

# Rembrandt's portrayal of the passions and Vondel's 'staetveranderinge'

Eric Jan Sluiter

In seventeenth-century Holland, the kinship between history painting and drama was frequently discussed, specifically when it concerned the representation of the passions.<sup>1</sup> To move the beholder by means of the depiction of strong emotions came to be seen as a central task of both arts, and it was in this domain, in particular, that the affinity between the two arts was emphasized. Remarkably, playwrights were foremost in articulating this similarity; in the prefaces of tragedies, history painting was sometimes given an exemplary role. Already in the preface of his first drama, *Het Pascha (Pesach)*, printed in 1612, Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) described the theatre play as 'a living, beautifully colored painting'.<sup>2</sup> Vondel was well-acquainted with ideas current in history painting, probably due to his friendship with Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688), and he was quite fond of employing these in the introductions to his plays. In the dedication of his tragedy *Gebroeders (Brothers)*, printed in 1640, for example, Vondel even 'painted' with words an imaginary painting by Rubens – an artist famous for his superb rendering of the passions. Through the description of this fictive painting Vondel was able to display the deeply moving qualities of his tragedy in a concise and clear image.<sup>3</sup> As Karel Porteman has pointed out, Vondel's description 'is based on what was deemed a fundamental similarity between tragedy and the in this respect even more effective history painting to move (*movere*) the beholder by way of visual representation'.<sup>4</sup> In the preface of *Joseph in Dothan*, Vondel states that this tragedy was inspired by the passions rendered in a painting by Jan Pynas (1581-1631), in which the blood-stained clothes of Joseph were shown to Jacob. Vondel adds that in the last scene of his play, 'he has tried to follow with words the painter's colors, drawing and rendering of the passions as closely as possible'.<sup>5</sup> The relation between tragedy and history painting is often mentioned in the writings of Vondel and Jan Vos (c. 1610-1667).<sup>6</sup> The latter, the director of the Amsterdam *schouwburg* (theatre), wrote several times that a play is like a speaking painting.<sup>7</sup> The kinship between the theatre and painting was apparently strongly felt, which is reason enough for us to ask what this bond meant in practice.

Contrary to what one would expect, the subjects of popular tragedies are rarely depicted in paintings. Strangely enough, it never seems to have occurred to painters, nor to their patrons, to portray or have portrayed a

Detail figure 7  
*The rape of Proserpina*, c. 1630

I  
Anonymous, title page, *Jan Vos, Aran  
and Titus*, engraving, Amsterdam 1641,  
The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek

scene from one of the dramas that were favored on the Amsterdam stage in the seventeenth century. We search in vain for renderings of episodes from *Aran en Titus*, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, *Cid*, *Biron*, *Karel en Cassandra*, *Vervolchde Laura*, *Stirus en Ariane*, *De veinzende Torquatus*, *Geraerd van Velzen* and *Elektra*, the ten dramas most often staged in the Amsterdam *schouwburg* between 1638 and 1665 in order of their popularity.<sup>8</sup> The few subjects that we do encounter in plays as well as in paintings are mostly, as is the case with the rare biblical dramas, based on material already traditional in painting, such as Vondel's dramas about Joseph.<sup>9</sup> Exceptions are two scenes from *Granida* by Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft (1587-1647) – which belong to the category of the pastoral – and the singular case of a scene from *Lucelle* by Gerbrand Adriaenszn. Bredero (1587-1647).<sup>10</sup> But why, for instance, did no client ask a painter to render a scene from Vos's *Aran en Titus*, the box office hit of the seventeenth century? The learned Caspar Barlaeus (1584-1648) wrote enthusiastically that within two months after the first performance he had seen this play no less than seven times!<sup>11</sup> Even if several printings of these plays, such as that of *Aran en Titus*, had an engraved illustration from the drama on the title page (fig. 1), this obviously did not inspire painters to depict similar scenes.

In subject matter both arts had, apparently, their own strong traditions. Thus, the kinship one felt was not located in the narratives themselves, but in the nature of the situations represented and the ways in which the corresponding passions were evoked. Therefore, the question raised here is whether, and if so, how, notions about the meaning and function of the rendering of the passions in tragedy have concrete relations with the aims of painters in history painting during the same period. I will limit myself to paintings by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). This is a work in progress; in a subsequent stage, other artists must be examined, while the ideas of other playwrights, in addition to Vondel and Vos, should be considered as well.

My point of departure is an influential statement that Albert Blankert formulated for the first time in 1981, and that many other art historians have repeated since. It addresses the notion that *staetveranderinge* (literally 'change of state'), a concept which plays a crucial role in Vondel's tragedies beginning in the 1640s, also had an important place in history paintings by Rembrandt and his pupils. In his introductory essay in the catalogue of the groundbreaking exhibition *Gods, saints and heroes*, and shortly after in his monograph on Ferdinand Bol, Blankert rightly pointed out that Rembrandt and his pupils showed a preference for scenes in which a dramatic reversal of mood from one extreme to the other takes place. Their paintings depict the precise moment that this change occurs. He connected this with the Aristotelian concept of *peripeteia*. Vondel called this *staetveranderinge*, and it constituted the core of his late tragedies.<sup>12</sup> Blankert argued that the concept must have been as important to Rembrandt as it was to Vondel. To demonstrate this, he cites examples such as scenes in which an angel unexpectedly appears, pictures with the appearance of Christ after the Resurrection, and other scenes with sudden occurrences, such as the feast



of Belshazzar, the blinding of Samson, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and the rapes of Proserpina, Europa and Ganymede.

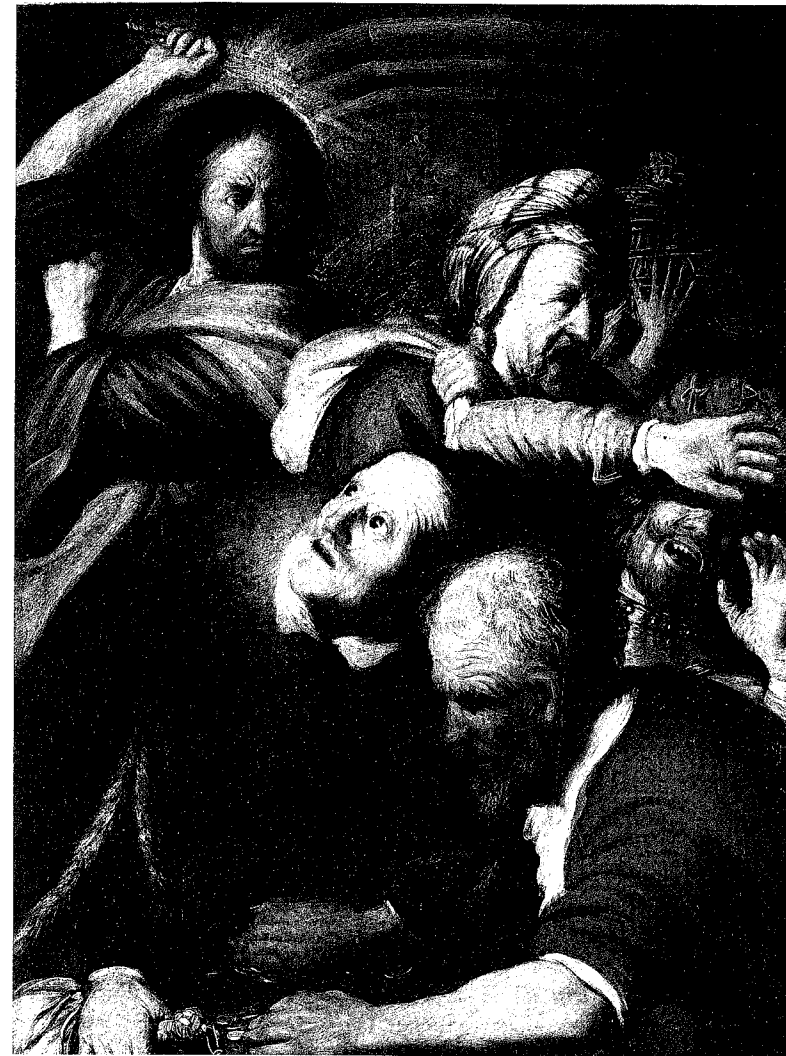
However, a drastic and sudden occurrence in a narrative – which, by its very nature, causes a reversal of mood – is confused here with the Vondelian notion of *staetveranderinge*, a concept that has much more complex implications, as we will see. That Rembrandt would have been aware of this concept in the 1630s is, moreover, impossible, since Vondel began to employ it in his dramas only as of the 1640s (he was the first, and for some time, the only, playwright to do so),<sup>13</sup> and Vondel explains the concept as late as 1659 in the introduction to the tragedy *Jeptha*.<sup>14</sup> I will return to this. First, I will demonstrate what, in my view, were the connections between significant elements in the portrayal of passions in Rembrandt's paintings of the late 1620s and 1630s and those in the tragedies of the same period.

### Senecan-Scaligerian passions, *oogenblikke beweeging* and Rembrandt's history paintings in the 1630s

The rendering of the passions of the soul in drama in the first half of the century was determined by the example of the tragedies of Seneca (c. 3 B.C.-65 A.D.) and the poetical concepts of Horace (65 B.C.-8 B.C.) and the humanist Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609).<sup>15</sup> Characteristic of Seneca's rhetorical-dramatic practice is the alternation of violent passions through disastrous reversals of fate that are meant to hit the audience with force. In the Senecan-Scaligerian tragedies that were so popular between 1610 and 1650, there is no gradual plot development that carries the viewer away. Within the separate building blocks of the drama, it was the rendering – the 'depiction', as it was often called – of the fierce and



2  
Rembrandt, *Belshazzar's feast*, c. 1635,  
oil on canvas, 167.6 x 209.2 cm, London,  
National Gallery



3  
Rembrandt, *Christ driving the  
moneylenders from the temple*, 1626, oil  
on panel, 43.1 x 32 cm, Moscow, Pushkin  
Museum

intense passions themselves that had to move the beholder. And this had to be done along strictly rhetorical lines. A gripping visualization of such passions was of great importance – 'seeing comes before saying' was Jan Vos's motto – and horror, as in Seneca's tragedies, was not shunned. On the contrary, it was warmly recommended by Scaliger. In his enumeration of suitable, mostly violent, themes that would move the beholder, there are many that easily recall subjects of Rembrandt's paintings of the late 1620s and 1630s. Scaliger lists, for example: terror (*Belshazzar's feast*, fig. 2), rage (*Christ chasing the moneylenders from the Temple*, fig. 3, *Balaam and the ass*), intimidation (*Samson threatens the father of Delilah*), murder (*The stoning of St. Stephen*, fig. 4), despair (*The repentant Judas*), fear (*Andromeda chained to the rock* (fig. 5), *Susanna and the elders*, fig. 6), rape (*The rape of Europa*, *The rape of Proserpina*, fig. 7, *The rape of Ganymede*), betrayal (*Samson and Delilah*), the killing of family members (*Abraham's*



4

Rembrandt, *The stoning of St. Stephen*, 1625, oil on panel, 89.5 x 123.6 cm, Lyon, Musée des Beaux Arts

*sacrifice of Isaac*, fig. 8), and the stabbing of eyes (*The blinding of Samson*, fig. 9).<sup>16</sup>

A rendering of the passions according to the rhetorical techniques of persuasion, in which the spectator of the tragedy is moved not through plot development but through the unmistakable and convincing visual representation of violent passions, corresponds entirely with the instructions given to painters by Rembrandt's pupil, Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678). Van Hoogstraten's advice seems to be an articulation of what must have been considered important principles for dramatic history paintings in the studios of painters, such as Pieter Lastman (1583-1633) and Rembrandt, between c. 1610 and 1640. As Thijs Weststeijn has demonstrated, Van Hoogstraten's instructions neatly follow rhetorical principles.<sup>17</sup> When Van Hoogstraten discusses the relationship between an episode in a story and the corresponding passions, he writes that 'one should only depict an *oogenblikkelijke beweging* (an instantaneous motion and emotion that takes place at one single moment) that expresses the particular action of the history'. He continues to say, quoting Horace, that the particular action and passion have to be '*enkel en eenwezich*', simple and unambiguous, 'so that the depicted scene

unequivocally [*eenstemmich*, literally 'with one voice'] involves the viewer as if he were one of the bystanders, and will make him frightened when showing a brutal deed, or pleased when seeing something cheerful, or moved with compassion when seeing that someone suffers harm, or gratified by some fair deed'.<sup>18</sup>

Such instructions, in accordance with rhetorical rules, must have been discussed in the circles of playwrights as well as of painters like Lastman and Rembrandt. As Thijs Weststeijn has demonstrated, *eenstemmig* and *eenwezig* parallel the rhetorical concepts of *evidentia* and *perspicuitas*.<sup>19</sup> However, the term *oogenblikkelijke beweging*, which beautifully articulates the visual rendering of a sudden, instantaneous and unambiguous motion and emotion, seems to originate in painters' conversations in studios such as those of Lastman and Rembrandt. It is



5

Rembrandt, *Andromeda chained to the rock*, 1629, oil on panel, 34 x 24.5 cm, The Hague, Mauritshuis

6

Rembrandt, *Susanna and the elders*,  
1636, oil on panel, 47.4 x 38.6 cm,  
The Hague, Mauritshuis

undoubtedly related to Rembrandt's use of 'die meeste ende die naetuerelste beweeghelijkheid' (the strongest and most natural motion and emotion), by which the artist articulated his goals when delivering the last two paintings of the Passion series.<sup>20</sup> One of them, *The resurrection*, portrays a moment that is so sudden and elicits such violent reactions that in the spectacular flash of light emanating from the angel, which causes the vehement commotion among the guards, we see a soldier falling head over heels as a sword hangs dangerously in mid-air (fig. 10). Christ grasps the edge of the grave, like a ghost who slowly awakens, which reminds us of the fondness for ghosts and apparitions in Senecan-Scaligerian drama. This scene seems to embody the ideal of every playwright working in the tradition of Senecan drama at that time.

Rembrandt's exceptional interest in this most theatrical-rhetorical type of painting may have been stimulated by his early education at the Latin school, where Latin dramas were performed by the pupils, as Svetlana Alpers has pointed out.<sup>21</sup> In rhetorical handbooks of the time, which were based on the Roman rhetoric of Quintillian (c. 35-c. 100) and Cicero (106 B.C.-43 B.C.), the eliciting of strong emotions, especially compassion, was extensively discussed.<sup>22</sup> One had to make the audience empathize by representing as clearly and recognizably as possible the misery and distress of a suffering victim. Cicero maintained that the suffering of an innocent and defenseless victim moves the audience more powerfully than any other form of human suffering.<sup>23</sup> One immediately thinks of Rembrandt's *Andromeda* (fig. 5) and *Susanna* (fig. 6), paintings in which the artist, more than any other painter before him, did everything to emphasize the vulnerability of these innocent and defenseless women.<sup>24</sup> Rembrandt's ambitious choice of subject for his earliest dated painting, *The stoning of St. Stephen* (1625, fig. 4) – a perfect demonstration of the Senecan-Stoic contrast between worldly violence and the suffering of the steadfast<sup>25</sup> – as well as for many of his later paintings, including *Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac* (1635, fig. 8), the scenes of rape, and the series of *The Passion of Christ*, all seem to be partly determined by the challenge to grip the viewer through intense empathy and compassion.

Apart from these, there are quite a number of works from this period (mentioned above) with sudden, violent actions and reactions, beginning with *Balaam and the ass* and *Christ chasing the moneylenders from the temple* (fig. 3), both dated 1626, and culminating in *Belshazzar's feast* (c. 1635, fig. 2) and *The blinding of Samson* (1635, fig. 9). It accords perfectly with Senecan-Stoic notions for Rembrandt to choose for his most gruesome and violent painting – arguably even the most violent painting of the seventeenth century – to represent a hero who perishes because of his moral weakness, having succumbed to uncontrolled desires. This moral recurs in many tragedies, among them *Simson* (1618) by Abraham de Koning (1588-1619).<sup>26</sup> Being shocked by gruesome deeds should lead to the insight that one has to remain steadfast under all circumstances. That Scaliger mentioned specifically the stabbing of eyes in his enumeration of topics suitable for a tragedy might have inspired Rembrandt to depict this exceptional moment from the Samson story – something no other painter ever did.<sup>27</sup>





### Vondel's *staetveranderinge*

The highly popular plays of Jan Vos would continue the Senecan-Scaligerian mode throughout the 1640s, '50s and '60s, albeit without the strong moral undertone of the Senecan dramas from the earlier decades, and many other playwrights would also adhere to it during the later period. As of the early 1640s, however, Vondel's tragedies would become increasingly inspired by Greek drama, in which the emotional reactions of the spectator are manipulated in an entirely different way. Although Daniel Heinsius (1580-1655) had recorded the theoretical formulation, based entirely on Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), of the function of *peripeteia* and *agnitio* in Greek drama as early as 1611, it had no repercussions in the tragedies of that period until Vondel, encouraged by Gerard Vossius (1580-1655), began to work with it.<sup>28</sup> His first step in this new direction was his translation, with the help of Vossius's son Isaac, of the *Elektra* of Sophocles (ca. 497-407 B.C.) in 1639. In this work, fear and compassion were incited by way of a continuous unfolding of the plot, in which inner conflicts, *woelingen* (literally: turbulences, agitations), as Vondel calls them, play an important role. He writes in the dedication: 'In this tragedy multifarious emotions all tumble about [*woelen*] violently, like wrath, recklessness, fear, compassion, hate and love, faithfulness and



7  
Rembrandt, *The rape of Proserpina*,  
c. 1630, oil on panel, 83 x 78 cm,  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,  
Gemäldegalerie

unfaithfulness, sorrow and joy'.<sup>29</sup> It was such *woelingen* that had to evoke emotions in the audience, not the spectacle of horror, nor the listening to gripping and gruesome stories. The development of inner conflict gradually leads to the climax, the *peripeteia*, translated by Vondel as *staetveranderinge*: the reversal of the protagonist's fate. This should be accompanied by *herkennis*, recognition, the Aristotelian *agnitio*.<sup>30</sup> In Vondel's point of view (and in this he follows his humanist friend Vossius and not Aristotle), this means not just a situation of recognition, but a realization of and insight into the true state of affairs:<sup>31</sup> the inescapable situation in which the protagonist finds him or herself. After this follows the *catharsis*.

In 1641, Jan Vos would state in the dedication of *Aran en Titus* that nature has to be depicted in all its aspects. With this, he challenges Vondel, who had published *Elektra* shortly before. In his preface, Vondel had used terms from painting in his description of the tragedy, writing 'that all the parts of this noble and royal maiden are well measured and flawless, just as the colors of Greek eloquence are artfully scumbled. Here one does not see anything misshapen, and all the components, from the minor to the major parts, cohere and flow together effortlessly'.<sup>32</sup> In the dedication of his play, Jan Vos places against the idealizing perfection of *Elektra* the 'deformity' of his hero, writing that the greatest minds in particular (such as the humanist Caspar Barlaeus, whom he addresses in this dedication), 'often have the most inquisitive eyes, and now and then like to gaze at creatures whom nature has refused pleasing proportions and the right highlights and shadows of their shapes'.<sup>33</sup> We notice how Vos responds wittily to Vondel's pictorial metaphors: instead of well-measured proportions, scumbled transitions and flowing, coherent compositions, he shows unpleasing proportions and strong contrasts in highlights and shadows. Thus, contrasting views had developed during the 1640s among the two leading playwrights in Amsterdam in precisely the same period that Rembrandt was searching for new ways to depict the emotional content of his history paintings. One reason for the drastic change that would follow might have been that, in his endeavor to depict *die natuereelste beweeghelickheijt*, Rembrandt must have realized that the depiction of a strong and instantaneous movement and emotion, an *oogenblikke beweging*, could never look truly natural because a painted figure is always 'still'.<sup>34</sup>

### The passions in Rembrandt's late history paintings

In contrast to the normative approach that took shape in the works and theoretical ideas of Vondel, Rembrandt would never renounce his basic principle that life should be followed without idealization in order to bring the things represented as close as possible to the world of experience of the viewer.<sup>35</sup> In this respect he remained closer to the ideas of Vos who, even as late as 1667, passionately defended the need for an unretouched representation of nature and human experience, even in all their disorderliness and ugliness.<sup>36</sup> However, Rembrandt would completely revise his manner of rendering the passions and engage the emotional



8  
Rembrandt, *Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac*,  
1635, oil on canvas, 193 x 132.5 cm,  
St. Peterburg, Hermitage Museum



9

Rembrandt, *The blinding of Samson*,  
1636, oil on canvas, 236 x 302 cm,  
Frankfurt, Städtisches Kunstinstitut

response of the viewer in an entirely different way. We have seen that in the works of the 1620s and '30s the motifs that emphasize immediate and clearly recognizable emotions and movements were pushed to their extreme. This is evident when comparing them to paintings and prints depicting the same subjects, in particular those he may have known and to which he may have responded.<sup>37</sup> We see the absolute opposite in his history paintings from the 1650s and 1660s. Now Rembrandt depicts motionless and mute situations: not a sudden reversal of vehement passions but the suggestion that we are present at a situation where a reversal of mood gradually takes place. We observe protagonists who seem to recognize and realize their tragic circumstances, and we feel that we are witnessing the *woelingen* which trouble the protagonists' minds.

On the stage, inner conflicts and agonies could be represented by long laments and soul-searching monologues. This was indeed the case in Vondel's *Jeptha*, in which Jeptha is torn between his love for his daughter and his obligation to keep his promise to sacrifice her. This inner conflict finally changes into the horrible insight – and here the *staetveranderinge* takes place through *herkennis* – that he made the wrong decision and not only committed a gruesome crime by killing his daughter but even sinned against God by doing so.<sup>38</sup> To accomplish something comparable in a

10

Rembrandt, *The resurrection of Christ*,  
c. 1636–39, oil on canvas, 92 x 67 cm,  
Munich, Alte Pinakothek





II  
Rembrandt, *Bathsheba*, 1654,  
oil on canvas, 142 x 142 cm, Paris,  
Musée du Louvre

painting the artist would have to visualize what, in fact, cannot be visualized: the inner thoughts, conflicts and ponderings of the protagonist – things the viewer cannot see. Rembrandt solved this brilliantly by compelling the viewer to think about what is going on in the mind of the person depicted and by giving the viewer the opportunity to project thoughts and conflicting emotions onto this person. In sharp contrast to his earlier work, Rembrandt thus banished all action and reaction and avoided any indication of dialogue, so that the viewer is forced to concentrate on a motionless protagonist of whom it is suggested that he or she is plunged in deep thought. This is the only element the viewer can

go by; the beholder is left to his or her own devices to interpret those thoughts because so little information is given. The viewer is free to contemplate and empathize with the inner conflicts and agonies of the protagonist and to project his own feelings and emotions.

For example, Rembrandt emphasized Bathsheba's expression of being lost in thought (fig. 11).<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, by depicting the letter with the message of King David at the center of the image – a combination no other painter had depicted before – Rembrandt indicates to the informed viewer that she is aware of the distressing situation in which she finds herself. She knows that she is being watched and that her beauty has elicited the sinful desires of a male voyeur. This combination focuses the viewer's attention on that which cannot be visualized, that is, Bathsheba's thoughts provoked by David's request. This is not a Bathsheba at the centre of a narrative action, spied upon, talked to, or handed a message or reading a letter. By banishing all this, Rembrandt

12

Rembrandt, *Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph*, 1656, oil on canvas, 175.5 x 210.5 cm, Kassel, Staatliche Museen

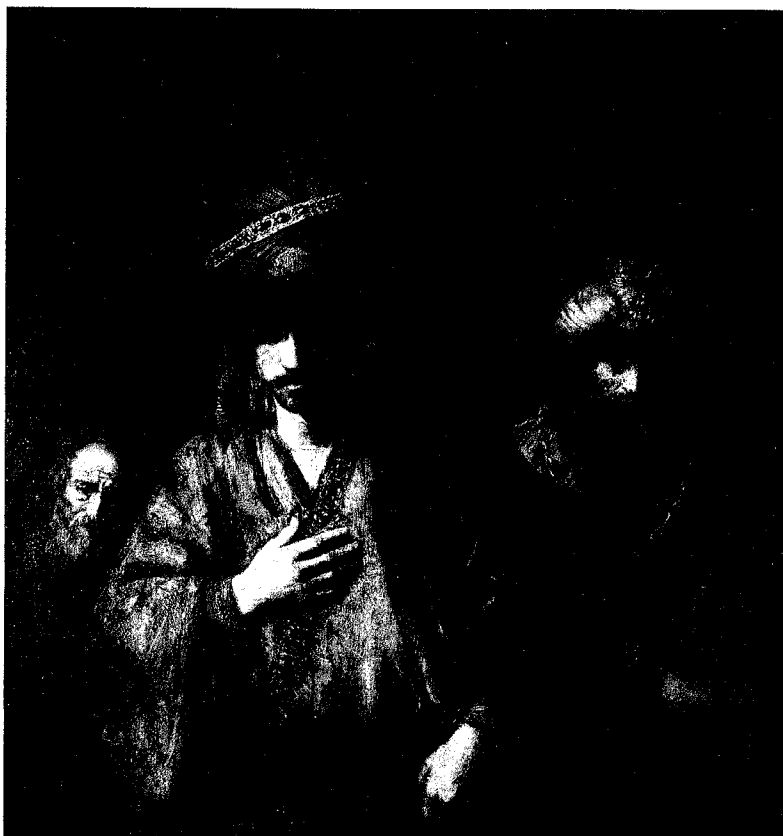




13

**The disgrace of Haman, c. 1665,**

oil on canvas, 127 x 116 cm, St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum



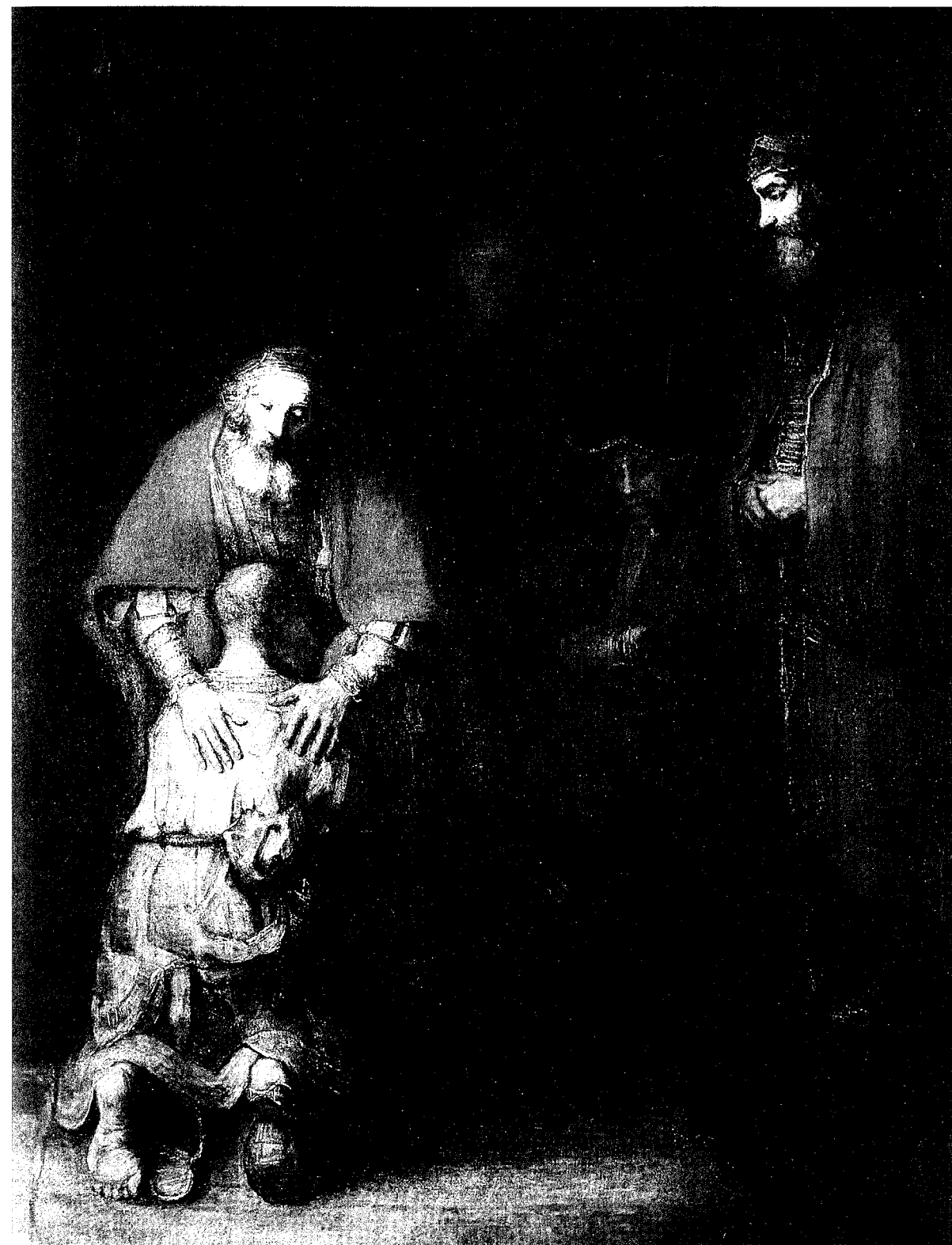
forces the viewer to think about her inner agonies and the harrowing choice she has to make, knowing that she realizes the terrible moral dilemma that faces her: either she chooses to lose her honor and commit the terrible sin of adultery, or she chooses to disobey the mightiest of kings (and her destiny to be the mother of Solomon).

In *Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph* (fig. 12) we do not see a Joseph who reacts with surprise to his father's supposed mistake of blessing the younger son with his right hand instead of the elder one. Instead, we see a Joseph and Asenath of whom we want to know what they are thinking and who seem to realize the far-reaching meaning of Jacob's decision and of the words this frail old man has just spoken. We do not see a furious Ahasuerus blowing up at Haman in *Haman and Ahasuerus at the feast of Esther* (1660, Moscow, Pushkin Museum) but an Ahasuerus, Esther and Haman who all seem to be in deep contemplation and recognize the fateful implications of Esther's words. *The disgrace of Haman* (fig. 13) shows three men, probably Haman, Ahasuerus and Mordechai, whose thoughts and emotions we try to divine; we assume that Haman reflects on the drastic change of his situation and realizes his downfall. All conventional motifs have been avoided to emphasize a man's acknowledgment of his terrible fate. In *The return of the prodigal son* (fig. 13), we do not observe a prodigal son falling on his knees while his father

14

**Rembrandt, *The return of the prodigal son*, c. 1666,**

oil on canvas, 206 x 205 cm, St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum



rushes towards him and an elder son reacts angrily, but a situation in which no one moves or speaks. This forces us, as well as the other bystanders who seem to contemplate the meaning of the occurrence, to ponder what goes on in the minds of the father and the son. Even in *Jacob wrestling with the angel* (fig. 14), we see a total lack of *oogenblikkelijke beweging, eenstemmigheid* and *eenwezigheid*, so that the viewer is compelled to wonder about Jacob's thoughts and to reflect on the reversal of his fate.

I do not maintain that Rembrandt consciously followed Vondel's theory of drama and his notions of *peripeteia* and *agnitio*, but I do think that Rembrandt's views about the rendering of the passions went through an analogous process of change. They evolved from an outspoken Senecan rhetorical mode of rendering the passions to a mode in which the viewer can empathize with the inner thoughts, conflicts and agonies of the protagonists, a transformation that seems to parallel Vondel's articulation of *staetveranderinge* and *herkennis*.



15

Rembrandt, *Jacob wrestling with the Angel*, 1659, oil on canvas, 137 x 116 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

# Notes

This article is based on a paper presented at the conference of the Renaissance Society of America in Los Angeles on March 20, 2009. I am grateful to Stephanie Dickey, who prompted me to turn the paper into an article. The current text elaborates on ideas put forward in a more embryonic form in my book *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* of 2006 (105-109, 138 and 364). It should, therefore, be considered a first step of a work in progress in which relations between history painting and drama in 17th-century Amsterdam are studied. This study is part of the project funded by NWO titled 'Artistic and Economic Competition in the Amsterdam Art Market, c. 1630-1690. History Painting in Rembrandt's Time'.

- 1 See J. Konst, 'Een levende schoon-verwighe schilderije. De tragedie als historiestuk', in: A.C.G. Fleurkens et al. (eds.), *Dans der muzen. De relatie tussen de kunsten gethematiseerd*, Hilversum 1995, 102-115. See also the essays by Gohlany, Roodenburg and Weststeijn in this volume.
- 2 J.F.M. Sterck et al. (eds.), *De werken van Vondel: volledige en geïllustreerde tekstuitgave in tien delen* (Wereldbibliotheek), 10 vols., Amsterdam 1927-1940, vol. 1, 164 (hereafter Vondel WB): 'een levende schoon-verwighe schilderije'. Also in the dedication of the *Leeuwendalers*, Vondel talks about his 'toneelschildery' ('stage play-painting'): *ibid.*, vol. 5, 266.
- 3 See the comprehensive discussion of this passage by K. Porteman, 'Vondel schildert een "Rubens"', *Neerlandica Extra Muros* 41 (2003), 2, 29-42.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 34: '...steunt op de fundamenteel geachte overeenkomst tussen het treurspel en de op dit punt nog effectievere historieschilderkunst om via de visuele representatie te ontroeren (movere)'.
- 5 Vondel WB, *op. cit.* (n. 2), vol. 4, 74: '... ten naasten bij, met woorden des schilders vetwen, tekeningen, en hartstochten, poogden na te volgen'. See Konst 1995, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 104 and K. Porteman, 'Geschreven met de linkerhand? Letteren tegenover schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw', in: M. Spies (ed.), *Historische letterkunde. Facetten van vakbeoefening*, Groningen 1984, 93-113.
- 6 Also in his theoretical treatise *Toneelschildt* (*Apology for drama*, 1661),

Vondel underlines emphatically that 'the tragedy has close ties to scenes [tafereelen] of history painting' (Vondel WB, *op. cit.*, n. 2, vol. 9, 383). Jan Konst has argued convincingly that only Vondel discussed this parallelism in a coherent way. Both arts had mimetic intentions and wished to present a convincing representation of reality, which meant that they both depended on classical rhetoric, not only in the sense of *docere, delectare* and *movere*, with an emphasis on the latter, but also in terms of the triad of *inventio, dispositio* and *elocutio*. Konst 1995, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 105-107 and 109. See Mieke Smits-Veldt for the interesting cases in which the legendary painting the *Sacrifice of Iphigeneia* by Timanthes was discussed in this context, specifically in poems by Hendrick Roelants celebrating a play by Jan Colm and by Bredero on a tragedy by Abraham de Koning (M.B. Smits-Veldt, 'Bredero en Timanthes', *Spektator. Tijdschrift voor neerlandistiek* 14 (1984/85), 288-294. Also see Konst 1995, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 110-112.

- 7 In his poem for the inauguration of the schouwburg, Vos writes, 'The pen of the poet is like a lively brush' ('De pen der dichters is een levendig penseel') and 'A play is ... a speaking painting' ('Een Spel [is] ... een sprekende schilderij'). Vondel underlines in his apology for the theatre, *Toneelschildt* (1661), that Simonides' famous dictum that poetry is speaking painting and painting mute poetry is especially applicable to the theatrical piece; see Porteman, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 42.
- 8 The only painting known to me is a rather primitive, anonymous painting of a scene from *Gysbrecht van Aemstel*, identified by G.M. Molkenboer in his 'Gysbrecht op Doornenburg', *Vondelkroniek* 1 (1930), 174-182, and also reproduced in the book mentioned hereafter (ill. 25). For the plays that were performed in the *Nederduytshe Academie* and the Amsterdam *schouwburg* during the period under discussion, see: E. Oey-de Vita and M. Geesink, *Academie en schouwburg. Amsterdams toneelrepertoire 1617-1665*, Amsterdam 1983. I counted only the tragedies and tragicomedies: *Aran en Titus* (1641, Jan Vos), *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* (1637, Joost van den Vondel), *De Cid* (1641, Johan van Heemskerck after Corneille), *Biron* (1639, Hendrick

Roclandt), *Karel en Cassandra* (1642, Theodoor Rodenburg), *Vervolchden Laura* (1645, Adam van Gernmez after Jean de Rotrou), *Stirus en Ariane* (1644, Jacob Struys), *Veynzende Torquatus* (1644, Geeraard Brandt), *Geraerd van Velzen* (1617, Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft) and *Elektra* (1639, Joost van den Vondel after Sophocles). With regards to the number of performances, the only biblical dramas that are among the most popular are *Josef of Sofompaneas* (1635, Joost van den Vondel after Hugo de Groot) and *Gebroeders* (1640, Joost van den Vondel).

- 9 After the 1630s, Vondel is almost the only playwright who still based dramas on biblical subjects; Mieke Smits-Veldt counted only 10 biblical dramas out of a total of 200 serious plays between 1630 and 1665, apart from the eleven written by Vondel in that period (M.B. Smits-Veldt, 'La Bible et le théâtre aux Pays Bas', in: J.R. Armogathe (ed.), *Le grand siècle et la bible*, Paris 1989, 495-503). With most biblical dramas, it is more difficult to assess a relation to painting because the material they treat was already conventional in painting, as is the case with the Joseph dramas. We also find, both in paintings and tragedies, scenes from the stories of, among others, Jephtha, Achab, Hagar, Judith, Samson, Solomon, Nebukadnezar, as well as Ariadne, Iphigeneia, Polyxena, Sophonisba, but in most cases it is hard to tell if there are direct relations between the two.
- 10 We know a remarkably large number of paintings of Granida and Daifilo based on two scenes in Hooft's play, of which the earliest paintings are the well-known works by Dirck van Baburen of 1623 and Gerard van Honthorst of 1625. However, these relate to the vogue for pastoral scenes. See the catalogue entries by Peter van den Brink in P. van den Brink (ed.), *Het gedroomde land. Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw*, cat. exh. Utrecht (Centraal Museum), Zwolle and Utrecht 1993, 87-90 and 172-176, with further references. For the small group of paintings depicting scenes from *Lucelle* (Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero) by Jan Miense Molenaer, see: D.P. Weller, *Jan Miense Molenaer: painter of the Dutch Golden Age*, cat. exh. Raleigh (North Carolina Museum of Art), New York/

- Manchester (VT) 2002, 153-155. These paintings are not only unusual because of the subject, but also in that they clearly depict a staged scene.
- 11 M. Meijer-Drees, 'Toneelopvattingen in beweging: rivaliteit tussen Vos en Vondel in 1641', *De nieuwe taalgids* 79 (1986), 453-460, esp. 455. Barlaeus adds to this that he normally sees the performance of a play only once.
- 12 A. Blankert, 'General Introduction,' in: A. Blankert et al., *Gods, saints and heroes: Dutch paintings in the age of Rembrandt*, cat. exh. Washington (National Gallery of Art), Detroit (Detroit Institute of Arts) and Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum), Washington 1980, 26-27; and A. Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680), Rembrandt's pupil*, Doornspijk 1982, 34-36.
- 13 In 1647, in the introduction of *Leeuwendalers*, Vondel mentions the application of *herkennis* (*agnitio* recognition) and *overgang* (*peripeteia*) (Vondel WB, *op. cit.*, n. 2, vol. 5, 266), which he later, in the introduction of *Jeptha*, calls *staetveranderinge* (Vondel WB, vol. 8, 775); see M. B. Smits-Veldt, *Het Nederlandse Renaissancetoneel*, Utrecht 1991, 95-103. See also below, note 28.
- 14 It should be noted here that the *staetveranderinge* in Vondel's *Jephta* certainly does not refer – as has been stated erroneously by Blankert and others – to the sudden reversal of Jephta's emotions from joy, because of his victory, to despair upon seeing his daughter as the first person to greet him. This moment of recognition (which Lastman depicted), as well as Jephta's second military victory and his vow that he will sacrifice the first person he encounters have all taken place before Vondel's play begins. *Staetveranderinge* here does refer, however, to Jephta's changing insight, from the conviction that he had to sacrifice his daughter to the realization that he made the wrong decision; see also below, note 38). The scene depicted by Pieter Lastman does appear in the 1554 tragedy by George Buchanan (*Jepthes sive votum*), which Vondel emulated, and in Abraham de Koning's drama (*Jephtahs ende zijn eenighe dochters treurspel*), of 1615.
- 15 For an excellent survey with a discussion of the characteristics of the Senecan-Scaligeran type of tragedy see Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 13), chapters III and IV, esp. 45-55; see also J. Konst, *Woedende wraakghierigheids en vruchtlooze weeklachten. De hartstochten in de Nederlandse tragedie van de zeventiende eeuw*, Assen and Maastricht 1993, 31-46 and 163-178; and K. Porteman and M. B. Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1560-1700*, Amsterdam 2008, 173-175.
- 16 For the topics that Scaliger mentions, see Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 53.
- 17 See T. Weststeijn, *The visible world: Samuel van Hoogstraten's art theory and the legitimization of painting in the Dutch golden age*, Amsterdam 2008, Chapter IV, and idem., 'Rembrandt and rhetoric: the concepts of affectus, enargeia and ornatus in Samuel van Hoogstraten's judgement of his master', in: M. van den Doel et al. (eds.), *The learned eye. Regarding art, theory, and the artist's reputation*, Amsterdam 2005, 116-117.
- 18 S. van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst*, Rotterdam 1678, 112: '... men moet toezien, datmen alleenlijk een oogeblickige beweging, welke voornamentlijk de daed der Historie uitdrukt, vertoone [...] Op dat het werk eenstemmich den toezien, als een anderen omstander verrukke, van een felle daed doe schrikken, en door het zien van iets blygeestichs doe verheugen: of dat hy door eenich aengedaen ongelijk met meedelijden bewoogen worde; en in een rechtvaerdige daed zich vernoegt bevinde'.
- 19 See Weststeijn 2005, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 116-119 and Weststeijn 2008, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 185-186.
- 20 For this letter and its transcription in English, see: H. Gerson, *Seven letters by Rembrandt*, The Hague 1961, 34-38. For an extensive discussion of Rembrandt and the passions in this period, see: E.J. Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the female nude*, Amsterdam 2006, chapter III, 'Intermezzo: Rembrandt and the Depiction of the Passions in the 1620s and 1630s', 99-111. See also the essays by Heinen and Roodenburg in this volume.
- 21 S. Alpers, *Rembrandt's enterprise: the studio and the market*, Chicago 1988, 42-43.
- 22 See especially Konst, *op. cit.* (n. 15),

- chapters 3.2 'De retorica van het movere' and 3.3. 'De pathetische elocutio', with further references.
- 23 Konst, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 84-86.
- 24 See Sluijter, *op. cit.* (n. 20), 90-93 and 123-129.
- 25 On the 'stoic Kontrapost' see: W. Brassat, 'Tragik, versteckte Kompositionskunst und Katharsis im Werk von Peter Paul Rubens', in: U. Heinen and A. Thielemann (eds.), *Rubens Passioni. Kultur der Leidenschaften im Barock*, Göttingen 2001, 54: '... man suchte die Wunde, Schmerzen und Folterqualen eines Helden möglichst grell zu schildern, damit ihre Überwindung in desto hellerem Licht erstrahle'.
- 26 Competition with Rubens must have been on his mind continuously during this period: it will come as no surprise that Rubens was a great admirer of Seneca and an adherent of his Stoic philosophy. Naturally, Rubens was well acquainted with Seneca's tragedies of horror. The abundance of gruesome suffering in those beloved Senecan dramas, combined with the Tridentine reform of the use of images, in which pathos was considered an appropriate means to intensify the devotion of the viewer, legitimized the violence and horror in paintings, especially those depicting martyrdom. See a.o. Brassat *op. cit.* (n. 25), 41-69 and U. Heinen, 'Peter Paul Rubens – Barocke Leidenschaften', in: N. Büttner and U. Heinen (eds.), *Peter Paul Rubens. Barocke Leidenschaften*, cat. exh. Braunschweig (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum), München 2004, 28-38, with further references. For Rubens, however, 'grâce et vehemence' always had to go hand in hand, as he wrote in a letter to Carleton (Heinen, *loc. cit.*). Rembrandt consciously sacrificed grace for an unconditional lifelikeness. For a discussion of Rembrandt's competition with Rubens in this particular painting, see Sluijter, *op. cit.* (n. 20), 259-260.
- 27 Thijs Weststeijn was the first to point out this connection. See Weststeijn 2008, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 214-215 (earlier in his dissertation of 2005, 119).
- 28 See Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 51, 58, 64/65; Konst, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 189; Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 177. If the more learned playwrights did not give evidence of understanding and using this concept until the middle of the century (and

- even then Vondel was an exception), it is unthinkable that painters would have known about it and used it when devising their compositions.
- 29 'In dit treurspel woelen veelereleie hartstoghten, gramschap, stoutigheid, vreeze, bekommering, haet en liefde, trouw en ontrouw, droefheid en blyschap, elck om 't hevighste'. (Vondel WB, , *op. cit.*, n. 2, vol. 3, 641)
- 30 See Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 55-58, 90-92; Konst, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 188-202, Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 177, 379-386, 531-538.
- 31 See W.A.P. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, Zwolle 1959, vol. 2, 294, note 2, and 366.
- 32 'Alle leden dezer edele en koninglijke maeghd zijn gelijkckmaetigh, en onberispelijck, gelijk oock de verwen der welsprekendteid kunstighlijck in 't Griex verdreven. Men ziet er niet wanschapens, en alle deelen, van 't minste tot het mceste, hangen hecht te zaemen, en vloeien zonder dwang uit malkanderen.' Vondel WB, *op. cit.*, n. 2, vol. 3, 642; see also M. Meijer Drees, 'Toneelopvattingen in beweging: rivaliteit tussen Vos en Vondel in 1641', *De nieuwe taalgids* 79 (1986), 453-460.
- 33 '... vaak de neusgierigste van oogen zijn, en by wijlen staren op schepselen, die de Natuur de gevoegelijke maat der ledematen, en juiste hoogselen en diepselen van hare vormen, heeft geweigert'. J. Vos, *Aran en Titus, of Wraak en Weerwraak*, Amsterdam 1641, 7.
- 34 Ernst van de Wetering has argued recently that this phenomenon must have been the cause of Rembrandt's crisis in the 1640s. See E. van de Wetering, 'Rembrandt als zoekende kunstenaar', in: E. van de Wetering et al., *Rembrandt. Zoektocht van een genie*, Amsterdam (Museum het Rembrandthuis), Zwolle / Amsterdam 2006, 108-115.
- 35 For Rembrandt's profound 'from life ideology', see: Sluijter, *op. cit.* (n. 20), chapter VII ('Intermezzo: Rembrandt's Notions about Art: "Coloring" and the "From Life" Ideology').
- 36 J. Vos, *Medea*, 1667, Dedication, 4 and 7-8. See Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 93-103; Konst, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 203-209; Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 538-541. About the representation of reality, see also the excellent chapter on this subject in G.J.M. Weber, *Der Lobtopos des 'lebenden' Bildes. Jan Vos und sein 'Zeege der Schilderkunst' von 1654*, Hildesheim / Zurich / New York 1991, 115-136.
- 37 See, for instance, Sluijter, *op. cit.* (n. 20), chapters II, IV and VI.
- 38 See Smit, *op. cit.* (n. 31), vol. 3, chapter IV; Konst, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 146-148 and 195-202; Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 531-532.
- 39 For my exhaustive interpretation of Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* in the Louvre, including the notion that she represents a prime example of 'staetveranderinge' and a culmination of Rembrandt's change of approach, see Sluijter, *op. cit.* (n. 20), 352-368 (*staetveranderinge*, 364-365).