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Iohannes Malbodius Pingebat: The Poetry of Jan Gossaert's Painting

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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By Katherine A. Sharrard

Jan Gossaert's travels to Rome with his patron, Philip of Burgundy, perhaps did not seem monumental from the start. His career in court painting continued after his return to the Netherlands, and the shared antique interest of artist and patron resulted in the development of a new style of *poesia*, in which the artist is prized for his ability to create the kinds of subjects related to epic and lyric poetry. The artist does not create a scene from a prior poem; he devises a new pictorial poem. Gossaert's paintings would be different from the Italian court paintings; although they were often similar in subject they were executed differently, with heightened attention to the nude figure, which resulted in an increased sense of tangibility. In focusing on Gossaert's *Neptune and Amphitrite, Danae,* and *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin*, I aim to clarify what exactly Gossaert's innovation was. The description of "the Apelles of our time," has proven to be very apt in this instance, as Gossaert proved himself not only a master of the technical but the poetic side of painting.

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Contents

Introduction

It is recorded that Jan Gossaert traveled to Rome with his patron Philip of Burgundy in 1508, although not much of Gossaert's early life and career is known. He was born in Maubeuge and became a master painter in Antwerp in 1503. It is not until Philip becomes his patron that there is a steady record of his life and work, in a large part due to the writing of Gerardus Geldenhauer, Philip's secretary. A poet and classicist, Geldenhauer wrote extensively on the art of Gossaert, and praised him as the "Apelles of our time."[1] Although this moniker was not unique to Gossaert, it was applied to him not only for his ingenuity and skill but also his subject matter. Gossaert was known for his use of the nude form, especially in conjunction with mythical subjects, which was unusual in the Low Countries. Although the use of nude figures was popular in Italy, this usage was less common in the Netherlands; indeed only Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* included nude figures on as large a scale as Gossaert's.[2] Because northern art in the fifteenth century was typically focused on portraiture or religious subject matter, nude figures primarily appear in religious contexts, such as altarpieces, portraying the Fall of Man or the Last Judgement.

As a master painter in Antwerp prior to his association with Philip, Gossaert created many religious works, and among his early images of Adam and Eve the example of other northern painters, primarily Dürer, can be discerned. In the Lugano *Adam and Eve*, Gossaert closely imitates Dürer's 1504 *Adam and Eve* engraving, and the figures

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[1] Ariane Mensger, *Jan Gossaert: Die* Niederländische *Kunst zu Beginn der Neuzeit* (Berlin: Reimer, 2002): 110.

[2] The Adam and Even panels in the *Ghent Altarpiece* depict nearly life-size figures, and for the 84 years until Jan Gossaert's *Neptune and Amphitrite* no other painter would attempt this. See: Stephanie Schrader, "Gossaert's *Neptune and Amphitrite* and the Body of the Patron," Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 58 (2007): 41.

seem small and almost insubstantial when compared with his later works on the same subject. The nude forms of Adam and Eve in the Providence drawing demonstrate the influence of the ancient nudes that Gossaert studied in Italy, especially in the strange and unrealistic rippling muscles in Adam's side. Trained in the Northern tradition, Gossaert returned from Rome with a new style that blended the muscular and beautiful nude forms of ancient Rome with the precise rendering of surface appearance typical of Northern art.

Because Gossaert's work was so affected by his situation, it is important to identify the historical context within which he worked. During the 15th century it became popular for German and Netherlandish artists to travel to Rome and study the ancient masterpieces, but when Gossaert traveled with his patron in 1508 it was an opportunity not many had. His primary patron, Philip of Burgundy, was the bastard son of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, and as such was accommodated to court life with artists and humanists. First as admiral of the Burgundian fleet and later as Bishop of Utrecht, Philip was in positions of power and wealth that allowed him to continue to live in high style. As one of the bastard sons of Philip the Good, Philip of Burgundy continued to serve as an ambassador in many ways, continuing the Burgundian family line that was trusted by the people, and the Burgundian court life famed for its literary, pictorial, and sumptuary culture.

The Burgundian court at its peak of wealth and power was famous for its patronage of the arts, and Gossaert, through Philip, became one of these artists who had the privilege of a permanent position. Long before Gossaert painted for Philip, another Philip became the Duke of Burgundy. While wealthy nobles had long been patrons of the arts, it is clear that Philip the Bold considered himself a serious collector and connoisseur.

The Duke was extremely wealthy and his extravagance is recorded in descriptions of his clothes (embroidered with ewes and swans and trimmed in expensive fur), his jewelry (the balas ruby was his favorite stone), and also fantastic tapestries for both his wife Margaret of Flanders and himself.[3] Philip placed a premium on skillful execution as well as exceptional erudition, and undertook such projects as the Chartreuse de Champmol, which resulted in making Dijon an artistic center. Philip was very interested in the tomb where he would be buried, and his wife became involved in the production of their portraits, done by Claus Sluter.[4] Artisans who worked closely with the court could become quite wealthy and often gained enough respect and wealth to advance the careers of their family members, even those who were not artists.[5] Because of the opportunity for steady employment and possibility of social advancement, a position as a court artist would have been extremely appealing to someone who sought access to higher social circles.

Court artists helped to maintain the patron's desired image. The Dukes of Burgundy also used art to demonstrate their wealth and power to their constituents and other rulers. A series of tapestries depicting the *History of Gideon* commissioned by Philip the Good was so beautiful and richly embroidered that when brought to Paris in 1461 they helped Philip upstage the newly crowned Louis XI.[6] For his son, Philip of

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[3] Joseph Calmette, *The Golden Age of Burgundy: The Magnificent Dukes and their Courts,* trans Doreen Weightman, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962): 65-69.

[4] Sherry C M Lindquist, "'The Will of a Princely Patron' and Artists at the Burgundian Court," In: *Artists at Court: Image-Making and Identity 1300-1550,* (Boston: Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum, 2004): 48.

[5] Claus Sluter brought his nephew from the Netherlands to take over his job when he retired, and Jean de Marville's daughter married a minor official who later became receiver general of Burgundy, probably through her connections. See: Lindquist, "'The Will of a Princely Patron' and Artists at the Burgundian Court," 52.

[6] Philip covered the façade of the Hôtel d'Artois where he was housed with the *History of Gideon* and *History of Alexander the Great* tapestries, see: Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "Portable Propaganda- Tapestries as Princely Metaphors at the Courts of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold," *Art Journal* 48:2 (1989): 125.

Burgundy, the patronage of art and artists would not only be a long-standing tradition in his life but a known device to manipulate the impression he made on others. By employing Gossaert, among others, to record his image for posterity and decorate his various homes, Philip could portray himself as learned, wealthy, and powerful. It was Philip who had a university education, not Gossaert, so much of the ancient subject matter would have been more familiar to the patron than the artist. However, a knowledge of the subject is not all that is required to paint a *poesia*, the subject matter in which Gossaert was celebrated as an innovator- a certain level of artistic invention was necessary. A *poesia* represents a new kind of artistic invention in painting, in which an artist is prized for his ability to create the kinds of subjects related to epic and lyric poetry. The artist does not create a scene from a prior poem; he devises a new pictorial poem. To undertake these paintings they would need to work jointly with a learned patron or scholar-collaborator.

We will never know exactly what Gossaert saw when he went to Rome, other than what he recorded in his drawings. Drawings of sculptures such as a Standing Apollo and Standing Hercules show attention to musculature and perspective; a drawing of the Colosseum shows Gossaert's fascination with crumbling ruins. It is obvious from his later work that he was influenced by ancient sculpture and architecture as well as contemporary Italian painting based on the antique. Mythological painting using nude figures was already established in Italian court circles, and painting based in a new kind of poetic invention had appeared in Florence, Mantua, Ferrara, and Rome. Like a poet, a painter was prized for his ability not just to replicate nature but also to devise the kinds of subjects associated with epic and lyric poetry. A perfect example of this is Botticelli's

Primavera, which according to an inventory from 1598 was located in the dining room of the Medici villa at Castello.[7] As an early Italian example of painted poetic invention, the *Primavera* may very well have been a model for later Italian and Netherlandish painters alike. It draws from knowledge of the writings of Ovid, Horace, Lucretius, Seneca and Politian, combining mythic elements from the *Fasti, Carmina, De rerum natura, De beneficiis, Sylvae*, and *Stanze per la giostra*, on the basis of the ancient Roman agrarian calendar.[8] The result is a new poetic fiction, not illustrative of a prior poem, but instead constitutive of a new pictorial poem. Certainly someone without extensive education would have had a great deal of trouble reading this painting, which depicts Zephyr, God of the west wind, grasping Chloris, nymph of bare earth, at the far left. As described in Ovid, the rape of Chloris results in her turning into Flora, Goddess of garden flowers. However, Ovid does not describe the transformation; Botticelli surpasses him and shows the metamorphosis in true Ovidian style. Flowers are expelled from Chloris's mouth, blending into the skirts of Flora next to her. Beside this transformation is Venus, standing at center, with Cupid flying over her head. The three graces dance next to her, clad in gauzy drapery rather than appearing nude, the conventional way in which they are portrayed. This can only be clarified by their appearance with Mercury, at the far right. When described as being in his company in Horace and Seneca, the Graces are clothed in loose and transparent gowns[9]. The appearance of Mercury is puzzling but may be

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[7] Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and the Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992): 20.

[8] Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and the Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent,* 24.

[9] Horace, *Carmina,* 1.30*;* Seneca, *De beneficiis,* 1.iii.2ff. Translations from Charles Dempsey, p 34-5. Horace's poem asks Venus to come to the Sabine Hills with Cupid, the Graces in "girdles all unloosed", the Nymphs, Youth and Mercury. Seneca describes why they would be wearing "loosened and transparent gowns," and describes them as with Mercury.

explained by references in the Georgic poetry of Horace, who writes about Mercury with the Graces and connects him to the agrarian calendar whose seasons it describes. In this early calendar, Mercury is the God of May, who presides over seeding and sowing. It is his role to stir the spring winds into action, which he does with his staff in this painting. It is he who awakens the winds, including Zephryr, who then rapes Chloris, making the bare earth flower- as such, the painting is cyclical. At the center of the cycle, Venus represents many things: the flowering spring, and the generative power of nature; love not only in the sense of springtime fertility but at a universal level.

The theme of love is further underscored by the way the goddesses are depicted. Their flowing blonde hair, high foreheads, small noses and dark brows all correspond to the way women are depicted in Italian love poetry. By alluding to these other poetic sources Botticelli is drawing a comparison of his own work with theirs. Just as Petrach described his love for Laura, Dante wrote about Beatrice, and Politian about Simonetta, so too Botticelli has fashioned a poetic image of the beloved. These poets represented and effectively invented their form of love- that of the love for an unattainable yet close woman who was virtuous and gentle. When Dante writes in *La Divina Commedia*, "Love, which absolves no one beloved from loving,"[10] as Francesca's explanation for her adultery, he explains in a line the idea that no one can completely reject the love of another person. The idealized women who were the focus of love poetry at this time may have been beyond the reach of the young poets who paid homage to them, but if the man was virtuous in character, person and manner, the woman was honor bound to return the

[10] Dante Aligheri, *The Inferno*, Trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000): 97.

love that was given to her.[11] Painters who draw on the imagery of love poetry also imply its message and characterization of love at the same time as they compare their own art to that of poets. Botticelli painted his female figures in the guise of the famous poetic heroines of medieval and renaissance poetry, echoing their description and new form of love inside a mythological setting. The poets described a renovation of love, and by utilizing their imagery Botticelli is alluding to the fact that he has done the same thing. His Venus at the center of the painting is not entirely sensual, poetic, or Christianized; instead she is a hybrid figure.[12] Botticelli did not recreate the poetic ideal of Petrarch's Laura, nor did he paint Beatrice, who is the idea of Christian love and charity. She is essentially antique and at the same time contemporary because of her attire and setting; the orange trees that fill her garden are a device that alludes to the Medici. The invention of Botticelli is what elevated his painting beyond historical or mythical into the realm of a poetic fiction, albeit a painted one.

Another common type of poetic painting is designed to portray various characteristics of the patron's virtues. In the *studiolo* of Isabella d'Este, for example, there was a series of seven paintings that when read together provided a stimulus for conversation; these complex images were designed around the theme of the *studiolo* as a place for engaging the mind. The paintings *Mars and Venus* and *Pallas and the Vices,* by Andrea Mantegna, represent two such mythological paintings; based in humanistic

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[11] The actual existence of women like Laura is contested, but there is the possibility that the kind of relationship described by this poetry came out of the system of patronage. Young poets in the houses of their patrons had no focus of their energy other than the wife of the house; causing this kind of unrequited relationship. However, if a woman is as perfectly virtuous as described by Petrarch and Dante, she could never be so cruel as to reject the love of a young man and would return it out of kindness (although not physically). See: Ralph G Williams, "Love and Death in Medieval and Renaissance Literature," In: *Images of Love and Death in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art,* (Michigan: University of Michigan Publications, 1976): 20.

[12] Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and the Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, 140-141.

scholarship, they represent the gods and goddesses in a way that would become canonical in the Renaissance.[13] Yet more than that, they are truly intellectual paintings, suited for a *studiolo* in the sense that they inspire discussion and thought on culture as the object of ancient humanistic learning. *Mars and Venus* defines the art of *poesia* in that it is not just a fable depicted in pictorial form, but a fable about fables. By showing the Muses and Apollo (Gods of poetry) alongside Mars, Venus and Vulcan (the subjects of a familiar poetic fable) Mantegna has made poetry the subject of his painting. The viewer is supposed to recognize and analyze these separate elements of poetry and decide who the work together. The painting can be examined ironically, from the perspective that it depicts a scandalous joke, or as a profound allegory of concord and discord joining to make harmony. The unfamiliar correlation of the story of Mars and Venus's adultery with Apollo and the Muses stimulates commentary and interpretation. This painting would allow Isabella and her circle of friends to pleasurably display their knowledge of humanist topics. It is a strange juxtaposition to paint Mars and Venus together, alluding to the sexually explicit story with a negative connotation, with the Muses, who are symbols of chastity and propriety. Because of the unfamiliar combination of themes the painting asks the beholder to make sense of it.[14]

The Muses here are shown at the Hippocrene spring, which as their source suggests that they are being shown in their original conception as pure. Other illustrations of the Muses did not always represent them as such, which was for some a

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[13] Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) :2.
[14] Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este,* 124.

problem of authenticity.[15] Many artists chose to illustrate the Muses in a lascivious context, causing a debate about which way they should properly be depicted. The idea of a source, or fountain of origin, is one that is important for the painting as a whole; the mythological painting examines the theme of origin in myths. In the grotto, Vulcan hangs a cluster of black and white grapes, referring specifically to Pliny's *Natural History* in which he records the oldest instructions for rasin-making. In this process, they are hung in a blacksmith's forge. Pliny mentions that as there are no older instructions for making raisins, and that these directions are close to the origin of things.[16] The *Natural History* was a canonical text, a compilation of various data about nature that underscored the role of nature as the supreme creator. Nature, as chronicled by Pliny, was not chaste or tame, but extravagant and fertile, and in this respect comparable to Venus. The moral authority of the Muses and Apollo is contrasted by Mantegna with Mars and Venus, who exemplify the natural passion that conquers rational morals. Even the actual earth has a fecundity that allows it to create the stone arch that supports Mars and Venus, as well as lush greenery, populated by rabbits, the invariable symbol of fertility. Both poetic creativity and natural creativity are compared side-by-side and thus analogized. Poetry stems from the natural world, after all, and in the story of Mars and Venus the principle of uniting forces to bring forth harmony is illustrated. This kind of poetic fiction in visual form was being produced in many parts of Italy, as demonstrated by Botticelli in Florence and Mantegna in Mantua. In Italy, painters and poets had begun

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[15] There were many depictions of the muses as sensual and erotic prior to the mid-15th century, when they began to be "chastened" and returned to their natural state. See: Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este, 127.*

[16] Pliny, *Natural History* XIV, 5, Trans. H Rackham, (Cambridge and London, 1968): Vol. 4, 217.

to compete in the same field of invention, and Gossaert would take this idea with him when he returned to the Netherlands.

After their trip to Rome, it seems likely that both the patron and artist evinced a strong interest in the nude figure as a poetic device in mythical paintings. Gossaert did not simply copy the works he saw in Italy; he painted his own poetic works that often happen to involve classical figures, as directed by Philip. While his earlier nude figures are reminiscent of the slim nudes painted by Jan van Eyck, or the canonically perfect nudes of Dürer, after his return they begin to display the bulky, muscular quality associated with Michelangelo and Italy. He becomes much more interested in musculature, often to an extreme degree as in his Providence drawing. His figures show a new association of physicality with supernatural quality. From here forward, both mythical gods and goddesses and Christian figures are portrayed in a way that uses physical grandeur to indicate spiritual perfection. The mythical male figures, such as Neptune or Hercules, are depicted on a scale that is entirely beyond human with imposing, bulky shoulders and muscles that show power and virility. Not only are Neptune and Hercules depicted as densely muscular, but the Virgin and Christ also get a fleshier, more robust treatment which is at odds with many of the Virgins produced by other artists in the Low Countries, who emulated the contemporary female fashion for slim, oval-shaped faces and high foreheads. The added bulk to his women does not make them imposing the way it does the men; rather, it makes them seem younger and less daunting. Gossaert's Madonnas have a softness in their round faces that when combined with their luminous complexion and shining, perfectly wavy hair gives a sense of youth and approachability along with other-worldliness. The fleshiness of his mythic female

nudes adds sensuality to their figures by literally increasing the amount of figure and skin displayed, making them more tactile in appearance. He is also interested in minute details of the form, paying as much attention to body hair, teeth and skin as his colleagues would pay to fabrics and mirrors. The striving after an effect of tangibility, the appeal to the tactile sense, may be discerned as well in the poetic invention of mythological subjects that also produce other sensory effects. Gossaert used this flexibility to create a wide variety of works both secular and religious for Philip.

Neptune and Amphitrite

Part of Gossaert's work for Philip was to contribute to Philip's overall program to create a humanist court at his residences in Souburg and Wijk bij Duurstede. Before being named Bishop of Utrecht in 1517, Philip was an Admiral of the Burgundian fleet, and he decorated his house in Souburg with nautical themes. It was for this house that Gossaert painted *Neptune and Amphitrite*, the first painting in which he explicitly connects himself with ancient painters. At the base of the platform on which Neptune and Amphitrite stand, Gossaert has included an inscription reading "Iohannes +Malbodius + Pingebat + 1516," which is the first time he uses the Latinzied "Malbodius" rather than "Gossaert" in his signature. He is imitating the great Greek painter Apelles, who, according to Pliny, signed his works "Apelles Faciebat." Apelles was not only famed for his skill as a painter, he also worked at the court of Alexander the Great. When Gossaert compared himself to Apelles in the *Neptune and Amphitrite* he is also comparing Philip to Alexander. Although Michelangelo, Dürer and Hans Holbein also signed their paintings with "faciebat" or "pingebat," because of Gossaert's subject

matter and style he is seeking the status of the famed ancient painter, indeed attempting to become the modern day Apelles in his subject matter.

A painting of Neptune was suitable because it fit into the nautical theme of the palace and served as a comparison to Philip. At the time, Philip was in a very important political position, and worked to assist various Burgundian allies. His efforts on their behalf resulted in his being given full maritime jurisdiction over both wartime affairs and civil issues.[17] One such task was escorting Isabella of Austria, the daughter of the Emperor Maximillian, to Denmark for her marriage to Christian II. The marriage was a political alliance that allowed Burgundian control of the Sound, increasing trade.[18] Philip also traveled with Prince Charles on his tour through the Netherlands in 1515, which was intended to introduce him as the new ruler. Philip's presence connected Charles firmly to their shared Burgundian blood, giving Charles more acceptance among the people. Philip's mastery of his role as political leader and admiral made for a logical comparison with Neptune, who was both political King and physical ruler of the ocean.

Philip's classical education makes the comparison all the more obvious. Erasmus's text on rhetoric, *De Copia*, gives examples of various comparisons that would be appropriate to praise great men. Included in this book was a section specifically focusing on characteristics of mythological figures.[19] As Philip strove to create a humanist court at Souburg, his intended guests would have understood this painting.

Gossaert's theme in this painting appears to be aggrandizing Neptune (and thus Philip), making him overwhelm the small, domed niche he has been placed in. This

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[17] Louis Sicking, *Neptune and the Netherlands: State, Economy, and War at Sea in the Renaissance* (Leinden:Brill, 2004): 72-77.
[18] Louis Sicking, *Neptune and the Netherlands: State, Economy, and War at Sea in the Renaissance* (Leinden:Brill, 2004): 209-213.
[19] Erasmus, *Literary Education and Writings 2,* trans. CR Thompson (Toronto, 1978): 626.

painting emphasizes Philip's role as a leader and godlike man by comparing him to both Neptune and Alexander. The setting is ancient in style, a pastiche of classical elements including columns, bucrania and a dome. The detailed decorations could have been copied from multiple locations in Rome, and the level of detail does indicate that Gossaert actually studied them after life. The Basilica Aemelia has similar columns to those depicted by Gossaert, a kind of strange Doric column with capitals.[20] Vitruvius mentions that temples should be designed to reflect the qualities of the god they are dedicated to; a sturdy Doric column would reflect Neptune better than something more ornamental.[21] Neptune's trident actually rises above the capitals of the columns, continuing into the archivolt of the room. The way the temple-niche impinges upon the figures also monumentalizes them, making them appear larger than they would in open space. The backdrop curtain fails entirely to frame Neptune and Amphitrite, making them seem almost too large for the pedestal on which they stand.

The figures of Neptune and Amphitrite show clear similarities to Dürer's *Adam and Eve*, as both are classicized nudes with Vitruvian proportions. Dürer drew from such ancient works as the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Medici Venus* when designing his print, and focused on proportion and geometry in the position and form of his nudes.[22] This print was well known-and widely circulated, exposing other artists to Vitruvian ideals of the human form. He also signed his full name in Latin, "Albertus Durer Noricus Faciebat,"

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[20] Other possible ancient monuments that have this kind of column include the Arcus Agusti and Temple of Hercules Victor. See: S. Herzog, "Tradition and Innovation in Gossaert's Neptune and Amphitrite and Danae," Bulletin Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen 19 (1968): 29-30. Herzog also suggests in her earlier Ph.D. dissertation that the columns may be ionic. See: S. Herzog, "Jon Gossaert, Called Mabuse (ca. 1478-1532), A Study of His Chronology with a Catalogue of His Works," Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1968, 82.

[21] The floor also appears as if it is covered in shallow water making an appropriate home for Neptune. See: S. Herzog, "Tradition and Innovation in Gossaert's Neptune and Amphitrite and Danae," 33.

[22] Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 85-86.

signaling his return to ancient forms and ideals.[23] The signature also importantly emphasizes Dürer's pride of being from the north. Whether or not he was borrowing from Italy, he was still "Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg."[24] His use of the imperfect verb "faciebat" is also noteworthy; instead of indicating a completed task it implies that it is ongoing. Pliny makes the claim that none other than Apelles used the Latin imperfect in his signature; Dürer, Apelles, and Gossaert, who also uses the imperfect tense, may be indicating that their artwork is never complete in their minds but always a work in progress. *Adam and Eve* certainly played a role in the development of the *Neptune and Amphitrite* and was possibly an inspiration to Gossaert because of its use of ancient forms.

The panel is one of the largest painted by Gossaert, measuring 188 x 124 cm, allowing the figures to be nearly life-size. Gossaert not only followed Dürer's example by using the Vitruvian canon, he also positioned his figures similarly. Neptune stands much like Adam, with his right leg bearing most of his weight and his left leg slightly bent. Both have their left arms up and bent, grasping a branch (Adam) or trident (Neptune). Eve and Amphitrite also show similarity in their position; their left legs holding weight while their right are slightly bent, mirroring their male counterparts. Gossaert's figures are broader and more muscular, even Amphitrite, whose abdomen shows clear musculature making her the perfect counterpart to Neptune. Her hips and thighs also seem larger than Eve's, although they both have sloping shoulders and soft rounded chins. Neptune is much more substantial than the wiry Adam, with a wider

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[23] Joseph Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 201; Stephanie Schrader, "Jan Gossaert's Art of Imitation: Fashioning Identity at the Burgundian Court," Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2006, 162.

[24] Craig Harbison, *The Art of the Northern Renaissance* (London: Calmann and Kind Ltd, 1995), 167.

stomach, hips, legs and a thicker neck. Neptune is not only a god but a physically powerful one at that, displaying the might required to master the seas.

Similarly, his virility is highlighted by the seashell codpiece and the close and sensuous relationship between himself and Amphitrite. The precision involved in depicting the pair brings them closer to naked than nude. A nude, even when depicting a sexual liaison, tends to idealize and lose some of the life-like attributes of a real person. While Neptune and Amphitrite are certainly idealized, they both have delicately painted wisps of pubic hair, and Neptune has a slight beard like a young man. They also have fully articulated navels and nipples, eyelashes, and slightly open mouths that show teeth. These very human characteristics bring the figures one step closer to the illusion of life. There is evidence that illusion was prized by Philip; another painter employed by him, Jacopo de' Barbari, was known for his ability to create deceptive illusion in his paintings.[25] In *Neptune and Amphitrite* Gossaert placed two monumental and very human figures upon a plinth perhaps more suited for sculpture, and he "carved" into the stone of the temple. This additional sculptural illusion within the painting is a sort of *trompe l'oeil* and yet another example of Gossaert's ability to fool the eye with his skill. His signature, so decidedly incised in the stone reads as a challenge to sculptors who needed three dimensions for their illusion while he only needed two.[26]

There is certainly an erotic undertone to the relationship between the figures, although this is not primarily a sensual painting. In addition to the detailed nudity of the

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[25] Schrader references the painting *Still Life with Partridge, Iron Gauntlets, and Cross Bolt* from 1504 as an example of de' Barbari's illusionistic skill. In this painting he also signs his name on a painted in piece of paper designed to look stuck to the panel, a trompe l'oeil. See: Stephanie Schrader, "Jan Gossaert's Art of Imitation: Fashioning Identity at the Burgundian Court," Ph. D. diss, University of California at Santa Barbara, 2006: 160.

[26] Stephanie Schrader, "Jan Gossaert's Art of Imitation: Fashioning Identity at the Burgundian Court," 168.

two figures, their close embrace while unclothed assumes a sexual relationship between the two. The way Amphitrite's hand seems to be resting on Neptune's buttocks solidifies familiarity between the two, and Neptune's large shell codpiece draws extra attention to the genitals. Philip was no stranger to sexual liaisons, which would make the comparison offered even more appropriate. However, the relationship between Neptune and Amphitrite is not simply sexual, as they are married, making it a legitimate relationship rather than clandestine. In a picture meant primarily as a display of sexual prowess it is unusual to focus on a married couple.

The two are obviously close as they sympathetically lean into each other. In the Dürer engraving, the tension that is in Eve's outstretched arm is now gone. Instead, Neptune and Amphitrite seem relaxed despite appearing as if on display. Neptune's gaze does not rest on Amphitrite's body or even her face; he instead gazes past to where they are holding hands. Similarly she gazes past him into space. Their lack of preoccupation with the body of the other seems to show that they are not servants to lust, but bound by love stemming from a balanced relationship. As if demonstrating this, they look as if their bodies naturally mirror each other, and Amphitrite tenderly nestles her head on Neptune's shoulder. Nudity alone should not define the painting simply as an erotic work. Gossaert's *Hercules and Dejanera* is an example of one of his sexual scenes; it shows action and tension as well as including nude forms. The forms of Hercules and Dejanera are twined together, and Dejanera grasps the cloak in her hand. The figures manage to convey both the erotic nature of their love and the end of their story, in which the cloak Dejanera holds poisons Hercules. In *Neptune and Amphitrite* Gossaert has painted an extremely intimate scene without making it a sexual one; there is no erotic

action taking place. In fact, the scene is very still and quiet. Neptune and Amphitrite seem to be having a personal moment together, but one based in love and companionship rather than lust. Amphitrite is not another prop to make Neptune's virility obvious, she is his compliment.

The way in which Amphitrite is depicted alludes to another outside source for the painting. With her wavy golden hair, high brow, straight nose and pale skin, Amphitrite adheres to Italian tropes of perfect female beauty. Petrach, Lucian, Dante and other poets spent much time describing the features of the women who were the subject of their affections and poetry. While a general social idea of beauty would certainly have had an impact on their thinking, the common description between them implies a deeper connection. Petrarch created such a desirable and perfect woman in Laura that portraits of her were created and craved by the public. The need to know what exactly she looked like, and which image was the most accurate, became close to a competition.[27] There was no portrait ever established as having been done from life, so images designed from Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and *Trionfi* were drawn- and in some cases, they were claimed to be the portrait of Laura that Petrarch tells us he commissioned from Simone Martini.[28] Since Laura's very existence is in question, the conflict over who would complete her most accurate portrait seems ironic. However, the human desire for a visual example prevailed, and artists portrayed her again and again, even though she may have been an entirely metaphorical figure.

It is not necessarily a coincidence that Gossaert's Amphitrite resembles this female ideal. Like Botticelli in the *Primavera*, Gossaert could be creating a figure of the

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[27] JB Trapp, "Petrarch's Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institues* 64 (2001): 65.
[28] JB Trapp, "Petrarch's Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved," 65.

beloved for his patron, who had no such consort. Philip was not chaste, even while Bishop of Utrecht, and he never had a wife. While Gossaert's emphasis on Philip's virility has been a focus of authors in the past, they ignore the similitude and closeness between Neptune and Amphitrite, and it is unclear why Amphitrite herself should be pictured.[29] A prop to Neptune's masculinity need not be given the attention and detail that Amphitrite has been given in her every aspect. Not only has Gossaert given Amphitrite as much attention as Neptune, but Neptune himself holds her hand with great care, and appears to be looking at their interlocked fingers. She truly seems to be loved by him.

Completing a truly poetic painting involves inspiration and creation on the painter's part. In his portrait of Philip as Neptune, a portrait of his attributes, Gossaert importantly included a woman who is his perfect counterpart and equal. Like the mysterious and ultimately unknown Laura and Beatrice, this woman has no history. By weaving together themes from love poetry, mythology, and a precise rendering of the human form, Gossaert created for his patron the ideal counterpart. Amphitrite represents the perfect woman: beautiful, sensual and perfectly matched to her husband.

Danae

Jan Gossaert's *Danae*, of 1527, was not painted for his first patron Philip of Burgundy, but most likely for Philip's nephew, Adolph, whom Gossaert worked for after

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[29] Stephanie Schrader argues that the presence of Amphitrite functions as another example of Neptune's virility. See: Stephanie Schrader, "Jan Gossaert's Art of Imitation: Fashioning Identity at the Burgundian Court," 176 and Stephanie Schrader, "Gossaert's *Neptune and Amphitrite* and the Body of the Patron," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 58 (2007): 49. Larry Silver did argue that Neptune and Amphitrite are an example of a licit relationship, although he did not offer an explanation. See: Larry Silver, "*Figure Nude, historiae e poesie:* Jan Gossaert and the Renaissance Nude in the Netherlands," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 37 (1986): 12.

Philip's death in 1524. The son of the "Grand bastard of Burgundy," Antony, Adolph also lived in Souborg and was the Marquis de Veere. Like Philip, Adolph constructed a noble court around his home and was a man of humanistic learning and wealth. Gossaert could continue to paint antique-inspired nudes for Adolph and the court, and would be able to persist in his emulation of and competition with the painters of the ancient world. The *Danae* painting, unlike *Neptune and Amphitrite*, depicts a whole story with multiple moralizing interpretations. Danae, a princess of Argos, was locked in a high tower by her father. The King had been told by an oracle that she would bear a son who would return to Argos to kill him, and in an attempt to prevent this, the King had her hidden away and guarded. However, Danae was so beautiful that Zeus saw her and fell in love, eventually impregnating her in a shower of golden rain. The King discovered her pregnancy only after her son, the Greek hero Perseus, was born, and he locked them both in a chest and threw them into the sea. At the behest of Zeus, Poseidon calmed the waters and the chest washed ashore where it was discovered by a fisherman with whom Danae raised her son.

While Perseus went on to become a very successful hero, he did not achieve the fame of Hercules and was certainly not as popular a renaissance subject.[30] Why then did depictions of Danae become prevalent? In the medieval tradition, Danae was connected to the Virgin as a figure of *pudicitia*, or modesty. In the early fifteenth century, the *Fulgentius metaforalis*, written by the Franciscan John Ridewall, discusses ancient myths in a Christian context. Even earlier, in 1328, Danae had been compared to the Virgin in a Moralized Ovid.[31] In the *Fulgentius metaforalis* an illustration accompanies her story, showing her carried aloft by guards as the golden rain falls on her (Figure 10). This

[30] One exception is Benvenuto Cellini's bronze sculpture from Florence. However, it was not completed until 1554.

[31] Madlyn Millner Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," *Art Bulletin* 60:1 (1978): 44.

interpretation of Danae as a type for the Virgin is in sharp contrast to Boccaccio's *The Geneaology of the Gods,* in which Danae is not chaste; she is corrupted by money. According to Boccaccio, Danae feared eternal imprisonment and bargained with Jove for her freedom.[32] Danae's story was also used in a poem by Guillaume de Mauchaut as a cautionary tale: if women do not guard themselves then no one else can.[33]

These dual interpretations of Danae lead to a varied pictorial tradition. There are no extant images of Danae from antiquity, and she appears only occasionally in book illustrations during the medieval period. However, during the sixteenth century her story is visited and revisited time and again, with Gossaert's painting being among the earliest.[34] In almost all the literature discussing Gossaert's painting, it is considered to be a continuation of the medieval *Pudicitia* type.[35] It also seems possible, however, that while the *Danae* has aspects of the medieval tradition, it is breaking away from her depiction as chaste and virginal. Although in comparison to the later images of Correggio and Titian it may seem virginal in aspect, when compared to the medieval illustrations Gossaert's painting seems erotic. Danae is painted seated on the floor of a round tower, in a semi-circular room with windows showing the roofs and towers of the surrounding city. She wears a bright blue robe that has slipped off one shoulder and bares her breast; her hands are gathering the robe up, which exposes her legs. She gazes

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[32] See: Madlyn Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," 44, note 13.

[33] Renate Blumenfel-Kosinski, *Reading Myth: Classical Mythology and Its Interpretations in Medieval French Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): 153.

[34] Madlyn Kahr connects the numerous Danae paintings with the publication of Boccaccio in Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish between 1472 and 1532. See: Madlyn Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," 45.

[35] Erwin Panofsky ("Der gefesselte Eros," 1933), Madlyn Kahr (Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," 1978), and Larry Silver ("*Figure Nude, historiae e poesie:* Jan Gossaert and the Renaissance Nude in the Netherlands," 1986) have specifically mentioned *Danae* as a continuation of the medieval tradition.

upwards, almost expectantly, into the golden shower. Gossaert added an aspect of realism to his painting by using gold leaf in the golden rain. Danae's open knees and direct gaze may not have the impact of a full nude, but she is clearly receptive to the golden shower, and it even seems that she is gathering the rain in her skirt. As demonstrated by the illustration from the *Fulgentius metaforalis*, in the past Danae was commonly depicted fully clothed, and not with open bare legs. Gossaert was not breaking tradition by painting Danae mostly dressed rather than nude; he was doing so by painting her with a bare breast and legs.

What are the paintings that make us think that Gossaert's *Danae* is so virtuous? Painted only a few years after Gossaert's version, Correggio's 1531 *Danae* is nonetheless quite different. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is not Danae's increased nudity but her companions: instead of being alone she is accompanied by Cupid and two putti. The painting was commissioned by Duke Frederico II Gonzaga as part of a series on the *Loves of Jove.* Danae, now nude but for a sheet around her waist, lies back almost limply and holds the sheet to catch the rain as it falls. The moment in time captured is that transient one when rain has just begun to fall- three drops are clearly visible, suspended mid-air. Cupid assists her with one hand and reaches out as if to feel the rain with the other. He seems fascinated by the source of the rain, the golden-toned cloud, which he gazes up towards. It also seems as if Cupid is pulling the sheet back from Danae's body, unveiling her further for Jove to see. For her part, Danae is most interested in the rain as it falls into the sheet that lies in between her legs, but she also may be gazing at her own body as it is slowly uncovered for her intangible lover.[36] The two putti in the foreground

[36] David Ekserdjian, *Correggio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 288.

assiduously sharpen an arrow, which has phallic connotations underscoring the sexual act taking place.[37] Golden tones are evident everywhere in the painting, shining in the border of Danae's bed curtains, her blanket, the bed, and the hair of everyone. It seems that a golden glow from the cloud and rain has suffused the whole room.

Titian also undertook the challenge of painting the scene, in 1546 and 1554. Danae herself is very similar in both paintings. She reclines back on her bed, creating a sinuous line with the curve of her back and her bent left leg. In both paintings, her left arm reaches out to touch something, although in the earlier panel she is grasping her sheet and in the later she is touching a small dog. Her companions are also different; Titian first painted Danae accompanied by Cupid, and then by a rather ugly old woman. The figure of a "nurse" was not unheard of in literature on the Danae myth; Apollonius of Rhodes may have been the one to introduce the character into the myth, and Conti also includes the nurse in his rendition.[38]

This second panel is an example of how the perception of Danae changed during the sixteenth century. Now completely nude, Danae is more languid than ever and actually makes no attempt to catch the golden rain herself. However, she gazes directly at the golden shower of rain, which is now depicted as coins. The cloud gives way to a bright burst of light, bathing Danae in radiance. The old woman eagerly gathers the golden coins, opening her arms and apron to the cloud. The keys on her waist indicate that she may be a procuress, making her the one responsible for selling Danae's virtue.[39]

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[37] Madlyn Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," 46.

[38] Cathy Santore, "Danae: the Renaissance Courtesan's Alter Ego," *Zeitshcrift für Kunstgeschicte* 54:3 (1991), 418; Anthony DiMatteo, *Natale Conti's Mythologies: A Select Translation* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1994): 53, 337.

[39] Cathy Santore, "Danae: the Renaissance Courtesan's Alter Ego," *Zeitshcrift für Kunstgeschicte* 54:3 (1991), 418.

Although Titian focuses on the greedy nature of humanity, he has at least allowed Danae, in all her beauty, to be innocent of avarice, which is clearly a sin of her companion.[40] Danae's small dog remains asleep through the assault, ironically when he should be awake protecting his mistress.[41]

These paintings allow us to better understand Gossaert's version, even though they were painted in a different time and place. Although Gossaert brought Italianate themes to Northern painting, he did not try to create Italian art while in the Low Countries. Working with a different clientele and coming from a different tradition, Gossaert's *Danae* may be the Northern version of a sexually charged painting. The use of totally nude forms in the Low Countries and Germany was considered somewhat alien prior to the sixteenth century. When nude forms were used in a non-religious context, it was often in a moralizing framework.[42] The notion that painting is a sensual art, that yet fulfills an edifying function, was developed hand in hand with artists' interests in the human body. Gossaert was innovative in combining the sensual and the traditional depictions of Danae, as well as incorporating the antique allusions and appealing to his patrons' enthusiasm for erotic paintings.

There are legitimate comparisons between the images of Danae and the Virgin as Gossaert paints them. In his painting *Virgin and Child in a Niche,* from the same year, the Virgin also has a full, round face, curling golden hair and lustrous pale skin. She too bares her breast, and both women wear beautiful pearl diadems that hold their veils in

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[40] Danae may be represent Eternal Bliss while her companion is only Temporary Bliss. Although the painting could allegorically be read as Avarice and Lust, Kahr believes that Titian was more interested in the theme of beauty and love. See: Madlyn Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," 50.

[41] Philipp Fehl, "*The Rape of Europa* and Related Ovidian Pictures by Titian pt. 2," *Fenway Court* (1981): 10.

[42] Gossaert's *Venus Vana* from the 1520s is characteristic of a moralizing nude; Hieronymous Bosch's nude revellers in the middle and right panels of *Garden of Earthly Delights* are also used in this context.

place. Even Danae's blue robe slipping from her shoulders recalls the color most commonly worn by the Virgin. Yet despite all these similarities, it is Danae, and not the Virgin, whom we witness eagerly accepting the golden rain of Zeus. While an Annunciation scene depicts the moment of conception, it is not as sexually explicit a moment as Danae's impregnation. The factor of lewdness alone is what separates *Danae* from Gossaert's religious work. It seems unlikely that any patron would want a painting that equated the Virgin with a moment, that despite Zeus's immateriality, is quite physical. It cannot be forgotten what the painting shows: Danae, gathering the rain in her skirt and allowing it to pool between her legs. How can it be explained, then, that Danae shares physical characteristics and clothing with Gossaert's images of the Virgin? Perhaps for Gossaert, beauty was constant, the meaning but not form of which was contingent on context. A beautiful woman, pagan or Christian, should be painted the same way. It is the Virgin's spiritual perfection that allows her to be so lovely and yet remain pure; the same cannot be said for her pagan predecessors.[43]

Gossaert's painting may not be as sexually explicit as later works, but the fact that he considered himself to be a modern-day ancient painter is important when considering *Danae* as an erotic image. The Greek play *The Eunuch*, by Terence, describes a painting of Danae situated within a brothel.[44] In this painting Zeus does not transform himself, the "golden shower" is gold coins he throws to Danae. Furthermore, the painting's tone and seductive nature inspire the protagonist to rape the beautiful girl he desires. This play was well known, and it is quite possible that Gossaert would have known Terence's

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[43] Larry Silver claims that both Danae and the Virgin have transcendent beauty but are beyond sin, whereas others fall to temptation. See: Larry Silver, "*Figure Nude, historiae e poesie:* Jan Gossaert and the Renaissance Nude in the Netherlands," 20. I am not considering Danae, in this image, to be a type for the Virgin and thus she is outside the circle of women who are without sexual reproach.

[44] Terence, *The Comedies*, trans. Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006):178.

description of the painting. If he truly desired to imitate and compete with ancient painters, what better way than by using the same subject? By painting *Danae*, Gossaert could have been proving himself once again the equal or better of ancient painters.

The painting of Danae shows the same anatomical attention to detail as *Neptune and Amphitrite.* Danae's has a rounded face with a soft double chin, and her arms and hands are fleshy. Her hair seems to be painted strand by strand, and her eyes are perfectly executed to show a bit of the inner eyelid and her lashes. As in the *Neptune and Amphitrite,* Danae's mouth is slightly open, as if in awe of the transformation of Zeus. Her akimbo legs and the ribbon trailing in between her breasts draw attention to the sexual nature of the encounter. In Gossaert's paintings, sexuality is often tied to a precise rendering of the human form, the difference between an idealized nude and a flesh-and-blood human. Gossaert competes with the ancient painter Nicias by creating a human nude both beautiful and so realistic that men cannot help but desire her. *Danae* is a challenge to ancient painters that goes beyond painting a lovely woman. Gossaert combines his knowledge of mythology and ancient architecture with the erotic elements of *studiolo* painting to create an image that is at once antique and modern.

St. Luke Drawing the Virgin

Gossaert continued to innovate on the Italian tradition of poetic painting by utilizing its methods for religious images. His 1520-30 painting of *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin*, develops various motifs and figures together in a way that they explain a plot to the viewer. Gossaert provides the viewer with clues to read a series of metaphors between the various characters in the painting, drawing from the Old and New

Testaments the way he previously used myth as inspiration. St. Luke kneels at a *prie-dieu*, drawing in silverpoint, and the Virgin appears in the center of a glowing cloud, carrying the Christ child and surrounded by putti. This is a new device for Northern painters, yet again something Gossaert has imported from Italy. The idea of a part of heaven or the spiritual realm suddenly appearing in our world is one that was developed in Italy to convey a visionary experience.[45] In the heavenly cloud, the Virgin cradles Christ closely, and their loving relationship is obvious as he embraces her and they gaze affectionately at each other. Their tender pose recalls the Virgin's role as Christ's spiritual bride. Many of Gossaert's images of the Virgin and Child echo the words of the Song of Songs in their tender caresses, offerings of fruit to one another or their gentle kisses. The Song of Songs, a deeply romantic love poem between a bride and bridegroom, is considered to be a prefiguration of the love between the Virgin and Christ.[46] Gossaert often alluded to Mary's role as the spiritual bride of Christ; indeed his soft, young Madonnas look barely old enough to actually be the mother of the Christ child. In *Virgin and Child in a Niche*, for instance, (Figure 16) Christ again embraces Mary while she holds his face close to hers, their cheeks touching as he turns to look at her. It is not only their intimacy as mother and son that is being depicted, but as supported by the apple in his outstretched right hand, their role as the new Adam and Eve, parents to the new spiritual humanity.

In the St. Luke painting, the Virgin's radiant skin, luxurious robe, and crown add to the idea that she is sublime, and totally beyond humanity; she and Christ are both

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[45] S Herzog, "Jon Gossaert, Called Mabuse (ca. 1478-1532), A Study of His Chronology with a Catalogue of His Works," 107.

[46] Specific examples of the poem include: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" (Song 1:2); Song 3:1-4, and Song 8: 6-7.

physically perfect to reflect their more important spiritual perfection. Her humility and approachability are not the focus of this painting; she is the Queen of Heaven and entirely otherworldly. As if to underscore this point, Luke has removed his patens because he is on holy ground, and he does not draw her image unassisted but rather his hand is guided by the angel who stands behind him. A book is in the compartment below the *prie-dieu* cum writing surface, reminding the viewer that Luke was an author as well as an artist. The space they are in is ambiguous in its function, only defined by its small, domed interior and classical style. The heavily ornamented walls include many pseudo-classical relief elements, such as bucrania, nude figures, cuirasses and other armor, and in the roundels are images that look as if they have been copied from Greek and Roman coins. Behind the Virgin is a medallion of Pegasus, an Emperor, and a woman, perhaps standing outside a temple; above Moses is a man, an Emperor with a radiate crown, and a female figure. The remaining medallions all appear to be Emperors.[47] While this style of ornamentation is classical it is actually based on contemporary Roman architecture and the revival of grotesque adornment based on the Golden House of Nero.[48] There do not seem to be any identifiable monuments that the details are directly copied from, although their detail suggests that they were drawn from life. Although the location is vague, the architecture has been perfectly designed by Gossaert to frame the subjects, as two arches and columns accentuate the two pairs.

The theme of St. Luke drawing the Virgin was one made popular in the early fifteenth century by Rogier van der Weyden, when he painted what would be the

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[47] S Herzog, "Jon Gossaert, Called Mabuse (ca. 1478-1532), A Study of His Chronology with a Catalogue of His Works," 272.
[48] Larry Silver, "*Figure nude, historiae e poesie*: Jan Gossaert and the Renaissance Nude in the Netherlands," 22.

paradigm for other artists. The Virgin sits beneath a low bench, her position demonstrating her humility; she is painted in the Madonna lactans tradition, and a half-kneeling St. Luke records her image in silverpoint. The space they are in- a high room which opens into a walled garden, overlooking a vista which is dominated by a large river- is reflective of passages from the Song of Songs, traditionally read as prefigurations of the Virgin and Christ, and also from the *Seal of the Blessed Virgin* by Honorious of Autun. The beautiful walled garden in the Song of Songs which captures the attention of the bridegroom was considered a type for the Virgin, whose purity, piety and humility are like the flowers planted within, and whose chastity is represented by the enclosing wall.[49] Only in her garden could Christ be "grown." Honorious of Autun also wrote on this theme, comparing the Virgin to a high tower room and a beautiful walled garden. A variety of texts illustrates this idea further: the walled garden is not only a type for the soul of the Virgin, but the souls of humanity, who must cultivate various flowers (the lily, representative of purity, or violets, symbolic of humility were among the most common) in order to entice God to enter our souls. The wall had to be built to keep out temptation, and weeding, or self-examination, was also a necessity.[50]

The room appears to be small and humbly furnished, albeit with a few iconographic references to the people within. On the arm of the bench near Mary are tiny figures of Adam and Eve next to the tree of knowledge. Eve plucks the apple from its branches, while the serpent (depicted with a human face) sits above the tree, presumably encouraging her. Adam, to Eve's left, sits primly and seems still unaware of Eve's

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[49] In Song 4:16 the bridegrrom is invited to his garden; in Song 8:10-12, she is compared to a wall with a vineyard within.

[50] Reindert Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the imagery of love in Flemish paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550,* Trans. Sammy Herman (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994): 22.

intentions. The Virgin, seated humbly on the ground and offering Christ wholesome nourishment, is the opposite of her wooden counterpart. Adam and Eve are the progenitors of sinful humanity, but the Virgin and Christ will redeem their sin and, as the new Adam and Eve, engender the spiritual renewal of the human race. Just as she offers Christ milk, the Virgin also offers the viewer spiritual sustenance, through her role as the Church. St. Luke also has a carved double: peeking out from under the wooden shelves in the room behind Luke is a bull's head, the evangelist's symbol. The glimpse into his study reminds the viewer of his role as an evangelist, and that Luke recorded the presence of the Christ and the Virgin in text and image.

Outside the small room, people can be seen traversing the city streets as usual, including a man on horseback, a woman carrying pails of water from the river, and a man who appears to be urinating with his back to us. Two people watch the scene from the walled garden; oblivious to the holy presence within the room, they seem absorbed in worldly interests. However, if you follow the pointing index finger of the small man, he directs our attention to a church far in the background[51]. While these common people may not be included in the interior scene, they are Christians and act as another set of role models, elevated above the others. In the room, Luke remains wholly focused on the task of recording the Virgin's image and one can clearly see how his small drawing has progressed. Silverpoint was a method often used for recording sketches made in preparation for larger paintings, so St. Luke may be making a sketch prior to a grander painting.

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[51] Alfred Acres, "Luke, Rolin, and Seeing Relationships," In: *Rogier van der Weyden St. Luke Drawing the Virgin: Selected Essays in Context* (Belgium: Brepols,1997): 29. Acres uses various directives within the painting to suggest a carefully planned almost geometric relationship between shapes, line and the figures.

Gossaert alludes to van der Weyden's painting in his earlier *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin* from 1515 (now in Prague, probably originally painted for the Painter's Guild in Mechelen), although it takes place in a vast, palatial classicized setting. This would have been unusual among his contemporaries; this use of Italianate architecture and sculpture was obviously Gossaert's way of introducing into the image the religious themes that interested him. The Virgin humbly sits on a low step, and is painted with a bared breast as if she has recently been feeding Christ. The palatial setting could seem out of place for the story which is normally depicted in St. Luke's study, but Gossaert has clearly depicted the Madonna of Humility, as she sits even lower that St. Luke. St. Luke is across from her, perching on the base of a column and drawing her image, but they seem small and far away from each other in the grand and somewhat alienating setting. As in the later St. Luke painting, he appears to have taken off his patens in the presence of the Virgin and Child. The immediate room they are in is a tour-de-force of Italianate architecture and sculpture, with several mythological references. A sculpted owl with outspread wings behind the Virgin is the symbol of Minerva, Goddess of Wisdom. Although the owl was commonly a symbol of evil in paintings, the embroidery of "Regina coeli" or "Queen of Heaven" on the Virgin's hem indicates why the owl may be considered a symbol of wisdom. As Queen of Heaven, the Virgin is also the embodiment of Wisdom.[52] Through the far arch, beyond which the eye is drawn, one notices that the architecture has changed from classical to gothic. The Virgin appears a second time, as does St. Luke; this time she stands before him while he writes. The vanishing point

[52] S Herzog, "Jon Gossaert, Called Mabuse (ca. 1478-1532), A Study of His Chronology with a Catalogue of His Works," 222.

coincides with the womb of a tiny figure of the Virgin, alluding to St. Luke's words, "Blessed is the fruit of your womb."[53]

The 1515 *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin* stands in almost complete contrast to the later painting. The immediacy and vibrancy of the late painting is absent in the earlier version, which is cooler in color and more aloof. When Gossaert painted the theme for a second time, he brought a fuller sense of life and urgency to the image. The brightly glowing areole, the fluttering putti, rippling fabric and mobile poses differentiate the second painting from the first. The new iconographic elements added by Gossaert allow him to re-tell the story of St. Luke drawing the Virgin with slightly different implications.

The exact date and patron of the painting is not known, and it could have been painted before Philip's death, if not for him, then either for Adolph or a painter's guild. No matter who the painting was executed for, there can be no doubt that both the patron and Gossaert were aware of the growing threat of iconoclasm. Although no true iconoclastic violence came to the Netherlands until 1566, when it swept through many towns and cities including Antwerp and Ghent, the feelings of the Reformed toward figural religious art were even at an earlier date becoming clear. In order to suppress the spread of Protestantism throughout the Low Countries, a combined effort was made by Philip II of Spain and the Catholic Church to restrict the type of Bible and additional religious texts that were published. Their efforts, while formidable, were not enough to stop the rising Protestant feeling among the inhabitants. Even with the restrictions, in the 1520s and 30s Antwerp was the largest producer of Bibles in Europe, including many Protestant editions; the Low Countries were one of the safest areas for the various

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[53] Luke 1:42 (New Revised Standard Version).

Protestants and the beliefs of Calvin and Menno Simons were well known. While the Catholic Church felt that art helped to highlight the important themes such as the sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the mystery of transubstantiation; many Protestant reformers, Calvinists and Anabaptists especially, thought that any art that was used in liturgy and even in private devotion was akin to idolatry. Gossaert's St. Luke painting puts together multiple poetic elements that allow it to be read as an allegory supporting the artist's role in the religious community. As one must "read" a poetic mythological painting, so too can this religious work be examined in this light.

The Virgin and Child have been portrayed as bodily in heaven, yet they are visible to Luke. That he is privileged to witness divine presence cannot be questioned. The positioning of Luke, who kneels before the vision and has removed his shoes, directly beneath Moses, who did the same before the burning bush, forces the viewer to consider the connection between them. While the bright cloud around the Virgin is consistent with visionary imagery, it also recalls the fire that Moses witnessed. Moses knelt before God as He set fire to the bush to prove his existence, and Luke kneels before the effulgent Virgin and Christ, God made flesh. Luke has followed the path of the New Law and is privileged enough to see and record a vision of Christ its founder. The sculpture of Moses also carries the tablet of the Law. Like the Virgin, who carries Christ, Moses too has borne the word of God. Again, Moses was fortunate and devoted to God, but the Virgin is even more so because she carries his son. Although the old prophets should be revered, the New Law and Christ are seen to reign supreme. As the more colorful and conspicuous elements of the picture, they trump the monochrome effigy of Moses. The circular analogy concludes with the comparison between the Virgin and

Luke, one of whom bears the Christ child and the other an image of Him. Recording the image of the Virgin and Christ is in this sense imitating the Virgin. The process of creating the image of Christ could even become a meditative prompt for the miracle of the Virgin's own "creation" of Christ in the mystery of the incarnation, making drawing and painting instruments of prayer.

An alternate reading arises from these many underlying connections. The positive emphasis on St. Luke and his action of praying as drawing begins to undermine the Reformed argument that all figural religious images are steeped in idolatry. If an angel was sent to guide the hand of Luke, how could the resulting drawing be seen to contravene God's will? Luke does not even look at the Virgin and Child; he sees the vision internally, with spiritual eyes. The Luke that is pictured here is the same deeply spiritual Luke of Rogier van der Weyden, represented as morally unimpeachable. The Moses holding the Ten Commandments in a niche above Luke draws our attention again. By removing his shoes, Luke has already associated himself with Moses whose bare foot pokes out from under his robe. Although the actual commandments are not visible, Moses noticeably points to the beginning, where the contested ban on image-making would be inscribed. He is drawing attention to the area in which the Reformed split the first Commandment, making the creation of any art used in devotion heretical. This painting clearly represents a scene of valid religious art being created in a way that makes it impossible that God would consider using such an image as idol worship. By using the Ten Commandments to support rather than destroy religious imagery, Gossaert has taken away what the Reformed use most as evidence that it should be banned.

This image further alludes to the passage from the old to the new. The classical setting, sculpture of Moses, and vision of the Virgin and Child create a timeline that is sets up the order of precedence in which the New Law supersedes the Old.[54] Just as pagan antiquity saw the growth of Judaism, the Old Law witnessed the birth of the New in Jesus. The figures of Mary and Christ, crowned and in glory, show humanity the new way of life. Gossaert designed for his Catholic patrons a painting that through its poetic elements makes clear the Catholic position on image making. The various symbols, viewed analogically, constitute a typological argument in the relation between Mosaic Law and that of Christ. It is through putting the pieces together that the alternate reading can be understood. In this painting, there can be nothing reprehensible in St. Luke's actions, and by that standard in the actions of those who follow him.

The Gossaert painting demonstrates the function of divine inspiration in art. While in the earlier painting there is no reason to believe that Luke is not able to create the image on his own, Gossaert's Luke may not even be able to draw without the guiding angel. It is as if a heavenly order was made to create an image, yet a human intermediary was needed to make the earthly painting. In this sense, the gift of drawing could be bestowed upon anyone who is worthy and has prepared his soul for Christ. Artists then become those who are specially blessed, opening their soul to Christ and able to create his likeness. Gossaert is contrasting the roles of divine and poetic inspiration for artists. Although he alludes to poetic inspiration in his architecture and ornamentation, he is asserting the supremacy of divinely inspired art. The grotesque ornamentation, representative of the antique, may be beautiful, but it cannot compare to the dramatic

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[54] S Herzog, "Jan Gossaert, Called Mabuse (ca. 1478-1532), A Study of His Chronology with a Catalogue of his Works," 271.

scene of the Virgin and Child. They are the ultimate muses for artists, and by dedicating art to them and artist may surpass the colorless carving in marble and create something truly resplendent.

Beyond Gossaert

Gossaert set an example for many of the artists with whom he came into contact, and through them also inspired their own students. Artists well known in their own right, such as Jan van Scorel, Maarten van Heemskerck, Bernard van Orley, and even Lucas van Leyden were all stirred by Gossaert's paintings.[55] Jan van Scorel probably met Gossaert as early as 1517, and soon after went on his own journey to Italy, where according to Karel van Mander he copied antique sculpture as well as contemporary paintings by Raphael and Michelangelo.[56] He also worked with Maarten van Heemskerck who would closely resemble Gossaert in his attention to ancient architecture and examination of the roles of religious and poetic inspiration. A print designer and a painter, Heemskerck artfully included the ruins of ancient Rome in prints of many varied topics. Also like Gossaert, he was not a man of formal humanistic learning, but one who included it in his art nonetheless.

Maarten van Heemskerck specifically scrutinized the roles of religious and poetic inspiration in his1532 *St. Luke Painting the Virgin*, in which he takes the idea of a religious *poesia* even further. In his portrayal of St. Luke painting the Virgin, Heemskerck positions Luke between the Virgin and Child and a mysterious figure in a

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[55] See: J. Richard Judson, "Jan Gossaert and the New Aesthetic," In: *The Age of Bruegel: Netherlandish Drawings in the Sixteenth Century,* ed. J.O. Hand (Washington D.C.: National Gallery and Pierpont Morgan Library, 1986): 13-24; Larry Silver and Susan Smith, "Carnal Knowledge: the Late Engravings of Lucas van Leyden," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 29 (1978): 239-298.
[56] J. Richard Judson, "Jan Gossaert and the New Aesthetic," 20.

toga and laurel wreath. This man, possibly a self-portrait by Heemskerck, seems to be a figure of artistic inspiration. He gestures with one hand towards the painting, the other flung upwards to the ceiling as if in exasperation. These gestures are echoed by the widely splayed arms of Christ who seems to be gesturing towards the painting with his left hand and blessing St. Luke with the right[57]. Luke is positioned in between divine inspiration in the form of Christ, and poetic information in the form of and classicized figure. Luke, in the center, is influenced by the two aspects that comprise a sacred *poesia*.

Various artists would take up the themes that Gossaert introduced into Northern art. They would change and work with the new ideas in the same way Gossaert did with the Italian examples. Working primarily as a court artist allowed Gossaert to experiment with *poesia* in a humanist setting, providing him with the patrons who would understand and appreciate his art. In order to understand the intricacy of many of Gossaert's paintings, a knowledge of mythology and ancient architecture was necessary at the very least, but would barely be sufficient. Even in the three paintings examined in detail here Gossaert also makes reference to rhetoric, Italian love poetry, moralized mythology, Biblical study and current events. In the *Danae* and *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin,* Gossaert produces images that acknowledge pictorial tradition yet don't duplicate it. He creates true *poesia* by combining these varied sources into a cohesive painting; yet his paintings are visually different from the Italian *poesia* or *favola.* Gossaert takes a contemporary Italian idea but works within the Northern tradition instead of abandoning it, and is the first northern artist to achieve this. In closing, Jan Gossaert truly earned the

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[57] Jean Owens Schaefer, ""St. Luke as painter: from saint to artisan to artist," In: *Artistes, Artisans et Production Artistique qu Moyen Age,* Vol. 1 (1986): 419.

description “Apelles of our time” as his work embodied imagination, erudition and a blending of many traditions that became an inspiration to other artists. While perhaps an experiment, his innovative use of new subject matter proved to be Gossaert’s lasting innovation.

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