. 13–70. The bed in the medieval interior is discussed by Philippe Contamine, "Peasant Hearth to Papal Palace: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Revelations of the Medieval World*, pp. 489–502.

32. See Klapisch-Zuber, "The Griselda Complex," pp. 219–20. For additional illustration of this story on a *cassone* panel, see A, cat. 18, p. 60, and plates 112 and 116.

Giovanni's gifts, then, may be temporary manifestations of display meant to put his mark on Giovanna.<sup>33</sup> No wonder that she has seemed so "idealized," so absent and unfocused in gaze.<sup>34</sup> She is shown here, in even the most straightforward reading of the panel, not in her own right but as the pawn in men's games.

The whole panel, when viewed from the perspective of recorded events, resembles the *ricordanze* both in structure and in substance. In the diaries, accounts of marriage were inserted en bloc into entries about domestic activities. These incisions of information transformed separate moments in time into sequential scenarios. The painting, too, assembles a coherent event out of distinct gestures and disengaged actions. But is that all the painting does? Is it merely a visualization of a well-honed textual activity—the diary entry? Or are there other differences to be sought between these two modes of presentation?

Perhaps we can ask which of the subjects might have had need for a record of the type that Jan van Eyck created. According to Tuscan custom, the groom required an official document to certify that all contractual stipulations had been satisfied so that he could receive the dowry. It was the notary's primary responsibility to provide such testimony; this took the form of a paragraph describing what had transpired, along with a signature. Both had to be in the notary's own hand. But, since the notariate didn't function in the same way in Bruges as it did in Italy, we might expect to encounter different record-keeping practices. In Flanders, the notariate was primarily an ecclesiastical institution that functioned for church rather than for civic matters. Although notaries were numerous in Bruges, they appear never to have formed the close links with town government that were characteristic of Italian notarial practice; nor did they organize into a guild. And the absence of work for merchants, which accounted for so much of the activity of Italian notaries, is particularly noteworthy in the records that survive. All of this has been attributed to the existence of a local alternative to notarial labor in the Lowlands: the *erfachtige liede*.<sup>35</sup> This custom, essentially one of oral proof, had its

33. Perhaps they signify the finished fabrics that were significant assets of merchants and were so listed in their financial statements. See "AB," p. 283. The Lucchese silk trade dominated the Bruges market as late as the 1460s ("AB," p. 270).

34. Max J. Friedländer pointed this out long ago: "The bride [is] less individualized, with more than a hint of the madonna type. . . . [She looks] into empty space with dreamy eyes" (Friedländer, *The van Eycks—Petrus Christus*, vol. 1 of *Early Netherlandish Painting*, trans. Heinz Norden [New York, 1967], p. 41). For a more recent remark of the same nature, see Penny Howell Jolly, "More on the Van Eyck Question: Philip the Good of Burgundy, Isabelle of Portugal, and the Ghent Altarpiece," *Oud Holland* 101 (1987): 250–51 n.16.

35. See James M. Murray, "Failure of Corporation: Notaries Public in Medieval Bruges," *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (June 1986): 155–66; hereafter abbreviated "FC."

roots in the Count's Charter of 1127, in which owners of urban land were given power to attest to legal arrangements and to witness private transactions. All that was required, in addition to their presence, was the attachment of their seal to whatever form the record took ("FC," p. 162).<sup>36</sup> Although this privilege did not provide history with the kinds of ordered documents that the Mediterranean notariate collected, it accommodated ongoing civic needs for certification. Jan, who was recorded as a landowner in Bruges for the first time in 1432, would have been eligible to play the role of community representative or "Flemish notary" in this painting.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps it was in that capacity that he attested to his presence by "recording" the events and affixing his signature to the panel. The words "Jan van Eyck was here" testify to his role in those completed actions. Jan's "eyewitness" account might then certify the marriage agreement for the purpose of the dowry transfer.<sup>38</sup>

Jan's function as "witness" would be different in this reading from that previously proposed. According to Panofsky, Jan recorded a religious ritual that, following the custom of the time, could be validly performed without a priest; the artist's signature identified him in a thoroughly unprecedented (and unnecessary) way as witness to that act (*ENP*, 1:203). My understanding of contemporary Tuscan tradition emphasizes that marriages had little to do with church ritual and that the role of an authorized witness, or notary, was central to the legal construction of the domestic ceremony. Thus Jan's apparent role in the production of this record would not have been exceptional from my perspective; it would have been essential. What is unusual is the fact that the role is being performed by a painter instead of a scribe, although, as I have noted, Jan would have been qualified according to local custom to function in the capacity of "notary." In fact, Jan heightens the simulated notarial legality of his "document" by juxtaposing his signature with a seal-like object: The painted convex glass, through its size, shape, and location, evokes the familiar and distinctive sign of legitimacy that was customarily affixed to official documents throughout the later Middle Ages.<sup>39</sup> Even the "reverse"

36. For more on the notariate and the significance of date and signature as marks of authenticity, see Bruges, Administration Communale, *Inventaire des archives de la ville de Bruges publié sous les auspices de l'administration communale*, 9 vols. (Bruges, 1871–85), introduction (unnumbered vol.); hereafter abbreviated *I*.

37. See W. H. James Weale, *Hubert and John van Eyck, Their Life and Work* (London and New York, 1908), p. xxxviii, for reference to Jan's first payment of an annual tax on a house. Murray notes that, according to Flemish practice, "valid arrangements could be attested in the presence of any two owners of urban land" ("FC," p. 162). The inclusion of two reflections in the mirror, in addition to those of Giovanni and Giovanna, may deliberately evoke these obligatory conditions.

38. There is no known written record of the marriage.

39. The seal, as an "attributive mark of jurisdiction," and its use by certain guilds

image that absorbs the mirror's surface contributes to the notion of a palpable two-sided sigillum. Jan, in recreating the materiality of that authenticating sign, and in associating it with chancery script, locates the evidence of witnessing in the diplomatic rather than the religious realm.<sup>40</sup> What remains remarkable is the thought that an image instead of a charter might have been used as a legal document in the fourth decade of the fifteenth century.

But would Jan have made such a "document" for Giovanni? Did the artist's relationship to the Duke, with whom Giovanni is known to have traded in the 1420s, set him up to it? Is it practical to imagine Giovanni rushing off to the bank, panel in hand, to collect his dowry payment? Perhaps the painting was created instead for the guarantors, those individuals whose job it was to see that the terms of the prenuptial contract were carried out. Or might Signor Cenami, father of the bride, have been the one who contracted Jan's services? He, certainly, was more prominent than Arnolfini, and the marriage ceremony was his "show" until the moment the dowry was surrendered. While the groom needed notarized proof in order to obtain control over the dowry, the bride's father may have wished for a "receipt" in order to prove that the dowry had been transferred; otherwise he might be out an investment and still have a daughter on his hands. The critical matter in the eyes of the bride's father was the fact that the dowry represented the bride's "pre-mortem" inheritance, her portion of the family patrimony.<sup>41</sup> It was intended to be attached to her for life, providing for the expenses of her household throughout her marriage. Should her spouse predecease her, as a much older man might well do, the dowry would revert to her even though her husband's family might make claims on it.<sup>42</sup> Giovanna, as a widow, actually did "sue"

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in Brussels in the fifteenth century is discussed by R. Petrucci in "The Seals of the Brussels Gilds," *Burlington Magazine* 2 (1903): 190–93. The circular matrix of the fifteenth-century seal of the Brussels Barbers' Guild shows Sts. Cosmas and Damian, Guild patrons, as two full-length, standing figures, a format that evokes the Arnolfini couple; over their heads is a Latin devise. The use of pictographic representations, such as a column, a dog, or a lion, in close association with a name, occurs on Bruges documents of the period. See *I*.

40. Heinrich Schwarz has remarked that the mirror is "like a huge seal that verifies the sacramental ceremony" ("The Mirror in Art," *Art Quarterly* 15 [1952]: 99; hereafter abbreviated "M").

41. See Herlihy, "The Medieval Marriage Market," pp. 19–20, and "DF." Klapisch-Zuber's interpretation of the dowry appears as "The 'Cruel Mother': Maternity, Widowhood and Dowry in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 117–31.

42. Provisions for return of the dowry fund if the bride died before the wedding were among the changes made to Florence's *Monte* in 1433. See "DF," pp. 407–8. For discussion of fourteenth-century archival records in Bruges concerning a bride's lawful

for repayment of a loan Arnolfini had made before his death. Her complaint dramatizes the plight of the “bartered bride” who had no claims on her father’s estate after her dowry had been given to her husband. Whatever might be left by her father at the time of his demise would be shared by her brothers, provided that the mother had not survived.

With that knowledge in mind, I begin to think of the painting as the clever commission of a shrewd banker. He conceived it as testimony to the turning over of the dowry in order to provide assurance for its return to Giovanna, when necessary, later on. The legal struggle that Giovanna’s brothers pursued during these years over a significant Rapondi inheritance could have prompted the family to seek to secure its financial claims and to restrain hers in so bold a manner; she was not part of that settlement.<sup>43</sup> My narrative, at this juncture, supposes that the painting was commissioned less for the way in which it recorded already accomplished exchanges (the marriage vows) than for the manner in which it was understood to obligate future ones (the return of the dowry). Indeed, the lone burning candle, a familiar attribute of legal ceremonies, may indicate that the vow that Giovanni is in the act of taking remains as yet incomplete;<sup>44</sup> something still remains to be done to finalize it.

Dowry negotiations were, of course, only one aspect of an increasing commercialization of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century life. Particularly in Bruges, one of the two leading markets of Europe, anyone—merchant, prince, banker, or even artist—would have been familiar with the pervasive discourse of the marketplace. Thus, Michael Baxandall’s observations, that merchant-bankers in Florence viewed their dealings through the language of their operations,<sup>45</sup> should not be limited to an understanding of interactions in the city on the Arno alone. However, the activity that needs to be singled out for Bruges involves the movement of money rather than the gauging of volume;

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claim to her dowry and half of the common property should her husband die, or his business fail, see Murray, “Family, marriage and moneychanging in medieval Bruges,” *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (June 1988): 115–25.

43. The litigation over the inheritance is discussed in Mirot, “Études lucquoises,” pp. 105–6. Giovanna was not mentioned in the settlement, a point that caused one critic to suggest that she had not yet reached majority (*JM*, p. 25 n.5).

44. Bedaux noted that a candle was lit when drawing up certain legal acts in Flanders and remarks that “only when it had burnt down was the legal character of the agreement final and indisputable” (“RS,” p. 10 n.14). A fully consumed candle is visible on Giovanna’s side of the chandelier.

45. See Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, esp. pp. 86–93. Baxandall provides the example of the art of gauging, that is, the visual calculation of surface and volume, in the terms in which it was set down in a mathematical handbook for merchants written by the painter Piero della Francesca.

this, as practiced in the late Middle Ages, differed from early modern systems in significant, and for my story relevant, ways.<sup>46</sup>

Because the Church banned usury, which theologians defined as any interest accruing from a loan, bankers were obliged to develop other modes of lending money at profit. Thus transactions that we might understand to be loans were identified and handled as exchanges, that is, the purchase or sale of foreign currency and its conversion before repayment. The negotiations on which the exchange was based might be real or fictitious; examples of patently phony exchanges can be cited even though they were publicly regarded as an infringement of business ethics when they occurred. Nevertheless, the Medici ledgers note instances of spurious or dry exchange, as these transactions were called (*MBC*, pp. 50, 81, 83). Detailed descriptions of each exchange, whether real or not, were recorded, and the names of the parties to the contract, which usually numbered four, were always included (*MBC*, p. 53).<sup>47</sup> After the drawee accepted the exchange, he was bound to pay it at maturity. If he reneged, the payee could protest by securing the services of a notary whose duty it was to record why the drawee refused to pay (*MBC*, p. 52). Since these operations were based on the fluctuating values of currencies and implied speculation, the Church did not view the system as usurious. By surrendering the guaranteed interest that conventional loans accrued and assuming the risk of exchange, bankers found a successful way to adapt themselves to the Church's doctrines about money-lending.<sup>48</sup>

The Arnolfini portrait can readily be understood in reference to business deals of this sort. After all, the dowry might have been a form of disguised loan. Perhaps Giovanna's dowry was to be advanced to Giovanni prematurely, in the interval between Ring Day and the consummation of the marriage, or even at a prior stage in the negotiations, in order to be available to him for commercial purposes. Cloth merchants, like Arnolfini, had a constant need for capital to buy raw materials and to pay wages in order to create the rich hangings and fabrics that would help to advertise their trade.<sup>49</sup> Possibly the dowry

46. I draw my understanding of merchant-banking practices in what follows from *MBC*, pp. 48–96; Raymond de Roover, *L'évolution de la lettre de change XIV<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1953); and Raymond de Roover, *The Bruges Money Market Around 1400* (Brussels, 1968), hereafter abbreviated *BMM*. For recent reinforcement of de Roover's work, see Richard A. Goldthwaite, "The Medici Bank and the World of Florentine Capitalism," *Past & Present* 114 (Feb. 1987): 3–31.

47. There are just four reflections in the mirror.

48. Raymond de Roover, following Bernardo Davanzati, says, "The business of exchange was an art which was practiced by the merchant-bankers who delivered money on the exchange not because they needed funds elsewhere but because they were thus able to lend at a profit without violating the ban of the Church against usury" (*MBC*, p. 66).

49. See "AB," p. 251.

was to be regarded as some kind of "credit" of the sort that bills of exchange routinely extended. The date on the wall, 1434, which marks the year in which Burgundian currency was unified and devalued, may refer to the monetary rather than the marital transaction.<sup>50</sup> Understandings of the sort that would have been involved in such money matters may seem abstruse to the modern viewer or critic; often they are difficult to document and describe because they formed tacit agreements at the core of the merchant-bankers' operations. Yet, since both families to the impending "merger" shown in the painting were involved in finance, familiarity with the procedures and requirements of credit and loans of all kinds can, I believe, be assumed in this instance. Jan, too, knew this language.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed the couple represents the union of descendents of what had been the three largest non-Florentine banking houses in Bruges in the late fourteenth century: the Cenami (Giovanna's father's family); the Rapondi (Giovanna's paternal grandmother's family); and the Guinigi (Giovanni's mother's family) (*MBC*, p. 39). Each establishment was founded and run by natives of Lucca, and, in all cases, the couple's connection to the financial institutions passes, significantly, through a woman. Statutes of the Lucchese community in Bruges, which date from 1369 and 1478, indicate that it was a tightly knit society (*MBC*, pp. 17–22).<sup>52</sup> Like other groups of foreigners in the city, it was organized into a *nation* that functioned in a threefold manner: as a trade company, it afforded its members business contacts; as a social club, it provided personal relationships for "expatriate" families; and, as a religious brotherhood, it supported devotion to the *Volto Santo*, the larger-than-life-sized carving of the crucified Christ that is still in the cathedral of Lucca. The society had a pew and a chapel in the canons' regular (Augustinian) church in Bruges, and attendance at high mass on the first Sunday of each month was expected of all Lucca natives. Giovanna's great-uncle, Dino Rapondi, was consul of the Lucchese *nation* on more than one occasion; his life illustrates the integration, within a member of this community, of commercial skills

50. The devaluation occurred during the winter of 1433–34. See Peter Spufford, *Monetary Problems and Policies in the Burgundian Netherlands, 1433–1496* (Leiden, 1970), and Munro, *Wool, Cloth, and Gold*, pp. 101–3. For the Ordonnance of the Duke on the monetary reform, see *I*, 5:18–31. A visit by the Duke to Jan in 1433, "to see certain work," along with three payments to Jan by the Duke in 1434, including one drawn from a tax on cloth, raise the spectre that the Duke may have been involved in the reimbursement of Jan for the Arnolfini painting. See Weale, *Hubert and John van Eyck*, pp. xxxix–xli.

51. Records of payments by the Duke to Jan stipulate the particular currency in question. See the documentation in Weale, *Hubert and John van Eyck*, p. xxxii, for one example.

52. See also Mirot, "La Colonie lucquoise à Paris du XIII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 88 (1927): 50–86.

with political involvement, “national” and religious identity, and aesthetic judgment. The narrow and lonely conception of Italian emigrés that Panofsky projected onto Giovanni and Giovanna would not have described them in an accurate manner.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the offices Dino ran in Bruges, Antwerp, and Paris, and his troubleshooting for the nobility, he was a contractor of building projects and a purveyor of exotic commodities such as oranges, cloves, and ginger. He was a dealer in both arms and illuminated books to the Court of the Duke and a supplier of gold cloth and silver vessels to the Duchess. When John the Fearless was taken captive in Nicopolis on an aborted Crusade in 1396, Dino raised the huge ransom through bills of exchange (*MBC*, pp. 83, 86). He was Philip the Bold’s chief financial advisor, banker, and agent; he bore the titles maître d’hôtel and councillor. For someone like this, style and taste were intricately entwined with power, money-making, and the deals that cement the two. For him and his kind, a painting by the Court artist, with its simulated richness and allusive claims, may well have provided the ideal alternative to the constraints of either the balance sheet or the charter. It certainly would have provided its owner with an instant enhancement of status.

Perusal of Jan’s oeuvre reminds us that his large, multifigure works, such as *The Virgin with Chancellor Rolin* in Paris, *The Virgin with Canon van der Paele, 1434–1436* in Bruges, and the Ghent altarpiece, were made to serve as guarantors of something that was wished for—a future reality—rather than as records of what might have already occurred.<sup>54</sup> On the outer wings of the Ghent altarpiece, which Jan finished in 1432, Joos Vijd and Elisabeth Borluut kneel veristically in simulated stone niches at the feet of what look like sculpted statues. Jan has represented the donors nearly life-sized, in natural colors and as organic parts of the otherwise fictive altar they endowed for their own remembrance. They remain forever immortalized in their pious donations, imploring their salvation. On a panel in Bruges, which Jan painted and dated 1436, Canon van der Paele kneels at the foot of the Virgin’s throne in a splendid sanctuary and in the company of saints. He, too, is presented to the viewer in a most unlikely fashion, since he

53. Twenty-one Lucchese were recorded in Bruges in 1400 (*BMM*, p. 28 n.10).

54. On Jan’s paintings, see *ENP*, pp. 178–245, and Elisabeth Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* (New York, 1980), pp. 74–121, 212–31, 266–79 for the three works in question, with illustrations; hereafter abbreviated *HJ*.

Craig Harbison prefers to see such paintings as “the embodiment of the process of meditation itself” rather than as “anticipations of the future” (Harbison, “Visions and meditations in early Flemish painting,” *Simiolus* 15 [1985]: 117, 100). He acknowledges, however, that “it is difficult and unnecessary to exclude this possibility absolutely, especially in a case like this, where the painting might eventually have served as a funerary monument for Canon van der Paele” (p. 100).

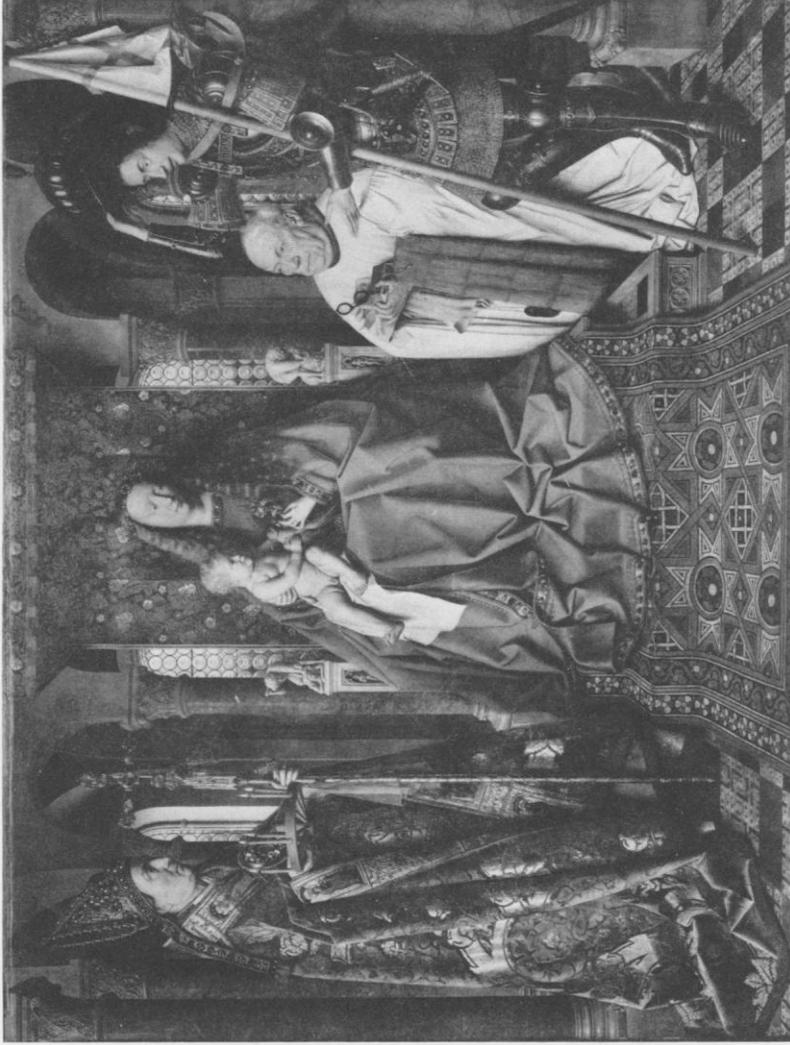


FIG. 3.—Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin with Canon van der Paele, St. Donation and St. George*. Stadelijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Bruges. © A.C.L.-Bruxelles.

never could have encountered either the Holy Family or the accompanying figures, Donatian and George, in just this way and in this historicized space. And, if he had or did, I doubt that he would have needed his spectacles on which Jan has, nonetheless, lavished such attention.

These imagined encounters and longed-for experiences of the Vijds and the Canon are transformed through Jan's meticulous fabrication of jewels, textiles, and architectural space into materially available events. In these paintings, Jan places living subjects in environments that are both intimately associated with them and readily identifiable by the viewer with the space in which the paintings are seen. The Canon's church and the city alderman's altar and chapel were to be the sites of the subjects' remembrance; the fact that the donors are shown within structures that simulate and connect with those in which the paintings were intended to be viewed secures the relationship between each picture's depictions and the locus of its anticipated reception. "Cast shadows" on the Annunciation panels of the Ghent altarpiece, which appear to be caused by light that falls through the chapel's south windows, dramatically illustrate this intimate association between Jan's conception and the site of its inspection. Although a document records Vijd's desire that his memory be perpetuated through the celebration of mass on the altar that he and his wife endowed, it is the painting that effectively secures that wish for him, in perpetuity, in the physical space of the chapel (*HJ*, pp. 78–79).

Jan's devotional paintings seek to persuade the viewer that present and future realities can coexist in the same time and space; it is a message that reinforces the commercial and matrimonial circumstances with which I have already associated the imagery of the London panel. For in those situations, as I have noted, the future implications of present actions were intricately bound up with each other.<sup>55</sup> The allusive nature of Jan's devotional paintings may help to expand appreciation of other aspects of his unprecedented marriage portrait. For example, if the depicted setting is to be perceived as a prescriptive part of the painting's purpose, in the way in which the Ghent and Bruges settings are to be understood, then the use of a bedchamber in the Arnolfini portrait may also define the circum-

55. For the promissory and consensual aspects of marriage ritual and problems that stemmed therefrom, see Sheehan, "The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England." I am grateful to Laura Spitzer for recalling to me the prospective *verba de futuro* in the initial betrothal ceremony, although I alone am responsible for the suggestive use to which that pledge has here been put. Note in this context as well de Roover's remark that "the important point to remember is this: unlike exchange markets today, the medieval market was limited to exchange dealings in futures or to forward exchange" (*BMM*, p. 23).

stances in which the couple wishes to be invoked in the future. And, since the other pictures portray what is hoped for rather than verifiable realities, it becomes possible that the Arnolfini–Cenami union is also shown as desired instead of realized.

It is conceivable that Giovanna was too young to be a wife at the time the negotiations were made between the families.<sup>56</sup> Possibly she resided in Paris and not in Bruges as the painting seeks to convince us. In either circumstance, the obligatory consummation could not have taken place, and the dowry ought not, then, to have been transferred. But the imminence of consummation has been enshrined on the panel through both the bold gesture and the prominent setting; that fact suggests that the artist was attempting to persuade us that all was proceeding according to plan. This painted presentation of a couple on the threshold of the consummation of their union might then have functioned in surrogacy, as material substitution, and not as record.

Jan had participated in matrimonial negotiations a few years earlier; that experience, as painter of a bride-to-be, undoubtedly assisted him in this commission. In 1428, Jan traveled to the Iberian peninsula as part of a delegation that negotiated a wife for Philip the Good. His likeness of Isabel of Portugal was sent to Bruges a few months before the marriage contract was signed in Lisbon.<sup>57</sup> Surely Jan had not been sent on the mission to provide the groom with a lifelike keepsake, a “photographic” preview of his future spouse. Jan’s portrait of Isabel probably functioned as part of an established sequence of marriage transactions; it may have served to authenticate the woman on whose behalf negotiations had been made so that, after her arrival in Flanders, when her consent to the prior arrangement was required, proof of her identity, and consequently confirmation of the authority of those earlier agreements, would be at hand. It would have been pretentious, but not implausible, for Guglielmo Cenami to have acted in a similar manner in regard to the disposition of his daughter. And I am wondering whether he didn’t do just that: ask Jan to paint a portrait of Giovanna about to be bedded by Giovanni Arnolfini so that agreed-

56. Lejeune emphasized how young she may have been as a way of discrediting her identity. We know that her mother was still alive in 1468 and that one of her brothers, Marc, was married in 1472, information which suggests either the youth of the family or its longevity (*JM*, pp. 24–25).

57. The portrait of Isabel, now lost and known only through copies, is discussed in Jolly, “More on the Van Eyck Question”; *ENP*, 1:179; *HJ*, pp. 131–33; and in remarks in Anne Simonson Fuchs, “The Netherlands and Iberia: Studies in Netherlandish Painting for Spain” (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 1977), pp. 9–38. The lengthy document in which the activities of the Duke’s mission are described can be found in Weale, *Hubert and John van Eyck*, pp. lv–lxxii. Among the procedures that were followed by the delegation in Portugal were meetings, celebrations, and the exchange of gifts; the sequence outlines marriage protocol of the time and can be favorably compared with Klapisch-Zuber’s reconstruction of nuptial proceedings from the *ricordanze*.

on arrangements concerning their future marriage, insofar as those involved the dowry, could move forward. While the Duke's motives in his marriage were ostensibly dynastic, the merchant-banker's would have been more flagrantly pecuniary: the Arnolfini portrait would portray, in this tale, the handing over of a woman as token or symbol of significant financial exchange. Even the brilliant dress Giovanna wears in the painting signals the site of such transactions. Green was the color of the cloth that members of the Florentine Guild of Bankers and Money-Changers, the *Arte del Cambio*, were required to place on the table they used as their "bank" in the city's trading centers, the *Mercato Nuovo* and the *Via di Tavolini*.<sup>58</sup>

My story about the panel may be summarized in the following way: Giovanna Cenami's father commissioned the Arnolfini portrait in the context of negotiations related to the disposition of one of his most valued commodities, his daughter's dowry. Because the arrangements on which this agreement hinged were in some way(s) irregular, they could not be attested to in the usual fashion by sworn deposition. Thus he decided to have memory of the complex transaction preserved in an alternate manner, one that emphasized the act of first-person participation over that of third-person written testimony. He desired a form of "record-keeping" in which present conditions and future circumstances could be made to seem concurrent and indivisible, one that would, at the same time, enhance his status. To achieve these goals, he engaged the services of Jan van Eyck, a newly established painter in Bruges whose qualifications for the task were particularly appropriate. Jan's recent acquisition of property in the city enabled him to function as "notary" according to local customs; previous diplomatic ventures, such as those he had undertaken on behalf of the Duke, added to his official credentials and familiarized him with relevant procedures regarding marriage ritual. His knowledge of courtly and financial circles within which the subjects moved elevated both his stature and the status of his work, and, perhaps most important of all, his recent acclaim as the maker of the Ghent altarpiece established his reputation as a painter of "promise." All of these factors helped him secure the sensitive assignment from Signor Cenami concerning prospective fulfillment.

The Arnolfini portrait emerges in this retelling as a visual enigma, a riddle in which nothing is as it appears to be. An icon of

58. *Florentine Merchants in the Age of the Medici: Letters and Documents from the Selfridge Collection of Medici Manuscripts*, ed. Gertrude Randolph Bramlette Richards (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), pp. 38–39. Kirshner and Molho have commented on the mixture of the morally responsible and the practical in the *Monte delle doti*, Florence's dowry fund, which was established in 1425 and revised a decade later. They call it "an institution facilitating the arrangement of marriages and the exchange of symbolic and real capital" ("DF," p. 434).

two people expands into a narrative about families in which religious effects succumb to artistic ones; completed action becomes ongoing presentation as a closed room and a frozen moment are transformed into open-ended space that extends into the future. And fabrics that the artist has so brilliantly imitated, which appear to be an essential part of the chamber, may be temporary manifestations of ceremonial display or an advertisement of professional prestige rather than permanent objects of domestic decoration. Foremost in this triumph of "seeming" is the activity the artist has placed at the center of his panel: a financial transaction that is enacted as a marriage ceremony, wherein the bride's father is the understood payer and the groom the payee. The woman is the commodity or credit, the price of which has previously been negotiated in her absence.

While the story, like its format, may be unprecedented in European art, the manner of presentation is not. Jan's "style" here, as in his other multigure paintings, emphasizes detailed factual renderings in order to secure validity for what is depicted. Gestures, glances, and things evoke the immediate circumstances of the painting's production. Through familiarity with that context, the contemporary viewer would have been implicitly invoked as collaborator in the construction of the painting's meaning. Moreover, the viewer's presence is attested to explicitly by the masculine reflections in the mirror; these define the onlooker's function not only as a participant, but also as an interpreter. For the reflections, which show the backs of the Arnolfini among other things, advise the viewer that there is more to see in the painting and in what it portrays than meets the eye. The painted mirror that both absorbs and returns our gaze, and which is located at the juncture of critical visual axes, announces the riddle before us.

The mirror assumes a different function in every version of the Arnolfini story and so it does in mine. For Panofsky, it was the *speculum sine macula*, a well-known symbol of Marian purity. According to another commentator, however, the carnality of the imminent sexual union makes the "spotless mirror" an inappropriate emblem; for him, the glass should be seen as the *speculum fidei*. A third position maintains that the Passion scenes that ornament the frame secure "profound salvational hopes" for the couple, while a fourth argues that mirrors like this one were artists' tools and were used to help them visualize space and effects of diminution.<sup>59</sup> I obviously seek to coordi-

59. The references for the interpretations of the mirror are as follows: *ENP*, 1:203, and Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton, N.J., 1982), pp. 124 and 150; the mirror of the world: Brian d'Argaville, *College Art Association Abstracts*, 1980; salvational promise: Robert Baldwin, "Marriage as a Sacramental Reflection of the Passion: The Mirror in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding*," *Oud Holland* 98 (1984): 57-75; the mirror as tool: David L. Carleton, "A Mathematical Analysis of the Perspective of the *Arnolfini Portrait* and Other Similar Interior Scenes by Jan van

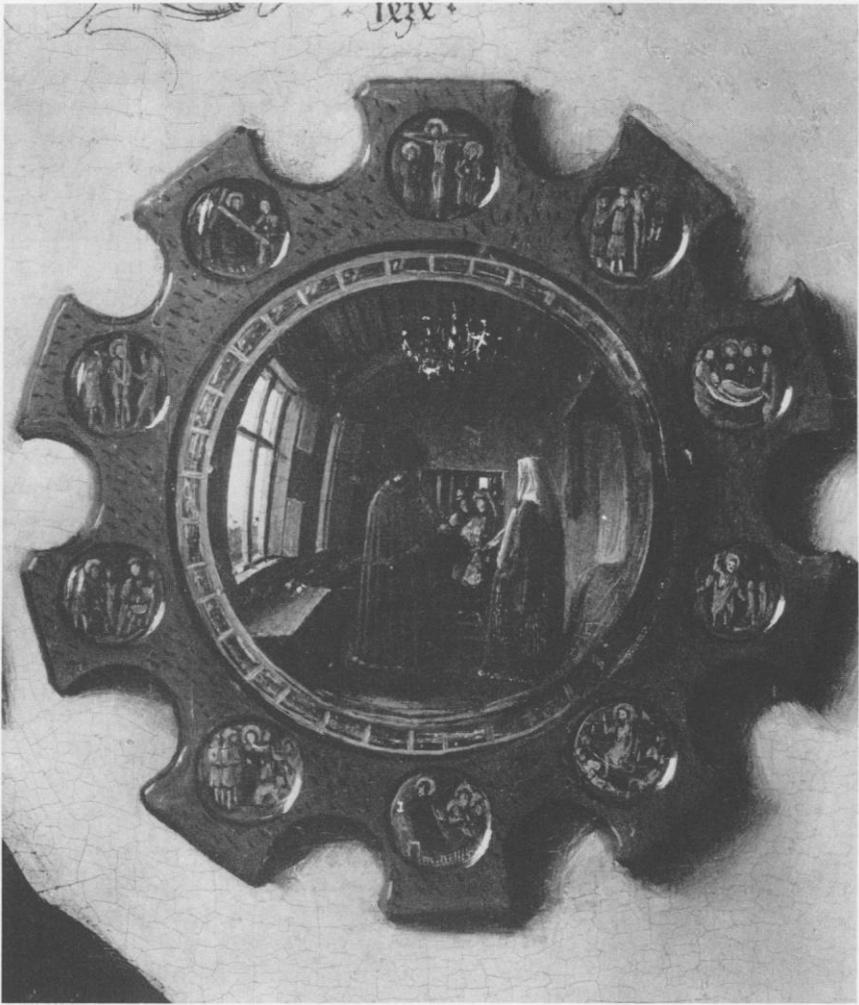


FIG. 4.—The Arnolfini mirror. Detail of fig. 1.

nate the glass with the story I have just told. In the circumstances I have constructed, it would not fit to regard the iconic mirror as a symbol of the Virgin—unless its function could be construed in an ironic manner. The mirror we see is, after all, profoundly “spotted”; it is extravagantly marked by the domestic and narrative reflections its environment lends to its surface. To read it as spotless we would need to detach it from its setting and erase the evidence of those reflections. Jan’s work would have to be edited in order to make it fit someone else’s text.

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Eyck,” *Art Bulletin* 64 (Mar. 1982): 118–24. Lejeune notes that such a mirror accounted for the physiognomic distortions of Giovanni’s face (see note 9 above).

In fact, reflections were critical to one aspect of a mirror's religious function and meaning in the fifteenth century. Documents of the 1430s concerning a lawsuit over the manufacture of mirrors indicate that such objects were sold as souvenirs at religious shrines so that pilgrims could bring home reflections of sacred places they had seen.<sup>60</sup> These signs would then be presented to local churches in order to bestow their acquired reliclike power as testimonies at a new location. Jan went on pilgrimages, we know,<sup>61</sup> and it is possible that he was familiar with such practices. It is also likely that he employed such an optical device in the exercise of his craft. The Arnolfini mirror, which is so closely associated with the signature, evokes both practices.

On the one hand, it serves as corroboration of that special sense of tangibly remembered sight that is central to the concept of witness. The reflection authenticates the reality of the event the mirror has seen; it attests here to those who have arrived and thus to the prior history of the event we see. By virtue of its capacity to hold onto reflected rays, the mirror qualifies as authoritative witness to the events it attends.<sup>62</sup> Its function as magical relic enhances its status as legal seal, reminding viewers that the past is ever present—not merely because it has been recorded, but especially because it has been caught in a mirror's glass. But Jan subverts the hierarchical claims of the mirror by flaunting the fact that the power of this glass is unmistakably of his making; the location of his signature proclaims him to be more the creator than the object of the reflections. He informs us that he has actively constructed what we see, possibly through the use of such an instrument in his own shop. Without the work of his hand, the mirror would have no potency; his consummate craftsmanship alone is thus responsible for the mirror's evocations. And whether he wished to do so or not, Jan thereby dramatizes for us the mythic link between mirror-makers and painters that was being addressed at nearly the same moment by Leon Battista Alberti. The Italian architect's 1436 *Treatise on Painting* reminded the reader that "'Narcissus, who saw his reflection in the water, . . . was the real inventor of painting.'"<sup>63</sup> Jan

60. See "M," pp. 102–4, for the magical power of mirrors. The Gutenberg matter is treated in Kurt Köster, "Gutenbergs Strassburger Aachenspiegel-Unternehmen von 1438/1440," *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 58 (1983): 24–44.

61. For Jan's pilgrimages, which included one to Santiago de Compostela while he was in Spain, and at least one other in the name of the Duke, see the documents in Weale, *Hubert and John van Eyck*, pp. xxxi–xxxii, for a pilgrimage in 1426, and p. lx, for the reference to the pilgrimage to Santiago in 1430–31.

62. See Wolfgang M. Zucker's observation that "the mirror witnesses the actual presence of the witnessing painter" ("Reflections on Reflections," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 [Spring 1962]: 240).

63. Leon Battista Alberti, quoted in "M," p. 110. Schwarz also points out that mirror-makers and painters belonged to the same guild in Bruges. Alberti's comments on marriage are equally relevant to our understanding of the Arnolfini portrait. They are contained in book 2 of his dialogue *Della Famiglia*, which was written by, if not in,

here appropriates both roles for himself as he proclaims himself to be painter *and* mirror-maker.

At the same time, the form of his signature removes him as a presence from the panel. In that brief sentence, “Jan van Eyck was [or has been] here,” he distinguishes his own completed activity from what he wished to have perceived as the painting’s ongoing role. By limiting the authority he claimed for himself as chronicler of the real, Jan enhanced the status of his creation as the record of the realizable. By noting that he *was* here, he put the viewer on notice that it is after all not the painter but the painting that bears witness.

The viewer is not alone in engaging in storytelling; the artist has done it, too. Just as we edit and eliminate in order to make our story come alive, Jan has borrowed organizing principles from familiar tales to assure that his assembled elements connect in coherent make-believe. There is more than a memory of Solomon and Sheba in the overdressed figures of the couple holding hands. The Queen of the South’s celebrated journey to the Wise King was a frequent narrative theme on Tuscan *cassone* panels of the second third of the fifteenth century, and Lorenzo Ghiberti chose it, somewhat exceptionally, as the last panel for his Old Testament Doors at the Florence Baptistry in the late 1430s.<sup>64</sup> The story of Sheba, who brings precious gifts in her retinue for her visit to the wealthy king, was intended to ennoble both parties. In return for her gift of “a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones, . . .

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1434. Alberti advises the prospective bridegroom to select his wife carefully: “He should act as do wise heads of families before they acquire some property—they like to look it over several times before they actually sign a contract” (Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, trans. Renée Neu Watkins [Columbia, S.C., 1969], p. 115). Alberti emphasizes that the groom “must also choose a woman who is well made for bearing children” and seek out kinsmen “of better than plebian blood, of a fortune more than diminutive, of a decent occupation” (pp. 116, 117). He advises that “the dowry should be precisely set, promptly paid, and not too high” (p. 118).

64. The basic work on *cassone* panels is Paul Schubring, *Cassoni*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1915–23). For scenes of Solomon and Sheba, more handily presented than in Schubring’s cumbersome volume of plates, see A, cats. 24–30, pp. 64–66. In addition to mention of several *cassone* panels with the story of Sheba’s visit to Solomon, André Chastel discusses a bas-de-page illumination in the Turin Hours with the same subject (Chastel, “La Rencontre de Salomon et de la Reine de Saba dans l’iconographie médiévale,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* [Feb. 1949]: 108–9). For Ghiberti’s panel, see Richard Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, 2 vols., Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology 31 (Princeton, N.J., 1970), 1:180–82. Krautheimer dates the Sheba panel last in the series of door reliefs and remarks on the “unusual choice” of subject to close the Old Testament cycle of the doors. He notes that “Ghiberti’s composition . . . appears closely related to traditional scenes of the Marriage of the Virgin and of other marriages, secular and semisecular. . . . Solomon grips in his left hand the right hand of the queen, while she, with head inclined, rests her left over her heart in a gesture of submission” (1:180–81).



**FIG. 5.**—Solomon and Sheba, detail of Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Story of Solomon*, bronze relief from the “Gates of Paradise.” Florence Baptistry. Photo: Archivi Alinari.

King Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever was asked besides what was given her by the bounty of King Solomon" (1 Kings 10:10, 13). It is easy to imagine that the members of two Italian merchant families, who are shown in their extravagant finery, are being depicted in Jan's painting in the guise of these celebrated Biblical figures. Tuscan art of the time consistently clothed routinely ceremonial practices in legendary forms; there are arguments that Flemish art did the same.<sup>65</sup> Fifteenth-century *cassone* panels, in particular, used the grandeur of historical conquest, religious victory, and poetic success to glorify mundane realities about marriage and to disguise their more tarnished truths. Those paintings, like this one, solicit our acceptance of their subjects as participants in an ongoing, lofty tradition.

But we must finally resist their attempts to seduce us into reading their stories in an elevated manner. The Arnolfini Portrait merely masquerades as a religious painting in which an Italian merchant is portrayed as he wished to be seen, in all his "sobriety, cool dignity, [and] orderliness." According to early fifteenth-century apologists like Leonardo Bruni, and the manuals for merchant behavior that were written by his contemporaries, exterior wealth ornamented its owner and assisted him in his struggle for virtue; poverty was shameful, even heretical. The whole community, it was claimed, stood to gain from the merchant's astute management of money and his own attendant moral growth.<sup>66</sup> Isn't that what we see celebrated in the London panel—middle-class, merchant-banker mentality? But when reattached to the larger context for which it was made, the painting's masculine luster dims, at least for me. This group accommodated its commercial

65. See "MR," pp. 53–54; A, pp. 39–51; John Pope-Hennessy and Keith Christiansen, "Secular Painting in 15th-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, Cassone Panels, and Portraits," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 38 (Summer 1980): 12–55, with illustrations in color; and Paul F. Watson, "Boccaccio's *Ninfale Fiesolano* in Early Florentine Cassone Painting," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971): 331–33. See also Randolph Starn, "Reinventing Heroes in Renaissance Italy," in *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 67–84. Jolly discusses "disguised" portraiture, that is, the appearance of contemporaries in the guise of illustrious historic figures, in the circle of the court of Philip the Good in "More on the Van Eyck Question," p. 243.

66. See John F. McGovern, "The Rise of New Economic Attitudes—Economic Humanism, Economic Nationalism—During the Later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, A.D. 1200–1550," *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 26 (1970): 217–53. The characterization of the businessman I have quoted is from McGovern's paraphrase of Benedetto Cotrugli's treatise of 1458 (p. 246). Sylvia Thrupp's study of the English businessman complements the picture I have drawn of his Flemish counterpart. See Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London [1300–1500]* (1948; Ann Arbor, Mich., 1962). Relevant remarks may also be found in Philippe Braunstein, "Toward Intimacy: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Revelations of the Medieval World*, pp. 549–56.

activities to meet requirements of religion, and it adjusted matrimonial ritual to reinforce market practice. Dowries might legitimately replace loans in its eyes, and brides could conceivably function as exchange transactions, as was the case for each one of Duke Philip the Bold's daughters.<sup>67</sup> And, in Jan's art, these men found relief from the sins of their past; they used the ill-gotten proceeds from financial ventures to purchase eternal remembrance.<sup>68</sup> Bankers, we recall, like the painter they employed, dealt in futures.

My tale has taken shape in accordance with the perspective from which I, as teller, chose to organize it. In my narrative, performed and promised transactions mingle; in the end, it is unclear where the scholar's story stops and the painter's begins. It is equally difficult to draw a firm line between what is knowable about the Arnolfinis and what is merely imaginable about their lives. Their story, according to mine, mimics the marriage of the plausible with the inexpressible of which their painter was an acknowledged master. In contrast to prior readings that have isolated either the mirror or the handclasp as religious symbols and argued for profoundly spiritual interpretations of the event, my view of Jan's work embeds the looking glass and the subjects in what can be known of everyday life; it celebrates the social significance of the occasion and sees, at best, ironic sanctity in the image. I have, after all, constructed a plot that traces a financial transaction of a secret and irregular kind and examines the use of art's persuasive powers to put a good, "spiritual" face on the matter. Surely this tale of a lucrative deal struck by men about a woman is not the romantic story I was told as a student and which I, in turn, have passed on to numerous classes of my own. That account, scripted by Panofsky, explained the painting as a remarkable artistic certificate of an exceptional marriage ceremony as viewed by an extraordinary witness. Although Panofsky's claims reverberate throughout my retelling, his story about the painted representation is vastly different from mine. What was for him an unusual ceremonial event has come to be perceived by me as more ordinary activity: "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait" has become in my retelling "A Diary of Giovanna Cenami's Dower." The story I have constructed about the London double portrait is a narrative about middle-class deceptions and artistic misrepresentations; in its discussion of the treatment of women and its

67. See Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Bold: The Formation of the Burgundian State* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 81–92.

68. Herbert L. Kessler has recently made a comparable remark in a more general way: "While praying before a work of art helped to secure salvation, the commissioning of art assured eternal protection of body and soul. . . . Christian art served as collateral in transactions for redemption" (Kessler, "On the State of Medieval Art History," *Art Bulletin* 70 [June 1988]: 177).

observations on the relationship of art to both money and power, it is a tale about business as usual.<sup>69</sup>

69. This tale takes on additional color when the lost painting by Jan of a woman at her toilet, which has of late been associated with the London panel, is explored in the context of this story; that project is in progress. For work on the painting, see Julius S. Held, "Artis Pictoriae Amator: An Antwerp Art Patron and His Collection (1957); Postscript (1979)," in *Rubens and His Circle: Studies by Julius S. Held*, ed. Anne W. Lowenthal, David Rosand, and John Walsh, Jr. (Princeton, N.J., 1982), pp. 43–58, and Schabacker, "Jan van Eyck's Woman at Her Toilet: Proposals Concerning Its Subject and Context," *Fogg Art Museum Report, 1974–5, 1975–6* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 56–77, with an appendix, "Condition and Treatment Report," by Elizabeth Jones, pp. 77–78.

For another view of evasion and deception in fifteenth-century Italy, see Molho, "Deception and Marriage Strategy in Renaissance Florence: The Case of Women's Ages," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (Summer 1988): 193–217. Molho acknowledges that falsified written records are hard to find since the intention of the perpetrators was deception. Thus, while statistical evidence suggests that the practice was widespread, its documentation, he notes, is rare (p. 214).

For an overview of approaches to the Arnolfini portrait and the question of indeterminacy in interpretation more generally, see Mark Roskill, *The Interpretation of Pictures* (Amherst, Mass., 1989), pp. 62–72, kindly brought to my attention by Henry Millon.

The marriage or betrothal scenarios I have imagined, in order both to explain what we see in the Arnolfini portrait and account for its representation, have real-life counterparts in the fourteenth-century records of the nearby city of Ghent. In one case, a young girl was "married" and advanced some sort of financial settlement by her father before she came of age; provision was made for cancellation and redistribution of the settlement should the marriage not take place when she reached maturity (David Nicholas, *The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children, and the Family in Fourteenth-Century Ghent* [Lincoln, Nebr., 1985], p. 24). Nicholas suggests that the substantial stakes relatives had in any issues concerning transfer of property would have encouraged them to keep such disagreements out of the hands of city magistrates (and, consequently, out of public records), thus explaining the relative paucity of documents concerning marriage disputes and attendant financial claims. James Murray, whose work on the Bruges Archives was of considerable help to me in the development of a key hypothesis in this paper, kindly brought Nicholas's helpful study to my attention after my own had been completed.