Between late December 1532 and September 1533, Michelangelo sent a series of drawings to Tommaso de’Cavalieri, the young Roman nobleman who had captured his affection. In the Rape of Ganymede (Cambridge, MA, Fogg Art Museum, Fig. 14), the Punishment of Tityus (Windsor, Royal Library), and the Fall of Phaeton (Windsor, Royal Library), Michelangelo used the imagery of ancient myth to communicate complex messages of love, desire, and the consequences of human hubris. Although much has been made of the intimate nature of these gifts, and of the relationship that generated them, this paper aims to draw attention to the unique status of these subjects in Michelangelo’s artistic production. The gift drawings for Cavalieri represent

one of the artist’s few forays into mythological subject matter. Despite his deep engagement with the art of classical Antiquity as a model for his conception of the human form, and his affinity for Neoplatonic philosophy, Michelangelo resisted antique subject matter for most of his career. In fact, his use of mythological subjects was restricted to

---

2 See Erwin Panofsky, ‘The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo’, in Studies