

THE CLOAK OF MERCY: REFLECTIONS ON REMBRANDT'S ETCHING *THE HUNDRED GUILDER PRINT*

JÜRGEN MÜLLER

Of all Rembrandt's etchings, *The Hundred Guilder Print* (Fig. 4.1) is perhaps the best known.¹ The image has been highly praised since its creation, and it has given rise to numerous legends.² The popular name for the etching refers to the enormous price of one hundred guilders that collectors were said to have paid for the exceptional piece, with Rembrandt himself spending the same amount to purchase the sheet back again. Even though this latter anecdote may have been invented, it nevertheless goes to show that connoisseurs of prints esteemed the piece from very early on.

Today, the assumption is that the image was exchanged as a gift between friends.³ This theory is based on a handwritten note on an impression of *The Hundred Guilder Print* in the Dutuit Collection. The note describes how, in exchange for his work, Rembrandt received a copperplate engraving depicting the plague that Raimondi had created after Raphael.⁴ This note would lead us to believe that Rembrandt's work was intended less as an item for sale than as a piece intended for special collectors and other artists, a fact that has contributed to the etching's legendary reputation.⁵ It is no surprise therefore that *The Hundred Guilder Print* survives in only two states that differ from each other only minimally.⁶ The vibrancy and size of the space and the number of figures – a crowd of more than forty people – represented in the image are astonishing, especially when considering the work's small format of 10.9 × 15.3 inches. The viewer continually discovers new men, women, and children in the scene's half-light. It is as if our eyes adjust to the darkness over time.

Art-historical research now assumes that Rembrandt made numerous revisions to *The Hundred Guilder Print*, completing the work in 1647 and 1648.⁷ Several preliminary drawings attest to an intensive working process. The etching's luminous painterly qualities have drawn unanimous praise from art critics. By combining drypoint and burin, the artist was able to create soft transitions between objects and people; the sensitive gradation in gray tones further confirms his mastery of etching techniques.

Christ stands in the center of the etching. His left hand is raised in a welcoming gesture, while his right hand beckons to a young woman with a child, as though encouraging her to step closer. A group of figures bathed in light appears on the left side of the scene, facing a group in shadow on the right. In depicting the figures, the artist strove to capture both individuals as well as an anonymous crowd, working with such inventiveness that no subject and no detail repeat. There is a gentle rise in the pictorial space. Jesus's head is positioned above the rest of the figures; the people on the right side are positioned lower than those on the left.

¹ 280 × 394 mm, etching, drypoint, and burin, second state of two. Not signed or dated; c. 1647–48. Veste Coburg Art Collections, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. VII, 376, 83. I would like to thank Sandra Kaden, Andrea Kiehn, Florian Kayser, and Stefano Rinaldi for their advice and consultation.

² Barbara Welzel, 'The Hundred Guilder Print', in *Rembrandt: Der Meister und seine Werkstatt: Zeichnungen und Radierungen*, ed. Holm Bevers et al. (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1991), 242, cat. no. 27; and Eric Hinterding, *Rembrandt: The Printmaker* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), 238–53.

³ Hinterding, *Rembrandt: The Printmaker*, 244.

⁴ Herbert Aloys Felix Keutner, 'Rembrandts Hunderguldenblatt' (Ph.D. diss., University of Cologne, 1952), 4; Welzel.

⁵ Hans-Joachim Raupp, 'Rembrandts Radierungen mit biblischen Themen 1640–1650 und das "Hundertguldenblatt"', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 57, no. 3 (1994): 414.

⁶ Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt Etchings from the Frits Lugt Collection*, 2 vols (Bussum: Thoth, 2008), 1:157.

⁷ Hinterding, 'Rembrandt Etchings', 157–58.



Fig. 4.1. Rembrandt, *Christ Preaching (The Hundred Guilder Print)*, Coburg, Germany Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, inv. no. VII,376,83. c. 1684. Etching / drypoint, 280 × 394 mm.

In his composition of the image, Rembrandt directs our attention through his use of light. We begin with the brightly illuminated group on the left and proceed steadily to the right. Some of the figures' faces are only partially visible, and their clothing and head coverings seem to have been selected and designed specifically for each individual. In this way, Rembrandt demonstrates his artistic skill and *variatio*.⁸ This level of detail in Rembrandt's work can be surprising and even amusing – for example when one discovers a boy sitting beside a donkey in the lower right-hand corner of the picture, almost completely hidden in shadow. It is as though it were just as important to the artist to conceal objects or people in his work as to show them. Looking and overlooking proceed hand-in-hand in *The Hundred Guilder Print*.

With its profusion of figures, the artist dramatically temporalizes our perception of the etching, since we begin to realize that there will always be something new to discover.⁹ Time is not concentrated in a single moment – as if everything might suddenly change in the next instant – but seems rather to stretch out unceasingly. This conception of time is developed in conjunction with the artist's compositional strategy. On the one hand, Rembrandt uses an ascending diagonal that starts on the lower left and moves up and to the right, passing the woman with her child and continuing above Christ. On the other hand, he uses semicircular forms that lead the viewers' eyes in a clockwise direction to the top and right edges of the image, until they return to the image's point of entry. In this way, our eyes are kept in constant motion, and we gradually absorb the salient parts of the scene.

For a long time, the subject of the etching remained obscure. Early research initially assumed that the etching is a depiction of Jesus healing the ill and blessing children. Today, however, it is believed that the artist was not depicting just one section of the Gospel of St Matthew, but instead drew from the entire 19th chapter.¹⁰ Rembrandt simultaneously represented several individual episodes that took place in succession, without compromising the image's overall appearance. The Pharisees are standing on the left. They are asking Jesus under which circumstances a man could be separated from his wife, a scene which occurs at the opening of chapter 19. The Gospel of Matthew goes on to describe the children brought to Jesus by their mothers so that they could be blessed. Rembrandt also depicted a young woman standing directly in front of Christ, holding an infant in her arms. A little to her left stands another woman whose son is pulling at her clothing. The boy clearly indicates the cause of his excitement – he is pointing at Jesus with his right hand. The Gospel of St Matthew reports that the disciples try to refuse the mothers, whereupon Jesus orders, 'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19:14).

Christ's disciples stand in the group to his left, among whom we recognize only the bald-headed Peter standing next to Christ. He is turning away a mother with her infant, but at the same time looks imploringly at Jesus, as if Jesus had just uttered the passage quoted above. The disciples behind Peter also seem to be listening and considering Christ's words. Christian Tümpel interprets this as an anti-Catholic statement. He views the iconography of Christ's fondness for children as a deeply Protestant image and finds significance in that of all disciples, it is St Peter who shows opposition to the mother.¹¹

The etching contains another scene from Matthew. Among the disciples and Pharisees sits a young man with a melancholy expression, resting his head on his hand. This elegant figure's presence can also be explained by consulting chapter 19 of the Gospel of Matthew. When the young man asks

⁸ Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck, facsimile van de eerste uitgave* (Utrecht: Davaco, 1969), fol. 16^v, 20 ff.

⁹ Jürgen Müller, 'Bild und Zeit. Überlegungen zur Zeitgestalt in Pieter Bruegels Bauernhochzeitsmahl', in *Erzählte Zeit und Gedächtnis: narrative Strukturen und das Problem der Sinnstiftung im Denkmal*, ed. Götz Pochat (Graz: ADEVA, 2005), 72–81, esp. 78.

¹⁰ As an example of early art-historical contributions to *The Hundred Guilder Print*, see Max Schmid, 'Das Hundertguldenblatt', *Kunstchronik* 6, no. 11 (1894–95): 161–65.

¹¹ Christian Tümpel, *Mythos und Methode* (Königstein: Langewiesche, 1986), 235 ff.; also Raupp, 416.

Jesus how to gain eternal life, Jesus answers that it is not sufficient simply to obey the Commandments, but that one should also sell one's possessions and give to the poor. Only in this way can one attain enduring 'treasure in heaven' (Matt. 19:21). After hearing Christ's words, the young man goes away morosely; he is the owner of a large fortune.

Fittingly, Rembrandt also included a camel under the arched entrance at the right, which seems to be pressing a man up against the wall behind him. This vignette refers to Christ's dictum that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24). This applies directly to the figure of the wealthy young man.¹² The right half of the image also depicts a great number of ill and old people, as well as a few children who are clustered together in the group.

In 1994, Hans-Joachim Raupp observed that Rembrandt did not limit himself to the aforementioned stories from the Gospel of Matthew, but created additional references to the text through motifs reminiscent of genre-painting. In this way, the small boy who draws his mother's attention to Christ, wanting her to move toward him, could allude to the passage that states, 'And every one that hath forsaken [...] brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother [...] for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life' (Matt. 19:29). Raupp also seeks to contrast the aloof distance of the Pharisees in the lower left corner with the proximity of the sick and needy to Christ through the passage, 'but many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first' (Matt. 19:30). Finally, Raupp draws attention to the hole and the torn branch in the foreground of the etching, which could refer to Matthew 15:13, in which Jesus says about the Pharisees, 'Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch'. With regard to the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer refers to another unremarkable detail. The patched trousers of the boy, who stands next to the Pharisee in the lower left corner, reminds her of the following verses of Matthew 9: 'No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins' (Matt. 9:16–17).

Numerous researchers have devoted work to *The Hundred Guilder Print*.¹³ Werner Weisbach has compared the print to *The Night Watch* and emphasized its artistic excellence.¹⁴ Many scenes have been interpreted convincingly: Barbara Welzel stressed the etching's qualities as a cabinet painting and collector's item, while Raupp considered the etching in terms of Rembrandt's artistic development and attempted to determine its specific form of visual argument.¹⁵ He compares *The Hundred Guilder Print* with works by Peter Paul Rubens who had depicted various miracles of St Ignatius simultaneously in one altarpiece. For clarification of Rembrandt's etching, Matthias Winner has referred to a reformatory woodcut after Hans Holbein the Younger, which depicts Christ as the true light of the world. Here the modest evangelical Christians on the left are faced with Catholic dignitaries on the

¹² This has been recognized several times in academic research, for example in Holm Bevers, Jasper Kettner, and Gudula Metze, *Rembrandt: Ein Virtuose der Druckgraphik*, (Berlin and Cologne: DuMont, 2006), 57.

¹³ It is disappointing, however, to see that prior arguments and discoveries are adopted without citing their original author. Raupp was the last scholar who endeavored to cite preceding research.

¹⁴ Werner Weisbach, *Rembrandt* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1926), 367. For the significance of *The Night Watch* and its connection to Raphael's *School of Athens*, see Jürgen Müller, 'Rembrandt's "Nachtwache". Anmerkungen zur impliziten Kunsttheorie', *Morgen-*

Glantz: Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft 9 (1999): 129–56; and Jürgen Müller, *Der sokratische Künstler: Studien zu Rembrandts Nachtwache* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 266–69.

¹⁵ We are indebted to Paul Crenshaw for his biographical interpretation. He endeavored to incorporate the artist's specific living conditions into his article for the St Louis Art Museum in 2006. See Paul Crenshaw, 'Rembrandt & Company', in *Rembrandt: Master Etchings from St Louis Collections*, ed. Francesca Herndon-Consagra and Paul Crenshaw (St Louis, MO: St Louis Art Museum, 2006), 80–127.



Fig. 4.2. Giorgio Ghisi (after Raphael), *The School of Athens*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-39.070 and RP-P-OB-39.071. 1550. Engraving on two plates, 513 × 810 mm.

right who, led by Aristotle and Plato, plunge into a pit. In the context of *The Hundred Guilder Print*, the question arises as to why Rembrandt should have represented the Protestants as malignant Pharisees. But wouldn't this contradict the heraldic principle of left and right? Finally, Eric Hinterding has discussed the etching several times, with a special focus on the genesis of the work.¹⁶

The literature on this print also makes reference to the image's resemblance to Raphael's *School of Athens* (Fig. 4.2). In her 2005 book *De God van Rembrandt*, Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer called attention to Rembrandt's use of this piece as a model and developed an extensive interpretation based on it.¹⁷ She draws a connection between the short stone column directly to the right of Jesus and the Old and New Testaments' imagery of Christ as a cornerstone.¹⁸ St Peter speaks of the cornerstone that builders

¹⁶ Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt as an Etcher*, vol. I, *The Practice of Production and Distribution* (Oudekerk aan den Issel: Sound & Vision, 2006), 114–18; Hinterding, *Rembrandt Etchings*, 155–60.

¹⁷ Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer, *De God van Rembrandt: Rembrandt als commentator van de godsdienst van zijn tijd* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2005). Unaware of Hoekveld-Meijer's interpretation, in 2009 Matthias Winner wrote an essay that similarly focused on the connection between *The Hundred Guilder Print* and Raphael's famous fresco. His interpretation proceeded from the assumption that Rembrandt believed *The School of Athens* to depict Paul's Areopagus sermon, basing his understanding on the Latin text in Giorgio Ghisi's reproduction. In the context of this hypothesis, Winner finds numerous allusions to texts from the New Testament. I find this problematic, for if one not

only proceeds from Ghisi's reproduction of *The School of Athens*, but also refers to Karel van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck* from 1604, one arrives at a different conclusion. In his life of Raphael, the Flemish art theoretician writes the following about the aforementioned work: 'Aristotle and Plato are also represented, each with his work, the "Timaeus" and the "Nicomachean Ethics" and they are surrounded by a large school of philosophers' (author's translation); Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 118. We can therefore assume that Rembrandt did not mistake *The School of Athens* for Paul's Areopagus sermon. See Matthias Winner, 'Rembrandts "Hundertguldenblatt" und Raffaels "Schule von Athen"', in *Rembrandt – Wissenschaft auf der Suche*, ed. Holm Bevers et al. (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2009), 77–86.

¹⁸ Hoekveld-Meijer, 118, 2.

have discarded and that would nevertheless provide support for believers (1 Pet. 2:4–10). There is a piece of fabric draped over this bricked column, and Hoekveld-Meijer interprets this as the cloak of mercy. Moreover, the corner of the column itself aligns with the vertical axis of the image; if one were to fold the opposite diagonal corners of the sheet together, this piece of fabric would be in the absolute center.

Rembrandt's Hundred Guilder Print and the Issue of Artistic Imitatio

The question remains as to whether the relationship between Rembrandt's *Hundred Guilder Print* and Raphael's *School of Athens* should be investigated exclusively on the basis of theological content. While the details of Hoekveld-Meijer's arguments hold varying degrees of validity, we should first and foremost welcome her image of Rembrandt. For her, the artist is less a humanist than a critical commentator on the institution of the Catholic confession. The artist was not seeking to illustrate theological teachings so much as to introduce critical arguments into a contemporary debate. As logical as the reference to the *School of Athens* may be, it is just as implausible to make recourse to the *Stanza della Segnatura* and the canonical views represented therein.¹⁹ If Rembrandt's work suggests a comparison to Raphael, this derives in part from his desire to demonstrate the aesthetic possibilities of etching, as the author herself writes.²⁰ A great artist does not require an enormous fresco in order to demonstrate his ability.²¹ To wit, he does not even need color to create a vital aesthetic effect. Perhaps the fact that Rembrandt refrained from signing and dating his work should be understood as a statement in its own right.²² The work asserts its ambition and extraordinary quality in such a way that it could only have one author. Anyone who does not recognize Rembrandt's distinctive hand is simply past helping, in accordance with the Latin proverb that one will recognize the lion by his claw (*ex ungue leonem*).²³ Judged by the goal of transcending the prescribed borders of the representable, the etching has been regarded again and again as a technical masterpiece, an art-theoretical *tour de force* to acknowledge its role as a technical masterpiece.²⁴

As far as Hoekveld-Meijer is concerned, it has to be remarked that the *School of Athens* does not appear in the picture as a conventional quotation, for Rembrandt criticizes its content as well as its form, and thereby Raphael's pretension.²⁵ As has been remarked upon by Kenneth Clark, the Dutchman adopts the landscape format, i.e. the relation of height to breadth. At the same time, he moves the viewpoint much nearer to the scene and makes use of certain elements of his predecessor's composition, which he reassembles differently. By doing so he makes a statement on the limits and possibilities of pictorial argumentation. The artist reflects on his model by ironically modifying its representational scheme: he 'splits' Raphael's picture in the middle and uses only one half of it.

Whereas the Italian highlights the structurally circular center and creates a kind of stage architecture on which his figures are arranged in strict isocephaly, the Netherlander eschews all this

¹⁹ Hoekveld-Meijer, 113.

²⁰ Hoekveld-Meijer, 112 ff. The status of graphic art is a national argument that reaches back to Dürer. See also Jürgen Müller, 'Ein anderer Laokoon – Die Geburt ästhetischer Subversion aus dem Geist der Reformation', in *Erzählen und Episteme. Literatur im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Beate Kellner et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 389–414.

²¹ Jürgen Müller, 'Holbein und Laokoon. Ein Beitrag zur gemalten Kunsttheorie Hans Holbeins d.J.', in *Hans Holbein und der Wandel in der Kunst des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Bodo Brinkmann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 73–89.

²² Winner, 79.

²³ Winner, 79; Desiderius Erasmus, 'Leonem ex unguibus aestimare', in *Compectens adagia*, vol. 2, chil.1, cent.9, prov.34, ed. Joannes Clericus (Leiden: 1701; Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 347.

²⁴ Barbara Welzel has done the most extensive work on this topic. See Welzel, 245.

²⁵ Visibility in general is underestimated in her interpretation. The geometrical pattern she believes Rembrandt has used for his compositions is simply absurd. Hoekveld-Meijer, 112 ff.

and modestly situates his figures on a lower level. Additionally, he moves the vast doorway to the right side of his etching so that we cannot see through it any more. Rembrandt does not make use of ideal geometrical forms and symmetrical patterns like the circle discernible behind Plato and Aristotle, nor does he avail himself of the device of central perspective.

The importance of the Raphael Rooms – including the aforementioned *Stanza della Segnatura* – for Rembrandt has long been acknowledged.²⁶ In 1999, I wrote on Rembrandt's engagement with the *School of Athens* in the artist's 1642 group portrait *The Night Watch*, a painting that occupies an important place in the artist's theory of art.²⁷ In this context, the problem of artistic *imitatio* was of central concern. Since the Renaissance, painters had been encouraged to take important artistic forerunners as their models. In theoretical treatises from the seventeenth century, Rembrandt was regularly accused of lacking any knowledge of Raphael or Antiquity.²⁸ In many of his images, Rembrandt toyed with his critics by including numerous references to ancient and Italian art in his paintings and etchings, then intentionally disguising those references.²⁹ In his famous group portrait of Frans Banning Cocq's company, he ironically portrays the conventions of militia portraits, contradicting the classical theory of Franciscus Junius, whose work *De Pictura Veterum* had appeared in Dutch in 1641. In his work, Junius reveals himself to be a strict theoretician who recommended that artists strictly observe ancient models.

By referring to Raphael's *School of Athens*, Rembrandt only seemingly complies with Junius's demand to make use of Italian and Classical models. In reality, *The Night Watch* contains critical comments on the doctrine of *imitatio*. Finally we have to mention Rembrandt's *Satire on Art Criticism*, a pen-and-ink drawing from the year 1644,³⁰ which Jan Emmens has interpreted as a polemic against Franciscus Junius.³¹ The drastic breach of decorum by showing the artist 'taking a shit' may be interpreted as a testimonial to Rembrandt's anticlassical leanings. It is more important, however, that Rembrandt in some parts of it refers to Raphael's *Parnassus* in the *Stanza*. He makes use of certain of its figures, in order to convict the classicists of their blindness. It is not Raphael who is attacked, but a sclerotic kind of art criticism sticking dogmatically to its rules.³² These hints should be enough to demonstrate that from the beginning of the 1640s, Rembrandt had grappled with Junius's classicism and developed polemical responses that may give us an idea of the outline of the conflict.

But what about *The Hundred Guilder Print*? Is a similar form of ironic argumentation also on display here? Does Rembrandt make veiled reference to Italian artists in this biblical scene? If so, which works of art might he allude to in his etching? We are indebted to the Dutch art historian Cornelis Hofstede de Groot for observing the similarity between the busts of St Peter and Socrates.³³ Moreover, he convincingly argues for the similarity between the physiognomy of the disciple with the tall hat to the left of St Peter and Erasmus of Rotterdam.³⁴ It appears that Rembrandt based his covert portrait of the theologian on a copper engraving by Albrecht Dürer and changed the head covering. Other historical personalities can be named here: for example, the old man at the outermost left edge of the image resembles the poet Homer. Rembrandt represented Homer on numerous occasions, and was known to have owned a plaster cast of his bust. Moreover, a figure on the left side of the painting reminds Hoekveld-Meijer of Martin Luther, a fierce opponent of Erasmus.³⁵ Considering Raphael's

²⁶ Kenneth Clark, *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance* (New York: New York University Press, 1966), 184–86.

²⁷ Müller, 'Rembrandt's "Nachtwache"', 129–56.

²⁸ Müller, *Der sokratische Künstler*, 28.

²⁹ Müller, *Der sokratische Künstler*, 266–91.

³⁰ *Satire on Art Criticism*, 1644, Pen and brown ink corrected with white, 6 1/8 × 7 15/16 in. (15.5 × 20.1 cm), New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 1975.1.799. <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/459210>.

³¹ Jan A. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regel van de kunst* (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1968), 150–54.

³² For further examples and literature, see Müller, *Der sokratische Künstler*, 8–9.

³³ Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, review of *Kritisches Verzeichnis der Radierungen Rembrandt's, zugleich ein Anleitung zu deren Studium* by Woldemar von Seidlitz. *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 19 (1896): 380.

³⁴ Hofstede de Groot, 380.

³⁵ Hoekveld-Meijer, 106.



Fig. 4.3. Pieter Soutman, *The Last Supper* (after a drawing by Rubens, after the fresco by Leonardo da Vinci), London, British Museum Department of Prints & Drawings, inv. no. 1868,0612.371. 1620s. Etching from two plates printed on two joined sheets, 293 × 994 mm. © Trustees of the British Museum.

portrayal of numerous philosophers in his *School of Athens*, the possibility arises that Rembrandt wanted similarly to show the wisdom of antiquity and the Renaissance through his figures. Rembrandt, however, added a critical edge to his work, alluding to the schism between the confessions that had persisted since the Reformation and had reached its sad climax in the recently concluded Thirty Years' War.

But how are the figures in the image formally conceived with regards to their iconographic models? I would like to explore, more directly than has been done in previous research, the possible visual motifs Rembrandt may have referenced for his image. While Kenneth Clark's 1966 work *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance* provides a basis, his discoveries still merit discussion.³⁶ Regarding *The Hundred Guilder Print*, Clark has discussed Rembrandt's use of individual figures from Leonardo's *Last Supper*, a painting that the artist copied several times.³⁷

In particular, Rembrandt borrowed two figures from Leonardo's *Last Supper*. The first is a man to the right of the pillar next to Jesus, situated behind an old woman who is praying. His outstretched left hand points to the sick man lying in the wheelbarrow; his position is directly reminiscent of Leonardo's St Matthew in the *Last Supper* (Fig. 4.3), a figure Rembrandt had copied.³⁸ In two drawings created prior to his etching, Rembrandt followed Leonardo closely in his portrayal of St Matthew's gesture. In one of the two drawings, Rembrandt placed a cap in the man's outstretched hand. It is as though the man has humbly taken off his hat in the presence of the Messiah, in order to make Christ aware of the ill man. With both arms pointing towards the supine figure, Rembrandt emphasized the pressing need for assistance.³⁹ In his second drawing, the figure stands in a larger group. He no longer holds a cap, and is instead framed by two praying or supplicating figures.⁴⁰

For the second figure inspired by Leonardo's *Last Supper*, Rembrandt relied on the image of Judas; in Rembrandt's case he became a Pharisee, standing among the group behind the wall on the left side of the etching. In this context, it is necessary to examine one of Rembrandt's two studies of the *Last Supper* more closely, for he has clearly marked the triangle in which the figure of Judas is found. Both of Clark's discoveries have been guiding lights. At the same time, however, I dispute Clark's interpretation based on the extent to which Rembrandt dissimulated his renditions of famous

³⁶ Generally, see Ben Broos, *Rembrandt en zijn voorbeelden/Rembrandt and his sources* (Amsterdam: Het Museum, 1985).

³⁷ Clark, 53 ff.

³⁸ Clark, 57–59.

³⁹ Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt: First Complete Edition in Six Volumes*, 6 vols (London: The Phaidon Press, 1954–57), 184.

⁴⁰ If one considers the facial features of the man in the etching, it becomes clear that the group was developed first and then the study, as the man's face bears greater similarity to that of the man in the etching.



Fig. 4.4. Cornelis Cort (after Raphael), *The Transfiguration at Mount Thabor*, Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale. 1573. Engraving, 565 × 392 mm. Public Domain.

motifs. It is no coincidence that while *The Hundred Guilder Print* has often been exhibited and interpreted, few sources for the etching have been pointed out. The artist does not make it easy for the viewer to discover his models. He resorts to a secretive manner of expressing himself, following the rhetorical tactic of *dissimulatio artis*.⁴¹

We bring our attention now to two drawings that have played no role in previous research. First, for the motif of the old blind man, we refer to a study of a bearded man who is supporting himself with a cane and directs his glance upward. This drawing, in which Rembrandt sought to clarify the blind man's head, more closely resembles the man in the etching. It appears to have been developed later than the study of the pair and works out a number of details more precisely.⁴² Above all, it is the head decorated with a fur hat that is reminiscent of the blind man in the etching. Next, we refer to a drawing from the former Museum Fodor, one which Benesch does not mention.⁴³ Here, we recognize Christ amidst a group of disciples and Pharisees. In particular, our attention is drawn to the figure at the left edge, who is holding his arms behind his back and is no longer paying attention to Jesus. We find the same figure in *The Hundred Guilder Print*, likewise positioned with his arms behind his back and wearing a similar hat.

Regarding other studies, it has been pointed out several times that the artist devoted special attention to the figure of the ill woman on the braided mat, so much so that he dedicated two further drawings to this motif.⁴⁴ While at work on the etching, it seemed necessary to Rembrandt to work out the position of the hands and arms.⁴⁵ The fact that this figure also appears in Raphael's work, however, has been overlooked to date. Here, as with the pointing man, one also has the impression that Rembrandt did not refer to models. However, this seemingly spontaneous figure is actually adopted from a famous motif from Raphael's *Transfiguration* (Fig. 4.4). From the figure of St Peter on the lower border of the Raphael, Rembrandt creates the image of the deathly ill woman. The seated apostle's dynamically outstretched arm in Raphael's work becomes in Rembrandt's etching a gesture that articulates a desire for contact with the Savior.

With reference to the *Transfiguration*, the figure of the kneeling woman beside the invalid also deserves mention as another variation on a famous motif in Raphael's image. It is, moreover, a motif described by Vasari as the 'main figure in the panel'.⁴⁶ In the context of such references, Winner has identified another motif borrowed from Raphael. For Winner, there is a striking formal similarity between the woman with a child directly to the left of Christ who has placed her right foot on a stone, and an anonymous background figure in Raphael's *School of Athens*.⁴⁷ Finally, Raupp notes the similarities between the figure of the Pharisee located behind the wall on the left-hand side of the image and figures from Lucas van Leyden's *Adoration of the Magi*.⁴⁸

Finally, I would like to point out yet another reference to an Italian work of art, undiscovered to date, which again demonstrates Rembrandt's encyclopedic knowledge of art history. Let us turn our attention to the wealthy young man seated in the midst of the Pharisees and disciples. For this figure, Rembrandt has employed the motif of Michelangelo's Jeremiah from the Sistine Chapel, which was available in replica as an engraving, of which Rembrandt seems to have been aware. Aside from his knowledge of the work of Leonardo and Raphael, Rembrandt thus demonstrates a familiarity with Michelangelo as well. Only in this context does it become clear how fastidiously the artist proceeded with his etchings, and how deeply his work contradicts those critics who accused him of ignorance of Italian art.

⁴¹ Müller, *Der sokratische Künstler*, 133 ff.

⁴² Benesch, 349.

⁴³ Crenshaw, 310.

⁴⁴ Benesch, 183 and 388.

⁴⁵ See Hinterding, *Rembrandt: The Printmaker*, 255–57.

⁴⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 330.

⁴⁷ Winner, 77.

⁴⁸ Raupp, 416.

As with my interpretation of *The Night Watch*, I regard Rembrandt's dissimulation of his models as a mode of ironic argumentation. The artist concealed his knowledge of Italian art, operating instead by understatement. Furthermore, he laid a trap for his classicist critics and detractors. Anyone who mocks Rembrandt over his alleged simplicity and overlooks his numerous references to other works of art ends up looking quite foolish. Rembrandt is a Socratic artist. Just as Socrates is described in Plato's *Symposium*, Rembrandt is a master of disguise, concealing himself in his images just as the ancient philosopher did in his supposedly simple questions.⁴⁹

Despite his repeated borrowing, we should not simply point out Rembrandt's use of individual figures, but we must clarify why the artist found the *School of Athens* so formally interesting that he referenced it both for his most important painting and his most ambitious etching. Obviously, if one wanted to be deemed a great artist, one had to engage with great models. With regard to the famous fresco, Rembrandt takes theological arguments less into account than he does Raphael's exemplary formal skill in simultaneously representing a large, complex group of people and creating a clearly defined center.

In his *Schilder-Boeck* from 1604, Karel van Mander deems all the formal characteristics of the *School of Athens* exemplary.⁵⁰ These characteristics include an unobstructed view of the central figure in the image; the multiform, varied presentation of the individuals; the placement of background figures in the corners of the image; and the ascent of the picture plane from front to rear. In the life of Raphael in the *Schilder-Boeck*, it is the artist's capacity for infinite variation and vitality that Van Mander holds in particular regard. Accordingly, after a long enumeration of the particular achievements of Raphael's fresco, Van Mander writes: 'Everything was accomplished in such a lovely/lifelike manner that the pope had everything else that had been painted in the rooms taken down'.⁵¹

In the original Dutch, '*lieftijcke manier*' is the key term in the quoted passage. Apart from referring to the aesthetic effect of grace and beauty, the term also recalls *sprezzatura* – the avoidance of artifice – which may be considered a condition for making a vital and natural impression.⁵² As with Raphael's work before him, Rembrandt's composition develops a tension between order and disorder, with the purpose of creating vitality. Rembrandt also adopts the graded spatial configuration of the figures as a representational and compositional strategy. I refer to the arrangement of the figures standing one behind the other, whose overlapping only allows fragmentary glimpses but creates the effect of a spontaneous vision. Differently from Raphael, Rembrandt guides our perception not only by contrasting large and small, or front and back, but also – and especially – through his use of light and dark. Finally, the highly individual and varied collection of his figures' poses, movement, and stances discussed above evidences Rembrandt's debt to Raphael. As Vasari determined and Van Mander confirmed, Raphael was a highly inventive artist.

We must remember that Rembrandt here quite deliberately cites major works of the Italian High Renaissance, from Leonardo's *Last Supper* and Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel Ceiling* to Raphael's *School of Athens* and *Transfiguration*. It is quite possible that Raphael's *Transfiguration* exerted the strongest influence, because Van Mander in his *Schilder-Boeck* treats it as a kind of artistic

⁴⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, 216e. Socrates is not the only master of dissimulation. One also thinks of Erasmus's adage, 'adopt the outlook of the polyp', speaking of camouflage artists such as Odysseus, Brutus, David, and chiefly St Paul, all of whom he praised expressly for their worldly wisdom and versatility. See Desiderius Erasmus, *Adagia*, trans. and ed. Anton J. Gail (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983), 37.

⁵⁰ Raupp, 414.

⁵¹ 'Want het was alles ghedaen met sulcken schoon lieflijcke manier, dat den Paus Pius alles liet afsnijten, wat ander in de ander Cameren hadden gheschildert'; 'Veel

minute dingen, die t'Aenmercken zijn, mocht ick verhalen: maer grootlijcx is te achten de ordinantie der History, die met een schoon orden onderscheyden, en bedeeft is: oockisser een schoon Prospective van metselry, met veel Beelden, soo dat Raphael met dese eerste proeve daer wel bewees, dat hyt veldt wilde houden onder al die Pinceelen handelden'. Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, 118r.

⁵² Nicola Courtright, 'Origins and Meanings of Rembrandt's Late Drawing Style', *The Art Bulletin* 78 (1996): 485–510.

testament and as the quintessence of Raphael's artistic production: 'In short, this was the last proof of his ability in the art: because he never wielded the brush afterwards'.⁵³ Both works of art, though under very different forms, share the concept of Christ as healer. Rembrandt, however, does not refer to a single episode, but to different scenes from the 19th chapter of the Gospel of St Matthew and links them to the subject of the sermon. That way parts of the audience receive a special function: they are part of the crowd and at the same time represent an individual episode of the Gospel.

The episode of the moonstruck boy in the *Transfiguration* makes clear that, in contrast to his disciples, the healing Christ is capable of delivering the sick from their demons. By adding the scene of the Transfiguration above, Raphael demonstrates Christ's unique status and gives a typological indication of the resurrection. His painting combines two scriptural passages in one simultaneous scene, thus stressing the representational capacity of his medium and its godlike possibilities.⁵⁴ The *Transfiguration's* subject is the presence of transcendence. In his transformation, hovering in the air and shining like the sun, his dress turning a dazzling white, Jesus manifests himself as God's son (Matt. 17:2). The light is of immense importance as it signals the Ascension and an approximation to God. Consequently, mankind in need of salvation in the lower part of the picture is confronted with the divine above. Raphael's painting reveals a confidence in salvation and conveys the impression that the painter is equally confident of his ability to represent it.

Rembrandt contradicts this in each and every case by adding countless passages from the Gospel of Matthew to his composition. In *The Hundred Guilder Print* simultaneity does not take place anywhere; on the contrary, Rembrandt is giving us the run-around.

The Limits of the Representable

Undoubtedly, Rembrandt strove to demonstrate his technical virtuosity. He was equally concerned with proving his immense knowledge of Italian art, a task he certainly achieves, albeit with *dissimulatio artis*. The artist makes his Italian models nearly unrecognizable by intentionally disguising them, such as transforming St Peter into an ill woman and an esteemed prophet into a young man, to give only two examples.⁵⁵ Only Leonardo's Judas retains his negative connotations, becoming a boastful Pharisee in the etching.

What, however, might be the theological significance of Rembrandt's *Hundred Guilder Print*? Why has the artist selected the 19th chapter from the Gospel of St Matthew for his ambitious etching? Why is this particular section of the New Testament suited to Rembrandt's bold design? And where exactly does the scene represented by Rembrandt occur? In the Bible, it says only that Jesus left Galilee in order to pray in the region of Judah, and that many people whom he had healed followed him. Does the artwork place us within the inner courtyard of a building? Or is it rather a town gate that we see on the right side, meaning that we are in a public square? What type of a wall rises up behind Christ? Is it a wall at all?

Each of these questions is a riddle. In chapter 19, Matthew emphasizes the controversy Jesus had caused with his demand for unconditional love. Moreover, Christ makes it clear that our earthly life cannot be the standard for heaven. Before the viewer, Christ pointedly repeats the message of his Sermon on the Mount to the Pharisees and the disciples. Matthew first criticizes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who expect to use Christ's answer as a pretext to lead him to blasphemy. The episode with

⁵³ Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 121'.

⁵⁴ See Rudolf Preimesberger, 'Tragische Motive in Raffaels "Transfiguration"', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 50 (1987): 88–115.

⁵⁵ For general information on the question, see Müller, *Der sokratische Künstler*, 128–225.

the rich young man similarly points out the young man's lack of understanding. While the young man obeys each requirement, Jesus draws attention to the insufficiency of his sacrifice, since he has kept his wealth for himself. In the end, even the disciples are criticized for turning the children away from Jesus. On the basis of these examples, it becomes obvious how few people understood Christ's message and were ready for true repentance.

All of this is represented in Rembrandt's etching. But how are we to understand the last verse of chapter 19, 'But many who are first shall be last, and the last shall be first' (Matt. 19:30)? This passage is informative inasmuch as Matthew draws on a paradox. The evangelist abandons the logic of identity in order to formulate consciously a contradiction in terms: a situation is the exact opposite of what it purports to be. Regarded formally, the evangelist makes use of a chiasmus, in which a permutation or a reversal takes place, one which will only occur in the future, however.⁵⁶ But how is this paradox to be represented visually, as an image?

It is important to consider this paradox in the context of the limits of textual and visual representation; any consideration of Christian theology demonstrates that not only the theologians of later times, but also St Paul and the Evangelists made repeated use of paradoxical formulations and parables to remind us that when discussing divinity, language quickly runs up against its limits.⁵⁷ Poetic formulations such as these – in the sense of a conscious contradiction – allow for ideas or concepts that cannot be stated directly. Thus, Erasmus of Rotterdam compared Christ's parables to the ironic formulations of Socrates, who famously states: 'I know that I know nothing', a paradoxical statement similar to Christ's '[the] first shall be last'.⁵⁸ Rembrandt plays with ironic and poetic paradoxes such as these when he places a blind old man in the brightest light, among a group of invalids and the suffering.

In Raphael's *School of Athens*, we find Plato and Aristotle in front of an enormous gate reminiscent of a triumphal arch. It is interesting to note how the motif of the gate's arch is repeated several times, a visual echo that contributes to the construction of perspective and recalls the interior of a basilica. Both the importance of the people present under the vault and the geometrical construction of perspective are staged as though Raphael wanted to communicate the size and importance of the philosophers' ideas, laws, and transcendence. In contrast, Rembrandt avoids any kind of idealized symmetry. Here, Christ is moved slightly left of center, and the gate is positioned alongside the right edge of the image. The background is not one of great beauty; instead we can make out the roughly joined stones of the structure. The form of the gate bears little regularity or uniformity, much like the scene's intense light. On one side of the image the lighting shimmers, producing a paradoxically warm feeling, while on the opposite side it appears strangely harsh.

When considering the piece's complex light and the surrounding walls of the inner courtyard, a further work of art must be mentioned. With his depiction of a tall, insurmountable barrier and the large gate, Rembrandt creates a feeling of enclosure that bears deeper contemplation. In her analysis of Raphael's representation of Plato in his *School of Athens*, Hoekveld-Meijer has noted the setting's 'similarity to a cave', alluding to Plato's allegory.⁵⁹ While this cannot be corroborated since Rembrandt can hardly be considered a literary scholar, he might well have been capable of such a reference. We are familiar with the few books from the auction inventory of Rembrandt's possessions of 1656.⁶⁰ We are also familiar, however, with the artist's enormous collection of drawings, engravings, etchings,

⁵⁶ Raupp, 418.

⁵⁷ Jürgen Müller, *Das Paradox als Bildform. Studien zur Ikonologie Pieter Bruegels d. Ä.* (Munich: W. Fink, 1999).

⁵⁸ Müller, *Das Paradox als Bildform*, 96–104; Jürgen Müller, 'Zur negativen Theologie des Bildes. Jan van Amstels Flucht nach Ägypten und Erasmus von Rotterdam', in *Transzendenz und die Konstitution von*

Ordnungen, ed. Hans Vorländer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 163–85; Müller, *Der sokratische Künstler*, 113–20.

⁵⁹ Hoekveld-Meijer, 110.

⁶⁰ Amy Golahny, *Rembrandt's Reading: The Artist's Bookshelf of Ancient Poetry and History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).



Fig. 4.5. Jan Saenredam (after Cornelis van Haarlem), *Plato's Allegory of the Cave*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-1887-A-11925. 1604. Engraving, 294 × 464 mm.

and paintings. Rembrandt is a visual, not a literary, scholar. This fact should provide the starting point for further deliberation. Although Plato's allegory of the cave was well known, a visual reference seems likelier than a familiarity with the text itself.

We are indebted to Jan Saenredam for an engraving (Fig. 4.5) after a painting by Cornelis van Haarlem that depicted Plato's allegorical cave. The work possessed a legendary status, equal to Dürer's *Meisterstiche* or Goltzius's series *The Life of the Virgin*, and appeared in seventeenth-century theoretical writings on art.⁶¹ In the engraving one sees groups of people who have different forms of access to the truth following the Platonic text. Relatively few people stand directly in the path of the sunlight; most are found within the cave and are dependent on artificial light. And while the scholars inside seem to continue a discussion of the artificial light, the large majority focuses on the shadows cast on the rear wall by the source of light. The image thus serves as an illustration of Plato's thought.

The engraving does not completely take on the message of the antique text, however; within the cave we find a figure who seems to be releasing people from their chains, and whose similarity to Christ has been commented on repeatedly. In this regard, the etching is particularly clear in its reference to the Gospel of John at the top margin of the engraving. It refers to the passage in which Jesus is called 'the light [which] has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light' (John 3:19). The image is striking for the variety of lighting effects, which Karel van Mander described in his *Schilder-Boeck* from 1604.⁶² At the same time, we are reminded of a Christian iconography that

⁶¹ Jürgen Müller, *Concordia Pragensis: Karel van Manders Kunsttheorie im Schilder-Boeck. Ein Beitrag zur Rhetorisierung von Kunst und Leben am Beispiel der rudolfinischen Hofkünstler* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993), 134–41.

⁶² Karel van Mander, *Das Lehrgedicht des Karel van Mander: Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar; nebst Anhängen über Manders Geschichtskonstruktion und Kunsttheorie*, trans. and ed. Rudolf Hoecker (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1916), 46.

functions in a similar manner: Christ in limbo. Here one sees the Savior breaking open the gates of hell in order to descend into the darkness and release virtuous individuals who preceded his coming.

The question remains whether we may associate Rembrandt's *Hundred Guilder Print* with this iconography by comparison to the gesture of Christ's outstretched hand. At the same time, we may also ask whether the immense stony surface behind Jesus is not an allusion to the Resurrection. As Paul Crenshaw argues, speaking of the 'tomblike structure' in the background, the surface recalls a rock-cut tomb sealed with a heavy stone.⁶³

Problematic, however, is the form of the 'stone', suggestive of a doorway. Whether or not this is the case is difficult to judge. The question of Christ's posture is by comparison rather easy to answer. In my opinion it is an allusion to the *Christus medicus* type, which, given the presence of so many invalids, makes sense. It may be compared to a famous Sebastiano del Piombo dramatically depicting the Raising of Lazarus as well as to a series of engravings by Maerten van Heemskerck, showing Christ and the woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years (Matt. 9:20). The cure is a faith cure, and Christ himself the medicine. With regard to the theological message of the etching we should remember, however, that Rembrandt did not place the savior at the center of the composition, but rather his garment. The pedestal of bricks behind Christ seems like a tiny altar covered by this garment. In my view this signifies a gesture of *humilitas*. If the pedestal can indeed be understood as an altar, it is remarkable that no liturgical or sacramental information whatsoever is offered, no opinion on the transubstantiation proffered. Instead the plain, unadorned altar points to the essence of Christianity.

Across from the Pharisees, we encounter a group of invalids, poor and oppressed, emerging from the twilight. Rembrandt shows them bent by age, kneeling, or even physically incapacitated by their illnesses. Some turn towards Christ in reverence, some point to others in need of his help. Within the overall context of the image, the number of hands represented is astonishing. The artist gives free reign to the individuals' gestures in order to characterize their internal attitudes. Hands either lie inactive, are folded behind backs – as with the merchant in the front left – or are clasped in positions of compassion or prayer, as on the right side of the image. A hope for healing proceeds hand-in-hand with a belief in Christ; faith is the true medicine. To the viewer, it becomes clear that mercy does not require a complicated theory, but rather is concerned with action. This is the actual content of Christ's message, thereby condemning the Pharisees, wise men, and scholars.

In chapter 23 of the Gospel of St Matthew, Jesus polemicizes against the 'teachers of the law and the Pharisees' because they 'do not practice what they preach' and he exhorts them not to 'do what they [i.e. the Pharisees] do' (Matt. 23:4). 'For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted' (Matt. 23:13) – a paradoxical statement we have similarly encountered at the end of chapter 19.

What these paradoxes amount to is that the world in a Christian perspective is governed by the law of inversion. Rembrandt accounts for this by inverting all conventions of representation. The heraldic right side is not the better one, the light on the Pharisee's side suggests their blindness, Christ is not at the center of the composition.

By my judgment, it is impossible to assign a denominational identity to such a complex staging. On the contrary, it appears more natural to take an interdenominational approach as the basis, one that posits Christ as the savior of all religions and peoples. The artist may allude to such a message by portraying what appears to be a black woman in profile on the right side of the image; her gaze is concealed under a strange hood, but she looks attentively towards Christ. The image's reference to Homer and Socrates can similarly be understood in this context; people who preceded Christ's birth are also taken into account, and are deemed capable of salvation despite their pagan identities.

⁶³ Crenshaw, 32.

Rembrandt's vision of heaven is open. This reminds us of the theological positions held by Erasmus. The program of the etching as a whole is defined by an anti-authoritarian attitude. Left and right, high and low, light and dark: no classical hierarchy is left intact. Even the physical appearance of Christ seems secondary to the cloak on the pedestal symbolizing mercy. Is it far-fetched to interpret this as a sign of reserve towards the denominational split? The fact that the disciples are classed with the Pharisees and that Peter is presented in an unflattering light might suggest that no priest is necessary to convey Christian truths. In opposition to Raphael, Rembrandt modestly eschews the magnificent *mise-en-scène* and does not allude to any liturgical or sacramental meanings. This seems a further indication of a downright anti-confessional stance.

And we must not forget that in the Gospel of St Matthew the temple itself is doomed, as Jesus warns his disciples that 'not one stone will be left on another' (Matt. 24:2). Keeping this in mind as an interpretational context we can conclude that we find ourselves at the foot of the Temple Mount. The terrain rising rearward, the rocks visible on the back mural, but most of all the high wall (in this case marking the limit of the temple precincts) could be understood in that sense.

The light in the etching provides another key to a deeper understanding of Rembrandt's work. At first glance, the emphasis rests on the light that radiates from Christ's face, which cannot be explained by another source of light. The harsh light reserved for the Pharisees differs greatly from the resplendent, soft glow that issues from the open gate on the right and that illuminates Christ and the group in the right half of the image. Terrestrial light is differentiated from the heavenly light flowing from the gate on the right side. This is of pivotal importance in any reading of the picture. Those who are now in darkness will soon be in the light, but it will be a different kind of light. Thus, it becomes clear that the figures located in the light in the print are actually those who are to be judged. Those who are still in darkness, on the other hand, will be brought to the light through Christ.

This subtle staging articulates two separate intentions. On the one hand, by showing the Pharisees in bright light, Rembrandt asserts the false order of the world. On the other hand, Christ's figure plays on the motif of a future reversal of light and shade. According to the mystery of the Incarnation, Christ is distinguished by a nimbus and self-illumination, but is paradoxically touched by the shadows of the people surrounding him. This becomes clear above all in Christ's raised left hand, the shadow of which recalls yet another: that cast on his robe by the hand of the woman who kneels fervently at his feet, her hands clasped in prayer. Crenshaw interprets this circumstance as 'the non-material world of the spirit that Christ preached'.⁶⁴ In the figure of the savior, Rembrandt creates a being that transfigures light and shadow. He is truly both human and divine.

We might say that the inner courtyard represented in Rembrandt's *Hundred Guilder Print* represents a kind of 'intermediate realm', inasmuch as bright daylight and divine light are distinguishable to the viewer. The resplendent shine of the light can only provide us with a vague conception. Even as we become aware of this ambivalence, we cannot yet look past the gate. Along with the other figures in the frame, Rembrandt has brought us as viewers into the inner courtyard. It remains our task to discover the ambivalence of the world, although we have no access to the true light.

The etching contains yet another covert reference, one that has remained undiscussed to date. The proverbial camel refers indirectly to the realm of heaven, which we could reach through the gate if only we were able. Our path, however, remains blocked and obscure. Directing our attention to the critically ill woman, who stretches out her arms towards Christ with her remaining strength, we discover an early Christian symbol. Leaves of ivy peek out from under the braided mat on which she lies. The ivy plant was used as a decoration on early Christian sarcophagi, and has long been a symbol

⁶⁴ Crenshaw, 28; Nicola Suthor, 'Ein Schattenspiel: Rembrandts "Hundertguldenblatt"', in *Kanon Kunstgeschichte: Einführung in Werke, Methoden und Epochen*,

vol. 2, *Neuzeit*, ed. Kristin Marek and Martin Schulz (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 352 ff.

of immortality. We find more ivy on the rear wall, as well as on the high wall on the right, signaling our redemption in a place beyond the wall and the gate.⁶⁵

Only now have we gained an idea of the etching's complexity and of Rembrandt's iconographic procedure. My point is not to repeat things that have been said already, but to frame critique and offer a caveat.

Rembrandt as a narrator knows well how to link different levels of meaning in his picture. It is, first of all, a masterstroke and a triumph of the etching technique. The artist represents light in all its forms. He succeeds in making us perceive the distinction between warm and cold colors, which we would expect from color only, thereby transcending the limits of etching as a medium. Then we recognize a multitude of people turning to the savior or away from him in a variety of attitudes. The whole scene seems to be in a state of flux, not just the people, but also the light that gives the impression of being able to change its intensity and direction. Through the use of extreme chiaroscuro the artist manages to depict the appearing and even the disappearing of things. Furthermore, we detect several figures represented only fragmentarily. Rembrandt aspires to the maximum vivacity of perception and ambitiously aims at catching a constantly changing reality. This is effected in close parallel to Raphael's *School of Athens* and other Italian High Renaissance motifs transformed into Rembrandt's artistic language. The artist evidently makes use of the concept of *dissimulatio artis*. He thus refutes his critics who had reproached him with ignorance. It is therefore telling that the exemplary motives of disciples and evangelists are transferred to supposedly unimportant figures. High is turned into low, when disciples and prophets are represented as simple, ill, or diseased people. This violation of decorum is doubtlessly intended as a criticism of the classical doctrine of *imitatio*. Finally, with a view to Raphael's *Transfiguration*, I have asked about the limits and possibilities of representing the transcendent. Here Rembrandt mistrusts the Italian's idealism. He eschews ideal geometrical patterns, isocephaly, symmetry, spheres: in short, all patterns symbolizing transcendence. By constructing an imagined space reminiscent of a cave, he frames his skepticism. After all, we know nothing about what lies beyond the cave. From a Christian perspective, *The Hundred Guilder Print* concentrates on the essentials – the artist depicts no temple, no ceremony or liturgy, just the exercise of charity representing the true *mysterium*. Good deeds seem to matter more to Rembrandt than sacraments. When practising charity, we are closest to Christ. Rembrandt's Christianity is unqualified and open to everybody, a practical truth requiring no theory.

As we have seen, *The Hundred Guilder Print* is a programmatic picture, as it offers the essence of Rembrandt's understanding of his art as well as of the New Testament. The variety of allusions and the painter's critical spirit are remarkable. He wholly refrains from favoring a certain denomination and its concepts and instead insists upon compassion as the ineluctable foundation of Christianity. And one may ask if the artist establishes a connection between the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the false critics of art? If one follows up the analogy between art critics and Pharisees, Rembrandt puts himself in the position of Christ. All this is not easy to discern, for the artist leaves the perverted order of the world intact by representing the Pharisees in radiant light. Rembrandt avoids caricature, but shows them as victims of their own blindness, whereas the less fortunate are able to understand where salvation comes from. Paradoxically, the light does not lead all people equally to insight.

If we wanted to characterize the etching in a word, it would be fitting to state that the artist is presenting us with a scenario of reversal. Proceeding from the biblical dictate according to which the first shall be last, Rembrandt introduces a contradictory structure into his etching. In the future, the light will be of another quality and will touch other groups. It is the provisional quality of Rembrandt's etching that captivates us. How else could the artist represent the scene, for the last are still not first? The promise of the divine realm appears, but not its fulfillment.

⁶⁵ For further references see Manfred Lurker, *Wörterbuch der Symbolik* (Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 1988), 158.