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REMBRANDT, RUBENS, AND CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY: THE CASE OF ANDROMEDA.*

The portrayal of Andromeda by the greatest Netherlandish painters of the 17th century, Rubens and Rembrandt, offers many opportunities to discuss a variety of sources, a wide range of interpretations, different functions, as well as diverging attitudes towards the heritage of classical antiquity. When focusing on this one subject, it is possible to demonstrate how such a mythological theme was used in different combinations of image and text, such as book illustrations accompanying translations; short summaries or moral explanations; prints with Latin verse; or emblems which could be used in a learned and in a light-hearted amorous context. Moreover, application of the theme in political allegory and allegorical use in the context of artistic ideals will also pass in review, as well as the employment for erotic amusement or as a vehicle to display certain artistic ideologies. Since Rubens and Rembrandt had truly diverging approaches, the fascinating variations in usage, functions and attitudes can be thrown into relief.

The little Andromeda, now in the Mauritshuis in The Hague (Fig. 24), was the first mythological subject that Rembrandt painted, probably in 1631, and he rendered it only once. It was also his first depiction of a nude figure. For Rubens, Andromeda was a subject that he portrayed several times throughout his career, up to one of the last works he made, painted probably in 1638 (Fig. 25). The story of Andromeda was well known from Ovid’s Metamorphoses, as were almost all the mythological subjects that became popular in Netherlandish painting in the late 16th and during the whole 17th century. The basic scheme of the depictions of the Andromeda story as we see it in Rembrandt’s painting and in

* A large part of this text appeared recently also in my book Rembrandt and the Female nude, that was published in December 2006.

Rubens’s late work was very conventional: it may be traced as far back as medieval illuminated manuscripts and was codified in the book illustrations that became immensely popular as of the mid 16th century, and which were printed in the many profusely illustrated editions in the vernacular of Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Especially the 178 lively woodcuts by Bernard Salomon published in 1557 in Lyons had a great impact; this beautiful booklet shows a sort of title of the fable above the print and eight lines of verse below, which your give a very concise summary of the story (Fig. 1). It has the visual appearance of an emblem book, but it offers an attractive compendium of the Ovidian fables, rendered in a combination of images and texts; easy to grasp and easy to remember. It was published in a French and in a Dutch edition, written by Guillaume Borluyt of Ghent. In the woodcut representing Andromeda chained to a rock while Perseus is fighting the monster, we recognize the general pictorial scheme that would so often return. Free copies of the Salomon series were made by the German Virgil Solis, which were first published in Frankfurt in two different German editions of 1563 and 1564: one of Johannes Posthuis, the other of Johannes Spreng. Best known was the one by Posthuis, that had four lines of verse in Latin and a free translation in German below every print (Fig. 2); sometimes these texts contained an exemplary moral but mostly they were just descriptive. These illustrations were in turn copied (all 178) and reproduced in the full Dutch prose translation by Johannes Florians or Blommaerts. The first edition with the whole series of woodcuts was printed in 1566 in Antwerp, the last one as late as 1650 (with quite a number of editions in between). Several others engraved or etched free copies for book illustrations related to the Salomon prototypes, for instance the Italian Antonio Tempesta, who made a well known series of 150 etchings which were published as a little book in Antwerp in 1606, with one line in Latin identifying the story only; and there were other editions, such as those with prints by Pieter van der Borcht (1591) and Crispijn de Passe (1607).

When surveying the subjects that became favourites in Netherlandish art of the later 16th and 17th century, it is striking that artists almost never ventured outside those subjects already depicted in the book illustrations; these prints also codified the moment to be depicted from a story. At the end of this period, the rather learned painter Gerard de Lairesse would write derisively: “The fables of Ovid are nowadays so profusely reproduced in prints which are accompanied by only three or four lines of text which sufficiently make clear what the story is about, Venus and Adonis, Vertumnum and Pomona, etcetera, that painters think they know enough: the one is dressed, the other naked, this is a man, that a woman, with this one goes a dog, with the other a pot of flowers. Why should I not just follow that, why should I do more research, since these subjects are depicted in such a way by the most famous masters, they ask?” Lairesse indeed hits the nail on the head; this seems to be precisely what happened in most cases during this period. The pictures in illustrated editions of the Metamorphoses would have been rooted in the minds of literate burghers as well as of artists as the prototypes of a certain scene. When thinking of the Andromeda story, this standard pictorial scheme would have immediately suggested itself to such people.

When Hendrick Goltzius took up the theme in four beautiful inventions, produced in different phases of his career, he kept close to this same conventional scheme, but varied brilliantly on it. His first engraving of 1583 shows basically the same composition (Fig. 3). Goltzius, of whom Karel van Mander wrote that he was like a Proteus or Vertumnus in the arts, because he could transform himself in different shapes every time — meaning that he could imitate different handelings (manners

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1 About these editions, see SLIJTER, De "heidensche fabuilen", op cit. (note 1), p. 170-179.
2 Exellente figurenen ghebruyd wydtte vnderste Porte Ovidius uytz vyftiden brouwck der veranderingen met huyselier bedeekte, Daer Guillaume Borluyt [...] Lyons, 1557.

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5 Metamorphoseon sive transformationum Ovidii libri XV [...] incise in picturam [...] Antwerp, 1606 illustrated by Antonio Tempesta; P. Ovidii Nasonis Metamorphoses, Augmentis Exercitationibus et Lucubrationibus [...]. Antwerp, 1591 illustrated by Pieter van der Borcht; P. Ovidii Nasonis XV Metamorphosion Librarium figuris [...]. a Crispiano Passo [...] auctore Gulielmo Salmanno, Aethen, 1607 (the prints themselves were first published by De Passe in 1603).
6 See SLIJTER, De "heidensche fabuilen", op cit. (note 1), part II.
7 G. DELABRIESEL, Groot Schilderboek, waar in de schilderkonst in al haar delen grondig werd onderwezen. 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1712, 1, p. 123. See also SLIJTER, De "heidensche fabuilen", op cit. (note 1), p. 97-98.
8 C. VAN MANDEr, "Leven der vermaerden doelachtige Schilders des ouden, en neuen tyds, in Het Schilder-Boek. Haarlem, 1603-1604, fol. 285c."
of working), when emulating great masters — clearly used the subject of Andromeda throughout his career to showcase his virtuosity at different stages of his career and to record his changing ideas and ideals about the portrayal of female anatomy and proportion[11]. In his earliest engraving he elaborated on the type of nude of Anthonie Blocklandt, in a second invention, engraved by an anonymous artist around 1590, he shows the extremely artificial and stylized type inspired by Bartholomeus Spranger (Fig. 4). In the one of 1601, engraved by Jan Saenredam, Andromeda’s body and proportions seem to become less artificial (Fig. 5). More classical proportions were already to be found in an invention of two years earlier, where the figure of Andromeda is shifted to the middleground and where Goltzius added — faithful to Ovid’s text — the lamenting parents and other onlookers around the main scene (Fig. 6)[1]. Something similar we find in an invention of Karel van Mander (Fig. 7), who pushed Andromeda even further to the background, placing Nereids in the foreground, in reference to the source of Andromeda’s predicament: her fate was a punishment for her mother Cassiope, who had boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids. This arrangement gave the artist the opportunity to show the naked female body from many different angles.

All these artists held on to the conventional motif of Perseus as seated on Pegasus in his fight with the threatening monster. Artists like Goltzius and Van Mander would have known perfectly well that in Ovid’s tale it is only Mercury’s winged sandals that enable Perseus to take the air. And indeed we do see this more faithful portrayal of the story in some illustrations, for instance in the ones by Pieter van der Borcht, an illustration in an edition of 1591, or Crispin de Passe after Maarten de Vos published in 1607 as a booklet with Latin and German verse summarizing the story (Fig. 8)[13]. However, Goltzius and Van Mander, as well as many other artists, such as Rubens in several of his depictions, maintained this pictorial convention codified in the many series of the Metamorphoses illustrations, although this deviated completely from Ovid’s text and all other classical accounts of the story.

The inclusion of the winged horse Pegasus derives from an old tradition encountered early in medieval miniatures — and indeed, in the Ovide Moralisé as well as Boccaccio’s Genealogia Deorum, Pegasus was mentioned as Perseus’s mount. This tradition reflects a confusion with the story of Bellerophon who, indeed, rode Pegasus[14]. Such confusion is understandable, since Pegasus does figure in the Perseus story: he was born from the blood of the decapitated Medusa, as Perseus himself recounts[15].

But why would artists like Goltzius, Van Mander, or even Rubens, all of them thoroughly familiar with Ovid’s Metamorphoses, follow this confusing tradition? One obvious reason is, that it offers the opportunity to depict a very attractive motif: Perseus seated on a horse driving down in full gallop with spread wings, waving manes and flowing tail, was undoubtedly a far more interesting pictorial motif than Perseus swooping down on his own. The various ways in which Goltzius depicts the flying horse, seen from different angles and often in strong foreshortening — obviously presented as a virtuoso performance — shows that he relished in this motif. But apart from that, there were certainly other reasons to keep Pegasus, reasons that had to do with an allegorical content of the image.

Before considering those, it should be understood that the traditional pictorial scheme of the subject — a frontally exposed nude woman as the focal point of the composition — made it an eminently suitable subject for an artist who wanted to display his ability to depict naked female beauty during a period in which this had become the paradigm of the highest artistic goals. Naturally, every ambitious artist wanted to be considered an Apelles of his time — there is almost no poem or text praising or eulogizing a painter which does not invoke Apelles. As Apelles was especially famous for the beauty and grace with which he


11 OVID, Metamorphoses, IV, 690-691. In the words of Floriánus’s Dutch translation (FLORIÁNUS, Metamorphose, op. cit. note 5): “Her father and mother had also come, offering nothing other in support than wailing and weeping” (Hoor vader ende moeder waren soo gekomen, de woekel voor een hysting unde hulpe anders niet en brachten dan een kermis ende weenen).


[14] OVID, Metamorphoses, IV, 785-786. This event can be seen accurately represented in the background of an illustration in the Venetian Ovidio Metamorfosen Vulgores of 1497, which combines several scenes from the story and in which Perseus flies unaided by Pegasus.
gazing at this painting of Andromeda: “I knew that it was caused by leaving right before my eyes — while your father was embracing me — the image of Andromeda, totally naked,” she tells her daughter. The painting visualizes a concept that also stemmed from antiquity: erotically charged paintings with beautiful figures hanging in a bed chamber had the power to stimulate beautiful offspring, which proved the power of painting as well as of the imagination. This concept was repeated endlessly from St. Augustine up to Jacob Cats. The connaisseur and medical doctor Giulio Mancini nicely summarized in the beginning of the 17th century the reason to hang such paintings in the bedchamber: “because [...] they serve to arouse one and to make beautiful, healthy and charming children”.

We also find the image of Andromeda in the entirely different, but light-hearted and playful amorous context of the Thromas Caputinis of 1618 (Fig. 10), one of those beautifully produced little books of love emblems, a genre that had a sudden popularity in the first two decades of the 17th century. Here the image of Andromeda stands for the concept that the power of love conquers all difficulties, instills courage and is impervious to danger. This little emblembook, which includes quite a few fables from Ovid’s Metamorphoses, is arranged in such a way that the Petrarchan ideal of love is consistently present. The Petrarchan mode, in which the torturéd and suffering lover is destined to fight with unwavering tenacity to conquer his beloved, is the central motif in Dutch

31 De Beschrijvingeghe Heliodor vande Maerolande geschiedenissen. Amsterdam, 1610, p. 173-178. ‘... endeckte ik oorzaak weel dat sateis was door recht voor mijn oogen gehad te hebben (terwijl ik ontevreden was om de bestekwissel van Andromeda heez naect, also gheefck van Perseus hare colans vande steenstea estehouden en verlaten bickt, door gi gheest hadde geweest voor de sje Monein’.”


33 Thomas Caputinis sive Emblemata Amortis, P.P.L. Utrecht, n.d. (1618). The first edition, with prints by Crispino de Paue, was published in 1618; a second edition appeared in the same year with prints by an anonymous artist that men less follow De Paue’s. See the introduction by H. de la Fontaine Verwey in the facsimile edition of Thromas Caputinis. Editio Tertia (Amsterdam 1620). Amsterdam, 1968. Noteworthy is that in the first edition we see the literal representation of Perseus seated on a rock batting a monster (compare the print by Willem Swanenburg after Jan Swammerdam, see SLUITER, Seductas, op. cit. (note 11), p. 53, fig. 40, which was replaced in the following two editions by the traditional depiction of Perseus astride Pegasus.

love emblems and amorous lyric poetry of the time\textsuperscript{27}. With its embedded eroticism, the Andromeda theme fits well into this popular amorous context. For the contemporary beholder who was familiar with the story — the elite youth for which these books were meant — this would have been the most obvious association that the image could evoke. However, there might have been several more reasons for the popularity of the Andromeda theme in the late 16th and early 17th century. In Dutch literature, the subject figured quite regularly in political allegories. In such instances, Andromeda stands for the threatened country, the Netherlands, and Perseus for the noble hero who liberates it from tyranny. We find the theme used in the Joyous Entry of the Prince of Orange in Brussels (1579), where it was staged by Jan Baptist Houthuijsen in a canal, with a winged Perseus handling a shield with the coat of arms of William of Orange and diving down into the water to kill the artificial monster, while hanging from a rope above the canal\textsuperscript{28}. In the printed text describing this joyous entry, however, the staged happening was not illustrated: instead the traditional image of Andromeda was used without adjustment to accompany the account. We see the same phenomenon more than half a century later, when in 1642 a tableau vivant (in the water of the Rokin) was planned for the joyous entry of Maria Henrietta in Amsterdam, with Perseus symbolizing Frederick Henry. Again in this case, the traditional image functioned as illustration when the description was published, albeit with the silhouette of Amsterdam in the background (Fig. 11)\textsuperscript{29}. As we can see in those examples, Pegasus was included in some cases and in others he was left out, as exemplified in the only emphatically allegorical representation of the subject. A print after Crispijn van den Broeck shows a group of women seated around the main scene, holding the coats of arms of the seventeen Netherlands provinces, while Perseus carries the arms of Spain and of the Duke of Alba, and Perseus those of William of Orange (Fig. 12)\textsuperscript{30}.

\textsuperscript{27} For the use of this playful variant of Petrarchism in Dutch amorous emblems, see the commentary by Paterman in R. PORETMAN, ed., P. C. HOOFIT, Emblemata Amatoria (Amsterdam, 1611). Leiden, 1983, esp. p. 16-20.


\textsuperscript{29} S. COSTER, Beschrijvinge van de blyde inhewerc [J.], Amsterdam, 1642. See D. P. SNOEP, Picturae en populorum. Afbeeldingen uit Rijk, 1977, p. 65-66.


Pegasus, who naturally makes for a very fitting mount for a heroic prince, is present in the theatrical performance during the Joyous Entry of Albert and Isabella in Louvain in 1599. In this case, Andromeda represents Belgica, while Albert flies to the Netherlands riding the winged Isabella, liberating the country by order of God\textsuperscript{29}. At the other side of the border, Jacob Duym also employed Pegasus in his play titled Naamsse Perseus, verlootse van Andromeda ofte de Nederlandsche Maaght (The Nassaau Perseus, liberator of Andromeda or the Dutch maiden), published in 1606\textsuperscript{30}. In the introduction, Duym describes the staging of the scene: a (dressed) Andromeda is chained to rocks, while Perseus and Pegasus emerge from a cloud hanging from a lever over the stage and can move up and down. Perseus sits in the saddle (the stage direction says: "the should be fastened well, so that he cannot fall") and with every movement of the lever, he stabs the dragon. This threatening monster is to be constructed of light wood or thick paper and is made to spit water and fire by an actor inside the apparatus. A commentator who explains each scene, interprets Pegasus as God's grace in which William of Orange puts all his trust. It is clear that one could use elements of this tradition at will — with or without Pegasus — just as it fitted best one's needs and purposes.

All this means that the many prints produced in the late 16th and early 17th century could be viewed, in the north as well as in the south, as political allegories. Although nothing in the images themselves — except, of course, in the one emphatically allegorical print — specifically points to such an allegorical meaning, the theme lent itself well to the traditional personification of a country as a maiden. If one wished to do so, the political allegory could easily be projected onto the image of the beautiful Andromeda as the threatened Northern, or Southern, Netherlands with the sea appropriately lapping at her feet. The Latin verse at the bottom of the many different prints never gives any specific allegorical reading, but instead only summarizes the story of Ovid in several variants (reporting that the ill-fated Andromeda, who had fallen prey to the monster because of her mother's pride, was saved by the


\textsuperscript{30} J. DUYM, Een naamsse Perseus, verlootse van Andromeda ofte de Nederlandsche Maaght, in Een Gehondenboe. Leiden, 1606, no page numbers.
virtuous Perseus who fell in love and took her as his bride). Like the images, these lines are not specific about an underlying meaning, but they may easily be read as metaphors, as one could also do with the image. There were additional aspects that must have made this story attractive. For artists like Goltzius and Rubens, appeal my have lain in the fact that it was one of those subjects which offered the opportunity to recreate the achievements of ancient painting. There were several texts from antiquity in which a painting of the Andromeda theme is described, for instance Philostratus’s *elphizasis in the Imagines*, in which Perseus has already killed the monster and a winged Eros frees Andromeda from her bonds.6 If Piny the Elder describes a painting by the famous Greek painter Nicias, which depicted the hero liberating Andromeda,11 it comes as no surprise that Rubens chose twice not to depict the conventional scene, but the moment that Perseus, with the help of Cupids, liberates Andromeda from her chains (Figs. 13 and 14).26 But we are also reminded of Ovid in these scenes: Andromeda’s attitude wonderfully shows her chasteness as described by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* at an earlier moment in the story, when Perseus asks her who she is: “She was silent at first, for being a maiden, she did not dare address a man; she would have hidden her face modestly with her hands but that her hands were bound.”27 When devising this scene, Rubens might have remembered Giorgio Vasari’s painting for the Studiolo in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, in which we can meet with an earlier example of the exceptional scene of Perseus liberating Andromeda from her bounds. Vasari came to this solution, because, in the context of the Studiolo, it was his main task to depict the transformation of the seaweeds into coral, which happened when Perseus placed the Medusa’s head on a bed of leaves and seaweed.28

The two beautiful versions by Rubens, the one in St. Petersburg between 1615 and 1620 and the Berlin version of after 1622, both show Pegasus in a very prominent role. The composition of the St. Petersburg version is close to the painting that hangs on the garden façade of Rubens’s house in the engraving by Harrewijn (Figs. 15 and 16). That Rubens used this theme in such an important and conspicuous place, as a kind of emblem for the workshop that was situated precisely in that part of the building, points to the fact that the theme of Andromeda must have had a special meaning for the artist. After Elizabeth McGrath had shown in a brilliant article of 1978, that the other scenes between the windows must have consisted of grisaille paintings which recreated paintings by ancient Greek artists or depicted events from their lives,29 a few years later Jeffrey Muller argued convincingly that the open loggia above the ground floor is actually an architectural illusion painted in perspective on the wall, and that the painting with Perseus and Andromeda that appears to hang before it, is painted on this wall. These images were meant to fool the eye of the viewer, representing a canvas as if it were hanging there to dry in the sun (a common practice).30 In a letter to Franciscus Juntius Rubens described the paintings of the ancient images “which present themselves to us only in the imagination, like dreams, or so obscured by words that we try in vain to grasp them.” This seems to be reflected in the grisaille paintings, before which the canvas of Andromeda freed by Perseus was placed as a “real” painting, thereby reviving the ancients, but emphatically remaining an illusion of an illusion at the same time.

Jeffrey Muller also pointed out that right at the opposite, above the arch that gives entrance to the courtyard from the garden, stand Mercury and Minerva, as if presiding over Rubens’s house (Figs. 17 and 18). These patrons of the arts, Mercury bearing alausillac instead of his

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Thus, the Andromeda theme has in this case a direct bearing on the status of Golitzin’s art, as it has on the art of Rubens, as evidenced by the painting on the façade of his house. It represents the image of true beauty rescued by the virtuous artist who, armed and guided by Hermathena and riding the winged Pegasus who had created the spring from which all creative inspiration flows, is in love with art and beauty. He is the devoted and inspired artist who defeats the monster, symbolizing the ignorant and jealous who threaten true art. This is an allegorical interpretation that was certainly intended in the case of the decoration on Rubens’s house; in other cases — and we saw this also with the political allegory — it could be projected onto the image if one wished to do so, depending on the context.

In a later Andromeda invention, an oil-sketch made as a design for one of the paintings of the Torre de la Parada, Rubens closely followed the traditional scheme that we know so well (Fig. 22). He left out Pegasus, so that the image — in the context of the Torre de la Parada it was meant to illustrate Ovid’s tale — conforms closely to Ovid’s text. At the same time he is, in this case, consciously competing with a work by Titian, who also painted a renowned painting of this scene. Having Titian’s work undoubtedly in mind, an invention he might have seen in Madrid and also would have known from a print by Giulio Fontana (Fig. 23), he elaborated this time on the expression of emotion: Andromeda now turns her face towards Perseus and the monster, anxiously following what is going on, while her body strains away in a rather strong movement, giving the whole scene a more narrative urge, so that the viewer can empathize more with Andromeda’s predicament.

When Rembrandt set out to depict his first nude, he chose Andromeda to do so (Fig. 24). The fact that more than any other theme, the conventional pictorial scheme of this subject offered the opportunity to represent a frontally exposed female body as the focus of the picture would have stimulated this choice. That Golitzin had shown how eminently suited the subject was to showcase one’s mastery and ideals in portraying the nude made it all the more challenging. Moreover, Rembrandt may have heard that the great Rubens had painted this subject on the garden façade of his house. For artists and connoisseurs who had visited Antwerp, a description of Rubens’s house would have been a very exciting piece of news to bring home. Furthermore, Rembrandt undoubtedly knew the print based on a composition of Titian (Fig. 23) and he may have read in Van Mander’s biography of this revered master, that Titian had made a famous painting of this subject. Thus, Rubens and Titian, the two painters who must have been most paramount in his mind as the ones to
measure himself against throughout his career, had both preceded him
with this subject. Finally Pliny’s text on Greek painters and Van Mander’s
translation of it, which mentions Nicia’s famous painting of Andromeda,
would have been avidly read by painters and connoisseurs alike. Enough
stimuli for Rembrandt to try out his own version. The first owner of
this painting remains unknown, but it is not unlikely that Constantijn
Huygens was somewhere nearby to applaud the choice of such a subject.43
Like Golzius, Rembrandt kept close to the conventional scheme,
which makes his drastic deviations all the more striking. For anyone
envisaging Golzius’s prints — and all artists and connoisseurs would
have had such prints in mind when looking at this Andromeda — it must
have been startling. Nothing would have prepared them for the emo-
tional impact of this little painting. By omitting Perseus and the mon-
ster44, Rembrandt eliminated all possibilities for any allegorical reading,
be it political or art-theoretical, for all of which the inclusion of both
Perseus and the monster is essential. Rembrandt focused on the action
and reaction of the narrative, as reflected in the single figure of Andro-
meda only. With her awkward movement, straining away from the terrify-

Andromeda’s fettered arms, painfully twisted, show emphatically
that Rembrandt, more than any artist before, imagined what her grievous
situation would look like in reality. Nothing is left of the elegant
contrapposto, so emphatically present in all earlier representations. Most
striking of all is the total lack of stylization of her body. Any reference
to classical ideals of proportions and posture, ideals which were present
— albeit in varying ways and degrees — in all the earlier depictions of
the subject, is totally absent. Rembrandt undoubtedly chose this subject
because it offered the opportunity to emulate well-known masters. The
fact that all the examples he will have known — in the first place the
inventions of Golzius — are so utterly different in the type of nude por-
trayed, makes evident how deliberate his deviation of the then existing
conventions must have been.

Rembrandt’s Andromeda has a body with a large head, short neck,
narrow shoulders, small breasts, an utterly un-classical lengthening of
the distance from breasts to navel, and a narrow ribcage sloping down in

narrowing at the same time turning to look at it. Andromeda
reacts more forcefully to what is happening than any Andromeda in an
cellar depiction of this subject. By emphasizing her frighted reaction to
an occurrence that the viewer cannot see, Rembrandt heightens the
feeling of suspense in an entirely new and original way, evoking the
whole episode in the image of this one frightened girl.

43 Schwartz vaguely suggested, on rather peculiar grounds, that the painting was
meant for the court. For this, and his assumption that Rembrandt’s painting is connected
with a Carolingian miniature copied by Jacob de Gheyn (in which Andromeda was rep-3
resented as a constellation), also implying that for that reason the painting should be inter-
preted astrologically, see G. SCHWARTZ, Rembrandt: zijn leven, zijn schilderijen,
Maarsen, 1984, p. 119 and my review of this book (E.J. SLUITER, “Een nieuwe

44 The idea to omit the other protagonist might have been suggested by the prints
of Agostino Carracci, who left out the figure of Perseus, but retained the monster. In
Rembrandt’s inventory of 1656, a large book full of prints by Annibale, Agostino and
Ludovico Carracci is mentioned. Seeing that in other early works the impact of prints by
the Carracci is also discernible, it seems that he would have collected these from early on
in his career. For the prints of the Carracci, see D. DEGRAZIA BOHLEN, Prints and
related drawings by the Carracci family: a catalogue raisonné. Bloomington, Indiana,
1979; the prints of Andromeda: nos. 179 and 180 (BARTSCH, op. cit. (note 40); XVIII,
60, nos. 125 and 126); these are part of the Lacocque-series.

45 OVID, Metamorphoses, IV, 609-691.

46 The striking whiteness of the skin might have been inspired by the Dutch trans-
lation of Johannes Florinus, which was reprinted numerous times from 1552 until
the middle of the 17th century. He elaborates on Ovid’s comparison with a marble statue,
emphasizing its whiteness: “a marble statue, so beautiful and white was her body.
...[FLORIANUS, Metamorphosis, op. cit. (note 5), p. 81,]"
by the total isolation of her strongly lit body against the threatening background of the dark, rough cliff. The sense of fear is heightened by the colour of her face and lips, which seem to be drained from blood. With the traditional stylization removed, Andromeda’s body is no longer an unapproachable ideal. This brings her closer to the viewer’s world of experience and enlists his empathy. By suggesting the presence of the male hero, but not including him in the image, Rembrandt even facilitates the imaginative process of identifying with the rescuing hero.

No comparison makes clearer the difference between the two artists than Rubens’s Andromeda of a few years later, probably 1638, now in Berlin, probably one of the last works of his long career, as it remained in his studio at his death (Fig. 25)42. Seeing them together makes immediately clear how much Rubens’s nudes, although the surface of the skin is treated with great lifeliness, ultimately conforms to a classical ideal, which is always more masculine: with broader shoulders, lower waist, a shorter distance between breasts and navel, wider thighs, and less emphasis on the stomach. Rubens’s life-size Andromeda, placed close to the picture plane, completely dominates the narrow canvas. The tiny Perseus and Pegasus almost dissolve in the richly coloured evening sky43. But Rubens still included this traditional motif, thereby allowing the political or art-theoretical references to be projected onto the image, if one wished to do so. Rubens added a gesture, a burning torch, pointing to Perseus’s fight with the monster, thus announcing her imminent rescue. In Andromeda’s upturned eyes the conventional motif found in most of Goltzius’s inventions may be recognized, but Rubens depicted this as a conscious emulation of Titian’s fearful Mary Magdalene, of which Rubens owned a version44. Thus, with this martyr-like image, Rubens seems to give the viewer the opportunity to think of an explanation of the fable, which, from medieval times up to Natalie Conti and Karel van Mander, tells us that the myth demonstrates how the innocent who keeps faith in God will be rescued in the end45.

43 During the process of painting, Rubens diminished the size of Perseus and Pegasus. See KELCH, Rubens, op cit. (note 43), p. 30 and p. 31, fig. 26 (infrared photograph).
52 See P.P. ROBER & R.O. RUBINSTEIN, Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources. London, 1986, p. 110-117, no. 83. The relief is now in the British Museum. In Rubens’s time it was in the Villa Montalto, next door to the Santa Maria Maggiore. Engravings after this relief were made by Giovanni Battista Franco and by Perrier (1645).
53 Surprisingly, this enigmatic figure is Minerva. For an interesting and convincing interpretation, see F. HEALY, Rubens and the Judgement of Paris: A Question of Choice. Tumbout, 1997, p. 151. Fiona Healy dates the painting in the middle of the 1630’s.
Huygens renders the pose and expression of the Judas figure in words, shows an engaged and participatory viewing of the picture and gives us insight into the way a true connoisseur reacted\textsuperscript{56}. Huygens explicitly focused on one figure only and emulated its emotional impact in words through an empathizing scrutiny of the depicted figure — gleaming the whole drama of the narrative from this one figure. In the process, Huygens made clear that this figure, pitiful in its miserable hideousness, is something entirely different from anything he had ever seen\textsuperscript{57}. This was the feat with which Rembrandt had surpassed all the Italians and the artists from antiquity: ‘Let all of Italy and all the miracles of beauty that have survived from antiquity be placed next to this. […] This I compare with all beauty that has been produced through the ages. This should be a lesson for all those nitwits who say that nothing can be created or expressed nowadays […] that has not already been done better in antiquity’\textsuperscript{58}. 

Huygens, the highly placed connoisseur, secretary of the Stadhoudler, famous poet and talent scout for the court, was undoubtedly an awe inspiring figure for Rembrandt. He must have made an immense impression on the young artist. His opinions on art, especially those on artistic rivalry, would have reinforced and intensified Rembrandt’s own endeavours. From Huygens’s autobiography of his youth, it clearly appears that he was of the opinion that one should compete with and surpass the works of antiquity and contemporary masters with one’s own means: not by following rules formulated in the past, but by one’s innate

\textsuperscript{56} It is certainly not a mere display of literary contrivances. For my criticism on the chapter Schwartz devoted to Huygens’s text (SCHWARTZ, Rembrandt, op. cit. (note 43), p. 72-77; he considers it in the first place as a rhetorical display of a dilettante who knew little about art and art theory!), see SLUITER, Een nieuwe vertaling, op. cit. (note 43), p. 288-289.

\textsuperscript{57} The motif of the hands pressed together may have been inspired by a print after Bloemaert. For Schwartz this was reason to argue that Huygens had it all wrong. However, precisely such a motif makes clear how right Huygens was: it shows the huge difference between what Rembrandt does with such a motif and the "beautiful" way a painter like Bloemaert employed this gesture to express emotion (SCHWARTZ, Rembrandt, op. cit. (note 45), p. 77; SLUITER, Een nieuwe vertaling, op. cit. (note 43), p. 288-289).

talents. This approach is not only obvious throughout his eulogy of Rembrandt, but we find the same attitude in Huygens’s strong opinions about the art of rhetoric. In matters of rhetoric, Huygens considers learnedness and the rules of antiquity redundant. Huygens’s heroes in the art of rhetoric are not the great rhetoricians of antiquity, not Quintilianus and Cicero, but Johannes Wtenbogaert and John Donne: “Let all of antiquity listen to this as well as all those people, who, following in their footsteps, find their rhetoric devices as they are in fashion nowadays, so irresistible.”

In this exclamation we hear almost the same words that Huygens had used when praising Rembrandt. For Huygens, the only thing that counted in the art of rhetoric was effectiveness in moving and convincing the audience. He strongly emphasized the need for simplicity, naturalness and innate talent: artful grace and beauty can be pernicious. He maintains that theory is superfluous: a talented person needs only training. One must forget about any artificial stylization based on rhetorical rules from antiquity. If one concentrates only on the message, the result will be good. He who speaks from the heart will speak to the heart, to summarize Huygens’s belief.

Emulating and outrprising others was central in Huygens’s account of painters of his time: all the pages he writes about them are composed in terms of the one surpassing the other. And having reached Rembrandt, he could prove that now a young Dutchman had surpassed the Italians and the painters of antiquity: “I maintain that no Protogenes or Apelles or Parrhasius ever had been able to invent […] all that — and I am amazed, when I say this — a young man, a Dutchman, a miller’s son, a beardless boy, condensed and expressed in its totality in this one figure [the Judas]. Bravo, Rembrandt! To have carried Troy, yes, the whole of Greece to Italy is not as great an achievement as transmitting the highest fame of Greece and Italy to Holland, which has been achieved by a young Dutchman who hardly ventured beyond the walls of his hometown.” And the means through which Rembrandt outstripped the Italians and the artists from antiquity was an unparalleled depiction of lifelikeness and human emotion to evoke empathy in the viewer, as Huygens showed emphatically with his “description” of the figure of Judas.

Having already met Huygens, Rembrandt’s choice of a mythological subject showing a female nude (the naked Andromeda) to repeat such a feat, might have been due to the fact that he wanted to prove to Huygens that he was perfectly able to compete with the Italians, even in this prestigious tradition that was pre-eminently associated with Italy: that of depicting the nude in subjects taken from classical mythology. After all, Huygens did criticize him for not making the journey to Italy.

Almost half a century later, Rembrandt’s pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten characterized Rubens as the master of rich composition (rijkijke ordonnante) and Rembrandt as the master of passions of the soul (lijdingen des gemoed). When discussing in his treatise of 1678 the different parts of the art or the “kunstdelen” (a notion based on the partes orationis from rhetorical theory), Van Hoogstraten’s discussion of this concept might have reflected lessons learned from his own master. He writes extensively about the concept of “besteegelijkheid”, the same word Rembrandt employed in the letter to Constantin Huygens.

59 De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens, op. cit. (note 58), p. 60; HUYGENS, Mijn jeugd, op. cit. (note 55), p. 64.
60 Huygens does this on several occasions, as early as 1628 and as late as 1666. See A. VAN STRIEN, Constantijn Huygens. Mengeling, diss. Amsterdam, 1990, p. 134-167. Apart from the autobiography, Huygens also extensively discusses this much later in the poem “Aen semmige prodkers”, from Megeling (1666), as well as in “La secretair” of 1628.
61 VAN STRIEN, Constantijn Huygens, op. cit. (note 60), p. 134-152. With the usual exaggeration, Huygens articulated these thoughts most extensively in Megeling (“Aen semmige prodkers”).
specific moment epitomized by a single, crucial emotion, represented as life-like as possible and with the purpose to involve the beholder and to have him empathize with the figure(s) represented, is precisely what Rembrandt was striving for in most of his paintings of the thirties. Rembrandt has often been considered indifferent or even hostile towards antiquity, but I am certain that he would have subscribed to the notion of classical antiquity as a self-evident source of inspiration and as a literary source for subjects with a prestigious tradition. For Rubens, the visual language of antiquity was of great and profound importance, for Rembrandt, on the contrary, it was not the visual forms of antiquity that were the ingredients for emulation, but the works of modern masters like Rubens, who, in his view, had surpassed antiquity. These were the ones he had to compete with by way of a convincing suggestion of lifelike motion and emotion: to grab the viewer and to incite a high degree of involvement. To achieve this, innate talent and the artist’s own judgement would lead to the best results, an attitude which would have been corroborated by his earliest admirer Constantijn Huygens.

43 This is, as a matter of fact, something different than the concept of stroomverandering of perspectiva that has, in my view erroneously, often been connected with Rembrandt’s paintings of this period. (The concept was introduced into the discussion of the expression of emotions in Rembrandt’s circle by Albert Blankert in A. BLANKERT et al., Gods, Saints & Heroes. Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt, exh. cat., Washington, National Gallery of Art — Detroit, Institute of Arts — Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1980-81. Washington, 1980, p. 26-27 and A. BLANKERT, Ferdinand Bol (1616-1650), Rembrandt’s pupil, Doornspijk, 1982, p. 34-36). In the first place, the concept of the Aristotelian stroomverandering of perspectiva, was described and applied by Vondel only as of the 1650’s, but more importantly: the Aristotelian perspectiva is much more complex. It concerns not just a sudden reversal of the mood of the protagonist from one extreme to the other, which is found, in fact, in many scenes of Sorcean-Scaligerian drama. The reversal of mood in the Aristotelian sense should always be connected with agitto (a recognition of and insight into a tragic situation). This recalls more what is encountered in Rembrandt’s late history paintings, for instance in Rembrandt’s Bathsheba, where the viewer is forced to think about what cannot be visualized: Bathsheba’s thoughts provoked by King David’s request — her contradictory emotions when having to chose between two evils. See E.J. SLUITER, “Rembrandt’s Bathsheba and the Conventions of a Seducive Theme”, in A. JENSEN ADAMS, Rembrandt’s Bathsheba Reading King David’s Letter. Cambridge-New York, 1998, p. 84-86.
1. Bernard Salomon, Andreaeus Chained to a Rock, woodcut.

2. Virgil Solis, Andreaeus Chained to a Rock, woodcut.

3. Hendrick Goltzius, Andreaeus Chained to a Rock, engraving.

4. Anonymous after Hendrick Goltzius, Andreaeus Chained to a Rock, engraving.

10. Anonymous, Andromeda Chained to a Rock, etching (Thomae Cupidinius, 1618).

11. Pieter Nolpe, Andromeda Chained to a Rock, engraving (S. Coster, Beschriwing van de bijde inkomste ..., Amsterdam, 1642).

12. Anonymous after Crispijn van den Broeck, Andromeda (The Netherlands) Chained to a Rock and Threatened by the Monster (Alve) and Liberated by Perseus (William of Orange), engraving.

16. Jacobus Harrewijn after J. van der Croes, Detail with the triumphal arch of Andromeda Rescued by Perseus on the garden façade of the Rubens House, engraving.

17. Jacobus Harrewijn after J. van Croes, View of the Rubens House: courtyard seen towards the entrance to the garden, engraving.

18. Jacobus Harrewijn after J. van Croes, Detail of the porch with Mercury and Minerva, engraving.


22. Peter Paul Rubens, Andromeda Chained to a Rock. Present whereabouts unknown.
23. Giulio Fontana after Titian, Andromeda Chained to a Rock, engraving.


LA FIGURE MYTHOLOGIQUE COMME ÉLÉMENT D’ARGUMENTATION RHÉTORIQUE DANS LA CORRESPONDANCE D’ERASME: ASSOCIATION ET DISTANCIATION. LES CAS D’HERCULE ET DE PROMÉTHÉE.

Dans une lettre de 1531 (ou de 1530?) adressée à Erasme, Nicolas Maillard qualifie son correspondant de "Hercules Gallicus"; ou, s’il pêche, de "Hercules Batavus"1. Un homme frère, d’une santé fragile, comparé à Hercule, le Nûmbo de l’antiquité ou le presque-président des États-Unis, Arnold Schwarzenegger dans plusieurs de ses films. Voilà une association comique au premier abord: Erasme, Hercule hollandais! Voilà une raison suffisante d’écrire cet article.

A l’aide de quelques exemples frappants dans les lettres d’Erasme lui-même et celles de ses correspondants, nous tenterons de répondre aux questions suivantes:

- Sous quelle forme les références mythologiques se présentent-elles dans l’épistolothèque humaniste?
- Quel est leur cadre de référence? (réalité versus fiction; leur relation vis-à-vis le réseau socio-culturel...)
- En quoi réside leur force persuasive? (c.q. argumentative du point de vue rhétorique)

Vu le cadre restreint de cet article nous nous limiterons à la mythologie gréco-romaine. Bien que Erasme lui-même écrive dans De Copia Verborum que les exemples peuvent être cuillis de n’importe quelle culture, de n’importe quelle époque ou n’importe quelle couche sociale,


2 Horum igitur ut quam maximam maximque variam comparare et in promptis habere conseniam, sive serie structura operis. Varietas exemplorum ab ipso genere nonnullam perpenditur. Sunt enim et anteaque et aedificia et publica genium derivantur ex exemplis sumptura, at discriminibus auribus, puta ab historicis, a poetis, et ex his a comici, tragicis, et grammaticis, hereticis, boculcet, a philosophis, et horum variis sunt rector; a theologis, a sacris voluminibus; a diversitate nationum, quod genus sunt alia Romanorum exempla et institutis, alia Graecorum, et inter Graecos, alia Lacodecaedriam, alia Cretensiam, alia Atheniensiam, item alia Africum, Hebrewo-