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ERASMUS AND THE VISUAL ARTS*

By Erwin Panofsky

I

We celebrate the five-hundredth birthday of Erasmus of Rotterdam (born in 1466, 1467 or 1469) at a time when there is agitated debate on the question whether the age he lived in deserves, or does not deserve, to be called 'The Renaissance'. Can we still define this period, as the *Oxford Dictionary* unhesitatingly did some thirty years ago, as the 'great revival of arts and letters under the influence of classical models, which began in Italy in the fourteenth century and continued during the fifteenth and sixteenth'? Whatever position we may take it must, I believe, be admitted that what a period thought and said of itself is as relevant to its character as what it was (or, rather, what we suppose that it was).

That Erasmus—like all his contemporaries—did think and speak of his age as a 'great revival of arts and letters' cannot be questioned and is evident from one of his earliest extant communications addressed to his friend Cornelius Gerard in June 1489:

It seems to me, dearest Cornelius, that the development of literature was similar to what can be observed in the various crafts which we are wont to call 'mechanical'. For, that very famous craftsmen of every kind flourished in the old days is attested by the poems of nearly all the bards. When you look back beyond an interval of two or three hundred years [viz., beyond the years from c. 1200 to c. 1300], be it at metal-work, paintings, works of sculpture, buildings, structures, in fine, at monuments of every kind of workmanship, you will, I think, both marvel and laugh at the extreme crudity of the artists; whereas in our own age there is again nothing in art which the industry of its practitioners is not able to accomplish.¹

Here Erasmus, little more than twenty years of age, unequivocally endorses that humanistic *Geschichtskonstruktion* which from the beginning of the fourteenth century had gradually evolved in Italy. Derived from Dante's famous juxtaposition of an outmoded with a 'modern' poet (Guido Guinicelli and Guido Cavalcanti), an outmoded with a 'modern' book illuminator (Franco Bolognese and Oderisi da Gubbio), and an outmoded with a 'modern' painter (Cimabue and Giotto), this humanistic *Geschichtskonstruktion* included from the outset both the art of the spoken word and the art of painting; but it

* Lecture given at the annual meeting of the American Council of Learned Societies, Baltimore, 20 January 1967.

¹ P. S. Allen, ed., *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, i, Oxford 1906–58 (hereafter Allen), pp. 103ff., no. 23, ll. 78–86: 'Sed ea, Corneli charissime, literarum mihi videtur esse vicissitudo quae et in caeteris opificum, quos mechanicos appellant, officiis. Nam et priscis temporibus omnis generis opifices

clarissimos vigiuisse omnium propemodum vatum testantur carmina. At nunc, si ultra tercentum aut ducentos annos caelaturas, picturas, sculpturas, aedificia, fabricas et omnium denique officiorum monimenta inspicias, puto et admiraberis et ridebis nimiam artificum rusticitatem, cum nostro rursus aevo nihil sit artis quod non opificum effinxerit industria.'

was not until Petrarch had conceived the almost heretical notion of the Christian 'Middle Ages' as a period of darkness intervening between two periods of light, and until Boccaccio had assigned a liberating role to Petrarch himself as well as to Giotto, that the Italian fifteenth century postulated an actual parallel between the vicissitudes of letters and painting or even between the vicissitudes of letters and the 'Fine Arts'—architecture, sculpture and painting—in their entirety.

Wonderful to tell [says Enea Silvio Piccolomini] as long as eloquence flourished, painting flourished . . . when the former revived, the latter also raised its head. Pictures produced two hundred years ago were not, as we can see, refined by any art; what was written at that time is [equally] crude, inept, unpolished. After Petrarch, letters re-emerged; after Giotto, the hands of painting were raised once more.

And in the Preface to his *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* (written between 1435 and 1444) Lorenzo Valla extended this parallel between letters and painting to all the other arts:

I do not know why the arts most closely approximating the *artes liberales*, viz., painting, sculpture in stone or metal and architecture, went into so long and so deep a decline and almost died out together with literature itself; nor why they have come to be aroused and revived in our own age; nor why there is now such a rich harvest of both good artists and good writers.

It is in all probability from Valla, his *pater spiritualis* himself, that young Erasmus derived his all-inclusive vision of the 'great revival': in the same letter that contains his universalistic definition of the Renaissance he recommended Cornelius Gerard to read the *Elegantiae* as the best guide to good Latinity.² And it is interesting to note that the great German artist, Albrecht Dürer, whose name was to remain connected with Erasmus's own throughout the centuries, dated the 'present renaissance' (*itzige Wiedererwachsung*, which for him amounted only to a revival of art and, more specifically, of art theory) to c. 1325–75: 'one and one-half centuries'—or, in another place, 'two hundred years'—before the time of his writing, and after an interruption of one thousand years.³

² Allen, i, p. 99 (note to letter no. 20) justly remarks that Valla's 'influence on Erasmus can hardly be overestimated'. We know that Erasmus made two paraphrases of Valla's *Elegantiae* (Allen, i, p. 108, note to letter no. 23). He expressed his devotion to him on every possible occasion, e.g., in the letters, Allen, i, pp. 103ff., 112ff., 119f. (nos. 23, 26, 29); and it is with irrepressible enthusiasm that he described his discovery of Valla's *In latinam Novi Testamenti interpretationem* in his letter to Christopher Fisher (Allen, i, pp. 406ff., no. 182). An oblique reference to Valla might also be discovered in Erasmus's letter to Boniface Amerbach, dated 31 August

1518, where he dates the climactic phase of the 'new flowering' (*reflorescunt*) of classical scholarship to 'about eighty years' (*ante annos plus minus octoginta*) before the time of his writing, that is to say, precisely in the years of Valla's *Elegantiae* (Allen, iii, pp. 383ff., no. 862).

³ K. Lange and F. Fuhse, *Dürers schriftlicher Nachlass*, Halle a.S. 1893 (hereafter Lange and Fuhse), p. 344, ll. 6–19 (dated 1523). The word *Wiedererwachsung* is a *hapax legomenon*; but the historical view expressed in the passage just referred to recurs repeatedly: Lange and Fuhse, p. 259, ll. 16–22; p. 338, l. 26; p. 339, l. 2. The published Preface to

Erasmus, however, seems to vacillate between a broader and a more restricted concept of the Renaissance. In the letter to Cornelius Gerard of June 1489, the list of arts revived after the decline of the 'Dark Ages', including as it does 'the monuments of every kind of workmanship', is, if anything, even more comprehensive than Valla's. But about thirty years later in the letter written to the great publisher Boniface Amerbach on 31 August 1518,⁴ Erasmus appears to limit this revival—putting an end to a period when 'even grammar, the mistress of correct speech, and rhetoric, the guide to copious and brilliant eloquence, stammered in an unseemly and pitiable manner'—to disciplines expressing themselves in Latin prose: medicine, philosophy and jurisprudence. No mention is made of other forms of human endeavour; and we realize, in a flash, the peculiar difficulties attendant upon a general evaluation of Erasmus's attitude towards the visual arts.⁵

II

Erasmus certainly took an intelligent and, in his earlier years, even moderately active interest in painting and drawing, much as he did in music.⁶ According to a respectable though undocumented tradition he practised painting while a young cleric in the monastery of Steyn near Gouda;⁷ and certain it is that he dabbled in decorative book illumination at that time.⁸ A line in

Dürer's *Vnderweysung der Messung* . . . , Nuremberg 1525 (reprinted in Lange and Fuhse, p. 181, ll. 23–28) differs from the preliminary version of 1523 only in that the 'rediscovery of this art' (viz., painting) is dated to 'two hundred years' rather than to 'one and one-half' centuries before the time of Dürer's writing, that is to say, to c. 1325 rather than to c. 1375; and in that it is explicitly credited to the Italians (*die Walchen*).

⁴ For the genesis and vicissitudes of the Renaissance concept in general, see W. K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation*, Cambridge, Mass. 1948 (where the probable derivation of the view set forth in Erasmus's letter of 1489 from Lorenzo Valla is already diagnosed on p. 43). Cf. also E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, Stockholm 1960 and 1965, pp. 10–41 with further literature; the roles of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio discussed on pp. 10ff., that of Valla on pp. 16ff., that of Erasmus on p. 17 (where, however, the name of Gerard should be corrected to 'Amerbach' in note 1, l. 3 from the foot of the page), that of Dürer on pp. 30f.

⁵ For Erasmus's attitude towards the visual arts see, above all, the excellent article by Rachel Giese, 'Erasmus and the Fine Arts', *Journal of Modern History*, vii, 1935, pp. 257ff., and the literature quoted therein. Further: G. Marlier, *Erasmus et la Peinture flamande de son*

temps, Brussels 1954, *passim*. For his and his correspondents' statements about Dürer, cf. E. Reicke, 'Albrecht Dürers Gedächtnis im Briefwechsel Willibald Pirckheimers', *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg*, xxviii, 1928, pp. 363ff.

⁶ C. A. Miller, 'Erasmus on Music', *Musical Quarterly*, lii, 1966, pp. 332ff.

⁷ Pieter van Opmeer, *Opus chronographicum orbis universi . . . usque ad annum MDCXI*, Delft 1667. The tradition recorded by van Opmeer passed, e.g., into Arnold Houbraken's *Groote Schouburgh* of 1718–21, G. G. Jöcher's *Allgemeines Gelehrtenlexicon* (ii, Leipzig 1750) and Thieme-Becker's *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*. But a little *Crucifixion*, said to have been owned by Cornelius Mucius (1500–72, for a time Prior of St. Agatha in Delft) and to have been inscribed by him with a laudatory distich (*Haec Desiderius—ne spernas—pinxit Erasmus/Olim in Steinaco quando latebat in agro*), if it ever existed, is lost. A triptych formerly in the collection of Mr. E. A. Faust in St. Louis and inscribed 'Erasmus P.' (M. W. Brockwell, 'A Painting by Erasmus', *Art in America*, vi, 1918, pp. 61ff.) is certainly the work of a professional painter.

⁸ See his letter to his friend Sasboud of c. 1488 (Allen, i, pp. 90f., no. 16): 'Vt autem serio loquar, quos flosculos dixeris non video; nisi forte libellum illum, in quo quosdam tibi flores, cum vna essemus, depinxeram.'

his *Carmen campestre*, however, where in his later years he complains of the insidious way in which old age secretly creeps upon the *felicia tempora vitae*, and where he remembers the time when as a young man he had 'thought of depicting unsubstantial forms without body',⁹ need not be taken to refer to actual painting but may simply describe a kind of poetic day-dreaming like Shakespeare's 'insubstantial pageant' of 'such stuff as dreams are made on'. And that some of Erasmus's *Epigrams on Paintings* allude to works of his own would be unlikely even had we the right to assume that they refer to any actual paintings at all. In all probability they are purely literary exercises (*ecphrases*); and in at least one case this can, I think, be proved. Erasmus's very colourful description of a *pictura Europae stupratae* begins with a portrayal of Mercury (recognizable by his caduceus, his broad-brimmed hat, his head-wings and his foot-wings) as he deflects a herd of cattle from the far-off mountains to the nearby shore where Europa and her companions are disporting themselves. In so doing he unwittingly abets the amorous intentions of his father, Jupiter, who, having joined the herd in the guise of a beautiful white bull, induces Europa to climb on his back and suddenly carries her across the waters to Crete where he 'soon ceases to be a bull and she ceases to be a virgin'.¹⁰ But of the countless artistic renderings of the Europa story none, so far as I know, shows these two scenes combined into one picture—that is to say, Mercury turning the cattle from the mountains to the shore, and Jupiter apparently forming part of the herd and ingratiating himself with Europa. They either show Europa playing with or mounting the bull; or they show Europa on the bull's back already *en route* to Crete. None of them includes Mercury, which would be possible only if the herd were represented twice. What Erasmus did is nothing but to write a paraphrase on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, ii, 833ff., where both scenes are depicted singly and in chronological order: Jupiter ordering Mercury to turn the herd towards the shore (836–45); and the Seduction of Europa initiated by the swim across the sea (869–75).

The only tangible evidence of Erasmus's own activity in the visual arts is a few marginal pen drawings: a representation of his personal symbol, the Roman God 'Terminus', in a printed copy of Aulus Gellius's *Noctes atticae*, and a series of sketches (probably meant to be marks of reference rather than embellishments) with which he enlivened the manuscript of his *Scholia to the Letters of St. Jerome*. Some of these marginal drawings are mere doodles; others are unpretentious renderings of homely objects such as pots, rings, bellows, or wine-jugs; still others are caricature portraits or self-portraits (Pl. 23c,d) infused with the sharply observant, humorous spirit which animates his *Praise of Folly* (composed four or five years before).¹¹ But none of them matches in

⁹ *Desiderii Erasmi Opera Omnia*, J. Clericus (Jean Leclerc), ed. (hereafter *Opera*), iv, Leiden 1703–6, col. 755ff., col. 756D: 'Pingere dum meditor tenuis sine corpore formas.'

¹⁰ *Opera*, i, col. 1221:

Hic qui a monte boves ad proxima littora vertit,
Aurea te, quis sit, virga monere potest.
Tum testes alae, neque non talaria, testis
In flavo bicolor crine galerus erit.

Si rogitas quid agat, patrio subservit amori
Inscius, obsequio furta dolosa tegens.
Raptor enim nivei latitat sub imagine tauri
Improbis, ac praedam per freta longa vehet:
Ut Cretam attigerit, mox taurus desinet esse
Juppiter, & virgo non erit ista diu.
Quid non caecus amor mortalia pectora cogat,
Si taurum aethereum non piget esse Jovem?
At quae formosis satis est cautela puellis,
Hic quoque stuprator si metuendus erat?

¹¹ Basle, University Library, MS. A.IX, 56; see E. Major, 'Handzeichnungen des

skill and quality the work of such other amateur draughtsmen as Goethe, Mörike, W. S. Gilbert or Thackeray.

Like most northern humanists Erasmus was primarily interested in the written word and only secondarily in the world accessible to the eye; in an unguarded moment he went so far as to assert that Pliny's *Naturalis historia* was worth more than all the works of all the sculptors and painters referred to therein.¹² Most of his statements about the visual arts must be read with the understanding that they were made with what may be called limited responsibility. And, unless he deals with the then burning question of image worship, he speaks of architecture, sculpture and painting either by way of moralization—as when he uses works of art to elucidate philosophical or theological concepts—or as an interested party, as when he attempts to please a correspondent or gives vent to purely personal impressions and reactions. In neither case can we expect consistency, objectivity or sustained originality; and in both cases, to quote Charles Peirce, what Erasmus parades is less important than what he betrays.

Thus the apparent contradiction between Erasmus's all-inclusive interpretation of the Renaissance movement in his letter to Cornelius Gerard of June 1489 and his more restrictive interpretation of it (seeming to limit its orbit to medicine, philosophy and jurisprudence) in his letter to Boniface Amerbach of 31 August 1518 can be explained by the simple fact that the later letter is a recommendation of Ulrich Zasius, the 'German Alciati', who was a great Latinist and juriconsult but had no appreciable interest in art. And in interpreting Erasmus's statements about the arts this characteristic tendency to attune them to the individual context, particularly to the attitude of his correspondents, must always be taken into consideration.

When a little-known French humanist, Henri Botteus or de Bottis, Bishop of Bourg-en-Bresse, mentioned the fact that a *peritus statuarius* (presumably the famous sculptor Conrad Meit, who was then working on the tombs of Margaret of Austria and her relatives in the Chapel of Brou, only about a mile from Bourg-en-Bresse), had shown him a portrait of Erasmus, the latter answered that he could think only of a medal by Quinten Massys (Pl. 23f) or of an engraving by Albrecht Dürer (Pl. 22a)—an engraving, however, which, as he curtly states, 'bore no resemblance to himself'.¹³ But when Erasmus announced the long-expected arrival of this same engraving (Bartsch 107) to Willibald Pirckheimer, the great Nuremberg humanist of whom Erasmus knew that he

Erasmus von Rotterdam', *Historisches Museum Basel, Jahresberichte und Rechnungen*, 1932, pp. 35ff.; see also W. S. Heckscher, 'Reflections on Seeing Holbein's Portrait of Erasmus at Longford Castle', *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, London 1967, p. 136, n. 23. For Erasmus's sketch of 'Terminus', see below, n. 39.

¹² Letter to Stanislaus Turzo, Bishop of Olmütz, of 8 February 1525 (Allen, vi, pp. 16ff., no. 1544, l. 74f.). It should be noted, however, that this letter is an introduction to Erasmus's own edition of Pliny and that the designation of Pliny's work as 'omnibus

omnium sculptorum ac pictorum operibus antependendum' must be read as an intentional hyperbole intended to castigate the 'temerity, not to say impiety' of careless editors and printers.

¹³ Letter of 29 March 1528 (Allen, vii, p. 376, no. 1985, written in response to Allen, vii, pp. 343f., no. 1963 of 6 March 1528): 'Pinxit me Durerius, sed nihil simile.' It should be noted that in Erasmus's and other humanists' vocabulary the verb *pingere* can apply to woodcuts, engravings and drawings as well as to paintings in the narrower sense.

was Dürer's most intimate and trusted friend, he spared his correspondent's feelings by, as it were, taking the blame for the lack of similarity upon himself: 'If the portrait is not very lifelike we should not be surprised: I am no longer the same person I was more than five years ago.'¹⁴ And when writing to René d'Illiers, Bishop of Chartres, he was careful to add a special postscript expressing his deepest regrets for a conflagration which had occurred there a few weeks ago: 'How much I deplore that the so-splendid and so-famous Cathedral of the town of Chartres [which Erasmus may or may not have visited when he stayed in Paris from 1495-98] has been burned down by lightning, I cannot say.'¹⁵

Utterances like these, while bearing witness to Erasmus's politeness, are not necessarily 'insincere'. What he wrote to Pirckheimer about the Dürer print differs from what he wrote to Botteus only in tone but not in substance. He seems really to have felt very little enthusiasm for the modern, Italian style of sculpture, painting and architecture (of which he takes cognizance only once, and that only in order to criticize its sumptuousness), whereas he speaks with genuine affection not only of Chartres but also of Canterbury Cathedral and of the royal colleges in England.¹⁶ And in one significant passage he confesses that he, being so small of stature, delighted in big towns and buildings and, though he seldom left his room, enjoyed the life of populous cities¹⁷—all of them being, it is understood, northern medieval cities.

III

Except, characteristically, for portraits of himself or his friends and representations of his personal 'symbol'—the 'Terminus' to which we shall shortly revert—Erasmus has left few verbal descriptions of individual works of art. His *Epigrams on Paintings* are, as has been seen, mere literary exercises. And a letter widely circulated at his time and still occasionally quoted as written by Erasmus to Peter Corsi (Cursius) on 6 January 1535 has unfortunately turned out to be an ingenious forgery which, by Erasmus's own testimony, 'not only imitated his handwriting but even his literary style' (*imitati sunt manum meam atque etiam phrasim*).¹⁸ This letter vividly describes a golden goblet, allegedly

¹⁴ Letter of 30 July 1526 (Allen, vi, pp. 371f., no. 1729): 'Si minus respondet effigies, mirum non est. Non enim sum is qui fui ante annos quinque.'

¹⁵ Allen, i, pp. 430f., no. 199, written in August 1506: 'Carnutensis oppidi tam splendidum profecto tamque celebre phanum fulmine conflagrasset, dici non potest quam feram acerbe.'

¹⁶ *Opera*, i, col. 783A-D; *ibid.*, col. 915D.

¹⁷ Letter to John Choler of 14 July 1529, Allen, viii, pp. 228ff., no. 2195, ll. 54ff.: 'Veruntamen vt caeci maxime dicuntur capi rebus videntium, ita ego pusillus semper magnis aedificiis et vrbibus sum delectatus; quumque raro pedem efferam cubiculo, tamen in ciuitatibus frequentissimis viuere gaudeo.' Cf. Friedrich Hebbel's distich:

Götter, ich ford're nicht viel! Ich will
die Muschel bewohnen,
Aber ich kann es nur dann, wenn sie der
Ozean rollt.

¹⁸ The spurious letter to Peter Corsi is printed in Allen, xi, pp. 357ff., but not numbered. It is still quoted as authentic even by such good scholars as Rachel Giese (*op. cit.*, p. 271). Its spurious character was exposed by Erasmus himself in a letter to Julius Pflug of 7 May 1535 (Allen, xi, pp. 130f., no. 3016) and in his *Responsio ad Petri Cursii defensionem* (Allen, xi, pp. 172ff., no. 3032, particularly ll. 574-7); the whole case is excellently summarized by Allen, xi, pp. 357f. Erasmus's remark to the effect that the spurious letter 'not only imitated his handwriting but even his literary style' is well deserved. The letter

a gift to Erasmus from Matthew Cardinal Lang of Salzburg and 'equally suitable for taking medicine and drinking wine' whose decoration, 'worthy of Phidias or Praxiteles', showed an Aesculapius on the lid and, on the cup itself, a slightly tipsy Bacchus surrounded by frolicking satyrs (σκιρτώντας *circum habebat Satyros*).

Two features supposedly characteristic of 'primitive' portraits—the half-closed eyes and the tightly compressed lips—interested Erasmus only as expressions of 'modesty' and 'probity'.¹⁹ And a letter containing a circumstantial and enthusiastic description of the house of Canon John Botzheim in Constance, its pictorial decoration including not only such Christian subjects as St. Paul Preaching, Christ Delivering the Sermon on the Mount, the Separation of the Apostles, and the Conspiracy of Priests, Scribes, Pharisees and Elders, but also the Nine Muses and the Three Graces (their nudity explained and justified by the time-honoured proposition that the group symbolizes the virtues of 'unadorned' benevolence and friendship)—this letter concludes with the assertion that the owner of the house was far more admirable than his admirable domicile and that 'the Muses and Graces lived in his heart rather than in the paintings, in his character rather than on the walls'.²⁰

The account of Botzheim's house—its decoration indeed a pictorial summary of Christian humanism as Erasmus and his adherents understood it—may thus be designated as a borderline case between description and moralization. And when it comes to fundamentals, Erasmus's views were largely

wittily parodies all Erasmus's little foibles: his inclination towards name-dropping, towards discussions of his bladder stone, towards interspersing the Latin text with Greek words and quotations ('ἀπτόλεμον καὶ ἄμαχον,' 'μνημόσυνον', 'σκιρτώντας', 'ἡ καὶ ἀνδρῶν κράτα βάλνει', 'ἄσπονδον πόλεμον'), towards the use of such Latin coinages as *ebriosulus* which combines two biforms of *ebrius* (*ebriolus* and *ebriosus*). Peter Corsi was an Italian poet and patriot, much appreciated in Vatican circles, who had attacked Erasmus because of his lack of respect for Italy and the Italians.

¹⁹ *Opera*, i, col. 1034A: 'Picturae quidem veteres nobis loquuntur, olim singularis cujusdam modestiae fuisse, semiclusis oculis obtueri, quamadmodum apud Hispanos quosdam, semipetos intueri blandum haberi videtur & amicum. Ibidem ex picturis discimus, olim contractis strictisque labiis esse, probitatis fuisse argumentum.'

²⁰ Letter to Marcus Laurinus of 1 February 1523 (Allen, v, pp. 203ff., no. 1342, particularly ll. 339–54): '... Domum habet quae Musarum domicilium videri possit: nusquam non prae se ferens aliquid nitoris et elegantiae, nusquam muta, sed vndique loquacibus picturis alliciens ac remorans oculos hominum. In aula aestiua, quam, vt ait, mihi paraverat,

proxime mensam stabat Paulus docens populum. In altero pariete sedebat Christus in monte, docens suos discipulos: tum Apostoli per iuga proficiscentes ad Euangelii praedicationem. Secundum fumarium consistebant sacerdotes, scribae et Pharisaei, cum senioribus conspirantes aduersus Evangelium iam subolescens. Alibi caneabant nouem sorores Apollinis, alibi Charites nudaе, simplicis benevolentiae et amicitiae non fucatae symbolum. Sed quid ego persequar totam illius domum epistola depingere? cuius nitelas, cuius delitias vix decem diebus perlustrare possis. Sed in totis aedibus vndique ornatisimis nihil est ornatius ipso hospite. Musas et Gratias magis habet in pectore quam in tabulis, magis in moribus quam in parietibus.' For the iconography of the 'Apostles departing in pairs to preach the Gospels', see A. Katzenellenbogen, 'The Separation of the Apostles', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, series 6, xxxv, 1949, pp. 81ff.; for the positive interpretation of the nudity of the Three Graces as a symbol of benevolence or friendship 'sine fuco, id est non simulata et ficta, sed pura et sincera', see, e.g., Servius, *Comm. in Aeneidem*, i, 720; Fulgentius, *Mitologiae*, ii, 1; *Mythographus* iii, 11, 2 (G. H. Bode, *Scriptores rerum mythicarum latini tres*, Celle 1834, p. 229).

dominated by orthodox theology and the traditional ideals of moderation and decorum, μηδὲν ἄγαν and τὸ ἐπιεικές.

IV

Erasmus was not an iconoclast. Not without slight touches of irony, he disapproved of both superstitious image worship and the 'odious fury' with which the statues of saints had been destroyed and murals had been white-washed in the *Bildersturm*, particularly in the great 'idolomachy' of Basle in February 1529; it had, he said, done nothing for piety and much for sedition.²¹ And his aversion to violence, coupled with his taste for art and his sense of history, prevented him from any real sympathy with the iconoclasts. Like all good theologians he insisted that what is venerable in an image is not the material effigy but the idea it represents, not the *signa* but the *divi ipsi*.²² The veneration of the saints, he thought, should always stop short of such idolatrous practices as genuflection, the kissing of hands, etc., and no one should imagine that, for example, St. Barbara could offer some special kind of protection which St. Catherine was unable to offer; or that, beyond their power of intercession, the saints could grant gifts which only God can bestow.²³ 'You

²¹ Letter to Justus Decius of 8 June 1529 (Allen, viii, pp. 190f., no. 2175, ll. 11-13). The expression *idolomachia* (which, 'curiously enough, came to a boil right in the cold of winter') occurs in the letter to John Vergara of 24 March 1529 (Allen, viii, pp. 106ff., no. 2133, l. 64). Cf. also the letter to John Antoninus of 9 June 1529 (Allen, viii, pp. 191f., no. 2176, ll. 67-69: 'Tantum in statuas diuorum et imagines saeuitum est, vsque ad internicionem') and a letter to Pirckheimer of 9 May 1529 (Allen, viii, pp. 161ff., no. 2158, ll. 13ff.): 'Nam quum decretum esset saeuire in diuos ac diuas, condensant sese in foro, dispositis tormentis aeneis, et aliquot noctibus illic sub dio agebant, extructa pyra ingenti, magno omnium metu. . . . Hactenus tamen Senatus moderatus est tumultum, vt per fabros et artifices tollerentur e templis quae tolli placuisset. Tantis autem ludibriis vsi sunt in simulacra diuorum atque etiam Crucifixi, vt mirum sit nullum illic aeditum miraculum; quum olim tam multa soleant aedere vel leuiter offensi diui. Statuarum nihil relictum est, nec in templis nec in vestibulis nec in porticibus nec in monasteriis. Quidquid erat pictarum imaginum, calcea incrustura oblitum est. Quod erat capax ignis, in rogam coniectum est; quod secus, frustulatim comminutum. Nec pretium nec ars impetrauit vt cuiquam omnino parceretur.' It is with a slightly malicious smile that Erasmus expressed his astonishment at the saints' failure to prevent this orgy of destruction by one of

their customary miracles; and in a later letter to Augustine Marius of 22 May 1530 (Allen, viii, pp. 440ff., no. 2321, ll. 32-36) he reported that the iconoclastic outbreak of the previous year had itself been explained and excused by what may be called a miracle in reverse. When someone had accidentally touched a statue with a javelin it collapsed at once; and this happened over and over again when the experiment was repeated with a stick: 'De imaginibus sic excusat, quendam hastili casu tetigisse statuam, mox concidisse. Idem quum baculo tentasset alius atque alius, omnes attactae conciderunt. Quo ex miraculo quum perspicere manifestam Dei voluntatem, caeteras quoque demoliti sunt.'

²² See, for example, *Praise of Folly*, *Opera*, iv, col. 454C: 'Nec jam usque adeo stulta sum,' says *Stultitia*, 'ut saxeas ac coloribus fucatas imagines requiram, quae cultui nostro nonnumquam officiant, cum a stupidis, & pinguibus istis, signa pro Divis ipsis adorantur.' Cf. also, among many other passages the letter to an unidentified recipient (Allen, x, pp. 282f., no. 2853, ll. 2-5): 'Tollunt omnes imagines, rem cum primis et elegantem et vtilem. Tollatur colendi superstitio, tollantur imagines templis indecorae aut immodicae, idque paulatim, et sine tumultu.'

²³ See the long letter to Jacopo Sadoletto of 7 March 1531 (Allen, ix, pp. 157ff., no. 2443, particularly ll. 220-6): 'Superstitionem enim interpretor . . . aut quum a singulis peculiararia quaedam petimus, quasi hoc possit prestare

honour the image of the Holy Face formed of stone or wood or painted in colour; but much more religiously should be honoured the image of Christ's mind which through the artifice of the Holy Spirit is expressed in Scripture.²⁴ The same sense of history compelled him to draw a sharp line between that which could be justified by tradition and the principles of moderation and decorum, and that which could not.

Erasmus did not particularly like the common practice of carrying around the statues of saints in procession; but he knew that these 'vestiges of ancient paganism' had been tolerated by the Fathers of the Church because to honour the 'images of pious men and women, whose miracles entitled them to share the Kingdom of Christ', was a great step forward from the worship of 'Bacchus, Neptune and Silenus with his satyrs'; and they were convinced that it was more difficult in the life of Christians to 'change one's expression of faith than public custom'. Thus he had no serious objection to 'converting the superstitious habit of courting around with torches in memory of the Abduction of Proserpina into the religious custom of convening in church with lighted candles in honour of the Virgin Mary' (thus celebrating the day of her Purification, still known as *Mariae Lichtmess*, *La Chandeleur* or Candlemas on 2 February). He did not mind that, whereas formerly people had invoked Apollo or Aesculapius in the event of sickness, now they turned to St. Roch or St. Anthony; that, whereas formerly they had prayed to Juno or Lucina for fertility or a happy childbirth, now they prayed to St. James or St. Margaret. Therefore

not all images are to be banished from the churches but the people have to be taught in what way to use them. Whatever vice there may be in this must be corrected (if it can be done without dangerous riots); what good there may be in it must be approved. It would be desirable that in a Christian church nothing be in evidence but that which is worthy of Christ. But now we see there so many fables and childish stories like the Seven Falls of Christ, the Seven Swords of the Virgin or her Three Vows and other silly human fabrications of this kind. Further the saints are not depicted in a form which is worthy of them—as when a painter, commissioned to portray the Virgin Mary or St. Agatha, occasionally patterns his figure after a lascivious little whore, or when he, commissioned to portray Christ or St. Paul, takes as his model some drunken rascal. For there are images which provoke us to lasciviousness rather than to piety. Yet, even these we tolerate because we see more harm in eliminating (*in tollendo*) than in tolerating (*in tolerando*) them.

If, he concludes, a gorgeous display of trophies and heraldic devices and the

Catarina, quod non possit Barbara: aut quum illos inclamamus, non vt intercessores, sed vt autores eorum bonorum que nobis largitur deus.'

²⁴ *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, *Opera*, v, col. 31F: 'Honoras imaginem vultus Christi saxo, lignove deformatam aut fucatam coloribus, multo religiosius honoranda mentis illius imago, quae Spiritus Sancti artificio expressa est litteris Euangelicis.' Cf. *Expositio con-*

cionalis, *Opera*, v, col. 533E: 'tametsi mira crassitudo est in homine Christiano, non posse contemplari Deum, nisi per imaginem, si tamen Dei potest ulla fingi imago. Mendax imago fallit.' In secularized form Erasmus expressed the same idea in the motto affixed to his own portraits (Dürer's engraving B.107 and Massys's medal of 1519: THN KPEITTO TA SYTTPAMMATA ΔΕΙΞΕΙ; cf. Pls. 22a and 23f).



a—Albrecht Dürer, Portrait of Erasmus, 1526 (pp. 204, 208, 324)



Courtesy Trustees, National Gallery

b—Quinten Massys, *The Ugly Duchess*. London, National Gallery (p. 214)

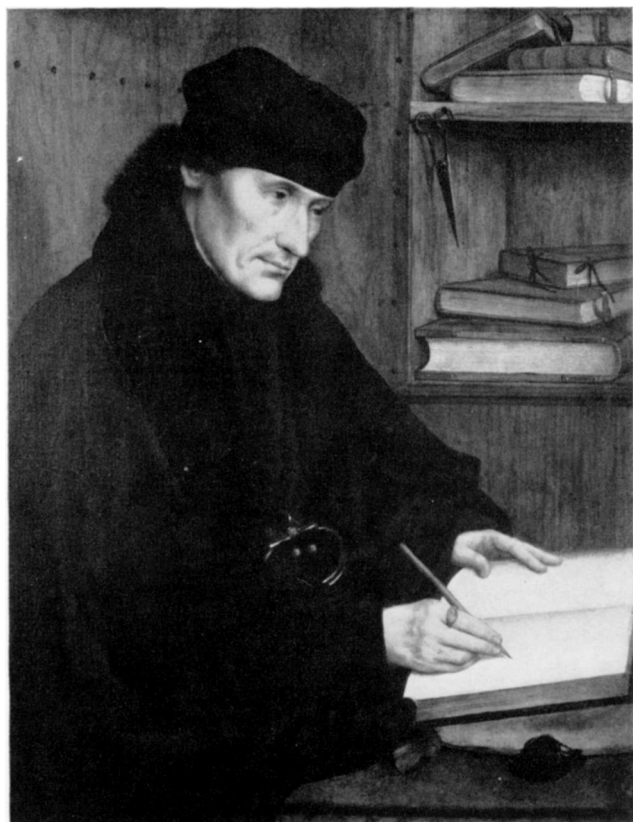
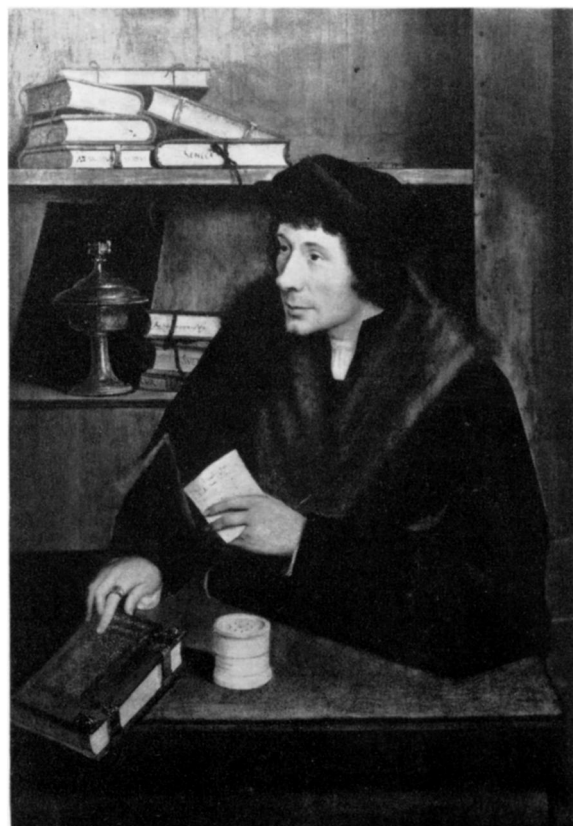


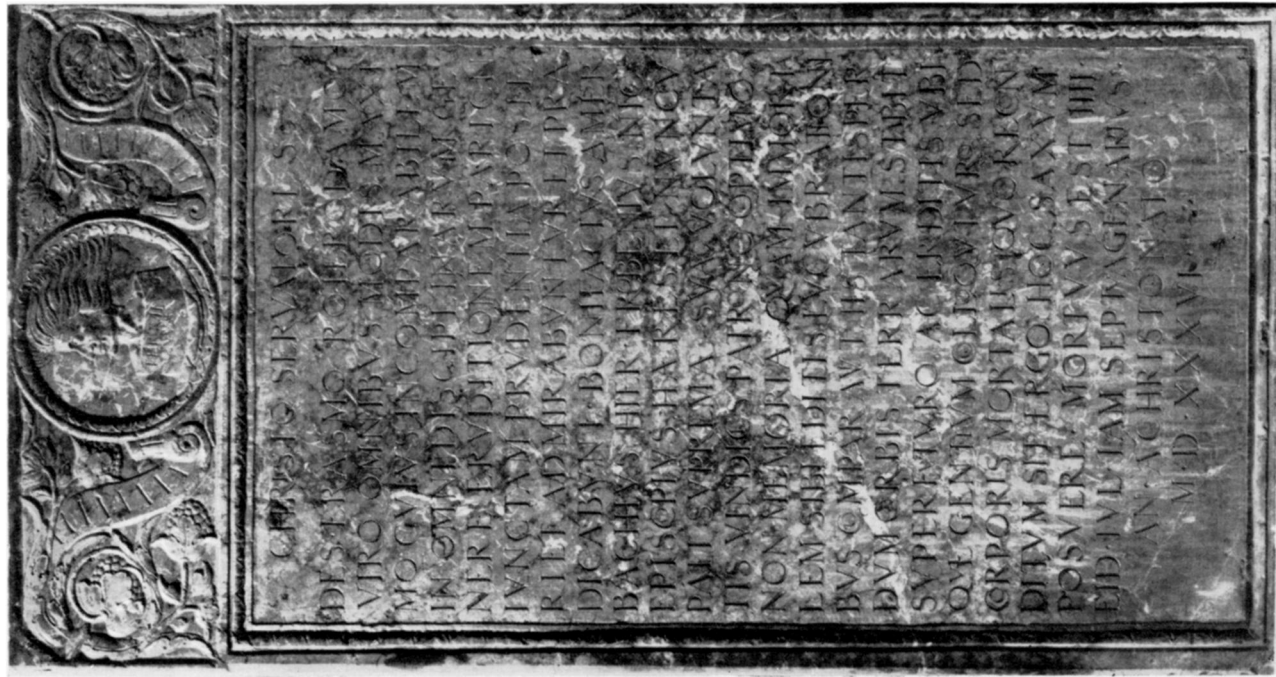
Photo: Alinari

c—Quinten Massys, *Erasmus*. Rome, Palazzo Corsini. From double portrait of Erasmus and Pierre Gilles, 1517 (p. 214)



Courtesy Lord Radnor

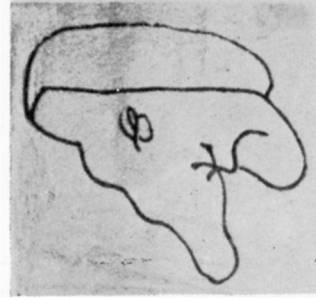
d—Quinten Massys, *Pierre Gilles*. Longford Castle, Collection Earl of Radnor. From double portrait of Erasmus and Pierre Gilles, 1517 (p. 214)



a—Tombstone of Erasmus, Basle Cathedral (p. 215)



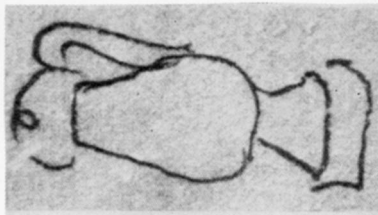
b—Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of Willibald Pirckheimer*, 1524 (p. 218)



c



d



e—Erasmus's signet ring with Terminus (after a cast in the British Museum) (pp. 215, 217)



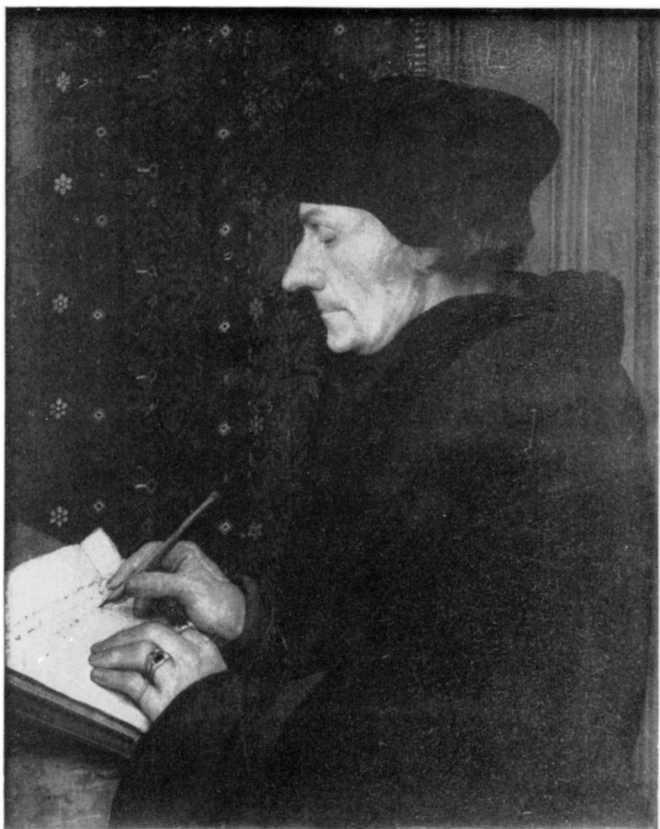
f—Quinten Massys, medal, 1519, obverse with portrait of Erasmus. London, British Museum (pp. 204, 208, 215)



g—Quinten Massys, medal, 1519, reverse with Terminus. London, British Museum (pp. 215f.)



c, d—Erasmus, marginal drawings. Basle University Library, MS. A. IX, 56 (p. 203)



a—Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Erasmus*, 1523. Paris, Louvre (p. 219)



b—Hans Holbein the Younger, *Erasmus with Terminus*, woodcut (p. 220)



c—Albrecht Dürer, *Knight, Death and Devil*, 1513 (p. 221)



d—Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of Erasmus*, 1520, charcoal. Paris, Louvre (p. 223)

Courtesy Cabinet des Dessins, Musée de Louvre

most ostentatious and obstructive tombs of rich people are suffered to exist in churches, 'then we may also rightfully tolerate the images of the saints'.²⁵

What Erasmus emphatically disapproves of is the 'realistic' presentation of life in hell 'down to the last detail, as though the author had dwelt there for many years', or of Heaven as a realm where the beatified souls can 'perambulate to their heart's desire, enjoying delicious food or even playing ball'.²⁶ And what he downright abhors is, needless to say, blatant profanity or indecency—even if the subject be taken from the Bible.

What shall I say about the licence so often found in statues and pictures? We see depicted and exposed to the eyes what would be disgraceful even to mention. Such subjects are publicly exhibited and willy-nilly forced upon everybody's eyes in hostelries and in the market-place as could inflame the lust, already cold with age, of a Priam or a Nestor . . . let us thank God that our religion has nothing which is not chaste and modest.

²⁵ *Modus orandi, Opera*, v, col. 1120A–1121B: 'Rursum in publicis supplicationibus ac pompis ecclesiasticis, quantum videmus apud quasdam gentes superstitionis, unusquisque opificum ordo circumfert suos divos, ingentes mali portantur a multis sudantibus. . . . Sunt enim ista vestigia veteris paganismi. Olim in sacris ludis circumferebatur Bacchus, Venus, Neptunus, Silenus cum Satyris, & difficilior erat in Christianorum vita mutare professionem, quam publicam consuetudinem. Itaque religiosi Patres arbitrabantur magnum esse profectum, si pro talibus diis circumferrentur statuæ piorum hominum, quos miracula declarabant regnare cum Christo. Si superstitiosa consuetudo cursitandi cum facibus in memoriam raptæ Proserpinae, verteretur in religiosum morem, ut populus Christianus cum accensis cereis conveniret in templum in honorem Mariæ Virginis. . . . Haec tolerata sunt a Patribus, non quod in his esset Christiana religio, sed quod ab illis, quæ commemoravimus, ad hæc profecisse magnus pietatis gradus videretur. Eadem ratione toleratæ sunt imagines, quas veteres Ecclesiæ proceres aliquot vehementer detestati sunt, odio, videlicet, idololatriæ. Gaudebant igitur populum huc profecisse, ut pro deorum simulacris venerarentur imagines Jesu Servatoris, & aliorum divorum. Quamquam harum usus jam in immensum progressus est. Nec tamen ideo profligandæ sunt imagines omnes e templis, sed docendus est populus, quemadmodum his conveniat uti. Quod inest vitii, corrigendum est, si fieri potest absque gravi tumultu; quod inest boni, probandum est. Optandum esset nihil in templis Christianorum conspici nisi Christo dignum. Nunc illic videmus tot fabulas ac naenias depictas,

ut septem lapsus Domini Jesu, septem gladios Virginis, aut ejusdem tria vota, aliaque id genus hominum inania commenta; deinde sanctos non ea forma repræsentatos, quæ ipsis digna sit. Siquidem pictor expressurus Virginem Matrem, aut Agatham, nonnumquam exemplum sumit a lasciva meretricula; & expressurus Christum aut Paulum, proponit sibi temulentum quempiam ac nebulonem. Sunt enim imagines quæ citius provocant ad lasciviam, quam ad pietatem; & hæc tamen a nobis tolerantur, quia plus videmus mali in tollendo, quam in tolerando. Videmus quaedam templa foris & intus plena nobilium insigniis, clypeis, galeis, leonibus, draconibus, vulturibus, canibus, tauris, bubalis, onocrotalis, vexillis ab hoste direptis; videmus locum occupatum ambitiosis divitum monumentis, solum inaequale factum & ad ingrediendum inhabile, quasi vel mortui studeant graves esse populo; hæc si feruntur in templis potius quam laudantur, arbitror & Divorum imagines recte tolerari.' For Erasmus's derivation of the Candlemas procession from the torch procession of Roman matrons to the Pantheon, see the *Golden Legend* (*Jacobi a Voragine Legenda Aurea* . . ., xxxvii, Th. Graesse, rec., 3rd edition, Breslau 1890, pp. 163f.); hence the two miniatures, one showing the Abduction of Proserpina, the other the Purification of the Virgin, in the manuscript (now Paris, Bibl. Nationale, MS. fr. 244–5) immortalized in Anatole France's *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* (G. Huard, 'Sylvestre Bonnard et la "Légende dorée"', *Les Trésors des bibliothèques de France*, iii, 1930, pp. 25ff., pl. xiii [MS. fr. 244, fol. 76]).

²⁶ *Praise of Folly, Opera*, iv, col. 469C.

All the more grievous is the sin of those who inject shamelessness into subjects that are chaste by nature. Why is it necessary to depict any old fable in the churches? A young man and a girl lying in bed? David looking from a window at Bathsheba and luring her into adultery? To show David embracing the Shunamite woman [viz., Abishag] who had been brought before him? Or the daughter of Herodias dancing? These subjects, it is true, are taken from Scripture; but when it comes to the depiction of females how much naughtiness is there admixed by the artists?²⁷

The observation that, as Erasmus says in another place, 'some artists tend to invest unobjectionable subjects with their own nastiness' may be very true; but it reveals a slight bias against artists as a species, and this slight bias even colours Erasmus's use of an Augustinian simile. In an attempt to explain why God not only tolerates sin but deems it necessary (*vitiorum nostrorum non est auctor Deus sed tamen ordinator est*) St. Augustine had written: 'Shadows in paintings, too, serve to set into relief all eminences and please not by virtue of quality [that is, because of their darkness] but by virtue of order [that is, because of their position in relation to the lighted portions].'²⁸ Wrestling with the related problem of divine reward and punishment, Erasmus also employs the painter's use of shadows as a medium of comparison; but he does so with a noticeably negative accent:

These thinkers [that is, the Lutherans who 'amplify the grace of God to such an extent that it operates regardless of merit'], it seems to me, contract God's mercy in one place in order to expand it in others—as if a host were to serve to his guests a very meagre breakfast in order to appear all the more splendid at his dinner—imitating, as it were, the painters who, when they wish to produce the deceptive illusion (*mentiri*) of light in a picture, obscure by shadow everything near it.²⁹

'Silent art is very eloquent,' says Erasmus and he proves his point by telling

²⁷ *Christiani matrimonii institutio*, *Opera*, v, col. 719, C-E: 'Haec erat ethnici philosophi sententia; & non pudet Christianos, homines spurcissimae petulantiae pro festivis ac lepidis amplecti? Quid memorem quanta sit in signis ac picturis licentia? Pingitur, & oculis repraesentatur, quod vel nominare sit turpissimum. Haec argumenta prostant publicitus in tabernis ac foro, & volentium nolentium oculis ingeruntur, quibus incendi jam frigidus aevo Laomedontiades & Nestoris hernia possit. . . . Agamus gratias Deo, quod nostra religio nihil habet non castum & pudicum. At tanto gravius peccant, qui rebus natura castis invehunt impudicitiam. Primum, quid est necesse quasvis fabulas in templis depingere? juvenem ac puellam eodem in lecto cubantem? David contemplantem e fenestra Bethsabeam, & ad stuprum

evocantem; aut amplectentem ad se delatam Sunamitin? Herodiadis filiam saltantem? Argumenta sumta sunt e Divinis Libris: sed in exprimendis foeminis quantum admiscunt artifices nequitiae?'

²⁸ St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* (*Patrologia Latina*, xxxiv, col. 229): 'Et umbrae in picturis eminentiora quaeque distinguunt, ac non specie, sed ordine placent. Nam et vitiorum nostrorum non est auctor Deus; sed tamen ordinator est.'

²⁹ *De libero arbitrio collatio*, *Opera*, ix, col. 1246, C-D: 'Verum interim isti mihi videntur alibi contrahere Dei misericordiam, ut alibi dilatent, perinde ac si quis apponat conviviis perparcum prandium, quo splendidior videatur in coena, et quodammodo pictores imitetur, qui cum lucem mentiri volunt in pictura, obscurant umbris, quae proximasunt.'

the story of Praxiteles's *Venus of Knidos* on which a young man *suae intemperantiae notas reliquit* (Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, xxxvi, 20). He heaps opprobrium on painters who show St. John and Martha whispering in a corner while Christ converses with Mary Magdalen, or who depict St. Peter draining a goblet of wine.³⁰

At times Erasmus sounds almost like Bernard of Clairvaux—as when he inveighs against the luxuries of the Certosa di Pavia built, at enormous expense, for the benefit of a few monks and crowds of visitors ‘who go there only in order to stare at this church of marble’;³¹ or like a member of the Holy Inquisition—as when he condemns all pictorial deviations from Scripture and writes:

In my opinion, at least, those who raged against the images of saints were led into their bigotry, however immoderate, not quite without justification. Idolatry, viz., the cult of images, is a horrible crime. . . . And since the arts of sculpture and painting were once counted among the liberal arts, this ‘silent poetry’ can at times have a stronger effect on human emotions than a man, even an eloquent one, could ever achieve by words. If only all the walls in all the churches were to show the life of Christ in becoming fashion! According to the African Council, ‘nothing should be recited in church except the canonical writings; in the same way there should be no pictures but those whose subject is contained in these canonical writings’. In cloisters, porches and ambulatories there may be other subjects taken from human history, provided they are conducive to good behaviour. But stupid, obscene or subversive panels should be removed not only from the churches but also from the whole community. And, as it is a kind of blasphemy to twist Holy Writ into silly profane jokes,

³⁰ *Christiani matrimonii institutio*, *Opera*, v, col. 696 E–F: ‘Loquax enim res est tacita pictura, & sensim irrepit in animos hominum. Quid autem turpitudinis est, quod hodie non repraesentent pictores & statuarii? Et his delitiis quidam ornant sua conclavia, quasi juventuti desint irritamenta nequitiae. Membraque verecundiae gratia celas ne videantur, cur in tabula nudas? Et quae non judicares tutum ad tuendam filiarum filiorumve pudicitiam intueri, si fierent, cur ea numquam pateris abesse a conspectu liberorum? Nota est fabula de juvene, qui in statua Veneris suae intemperantiae notas reliquit. Addunt artifices quidam etiam verecundis argumentis de suo nequitiam. Etenim, quum pingunt aliquid ex Euangelica historia, affingunt impias ineptias: velut quum exprimunt Dominum apud Martham ac Mariam exceptum convivio, interea dum Dominus loquitur cum Maria, fingunt Joannem adolescentem clam in angulo fabulantem cum Martha, Petrum exsiccantem cantarum. Rursus in convivio Martham a tergo assistentem Joanni, altera manu injecta humeris, altera velut

irridente Christum, qui nihil horum sentiat. Item Petro jam vino rubicundum cyathum admovere labris.’ The ‘supreme eloquence’ of art as ‘silent poetry’ is also stressed in *De amabili Ecclesiae concordia*, *Opera*, v, col. 501B, quoted below, n. 32; for the whole passage, cf. *Christiani matrimonii institutio*, *Opera*, v, col. 719, C–E, quoted above, n. 27.

³¹ *Colloquia (Convivium religiosum)*, *Opera*, i, col. 685A: ‘Cum essem apud Insubres, vidi monasterium quoddam ordinis Cartusiani, non ita procul a Papia: in eo templum est, intus ac foris, ab imo usque ad summum, candido marmore constructum, & fere quicquid inest rerum, marmoreum est, velut altaria, columnae, tumbae. Quorsum autem attinebat tantum pecuniarum effundere, ut pauci monachi solitarii canerent in templo marmoreo, quibus ipsis templum hoc oneri est, non usui; quod frequenter infestentur ab hospitibus qui non ob aliud eo se conferunt, nisi ut spectent templum illud marmoreum.’ Erasmus has therefore high praise for columns of simulated marble because they ‘make up for the lack of money by art’ (*ibid.*, col. 674D).

so do they deserve heavy punishment who, when depicting subjects from the Bible, mix in, according to their own fancy, something ridiculous and unworthy of the saints. If one wants to play the fool let him take his subjects from Philostratus.³²

Bernard of Clairvaux and the Holy Inquisition were cited advisedly. Erasmus's insistence on a clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the profane compelled him to agree with both Luther and the Council of Trent in answering one of the basic artistic questions of his day: was it permissible or even desirable to represent the sacred personages of the Bible and the *Acta Sanctorum* in the guise of mythological characters? Luther as well as the Council of Trent sternly disapproved of such a fusion. Luther called it a kind of prostitution; and the Council of Trent placed on the Index 'all the allegorical or tropological [i.e., Christianizing] commentaries on or paraphrases of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*' while raising no objection to the unadulterated paganism of the original text.³³ Erasmus not only censured those who (like the narrow-minded and 'intolerably supercilious' linguists who acknowledged only Cicero as a model of good Latin) took an inordinate delight in classical 'coins portraying Hercules or Mercury or Fortune or Victory or Alexander the Great, or any Roman emperor', and would rather look at the Rape of Danaë or the Abduction of Ganymede than at the Annunciation or the Ascension of Christ—while ridiculing as superstitious whoever 'cherished a fragment of the Holy Cross or an image of the Trinity and the saints';³⁴ he also condemned, in the

³² *De amabili Ecclesiae concordia*, *Opera*, v, col. 501, B-D: 'Qui saevierunt in divorum imagines, non prorsus ab re concitati sunt ad eum zelum, licet immodicum, mea quidem sententia. Nam horribile crimen est idololatria, hoc est, simulacrorum cultus: qui, tametsi jam olim sublatus est e moribus hominum, tamen periculum est, ne technis daemonum eodem revolvantur incauti. Sed quum statuaria & pictura olim inter liberales artes habita sit tacita poesis, plus interdum repraesentans affectibus hominum, quam homo, quamvis facundus, possit verbis exprimere . . . , corrigendum erat, quod per imagines irrepererat superstitionis, utilitas erat servanda. Utinam omnes omnium aedium parietes haberent vitam Jesu Christi decenter expressam! In templis autem, quemadmodum in Africano Concilio decretum fuit, *Ne quid recitaretur praeter Scripturas Canonicas, ita conveniret nullam esse picturam, nisi cujus argumentum in Canonicis Scripturis contineretur*. In peristyllis, porticibus & ambulacris possent & alia pingi ex humanis historiis desumta, modo facerent ad bonos mores. Stultas vero aut obscoenas aut seditiosas tabulas oportuit non solum e templis, verum etiam ex omni civitate sublatas esse. Et quemadmodum blasphemiae genus est sacras litteras ad ineptos ac profanos detorquere jocos, ita gravi poena digni sunt,

qui cum pingunt Canoniarum Scripturarum argumenta, de suo capite miscent ridicula quaedam, ac sanctis indigna. Si libet ineptire, a Philostrato potius petant argumenta.'

³³ See the Index of Pius IV (1564), reprinted in F. H. Reusch, *Die Indices librorum prohibitorum des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen 1886, p. 275. For Luther's position, see *Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, xliii, Weimar 1912, p. 668.

³⁴ *Dialogus Ciceronianus*, *Opera*, i, col. 999, C-D: 'Quam habemus in delitiis Herculis, aut Mercurii, aut Fortunae, aut Victoriae, aut Alexandri Magni, Caesarisve cujuslibet simulacrum nomismate expressum? & veluti supersticiosos ridemus, qui lignum crucis, qui Triadis ac divorum imagines inter res caras habent. Si quando Romae conspicatus es Ciceronianorum *μουσεία*, recale quaeso nuncubi videris imaginem Crucifixi, aut sacrae Triadis aut Apostolorum, paganismi monumentis plena reperies omnia. Et in tabulis magis capit oculos nostros Jupiter per impluvium illapsus in gremium Danaës, quam Gabriel sacrae Virgini nuncians coelestem conceptum; vehementius delectat raptus ab aquila Ganymedes, quam Christus ascendens in coelum; jucundius morantur oculos nostros expressa Bacchanalia, Terminaliave, turpitudinis & obscoenitatis plena, quam Lazarus

name of 'fittingness', such artists as would lend the appearance of Jupiter to God the Father or that of Apollo to Christ.

Suppose now, if you like, [we read in the *Ciceronianus*] that Apelles, who in his time surpassed all painters in the representation of gods and men, were by some miracle to reappear in our own century and were to paint the Germans as he had once painted the Greeks, or the monarchs [of our time] as he had once painted Alexander, although nobody like them exists nowadays: would he not be said to have painted them badly?—Badly, because not fittingly (*male quia non apte*).—If he were to paint God the Father in the guise in which he had once painted Jupiter, Christ in the form in which he had once portrayed Apollo, would you approve of that?—Not at all.—What if somebody today were to render the Virgin Mary in the same manner as Apelles had once portrayed Diana, or St. Agnes in the form in which Apelles had painted the Ἀναδυομένη celebrated by all writers, or St. Thecla in the form in which he had painted Laïs? Would you say that such a painter was similar to Apelles?—I don't think so.—And if someone were to adorn our churches with statues similar to those with which Lysippus once adorned the temples of the gods, would you say that he is similar to Lysippus?—No.—Why not?—Because the symbols would not correspond to the things symbolized. I would say the same if somebody were to paint a donkey in the guise of a buffalo or a hawk in the guise of a cuckoo, even if he had otherwise expended the greatest care and artistry upon that panel.³⁵

Here Erasmus, the humanist, not only agrees with Luther and the theologians of the Counter-Reformation but places himself in diametrical opposition to the very man whom he and his circle were wont to call 'the Apelles of our age': Albrecht Dürer. Faced with precisely the same problem and adducing precisely the same examples, Dürer wrote as follows:

Just as they [sc., the Greek and Roman artists] attributed the most beautiful human shape to their false god, Apollo, so will we use the same proportions for Christ our Lord Who was the most beautiful man in the universe. And just as they employed Venus as the most beautiful woman, so will we chastely present the same lovely figure as the most pure Virgin

in vitam revocatus aut Christus a Joanne baptizatus.' In his *Responsio ad Albertum Pium* (*Opera*, ix, cols. 1160F–1163D) Erasmus is, however, careful to emphasize the difference between representations of the Trinity and representations of Christ, to reject as superstitious the invocation of special saints for special purposes and to condemn such superstitions as the belief that the aspect of St. Christopher protected the faithful from violent death.

³⁵ *Dialogus Ciceronianus*, *Opera*, i, col. 991Fff.: 'Da nunc si libet ex pictoribus Apellem, qui suae aetatis & deos & homines optime pingere solitus est, si quo fato rediret

in hoc seculum, & tales pingeret Germanos, quales olim pinxit Graecos, tales monarchas, qualem olim pinxit Alexandrum, quum hodie tales non sint, nonne diceretur male pinxisse?—Male, quia non apte.—Si tali habitu pingeret quis Deum Patrem, quali pinxit olim Jovem, tali specie Christum, quali tum pingebat Apollinem, num probares tabulam?—Nequaquam.—Quid, si quis Virginem matrem hodie sic exprimeret, quemadmodum Apelles olim effigiabat Dianam, aut Agnen virginem ea forma, qua ille pinxit illam omnium literis celebratam Ἀναδυομένην, aut divam Theclam ea specie qua pinxit Laidem, num hunc diceres Apelli similem?—

Mary, the mother of God. Hercules we will transform into Samson, and with all the others we will do likewise.³⁶

V

Dürer, of course, is one of the three great artists to whom Erasmus was linked by personal acquaintance, who served him as portraitists and who in turn were influenced by his philosophy of life. The two others are Quinten Massys and Hans Holbein the Younger.³⁷

To Massys—*insignis artifex* or *artifex non vulgaris*³⁸—we owe, first of all, the moving double portrait of Erasmus and his lifelong friend, Pierre Gilles (Petrus Aegidius), the learned, gentle and generous Secretary to the City of Antwerp (Pl. 22c,d). This double portrait—showing the two friends in two panels but within the unified setting of a well-appointed library—was completed in the spring of 1517 and is now divided between the collection of the Earl of Radnor at Longford Castle and the Galleria Nazionale in the Palazzo Corsini in Rome. It bears witness to a *quadruple amitié*: the friendship between Erasmus, Pierre Gilles, Massys, and Thomas More. It was sent to the latter as a gift from the sitters, and on 6 October 1517 Thomas More expressed his delight in glowing letters of gratitude to the two donors and in a dithyrambic poem addressed to the painter. Massys in turn was influenced, it seems, by Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (first published in 1511), as can be seen in the 'social criticism' implied by such pictures as his *Ill-Assorted Couples*, his *Usurers*, or the so-called *Ugly Duchess* in the National Gallery in London (Pl. 22b) who looks very much like one of those foolish old women who, to quote from Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, 'still wish to play the goat, industriously smear their faces with paint, never get away from the mirror, and do not hesitate to display their foul and withered breasts'.

In 1519, Massys portrayed Erasmus once more on a beautiful medal which, on the one hand, was to give rise to a 'stupid squabble' (*stolidissima cavillatio*) about Erasmus's character and, on the other, permitted him to display a rather

Non arbitror.—Et si quis templa nostra talibus ornaret simulacris, qualibus olim Lysippus ornavit fana deorum, num hunc diceret Lysippo similem?—Non dicerem.—Cur ita?—Quia signa rebus non congruerent. Idem dicerem, si quis asinum pingeret specie bubali, aut accipitrem figura cuculi, etiam si ad eam tabulam summam alioqui curam & artem adhiberet.'

³⁶ Lange and Fuhse, p. 316, ll. 9–17: 'Dann zu gleicher Weis, wie sie die schönsten Gestalt eines Menschen haben zugemessen ihrem Abgott Abblo, also wolln wir dieselb Moss brauchen zu Crysto dem Herren, der der schönste aller Welt ist. Und wie sie braucht haben Fenus als das schönste Weib, also woll wir dieselb zierlich Gestalt kreuschlich darlegen der allerreinsten Jungfrauen Maria, der Mutter Gottes. Und aus dem Ercules woll

wir den Somson machen, desgeleichen wöll wir mit den andern allen than.'

³⁷ Cf. the literature referred to in n. 5 above; further K. G. Boon, *Quinten Massys*, Amsterdam, n.d., pp. 48f., figs. pp. 46 and 47; Marlier, *op. cit.*, pp. 71ff., figs. 9 and 10, facing p. 28 (where, however, the portrait of Petrus Aegidius is reproduced from a good copy preserved in the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts at Antwerp). More specifically, see A. Gerlo, 'Erasmus en Quinten Metsijs', *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art*, xiv, 1944, pp. 33ff., and *idem*, *Erasmus et ses Portraitistes* . . ., Brussels 1950.

³⁸ Letter of 15 May 1520 to Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg (Allen, iv, pp. 259f., no. 1101, ll. 8f.) and letter to Nicholas Everardi of 17 April 1520 (Allen, iv, pp. 237f., no. 1092, l. 3).

surprising familiarity with the technical procedures of 'medallurgy'. Its obverse (Pl. 23f) shows the bust of the still youthful-looking Erasmus in pure profile, turned to the left and accompanied by a Greek line often referred to in his letters and repeated in Dürer's engraved portrait of 1526: *ΤΗΝ ΚΡΕΙΤΤΩ ΤΑ ΣΥΓΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ ΔΕΙΞΕΙ*, 'The better [Image] will my Writings show'. The reverse (Pl. 23g) exhibits Erasmus's personal patron saint: Terminus, the god of boundaries, with whom Erasmus seems to have identified himself to such an extent that the Roman god may be described as the humanist's *alter ego*. On the medal, Terminus appears *en buste* as a youth with flying hair, and he, too, is shown in profile and turned to the left. The bust rests upon a cubiform base which emerges from a mass of piled-up earth (*agger*). The motto (inscribed on the base and on either side of the bust) is *ΤΕΡΜΙΝՄS CONCΕDΟ ΝՄΛΛΙ* or, with the order of words slightly changed, *CONCΕDΟ ΝՄΛΛΙ ΤΕΡΜΙΝՄS*; and in the circumference we read *MORS VLTIMA LINEA RERVM* (the last line of Horace, *Epistolae*, i, 16, 79) and *ΟΡΑ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΜΑΚΡΟΥ ΒΙΟΥ*, meaning, respectively, 'Death Is the Ultimate Boundary of Things', and 'Contemplate the End of a Long Life'.

In 1509, while travelling in Italy with his high-born friend and pupil, Alexander Stewart (natural son of King James IV of Scotland, and later Archbishop of St. Andrews), Erasmus had been presented by Alexander with an ancient gem which showed the figure of Terminus—a god whose identity and significance had been discovered by Politian and made known to the scholarly world by Lilius Gregorius Gyraldus. Erasmus, 'avidly seizing upon the omen' and wishing to 'preserve the memory of his young friend in perpetuity', had it copied for his own signet ring (Pl. 23e), adding the motto *TERMINVS CEDO* (not as yet *CONCEDO*!) *NVLLI* a variant on Aulus Gellius's *Jovi ipsi regi noluit concedere* which was apparently his own invention. He used this *familiare symbolum* in the margins of his Gellius edition and employed it as long as he lived; the Terminus figure even adorns his tombstone in Basle Cathedral (Pl. 23a).³⁹

The motto meaning 'I Yield to None' alludes to the story, transmitted by many classical authors and widely discussed in the Renaissance, according to which Terminus had been the only God to refuse to make way when Jupiter decided to have his sanctuary on the Capitoline Hill; and it can hardly be doubted that, in adopting this Terminus as a personal symbol, Erasmus claimed a similar position for himself in relation to the contemporary forces which tried to push or pull him in their direction. If twenty years later he wrote that his nature made him inclined to 'yield to all rather than to none' (*citius concedens omnibus quam nulli*), he was in a sense quite right; an immovable object can just as well be said to obey all contradictory impulses that act upon it, as to obey none of them. Yet amidst a whirlpool of conflicting tendencies, Erasmus's attitude of self-sufficient superiority and Olympian detachment

³⁹ The expression *familiare symbolum* occurs in a letter to Quirinus Talesius of 6 March 1529 (Allen, viii, pp. 73f., no. 2113, l. 5); for Erasmus's sketch of 'Terminus' (in the Tacuinus edition of Aulus Gellius's *Noctes Atticae*, Venice 1509), see J. Białostocki,

'Rembrandt's "Terminus"', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, xxviii, 1966, pp. 49ff., n. 23. An engraving after Erasmus's memorial tablet in Basle Cathedral is reproduced, after an 'Epitaphienbuch' of 1574, in the *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, v, col. 936, fig. 2b.

aroused so much antagonism that he found it necessary to defend himself. This he did in a long letter, addressed to Alfonso Valdes on 1 August 1528, in which he asserted that—apart from the fact that the motto *CONCEDO NVLLI TERMINVS* or *TÉRMINVS CONCEDO NVLLI* (though not *CEDO NVLLI*!) constitutes either an *iambicus dimeter acatalectus* or a *dimeter trochaicus acatalectus*—he bore not the slightest resemblance to the young god with flying hair and that the Greek and Latin lines must be understood to be pronounced not by himself but by Death: he wants his readers to believe that it is Death, the boundary of life, and not Erasmus, who ‘yields to none’. This reinterpretation is not very convincing, even if we admit that Erasmus’s own ideas may have changed in the course of the years. It was rejected, in fact, not only by his foes but also by his admirers. As late as 4 November 1535 (seven years after the letter to Valdes!), a life-long friend, Paul Volz, concluded a letter to Erasmus with the words: *Tu cum Termino tuo nulli coessurus es*, ‘You, together with your Terminus, will yield to none’.⁴⁰

The Terminus figure on the medal (Pl. 23g) gave trouble not only as a ‘symbol’ but also for technical reasons. Erasmus had sent casts, either in bronze or lead, to a great number of friends and well-wishers, among them Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg,⁴¹ Nicholas Everardi, President of the Council of Holland, Zeeland and Friesland,⁴² George Spalatinus, the well-known confidant of Frederick the Wise,⁴³ and, of course, Willibald

⁴⁰ Allen, xi, pp. 248f., no. 3069, l. 13. For Paul Volz, cf. Allen, ii, pp. 158f. In a letter by a French theologian, Nicolas Mallarius of 1 February 1530 or 1531 (Allen, ix, pp. 111ff., no. 2424, ll. 135–46) the controversial inscription (aberrantly rendered as *NVLLI TERMINVS CEDO*) is said to identify the god as *humanae vitae symbolum*. The letter to Alfonso Valdes is found in Allen, vii, pp. 430ff., no. 2018. The expression *stolidissima cavillatio* is used in Erasmus’s letter of 30 March 1530 to the Spanish jurist and historian, Peter Mexia (Allen, viii, pp. 405ff., no. 2300, particularly ll. 101–6). Here Erasmus complains that his chief adversary, the Franciscan Luis Carvajal, refused to accept his *excusatio*, viz., the interpretation laid down in his letter to Valdes, *quasi ego fuerim vnquam tam insanus vt—non dicam in vniuersis, sed in vna quapiam disciplina—me praetulerim omnibus*. The whole Terminus problem—already excellently summarized in Claudius Minos’s *Commentary* on Alciati’s *Emblema* no. clvii—was brilliantly discussed by E. Wind, ‘Aenigma Termini’, this *Journal*, I, 1937, pp. 66ff. Cf. J. Białostocki, *op. cit.*, with further references. Massys’s authorship is attested by Erasmus’s letter to Botteus of 29 March 1528 (Allen, iv, p. 237, n. 2, and vii, p. 376, no. 1985, ll. 5f.).

⁴¹ Letter of 15 May 1520 (Allen, iv, pp. 259f., no. 1101, ll. 5ff.). His Eminence re-

ceived, of course, a bronze cast and Erasmus goes out of his way to translate the Greek inscription: ‘Interim vmbra Erasmii mitto...; *potiorem imaginem mei, si quid tamen mei probum est, habes in libris expressam*. Corporis effigiem insignis artifex expressit aere fusili.’ The cardinal’s own *effigies*, of which Erasmus says that it was in his possession, is in all probability not a coin, as Allen suggests, but Dürer’s engraving B.102 of 1519, of which Cardinal Albert had received two-hundred impressions as well as the copper plate (Lange and Fuhse, p. 67, ll. 15–20; Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlass*, ed. H. Rupprich [hereafter Rupprich, *Nachlass*], i, Berlin 1956, pp. 86f.).

⁴² Letter of 17 April 1520 (Allen, iv, pp. 237f., no. 1092). In spite of his high position Everardi received only a lead cast: ‘Interea mitto celsitudini tuae plumbeum Erasmum, ab artifice non vulgari effigiatum, nec mediocri sumptu.’ As we learn from a letter to Pirckheimer of 3 June 1524 (see below, n. 47) Massys had received a fee of more than thirty florins.

⁴³ Letter of 6 July 1520 (Allen, iv, pp. 297f., no. 1119, l. 5). The bronze medal was sent to Frederick the Wise by way of reciprocation for two coins, one in silver, the other in gold: ‘vtriusque meritis respondet materia.’

Pirckheimer.⁴⁴ But after a few years he seems to have run out of specimens and to have become dissatisfied with the quality of his portrait on the obverse. He at once suspected the Terminus figure on the reverse of being the root of the trouble. And in a letter of 8 January 1524, apparently placing more confidence in the medalists of Nuremberg than in those of Basle, he asked Pirckheimer to find 'some workman' who might try to produce a set of new and better casts, using bronze only.⁴⁵ A month later (on 8 February 1524) Erasmus repeats this suggestion and further proposes that 'some artisan' (*artifex quispiam*) might try to produce the new specimens on the basis of a new leaden 'archetype'—probably, since the original was still in Massys's workshop, a new matrix to be taken from the original in Pirckheimer's possession after it had been 'carefully cleaned at the edges'. As a last resort, the portrait on the obverse might be cast alone, with the Terminus figure on the reverse left out; because, Erasmus thought, it was the strong relief (*densitas*) of the latter's base (*saxum*) and of the pile of earth beneath it (*agger*) which prevented the face and neck of the portrait from coming out properly.⁴⁶ After another four months, on 3 June 1524, the problem was still unsolved and Erasmus had further suggestions: concerning the bronze to be used for the new casts he now specifies that ratio between tin and copper which was used for bells. And he proposes to avoid the equality of projection between the obverse and the reverse (*utrinque respondens densitas*) by 'turning the head of Terminus to profile' (*si caput Termini vertatur ad latus*). This implies, of course, that originally the Terminus head on the medal was shown in front view, as it is on Erasmus's signet ring (Pl. 23e). And since the Terminus on all the extant medals already shows his head *versum ad latus*, we must assume that—unless Erasmus's memory failed him—his advice was followed so thoroughly that not a single specimen of a 'first state' of the medal, with the head of Terminus turned to front view,

⁴⁴ This fact is attested by Erasmus's letter to Pirckheimer of 14 March 1525 (Allen, vi, pp. 44ff., no. 1558, ll. 31f.), and is taken for granted in his letter of 8 January 1524 (Allen, v, pp. 38off., no. 1408, for which see the following note).

⁴⁵ Letter of 8 January 1524, cited in the preceding note, ll. 29ff.: 'De fusili Erasmo recte coniectaras. Felicius prouenire solet ex materia cupro stannoque temperata. Et Terminus, qui a tergo est, obstat quo minus facies foeliciter exprimatur. Id velim istos tentare. Gaudeo Durero nostro contigisse sutorem suum: cui ex me multam dices salutem, et item Varenbulio.' The 'Gaudeo Durero nostro contigisse sutorem suum' is a little humanistic joke which would be spoiled by emending the transmitted *sutorem* into either *censorem* or *fusorem*. In my opinion (cf. E. Panofsky, "'Nebulae in pariete"; Notes on Erasmus' Eulogy on Dürer', this *Journal*, XIV, 1951, pp. 34ff., n. 1) the *sutor* is none other than Edward Lee (Leus), Bishop of Colchester (later of York), an arch enemy of

Erasmus. This pugnacious prelate, then detained in Nuremberg for about six weeks, had looked at all the 'sights' and found fault with Dürer's paintings as reported by Pirckheimer in a previous letter (cf. Allen, v, pp. 396f., no. 1417). Since Dürer is constantly referred to as 'Apelles' by Erasmus and in his circle (cf. below, n. 72), Erasmus must have been pleased to compare Lee to the proverbial 'cobbler' who had dared criticize Apelles, thereby giving rise to the adage *Ne supra crepidam sutor* (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xxxv, 85, quoted by Erasmus in his *Adagiorum chiliades*, i, 6, 16).

⁴⁶ Allen, v, pp. 396f., no. 1417, ll. 34-42: 'De fusili Erasmo scripseram: ex quo coniicio litteras eas non fuisse redditas. Si artifex quispiam plumbeum archetypum expresserit purgatis angulis, foeliciter esset fusio. Deinde materia mixta ex aere et stanno foeliciter reddit imaginem. Postremo, si solus Erasmus absque Termino funderetur, opinor melius cederet; nam densitas saxi et aggeris qui est a tergo, obstat quo minus bene reddatur facies et collum. Licebit vtrumque experiri. Si

has come down to us.⁴⁷ By way of addendum Erasmus unexpectedly digresses into a very technical discussion:

There is also the 'art of shrinking an image'; but it is time-consuming and laborious. A clay impression is taken from the original, after it has been set into a circular rim of bronze, and allowed to dry; this process is repeated several times [so that, owing to the dehydration of the clay, each impression becomes smaller and smaller than the preceding one]; finally a lead impression is taken from the last [that is, the smallest] impression in clay.⁴⁸

To understand this excessive preoccupation with the quality of a portrait in one of the multiplying media—whether medal, engraving or woodcut—we must remember the peculiar structure of northern as opposed to Italian humanism.⁴⁹ In Italy the humanistic movement was, as it were, aristocratic and centripetal: it was able to count on the gravitational force of cosmopolitan centres such as Florence, Rome, Ferrara, or Venice, and on a limitless supply of interested and open-handed princes and cardinals. Its northern counterpart—egalitarian and centrifugal—had to invade the homes of the better classes, nobility and bourgeoisie, alike. It had to create rather than to answer a demand for the values of modern art and learning—and to boost the representatives of the new culture by personal publicity. Contrary to the Italian custom of keeping medals and portrait engravings under lock and key, they were put up on the wall so that they were always accessible to the owner's and his visitors' eye and mind. Erasmus assures Pirckheimer not once but twice that his two portraits, Dürer's engraving of 1524 (Pl. 23b) and a medal (unfortunately not by a 'new Lysippus' whose work would be equal to that of the 'new Apelles'),⁵⁰ adorned the opposite walls of Erasmus's little

bene cesserit, fundat ac vendat suo bono. Si mihi miserit aliquot exemplaria felicia quae donem amicis, numerabo quod volet.' That the *plumbeus archetypus* referred to in this letter was the original matrix cut by Massys in 1519 (as suggested by Allen, v, p. 382, note; cf. also Allen, iv, pp. 237f., no. 1092, n. 2) is hardly possible because we learn from a later letter (Allen, v, pp. 468ff., no. 1452, II. 37f.) that even on 3 June 1524, the original matrix (*fons*), cut in lead, was still in Massys's workshop; see following note.

⁴⁷ Allen, v, pp. 468ff., no. 1452, ll. 29–39: 'Quidam putant fusionem felicius euenturam, si Cyprio aeri misceatur stannum, ex quali materia funduntur campanae. Est et aliud remedium, si caput Termini vertatur ad latus. Nunc vtrinque respondens densitas facit vt vultus minus foeliciter reddatur. Est insuper et ars contrahendi imaginem; sed longum id est et laboriosum. Si excipiat argilla incluso circulo aereo, deinde siccescat, idque fiat saepius, tandem ex argilla excipiat plumbea. Id commodius fieret, si

haberetis fontem. Is est in plumbo, sed apud artificem: quamquam is pollicitus est se mihi illum redditurum. Nam habuit ex me supra triginta florenos operae suae pretium.'

⁴⁸ Letter of 3 June 1524, quoted in the preceding note. While it is true that the successive clay impressions would diminish in absolute size, this process could not change the ratio between circumference (or diameter) and thickness, as both would decrease proportionally.

⁴⁹ The following paragraph freely repeats, I am sorry to say, what I had written in 'Conrad Celtes and Kunz von der Rosen: Two Problems in Portrait Identification', *Art Bulletin*, xxiv, 1942, pp. 52ff.

⁵⁰ Letter of 14 March 1525 (Allen, vi, pp. 44ff., no. 1558, ll. 33ff.): 'Alexander Magnus Apellis vnus manu pingi sustinuit. Tibi contingit Apelles tuus, videlicet Albertus Durerus, vir ita primam laudem obtinens in arte sua vt nihilo minus admirandus sit ob singularem quandam prudentiam. Vtinam in fusili tibi perinde contigisset Lysippus aliquis! Cubiculi

study.⁵¹ What was uppermost in his mind when he ordered a 'new edition' of the Massys medal was the wish to give casts to even more friends than he had done when it was made.⁵² And it is against this background of a personal image worship, which could easily turn into an equally personal iconoclasm, that we must see Erasmus's half-facetious reference to an unnamed canon of Constance who disliked him so much that he affixed Erasmus's engraved portrait to the wall of his chamber for the sole purpose of spitting on it whenever he passed by.⁵³

VI

For us it is almost impossible to imagine Erasmus other than as he appears in his portraits by Holbein, particularly in that marvel of pictorial charm and psychological penetration which today can be admired in the Louvre (Pl. 24a).⁵⁴ Holbein understood, like none other, the 'wiry concord' of Erasmus's personality: the fragile delicacy of his body and the strength of his mind; his need for solitude and his craving for friendship; his humour and his seriousness; his love of tranquillity and his thirst for action; his urbanity and his sarcastic conceit. As a young man of eighteen and assisted by his brother, Ambrose, Holbein had embellished a copy of Froben's 1515 edition of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, just off the presses, with a set of delightfully spirited pen-drawings which, according to the original owner, amused and pleased Erasmus very much.⁵⁵ Subsequently Holbein and his workshop produced those portraits which were to determine Erasmus's 'image' for all time; he provided the

mei paries dexter habet te fusilem, laeuus pictum. Siue scribo, siue obambulo, Bilibaldus est in oculis, adeo vt si tui cupiam obliuisci, non possim.'

⁵¹ Letter of 5 February 1525 (Allen, vi, pp. 15f., no. 1543, ll. 6ff.): 'Anulum et fusilem Bilibaldum, mox et pictum foelicissima Dureri manu accepi. His vtrumque cubiculi mei parietem ornaui, vt quocunque me vertam, obuersetur oculis Bilibaldus'; cf. the letter of 14 March 1525 (quoted in the preceding note).

⁵² See the letter quoted in n. 46 above.

⁵³ Letter to Nicolas Mallarius (cf. above, n. 40) of 28 March 1531 (Allen, ix, pp. 224ff., no. 2466, ll. 88ff.): 'Est quidam canonicus Constantiensis, qui mei effigiem in charta impressam habet in conclauis suo, non ob aliud nisi vt, quum inambulat, quoties eam praeterit, conspuat.' That the print in question was Dürer's engraving B.107 is probable but not demonstrable.

⁵⁴ The Louvre portrait is one of two that were produced at Basle at the end of 1523. Both were sent to England prior to 30 June 1524, one of them to William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury; the other is now owned by the Earl of Radnor at Longford Castle and illustrated, e.g., in Marlier, *op. cit.*, fig. 7; for the interpretation of the Longford portrait,

see W. S. Heckscher's article (quoted n. 11 above), pp. 128ff. A copy of the Louvre portrait is in the Basle Museum which also preserves the best, probably authentic, specimen of Holbein's numerous portraits of Erasmus in small-sized roundels (P. Ganz, *Meisterwerke der Öffentlichen Sammlung in Basel*, Munich 1924, figs. 79 and 80; Allen, ix, plate facing p. 226). For the general problem of Holbein's portraits of Erasmus, cf. Giese, *op. cit.*, pp. 268ff.; Gerlo, *Erasme et ses Portraitistes*, *passim*; Thieme-Becker, *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, xvii, pp. 335ff.

⁵⁵ These drawings, originally ordered and in part humorously annotated by an intimate though much younger friend of Erasmus, Oswald Myconius (*recte* Geissbühler, also known as Molitoris), are still preserved in the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung (Kupferstichkabinett) at Basle. They were published in an admirable facsimile edition (H. A. Schmid, *Erasmi Roterodami Encomium Moriae*, Basle 1931) and are also available in good photoxylographies (produced in 1869-70 by Cassian Knaus) in the German translation by Alfred Hartmann, E. Major, ed., Basle and Stuttgart 1943 (5th edition, 1960). See also Heckscher, *op. cit.*, p. 132, n. 12.

design for a stained-glass window, exhibiting the inevitable Terminus, which was destined as a gift of Erasmus to Basle University;⁵⁶ and he supplied the publishers of Erasmus's works with many metal cuts and woodcuts, culminating in a magnificent portrait in full length (probably executed between 1528 and 1532, when Holbein stayed at Basle, rather than in England) where a graceful Erasmus places—Venetian fashion—a reverent hand upon a bust of his beloved Terminus (Pl. 24b).⁵⁷

Erasmus in turn not only enjoyed Holbein's illustrations of the *Praise of Folly* but also referred to him as a *homo amicus*,⁵⁸ an *artifex satis elegans*,⁵⁹ even an *insignis artifex*.⁶⁰ He had high praise for a group portrait showing Thomas More surrounded by the members of his household, a sketch of which Sir Thomas had sent to Erasmus;⁶¹ and he provided the painter with letters of recommendation to numerous friends, among them Pierre Gilles and Thomas More himself. Thomas More most generously encouraged and befriended Holbein even to the extent of offering him the hospitality of his house, and in a letter to Erasmus spoke of him as 'your painter' and a 'wonderful artist'.⁶²

Some time before 1533, however, something must have happened to spoil Erasmus's friendly attitude towards Holbein: in the postscript of a letter to Boniface Amerbach written in the spring of that year, Erasmus in effect accuses Holbein of abusing his [Erasmus's] good nature and even of dishonourable conduct:

They [viz., all kinds of spongers] seek your patronage because they know that you are the one man to whom I cannot refuse anything. In this way Holbein extorted through you letters [of recommendation] to England. But he lingered in Antwerp for over a month and would have stayed longer had he found [a sufficient number of] simpletons. In England he deceived those to whom he was recommended.⁶³

VII

In short, Erasmus and Holbein completely understood but, perhaps for this very reason, did not wholeheartedly respect each other. Of the relationship

⁵⁶ Basle, Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung; illustrated, e.g., in Allen, vii, plate facing p. 430.

⁵⁷ For all this see Giese, *op. cit.*, pp. 268ff., and Thieme-Becker, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁸ Letter to John Faber of 21 November 1523 (Allen, v, pp. 349f., no. 1397, l. 3).

⁵⁹ Letter to Pirckheimer of 3 June 1524 (Allen, v, pp. 468ff., no. 1452, l. 41).

⁶⁰ Letter to Pierre Gilles of 29 August 1526 (Allen, vi, pp. 391f., no. 1740, l. 21).

⁶¹ Letter to Thomas More of 5 September 1529 (Allen, viii, pp. 271ff., no. 2211, ll. 76–79). The sketch sent to Erasmus by Thomas More is illustrated in Allen, *ibid.*, plate facing p. 273.

⁶² Letter of 18 December 1526 (Allen, vi,

pp. 441ff., no. 1770, ll. 71ff.): 'Pictor tuus, Erasme charissime, mirus est artifex; sed vereor ne non sensurus sit Angliam tam foecundam ac fertilem quam sperarat. Quamquam ne reperiatur omnino sterilem, quoad per me fieri potest, efficiam.'

⁶³ Letter of 22 March (postscript separately dated 10 April) 1533, Allen, x, pp. 192f., no. 2788, ll. 44–47, erroneously quoted as no. 1397 (cf. n. 58) by Giese, *op. cit.*, p. 270, n. 61: 'Subornant te patronum, cui vni sciunt me nihil posse negare. Sic Olpeius per te extorsit litteras in Angliam. At is resedit Antwerpiae supra mensem, diutius mansurus, si inuenisset fatuos. In Anglia decepit eos quibus fuerat commendatus.'

between Erasmus and Dürer almost the opposite is true: they respected each other without much mutual comprehension.

Dürer and Erasmus were linked by their common affection for Pirckheimer, and it is more than probable that Dürer's famous engraving of 1513 (Pl. 24c), best known as *The Knight, Death and Devil*, was inspired by Erasmus's *Enchiridion militis Christiani*; it is perhaps no accident that its date coincides with the inception of Erasmus's friendship with Pirckheimer.⁶⁴ This *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* is a telling document of Erasmian humanism, taking its examples from the classics as well as the Bible, rejecting the theologians in favour of the sources and spurning sin not only as something forbidden by God but even more as something incompatible with the dignity of man. Therefore, while it could not supply an artist with iconographic details it could reveal to Dürer the idea of a Christian Faith so virile, clear, serene, and strong that the dangers and temptations of the world simply cease to be real.

In order not to be deterred from the path of virtue because it seems rough and dreary, [writes Erasmus] and because you must constantly fight three unfair enemies, the flesh, the Devil and the world, this third rule shall be proposed to you: all those spooks and phantoms which come upon you as in the very gorges of Hades must be deemed for nought after the example of Virgil's Aeneas.

It is by representing the armoured, tight-lipped horseman as well as his faithful dog (the symbol of three virtues subsidiary to Faith but no less indispensable for salvation, to wit, Zealous Endeavour, Sacred Letters and Truthful Reasoning), in pure profile and by contrasting their palpable three-dimensionality with the confused, chimerical twilight of a wilderness haunted by the shadowy figures of Death and the Devil, that Dürer managed to reduce the enemies of mankind to 'spooks and phantoms', *terrícula et phantasmata*: the knight passes them by as if they were not there. If the engraving needed a caption this caption might be found in the Biblical command of which Erasmus reminds his *Miles Christianus*: 'Look not behind thee'.⁶⁵

Yet, how deeply Dürer misunderstood the very essence of Erasmus's nature is demonstrated by the fact that, when hearing of Luther's abduction to the Wartburg and, like many others, believing it to have been engineered by Luther's enemies, he could write in his diary on 17 May 1521:

Oh, Erasmus of Rotterdam, what are you going to do? . . . Hearken, you Knight of Christ, ride forth at the side of our Lord Christ, protect the truth, earn the crown of the martyrs . . . and should you become like unto Christ your master in suffering shame from the liars in this world, and

⁶⁴ Cf. Allen, ii, p. 40, no. 318, introductory note.

⁶⁵ For Dürer's engraving B.98 see, e.g., E. Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton 1943, etc., pp. 151-4. The essay by A. Leinz-von Dessauer, 'Savonarola und Albrecht Dürer', *Das Münster*, xiv, 1961, pp. 1ff., where an

attempt is made to identify Dürer's Knight with Savonarola and to interpret his dog (though he is not spotted as are Andrea da Firenze's dogs in the Spanish Chapel in S. M. Novella) as an allusion to the Dominican Order, does not appear convincing to this writer.

should you die a little earlier for that, you would pass all the sooner from death to life and would be glorified by Christ.⁶⁶

Exactly seven weeks later, on 5 July 1521, Erasmus himself was to write to Richard Pace, Secretary of State to Henry VIII of England and Dean of several cathedrals:

How could I have helped Luther by associating myself with him in his danger? There would have been two victims instead of one. I greatly wonder what kind of spirit has moved him in his writings. He has certainly inveighed with colossal malice against those who cultivate polite letters. He has taught and proclaimed much in an excellent manner. If only he had not vitiated the good he did by intolerable evil! Even had he written everything with reverence, I should still not have been inclined to risk my head for the sake of truth. Not everyone has the strength to die as a martyr. I am even afraid that, should a real riot occur, I might act like St. Peter. When they decide rightly I follow the Popes and Emperors because it is just; when they decide wrongly I put up with them because it is safe.⁶⁷

When Dürer made his passionate appeal to Erasmus they had been personally acquainted for almost a year. During this period they exchanged invitations, amenities and presents.⁶⁸ In the late summer of 1520 Erasmus

⁶⁶ Rupprich, *Nachlass*, i, pp. 171f., ll. 96f.: 'O Erasme Roderadame, wo wiltu bleiben? Sieh, was vermag die vngerecht tyranney der weltlichen gewahlt vnd macht der finsternüß! Hör, du ritter Christj, reith hervor neben den herrn Christum, beschütz die warheit, erlang der martärer cron! Du bist doch sonst ein altes meniken. Jch hab von dir gehört, das du dir selbst noch 2 jahr zugeben hast, die du noch tügest, etwas zu thun. Die selben leg wohl an, dem evangelio und dem wahren christlichen glauben zu gut, und laß dich dann hören, so werden der höllen porten, der römisch stuhl, wie Christus sagt, nit wieder dich mügen. Und ob du hie gleich förmig deinem maister Christo würdest und schand von den lügnern jn dieser zeit leidest und darumb ein klein zeit desto eher stürbest, so wirstu doch ehe aus dem todt ins leben kommen und durch Christum clarificirt. Dann so du auß dem kelch trinckest, denn er getruncken hat, so wirstu mit ihm regiren und richten mit gerechtigkeit, die nitt weißlich gehandelt haben. O Erasme, halt dich hie, das sich gott dein rühme, wie vom Davidt geschrieben stehet; dann du magst thun, und fürwar, du magst den Goliath fellen. Dann gott gestehet bey der heyiligen christlichen kirchen, wie er ja unter den Römischen stehet, nach seinem göttlichen willen. Der helff uns zu der ewigen seeligkeit, gott vatter, sohn und heiliger geist, ein einiger

gott. Amen.' That Dürer enjoins Erasmus to 'ride forth' like the 'Ritter Christi' shows that he thought of him as both a *Miles Christianus* and the hero of his own engraving.

⁶⁷ Letter of 5 July 1521 (Allen, iv, pp. 540ff., no. 1218, ll. 26-35): 'Aut quid ego potuissem opitulari Luthero, si me periculi comitem fecissem, nisi vt pro vno perirent duo? Quo spiritu ille scripserit non quo satis demirari, certe bonarum litterarum cultores ingenti grauauit inuidia. Multa quidem preclare et docuit et monuit. Atque vtinam sua bona malis intolerabilibus non viciasset! Quod si omnia pie scripsisset, non tamen erat animus ob veritatem capite periclitari. Non omnes ad martyrium satis habent roboris. Vereor enim ne, si quid incideret tumultus, Petrum sim imitaturus. Pontifices ac Cesares bene decernentes sequor, quod pium est; male statuentes fero, quod tutum est.'

⁶⁸ In an entry in Dürer's diary (Lange and Fuhse, p. 116, l. 3) made between 5 August and 19 August 1520 Dürer credits a 'herr Erasmus' with the gift of a Spanish cape and of three masculine portraits (cf. Rupprich, *Nachlass*, i, p. 152, ll. 110f., and p. 182, n. 135). This entry cannot refer to Erasmus Strenberger, Secretary to John de' Banissi, because this second Erasmus is not given the title 'Herr' in other entries in Dürer's diary and because his name was not known to Dürer himself until

sat to Dürer for two drawings;⁶⁹ and the continuance of their friendly though never very warm relationship (even under the assumption that an earlier, more cordial letter of condolence to Pirckheimer is lost, Erasmus's 'What use is it to deplore the death of Dürer since we are all mortal? An epitaph has been prepared for him in my book' does sound a little chilly)⁷⁰ is attested by numerous greetings, by repeated references to Dürer as an artist 'worthy of eternal memory' and 'deserving never to die'⁷¹ and, most particularly, by Erasmus's constant designation of Dürer as 'Apelles', 'Apelles noster' or even, after Martial's Epigram XI, 9, 'artis Apelleae princeps'.⁷²

The merits of Apelles also furnished the main theme for what Erasmus called his 'epitaph' of Dürer, that famous passage inserted into his charming *Dialogus de recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiacione* which appeared in 1528.⁷³ This passage is the only Erasmian text devoted to the characterization of one individual artist, and its history is intimately linked with that of Dürer's engraved portrait of Erasmus which had been completed in 1526.

Dürer, we recall, had twice portrayed Erasmus in 1520; but of these two drawings, the one which Erasmus deemed worthy of mention and which has come down to us—the charcoal drawing L.361 in the Louvre (Pl. 24d)—had remained unfinished because the sitting was interrupted by the visit of some

27 August 1520 (Lange and Fuhse, p. 122, ll. 15ff.; Rupprich, *Nachlass*, p. 155, ll. 24ff., and particularly *ibid.*, p. 184, n. 191). In later entries (Lange and Fuhse, p. 125, l. 4; p. 151, l. 4; Rupprich, *Nachlass*, p. 156, ll. 92f.; p. 166, l. 180) Erasmus of Rotterdam is always referred to as 'Erasmus Roterodamus'.

⁶⁹ Lange and Fuhse, p. 125, ll. 9f.; Rupprich, *Nachlass*, p. 156, ll. 100f.

⁷⁰ Letter of 24 April 1528 (Allen, vii, pp. 382ff., no. 1991, ll. 2f.). For the interpretation of this letter see Allen's note 1 and Panofsky, '“Nebulae in Pariete,”' p. 35.

⁷¹ That Dürer was an artist 'worthy of eternal memory' is stated in the same letter (Allen, no. 1729) in which Erasmus politely expressed his disappointment with Dürer's engraving (quoted above, n. 14); for the phrase 'may he never die', see below, n. 74. Dürer in turn courteously presented Erasmus with a copy of his *Vnderweysung der Messung* before 6 June 1526; see Erasmus's letter to Pirckheimer of that date (Allen, vi, pp. 350ff., no. 1717, ll. 71f.).

⁷² Letter to Pirckheimer of 28 August 1525 (Allen, vi, pp. 154ff., no. 1603, l. 114). Further Erasmian instances (apart from the oblique reference in Allen, no. 1408, for which see nn. 44 and 45), are found in Allen, nos. 1398, 1536, 1558. The comparison of a famous painter with Apelles was, of course, a *topos* very common ever after Boccaccio had applied it to Giotto (*Genealog. deorum*, xiv, 6).

It was used, for example, to exalt Quinten Massys (Thomas More's poem of 7 October 1517); Jan van Eyck (memorial tablet in St. Donatian at Bruges); Fra Angelico (inscription on his tomb in S. M. sopra Minerva, reprinted in Vasari, *Opere*, G. Milanesi, ed., Florence 1877–1885, ii, p. 522); Leonardo da Vinci (Luca Pacioli, *De divina proportione*, Venice 1509); Frans Floris; Michiel Mierevelt; Rubens; van Dyck; Caravaggio (Alof de Wignacourt, quoted in W. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton 1955, pp. 288f.); Poussin; Gonzales Coques of all people; and (almost proverbially) Titian. For the whole subject, see R. W. Kennedy, 'Apelles redivivus', *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann*, New York 1964, pp. 160ff.; Panofsky, '“Nebulae in pariete,”' pp. 34–41 (not quoted by Mrs. Kennedy); W. S. Hecksher, 'Reflections on seeing Holbein's Portrait of Erasmus', (see n. 11 above), p. 139, n. 31; and, with more comprehensive documentation, M. Winner, *Die Quellen der Pictura-Allegorien in gemalten Bildergalerien des 17. Jahrhunderts zu Antwerpen*, Diss. Cologne 1957, pp. 3–40.

⁷³ *Opera*, i, cols. 909ff., particularly col. 928. A German translation, remarkable for the fact that the two most difficult passages are omitted, is found in J. G. Schöttel (1612–76), *Ausführliche Arbeit von der Teutschen Haupt-sprache . . .*, v (Von Teutschland und Teutschen Scribenten), Braunschweig 1663, pp. 1164f.

very important persons.⁷⁴ From 1523 at the latest, Erasmus and Pirckheimer seem to have engaged in a well-intentioned little scheme: Erasmus in the hope that Dürer might be induced to develop the unfinished drawing into a formal engraving (wherein, aided by memory and the Massys medal, Dürer might make him 'a little plumper' as he had done with Pirckheimer in the engraving of 1524);⁷⁵ Pirckheimer in the hope that Erasmus might be induced to expand into a full-fledged eulogy a complimentary remark about Dürer which had been included in the Preface to Erasmus's edition of Chrysostom's *De Sacerdotio* of 1525, addressed to Pirckheimer himself.⁷⁶ But in spite of Pirckheimer's prodding, both Dürer and Erasmus had to wait a long time.

Erasmus did not receive his engraved portrait (Pl. 22a)—which, we remember, was to disappoint him so woefully—until some time before 30 July 1526; Dürer did not see Erasmus's eulogy—if indeed he saw it all—until just before his death on 6 April 1528.

Introduced—'not without a little strain', as Erasmus was the first to admit⁷⁷—by the remark that future penmen should learn to draw because 'he whose fingers are practised by shaping lines into all sorts of forms will also shape his letters more smoothly and felicitously, much as those trained in music will pronounce more correctly even when they do not sing', and by the statement that more accurate information about good draughtsmanship may be found in Dürer's *Treatise on Geometry* ('written in German but very learned'), this eulogy reads as follows:

Dürer's name has been known to me among the most renowned masters of painting; some call him the 'Apelles of our age'.—I hold that Apelles, were he alive today, would, as the honest and candid man that he was, concede the glory of this palm to our Albert.—How can this be believed?—I admit that Apelles was the prince of this art upon whom no reproach could be cast except that he did not know when to take his hand off the panel (i.e., when to stop)—a splendid kind of blame (*speciosa reprehensio*). But Apelles was assisted by colours even though they were

⁷⁴ Letter to Pirckheimer of 19 July 1523 (Allen, v, pp. 307f., no. 1376, ll. 1ff.): 'Durero nostro gratulor ex animo; dignus est artifex qui nunquam moriatur. Coeperat me pingere Bruxellae; vtinam perfecisset!'

⁷⁵ Letter to Pirckheimer of 14 March 1525 (Allen, vi, pp. 44ff., no. 1558, ll. 47–51): 'A Durerio, tanto nimirum artifice, pingi non recusem; sed qui possit, non video. Nam olim me Bruxellae deliniavit tantum, at coeptum opus interruperunt aulici salutatores. Quamquam iam olim infelix exemplar exhibeo pictoribus, indies exhibiturus infelicius.' On 8 January 1525 (Allen, vi, pp. 2f., no. 1536, ll. 11–14) Erasmus had written to Pirckheimer what follows: 'A Durerio cuperem pingi, quidni a tanto artifice? Sed qui potest? Coeperat Bruxellae carbone, sed iam dudum excidi, opinor. Si quid ex fusili et memoria sua

potest, faciat in me quod in te fecit; cui addidit aliquid obesitatis.'

⁷⁶ This Preface is identical with Erasmus's letter to Pirckheimer of 14 March 1525, last referred to in the preceding note. The passage in question (Allen, vi, pp. 44ff., no. 1558, ll. 33–36) reads as follows: 'Alexander Magnus Apellis vnus manu pingi sustinuit. Tibi contingit Apelles tuus, videlicet Albertus Durerus, vir ita primam laudem obtinens in arte sua vt nihilo minus admirandus sit ob singularem quandam prudentiam.'

⁷⁷ Letter to Pirckheimer of 20 March 1528 (Allen, vii, pp. 364ff., no. 1977, ll. 55ff.): 'Fortasse dices esse coactius; fateor, sed non dabatur alia occasio; et arbitrator eum libellum, qualis qualis est, maxime volitaturum per manus hominum.'

fewer and less ambitious [than today], still by colours. Dürer, however, though admirable also in other respects, what does he not express in monochromes (*monochromata*), that is, by black lines? Shade, light, radiance, projections (*eminentias*), depressions. Moreover, from one object [he derives] more than the one aspect which offers itself to the beholder's eye [this, it seems, is a clever paraphrase of what we would call stereometrical perspective]. He accurately observes proportions and harmonies (*symmetrias et harmonias*). He even depicts what cannot be depicted: fire; rays of light; thunderstorms; sheet lightning; thunderbolts; or even, as the phrase goes, the clouds upon a wall; characters and emotions—in fine, the whole mind of man as it shines forth from the appearance of the body, and almost the very voice. These things he places before our eyes by the most felicitous lines, black ones at that, in such a manner that, were you to spread on pigments, you would injure the work. And is it not more wonderful to accomplish without the blandishment of colours what Apelles accomplished only with their aid?⁷⁸

Obviously most of this praise is borrowed from the classics, preponderantly from Pliny's praise of Apelles (*Nat. Hist.*, xxxv, 96). Other phrases, however, recall what Pliny says of Apelles's teacher, Pamphilus of Macedonia, who was 'erudite in all branches of knowledge, especially arithmetic and geometry' (*ibid.*, 76); of Parrhasius and Euphranor, according to Pliny the first painters to have mastered *symmetria* (*ibid.*, 67 and 128); of Nicias of Athens, who 'carefully observed light and shade and took great care to make the painted figures project (*eminerent*) from the panel' (*ibid.*, 131); and of Aristides of Thebes, who 'first depicted the character and sensibilities of men, that is, what the Greeks call *ἦθη*, as well as their emotions' (*ibid.*, 98). The expression *monochromata* is also appropriated from Pliny, and the locution 'clouds upon a wall', lengthily commented upon in Erasmus's *Adages*,⁷⁹ comes from Ausonius.

But it is precisely this headlong flight into the classics (crowning Dürer, as it were, with the crowns of five or six ancient masters whose works were as little known to Erasmus as they are known to us) that bears witness to Erasmus's desire to do justice to Dürer's greatness and universality. And what looks like a random assemblage of quotations is in reality a well-ordered exposition which proceeds from the 'pictorial' aspects of painting (*umbrae*,

⁷⁸ The Latin text (see above, n. 73) reads as follows: 'Equidem arbitror si nunc viveret Apelles, ut erat ingenuus et candidus, Alberto nostro cessurum huius palmae gloriam.—Qui potest credi?—Fateor Apellem fuisse eius artis principem, cui nihil objici potuit a caeteris artificibus, nisi quod nesciret manum tollere de tabula. Speciosa reprehensio. At Apelles coloribus, licet paucioribus minusque ambitiosis, tamen coloribus adiuuabatur. Durerus quanquam et alias admirandus, in monochromatis, hoc est nigris lineis, quid non exprimit? umbras, lumen, splendorem, eminentias, depressiones: ad haec, ex situ, rei

unius non unam speciem sese oculis intuentium offerentem. Observat exacte symmetrias et harmonias. Quin ille pingit, et quae pingi non possunt, ignem, radios, tonitrua, fulgetra, fulgura, vel nebulas, ut aiunt, in pariete, sensus, affectus omnes, denique totum hominis animum in habitu corporis relucentem, ac pene vocem ipsam. Haec felicissimis lineis iisque nigris sic ponit ob oculos, ut si colorem illinas, iniuriam facias operi. An non hoc mirabilius, absque colorum lenocinio praestare, quod Apelles praestitit colorum praesidio?

⁷⁹ *Adagiorum chiliades*, ii, 4, 38.

lumen, etc.) to perspective; from perspective to the mathematical rules of design and proportion (*symmetrias et harmonias*); from these to 'that which cannot be depicted', viz., luminary effects (*ignis, radii, tonitrua*, etc.); thence to imaginary, even chimerical concepts (*nebulae in pariete*); and, finally, to phenomena of a purely psychological order (*sensus, affectus omnes*, etc.).

This wealth of borrowings, moreover, should not blind us to the fact that many of the classical notions are reinterpreted in a new and highly original manner, and that much has been added for which no model could or can be found. The word *monochromata*—which in Pliny's usage denotes real paintings executed in one colour (red or, exceptionally, white) on black, a technique peculiar to the 'ancients' (*veteres*), that is to say, to painters so early that 'their age is not transmitted'—has been transferred to what we would call the graphic arts (woodcuts, engravings and etchings), where everything is expressed by black lines (*nigrae lineae*). No one before c. 1400 could have thought of these media because they had not been invented; nor could anyone have thought of perspective, of which the same is true. And nothing could be more perceptive than Erasmus's remark that those who would add pigments to Dürer's prints (as was occasionally done at the request of uncomprehending owners) would 'injure' them.

Erasmus's 'eulogy' poses, however, one puzzling question which came to my attention only quite recently and which I do not dare answer for myself. In presenting Apelles as a man as unassuming as he was gifted (hence possibly Erasmus's assertion that Apelles, 'honest and candid as he was', would concede the glory of painting to Dürer) Pliny informs us that Apelles, though always ready to recognize the merits of others, claimed superiority over his great competitor, Protogenes of Kaunos, in one and only one respect: in contrast to himself, Protogenes 'did not know when to take his hand off the panel'—*quod manum ille de tabula non sciret tollere*. In his eulogy on Dürer, Erasmus tells us exactly the opposite: according to this eulogy, it was Apelles, and not Protogenes, upon whom no reproach could be cast except that he did not know when to stop.

On the face of it, this remarkable inversion of Pliny's text seems to be explicable by one of two assumptions: Erasmus, like everybody else, may have been guilty of a slip of memory; or he may have misconstrued Pliny's sentence (particularly if we assume that he had used a defective manuscript or printed edition where the *non* before *sciret* had been omitted). But both these explanations are hardly satisfactory. Erasmus himself had published an edition of Pliny as recently as 1525; and Pliny goes out of his way to characterize Apelles's dictum as a 'memorable precept' aimed at Protogenes and 'warning against exaggerated diligence'. In addition, Erasmus had included the proverbial phrase *manum de tabula* in his *Adages* and there explains it exactly as Pliny had done:

Here allusion is made to a saying of the most distinguished painter, Apelles, who, admiring the work of Protogenes, which was executed with immense labour and exaggerated care, admitted that Protogenes was his equal or even his superior in every other way but claimed that he, Apelles, surpassed Protogenes in one respect, to wit, in that Protogenes did not know

when to take his hand off the panel—a memorable precept to the effect that too much diligence is often harmful.⁸⁰

Thus as a third alternative, we might consider the possibility that Erasmus transferred Pliny's statement from Protogenes to Apelles on purpose and with a personal reference to Dürer. It was Dürer, constantly proclaimed as the 'new Apelles', who was known as a perfectionist; it was Dürer of whom it was written that, 'had there been anything in him that could be likened to a vice, it was his unique and infinite diligence which acted as an inquisitor often inequitable even unto himself'. These words are found in the Preface to the Latin translation of Dürer's own *Treatise on Human Proportions*;⁸¹ and their author was none other than Joachim Camerarius, Professor of Greek and History at the Gymnasium in Nuremberg, a close friend to Dürer but intimately acquainted also with Erasmus through personal contact and an exchange of letters which range from 1524 to 1528—precisely the time when Erasmus's eulogy on Dürer was being composed.⁸² It would have been a little joke in the true Erasmian manner had he intentionally retouched Pliny's image of Apelles so that it would agree with Dürer's even with respect to that one little shortcoming: 'exaggerated diligence'—a 'splendid kind of blame'. At a time when Dürer was still alive it would have been entirely permissible to make a good-natured allusion—understandable to the initiated only—to the fact that Erasmus himself had been a victim of Dürer's perfectionism—having been kept waiting for his engraved portrait for a full six years.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, i, 3, 19: 'Manum de tabula. Allusum autem apparet ad Apellis nobilissimi pictoris dictum, qui, cum Protogenis opus immensi laboris ac curae supra modum anxiae miraretur, ait omnia sibi cum illo paria esse aut illi meliora, sed uno se praestare, quod manum ille de tabula nesciret tollere, memorabili praecepto, nocere saepe nimiam diligentiam.' Cf. Pliny, *N.H.*, xxxv, 80.

⁸¹ *De symmetria partium*, Nuremberg 1532, Preface: 'Erat autem si quid omnium in illo

viro quod vitii simile videretur, unica infinita diligentia et in se quoque inquisitrix saepe parum aequa.'

⁸² See Allen, v, pp. 444ff., no. 1443, l. 78; *ibid.*, pp. 544ff., no. 1496, ll. 25 and 209; *ibid.*, pp. 599ff., no. 1524; vi, pp. 15ff., no. 1543, l. 16; vii, p. 322, no. 1945 (datable to February 1528, the latest direct letter from Erasmus to Camerarius); cf. further Allen, ix, pp. 173ff., no. 2446, ll. 50f. and 153f.; *ibid.*, pp. 269f., no. 2495, ll. 35ff.

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[Footnotes]

⁵ **Erasmus and the Fine Arts**

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