

MANNERISM

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STYLE AND CIVILIZATION

The Arrival of Mannerism in the Visual Arts

While it is not intended, in this little book, to give a historical survey of Mannerism, it is important to focus attention upon the early growth of the style because this, more than anything, helps us to understand its true nature. If we watch the sequence of events we find, for example, that Mannerism did not grow up (as is so often claimed) in any sense as a reaction against, or in opposition to, the High Renaissance but as a logical extension of some of the latter's own tendencies and achievements.

THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

This period, which we normally stretch from the maturity of Leonardo about 1480 to the death of Raphael in 1520, is not to be conceived as one of repose in implied contrast to a succeeding one of restlessness; on the contrary, it was itself deeply marked by the strains of growth and change. The climax of this period, the first decade of the Cinquecento, was dominated by events in Florence and Venice, and these had an astonishing diversity. Leonardo, for example, created almost simultaneously his *Leda*, *Mona Lisa*, the *Battle of Anghiari* and the *Angel of the Annunciation*. In the *Leda*, he established a new canon of the female nude, which was a renewed classicism emulating but not imitating the formal qualities of the antique and far exceeding it in sensuousness. In the *Mona Lisa* he established a new and more ambitious concept of portraiture: to describe not only the exterior qualities of the subject but also the inner qualities of mind. In the *Battle of Anghiari*, never completed, he raised history-painting to an undreamed-of level of energy and violence. In the lost *Angel of the Annunciation*, he experimented with a new relationship between work of art and spectator, for the latter found himself in the physical and emotional position of the Virgin Mary, as recipient of the Angel's message: in other words, as part of the painting's subject.

In Venice a corresponding exploration of new territories was made by Giorgione. Partially influenced by Leonardo, he

animated the portrait in a similar way, and added a dramatic dimension also to landscape; his *Tempesta* is not so much a timeless, static record of nature's appearance, but nature in a mood – that is, in a specific meteorological condition. In his frescoes on the Fondaco de'Tedeschi he liberated the human figure from the inhibitions of posture and viewpoint that still remained at the close of the fifteenth century, and gave it – if we may trust early descriptions – a striking vitality of colour and realism of texture.

There is, however, another aspect of these developments. Giorgione's *Tempesta* was, at least in part, the answer to a challenge handed down from antiquity; for Pliny records that Apelles painted the unpaintable, a thunderstorm. A similar artistic self-consciousness is revealed by Leonardo's invention, so often followed in the High Renaissance and prefigured only in the work of Masaccio, of the pyramidal figure-group; this implies the subjection of natural movement to an abstract aesthetic formula – it is an intentional expression of the perfection of the work of art itself, and of its autonomy in relation to an illustrative or spiritual function. In the fifteenth century there are already indications of the notion that a work of art is partly a demonstration of its creator's *virtù*, but there is no clearer illustration of the renewed emphasis on this idea in the High Renaissance than the first one-man exhibition since antiquity. In 1501 the Florentine public was invited to admire Leonardo's *Saint Anne* cartoon, which had most probably been made with no commission in mind but solely with the intention of producing, in the most exact sense, a 'marvellous' work of art.

If we leave Michelangelo and Raphael on one side, for the moment, the artists coming to maturity in the second decade of the sixteenth century explored still further the animating, sensuous and realistic tendencies in the first decade (which, in retrospect, we see as tendencies towards baroque art) rather than those that would make the work of art the answer to an aesthetic problem. We cannot, naturally, make such a statement absolutely, but only as an impression of the placing of emphasis. In Florence the later works of Fra Bartolomeo (d. 1517) became increasingly energetic and substantial in the formal sense; more important, in the long run, were the paintings of Andrea del Sarto (such as the *Marriage of St Catherine* in Dresden, 1513, or the *Madonna of the Harpies* in the Uffizi, 1517), which were above all vibrant, expressive and communicative.

Sarto's highly individualistic pupils, Rosso and Pontormo, took this style as a new point of departure, sought first to imitate and if possible to surpass it and then moved, about 1520, to a point of sharpness, tenseness and even brutality that was again a new invention but always motivated by and keyed to the expression of the subject; not accidentally, the major works of this phase had subjects from the Passion — Pontormo's frescoes in the Certosa di Galluzzo (1522-4) and Rosso's *Deposition* at Volterra (1521).

Titian, in Venice, working within a style that was always more natural than theirs, was at one moment emphatically sensuous (as in the *Sacred and Profane Love* in the Borghese Gallery, Rome) and at another no less emphatically dynamic (as in the *Assunta* in the Frari, Venice). In relation to him, Lotto and Pordenone played a role not unlike that of Rosso and Pontormo in relation to Andrea del Sarto; their work appears sometimes strange, often awkward or violent, but always expressive and communicative in intention. Correggio, in Parma, came closest of all to a style that deserves the title proto-Baroque; it exploits a natural, sensuous grace, highly charged sentiment, and compositional or emotional devices that relate the spectator more directly to the action in the work of art than ever before. Most of these artists greatly admired the realistic and unidealized expressiveness of engravings from the North, by Schongauer, Dürer and Lucas van Leyden. Collectively they illustrate one of the logical sequels to the ferment of ideas around 1510, and one path out of the High Renaissance.

MICHELANGELO AND RAPHAEL

With Michelangelo and Raphael the situation is more complex; there is, at first, ambivalence in their choice of direction, and then increasingly a placing of emphasis on qualities rather different from those summarized above. We are concerned, also, with their part in establishing Rome as an artistic centre of primary importance.

In the first decade of the sixteenth century Michelangelo's work is bewildering in the variety of artistic ideals it expresses. The *Saint Matthew*, for example (begun 1506 and left incomplete), is tense with an unrestrained physical and emotional energy; the boldness of its torsion, the vitality of its movement and the passion expressed in its head have no precedents, except in antiquity. While it is true that these are artistic

conquests, and may be admired as such, they also express a specific dramatic and quasi-narrative situation, in this case the 'inspiration' of an Evangelist; and the emotional experience thus conveyed places the *Saint Matthew* in an intermediary stage between the inanimate, icon-like Saints of the greater part of the fifteenth century and those of Bernini. Michelangelo here makes the same animating change in this category of images as Leonardo does in the portrait, and Giorgione in landscape.

But when we turn to Michelangelo's *Doni tondo*, in the Uffizi (c.1506), and his cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* [20] (1504-5), the emphasis seems really to be different. The torsions and movements in the first express nothing except the artist's virtuosity; the ambition lies less in expression than in the conquest of difficulty. The cartoon, made in rivalry with Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, demonstrated far more comprehensively that Michelangelo's art enjoyed absolute sovereignty over the human figure; its message, to the sixteenth century, was that there were now no limitations in the complexity of postures and the variety of aspects in which the body might be re-created and seen. On the other hand it told them much less about the appearance of a battle than Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*; it was a professional manifesto, and not an illustration. This is the germ of an idea that later became so fully conscious that it could be expressed in writing. Vasari, conducting the young prince Francesco de' Medici round his decorations in the Palazzo Vecchio, remarked: 'I have made

20. *The Battle of Cascina*. After Michelangelo



this composition . . . with these foreshortenings of the figures seen from below, partly to show the capacity of art . . .' (*parte per mostrar l'arte*).

The ambivalence of intention in these works by Michelangelo is probably not more extreme than in the contemporary works of Leonardo; the immediate importance of that aspect of Michelangelo's style that emphasizes aesthetic autonomy lies in the form it takes: it expresses in particular the conquest of difficulty (which is not, as we have seen, in itself a new idea). Like Leonardo, however, Michelangelo – in the *Doni tondo* and the *Battle Cartoon* – is also working out a new standard, classical in inspiration, of grace and idealized beauty of form.

In the Sistine Ceiling (1508–12) these varied tendencies are pursued further; in this case the scale and complexity of the project is so great that there exists within it every nuance between the polarities of intention in the earlier work. Parts, such as *Jonah*, the early Creation scenes and the crepuscular figures in the lunettes, continue the line of expressiveness that encompasses *Saint Matthew*. In the *Brazen Serpent* these qualities are in equilibrium with a demonstration of artistic capacity even richer than that of the *Battle Cartoon*. But there are also parts, most conspicuously some of the *Ignudi* [21], in which the qualities of grace, elegance and poise are so intense that the beauty of the work of art becomes more nearly its subject than ever before. At this point, perhaps, we should judge that the quality *maniera* begins to characterize a style.

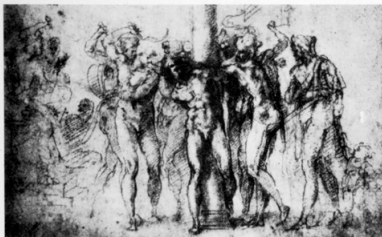
How easy and just was the transference of the word *maniera*, a term for an ideal of behaviour, to a work of art we can see if we look beyond the clearly appropriate idealization and polish of form to the deportment of such a youth. We recognize already an air of refined detachment, and – to descend to a detail – a formula for twisting the wrist and holding the fingers in an apparently easy and elegant tension, that will be endlessly repeated in Mannerist works to the end of the period [13, 45]. Was this how Castiglione's young courtiers relaxed, or did it take the imagination of a supreme master of the human body to invent a stylish deportment that is only too easily imitated in life?

But if these precociously Mannerist features may be found elsewhere in the ceiling, notably in some Prophets and Sibyls, the whole work is not characterized by them. This only begins to be true a few years later. Michelangelo's contributions to painting for the next decade and more were made only at



second hand, and chiefly through the medium of drawings he provided for his protégé Sebastiano. One of these was for a fresco of the *Flagellation* to be painted by Sebastiano in San Pietro in Montorio, Rome; Michelangelo's preparatory drawings [22] were made in 1516. Here the new spirit of refinement and grace informs the whole design, giving it an unreal, ballet-like beauty and reserve. It is hard to imagine a conception of this subject less expressive of its essential brutality, and hard not to believe that this purification of the content results from a preoccupation with style, as in *Bembismo*.

The same thing happens in Michelangelo's sculpture, though not in all of it. At about the same time as the Sistine



Ceiling he was working on sculptures for the tomb of Julius II – the *Moses*, and the two *Slaves* now in the Louvre. These vary between dynamism and listless grace, but each inflection of style is expressive of the content of the figures – in fact makes and describes it with absolute clarity. A few years later the same is probably true of the four unfinished *Slaves* for the same project now in Florence; had they been finished it seems that their style would still have been the servant of an emotion and a subject. But contemporary with these is a work in which the servant seems to usurp the position of its normal master, in which style seems to become subject and subject in the old sense to be driven out; this is the *Risen Christ* [23] in S. Maria sopra Minerva (1519–20).

But we must beware of underestimating the complexity of the situation. In the case of Michelangelo, and of Raphael, we should not interpret such idealization as a complete negation of expression, but rather as the translation of expression to another plane. That the beauty of Michelangelo's *Christ* has a spiritual meaning and effect there can be no doubt, for such is its icon-like stimulus that the forward foot must be protected by a metal shoe from the kiss and touch of the devout. The ambivalence of the beauty of this work is derived from its double intention; it seems reasonable to believe that Michelangelo should have wished us to admire the capacity of his art, but we know from his poetry of the period that beauty of form was for him a manifestation of Divine Grace that moved him



23. *The Risen Christ*. Michelangelo

most when he found it in the human body. This idea was metaphysically based, and related to current Christianized Neoplatonism. It was also, however, another aspect of the notion of the artist as another god, his work another nature; for Michelangelo believed that the Divine was most clearly revealed in what was most perfectly created, and this is probably the principal reason why his art was devoted to the human form so exclusively, save for the abstract forms of architecture.

Similar ideas circulated in the literary world around Raphael. For example in the fourth book of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* Pietro Bembo, talking of 'beauty, which is a sacred thing', says that its source is in God, and external beauty is a symbol of



24. *Testa Divina* (detail). Michelangelo

goodness. Vasari, in 1550, gives the same justification for figures in altarpieces that are 'a little more graceful, beautiful and adorned than the ordinary'; in his case it is possible to doubt the sincerity of the argument, but not in Michelangelo's.

In the case of the *Minerva Christ* the expression of artistic accomplishment leads, perhaps for these reasons, to a heroic and neo-Hellenistic ideal of grace. A different aspect of the same pursuit appears in a group of drawings known as *teste divine* [24] of which the earliest probably come in the early 1520s. The idealism is equally emphatic in the shaping of the features themselves, but the most striking thing here is the elaborate fantasy in the *coiffure* and head-dresses; they are at once compact demonstrations of refinement and imagination.

As we must say so often, the type is to some extent prefigured in rare cases around 1500, but it is here classicized and formalized into a motif which was to be much imitated by the next generation.

Raphael's contribution was no less important than Michelangelo's. Maturing a few critical years later it was natural that his inventive role in the formation of the new style should have been less, but his seminal role was at least as great – partly because of his conspicuousness on the pinnacle upon which he was raised by an admiring Rome, partly because his work was intellectually and physically more accessible, and partly because he, unlike Michelangelo, had an important group of pupils and followers.

In the eleven Roman years before his early death in 1520 Raphael did, of course, produce many works that are so dynamic, expressive and realistic that they are irrelevant to our subject; but interspersed among them, and increasing in importance, are others that are incipiently Mannerist. Characteristic is the suave and coolly elegant Magdalene on the right of the *Santa Cecilia* [25] of about 1515; tall of stature, impeccably composed in emotion and movement, she compels admiration, which is her function. Her face is a portrait of Raphael's mistress, but even she was seen through a refining screen of preconceptions. Her clothing is brittle, formed upon the study of Hellenistic sculpture rather than real life, and metallic and a little unreal in colour; the whole transformation freezes humanity out of her, but in compensation saturates her in beauty to a very high degree. Since it is beauty that is willed and artificial it is, and must be, beauty of a particular kind; like any exaggerated ideal, it is a departure from the universal and hence vulnerable in the face of another convention.

A work in which these qualities characterize the whole is the *Saint Michael* [26] of 1517–18. Because of the perfect harmony of all its qualities and parts it is easy to overlook its essential complexity – easiest to grasp, perhaps, if we imagine the figures cast, as they so appropriately could be, into a bronze fountain-figure. There are two rotating systems of forms around the two heads, which are respectively of symbolic refinement and vulgarity. These elaborate patterns of movement and form in space are exactly counterpoised: too exactly, in fact, for there to be an effect of energy, and there results instead a suspension of movement (in the sense of getting somewhere, or performing some action), harmonious with the suspension

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25. *Santa Cecilia* (detail). Raphael



26. *Saint Michael*. Raphael

of emotion. The torsions of the figures are extreme, yet accomplished without strain; they may be read as postures because they are so sensitively balanced. It is, again, an intensively *artificial* picture, whether examined in these general terms or in detail, where the beautiful head of Saint Michael or the elaborate ties of his leggings are vignettes of proto-Mannerist delicacy and fantasy. Parts of the *Transfiguration* (1517-20) are abstracted in a similar way above and beyond reality.

MANNERISM RAMPANT: ROME, 1520-27

What we witness in these works by Michelangelo and Raphael is, in effect, the formation of a new visual language; these two artists were the inventors of the first vocabulary of the Mannerist style, and also (for example in the *teste divine*) of its figures of speech, which were then greatly developed and enriched by younger men. Using the analogy in a more historical sense, what happens in the figurative arts is akin to *Bembismo*

in literature – its elegancies and intricacies, its disinvolvement from passion, and its tendencies towards abstraction from reality and towards classicism arise from an obsession with the problem of perfecting *style*. In painting and sculpture this development gathers momentum markedly in Rome in the hedonistic years between 1520 and the catastrophic Sack of 1527 – hedonistic but for the rude but momentary interruption of the pontificate of Adrian VI. Like Firenzuola's *L'Asino d'oro*, the works produced then were shaped by their immediate antecedents and by the remote past; as Firenzuola's language is consciously latinized in his pursuit of more complex and more elegant form, so an ever-increasing admiration for, and intelligent understanding of, ancient art is the essential background of Mannerism.

With Raphael dead and Michelangelo in Florence, events in Rome after 1520 were left in the hands of a remarkably talented group of young men. Certainly the headlong evolution of Mannerism is dependent upon the historical accident that this concentration of brilliant yet still impressionable minds was there at the right moment. A forcing-house is the image suggested by the rivalry among them, often friendly but occasionally murderous; and these conditions existed nowhere else but in Rome. Leisure hours, patrons, commissions and engravers were all shared. Not surprisingly, it is almost impossible to disentangle individual contributions from the net of mutual influences.

A striking case is Polidoro da Caravaggio. As Raphael's assistant his talent in decoration had already been exploited; on achieving independence Polidoro raised decoration, as it

27. *Persius with the Head of Medusa*. After Polidoro da Caravaggio



were, to the aesthetic status of history-painting in his most typical productions, an astonishing number of monochrome house-façade paintings compressed into these few years. All of them were inspired in one way or another by antique works: for example, friezes of vases *all'antica* (but of a concentrated and convoluted fantasy never quite found in the original), trophies of piled-up armour (more extravagant than Roman trophies ever are), or, most characteristically, simulated reliefs normally of classical subjects in which he demonstrated that no one understood better than he the laws of antique relief-style [27].

Even here, it was not in effect an imitation, for Polidoro's very influential figure-style, derived equally from Raphael and ancient sculpture, had a svelte and luxuriant plasticity and a satirical wit that at once exceeded and mocked classical art. In all his works of this period Polidoro was inexhaustibly imaginative, within an admittedly restricted field, and he had exactly that combination of fertility and facility that was so much in demand in the Mannerist period.

Perino del Vaga was another associate of Raphael who matured immediately after the latter's death. When young he was unquestionably a major contributor to events in Rome, and produced in 1522-3 the most strikingly developed Mannerist composition that we know of this date; though by the accident of the Roman plague he produced it in Florence. It was the cartoon for a fresco, never painted, of the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand*; only the preparatory *modello* [28] survives, but this allows us to appreciate how elaborated are the compositional schemes of Raphael's history-painting, how poised, formalized, and fundamentally undramatic are the movements, how stylized and unreal the forms. It has a ritualistic rather than a catastrophic air. What we miss now is the quantity of the cartoon's detail, described so enthusiastically by Vasari:

... cuirasses in the antique style and most ornate and bizarre costumes; and the leg-pieces, boots, helmets, shields and the rest of the armour made with all the wealth of most beautiful ornament that one could possibly create, both imitating and supplementing the antique, drawn with that devotion and artifice that reaches the very heights of art.

As an extravaganza designed to impress, it worked; in Florence the connoisseurs were astonished by the new Roman



28. *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand*. Perino del Vaga

style, and the students copied it as they had previously copied Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina*.

In a more intimate vein, Perino produced equally precocious examples of Mannerism in a set of designs made in 1527 for the engraver Caraglio, one of which represents *Vertumnus and Pomona* [29]. The scale of the figures being almost that of the whole design, we are more immediately aware of the freedom in the distribution of their parts, as if they were abstract and not figurative material; for the figures, interlaced one with the other, are also deployed in a remarkably decorative way over the whole surface. This freedom of disposition is obtained by manipulations of considerable torsion, achieved, however, with perfect ease in the figures themselves. Grace, not tension, is the result, and every form is refined to its perfect type; the male head is as much an ideal as the female. Perino's *Vertumnus and Pomona* is also typical of Mannerism in its approach to the erotic: described, more or less elliptically, but then neutralized, just as in Bronzino's *Allegory* [52] twenty years later. In art, as in human behaviour, *maniera* effects a sterilization of passion, as it does of all other germs of imperfection.

Of this group of artists the one most instinctively inclined to grace was Parmigianino [1]: so much so that in later art theory there is a word, *imparmiginare*, which is to submerge expression of the subject in elegance and delicacy. He came to

29. *Vertumnus and Pomona*.
After Perino del Vaga



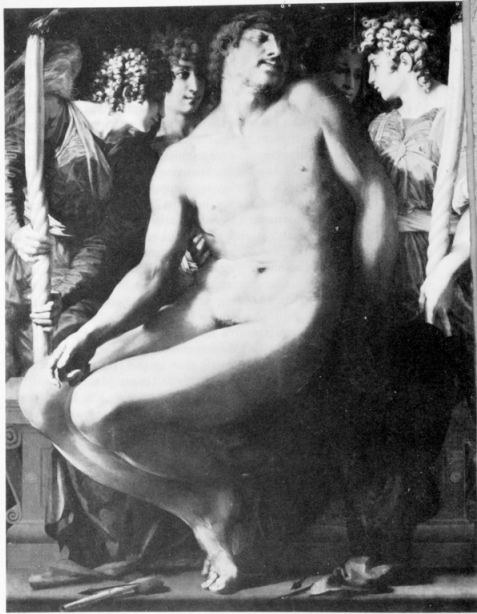
30. *The Marriage of St Catherine*.
Parmigianino



Rome in 1524 and was immediately hailed as a prodigy; in him, it was said, was reborn the spirit of Raphael (to whom, in fact, his earliest works show him predisposed). The *Marriage of St Catherine* [30] is typical of the work he did there. Simply as a painter he is more sensitive than any of his colleagues and luxuriates in passages of breath-taking beauty, as in the head of Saint Catherine, one of the *teste divine* Raphaelized. In a different way it is an exceptional sensitivity that shapes this composition into curves that, like waves, flow together to climaxes, and then part again – curves so filled with their own aesthetic vitality that the illustrative meaning of the forms (curtains, arms, fingers) of which they are composed is partially lost. The head in the lower left corner (perhaps Zacharias) seems as much an element in a pattern as Saint Catherine's wheel or the circular window above, and when read realistically seems capricious and bizarre in this position; it is an interesting example of the exploitation for purely aesthetic effect of a device which had originally an expressive purpose, as in *Holy Families* by Correggio where such fragmentary figures suggest the closeness of the spiritual event to the spectator. This is not the reason for Parmigianino's head. Even so, the picture is not without meaning; while action and described emotion express the subject much less directly than in the High Renaissance, the theme is communicated in this and many Mannerist works on another, more symbolic level. With care the fingers exchanging the ring are placed dead centre, below a mullion in the window and framed by the door and the two shadowy figures, perhaps Prophets, deep in conversation.

Perhaps the most individual artist of this group was Rosso; his Mannerism has the intensity of the convert's, for it represents a marked change of direction after the vivid, direct and brutally expressive works he painted around 1520. It is about the time of Perino's sojourn in Florence (1522-3) and his own departure for Rome a year later that his inborn wilfulness and exoticism is channelled away from passionate communication towards fantasy. His work becomes very much more refined, and more elegant [32], yet it is not this aspect of Mannerism that Rosso illustrates so well but rather the complementary inventive facility: boundless, spicy and as designedly breath-taking as Parmigianino's porcelain delicacy of technique.

His chief painting of the Roman years is the *Dead Christ*, now in Boston [31], intricate, suave and ambiguous in a



31. *Dead Christ with Angels*. Rosso

manner scarcely to be expected after the violent *Deposition* at Volterra, 1521. *Maniera* describes its new quality exactly. It has been aptly described as a Christian *Laocoön*, yet the analogy is exclusively formal for there are no emotional overtones of catastrophe. Spiritual meaning resides in symbols, the torches of everlasting life and the instruments of the Passion below, which alone prevent us from mistaking the subject for the *Dead Adonis*.

The natural result of a common consent, not only to release imagination from all restraints but also to raise it to a higher valuation, was a flood of inventions. Quantity became once again an index of quality, as it had not been in the earlier Renaissance, because it demonstrated a now positive aspect of artistic capacity inexpressible in the singular. A premium on variety pulls away from unity towards multiplicity. This is a development favoured by the expansion of the engravers' role. So Rosso contributed three designs to the series *The Loves of the Gods* [32], in which Caraglio also engraved a number by Perino [29], and for the same engraver designed a whole set of twenty *Antique Deities*, of which we reproduce *Juno* [33]. These are still only a fraction of his inventions in the three Roman years; like Polidoro's his is a case of the

32. *Saturn and Philyra*. After Rosso



33. *Juno*. After Rosso

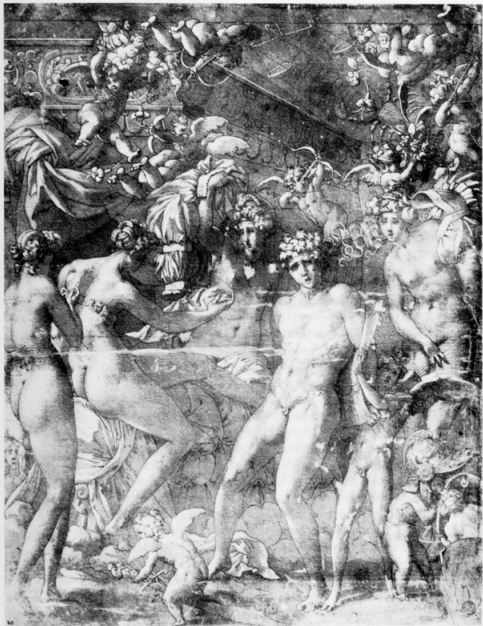


happy congruity of a new kind of talent and a new demand. Rosso's drawings reveal that these serial productions were prepared with exquisite care. Mannerism preserved that high intensity of preparatory work demanded during the High Renaissance.

In *Saturn and Philyra*, Rosso is as extravagantly capricious in his manipulation of natural form as Perino in *Vertumnus and Pomona*, and even more wilful in its schematization; above all his wit is more piquant, giving us here a splendidly funny image of a horse in love. It is a delicious perversity, intended to entertain, that makes him represent Juno [33] with the anonymity of a back-view and *profil perdu*. It is entertaining also to see his horse as attenuated, as refined, as *manieroso*, as Philyra, or his peacock with the same tiny head and tapering legs as Juno. Yet it is, of course, more than witty; in the *Juno*, the two linked vertical bodies are set off with marvellous sensitivity against the asymmetrical curve that rises anti-clockwise round the peacock's tail and falls again through the goddess's bunched drapery; all forms and movements are beautifully poised in relation to the outline of the niche.

Rosso's most extravagantly Mannerist work in Italy was a *Mars and Venus* [34] designed in Venice for Aretino in 1530. This provides an extraordinary contrast to Correggio's erotic mythologies of the same date, for it is hardly a credible illustration of its subject. The subject itself is mocked: for example the ring of flying *putti* above (previously used by Rosso in an *Assumption*, circling the triumphant Virgin) loose off a great deal of ammunition and threaten to empty their cornucopias on the lovers, but Mars is revealed by Cupid as improbably triumphant and anything but master of the situation. What the work stimulates positively is not belief in a narrative, not the evocation of something real outside itself, but fascination in itself, in its complexities, its visual jokes, its *tours de force* of manipulation and technique, and its accumulated demonstration of artistic capacity. And, typically, it contains several ingenious variations on Michelangelo's *teste divine*.

This was the highly-evolved style that Rosso took to Fontainebleau. In terms of influence, he and Parmigianino were the most important of the Roman group dispersed at the Sack of 1527. Those that we have mentioned were not, of course, all; Giulio Romano and Sebastiano del Piombo contributed too, and Beccafumi in Siena was moving along a very



34. *Mars and Venus*. Rosso

similar path. Throughout the decade Michelangelo in Florence created type after type of the 'figures of speech' of Mannerism, and by its end Pontormo had become infected by many of its ideals.

THE PROBLEM OF ARCHITECTURE

It is obvious that if we are to use the term Mannerism of architecture we must do so in a slightly different way; yet if we recall that Raphael and Castiglione held *maniera* to be a desirable quality found in antique buildings, it is clear that its use in this context is equally legitimate. When we look for a similar imposition of artistic will upon received forms – always, essentially, on the basis of mastery of those forms – we need a substitute for naturalism, the point of departure in the figurative arts. In Italian architecture around 1500 this norm is provided by the Vitruvian vocabulary, the mastery of which had been fully regained by Bramante. With this adjustment we may look for developments that exceed the norm in respect of refinement, grace, complexity, demonstrative accomplishment or caprice. An obsession with style may again triumph over function; at first sight this point promises to be clearer in the case of architecture, an essentially functional art, than in painting or sculpture, but the position is in fact a complicated one.

Many of the elements on a Bramante façade – columns, entablatures, window-tabernacles – look functional when they are, in cold structural fact, decoration of the wall. Conversely, eccentricities can conceal a structural purpose. What matters, then, is the visual effect – whether it is of style in the service of a functional idea, or of style so emphatic, so autonomous, that justification by apparent function does not arise.

Pursuing the problem on these lines we may discuss architecture, as we have discussed the figurative arts, as normative or artificial (in either the originally appreciative or currently pejorative senses). But Raphael implies that *maniera*, conspicuously lacking in Gothic buildings, was characteristic of the antique; therefore Mannerist architecture, like Mannerist painting and sculpture, or Firenzuola's *L'Asino d'oro*, must be the super-sophistication of a *classical* style. Lastly, we should expect to find less Mannerism in architecture, since it is the nature of buildings that they can seldom be treated as pure works of art. The divine right of architects is circumscribed by practical considerations.

The situation is illuminated by Vasari's remarks on Michelangelo's architecture. No one was ever more convinced than Vasari of the necessity of knowing the rules, but what Vasari admired most was the genius that rose above them. He attributes to Michelangelo the initial demonstration of how this could be done, 'working somewhat differently' from those who followed 'the common usage, or Vitruvius. This licence has encouraged others to imitate him, and new fantasies have appeared, more like grotesques than regular ornament. Artists are perpetually indebted to Michelangelo who loosed the chains and restraints that inhibited those who walked along the common path.' Vasari is, in another place, aware of the dangers of this liberty, but there is here an implied disdain for blind obedience to the rules, only less obvious than his disdain for the period before the rules were re-established.

This 'varied and more novel' style in architecture appeared at the same time and place as Mannerism in painting and sculpture. Michelangelo's first purely architectural work was the decoration of one exterior wall of a small chapel in the Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome (c. 1515). In the centre is a window-tabernacle of regular components – half-columns, entablature and pediment – but unusual width. The window is quartered by a cross-shaped mullion; applied to the upper arm of the cross is a scroll-bracket which ostensibly supports the entablature at its centre but succeeds also in attracting attention to itself and its peculiar position. The lowest quarters of the window are barred by attenuated balusters; odd in themselves, they have an odd effect on the central mullion, the lowest arm of the cross, to which are attached two half-balusters that make it appear swollen in the middle. There are several other uncanonical details. The whole is executed in marble, not stone, and the lines are clean, the curves being beautifully set off by the rectangles. The effect is delicate, but chilled and rather severe. No single form is markedly irregular in relation to the antique, and no contemporary connoisseur could doubt that Michelangelo knew the anatomy of antique architecture as well as he did that of the human body. It is the incipiently wilful composition that is distinctive, and the artifice depends for its success upon an informed beholder: one who recognizes the departures from 'the common usage, or Vitruvius', and one who appreciates the artist's sovereignty over antique forms. In the same way, Ariosto, in his

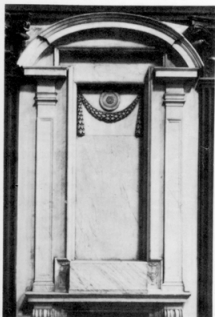


35. The Medici Chapel. Michelangelo

36. The Medici Chapel (detail). Michelangelo

Orlando furioso, relies upon a reader informed enough to recognize not only the quotations but also the transformations of classical texts.

In the next decade Michelangelo set the decisive standards of the new architecture in two buildings attached to San Lorenzo, in Florence: the Medici Chapel [35, 36] and the Laurentian Library [37]. The Medici Chapel is the earlier (the definitive design came about 1521), and here the licence operates on a relatively moderate scale. In the corners [35] the blind tabernacles and the (mostly false) doors are run into one unit, for they share the main horizontal member between them; the brackets at the ends of this horizontal may be read as supporting a lintel in the context of the door or hanging from a base in the context of the tabernacle. In detail the tabernacle [36] is peculiar. Between pilaster and pediment there is no capital (the lowest entablature mouldings take its place). The pediment breaks forward over the *recession* of the niche; the niche is framed by a moulding that meanders into corners, taking the recessed plane with it into the area of the pediment. A block, as if to support sculpture, occupies the bottom of the niche which is, however, too shallow for sculpture; it is flanked by two tiny reliefs of exquisitely fantastic vases. The whole



tabernacle-cum-door unit is fitted so tightly (so much more tightly than in common usage) into the principal members of the lowest zone of the chapel [35] that the plane of the wall is lost to view. This effect continues throughout this level, so that the wall is apparently replaced by a sculptural complex of advancing and receding forms; the plasticity in the architecture increases towards the middle of the wall, where are the figures (more were intended). To see the tabernacles set in the whole wall is also to realize that their pediments are so adjusted in scale that they belong to a continuous horizontal band of decoration running through the capitals of the main order and the attic-frieze in the central section, where their curvature is reversed in the swags. It is fascinating, cerebral, and stimulates in the beholder the recondite pleasure of sharing the architect's erudition; it is beautifully executed in marble, again, under Michelangelo's exacting supervision; it is stylish but also intensely serious, for the pure, cold forms have an air of death as chilling as the tombs themselves.

The severity characteristic of Michelangelo is combined with an appropriate solemnity in the *ricetto* (lobby) of the Laurentian Library [37]. The principal development here is the application of licence to *all* architectural members, major and

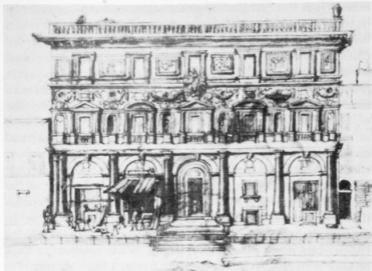
37. The Laurentian Library Vestibule. Michelangelo



minor. It is the first building that seems to have been turned outside in, for the massive treatment of the interior walls belongs by tradition to exteriors. The main order of coupled columns and almost hidden square-section piers is recessed *behind* the plane of the wall that carries the tabernacles; since the mouldings above and below the order break forward with the wall it seems that the wall is squeezed forward by the order, or as if the architecture had become organic, capable of movement. A similar understanding in terms of potential movement is necessary for the door-case inside the reading room, where one complete tabernacle is compressed in another and seems to break through it. In the *ricetto* the most obvious sense of movement is in the staircase, shaped in viscous curves that pour downwards from the reading room to the floor. In detail the tabernacles are more austere than those of the Medici Chapel but more profoundly wilful. What appears to be a pilaster is in fact, in relation to the norm, a pure abstraction: a shaft tapered from the top downwards with applied mouldings at each end that are not full width and therefore have not even the nature of capitals or bases. The seven flutes on the lower parts of the shafts are repeated in the brackets, at the foot of the tabernacle, which, being rectangular, are unmistakably reminiscent of triglyphs that belong at the top of an order. Strangest of all, and most conspicuous, are the enormous voluted brackets below the main order of coupled columns; because of the thin horizontal strips of blank wall between them and the columns they appear to support nothing, but perversely to hang from a moulding.

Today it seems most natural to read such licence as conscious irrationality, but this may well be a false projection backwards of a current aesthetic virtue. More convincing is the motive given by Vasari for an equally odd employment of such brackets on Michelangelo's final scheme for the tomb of Julius II; in this case he turned them upside down and placed them on bases, intended originally for sculpture, with their backs against herm-pilasters, 'to relieve the poverty of the lower part'. In Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, fantasies, *mostri* and other forms of *varietà* relieve boredom, or so it was universally agreed.

Michelangelo's principal contribution, then, to Mannerism in architecture was the notion of imposing an all-powerful artistic will on forms of classical derivation, of converting in this sense the mastery of those forms achieved in the High Renaissance into a God-like relation to his raw materials.



38. Palazzo Branconio dell'Aquila. Raphael

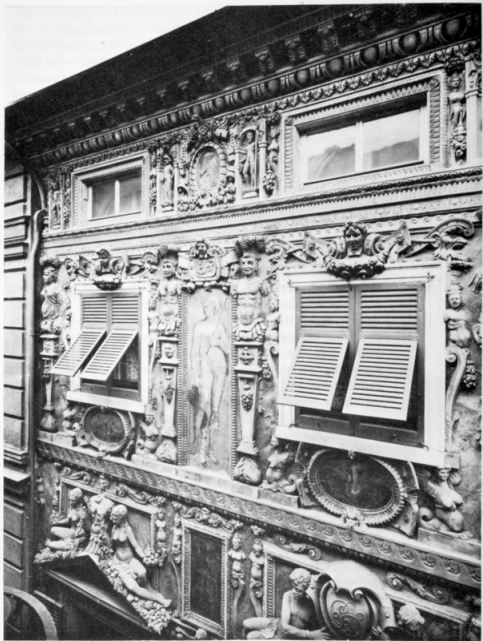
Raphael's contribution was ideally complementary: grace, lightness, complexity and material luxuriance. More illuminating in his case than any comment by Vasari is Raphael's own criticism of High Renaissance architecture, especially Bramante's, which he found fell short of the best antique style in decorative richness of materials. It is characteristic of the complex potentialities of the second decade of the century that this conviction led him to the sumptuous Chigi Chapel that is truly proto-Baroque and to the Palazzo Branconio dell'Aquila [38] that is proto-Mannerist; both were presumably thought to be more truly antique than what we now, perhaps too easily, call the 'classical' style of the High Renaissance.

Palazzo dell'Aquila (destroyed in the seventeenth century) was such a harmoniously elegant building that it is easy to overlook that it was a very adventurous piece of architecture. The ground-floor was sober: five regular arched openings framed by six robust half-columns in an arrangement as ostensibly functional as in any building by Bramante. In the *piano nobile*, however, it appeared that the supporting function of the columns was terminated in statues placed in niches, so that in the wall's own plastic pattern a concave form crowned a convex one, and in its structural pattern a negative was superimposed on a positive. The positive stress sidestepped to

the half-columns of the window-tabernacles, and became weakened as it was divided and diminished in scale; finally it was dissipated in the complex pattern of pediments and stucco decoration at the mezzanine level. In the topmost zone there was no trace of an order; the window-tabernacles were scarcely more 'architectural' in character than picture-frames, and indeed between the windows there were framed paintings. Thus as the structural pattern progressively diminished upwards it was replaced by a decorative and functionally abstract one; and articulation, or sub-division, was replaced by a woven, so to speak polyphonic, all-over texture.

The compositional sophistication operated in the horizontal dimension as well. The lowest zone was of five units, closed with firm accents at each end. The *piano nobile*, of eleven units, alternating in value, began and ended with a weak beat like an hendecasyllabic verse; in fact the terminal units were the weakest of all, for the first and last niches were narrower than the rest and in relief only, not fully hollowed. The mezzanine, with the looping swags, acted as a transition to the upper story in which the units dividing the windows were wider than the window-frames. Thus the rhythmic design was richly varied indeed, compared with a façade by Bramante; and the succession of forms through ground-floor columns, niche-and-statue, swag-and-portrait-medallion to framed painting was a strikingly complex transformation. In detail it was rich in yet another sense; the main door-frame, for example, was of coloured marble; the *stucchi* in the mezzanine must have been of the most refined quality, executed as they were by the greatest artist in this medium, Giovanni da Udine, and it seems that they were painted. The paintings above were probably in grisaille like Polidoro's, and the statues were surely antique. On the other hand Raphael seems to have treated the antique forms themselves, here as elsewhere, with far greater respect than Michelangelo. The Palazzo dell'Aquila does not survive, but we may see the same spirit in another of Raphael's inventions, the Villa Madama in Rome: today a beautiful fragment which, if it had been completed as projected, could have been the most significant secular building of the century.

The stylish and decorative complexity of Palazzo dell'Aquila has many sequels, none as intellectual and none so finely controlled; in Rome Palazzo Spada is an obvious example, Palazzo Crivelli in Via de'banchi vecchi is less well-known; and from this type derive Palazzo Negrone in Genoa [39] or



39. Palazzo Negrone (detail). Attributed to G. B. Castello

40. Santa Maria di Loreto. Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and Giacomo del Duca

the Maison Milsand in Dijon. The most distinguished example, which accentuates again the neo-classicism of Raphael's building, is Pirro Ligorio's Casino of Pius IV [79]. The liberating effect of Raphael's late architecture was different in kind from Michelangelo's but was scarcely less far-reaching; Giulio Romano's Cavallerizza, for example, or his Palazzo del Tè [81], both in Mantua, depend fundamentally upon Raphael's inspired injection of variety and prolixity into the 'common usage, or Vitruvius'.

