



9. Alexander Voet the Younger after Peter Paul Rubens, *A Satyr and a Nymph*, engraving.

Eric Jan Sluiter

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 century¹. 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.

¹ See E.J. SLUIJTER, *De "heydensche fabulen" in de schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw. Schilderijen met verhalende onderwerpen uit de klassieke mythologie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, circa 1590-1670*. Leiden, 2000. About *Andromeda*, see p. 36-37 and 218-220.

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*². 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 only 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 Ghent³. 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 Posthius, the other of Johannes Spreng⁴. Best known was the one by Posthius, 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 Florianus or Blommaerts⁵. 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)⁶. 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

² About these editions, see SLUIJTER, *De "heydensche fabulen"*, op cit. (note 1), p. 170-179.

³ *Excellente figueren ghesneden uuyten uppersten Poete Ovidius uuyt vyfthien boucken der veranderinghen met huerlier bedietsele*, Duer Guillaume Borluyt [...]. Lyons, 1557.

⁴ *Iohan. Posthii Germershemii tetrasticha in Ovidii Metam. Lib. XV*. Frankfurt a.M., 1563 and *P. Ovidii Nasonis. Dass sinnreychen und hochverstendigen Poeten Metamorphoses*. Frankfurt a.M., 1564.

⁵ *Metamorphosis dat is de Herscheppinge, Beschreven door den vermaerden Poet Ovidius Naso*. Antwerp, 1566.

⁶ See A.W.A. BOSCHLOO et al., *Ovidius herschapen. Geïllustreerde uitgaven van de Metamorphosen in de Nederlanden uit de zestiende, zeventiende en achttiende eeuw*. The Hague, 1980 and SLUIJTER, *De "heydensche fabulen"*, op cit. (note 1), Appendix II (p. 194-195).

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)⁷.

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 story⁸. 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, Vertumnus 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"⁹. 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 time¹⁰ — meaning that he could imitate different *handelingen* (manners

⁷ *Metamorphoseon sive transformationum Ovidii libri XV [...] incise in pictorum [...]*. Antwerp, 1606 (illustrated by Antonio Tempesta); *P. Ovidii Nasonis Metamorphoses, Augustis Brevioribus ex Luctatio Grammatico [...]*. Antwerp, 1591 (illustrated by Pieter van der Borcht); *P. Ovid. Nasonis XV Metamorphoseon Librorum figurae [...]*, a Crispiano Passeo [...] autore Guilhelmo Salsmanno, Arnhem, 1607 (the prints themselves were first published by De Passe in 1602).

⁸ See SLUIJTER, *De "heydensche fabulen"*, op cit. (note 1), part I.

⁹ G. DE LAIRESSE, *Groot Schilderboek, waar in de schilderconst in al haar deelen grondig werd onderwezen*. 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1712, I, p. 123. See also SLUIJTER, *De "heydensche fabulen"*, op cit. (note 1), p. 97-98.

¹⁰ C. VAN MANDER, 't Leven der vermaerde doorluchtighe Schilders des ouden, en nieuwen tyds, in *Het Schilder-Boeck*. Haarlem, 1603-1604, fol. 285r.

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 proportion¹¹. 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)¹². 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 Borch, an illustration in an edition of 1591, or Crispijn 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.

¹¹ See also E.J. SLUIJTER, *Seductress of Sight. Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age*. Zwolle, 2000, p. 48-52.

¹² OVID, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 690-691. In the words of Florianus's Dutch translation (FLORIANUS, *Metamorphosis*, op. cit. (note 5): "Her father and mother had also come, offering nothing other in support than wailing and weeping" (*Haer vader ende moeder waren oec gecomen, de welcke voor een bystant ande hulpe anders niet en brachten dan een kermen ende weenen*).

¹³ See above, note 7.

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 Pegasus¹⁴. 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 recounts¹⁵.

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 diving 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

¹⁴ This pictorial form was probably derived by Salomon from a miniature in Christine de PISAN, *Epitre d'Othea* (see C. GREENHAUS LORD, *Some Ovidian themes in Italian renaissance art*, diss. Columbia University. New York, 1968, p. 45-50). The manuscript illumination in an edition of Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus* should also be mentioned (see J.M. STEADMAN, "Perseus upon Pegasus and Ovid Moralized", in *The Review of English Studies*, n.s., IX, 1958, p. 407-410). In the *Ovide Moralisé*, Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus* and also in Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum* Pegasus is mentioned as Perseus's mount.

¹⁵ OVID, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 785-786. This event can be seen accurately represented in the background of an illustration in the Venetian *Ovidio Metamorfoseos Vulgare* of 1497, which combines several scenes from the story and in which Perseus flies unaided by Pegasus.

depicted nude women¹⁶, the image of female beauty could even stand for the beauty of painting in general¹⁷.

Moreover, Andromeda's great beauty, the sight of which immediately fired the love of Perseus, as was pointedly described by Ovid, offered a great challenge to artists: "As soon as Perseus saw her there, bound by the arms to a rough cliff, [...] he took fire unwitting, and stood dumb. Smitten by the sight of the beauty he sees, he almost forgot to move his wings in the air"¹⁸. And furthermore — and certainly no less important — it should not be forgotten that the image of a nude young woman in distress, chained and helpless, threatened by some villain or monster, and about to be rescued by a male hero, belongs to an obvious, archetypal eroticism. This erotic motif occurs with many variations in contemporary times, especially in film. Even the ancient Andromeda story itself can still function as a scene to arouse the viewer, as may be gathered from a hilarious passage in a novel by David Lodge, in which the staging of the Andromeda story in a Soho nightclub is described as a rather classy act designed by a quite intellectual stripper¹⁹.

In the 17th century however, in a context in which it exemplified an image with a distinctive erotic impact, we find the image of Andromeda in a rare and rather odd painting by Karel van Mander III (Fig. 9)²⁰, that would have been considered very funny by a 17th century viewer, but is a bit disquieting for us. The painting shows a rare scene from Heliodor's *Aethiopica*, a text from late antiquity that had become one of the most popular novels of the 17th century. It tells the story of Chariclea whose black mother, an Ethiopian queen, gave birth to a white skinned daughter, the beautiful Chariclea. This change in colour was due, according to the queen, to the fact that during conception of the child, she had been

¹⁶ PLINY, *Natural History*, XXXXC, 79. See VAN MANDER, *Leven*, op. cit. (note 10), fol. 76v: "It was agreed that he had a special way or gift that was to be seen in all his paintings, a certain grace, which no other painter was able to follow ... a certain Venus which the Greek call *Charis*, in which he surpasses all others" (*Daer wert van hem ghetuyght, dat hy hadde voor een bysonder deel oft gave, dat in al zijn Schilderijen te sien was een seker gracelijckheyt, die geen Schilders en vermochten nae te volghen. ... een seker Venus, die de Griecken heeten Charis, in welck hyse alle overtrof, ofte te boven ghingh*).

¹⁷ See SLUIJTER, *Seductress*, op. cit. (note 11), p. 138-140.

¹⁸ OVID, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 672-677.

¹⁹ D. LODGE, *Small World*. London, 1984, p. 188-189.

²⁰ The painting was one of a ten part series on the *Aethiopica*, painted for Christian IV of Denmark. See about the painting: E. McGRATH, "The black Andromeda", in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LV, 1992, p. 1-4; J.P. MUNK, "Karel van Mander III. Court Painter, Collector and Steward of the Cabinet of Curiosities", in *Apollo*, CXXV, 1988, p. 88-92 and G.J. WEBER, "Poetenhafer, Fluggesel und Künstlerparnass. Pegasus in den Niederlanden", in *Pegasus und die Künste*, exh. cat., Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe. Hamburg, 1993, p. 73.

gazing at this painting of Andromeda: "I knew that it was caused by having right before my eyes — while your father was embracing me — the image of Andromeda, totally naked," she tells her daughter²¹. The painting visualizes a concept that also stemmed from antiquity: erotically charged paintings with beautiful figures hanging in a bedchamber 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 connoisseur 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"²².

We also find the image of Andromeda in the entirely different, but light-hearted and playful amorous context of the *Thronus Cupidinis* 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 century²³. Here the image of Andromeda stands for the concept that the power of love conquers all difficulties, instils 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 present²⁴. The Petrarchan mode, in which the tormented and suffering lover is destined to fight with unwavering tenacity to conquer his beloved, is the central motif in Dutch

²¹ *De Beschrijvinghe Heliodori vande Moorelandtsche geschiedenissen*. Amsterdam, 1610, p. 177-178: "... beekende ick d'oorsaecke wel, dat sulcx was door recht voor mijn ooghen ghehad te hebben (terwijl dat uwen vader my omhelsde) de beeltenisse van Andromeda heel naect, also ghelyck of Perseus haer onlangs vande steenrotse ontbonden en verlost hadt, daer zij gheset hadde geweest voor de zee Monster".

²² A. MARUCCHI, ed., G. MANCINI, *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (with commentary by L. Salerno). Rome, 1956, I, p. 143. Quoted by D. FREEDBERG, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago-London, 1989; see also D. ROSAND, "So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch", in R. GOFFEN, ed., *Titian's Venus of Urbino*. Cambridge-New York, 1997, p. 48.

²³ *Thronus Cupidinis sive Emblemata Amatoria*, P.T.L. Utrecht, n.d. [1618]. The first edition, with prints by Crispijn de Passe, was published in 1618; a second edition appeared in the same year with prints by an anonymous artist that more or less follow De Passe's. See the introduction by H. de la Fontaine Verwey in the facsimile edition of *Thronus Cupidinis. Editio Tertia (Amsterdam 1620)*. Amsterdam, 1968. Noteworthy is that in the first edition we see the literal representation of Perseus seated on a rock battling a monster (compare the print by Willem Swanenburgh after Jan Saenredam, see SLUIJTER, *Seductress*, op. cit. (note 11), p. 53, fig. 40), which was replaced in the following two editions by the traditional depiction of Perseus astride Pegasus.

²⁴ See S.F. WITSTEIN, *Bronnen en bewerkingswijze van de ontleende gedeelten in Rodenburghs Eglentiers Poëten's Borst-weringh (1619) (Mededelingen der Kon. Ned. Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, nieuwe reeks, XXVII, no. 6)*. Amsterdam, 1964, p. 316.

love emblems and amorous lyric poetry of the time²⁵. 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 Houwaert 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 canal²⁶. 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)²⁷. 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 Netherlandish provinces, while the monster carries the arms of Spain and of the Duke of Alba, and Perseus those of William of Orange (Fig. 12)²⁸.

²⁵ For the use of this playful variant of Petrarchism in Dutch amorous emblems, see the commentary by Porteman in K. PORTEMAN, ed., *P.C. HOOFT, Emblemata Amatoria* (Amsterdam, 1611). Leiden, 1983, esp. p. 16-29.

²⁶ *Declaratie van de incompst van de Prince van Orangien binnen Brussel*, Antwerp, 1579. See M. SABBE, "De Andromeda sage als politieke allegorie", in *Album* [...] J. Vercoullie. Brussels, 1927, p. 235-239.

²⁷ S. COSTER, *Beschrijvinge van de blyde inkoopste* [...]. Amsterdam, 1642. See D.P. SNOEP, *Praal en propaganda*. Alphen a/d Rijn, 1975, p. 65-66.

²⁸ G. VAN RIJN & C. VAN OMMEREN, *Atlas van Stolk. Katalogus van de historie-, spot- en zinneprenten betreffende de geschiedenis van Nederland*, 10 vols., Amsterdam-The Hague, 1895-1931, no. 461. The print is after a drawing by Crispijn van den Broeck in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (F. LUGT, *Bibliothèque Nationale. Cabinet des Estampes. Inventaire général des dessins des écoles du Nord*. Paris, 1936, p. 48, no. 190, pl. LVI).

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 God²⁹. At the other side of the border, Jacob Duym also employed Pegasus in his play titled *Nassausche Perseus, verlosser van Andromeda ofte de Nederlantsche Maeght* (The Nassau Perseus, liberator of Andromeda or the Dutch maiden), published in 1606³⁰. 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: "he 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

²⁹ J.B. GRAMAYE, *Andromeda Belgica dicta*. Louvain, 1600. Earlier the theme was used for the Joyous Entry into Antwerp of Archduke Ernest in which, naturally, the monster stood for the bellicose attitude of the Netherlands (SABBE, *De Andromeda sage*, op. cit. (note 26), p. 235-239). See also W. THOMAS, "Andromeda Unbound. The Reign of Albert & Isabella in the Southern Netherlands, 1598-1621", in W. THOMAS & L. DUERLOO, eds., *Albert & Isabella 1598-1621*, exh. cat., Brussels, Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire. S.I., 1998, II, p. 1.

³⁰ J. DUYM, *Een Nassausche Perseus, verlosser van Andromeda ofte de Nederlantsche Maeght*, in *Een Ghedenckboec*.. Leiden, 1606., no page numbers.

virtuous Perseus who fell in love and took her as his bride)³¹. 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 may 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 *ekphrasis* in the *Imagines*, in which Perseus has already killed the monster and a winged Eros frees Andromeda from her bounds³². Pliny the Elder describes a painting by the famous Greek painter Nicias, which depicted the hero liberating Andromeda³³. 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)³⁴. 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"³⁵. When devising this scene, Rubens might have

³¹ Only the Latin verse under the print of Willem Swanenburgh after Jan Saenredam, composed by Petrus Scriverius, is entirely different and contains a remarkable reference to the darkness of Andromeda's skin. Although Andromeda is an Ethiopian princess, Ovid makes no mention of her dark skin in the *Metamorphoses*; on the contrary her emphasizes her whiteness by comparing her body with a white marble statue. Scriverius, however, undoubtedly aware of the fact that Ovid described her as dark-skinned in the *Ars amandi* as well as in the *Heroides*, wrote (translated from the Latin): "Just as in the case of Andromeda, whose skin is the color of her country, black girls may hope for a handsome man as well". See on the tradition of Andromeda as a black woman: McGRATH, *The black Andromeda*, *op. cit.* (note 20), *passim*.

³² J.M. MULLER, "The Perseus and Andromeda on Rubens's house", in *Simiolus*, II-III, 1981-82, p. 140.

³³ PLINY, *Natural History*, XXXV, 132-133; Van Mander translates this as: "the nude Andromeda who was freed by Perseus" (*de naekte Andromeda die van Perseo verlost werde*); Van Mander's source, a French translation of Pliny, makes no mention of nudity, but for Van Mander, who knew the pictorial tradition, it must have been self-evident that she was naked. For Van Mander's source see H. MIEDEMA, ed., *Karel van Mander, Het leven der oude antijcke doorluchtighe schilders*. Amsterdam, 1977, fol. 74v (Du Pinet 1584, II, p. 654, verse 41-46: *une Andromeda, secourue de Perseus*).

³⁴ Muller mentions an Augustean relief in the Capitoline Museum and a sarcophagus relief embedded in 1616 in one of the walls of the Palazzo Mattei in Rome, in which Perseus frees Andromeda and which probably reflects Nicias's famous composition (MULLER, *Perseus and Andromeda*, *op. cit.* (note 32), p. 140-141).

³⁵ OVID, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 681-683. This happens in an earlier stage of the story, before he starts fighting the monster.

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 seaweeds³⁶.

The two beautiful versions by Rubens, the one in St. Petersburg of 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 lives³⁷, 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)³⁸. In a letter to Franciscus Junius Rubens described the paintings of the ancients as 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 a maulstick instead of his

³⁶ OVID, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 741-752. See L. BERTI, *Il Principe dello Studiolo*. Florence, 1967, p. 61.

³⁷ E. McGRATH, "The painted decoration of Rubens's house", in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLI, 1978, p. 245-277.

³⁸ MULLER, "Perseus and Andromeda", *op. cit.* (note 32), p. 131-140.

caduceus, had together armed Perseus; this act is depicted in an engraving by Jan Muller after Bartholomeus Spranger (fig. 19). Equipped by these gods, Perseus was able to slay Medusa, from whose severed head Pegasus was born, Pegasus who struck mount Helicon with his hoof to create the Hippocrene spring in which the Muses bathe. Around this time many artists were quite preoccupied with the image of *Hermathena*, Mercury and Minerva together, as the patrons of the Liberal Arts and as such also appropriated by the art of painting³⁹. One of those artists was Hendrick Goltzius, of whom we know several depictions of *Hermathena*⁴⁰, but best known are his paintings of 1611, in which Mercury holds a palette and brushes and Minerva wears a beautiful helmet, crowned by a gilded Pegasus (Figs. 20 and 21). In the background of these paintings we encounter familiar motifs of the enemies of real art: behind Mercury, the god who stands for artistic imagination and eloquence, a figure representing jealousy and slander, and behind Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and learning, king Midas figures as a representation of the ignorant, who are unable to value true art.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that after the death of Goltzius in 1617, Balthasar Gerbier, artist, political agent and an acquaintance of Rubens, wrote a lengthy elegy, titled *Eer ende Clacht-dicht* (published in 1620)⁴¹, in which a long procession of artists lament Goltzius's death. Heading this procession, and the first to mourn the death of Goltzius, is the greatest of all, Rubens. The poem tells us that Rubens is painting "an emblem full of meaning" on a large canvas, which included the musical contest between Apollo and Pan, surrounded by the Muses, a subject referring to the victory of true art over ignorant judgement⁴², as well as "the evil rock where Andromeda is lamenting".

³⁹ See Th. DACOSTA KAUFMANN, "The eloquent artist: towards an understanding of the stylistics of painting at the court of Rudolph II", in *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, I, 1982, p. 119-145.

⁴⁰ The print, attributed to Jacob Matham and dated 1588 (A. BARTSCH, *Le peintre-graveur*. Vienna, 1803-1821, III, p. 119, no. 281), was engraved after a drawing that still exists. See E.K.J. REZNICEK, *Hendrick Goltzius. Drawings Rediscovered 1962-1992*. New York, 1993, p. 83.

⁴¹ O. HIRSCHMANN, "Balthasar Gerbiers eer ende clacht-digt ter eeren van Henricus Goltzius", in *Oud Holland*, XXXVIII, 1920, p. 114-115.

⁴² Goltzius made a drawing (E. REZNICEK, *Die Zeichnungen von Goltzius*, Utrecht, 1961, I, p. 273-274, no. 107) and an engraving of this subject (BARTSCH, *op. cit.* (note 40), III, p. 25, no. 140), dated 1590, the latter undoubtedly one of his most ambitious prints. Deviating from Ovid's story, Minerva and the Muses have been added. On the interpretation of this print and the lines underneath by Franciscus Estius, see D. KRYSTOF, "'Die wahre Kunst ist bescheiden und schweigsam.' Zu Goltzius' *Midasurteil* von 1590", in R. FALKENBURG et al., eds., *Goltzius-Studies. Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617)*, in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, XLII-XLIII, 1991-92, Zwolle, 1993, p. 427-437.

Thus, the Andromeda theme has in this case a direct bearing on the status of Goltzius'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 Goltzius 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 Nicias'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 subject⁴³.

Like Goltzius, Rembrandt kept close to the conventional scheme, which makes his drastic deviations all the more striking. For anyone envisioning Goltzius'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 emotional impact of this little painting. By omitting Perseus and the monster⁴⁴, 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 Andromeda only. With her awkward movement, straining away from the terrifying monster while at the same time turning to look at it, Andromeda reacts more forcefully to what is happening than any Andromeda in an earlier depiction of this subject. By emphasizing her frightened 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 represented as a constellation), also implying that for that reason the painting should be interpreted astrologically, see G. SCHWARTZ, *Rembrandt; zijn leven, zijn schilderijen*. Maarssen, 1984, p. 119 and my review of this book (E.J. SLUIJTER, "Een nieuwe vertekening van het Rembrandt-beeld", in *Oud Holland*, CI, 1987, p. 291).

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 BOHLIN, *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, p. 60, nos. 125 and 126); these are part of the *Lascivie*-series.

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 Goltzius — are so utterly different in the type of nude portrayed, 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 a protruding belly, which is emphasized by a shadow at the underside. Rembrandt breaks away from the kind of stylization that was usual among the former generation of artists, but at the same time he seems to hark back to conventions of depicting the naked body by early Netherlandish painters. However, Rembrandt's insistence on the folds in the skin at her left shoulder and between her breasts, the twisted shape of the skinny arms and the pale face contorted by fear are entirely new and pointedly demonstrate a striving for lifelikeness as had never been tried before. The slightly open mouth refers to the specific moment that "...the monstrous creature loomed up, breasting the wide waves. The maiden shrieked"⁴⁵. The eyes turned sharply to the left accentuate Andromeda's expression of great anxiety. The effect of lifelikeness is enhanced by the handling of paint and the strong lighting. The rather thickly painted, but very controlled modelling of Andromeda's body makes her torso stand out against the freely handled and thinly painted dark background⁴⁶.

Everything is designed to enhance the image of vulnerability. The emotional appeal of this helpless naked girl is all the more emphasized

⁴⁵ OVID, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 689-691.

⁴⁶ The striking whiteness of the skin might have been inspired by the Dutch translation of Johannes Florianus, 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)⁴⁷. Seeing them together makes immediately clear how much Rubens's nudes, although the surface of the skin is treated with great lifelikeness, ultimately conformed to a classical ideal, which is always more masculine: with broader shoulders, lower waist, a shorter distance between breasts and navel, wider ribcage, 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 sky⁴⁸. 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 genius with 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 tearful Mary Magdalene, of which Rubens owned a version⁴⁹. 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 Natale Conti and Karel van Mander, tells us that the myth demonstrates how the innocent who keeps faith in God will be rescued in the end⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ See: J. KELCH, *Peter Paul Rubens. Kritischer Katalog der Gemälde im Besitz der Gemäldegalerie Berlin*. Berlin, 1978, p. 29-36.

⁴⁸ During the process of painting, Rubens diminished the size of Perseus and Pegasus. See KELCH, *Rubens, op cit.* (note 47), p. 30 and p. 31, fig. 20 (infrared photograph).

⁴⁹ K. L. BELKIN & F. HEALY, *A House of Art. Rubens as collector*, exh. cat., Antwerp, Rubenshuis & Rubenianum. Antwerp, 2004, p. 88-91.

⁵⁰ C. VAN MANDER, *Wtlegghingh op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ovidii Nasonis*, in *Het Schilder-Boeck*. Haarlem, 1603-1604, fol. 41r/v. See also Comes (here referred to in a later French translation): *Natalis Comes Mythologie ou explication des fables [...] traduite par I. de Montlyard [...] revue [...] par I. Baudoin*. Paris, 1627, p. 951 (VIII, 26).

Next to Rembrandt's nude, one realizes how much the fleshy body of Rubens's *Andromeda* conforms to classical proportions and to the traditional *contrapposto*. The body is even quite close (in reverse) to a drawing Rubens made after a statue of a *Venus Pudica* (Fig. 26)⁵¹. He even may have been inspired by the pose of a bacchante holding a tambourine above her head on a then well known Roman sarcophagus relief (Figs. 27 and 28)⁵². He used the same pose a few years earlier for the left goddess in a late painting of the *Judgement of Paris*, where it became quite a provocative posture of a woman undressing for the viewer⁵³. However, in the late *Andromeda* Rubens transformed the pose into the epitome of the innocent suffering of a maiden who is not only chained and threatened, but — worse for a chaste virgin — whose naked body is exposed against her will to the eyes of everyone who sees her.

This *Andromeda* indeed resembles Ovid's description: "he [Perseus] would have thought her a marble statue, save that her hair gently stirred in the breeze, and warm tears were trickling down her cheek", but a statue that has really come to life. It is a perfect demonstration of Rubens's approach of the antique, about which he himself wrote in *De Imitatione Statuarum*: "one must have a profound knowledge of ancient sculpture, but it is necessary to make judicious use of statues and above all, to avoid the taint of the appearance of stone. A painting should not look like coloured marble, but like flesh and blood, because the subtleties of shadow, luminosity and movement are central to the painter's art". This *Andromeda* is a colouristic highpoint in the depiction of seemingly living flesh, and the suggestion of soft, breathing skin has rarely been matched in the history of art. Had Rembrandt seen this breathtaking virtuoso performance in the art of colouring, he would surely have admitted defeat, although he might have reacted critically to the conventionalism of *Andromeda*'s "classical" proportions, her elegant

⁵¹ There are two drawings, both copies after a lost drawing that Rubens made of the *Venus Pudica*, now in the Uffizi in Florence. See M. VAN DER MEULEN, *Copies after the Antique (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XXIII)*. London, 1994, II, p. 71-74, nos. 58-59.

⁵² See P.P. BOBER & R.O. RUBINSTEIN, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*. London, 1986, p. 116-117, 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 enticing figure is Minerva. For an interesting and convincing interpretation, see F. HEALY, *Rubens and the Judgement of Paris: A Question of Choice*. Turnhout, 1997, p. 151. Fiona Healy dates the painting in the middle of the 1630's.

contrapposto and her pathetic upturned eyes, all of which he would have considered unnatural. For Rubens, who adhered to classical proportions and classical conventions of poses and gestures, the formal example of antiquity remained the standard to emulate. It exemplifies his ideology of selective imitation of nature as well as of classical sculpture and shows his recreation of what he saw as "the physically and, by implication, morally and intellectually superior past", as Jeffrey Muller formulated Rubens's attitude. Rembrandt's main concern, on the other hand, was to depict as convincingly as possible a plausible and lifelike expression of the emotions.

To Rembrandt, the explicit linking of the expression of emotion with an "after life" ideology must have been crucial. In a letter written in 1639 to Constantijn Huygens, he described his endeavours as observing *die meeste ende die natuereelste beweegelijkheid*, or "the most natural (e)motion", meaning: the most lifelike expression of emotion through natural movement of the human body⁵⁴. With these famous words he expressed clearly his major artistic goal and it was precisely this, that Huygens immediately noticed around 1629, probably shortly before Rembrandt made his *Andromeda*⁵⁵. Praising Rembrandt excessively in the autobiography of his youth, Huygens acutely underlined that Rembrandt's excellence was to be found in particular in the *affectuum vivacitas* and *vivida inventio*, or life-like expression of emotions and true to life inventions. That Rembrandt's portrayal of the passions meant to, and indeed managed to evoke a strong empathy in the viewer, was demonstrated by Huygens with his beautiful *ekphrasis* of Rembrandt's figure of the repenting Judas in *Judas Repentant, Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Imagining that one really sees what is happening before one's eyes, was certainly part of the established tradition of *ekphrasis*, but the context as well as the sheer enthusiasm with which

⁵⁴ For the letter, see H. GERSON, *Seven Letters by Rembrandt*. The Hague, 1961, p. 34. For discussion about the word "beweegelijkheid", see L. DE PAUW-DE VEEN, *De begrippen "schilder", "schilderij" en "schilderen" in de zeventiende eeuw*. Brussels, 1969, p. 202-212 and J.A. Emmens, "Review of H. Gerson, *Seven Letters by Rembrandt*, The Hague, 1961", in *Oud Holland*, LXXVII, 1963, p. 79-82.

⁵⁵ Huygens started his autobiography in May 1629, but he wrote the passage on Rembrandt and Lievens in the spring of 1631 (see Constantijn HUYGENS, *Mijn jeugd. Vertaling en toelichting door C.L. Heesakkers*. Amsterdam, 1987, p. 134). One can only guess when he visited them. Considering that he saw the painting *Judas Repentant, Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*, dated 1629, which, according to the Rembrandt-Corpus (J. BRUYN et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*. The Hague-Boston-London, 1982-2005, I, no. A 15), must have been started in the previous year, it was 1628 at the earliest.

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 reacted⁵⁶. Huygens explicitly focused on one figure only and emulated its emotional impact in words through an empathizing scrutiny of the depicted figure — gleaning 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 seen⁵⁷. 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"⁵⁸.

Huygens, the highly placed connoisseur, secretary of the Stadtholder, 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

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 SLUIJTER, *Een nieuwe vertekening*, op. cit. (note 43), p. 288-289.

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 43), p. 77; SLUIJTER, *Een nieuwe vertekening*, op. cit. (note 43), p. 288-89).

⁵⁸ *De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens door hemzelf beschreven*, translation A.H. Kan, Rotterdam, 1971, p. 79 and HUYGENS, *Mijn jeugd*, op. cit. (note 55), p. 86; J.A. WORP, "Constantijn Huygens over de schilders van zijn tijd", in *Oud Holland*, IX, 1891, p. 126: *Accedat Italia omnis, et quidquid ab ultima antiquitate speciosi superest aut mirandi [... here follows his description of Judas ...] omni saeculorem elegantiae oppono, et scire inscitissimos mortales cupio, qui, quod alibi insectati sumus, nihil effici magis quam dici hodiè autumant, quod non dictum prius et effectum vetustas viderit.*

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"⁵⁹.

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 pernicious⁶⁰. 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 beliefs⁶¹.

Emulating and outstripping 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 would have 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

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: Mengelingh*, diss. Amsterdam, 1990, p. 134-167. Apart from the autobiography, Huygens also extensively discusses this much later in the poem "Aen sommige predikers", from *Mengelingh* (1666), as well as in "La secretaire" 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 *Mengelingh* ("Aen sommige predikers").

of his hometown"⁶². And the means through which Rembrandt outstripped the Italians and the artists from antiquity was an unqualified 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 Italy⁶³.

Almost half a century later, Rembrandt's pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten characterized Rubens as the master of rich composition (*rijklijke ordinantien*) and Rembrandt as the master of passions of the soul (*lijdingen des gemoeds*) 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)⁶⁴. Van Hoogstraten's discussion of this concept might have reflected lessons learned from his own master. He writes extensively about the concept of "beweeglijkheid", the same word Rembrandt employed in the letter to Constantijn Huygens

⁶² *De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens*, op. cit. (note 58), p. 79-80; HUYGENS, *Mijn jeugd*, op. cit. (note 55), p. 86. WOP, *Constantijn Huygens*, op. cit. (note 58), p. 126: *Aio enim, nulli aut PROTEGENI, aut APELLI, aut PARRHASIO in mentem venisse nec, si redeant, venire posse quae (obstupesco referens) Adolescens, Batauis, molitor, imberbis uno in homine collegit singula, et uniuersa expressit. — Macte vero, mi REMBRANDTI, non Ilium in Italiam tanti, non omnem Asiam portasse fuit, quanti Graeciae et Italiae summam laudem in Batavos pertractam ab homine Batauo, urbis patriae vix adhuc pomoeria egresso.*

⁶³ WOP, *Constantijn Huygens*, op. cit. (note 58), p. 130; *De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens*, op. cit. (note 58), p. 82; HUYGENS, *Mijn jeugd*, op. cit. (note 55), p. 89.

⁶⁴ S. VAN HOOGSTRAATEN, *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst*. Rotterdam, 1678, p. 75. On Van Hoogstraten's use of rhetoric and the relation of these terms with traditional rhetoric, see T. WESTSTEIJN, *De Zichtbare Wereld. Samuel van Hoogstraten's kunsttheorie en de legitimering van de schilderkunst in de zeventiende eeuw*, diss., Amsterdam, 2005, chapter IV and T. WESTSTEIJN, "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. Essays for Ernst van de Wetering*. Amsterdam, 2005, p. 111-133; Van Hoogstraten derives this concept from Junius, who speaks of the *partes pingendi*, a direct translation of *partes orationis*. See also S. GROHÉ, *Rembrandts mythologische Historien*, Cologne, 1996, p. 149, who earlier remarked upon Hoogstraten's characterization of Rembrandt as the painter of the *lijdinge des gemoeds*.

when describing for what he was striving. Quoting Horace, Van Hoogstraten applies the poet's well known *dictum* that a poem has to enlist the reader's empathy, when writing: "It is not enough that an image is beautiful; there has to be a certain *beweeglijkheit* (movement that expresses emotion) that exerts power over the viewer. As Horace sings about poetry: 'A beautiful poem will not lightly move me, but friendliness can transport heart and soul. One laughs, one cries, and the spectator will follow: so if you want me to cry, show me crying'. This is also true for painters: they do not move the soul, if they take no heed of this *beweeglijkheit*"⁶⁵. Van Hoogstraten also gave the advice (and one seems to hear Rembrandt in it): "if one has a single figure of many together in mind, one should see to it that one shows only one instantaneous (e)motion (*oogenblikke beweeging*) which expresses in essence what occurs in the story. [...] So that the work unequivocally involves the viewer as if he were one of the bystanders, and will make him frightened when shown a brutal deed, or that he is pleased when seeing something cheerful, or moved with compassion when seeing that someone suffers harm, [...]"⁶⁶. The depiction of a sudden occurrence, implying a

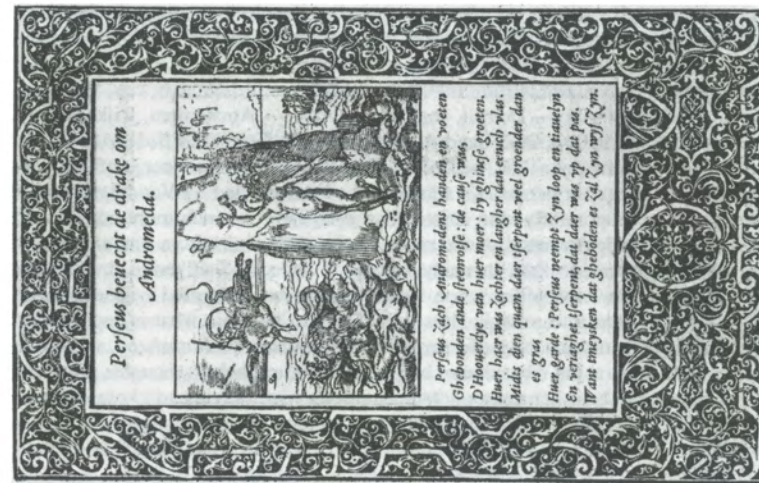
⁶⁵ VAN HOOGSTRENTEN, *Inleyding*, op. cit. (note 64), p. 292: 't Is niet genoeg, dat een beelt schoon is, maer daer moet een zekere beweeglijkheit in zijn, die macht over d'aenschouwers heeft; Gelijk Horatius van het dichten zingt: 'Een schoon gedicht zal mij niet licht beroeren, / Maer vriendlijkheit kan hert en ziel vervoeren. / Men lacche, of ween', d'aenschouwer raekt op't spoor: / Dus wilt gy dat ik schreye, schrey my voor.' Zoo is't ook met de Schilders, zy beroeren 't gemoed niet, zooze deeze beweeglijkheit overslaen. To do this well, one needs *dansleyding* (literally dance-directing), by which he means the right manner to depict natural and graceful movement. Grohé has already quoted several of Van Hoogstraten's passages on the depiction of the passions in his chapter "De lijdningen des gemoeds" (GROHÉ, *Rembrandts mythologische Historien*, op. cit. (note 64), p. 149-156. See extensively WESTSTEIJN, *Rembrandt and Rhetoric*, op. cit. (note 4), p. 116-119, who connects *beweeglijkheid* with the rhetorical concept of *energeia*.

⁶⁶ VAN HOOGSTRENTEN, *Inleyding*, op. cit. (note 64), p. 116: *Het zy nu, datmen een enkel beelt, of veele te zamen voor hebbe, men moet toezien, datmen alleenlijk een oogenblikke beweeging, 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 rechtvaardige daed zich vernoegt bevinde. Hier vereyscht dan voor al, dat de doeningen of beweegingen des lichaems met de lydingen des gemoeds overeenkomen, al waert zelf in byna stilstaende vertooningen.* Van Hoogstraten also uses in this context the words *enkel en eenweezich* (single and with one characteristic [e]motion) as a requirement, again quoting Horace. On the "single, immediate action" (*enkele en oogenblikke daet*) as Van Hoogstraten writes in the margin at this point, see extensively WESTSTEIJN, *Rembrandt and Rhetoric*, op. cit. (note 64), p. 116-119, who connects *eenwezig, eenstemmich* and *oogenblikkig* with the rhetorical concepts of *perspicuitas* and *evidentia*.

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 thirties⁶⁷.

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.

⁶⁷ This is, as a matter of fact, something different than the concept of *staetveranderinge* or *peripeteia* 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, Rijkmuseum, 1980-81. Washington, 1980, p. 26-27 and A. BLANKERT, *Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680), Rembrandt's pupil*. Doornspijk, 1982, p. 34-36). In the first place, the concept of the Aristotelian *staetveranderinge*, or *peripeteia*, was described and applied by Vondel only as of the 1650's, but more importantly: the Aristotelian *peripeteia* 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 Senecan-Scaligerian drama. The reversal of mood in the Aristotelian sense should always be connected with *agnitio* (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 choose between two evils. See E.J. SLUIJTER, "Rembrandt's Bathseba and the Conventions of a Seductive Theme", in A. JENSEN ADAMS, *Rembrandt's Bathseba Reading King David's Letter*. Cambridge-New York, 1998, p. 84-86.



1. Bernard Salomon,
Andromeda Chained to a Rock, woodcut.



2. Virgil Solis, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*, woodcut.



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



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



5. Jan Saenredam after Hendrick Goltzius, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*, engraving.



6. Jacob Matham after Hendrick Goltzius, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*, engraving.



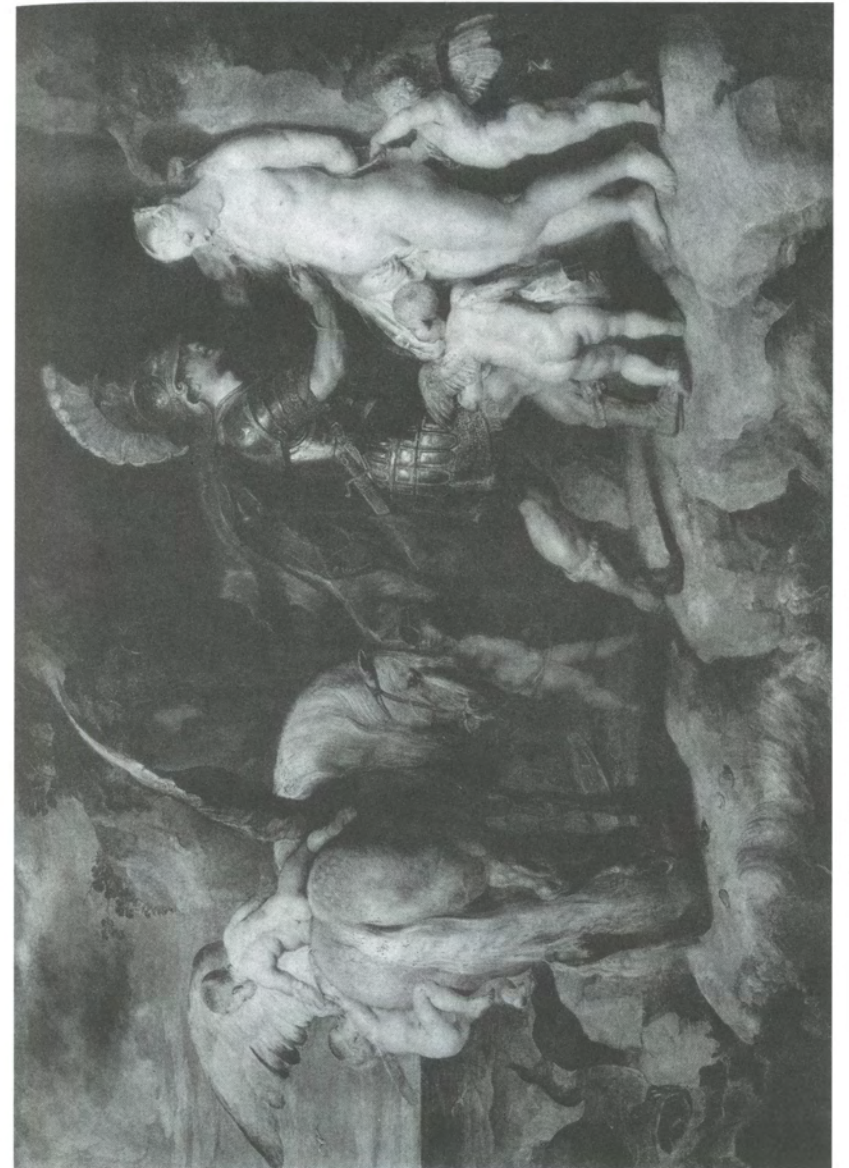
7. Jacques de Gheyn II after Karel van Mander, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*, engraving.



8. Crispin van de Passe, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*, engraving.



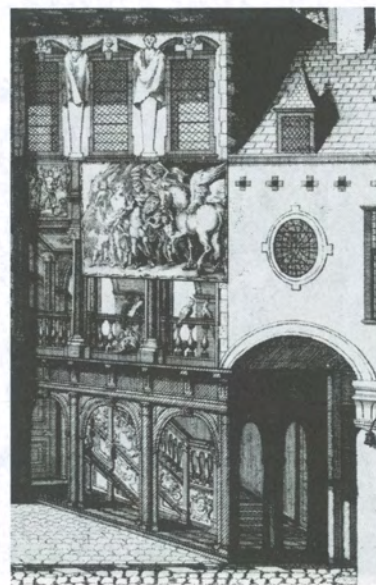
13. Peter Paul Rubens, *Andromeda Rescued by Perseus*. St. Petersburg, Hermitage.



14. Peter Paul Rubens, *Andromeda Rescued by Perseus*.
Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie.



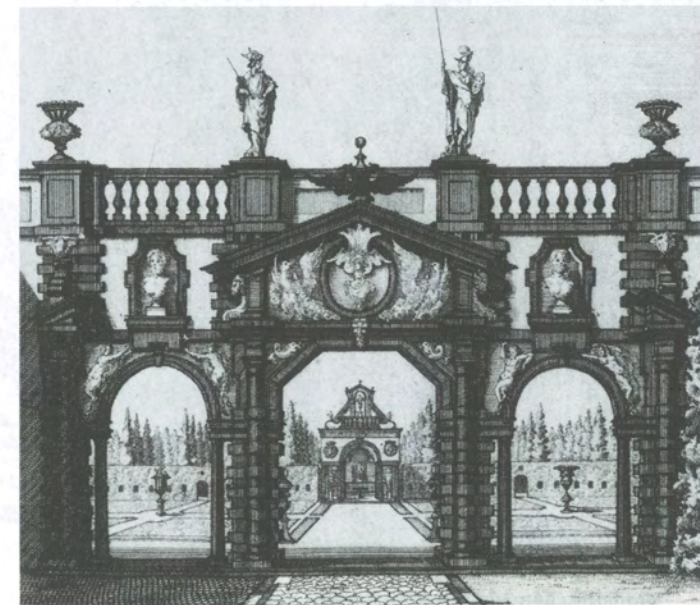
15. Jacobus Harrewijn after J. van Croes,
View of the Rubens House, engraving.



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



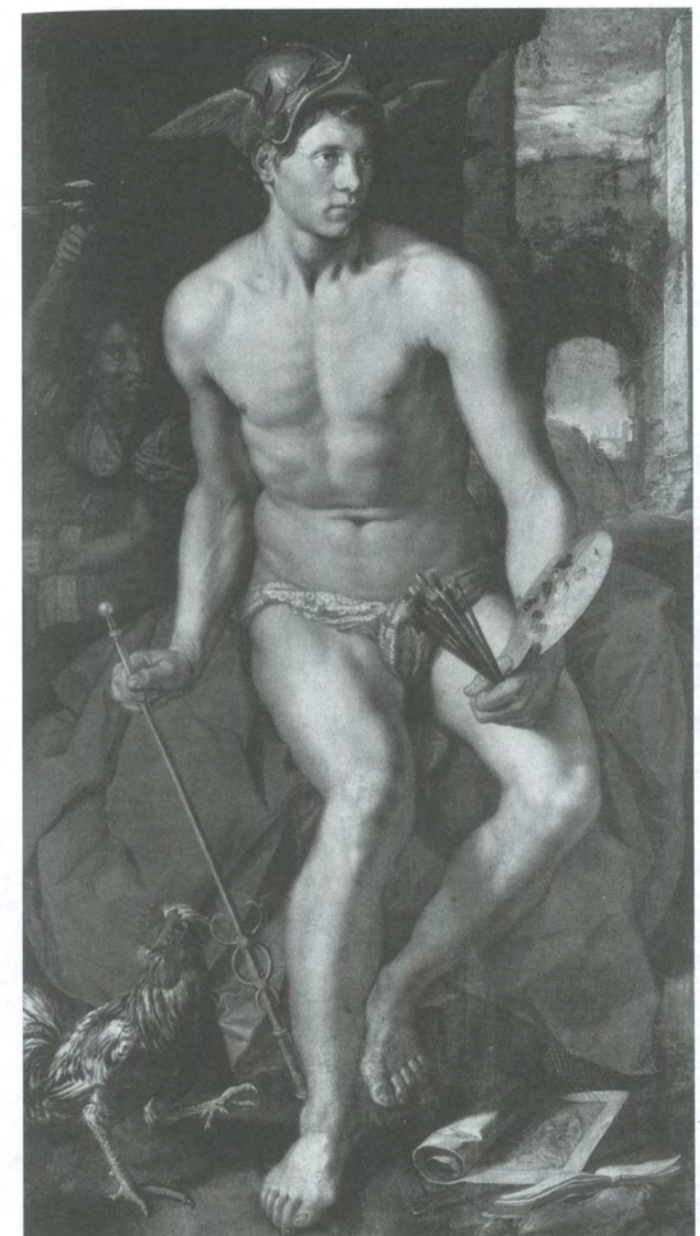
17. Jacobus Harrewijn after J. van Croes, *View of the Rubens House: courtyard seen towards the entrance to the garden*, engraving.



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



19. Jan Muller after Bartholomeus Spranger,
Perseus Armed by Minerva and Mercury, engraving.



20. Hendrick Goltzius, *Mercury*. The Hague, Mauritshuis,
on loan to the Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem.



21. Hendrick Goltzius, *Minerva*. The Hague, Mauritshuis, on loan to the Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem.



22. Peter Paul Rubens, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*. Present whereabouts unknown.



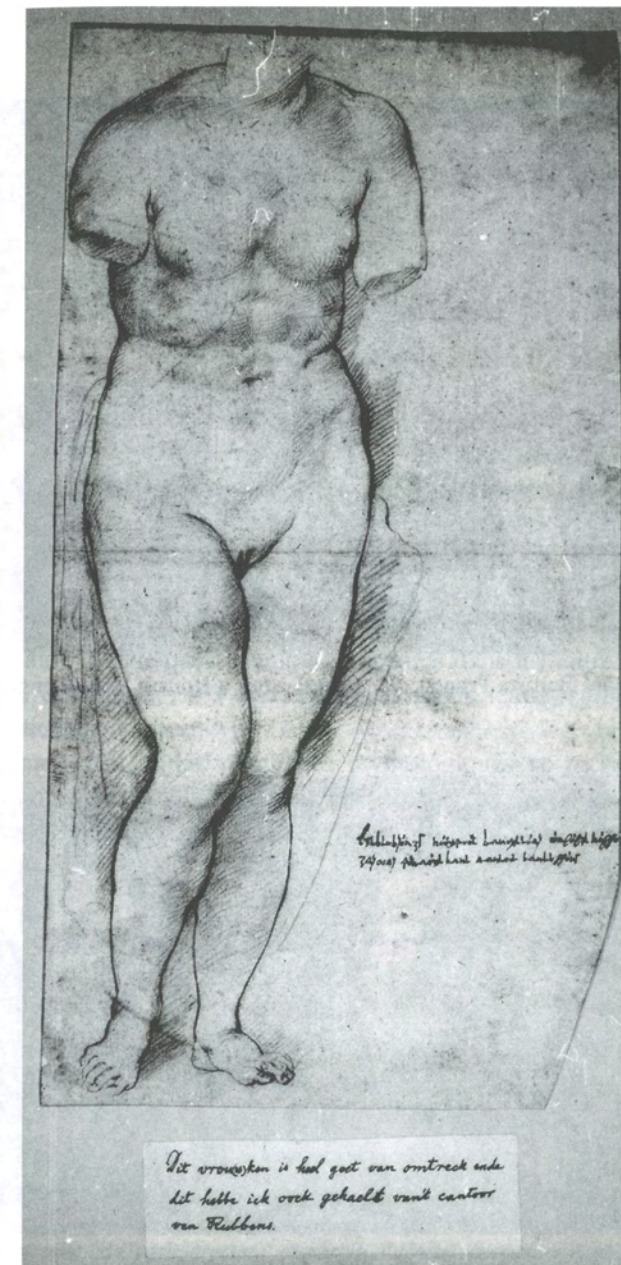
23. Giulio Fontana after Titian, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*, engraving.



24. Rembrandt, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*. The Hague, Mauritshuis.



25. Peter Paul Rubens, *Andromeda Chained to a Rock*. Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie.



26. Copy after Rubens, *Torso of a Venus Pudica*, from Rubens Cantoor. Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst.



27. Giovanni Battista Franco, *Bacchanal*, after a Roman Relief, engraving.



28. Idem, detail.

Rudolf De Smet

**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 Mallarius qualifie son correspondant de "Hercules Gallicus"; ou, s'il préfère, de "Hercules Batavus"¹. Un homme frêle, d'une santé fragile, comparé à Hercule, le Rambo 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'épistolographie 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 limitons à la mythologie gréco-romaine. Bien que Erasme lui-même estime dans *De Copia Verborum* que les *exempla* peuvent être cueillis de n'importe quelle culture, de n'importe quelle époque ou n'importe quelle couche sociale²,

¹ Desiderius ERASMUS, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, in Percy S. ALLEN, Helen M. ALLEN & Heathcote W. GARROD, eds., Oxford, 1906-1958 (ALLEN, *EE* par la suite), IX, p. 117.

² *Horum igitur ut vim quam maximam maximeque variam comparare et in promptu habere conueniet, ita varie tractare oportebit. Varietas exemplorum ab ipso genere nonnunquam perpenditur. Sunt enim et antefacta et antedicta; et publicae gentium consuetudines in exemplis sumuntur; et a discriminibus autorum, puta ab historicis, a poetis, et ex his a comicis, tragicis, epigrammaticis, heroicis, bucolicis; a philosophis, et horum variae sunt sectae; a theologis, a sacris voluminibus; a diuersitate nationum, quod genus sunt alia Romanorum exempla et instituta, alia Graecorum, et inter Graecos, alia Lacedaemoniorum, alia Cretensium, alia Atheniensium, item alia Afrorum, Hebraeo-*