

The Pictures of Hans Vredeman de Vries in the Council's Grand Chamber of the Main City Town Hall in Gdańsk

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Hans Vredeman de Vries's paintings constitute but a fraction of all his artistic work; moreover, they have been almost entirely preserved outside the artist's motherland. One of the places where they can be viewed is Gdańsk, where Hans Vredeman arrived in 1592 and spent four years.¹

That was not the happiest period in the artist's wanderings as an emigrant. Before he arrived in Poland, he had worked in Hamburg, where he made his name as a painter. This activity helped him earn his living, but it could not afford to develop his theoretical interests and led to the negligence of applied graphic arts. The Hamburg pictures did not survive, but, as Karel van Mander writes, were admired by crowds of visitors who were deceived by the illusory and sketchy perspective of the architecture he presented.²

It was architecture that brought Hans Vredeman to Gdańsk: the City Council engaged him as the architect of the fortifications. On 1 October 1592 Vredeman signed a one-year contract as a municipal architect to build defences at the mouth of the Vistula River, Wisłoujście, and on the Motława.³ Simultaneously Anton van Obbergen – his fellow-countryman – was entrusted with the same task. A year later it was Obbergen's project that was approved for implementation by the City Council and Vredeman was dismissed. In his letters to the City Council Hans Vredeman complained about the fate that befell him and appealed for help with the predicament in which his family found itself.⁴

At that time he also suffered another defeat as a representative of Gdańsk painters who petitioned the Council that a painters' guild be established in Gdańsk. The petition was turned down. On March 1, 1594 Vredeman again voiced his complaint to the City Council about the poverty he had to struggle against in Gdańsk. He pointed to his old age and asked to be helped out by being offered a job. Successful this time, he was commissioned to paint the picture *Orpheus among beasts* for the Court of Artus. He owed this change for the better to the mayor Bartholomeus Schachmann, who initiated the reconstruction of numerous buildings in the city, and who, as an educated humanist, authorized the intellectual content in the decor of these buildings.

We know that *Orpheus*, which did not survive, hung on the south-east wall in the Court of Artus and depicted a peaceful coexistence of animals, usually hostile to one another, calmed

down by Orpheus' music. The metaphor of the painting was intended to soothe the temperament of the revelling burghers. *Orpheus* enjoyed approval and Vredeman designed a counter bench and a musicians' gallery for the Court of Artus.

At that time the municipal authorities undertook to change the interior decorations in the stately rooms of the Main City Town Hall (fig. 1). The Council's Grand Chamber was to follow the design of the decorations that are found in the senators' conference room of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice. It was Vredeman who was entrusted with that task. His greatest work of his is known from the wall pictures, which played the most important role in the decorative programme of the room. As they were considered too modest, the ornaments of the ceiling were removed in the years 1608 - 1611, and, thus, nothing is known about how they looked.⁵ (ill. 2)

Seven pictures have survived until our times. One picture painted by Vredeman is missing, which was used as a screen in front of the fireplace and the door that led to the Council's Small Chamber. It took the artist two years, 1594 and 1595, to complete the decoration of the Great Chamber. He was assisted by his son Paul, who fell off the scaffolding in 1594, and it was the Council who paid for the treatment, which was duly recorded in the city books.⁶ The last trace that evidence provides of Vredeman's stay in Gdańsk is a record in the books dated 30 December 1595.⁷ Afterwards the artist returned to Hamburg, which he and his son left for Prague, to work for the emperor Rudolph II. Despite the failures, the artist's stay in Gdańsk was marked by undeniable successes which influenced the city's arts to a large extent.

In the Council's Grand Chamber we deal with Hans Vredeman's single cycle in painting that has been preserved almost intact. The interpretation of the content reveals the creator of the cycle to be a Calvinist Protestant. The author might have been Mayor Schachmann,⁸ though it seems that Vredeman must have had a significant share in the creation of the content of the cycle. The character of the work was mainly determined by its location. The Council's Grand Chamber, later to be called Red Room, was the most representative interior in the Town Hall, serving as a place where the City Council held their meetings. It was there that the most important decisions concerning the city were made: it was the centre of municipal government, its sanctuary.



Fig. 1: The Main Town Hall.

In planning the decor, decorative intentions gave way to didactic ones. In that kind of interior the axis of the programme was inevitably the primary notion of power. The didactic character of the Gdańsk cycle is deeply rooted in that concept. It was to embody an artistic catechism of good citizenship. The dominance of the founder's erudition, and the richness of content over form makes it practically impossible to detect the personality of the Flemish artist in the work. From the very beginning it was not easy to interpret the programme of the whole cycle. The pictures were addressed to an educated viewer, and, like scientific treatises, they gave first of all intellectual pleasure, only later to be followed by aesthetic experience.

A comparison to scholarly texts is obvious when the composition of the pictures is analysed. The main scene, like footnotes, is accompanied by smaller scenes in the background which complement the subject. The arrangement of the programme is based on the antithetic juxtaposition of two contrasting ideas, like in philosophical or theological treatises. The literary character of the pictures is reinforced with numerous inscriptions, references, and numerations that mostly refer to the *Old* and the *New Testament*. That is something that rarely happened in painting in those times. These writings make the cycle unique and help interpret those text-pictures. Karel van Mander mentions eight pictures, and describes the last one in detail, which used to be placed in front of the fireplace, but which did not survive.⁹

I Justice

The first picture shows Justice and Injustice (fig. 3). It is to be found next to the seventh, the last one, which depicts *The Last Judgement*. The highlighted issue of justice opens and closes the programme of the cycle. It is confirmed by the fact that the allegory of Justice appears in all the pictures painted by Vredeman in the Red Room. They reveal the mediaeval concept of the morality play in a new form. Humanism and Protestantism introduced changes in the methods of presentation and brought about a considerable secularisation of ethical concepts. The picture *Justice and Injustice* differs markedly from the others in composition. It is characterized by precise symmetry with the effect that Justice and Injustice are in balance.

The foreground shows two antagonistic scenes: mercy bestowed on a widow with the orphaned children and the expulsion of an old man, a widow, and orphans. They are separated by a pillar with symbols of Law and Gospel on it. As a result, there are two tribunals in the centre, one of Justice and one of Injustice. The one on the right illustrates judgement over a culprit who is being brought to Justice, allegorically personified by a woman. Between the tribunal and the defendant there are three allegorical figures signed as: *Veritas* (Truth), *Ratio* (Reason), and *Indagatio* (Examination). *Veritas* has a bare leg (the symbol of nakedness) and is holding a leafless twig in one hand. *Ratio* is shown with a bit

– a symbol of rationally restrained passions- while *Indagatio* is putting a mirror in front of the accused. The execution that is to be seen in the background is a memento of the severity and inevitability of just punishment. The judges who accompany Justice are all distinguished men keeping their hands in the sleeves of their ample robes. The hiding of hands has a symbolic meaning and signifies that the judges are incorruptible. The still faces and hands of the judges and their garments bring to mind the portraits of Venetian senators. Seeing them, the viewer is reminded of a meeting of the Supreme Council chaired by the Doge who has been replaced by Justice. Eyes that are closed are the permanent characteristics of this allegory, as are the unsheathed sword and scales.

The other side of the picture presents the unjust tribunal. There a rich burgher, who refuses payment to a worker and succumbs himself to corruption. Thus he is the personification of double injustice. In this case, too, the tribunal, the allegory of Injustice, consists of six judges. The judges have four-cornered caps on their heads that resemble those worn by the catholic clergy in the 16th c. Their faces and gestures express agitation. Injustice looks very much like her antagonist: she has a crown, a sword, and scales that are crooked. Next to her throne stands the figure of a confidant whose influence makes the verdicts biased. In the niche in the wall next to the judges a vessel filled with gold is to be found, a meaningful object of cult and corruption. The whole pageant is crowned with a scene that is witnessed through an arcade in the town square. There is a slain victim lying in front of the Town Hall while the murderer is running away through a gate. The malfunctioning judicial system breeds impunity.

II The Council

The second picture in the cycle presents the Council (fig. 4). The painting, which is the richest in iconography, focuses on the problem that is fundamental for Gdańsk, i.e. the republican government. Everything here has a symbolic meaning. The spatial composition of figures and groups of figures, as well as the background and architecture, come second to the metaphorical content. The figures in the columned hall constitute the main element. Holding hands, ten middle-aged and old men create a tight circle around the throne on which a female figure is sitting. The councillors' hands are joined together by the allegory of Justice-Law. The scene represents the Council, and the problem of Justice is perceived here as the most important moral issue connected with government. The hands that the councillors hold together symbolize unanimity, consensus, and mutual trust, whereas the dogs that are sitting between them represent loyalty and vigilance. The last virtue is shown in the allegory of Vigilance (*Vigilantia*) on a canopied throne, wearing a crown, swaying the sceptre, and a lance with a pennon. Beside, a personification of Reason (*Ratio*) is laying a somewhat at the feet of Vigilance, and is holding a bundle of birch twigs. This is not the first or the last repetition of connotations and the doubling of allegories.

This does not mean that the author lacked in imagination but denotes that the presented ideas are painted in hues that are always new. Another figure at the throne of Vigilance is *Occasio*, a woman with an exposed skull at the back of the head, tied to the base of the throne with a forelock. It is interpreted as the need for seizing the opportunity, or in the less popular version that is, however, nearer to the exogenesis of the Gdańsk cycle, it is to be understood as the ability to use time properly¹⁰. For those in power this is virtue number one. *Vigilantia*, *Ratio*, and *Occasio* symbolize the councillors' basic duties. Those taking part in the meeting are surrounded outside by the next allegories, from the right: *Rectitudo* (Simplicity – with a cane in her right hand), *Scientia* (Knowledge – a slab with a triangle drawn on it), *Imaginatio* (Imagination – with a mirror in her hand), *Experientia* (Experience – holding a red-hot piece of iron in pincers), *Providentia* (Prudence – looking into a mirror). On the other side of the throne we notice the following personifications of virtues: *Perseverantia* (Perseverance – with a turret on her head and laurel tree in her hand), *Labor* (Labour – represented by Atlas supporting the earth, the only male figure among the allegories), *Alacritas* (Swiftiness – a winged figure with a dog-collar on her right hand), *Feducia* (Trust – helmeted and in armour, and *Facilitas* (Gentleness – breaking an arrow). Outside the circle one can discern two more allegories: from the left *Taciturnitas* (Silence – a figure with a finger on her lips), and at the entrance *Custodia* (Vigil – an armed knight with a burning torch).

Outside the room in this picture there are examples that contradict the wisdom inherent to the Council and show the damage the lack of it causes. In the foreground we see a man who is filling up a well, and a dead calf is lying beside. Farther away another one is closing a cow-shed from which a wolf is carrying away a lamb. These two scenes are close to realistic Flemish painting, and find their origin in Dutch proverbs which mean that somebody is wise after the harm has been done.

The next scene points to anger as the source of wrong decisions and stems from Aeneid. On a hill, three women: Mata, Fury Alecto, together with one of the Erinyes, are instigating Turnus, the king of the Rutuli, to vengeance, while behind them the result of a conflict is to be seen: a burning city and a ship ablaze on the sea. The theme is developed in the fourth picture of the cycle. The next two motifs that find their roots in mythology present illustrations of ignorance and impudence. A four-horse carriage that is falling from the sky exemplifies Phaeton, which refers to foolish rulers. Above, the falling solitary figure of Icarus symbolizes the same juvenile vices as Phaeton does.

III Piety

The third picture represents Piety – *Pietas* 'in a modern [= gothic] temple', as van Mander describes it (fig. 5).¹¹

However, piety is here but one of many propositions, for the picture contains a programme of ethical and cult duties, exemplified by the antinomian notions of *Vera Religio* and *Ficta Religio*. Basically, it shows the contrast between the cult of spiritualism, advocated by Reformation, and iconolatriy that is typical of Catholicism. Scenes from the Old Testament provided examples. The characters of Josiah and Salomon must have provoked heated interpretations against the background of the religious discussions and controversies that arose in Gdańsk in those days.

A scene of historical character is on its way inside a Gothic church that is void of any artistic figures and other cult decorations. Halfway in the middle nave King Josiah is seated on the throne, and is addressing the congregation. The inscription at the foot of the throne leaves no doubt as to his identity: *IOSYAS Rex*. Having found Moses' tablets, the King is revealing "the words of the book of covenant". Next to the throne there is an allegorical figure of *Pietas* with her hands clasped for prayer. In the middle of the aisle a man is sitting at a book-rest reading an open book, this is the priest Saphan beside whom there is the allegory of *Veritas* holding a thorny twig. Both these figures resemble the evangelists from medieval illuminations. The text of *Deuteronomium* is being listened to with concentrated attention.

In the foreground, on the stairs that lead to the church, there are allegorical scenes with inscriptions that comment on them. They concern the duties of both the clergy and the rulers. *Institutio* describes the scene to the left: a woman with two children is receiving an alms from a man standing nearby. This is the imperative of education. The next episode, signed as *Misericordia* (Pity), shows a man who is giving an alms to a child sitting on the stairs to the church. The allegories situated under the other arcade are of a different character: *Humilitas* (Humility) is symbolized by a bare-footed child with crossed hands covered with a cap, *Religio* is depicted by a Jewish priest with a mitre and a shield on his back, while *Obedientia* took the figure of a man with his hands crossed against his chest.

On the opposite side in the church there is an altar with the Tables of the Testimony and an open book of the Gospel. Above it, in a radiant circle, one can see the name of Jehovah around which there are allegories of the following virtues: *Iustitia* (Justice – the most important, sitting in the middle), *Spes* (Hope – with folded hands, and an anchor at her feet), *Charitas* (Love – feeding children), *Fides* (Faith – with a chalice and a cross) and *Obedientia* (Obedience – with the palm and a goblet on the altar's mensa). The next three are *Prudentia* with a mirror in her hand; *Consilium* with clasped hands, looking at the symbols of the *Old* and the *New Testament*, and *Ratio*. It is in practical life that they find their significance. They are the symbols of care, providence, and practicality in everyday activities. This programme is also applicable in the domain of religion. *Idolatria* – two scenes

on the left side of the picture – is the negation of true religion (*Vera Religio*). Both are traced back to the *Old Testament*. The first shows a man on his knees, worshipping a pagan god under a canopy. The other shows the homage being paid by the Israelites to the golden calf. Nearby one can see the tents of those travelling to the Promised Land, farther away there is Mount Sinai with its peak hidden in a cloud. At the bottom of this fragment the painter placed an allegory: a child with a stick crossing a stream, and called *Securitas*.

It is evident that the subject matter of the picture is focused on the problems of the cult. Pieta is defined here as 'religious idea that excludes any graphical resemblance to God'.¹² This is particularly highlighted in the figure of King Josiah whose achievement was a radical reform of the cult which resulted in ridding the temple of all the pagan accretion. Protestantism saw Josiah as a symbol of struggle against Idolatria and returning to true religion, to Moses' law. The idea was cherished by Calvin whose negative attitude towards cult art found its expression in *Institutio Religionis Christianae*.¹³ From this point of view Josiah is perceived as a symbol of true devoutness.

IV Concord

The fourth picture is also based on the principle of contrasts. Its subject is *Concordia* and its negation *Discordia* (fig. 6). The picture does not have a clear centre. It lacks biblical and historical scenes. It is composed of loosely connected episodes created by allegorical pairs of people and animals. Of great interest is the architecture that builds up the space for numerous figures. It consists of three parts: a domed apse, a nave with a three-bay barrel vault and a circular hole in the middle of the central span, and a narrow aisle. This temple of Concord (its sacral character is evidenced by the altar in the apse with the inscription *Concordia*, the Tables of the Testimony, and a book of the Gospel) has hardly any walls. The vaults are supported by Doric columns, and the open character of the interior gives the impression of stage decorations. It is difficult to find a prototype for this fantastic building, which is rather a product of Hans Vredeman de Vries' imagination. Under the vault, in a bright framing, there is a Hebrew tetragram which denotes Jehovah. Faith and Love, theological virtues, are standing at the altar, a prerequisite for perfect concord. Close to them there are two groups of women who are singing and playing instruments. Music and singing are strictly connected with the main idea of the picture. String instruments such as the harp, the zither, and the lyre were regarded as the symbol of concord, harmony of different tones. Already Plato had already compared harmony in music to mutual understanding among the citizens.

In the nave the artist painted the personifications of the virtues that are the attributes of Concord. Two female figures shaking hands are *Fidelitas* (Fidelity – with a dog) and *Clementia* (Gentleness – with a lamb). The next pair is *Pax*

(Peace – with a broken sword, doves, and an olive twig) who is kissing *Iustitia* (Justice – with a sword pointing downwards, and scales). These two allegories are to be found in the centre of the picture, their importance having thus been emphasized. Their meaning can also be interpreted as *Pax Christiana*, reconciliation among Christians. On the left there is half-naked *Veritas* (Truth – with a thorny twig and an open book). Nearby a knight is standing; he is wearing Roman attire and has a laurel wreath. The inscription identifies him as *Benivolentia*. On the stairs one can discern two men wearing Greco-Latin clothes; the older one has a wreath on his head, the other is wearing a lion's skin, the head of which is a kind of helmet. They were labelled as *Amicitia*. They represent *Ulysses* and *Diomedes*, who symbolize the union of wisdom and strength. This example, taken from the Trojan war, points to the need for mutual support in difficult and important enterprises. The inscription under the next figure in a knight's outfit identifies him as *Foedus* (Covenant – with a laurel wreath).

In front of a group of knights a rooster and a sitting hen with chicks are to be seen. They are connected by the inscription *Tutela*, which means care, and which directs the message of the picture towards the aspect of Concord so important in the family. The next allegory reveals a similar character. On the stairs two children signed as *Comitas* (Gentleness) are embracing each other. They are *Castor* and *Pollux*, who as loving brothers were used as a symbol to illustrate this allegory. Above, an ox and a lion are lying facing each other. This scene has its origin in Isaiah's prophecy that tells about a universal mutual understanding that mitigates bloodthirsty instincts. In the aisle four men are sitting dressed in clothes that are contemporary with the picture. The men are holding hands, which means that the sittings of the City' Senate – *Consilium* – are peaceful. In the bay above the nave the image of a crane with a stone in its claws was drawn, signed as *Vigilantia* – an allegory of Vigil.

The left side of the picture, with Discord, shows a yard between a temple and a building with a tower. The one-storey palace has a jutting central break that is crowned with a loggia illuminated by burning cressets. In it one can discern musicians playing noisy instruments. The fire and the noisy music have a symbolic meaning. The flame, as the hotbed of hatred and discord, was as frequently present in the medieval metaphor as it is nowadays. The noisy music of trumpets, on the other hand, contradicts the harmony and modesty of string-instruments music, pointing to conceit which breeds discord.¹⁴ In the square three half-naked women and three men are fighting. The raging women are the ancient goddesses of evil, Furies: *Alecto*, *Tisifona*, and *Megera*. In the middle of this group some wolves are biting one another to death. This is the representation of bestiality caused by lack of concord. The barking dog is also a symbol of rage and discord. Farther, in the gate to the yard, one can see a man who is abducting a woman. This scene bears similarity to the

episode from the first picture in the cycle, where a criminal is escaping through an unguarded city gate. 'United we stand divided we fall' is the author's message expressed in the picture and addressed to the city government.

V Liberty

The next picture, whose theme is Liberty, departs from the pattern that had been used before (fig. 7). Instead of in an interior, the action takes place in an open space, and inert allegories replace figures in motion. In a pillared portico, open to a landscape, there is a triumphant chariot of Liberty. However, the principle of antinomy of a virtue and its contradiction was preserved. The main scene covers almost all the area of the canvas while its antinomy – the scene of Slavery – has to be fitted into the margin of a scenic background.

The composition of this picture attracts attention, because the central perspective, so typical of Vredeman, was replaced by strict symmetry. The painter employed two longitudinal planes; the nearer is filled by the pageant of Liberty while the farther is composed of three symbolic episodes. Like in previous paintings biblical themes coexist here with historical allegories and motifs. The main scene, the procession of Liberty, recalls the tradition of the chariots of triumph known from ancient Rome and the Byzantine Empire. There are also numerous descriptions and iconographic sources of festive ingress of monarchs, dating from the 16th c., which were virtually complete moral treatises.

The Gdańsk pageant is led by a figure dressed in ancient clothes. The standard he is carrying displays broken manacles, and on the flag-staff there is *Pileus* – a felt hat which in ancient Rome was the symbol of freedom. It used to be worn on shaven heads by slaves who had been given back their freedom. The standard-bearer is being followed by a boy with a tambourine. In their wake there are pairs of allegories pulling the chariot of Liberty: *Iustitia* (Justice – blind, with a crown on her head, a sword and scales) and *Fortitudo* (Fortitude – with a column on her shoulder), *Prudentia* (Prudence – with a mirror in her hand and a snake on her right forearm) and *Temperantia* (Moderation – is pouring wine into a goblet). They are the power that drives the carriage of Liberty. *Veritas* (Truth – half naked, with a thorny twig) and *Ratio* (Reason – with a bit in her hand) are marching at the sides of the quadriga. On the canopied throne *Libertas* (Liberty – a beautiful young woman with a wreath on her curled hair) is holding a book with seven seals and the inscription *Iura et Leges* in her right hand; in her left one she is carrying the palm. Over the canopy Jehovah's name can be seen, and below, two angels are holding a cartouche with the sentence: 'Gloriam Deo Pax Hominibus De Bona Voluntate'. This is a free transcription of a quotation from the Gospel of St. Luke, which means that for the author of the whole concept the Bible was a source of allegorical content rather than the springboard of theological studies. At the foot of Liberty, a wolf is lying with a sheep, which indicates that

murderous instincts have already died, and a cat – an animal that was born to be free. The figures of two women and a dancing man with a tambourine bring up the rear. Singing and rejoicing inseparably follow in the wake of Liberty.

Together with this rejoicing group, a Biblical scene shows Jews crossing the Red Sea. At the sign given by Moses with his staff, two walls of water come apart. The motif of escape from slavery in Egypt is an allegorical picture of freedom. It has the same meaning as the next episode taken from ancient history. This is an indication that the works of Erasmus of Rotterdam, who advocated allegorical, non-dogmatic interpretation of the Bible, were known.¹⁵

The mid-section contains a historical scene. In the amphitheatre, which resembles the Roman Colosseum, the citizens of Athens are greeting the Roman hero Tullius Quintus, who liberated the city from the yoke of Philip of Macedonia. The Roman commander is proclaiming the city free, which is enthusiastically received by the inhabitants. The liberation of the Greeks and the Exodus scene are the last to illustrate the triumph of Liberty. Their task is to show citizens' freedom as the keynote of the program.

The picture ends with the representation of Slavery. The scene depicts ships riding at the shore to which armed soldiers are driving people in irons. One can assume that it is a raid by pirates who want to capture slaves. The aim of the scene is to condemn practices like that and to recall republican liberties, among which freedom was the most prominent.

VI Steadiness

The sixth picture painted by Vredeman for the Council's Chamber bears the title *Constantia*, i.e. Steadiness (fig. 8). The main theme was introduced in the foreground of an open columned building. Here we see the Maccabaeus brothers with their mother and old Eleazar, as well as allegories and symbolic objects. The history of the Maccabaeus family is a frequent example of heroic constancy. Apart from courage, they display stoical approach to suffering they have to bear. Without any protest they withstand torture and, supported by their mother, give their lives in defence of Moses' law. This example must have been very important for the helpless Protestant communities who from the second half of the 16th c. had to cope with greater and greater oppressions from Catholic reactionism. It particularly appealed to the followers of Calvin whose doctrine of predestination contained strong elements of stoicism. Of significance in this context is the Maccabaeuses' stance as opponents of idolatry, which is time and again condemned in the whole painting cycle. Next to the brothers there is the figure of old Eleazar wearing a white martyr's tunic. He is the master of the seven brothers, and just like them, he was to urge people to persist in their professed religion. The examples are a crucible of philosophical stoicism and the ideal of Christian perseverance in faith despite suffering. Above a group of martyrs two angels with

the palm of victory are raising a crown, and over them there is the name of Jehovah in a radiant circle. The representation of the Maccabaeuses is repeated in the right section of the picture together with other examples of martyrdom: Abraham's sacrifice, the stoning of St. Paul, the stoning of St. Stephen, and *Muncius Scaevola* with his hand on fire. The episodes are an extension of the main idea of the picture: an attitude based on Constancy, Patience, obedience to God, and sacrifice. The examples taken from the Bible and the history of Rome reflect the situation in the contemporary Netherlands, suffering religious and political oppressions.

In the mid-section of the picture, next to the altar stone with the Tables of the Testimony and the Gospel, and deep into the hall, there are allegories of virtues. According to the inscription *IUSTITIA* on the antependium, the altar is devoted to Justice. The persistence and heroism of the figures in the foreground guard the Tables of the Testimony and the Gospel which are founded on Justice. At the entrance two knights are standing, which points to the militant character of Constancy and Patience. The warrior on the right is *Animositas*, i.e. Courage while the one on the left is *Ingenuitas*, which means Nobleness. Laurel wreaths and crowns they are endowed with mean victory resulting from Constancy.

The left side of the picture is dedicated to Inconstancy. This time the antinomy of the virtue is symbolised by the world – *Mundus* which is represented by a woman on the throne, which is similar to an altar. *Frau Welt* – Lady World is frequently present in the allegorical graphic art of the 16th c. The figure is holding a cup and a sack of gold; she has a glass ball on her head, and at her feet there are expensive vessels filled with money. She is assisted by *Caro* (Sensuality) and *Vanitas* (Vanity), while three people are kneeling in front of the altar. The glass ball symbolises the fragility and shallowness of the affairs of the world, and the illusion of happiness that worldly possessions bring with them. The weakness in the people who succumb to these phantoms is symbolised by *Defectio*. It is represented by a smartly dressed man who is pulling a rusty plough behind him. Of similar meaning is the figure of a boy, labelled as *Levitas*, who is hurrying up the stairs with a cane and a streaming scarf in his hands. This signify inconstancy, vanity, and rashness, typical of immature age.

VII The Last Judgement

The last picture in the cycle is *The Last Judgement*, unquestionably religious in character, which is evident in the traditional iconographic records (fig. 9). The picture is the ultimate conclusion of the programme, in which the Protestant orientation of the author is most visible. *The Last Judgement* resumes the ideas expressed in the previous pieces of the cycle. Here individual virtues and vices have eschatological dimensions. However, Doomsday does not mean the end of all things only; it is the victory of Truth and the triumph of Justice.

Like the previous ones, this picture is also constructed on the principle of contrasts. Its composition was based on the pattern that had been developed in the late Middle Ages, where there is a clear-cut horizontal division into the earthly and the heavenly sphere, with a symmetrical borderline between the redeemed and the condemned.¹⁶ Christ, who is sitting on the rainbow, is not so much the Judge here but first of all the Saviour who is rewarding the redeemed. In his outstretched right hand he is holding a crown so as to put it on their heads. The sceptre in the left hand, the crown, and the purple overcoat are the symbols of power. The tetragram IHWH indicates that God is present in the act of judgement.¹⁷ Christ's feet are resting on the terrestrial globe with the outlines of the continents and inscriptions: *Europa, Asia, Africa, America*. *Sphaera* shows that the Saviour is almighty. The light in the window that is reflected in it is the symbol of divine compassion and a reflection of light from paradise. This motif belongs to the iconographic type of *Salvator Mundi* that was prevalent in the Netherlands in the Renaissance. So were the four winds and the angels signalling the rising from the dead on their trumpets.

Angels and apocalyptic old men are closest to the Judge. The traditional figures of the Mother of God and John the Baptist are missing. This is not only the expression of the Protestant negation of the cult of the saints but also the negation of the role of the church as a mediator and its influence on God's decrees, which in the doctrine are symbolised by Mary and the Baptist. The Saints were replaced by allegories that are the epitome of the Protestant doctrine of salvation: *Misericordia* (Compassion) and *Gratia* (Mercy) on the right side, and *Iustitia* (Justice) and *Veritas* (Truth) on the left. According to the doctrine salvation can only be gained through faith in Christ's compassion and mercy. The mercy is symbolised here by the rainbow that serves as the Judge's throne.

Archangel Michael is omitted. In his stead Vredeman painted a column on a solid base that supports the emblems of faith: a book of Gospel with seven seals, and the head of an angel over an open codex. The Gospel is lit up and faces the redeemed. The Tables of the Testimony with a death's head are placed directly in front of the condemned and a shadow is cast over them. Above them, there is a cross with a crown on the vertical beam and a laurel wreath below. Next to the cross there is a palm twig with a sword opposite it. The trigonal base of the Tuscan column is the symbol of perfection. The column itself expresses the power of faith through which one can be redeemed. The cross is a reminder that it is Christ's merits, not man's, that make redemption possible: his suffering and death, which is also an act of victory, symbolised by the crown, the laurel wreath, and the olive twig. The sword that is found next to the signs of law expresses the rigidity of the administration of justice.

The group of the redeemed contains the traditional iconographic motifs: rising from the dead, and the angels raising

the chosen ones into heaven. However, the allegories that were added to the traditional scenes offer a different interpretation of the existing truths. They appear in the foreground. Three of them represent theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love, the fourth being Constancy. *Pietas*, *Spes*, *Concordia*, and *Constantia* play the role of mediators between people and God, hence their presence among the resurrected. The Eden in this interpretation is a place of rest and cool that has its origin in the tales of the fabulous gardens of the former rulers in the Orient. At the same time it is the altar of the Lamb founded on a dome supported by light columns, and situated on a hill surrounded by cypress trees. It gives the impression of a garden arbour at the feet of which there are ponds and park pavilions. Four rivers flow out from four gates to the Garden of Eden. The place is surrounded with numerous angels with musical instruments. The cypress trees have a symbolic meaning; they mean the finish – the end and eternity (their ever green colour) – , and their slender shape points to heaven. The souls of the redeemed, however, pass by this Garden of Eden. They are heading first towards Christ who is waiting for them with a crown in his hand.

The pattern of contrasts is fully implemented on the side of the condemned. This is the picture of the triumph of Satan, which depicts total destruction. The flames devour everything around. The condemned are deafened by music from hell, their faces betray fear. Deep in the background the most Protestant element of this picture is to be seen: the Pope's Vatican Palace in Rome with a bridge on the Tiber. This identification of Rome with Babylon, the haunt of vice and moral degradation, was very characteristic of the Reformation.¹⁸ An open declaration like this against *die Hure Roma*, as Luther put it, was extremely rare in Polish Protestant art.¹⁹ The main focus of attention in this section of the picture is the scene in which Satan is driving the terrified reprobate towards the open mouth of hell. Here one can detect borrowings from Hans Memling's *The Last Judgement* in S. Marias Church at Gdańsk, as well as from more recent Dutch paintings of Bosch and Bruegel. It is from them that Vredeman took half-beast and half-human diabolic creatures. Leviathan's open mouth is reminiscent of the gate to hell. Inside it there is a ship loaded with the damned. On Leviathan's head devils generate satanic music with the help of trumpets and bells. In the foreground one sees how punishment is being inflicted for individual sins. The figure of a woman with exposed breasts illustrates unchastity. The man into whose mouth Satan is pouring liquid is a drunk. Another one, with scales, brings to mind greed. Only one allegory is signed here; it is *Fraus*, i.e. the desire for excessive profit, which gives rise to crime and usury.²⁰ Grotesquely the figure of a miser is depicted on all fours, terrified, watching a devil approaching his buttocks. He is being attacked by another beast with claws. On the whole, however, Vredeman's inferno does not break with the stereotypes present in the painting of those times, and is not as sinister as pictures by other Dutch artists.

VIII Reason

To his description of seven wall pictures van Mander adds an eighth one that served as a screen in front of the fireplace. He also mentions its main allegories, so we can now define the underlying idea of the enterprise: '... the eighth picture, which is placed in front of the fire in summer. Through an arcade, one can see a sitting allegory of Reason with a dog, a symbol of faithfulness painted from nature. These keep in confinement Discord (*Discordiam*), Mutiny (*Seditionem*), Treason (*Tradictionem*), False Testimony (*Calumniam falsam*), Hatred (*Invidiam*)'.²¹ Thus, this non-existing picture can be called *Ratio*. It shows Reason as the main force that checks bad instincts. It is perfectly in line with the programme of the whole cycle, in which rationalism frequently gains the upper hand. The faith in reason as a panacea for evil, and looking for sources of crime in stupidity and ignorance, are an integral feature of the humanist outlook of Erasmus of Rotterdam, which was also expressed in the Gdańsk cycle. Hardly anything else can be said about this lost picture.

The antonymous presentation of virtues and vices in the Hans Vredeman de Vries' Gdańsk cycle reveals the same educational concept that underlined the medieval psychomachia. As has been shown many times, the preaching character of the work owes much to Calvin's teachings. It also dominates over artistic qualities. The concentration of symbols and its ideological devotion gained the upper hand over originality, or even the elementary principles of good taste. Consequently, the multi-layer content took the form of narration with recurring episodes. This is the explanation why the composition is naive and anachronic. However, that was the artist's conscious choice, strengthened by the specific character of the commission from the city government.

Notes

1. Last Vredeman's work in Danzig was picture for church Of Corpus-Christi "Allegory of offence and..." from 1596. Deposit in the National Museum in Gdańsk.
2. K. van Mander, *Das Leben der niederländischen Maler*, II, München-Leipzig 1906, p. 111
3. Compare: Cuny G., *Danzigs Kunst und Kultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt 1910, p. 47; Idem, *Johannes Fredeman de Fries und Aegidius Dickman (Mitteilungen des Westpreussischen Geschichtsvereins*, nr 4), 1927, p. 69.
4. Group of documents from Gdańsk Archiv "XLII Maler", with original Vredeman's applications, got lost during second war
5. W. Tomkiewicz, 'Alegoria handlu gdańskiego. Izaaka van den Blocke', *Biul. Hist. Sztuki* 1954, p.408.
6. Cuny, op. cit. (note 3), p. 71.
7. Bills for Vredeman's paintings survived in Gdańsk State Archive, originating from the period: 17 September 1594 - 30 December 1595. APG inv. nr. 300,12/21, p. 251-253; APG inv. nr. 300,12/22, p. 245.
8. Bartholomeus Schachmann was a humanist, well-known traveller and possessor of 'an office of curiosity', due to which he was imputed for practising black magic. Compare: T. Hirsch, *Über den Handelsverkehr Danzigs mit den Italienischen Staaten zu Ende des XVI Jahrhunderts (Neue Preussische Provinzial Blätter IV)*, Königsberg 1847, p. 226; P. Simon., *Geschichte der Stadt Danzig II*, Danzig 1918, p. 555; T. Tomkiewicz, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 409-419.
9. Van Mander, op. cit. (note 2), p. 112
10. In this meaning it was used often in man's figure as Kairos. Compare: E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, New York 1939, p. 72.
11. Mander, op. cit. (note 2), p. 112, 'Pietas in eenen Modernen Tempel'.
12. Iwanoyko E, *Gdański okres Hansa Vredemana de Vries*, Poznan 1963, p.67.
13. J. Calvinus, *Institutio Religionis Christianae....* Lib. IV. Cap. V. Sectio 18; Compare: L.P. Spelman, 'Calvin and the Arts', *Journal of Aesthetics* 1948.
14. C.G. Strindbeck, *Bruegelstudien*, Stockholm 1956, p.168.
15. R. Kommos, *Sebastian Franck und Erasmus von Rotterdam (Germanische Studien*, Heft 153), Berlin 1934, p. 63.
16. G. Spielerkötter, *Die Darstellung des Weltgerichtes von 1500-1800 in Deutschland*, Düsseldorf 1939, p. 25.
17. Calvin used the name of Jehovah instead of Deus. It was similar in Gdańsk epigraphy.
18. Compare: H. Preuss, *Die Vorstellung Luthers zum Antichrist*, Leipzig 1906.
19. Compare: S. Scharfe, *Religiöse Bildpropaganda der Reformationszeit*, Göttingen 1951.
20. E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandisch Painting*, Cambridge 1953, pp. 154-356.
21. Van Mander, op.cit. p.113.



Fig. 2: The Red Room



Fig. 3: Justice



Fig. 4: The Council



Fig. 5: Piety



Fig. 6: Concord



Fig. 7: Liberty



Fig. 8: Steadiness



Fig. 9: The Last Judgement