ALLEGORY

Allegory [Gr. *allegoria*, description of something under the guise of something else].

Term used to describe a method of expressing complex abstract ideas or a work of art composed according to this. An allegory is principally constructed from personifications and symbols, and, though overlapping in function, it is thus more sophisticated in both meaning and operation than either of these. It is found primarily in Western art and constitutes an important area of study in Iconography and iconology.

I. Introduction.

Allegory, a means of making the ‘invisible’ visible, is a product of the philosophical thought of Classical antiquity and was used by the ancients not only in the fine arts but also in literature and rhetoric (Cicero: *On the Orator*, xxvii.94; Quintilian: *Principles of Oratory*, VIII.vi.44; IX.ii.92; Plutarch: *Moralia*, 19, E-F). In contrast with the symbol, which is a phenomenon of nearly all cultures and religions, allegory is thus essentially a feature primarily of Western art.

The mechanism of allegory further distinguishes it from both symbolism and personification. Symbolism, in ordinary parlance, occurs when an object is used by convention to refer to a general idea, while personification occurs when abstract terms are expressed by human figures, generally with significant attributes. An allegory, however, includes combinations of personifications and/or symbols, which, on the basis of a conventionally agreed relation between concept and representation, refer to an idea outside the work of art.

Allegories themselves can be subdivided into the categories of dynamic and static. In dynamic allegories the personifications perform an active role, as, for example, in Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* (beginning of the 5th century AD), the strife between Vice and Virtue. In a static allegory the different elements of the picture illustrate different elements of an intellectual concept—taken as a whole, they may be the pictorial formula expressing, for example, the universality and inner connection of knowledge, faith etc. Furthermore, an allegorical significance may be attached to subjects with a prior sense of their own, such as mythology, genre or historical events, and the resulting ambiguity is sometimes pursued as an end in itself. The generation of allegorical meaning takes place without the need for aesthetic appreciation, although Renaissance (and later) art theories stipulated rules for Decorum, so that, for example, a noble subject must be expressed in noble forms. Allegory, whether or not in conscious imitation of the ancients, continued to be employed until the 19th century, when it fell into disfavour because it was considered to be ‘intellectualistic’ and a hindrance to visual communication.

II. Classical.

Two related developments of great importance characterized the Greek attitude towards religion and distinguished it from that of other ancient peoples. These were the ability to reflect rationally on the preternatural forces by which life is governed and the gift of transposing religious experience into anthropomorphizing metaphors. Gradually, in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, myth became transformed into poetry, ritual action into drama, and cult objects with a fetish character into allegorical ones, thus creating a distinction between outer appearance and significance. In place of the old homogeneous mythology, there arose, within the same external forms, a ‘paramythology’, a new mythic idiom that was allegorical: ‘The image came to be interpreted allegorically when it had lost its self-evident character’ (Hinks, 1939, p.
11). This made it possible, for example, to see the war of the Greeks against the Amazons as an allusion to the war against the Persians. A further step in this direction led to purely allegorical representations without a mythological pretext, such as Apelles’ lost painting incorporating personifications of Calumny and others or the *Kairos* (Opportunity) of Lysippos (Roman relief copy, Turin, Mus. Ant.), and depictions of *Psychomachia*, especially as literary themes (e.g. *Hercules at the Crossroads; Tabula Cebetis*).

At a very early stage, personifications came into use to represent abstractions of ideas comprising almost the whole world picture of ancient times: seasons, towns, continents, Fortune, Conquest, Peace and so on. These personifications, especially in Roman art, were used in symbolic terms (e.g. as references to triumph or apotheosis) in relation to particular historical events, as in the *Great Cameo of France* (AD 17; Paris, Bib. N., Cab. Médailles), which possibly commemorates the departure of Germanicus to the east. Personifications of the seasons, depicted on sarcophagi, allude to the revolutions of time and may thus symbolize the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (life after death, reincarnation, transmigration of the soul and so on); in this way, besides being an allegory of eternity, they can also be an allegory of the harmony between macrocosm and microcosm. The use of allegorical personifications on coins and medals is of great importance on account of their dissemination throughout the Greco-Roman world and their continuance in post-Classical times.

III. Medieval.

1. Until the 12th century.

Late Antique personifications (of virtues, vices, planets, liberal arts, etc) retained their validity in early medieval art. Also important was the adoption of the antique theory of allegory by St Augustine (AD 354–430) and by St Isidore of Seville (c. AD 560–636), who wrote, ‘An allegory is a manner of speaking figuratively; it sounds like one thing but means another’ (*Etymologiae*, I.xxxvii.22). This refers to literature, but in relation to the fine arts it became an argument with regard to iconoclasm, as reflected in the comment of Pope Adrian I (*reg* AD 772–95), who supported the use of allegory as a means ‘to show the invisible through the visible’. More generally, such ideas provided a theoretical basis for the use of symbolism and allegory in art.

Of great importance in the thinking about allegory was the development of biblical exegesis. A distinction was drawn between *sensus litteralis*, the literal narration of a biblical story, and *sensus spiritualis*; the latter was again divided into *sensus allegoricus* (the true meaning hidden behind the literal sense), *sensus
tropologicus (the moral significance) and sensus anagogicus (the meaning in the light of eschatology), although those distinctions were not always used strictly in practice. Typology, developed from the sensus spiritualis, had far-reaching effects on the visual arts, linking Old Testament scenes (the Type) with New Testament ones (the Antitype). In Carolingian times the contrast between Ecclesia and Synagoge developed from this line of thought.

The continuance of the Classical literary tradition of allegory, and the development both of multiple interpretations of the Bible and of typology, helped to form the basic medieval attitude that everything in the visible world may have a symbolic meaning. Moreover, the Neo-Platonist Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite had expressly associated allegory with beauty: visible things are images of the beauty of the invisible. This view influenced Abbot Suger Abbot of Saint-Denis in the 12th century.

As an inheritance from antiquity, the four cardinal virtues had a firm place in Christian iconography: Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice, which Cicero and Ambrosius Macrobius (fl c. AD 400) subdivided into various aspects and facets. These were combined with the three ‘theological virtues’, Faith, Hope and Charity, mentioned by St Paul (1 Corinthians 13:13), to constitute the seven principal virtues. Three main types of iconography of the virtues developed in the early Middle Ages: that derived from the Classical idea of an author, with Virtue as inspiration; the conflict between Virtues and Vices, elaborated in Prudentius’ Psychomachia; and that derived from the latter and from the image of the triumphant Christ, with Virtue crushing Vice underfoot. Another important Classical heritage was the tradition of the liberal arts: the Trivium of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic and the Quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. The pictorial tradition related to these begins with the exhaustively described personifications in De nuptiis philologiae et Mercurii by Martianus Mineus Felix Capella (fl c.480). As regards both form and content, the iconography of the liberal arts derived from that of the Muses.

2. 12th and 13th centuries.

Visual unity began to be achieved thanks to the great 12th- and 13th-century encyclopedias, such as the Glossa ordinaria, attributed to Anselmus of Laon (c. 1050–1117), and the Speculum majus of Vincent of Beauvais (c. 1190–1264). The two main trends of medieval thought (the irrational and mystical, influenced by Neo-Platonism, and the rational and didactic, influenced by Aristotle) were informed by these encyclopedias and in the visual arts. Vincent of Beauvais regarded the liberal arts as the foundation of all knowledge required by the philosopher (Speculum doctrinale, II. 31), and this was further developed in the monumental decoration of cathedrals. The point of departure for the fine arts continued to be the allegorical interpretation of reality as, in Thomas Aquinas’s words, ‘spiritual meanings expressed in material metaphors’.

At the beginning of the 12th century the first truly Christian illustrations of comprehensive encyclopedic knowledge appeared and also two important forms for the allegorical expression of hierarchical relations: the rosette (e.g. in the Mystical Paradise in the Speculum virginum, c. 1135–53; London, BM, Arundel MS. 44, fol. 13r); and the allegorical tree (e.g. Tree of the Virtues and Vices in Liber Floridus Lamberti, c. 1120; Ghent, Bib. Rijksuniv., cod. 1125, fols 231v–232r). From the allegory of the tree there developed that of the cross, as a systematic aid to mystical contemplation.

The principle that human wisdom is dependent on divine wisdom and must be directed towards it is equally expressed in the rational–didactic programmes of the portal decorations of Chartres Cathedral
(1145–55; see fig.) and Notre-Dame (1210–20) in Paris and in the decoration of, for example, the Trivulzio Candlestick (c. 1210; Milan Cathedral), attributed to Nicholas of Verdun, the whole structure of which expresses the metaphor of Christ as the ‘True Light’. Each of these programmes in itself forms an allegorical representation of the structure of Church and faith. The rational–didactic and the irrational–mystical ways of thought found a happy synthesis in the Hortus deliciarum (c. 1180; Strasbourg, Bib. Mun., destr.; copy, Paris, 1870; London, BL, 1703. d. 7, fol. 32r) by Herrad von Landsberg, one of the earliest documented women artists. This serves mystical ends thanks to a stoutly built systematic ‘édifice’: the representation of Philosophy reflects the system of the work as a whole. Roughly contemporaneous with the Hortus deliciarum is the allegorical poem Anticlaudianus (1181–4) by Alanus de Insulis (Alain de Lille; c. 1116–1202/3), a Christian transcription of Martianus Mineus Felix Capella’s De nuptiis philologiae et Mercurii. Apart from psychomachy, this poem is chiefly of interest for its allegorical cosmology, which foreshadows Dante’s Divine Comedy.

The Bible moralisée (c. 1220–30) is not a typological Bible like the later Biblia pauperum (c.1300) or the Speculum humanae salvationis (c. 1310–24) but an allegorical commentary on the Bible. In some of the illustrations, genre scenes are given an allegorical significance influenced by the iconography of virtues and vices in the portal decorations of Notre-Dame in Paris, which were created somewhat earlier, though in the same cultural climate, and in which the vices are symbolized by instances from everyday life. This method rapidly became popular through miscellanies containing model sermons and through the many translations and adaptations of the ethico-theological treatise La Somme le Roy (1279) by Frère Laurent (c.1228–c. 1300/02).

### 3. 14th and 15th centuries.

In the late Middle Ages there was a predominant taste for allegories calculated to arouse an emotional response. These included exhortations to poverty and chastity, for example in the Mystic Marriage of St Francis and Poverty (early 14th century; Assisi, S Francesco, Lower Church) by the Master of the Assisi Vault (Maestro delle Vele), and allegories of the vicissitudes of life and the triumph of death, for example the Camposanto (c. 1350), Pisa, and the Ars moriendi treatises. The idea of the Imitatio Christi, expressed in affective devotion, formed the leitmotif of late medieval ethics. Also from this period is the theme of the vices crucifying Christ, emphasis being laid on Christ’s willing sacrifice as the supreme example of divine love (e.g. the south German Psalter of Bonmont, c. 1260; Besançon, Bib. Mun., MS. 54, fol. 15v). There was also an attempt to arouse emotion in depicting the conflict between virtues and vices, as in the Etymachia (c.1330) or the Pèlerinage (1331) by Guillaume de Deguileville (b 1295; fl 1358). With help from the
technique of the *Ars memorandi*, there appeared in the late Middle Ages personifications combining in
themselves all virtues or all vices (e.g. c. 1425–50; Rome, Bib. Casanatense, MS. 1404, fol. 2v). The female
personification embodying all vices here takes on the form of ‘*Frau Welt*’.

Secular or political allegories, such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *Good and Bad Government* frescoes (1337–40;
Siena, Pal. Pub.), depict the opposition of Justice and Injustice on various levels of abstraction. At the end
of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th the encyclopedic work of Vincent of Beauvais and
Thomas Aquinas was continued by Bruno Latini in *Tesoretto* (before 1267), by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*
(after 1314) and further by Dante’s son Jacopo di Dante Alighieri (1299–1349) in *Dotrinale*. Against this
background some monumental cycles of an allegorical–encyclopedic character were created in Italy, such
as the reliefs (1337–41) of the Campanile in Florence by Andrea Pisano, completed by Luca della Robbia,
(1399/1400–82) and the decorations of the Spanish Chapel (1366–8; Florence, S Maria Novella) by Andrea
da Firenze (i), a *summa* of church doctrine and an allegory of the overthrow of heresy.

In line with the allegorical way of thought in religious matters, the medieval attitude to Classical antiquity
was characterized by a search for Christian values that were present in the classics in an imperfect form.
The *Ovidius moralizatus* (c. 1330) by Petrus Berchorius (c.1285/1300–1362), *Fulgentius metaphoralis* (c.
1330) by John Ridewall and Christine de Pizan’s *Epître d’Othéa* (c. 1400), in continuation of fragmentary
attempts in earlier centuries, present a moralized exposition of mythology and ancient history, using,
among other things, the method of multiple biblical exegesis.

In the first half of the 15th century the representation of the virtues in northern Europe went through a
phase known as ‘the new iconography’. The various medieval treatises on the virtues had so differentiated
these personifications that the traditional attributes were no longer adequate. The tradition of Cicero and
Ambrosius Macrobius, plus the differentiation of virtues into new aspects and facets, called for new
attributes that were duly devised: for example the sieve and coffin for Prudence and the clock, spectacles
and windmill for Temperance, as in the illustrations to *De quattuor virtutibus* (c. 1470; Paris, Bib. N., MS.
Fr. 9186, fol. 304r). A full century later these attributes were still being used by Pieter Bruegel the elder in
a cycle of engravings of the *Virtues* (1559–60).

Secular allegory in the late Middle Ages was dominated by the related themes of love, folly and death. The
allegory of courtly love (*Roman de la rose*) was blended in the 15th century with aspects of social irony, for
example by Master E. S. and the Housebook Master. Partly owing to the *Narrenschiff* (Strasbourg, 1493/4)
by Sebastian Brant (1458–1521), folly and vanity became leitmotifs of Dutch art in the 16th and 17th
centuries.

At the end of the Middle Ages a type of allegory was developed in the Netherlands that did not make use
of personifications but consisted of the allegorical interpretation of landscape. The iconography of the two
paths of life, expressed in landscape terms, for example by Joachim Patinir, developed on the one hand
from Classical themes such as *Hercules at the Crossroads* and *Tabula Cebetis* and on the other from St
Augustine’s distinction between the *Civitas Dei* (city of God) and the *Civitas terrae* (earthly city); these
were connected with the theme of the pilgrimage of mankind, which developed later and which was
depicted by, for example, Hieronymus Bosch.
IV. Renaissance.

1. Italy.

In the Renaissance the almost exclusive orientation of allegory towards the Christian doctrine of salvation gave way to a broader application of philosophical systems and social phenomena. It became an expression of Neo-Platonism and of the self-aggrandizement of princes, city states and burghers, a witness to the cultural link with antiquity and the expression of a new sense of history. The transition to the Renaissance was accompanied by iconographic and conceptual developments. Classical personifications that had taken on unclassical appearances during the Middle Ages were now restored to their Classical forms, but they retained aspects belonging to the medieval interlude. Consciously or otherwise, in some cases (e.g. Cupid blindfolded, or Father Time) these were aspects that expressed the development of these personifications in the Middle Ages (something described as ‘pseudomorphosis’, Panofsky, 1939).

The medieval use of differentiated virtues (virtutes) was replaced by that of Virtue in general (with a recollection of the antique virtus), personified first by Hercules, later (c. 1510) as a female figure sitting or standing on a rectangular block to emphasize her stability as compared with Fortune, who is poised on a sphere. Virtue and Fortune are two forces, differing in degree, which govern human fate and together express the Ciceronian maxim Duce Virtute, comite Fortuna (‘With Virtue as leader and Fortune as companion’), as depicted, for example, on the medal produced in honour of Giuliano II de’ Medici (1513; Florence, Bargello). In the iconographic tradition, Virtue wars with Fortune and is victorious. Virtue in general also takes on the aspect of Minerva in her various functions as bringer of peace, protectress of the arts and sciences, defender of chastity and so on. Antique Roman coins were an important iconographical source for this development.

Among the medieval themes that were continued in the Renaissance were cosmological cycles (e.g. the cycle of the months, with Aries, Taurus and Gemini (1469–70, by Francesco del Cossa; Ferrara, Pal. Schifanoia), cycles of Virtues (e.g. Piero Pollaiuolo and Botticelli’s series of Virtues, 1469–71; Florence, Uffizi) and cycles of the Liberal Arts (e.g. Bernardino Pinturicchio’s Liberal Arts, c. 1495; Rome, Vatican, Appartamento Borgia). Raphael’s Stanza della Segnatura (1509–11) in the Vatican in Rome represents a continuation of the monumental late-medieval encyclopedic cycles.
In Neo-Platonist philosophy, personifications and allegories are the manner in which the supernatural, the Idea, manifests itself, being otherwise inaccessible to mortal senses. By intuition and in moments of ecstasy (‘furor poeticus’) the artist, thanks to love and to his desire for divine beauty and for the good, is able to depict the beauty of the Idea. Everything material is to be conceived as a symbol of perfection in the divine world (icones symbolicae). Christian and non-Christian sources of knowledge are both of divine origin and of equal value. This explains the particular respect paid to the hieroglyphs of Horapollo (early 5th century AD), which were thought to reflect divine wisdom. Horapollo’s *Hieroglyphica* (1419; printed in Venice, 1505) and the allegorical romance *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499) by Francesco Colonna (fl1490–1527), which was influenced by it, constitute the Neo-Platonic foundations of the science of emblems. The Neo-Platonic world picture, in which Reason plays a mediating role in the conflict between body and spirit, forms the background to many allegorical representations, such as Botticelli’s *Minerva and a Centaur* (c. 1482–3; Florence, Uffizi) and Giorgione’s *Three Philosophers* (1525; Vienna, Ksthist. Mus.).

Increased knowledge of Classical antiquity did not lead to a simplification of the allegorical interpretation of mythology, but rather the contrary. Marsilio Ficino developed the concept of the ‘duae Veneres’, the heavenly and the natural Venus, corresponding respectively to Amor divinus (divine love) and Amor humanus (human love): different in rank but both of heavenly origin, the two forms of love are honourable in themselves and are opposed to Amor ferinus (sensual passion). These ideas of love were reflected in Botticelli’s *Primavera* (the natural Venus; 1478) and the *Birth of Venus* (the heavenly Venus, 1480–85; both Florence, Uffizi). In a complementary interpretation these paintings also represent an allegory of spring, a pictorial reflection of the poetry of Angelo Poliziano. Titian’s *Sacred and Profane Love* (c. 1514–15; Rome, Gal. Borghese) depicts the same Neo-Platonic pair of Venuses, but this time in the mythological disguise of
a marriage portrait. The concept of the ‘duae Veneres’ developed in the direction of the older opposition between sensual love and love of virtue, along with a second pair of concepts, that of Eros and Anteros (Amor virtutis), and it was applied in the more general context of psychomachia. This is exemplified in the paintings for the studiolo of Isabella d’Este, Marchioness of Mantua, in Mantua, such as Mantegna’s Pallas Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue (1499–1502).

The allegorical motif of a triumphal procession offered opportunities of presenting a hierarchical order of precedence. Use could be made of examples from biblical, antique and contemporary history, and (an important difference from the Middle Ages) there was room for the historically based reconstruction of processions from Classical antiquity. Petrarch’s Trionfi (1351–3) are a Christian counterpart of antique triumphal processions. The motif was as suitable for allegorical triumphs of princes (as in Piero della Francesca’s Triumph of Federigo da Montefeltro, c.1465; Florence, Uffizi) as for Christian themes (as in Titian’s Triumph of Christ, woodcut, c. 1510), as well as for processions of gods, seasons and so on. An interest in antiquity is clearly felt in Mantegna’s Triumphs of Caesar (c. 1486–1505; London, Hampton Court, Royal Col.), which contains elements from Horapollo and the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, some of which were used by Dürrer in his engraving of the Allegorical Triumph of Maximilian I (1512; e.g. Vienna, Albertina).

Fresh allegorical themes were borrowed from Ekphrasis literature (antique descriptions of statues or pictures), such as Hercules at the Crossroads (as in Sebastian Brant’s Narrenschiff, Latin edn, Lübeck, 1497; or Raphael’s Dream of the Young Scipio Africanus Major, c. 1504; London, N.G.), the Tabula Cebetis (as in Hans Holbein the younger’s woodcut for the title page of Desiderius Erasmus’s Annotationes in Novum Testamentum; Basle, 1522) and the Calumny of Apelles (as in Botticelli’s painting of that name, 1490s; Florence, Uffizi; see fig.). About the middle of the 16th century a spate of emblem books, based on Horapollo and the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, explained by means of examples the symbols of the ancient world, for example Andrea Alciati’s Emblemata liber (Augsburg, 1531) and works by Lylius Gyraldus (Lilio Giraldi; 1479–1552) in 1548, Natale Conti (Natalis Comes; c. 1520–82) in 1551, Achille Bocchi (1488–1562) in 1555, Piero Valeriano (Bolzani; 1477–1558) in 1556 and Vincenzo Cartari in 1556. All these were used as sources by Cesare Ripa in his highly influential Iconologia (Rome, 1593; first illus. edn, Rome, 1603). Before the appearance of the handbooks, this scholarly knowledge had already been put to use in some allegorical cycles: in Correggio’s Camera di S Paolo (1518–19; Parma, monastery of S Paolo) and Giulio Romano’s decorations for the Palazzo del Tè (c. 1525–35) in Mantua. Titian’s allegorical themes also owe much to the science of emblems and antique symbolism, as shown, for example, in his Allegory of Marriage, altered to an In memoriam, incorrectly known as the Allegory of Alfonso d’Avalos, Marchese del Vasto (c. 1530–35; Paris, Louvre), and his Allegory of Prudence (c. 1570; London, N.G.).

The intellectualizing and complicating tendencies of Mannerist allegory entailed a loss of clarity. Vasari in his Ragionamenti (Florence, 1588) described his own mythological decorations (1570) in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence but accompanied the allegorical interpretations with alternatives. Bronzino’s Allegory of Venus and Cupid (c. 1545; London, N.G.) is a confusion of different themes (disarming of Cupid, unmasking of deceit), which makes interpretation difficult (Triumph of Venus, or warning against illicit love). Allusions to the patron’s own exploits and circumstances form the key to the allegorical interpretation of such mythological cycles as the decoration of the Palazzo Doria (1528–35) in Genoa by Perino del Vaga with the Glorification of Andrea Doria and that of the Galerie François I (1534–7) at Fontainebleau by Rosso Fiorentino with the Glorification of Francis I ‘under the cloak of fables’ (Panofsky, 1958).
2. Northern Europe.

In Dürer’s time Nuremberg was a centre of Neo-Platonism, and its influence can be seen in his allegorical themes. Dürer was acquainted with humanists such as Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), Sebastian Brant, Konrad Celtis and Willibald Pirckheimer, and his theory of proportion was based on Neo-Platonic foundations. Neo-Platonic circles evolved the doctrine of the ‘golden mean’ (*aurea mediocrates*), according to which the highest good could be achieved by combining virtue (*virtus*) with pleasure (*voluptas*, in the Epicurean sense). This is probably the theme of Dürer’s engraving *Hercules* (c. 1498; b.73). The Neo-Platonic philosophy is expressed most eloquently in the engraving *Melencolia I* (1514; b.74). The pose and attributes of the figure are a combination of the personifications of Geometry and creative Melancholy, and it may be regarded as a spiritual self-portrait.

Other allegorical representations bear witness to Dürer’s familiarity with philosophical or literary sources of a humanistic kind, for instance Angelo Poliziano’s *Manto* (Bologna, 1492) as a source for the *Large Nemesis* (1501–2; b.77). The melancholic temperament was also depicted by Lucas Cranach the elder (e.g. *Allegory of Melancholy*, 1532; Copenhagen, Stat. Mus. Kst).

In northern Europe the allegorical language of the Renaissance harmonized well with the late-medieval tradition of ceremonial processions, pageants and plays by Chambers of Rhetoric. German and Dutch humanism, flavoured as it was with a touch of irony, guaranteed the continuation of allegories of folly and satire at the expense of wealth, ambition and so on. Moreover, the Reformation, openly or otherwise, gave its endorsement to allegorical imagery, as shown in the works of Lucas Cranach the elder, Hans Baldung, Hans Weiditz the elder, Cornelis Anthonisz and Jan Swart.

Several series of engravings by Maarten van Heemskerck, such as the *Allegory of the Unbridled World* (1550; Hollstein, nos 200–03), *Jacob’s Ladder* (1550; Hollstein, nos 187–200) and the *Triumph of Patientia* (1559; Hollstein, nos 151–8) express the doctrine of perfectibility developed by the philosopher and engraver Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert. According to this, mankind could achieve salvation by the use of reason and by placing love of God above all things; folly, on the other hand, was culpable ignorance. Both in Coornhert’s ‘rhetorician’ plays and in Heemskerck’s engravings, biblical figures play an allegorical role; sacred and secular characters are on the same footing and are inseparably connected.
The existing preoccupation with the Vanitas idea was reinforced by humanistic and theological literature. The theme of the Prodigal Son gave rise to allegories of the vanity of earthly pleasure (e.g. in the work of Cornelis Anthonisz.). The kitchen scenes of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer combine the Vanitas motif with the contrast between vita activa and vita contemplativa. Alongside the motif of a putto with a death’s head, there arose, as a visual rendering of one of Erasmus’s Adagia, the figure of a putto blowing bubbles, as in Hendrick Goltzius’s engraving *Quis evadet?: Homo bulla* (1594).

V. Baroque.

In Baroque allegory the emotions (‘affetti’) are depicted in a naturalistic manner: the gods and personifications behave in a human and dramatic way, thus increasing the spectator’s interest in the idea expressed. The gods and personifications are no longer mere ‘invisible’ inspirers or companions belonging to a supernatural reality but may take part in the action alongside historical personages, who are thereby endowed with a touch of heroic status. The illusionism of quadratura ceiling painting also helped to obscure the difference between symbol and reality.

The Counter-Reformation doctrine that salvation was to be found only in the Church gave rise to allegorico-didactic programmes in which clarity was the first requirement, for example Theodor Galle’s illustration for the *Occasio arrepta, neglecta* (Antwerp, 1605) of Jan David (fl 1601–17), and emblems in which visual metaphors became a vehicle for Church dogmas (e.g. Otto van Veen’s *Amoris divini emblemata*, Antwerp, 1615), as well as to more disguised representations (e.g. Nicolas Poussin’s allegorico-typological cycle of the *Seasons*, 1660–64; Paris, Louvre).

The development of the glorification theme received a decisive impulse from the decorations of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice by Tintoretto, Veronese and Giacomo Palma Giovane, which had its effect on Rubens’s panegyric cycles and on those of Pietro da Cortona, such as the *Glorification of Urban VIII* (1633–9; Rome, Pal. Barberini). The allegorical triumph was the formula *par excellence* not only for glorifying princes but also for portraying the victory of the Counter-Reformation Church, as in Rubens’s tapestry cycle *Triumph of the Eucharist* (1625–8; Madrid, convent of the Descalzas Reales). It thus satisfied the humanistic preference for antique forms as a means of depicting abstract ideas.
The creators of programmes with visual metaphors were ideally served by the increasing profusion of emblem literature and Iconographic handbooks (the many translations of Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* indicate its widespread use), and encyclopedias of symbols, such as the *Mondo simbolico* (Milan, 1653) by Filippo Pinelli (c. 1604–67) and *Il cannocchiale Aristotelico* (Turin, 1654) by Emmanuele Tesauro (1592–1675). The theme of secular glorification, in which the prince was lauded as ‘exemplum virtutis’ with the help of allegorico-mythological personifications and emblematic allusions, as well as references to the Golden Age, was deployed on a grand scale in Rubens’s work, such as the cycle (1622–5; Paris, Louvre) for the Medici Gallery in the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris and the decoration of the Banqueting Hall (1630–35) in London (in situ). In many respects Rubens’s great cycles formed a model for the decoration of the Huis ten Bosch (1647–52) at The Hague by, among others, Théodore van Thulden, Jacob Jordaens and Gerrit van Honthorst, although it differs from them in structure and intention.

For his frequent allegories of peace and war Rubens used the whole repertory of iconographic means developed for this purpose since the Renaissance, as in *Mars Defeated by Minerva* (e.g. sketch, c.1635–7; Paris, Louvre). This theme forms the background of the *Allegory of War and Peace* (1629–30; London, N.G.) in which the central figure, Venus Pacifera rather than Pax, embodies love, fertility, abundance and prosperity, which is the precondition and also the effect of peace. In Rubens’s sombre *Allegory of War* (1637; Florence, Pitti), Mars, the personification of fury, tramples on the arts and sciences.

Allegory was an approved way of expressing a political viewpoint, either in satire or in official commissions, as in Théodore van Thulden’s allegories of the political aspirations of Brabant (e.g. c.1650; ‘s Hertogenbosch, Stadhuis) and Abraham van den Tempel’s allegories of the cloth industry (e.g. 1650–51; Leiden, Stedel. Mus. Lakenhal). The *portrait historié*, a combination of portrait and allegory, was an internationally familiar genre. Practised since the Renaissance, it identified the subject with a biblical or mythological figure regarded as an ‘exemplum virtutis’ or with a Virtue, as in Paulus Moreelse’s *Sophia Hedwig, Countess of Nassau Dietz, as Charity, with her Children* (1621; Apeldoorn, Pal. Het Loo).

Along with overt allegories, in 17th-century Dutch and Flemish painting there developed the genre of ‘concealed allegory’: an everyday scene, or what appeared to be such, containing a moral exhortation or warning, often indicated by an emblematic motif, taken perhaps from *Sinnepoppen* (Emblematic poetry; Amsterdam, 1614) by Roemer Visscher (*fl* 1586/7–1652), *Sinne- en minnebeelden* (Symbols and love emblems; Middelburg, 1618) by Jacob Cats (*fl*) or some other visual metaphor such as a proverb. Many ‘instructive series’, composed in the 16th century with the aid of personifications, appeared in the 17th century in a naturalistic form, for example in the work of Willem Buytewech, Adriaen van de Venne, Jan Miense Molenaer, Gerrit Dou, Gerard ter Borch the elder and Jan Steen. These included such subjects as the five senses (with a warning against earthly vanity); the four temperaments (with a warning against depravity), the four times of life (warning against the rashness of youth and the folly of age); and many other themes connected with love, folly and vanity. An essential feature is the combination of ‘instruction and delight’ and the principle that the ideas expressed can be interpreted in either a good or a bad sense.

Later in the century, under the influence of classicism and because the hidden implications were often no longer understood, there was a return to the Classical pictorial vocabulary for the representation of abstract ideas, as in the works of Gérard de Lairesse.

Artists in Italy continued the tradition of concealing or revealing several layers of meaning by the use of mythological forms. The Ovidian love scenes in Annibale Carracci’s decorations for the Farnese Gallery (1597–1600) in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome (in situ) form a Neo-Platonic allegory of love and at the same time allude to the famous deeds of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. In Pietro da Cortona’s decorative cycle
(1640–46) in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence (in situ), the astrological and mythological elements are also a glorification of Cosimo I de’ Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Such allusions are also found, though less prominently, in religious allegory, for example in Andrea Sacchi’s Allegory of the Divine Wisdom (1629–33; Rome, Pal. Barberini), with its symbolic references to Pope Urban VIII.

In the mid-17th century, as an intimate counterpart to the great fresco cycles, the work of Pietro Testa, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione and Salvator Rosa evinced a romantic—philosophical approach to such traditional themes as vanity and melancholy. Around 1670 religious allegory on a monumental scale was revived by Neo-classical academicians with Giovanni Pietro Bellori as their spokesman, as shown, for example, by Carlo Maratti’s Triumph of Clemency (after 1673; Rome, Pal. Altieri). The tradition of monumental allegorical decoration was continued by Giambattista Tiepolo (e.g. Allegory of the Four Continents, 1752–3; Würzburg, Residenz) and by the masters of south German Baroque, as in the ceiling fresco (1747; St Florian Abbey, library) executed by Bartolomeo Altomonte after a scheme by Daniel Gran.

VI. Romanticism, Realism and decline.

Allegory fell into a crisis in the second half of the 18th century. The routine application of Ripa’s rules showed that it had lost its inner strength. Theorists of art such as Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing raised the question of the aesthetic value of allegory and soon began to criticize and reject it as a system of ‘arbitrary’ signs. Johann Joachim Winckelmann attempted in Versuch einer Allegorie, besonders für die Kunst (Dresden, 1766) to breathe new life into allegory, for instance by introducing models from antiquity in place of what he considered to be Ripa’s absurdities. However, this attempt was doomed to failure, as it completely failed to meet the need for a type of image that possessed an inner unity with that which it signified. As opposed to the purely rational transference of ideas, art was required to produce an emotional effect. After the way had been prepared by Karl Philipp Moritz and Johann Gottfried Herder, Goethe (1797) and Schelling (1802) formulated this problem in terms of an opposition between allegory and symbol: allegory being the significant indication of an idea outside the work of art, while the symbol does not indicate but actually is the idea, thanks to the organic and indivisible unity of image, expression and significance.

At about the same time, symbolism was enhanced in value from a different angle. Romantic philosophers such as Friedrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Johann Joseph von Görres took up the old religious—mystical idea of the symbol as the bearer of a hidden, deeper meaning. There thus arose the conception of art as the medium and the artist as interpreter, of the mystical truth contained in symbolic language (hieroglyphs), and the irrational element was made one of the basic principles of art and art theory. It was this conception of symbols that found expression in Romantic art, especially in Germany. In addition, 19th-century artists became aware of the tension between reality and allegorical figures. If, for instance, one wished to raise a historical event to a higher, more general plane, it was necessary to combine time-conditioned and timeless elements in a viable synthesis. Artists wrestled with this problem almost throughout the century.

This synthesis was achieved for the last time in Eugène Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People (1830; Paris, Louvre), in which Liberty embodies the abstract notions of freedom and victory, making use of an older pictorial tradition, but at the same time forms an integrated part of the action, in a ‘naturalized’ allegorical personification. Attempts to bridge the gap between tradition and the present day by means of a compromise (combining traditional allegorical personification with ‘modern’ elements such as steam-engines) aroused little response, as witnessed in Horace Vernet’s ceiling painting of the Salle de la Paix
(1838–47) in the Palais Bourbon in Paris and the entries submitted for the prize of 1848 for an allegorical personification of La République.

In 1855 Gustave Courbet introduced the conception of ‘allégorie réelle’ in connection with his Painter’s Studio (1854–5; Paris, Mus. d’Orsay), an allegory in terms of contemporary activity. As in the concealed allegories in 17th-century Dutch painting, Courbet also completely discarded the traditional language of allegory in favour of a realistic presentation, while retaining the allegorical significance. Given the artistic development of the second half of the 19th century, his ‘allégorie réelle’ was rather a terminus than the beginning of a new stage. With the emergence of Symbolism, allegory as opposed to symbol was no longer regarded as an adequate means of expressing transcendental truth. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, allegorical personification still enjoyed some application in the field of nationalist propaganda (e.g. in Wilhelmine Germany), with its counterpart of caricature and political satire; nevertheless, in these fields also the traditional pictorial language must finally be regarded as having been superseded.

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