

MANNERISM

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STYLE AND CIVILIZATION

The Historical Reality

This book will have at least one feature in common with all those already published on Mannerism; it will appear to describe something quite different from what all the rest describe. It is as well to be frank about this from the start. Such is the confusion in our present usage of the term that one perfectly natural reaction, to be found even among art-historians, is that Mannerism does not exist.

Obviously, my editors and I believe that Mannerism does exist, with the same kind of reality (and no more) as the other style periods that are commonly acknowledged. In my view the contradictions in contemporary meanings for the word 'Mannerism' are to a great extent due to the fact that most of them are too contemporary and not sufficiently historical. In the attempt to rescue sixteenth-century art from the ill repute that much of it enjoyed in the nineteenth century, it has been endowed with virtues peculiar to our time – especially the virtues of aggression, anxiety and instability. They are so inappropriate to the works in question that some pretty odd results are bound to follow (the sixteenth-century viewpoint of works of art was admirably relaxed). My conviction is that Mannerist art is capable of standing on its own feet. It can be and ought to be appreciated or rejected on its *own* terms, and according to its own virtues, not ours. This raises no particular difficulty unless we succumb to a certain aesthetic squeamishness, for some of the relevant virtues are, unquestionably, hard to accept today.

At all events, it is a fact that many interpretations now exist for Mannerism. The conclusion is unavoidable: each author must define his term and justify the way he uses it – not as an academic ritual but so that the reader may make up his own mind about where it goes right and where it goes wrong.

DEFINING THE TERM

In the term 'Mannerism' there is a trap, concealed in the word itself. 'Mannerism' appears among purely descriptive terms,

'Gothic', 'Renaissance' and 'Baroque', and it alone is an 'ism'. This is an invitation to conceive it as a movement, like those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: as if it had a conscious direction, a manifesto, and a self-awareness that is focused in the notion of conflict with the art of the immediate past. But these ideas are anachronistic if they are projected back into the sixteenth century; they distort one pattern of development into another, and while they have the apparent virtue of making tidy something that is in reality untidy they end in an embarrassing disagreement between what is said now and what was said and thought at the time.

The problem of defining the term Mannerism is first of all a problem of method. Part of our present trouble is due to a certain arbitrariness in its application. A great deal of sixteenth-century art had been consigned to limbo by critics from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries; they thought it perverse and decadent. Around 1920 it was realized that so sweeping a condemnation was unjust. A number of interesting things happened in this neglected period; many of them were strange and fascinating, some of them were beautiful. To these phenomena, isolated and examined, was then applied the term Mannerism which was, as we shall see, conveniently at hand; it was as if the label could be attached freely to anything without one. Since the sixteenth century embraced some remarkably diverse styles, Mannerism as a concept became, not unnaturally, strained.

But another process may be used. The label did, in fact, come down to us firmly attached to something; we have inherited, not invented, it. If we give up the right to make it mean anything we like, we have in return a meaning that is specific, arguable and historically legitimate. For the expression Mannerism is unusual among our style-labels since, like Impressionism, it may be traced back to ideas in circulation in the cultural context of the works themselves. Having found out what, historically, it should apply to, we may at that stage begin to define tendencies in style that are in harmony with it. This may provide us, finally, with a more restricted field of operation than does the more arbitrary approach, but this is of no significance. We are not bound to account for all the multitude of tendencies in the sixteenth century; and the value of any such term as ours varies in inverse proportion to the number of diverse phenomena it is made to embrace.

The origin of the expression Mannerism lies in an Italian word: *maniera*. This word was used during the Renaissance period in a number of grammatically different ways and carried with it a like number of meanings, but Mannerism is derived from one particular usage only: the absolute one. *Maniera* may in all cases be translated into the English word *style*. We use our word in various ways, most often with some qualification, as when we talk of Giotto's style, Byzantine style, abstract style, and so on. More rarely we use it absolutely; we say that a person, a performance or a man-made object (artefact or motor-car) *has style*, or equally has not. In the same way *maniera* was a possible, and in general desirable, attribute of works of art. For example Raphael and Castiglione wrote a most significant letter in 1519 to Pope Leo X on the architecture of Rome, in which they said that the buildings of the Goths were 'privi di ogni gratia, senza maniera alcuna' (devoid of all grace and entirely without style); in its context this remark implied that the qualities of grace and *maniera* were to be appreciated in the architecture of antiquity. Already in 1442 a sonnet listed *maniera* among the heaven-sent gifts of Pisanello; and in 1550 Vasari included it among the five qualities which, by being more highly developed in the art of the sixteenth century than that of the fifteenth, made his period superior.

The precise meaning of the word, when used absolutely as in these and several other cases, may be narrowed down by considering its still earlier history. Renaissance criticism of the visual arts was a less mature, articulate and well-armed discipline than many other literary forms of its kind, and the device of borrowing terms of reference and analytical techniques that occurs throughout the history of these disciplines was at that moment a very necessary one for writers in this field. The concept *maniera* was borrowed from the literature of manners, and had been originally a quality – a desirable quality – of human deportment. Lorenzo de' Medici, for example, required *maniera* in the deportment of ladies. In turn the word had entered Italian literature from French courtly literature of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. There *manière*, like its Italian derivative, meant approximately *savoir-faire*, effortless accomplishment and sophistication; it was inimical to revealed passion, evident effort and rude naïveté. It was, above all, a courtly grace. This meaning survives, not only through its transference in Italy to the visual arts but also in its modern

English equivalent, 'style'. *Maniera*, then, is a term of long standing in the literature of a way of life so stylized and cultured that it was, in effect, a work of art itself; hence the easy transference to the visual arts.

However, there were two sides to this coin, then as now. If we say that a person has style we may wish to imply that he is unnatural, affected, self-conscious or ostentatious. In the sixteenth century *maniera* was generally a desirable attribute of a work of art, but this positive aspect was accompanied by the realization of the negative one that corresponded to what we now call, derogatively, stylization. Vasari found this defect, perhaps rightly, in the self-generating abstraction of Perugino, and another writer, the Venetian Lodovico Dolce (1557), implied that there was a general recognition of a deplorable tendency towards the reduction of artistic creation to a stereotype, to *maniera*. It was understood that *maniera*, whether in people or works of art, entailed a refinement of and abstraction from nature and this might or might not be a good thing. The tendency, setting in towards the end of the sixteenth century, was increasingly to question its validity, and thus it was that the negative aspect of the quality *maniera* came, in time, to be its whole meaning. To the seventeenth-century theorist Bellori *maniera* – the vice that destroyed good painting between, approximately, Raphael and Rubens – was an ideal born in the artist's fantasy and based not upon reality but upon *pratica*: stylistic convention and technical expertise.

Changing prejudice often inverts the value of words while preserving most of their sense; virtues are turned into vices, artistic qualities become defects. A case that concerns us is the word 'artificial' which is now normally pejorative, implying something meretricious. But it was not originally so, and in the sixteenth century the word *artifizioso* was wholly complimentary, and to a great extent concomitant with *maniera*; books ought to be written, and pictures painted, with artifice. Benedetto Varchi (1548) defined the intention of artistic creation as 'an artificial imitation of nature', which is the more interesting for being a widely held view rather than an original one. We have also, equally irrationally, made a term of abuse out of the word 'rhetorical'. These things happen when the convictions of one age are no longer reconcilable with those that succeed it. It is our nature to assume that our convictions alone are right, which they are unlikely to be.

As applied to people the notion of 'style' had always had, in France, derivative adjectives; in the first half of the sixteenth century there was current in Italy the flattering term *manieroso*: stylish, in the sense of polished. It was not long before works of art were similarly described. An alternative in the seventeenth century is *manierato*: more negatively intended, like our 'stylized'. The objective sense of the word is exemplified in a note made by Jonathan Richardson (1722), the heir to the whole Renaissance and academic tradition of criticism, on an antique bust of a girl in the Uffizi: 'very young, and a natural pretty air: this is not common in the Antique, which is generally *Manierato*'. Simultaneously there appeared in France the abusive name for a type of artist, more concerned with technical facility than anything else: *maniériste*. When in turn this title was transferred once more into Italian by the great historian Luigi Lanzi (1792) he adhered more precisely to the ideas implied by the root of the word since he specifically meant that group of artists previously stigmatized by Bellori with the vice of *maniera*; and this is important for it was Lanzi who invented, in the same context, the substantive we now use: *manierismo*.

The title thus given to a period is derived from a quality which is singled out, soon after the period in question, as most characteristic of it, and from a quality that is appreciated before and during that period. So, when we turn to look for tendencies in the art of the sixteenth century that may justifiably be called Mannerist, it is logical to demand that these should be, so to speak, drenched in *maniera* and, conversely, should not be marked by qualities inimical to it, such as strain, brutality, violence and overt passion. We require, in fact, poise, refinement and sophistication, and works of art that are polished, rarefied and idealized away from the natural: hot-house plants, cultured most carefully [1]. Mannerism should, by tradition, speak a silver-tongued language of articulate, if unnatural, beauty, not one of incoherence, menace and despair; it is, in a phrase, the stylish style.

There may have been an element of chance in the early selection of one quality in this kind of art to typify the whole, and we should greatly impoverish our understanding of Mannerism if we did not take account of other ideas intimately associated, in the same cultural context, with *maniera* and ideally harmonious with it. Modern aesthetic attitudes, at least those of sufficient maturity for us to be aware of them, are



quite as effective an obstacle to the appreciation of Mannerist works of art as were those of Ruskin's era, and a frame of mind tolerant to them is not easily acquired. One reads, as we have seen, with surprise that artifice is a quality to be nurtured; yet there is clearly no reason why it should not be. Almost more important is the notion of difficulty, that is to say of difficulty overcome, which achieved during the Renaissance and Mannerism a significance which now seems hypnotic and irrelevant. Lorenzo de' Medici, in a Commentary upon his own sonnets, argued that this verse-form is the equal of any other because of its *difficultà* – because *virtù*, according to the philosophers, consists in (the conquest of) difficulty; to the philosophers he might have added Vitruvius who defined Invention as 'the solving of difficult problems and the treatment of new problems achieved by a lively intelligence'. Painters and sculptors each argued the superiority of their art over the other because it was more difficult. One of the qualities of Brunelleschi's trial relief for the bronze doors of the Florence Baptistery that his friend and biographer Manetti admired most was *difficultà*. It was, according to Raphael and Castiglione, to be found in antique architecture. Vasari praised Bramante for increasing it, together with beauty, to the great advantage of the modern style in architecture. This idea was important because it led to the appreciation (which we do not share) of facility as a very positive virtue; and it led also to those kinds of complexity and invention that are the result of deliberately raising more difficulties, so that dexterity may be displayed in overcoming them.

Today we take a somewhat priggish attitude towards virtuosity, but in the sixteenth century there were fewer inhibitions. Vasari defined perfection in the art of painting as richness of invention, absolute familiarity with anatomy, and the reduction of difficulty to facility; and Dolce went so far as to say that 'facility is the basis of the excellence of any art'. Already in the fifteenth century Landino praised Masaccio's 'great facility of execution', an attitude unlikely to be prominent in any modern monograph on this artist.

Castiglione, in the *Cortegiano* (published 1528, but written earlier), invented a word for the courtly grace revealed in the effortless resolution of all difficulties – *sprezzatura*, which is that kind of well-bred negligence born of complete self-possession that Van Dyck and Gainsborough not accidentally divined in the English gentleman – and this term was used

with enthusiasm by Dolce for works of art. As with 'facility', the opposite vice is the *visible* application of too much effort or any sense of strain in the performance.

The love of complexity rather than economy was another characteristic of the period. Lorenzo de' Medici, in the same Commentary, expressed his dislike of obscurity and hardness of style but valued copiousness and abundance. And finally we have to accept the validity of the caprice, the bizarre fantasy, or, as we sometimes call it, the conceit. This was so well understood in the sixteenth century that Vasari could praise as capricious, for example, the spectators crowded on columns in Raphael's *Heliodorus*, and as 'a most bizarre invention' an octagonal plan of Brunelleschi's – cases from earlier periods where these devices have different, and functional, purposes. Correspondingly, it was common for Mannerist artists to adapt artistic forms or compositional devices, originally invented with expressive functions, and to use them in a non-functional way, capriciously.

LIMITS OF THE FIELD

Mannerist art should not be identified with mannered art, for while the first is always to some extent mannered the second is not always Mannerist, since it may be anything but graceful and accomplished. If we were to reassemble our stylistic category from mannered works we should find ourselves associating works from virtually every period with nothing in common except one negative quality. A category that includes Crivelli, Magnasco and Ford Madox Brown is neither historical nor illuminating.

The whole meaning of *maniera*, with positive and negative aspects, is the origin of our term and it is this that must be the basis of our selection. Although no concept of a movement *manierismo* existed in the sixteenth century it was then, without doubt, that *maniera* was most appreciated in works of art. A chronological category has been made of this ideal, and we should, if we want to use it, determine at what points the ideal begins and ceases to characterize a style. Stylistic changes in the pre-Romantic periods were never violent or reactionary; they were complex, gradual processes. At a certain point one feels that the ingredients and intentions have changed in their relative proportion, so that a new set of values predominates. *Maniera*, in small proportion, is present in many periods, especially in the fifteenth century; there is no inconsistency if a

contemporary of Pisanello found *maniera* in his work, or if Vasari detected it in Ghiberti, for it is indeed there. But Vasari also said that the fifteenth century was relatively deficient in this quality when compared with his own century, and that was also an accurate observation provided that we allow flexibility in one respect. We must be prepared for more or less *maniera* between one artist and another, between one work and another by the same artist, or even between individual parts in the same work. It is an unrealistic tendency to regard periods of style, in themselves increasingly artificial as we go further back into history, as tidily homogeneous.

The 'stylish style' had its roots deep in the High Renaissance. It is important to remember that Vasari understood things differently from us, since he saw the works of his own period as more intimately related to those of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael than were the latter to those of the earlier Renaissance. In many ways he was right, for it is not difficult to show that the High Renaissance was more revolutionary than Mannerism; but he was only wholly right if the High Renaissance is seen across the rather different prejudices and preferences of the mid sixteenth century. He and his contemporaries saw only a part and they thought it the whole; but that part was a constituent of real, and indeed growing, importance within the limitlessly faceted totality of the High Renaissance. Mannerism was latent in the preceding period to the same extent as were the many Baroque tendencies in sixteenth-century art, and it was as logical a sequel. One of the most characteristic things about Mannerism is that its birth was ideally easy and attended by no crisis.

A style drenched in *maniera*, and distinct from the expressive, communicative and dynamic proto-Baroque tendencies of the High Renaissance, first reared its beautiful head in Rome about 1520. We shall examine this event in more detail later, and may anticipate here by saying that in these early products [28] an insistently cultured grace and accomplishment is accompanied by the kindred qualities of abstraction from natural behaviour and appearances, bizarre fantasy, complexity and invention that were outlined above. This style was evidently congenial to patrons and connoisseurs for it spread with the rapidity of a fashion. The artists in this Roman group were, as it happened, travellers (their journeys were provoked by the plague of 1522, the artistically disastrous pontificate of Adrian VI, and the Sack of Rome in 1527) and,

of course, this greatly facilitated the dissemination of the style. Perino del Vaga introduced it publicly to Florence in 1522-3, Giulio Romano to Mantua in 1524, and Polidoro to Naples in 1527. A Florentine, Rosso, joined the group in 1524 and, working subsequently in central Italy and for a moment in Venice, finally transplanted the style with great effect to Fontainebleau in 1530; he was joined there in the early 1530s by Primaticcio, who came from the new centre at Mantua. Parmigianino, joining the Roman group in 1524, returned to Emilia in 1527.

Nearly all these artists worked very extensively for engravers, and Parmigianino was a graphic artist in his own right, so that Mannerism became, at least potentially, accessible immediately on a European scale. Soon, the same style in sculpture became almost as freely disseminated through the production, on an unprecedented scale, of small bronze and terracotta copies. The proliferation of engravings is related to the eventual triumph of Mannerism in Northern Europe, which was virtually complete, over other possible developments out of the High Renaissance; in Italy itself these alternative currents (which were much less frequently published in engravings) progressed with equal vigour, and Mannerism enjoyed no such total triumph.

Mannerism was essentially an Italian style, and wherever it appears outside Italy it represents the adoption of Italian standards. Its spread throughout the North was, in fact, one aspect and result of the Italian cultural domination of Europe that dates from the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France

2. Galerie François 1^{er}. Rosso and assistants



(1494): the domination that compensated artistically for the political and military subjection of Italy in the same period. The spread of such wholly Italian exports as the Galerie François 1^{er} at Fontainebleau [2.] raises no particular problem; but it is much harder to understand the indigenous product. One preliminary difficulty arises from the almost total absence, north of the Alps, of anything equivalent to the High Renaissance – that moment which in Italy finally made Gothic not only the object of derision but also a dead language (dead in the sense that any subsequent case is a revival). A late-Gothic style flourished energetically in most countries outside Italy well into the sixteenth century with results sometimes very beautiful and sometimes merely peculiar.

Now it so happens that some characteristics of Gothic – especially of late-Gothic – align themselves easily with those of Mannerism: tendencies towards grace, complexity, preciousness and so on. And a very confusing situation arose when the late-Gothic style was superficially overlaid by Italian Renaissance influences, as in the case of the painters known as ‘Antwerp Mannerists’ or, in architecture, in the dormers, turrets and chimneys of the Château de Chambord. It is only when, as in some instances at Chambord, the motifs are specifically Mannerist, and executed with a certain necessary panache, that this kind of work should be given the title; oddity by itself is not a qualification. Most of the hybrid forms are better conceived as an awkward vernacular classicism. The analogy is accurate to the extent that a major contemporary phenomenon in literature, discussed articulately in France and

3. *The Death of Adonis*. After Rosso



England, was the collision of the vernacular with Italian influence.

The dilemma raised by the affinity between late Gothic and Mannerism may be illustrated in another way; it will be recalled that *maniera* was (reasonably) detected in Pisanello and Ghiberti, two of the most Gothic artists of the Italian Renaissance, while, on the other hand, grace and 'style' were the qualities totally absent, according to Raphael and Castiglione, from Gothic architecture. Rather similarly Tasso, writing in 1571 after a visit to Paris, said that French (that is, Gothic) architecture was built 'without any regard to elegance or fitness', which at first sight seems absurd. It is clear, however, that the elegance and fitness required by Tasso were not of a general but of a particular kind – in fact, classical; and it was this particularized *maniera* that was demanded by Raphael. The solution to the dilemma is probably to be found in the concept of a 'universal mannerism' – that is to say, a tendency that may appear within any period and almost any category of style, similar in certain respects only to Mannerism proper, which is that of the sixteenth century; the latter is born of the rich experience of classical form, harmony and *gravitas* that is the High Renaissance, and however much it may later betray its parent the stamp of that experience is always there.

When put to the test, then, the Italianate late-Gothic style probably fails to qualify. More certainly a failure is another kind of Northern art that is pseudo-Mannerist, by default. Architectural exercises in the Italian manner but of uncertain competence, such as the Ottheinrichbau at Heidelberg (c.1555), are often hailed today as Mannerist because they are strange and unconventional: but they fail by the first test of all, which is *savoir-faire*. They are precisely not *manieroso*. When a Mannerist artist breaks rules he does so on the basis of knowledge and not of ignorance. A considerable amount of North European architecture of the sixteenth century must be excluded for these reasons.

In France a native Mannerist style was properly established in the 1540s, in the work of Jean Goujon [4] and perhaps some aspects of Philibert de l'Orme; it continued with that of Germain Pilon [5] and Jacques du Cerceau the Elder [6]. Even if the style of these artists was largely Italian in inspiration, the level of their artistic achievement was as high as that of their Italian contemporaries. In the Low Countries the ground was prepared by a group of artists, working around 1540, known

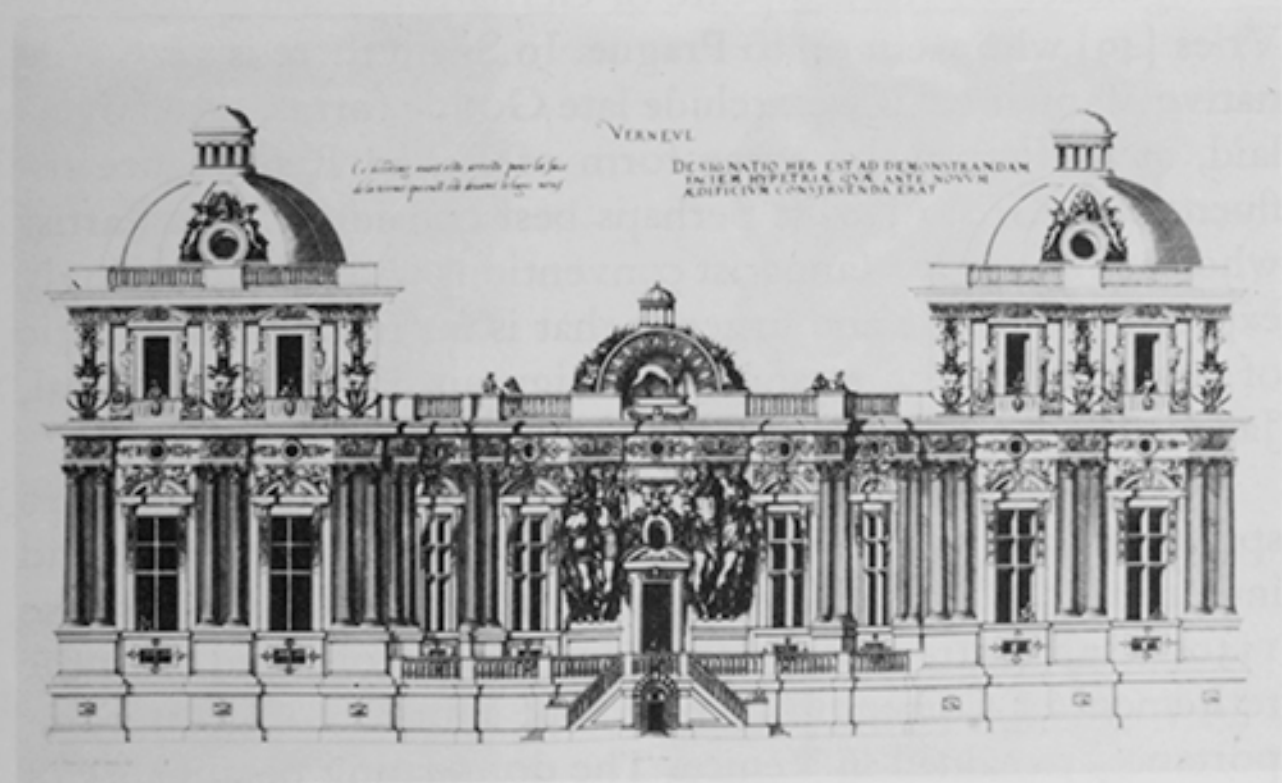


4. *Water-nymphs*. Jean Goujon



5. Monument to the Heart of Henri II. Germain Pilon

6. Château de Verneuil. Jacques Androuet du Cerceau the Elder





7. *Apollo and Midas*. Hendrick Goltzius

appropriately as Romanists (especially Marten van Heemskerck), and a true and enormously influential Mannerism appeared in Haarlem from about 1580, above all in the work of Hendrick Goltzius [7]. The style is severely limited in England by the rude naïveté of most native artistic production, and it is probable that little deserves the term beyond the extremely sophisticated miniatures of Isaac Oliver [8] and a certain type of architecture that amounts to a conceit, in the Elizabethan sense, such as Longford Castle, or the splendid entrance tower of Bramshill. In Germany there were important centres in Augsburg and Munich at the end of the century, particularly distinguished by the sculpture of Gerhard [9] and Adriaen de Vries [49] who went on to Prague. In Spain there is very little native Mannerism if we exclude late Gothic forms, often overlaid, as in France, by some form of Italian Renaissance influence. El Greco [10] is perhaps best considered as an artist who used strongly Mannerist conventions with an increasingly expressive purpose and urgency that is far from characteristic of Mannerism; the strangely ambiguous French provincial, Jacques Bellange [11], stands in much the same position.

To return to Italy: the style that grew in Rome around 1520 spread, as we have seen, over the centre of the peninsula and into the Po Valley and was very widely established in the 1530s. One centre of resistance, in Parma, collapsed with the retirement of Correggio in 1530, but another, of greater importance, remained in Venice. The dominating personality of

Titian ensured that Venetian art was primarily dedicated to the further exploration of the expressive and naturalistic aspect of Renaissance art in a direction that leads more directly than Mannerism to an artist such as Rubens. There was, to be sure, a central Italian invasion around 1540, led by Francesco Salviati, and Titian himself experimented inconclusively with Mannerist forms around the same time, but the effect was not lasting except perhaps in one case, that of Andrea Schiavone. Tintoretto is often described as a Mannerist but it is questionable whether his aims and ideals may be properly construed in this way; his work is sometimes elegant and sometimes a little abstracted, but it is never polished and always fired with a disqualifying energy. The resistance of Venice, however, should not be oversimplified to produce a conflict of irreconcilables; it seems that there were no tendencies in sixteenth-century art that could not be combined with complete harmony, and this interchange may be seen at many points. In centres such as Ferrara and Bassano, caught in cross-currents of Roman or Emilian Mannerism and the Venetian style, an artist might vacillate, but without any apparent discomfort.

There was a certain natural antipathy between Mannerism and the Counter-Reformation, and in general the style became effete in Italian religious works from about the 1570s, continuing with somewhat reduced conviction in secular and

8. *Portrait of a Lady*. Isaac Oliver



9. *Venus, Mars and Cupid*. Hubert Gerhard





10. *Laocoön*. El Greco

decorative works into the seventeenth century in such an artist as the Cavaliere d'Arpino. Again however, individual personalities upset all generalizations, for if the style was a declining force in Rome relatively early, it went on flourishing late in Florence because of the overwhelming influence of Giovanni Bologna [12] and to a lesser extent of Buontalenti [77]. The last truly vigorous manifestations were in the North, in a group of Dutch artists from the schools of Haarlem and Utrecht, typical of whom was Wtewael [13] (d. 1638), and at the court of Rudolf II at Prague where the dominant figure was a former colleague of Goltzius, Bartholomäus Spranger [14] (d. 1611). A similar figure in Dresden was Johann Kellerthaler.

THE SISTER ARTS

The purpose of the foregoing survey is to give some impression of the scope, chronologically and geographically, of Mannerism in the three major visual arts. If we were to consider in the same way the so-called minor arts and styles of ornament we would find a pattern similar in some respects, the principal deviations being due to the location of particular skills and the inherent fitness of Mannerism to different art-forms; these lead, for example in metalwork, to a concentration

11. *Pietà*. Jacques Bellange

12. *Apollo*. Giovanni Bologna





13. *The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis*. Joachim Wtewael

of production in the North and the survival of Mannerist conventions throughout the Baroque period.

Mannerism, as we have seen, is a term invented for a category in the history of the visual arts. Recently, as a result of the continuing cross-fertilization of critical disciplines, the concept has been transferred to other fields. This has led to some confusion, since there have also been transferred the varieties of meaning that art-historians attach to the term. However, the transference is not artificial, for equivalents really do exist; and a study of sixteenth-century literature and music not only provides illustrations of such similarities but also reflects a little light back on to the concept of Mannerism in the visual arts, which remains our primary concern.

The modern tendency towards increasing specialization in all branches of research and scholarship has discouraged comparative studies of the arts; and what we so seldom do we generally distrust. But our distrust of analogies was not shared by the sixteenth century, which inherited from antiquity a habit of drawing parallels as a matter of course.

Some examples of these analogies should be given; but there is another point to consider first, which to some extent explains them. Too little appreciated is the extent to which the



critical language of one of the arts in the sixteenth century was in fact common to all of them. This was only in part due to cross-fertilization; it was primarily due to the derivation in each case of critical techniques, frameworks and terms of reference, from the enormous body of ancient criticism which was, as it happened, mainly literary and rhetorical, to a lesser extent musical, and scarcely at all concerned with the visual arts.

For example, in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* Vasari found an outline sketch of the stylistic development of ancient rhetoric that he could adapt to his own purposes in his *Vite* (1550). The same historical scheme had already been adapted to Renaissance music by Glareanus in his *Dodekachordon* (1547); Glareanus, a humanist writing in Latin, also leaned heavily on Quintilian's terminology. No less important were the treatises of Aristotle, Demetrius and Cicero. The influence of all of these on later Renaissance literary criticism hardly needs to be recalled. In the sixteenth century there were remarkably few critical ideas that were *not* derived from antiquity.

Quintilian's sketch of the history of rhetoric was, moreover, preceded by illustrations of the same pattern of development in ancient painting and sculpture, as if he expected his reader to grasp the point more readily in these cases. Each orator could be paired off with a painter or sculptor. Cicero, Demetrius and Aristotle drew similar analogies. The latter, in the *Poetics*, illustrated a point of literary style by comparison with painters, among whom Pauson painted men worse than they were, Polygnotus better and Dionysius about right. In Trissino's *Poetica*, Book V (drafted about 1530), the same points were illustrated by Montagna, Leonardo and Titian, and he then extended the illustration to music and the dance. Cosimo Bartoli's *Ragionamenti* of 1567 contains chronological comparisons between composers and sculptors, pairing first Ockeghem with Donatello and then Josquin des Prés with Michelangelo. Tasso himself readily thought across from poetry to painting and sculpture (in the *Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica*, 1564) and to music and rhetoric (in *La Cavaletta*, 1587). The most striking example, however, is provided by Sperone Speroni, a dramatist and literary critic inclined to Mannerism; in a late work, *Sopra Virgilio*, he compared the Latin author's poverty of invention to Titian's and then to the Colosseum, or a pyramid, while Homer's poetry – adorned, amplified and rich in epithets – reminded him of Corinthian architecture

and Hellenistic sculpture (he cites the *Laocoön* and *Apollo Belvedere*).

This community of ideas, and its relation to Mannerism, will be the subject of Chapter 4. We shall see there the conscious relationship between the pursuit of a refined style in all the arts and the concept of an age more cultured than its immediate past. For self-conscious stylization is the common denominator of all Mannerist works of art. Undoubtedly this kind of stylization was stronger around 1500 in literature than anywhere else. When we turn to literature, however, we must take account of a point first made in one of the greatest critical works of our time, E. R. Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*.

Curtius, borrowing the term from the history of art, defines moments of mannerism, that is of preciousness of style for its own sake, in almost all phases of European literature, including antiquity; he finds a constant oscillation in this direction or towards classicism, which is direct expression of the matter. This is a valuable concept, for all the arts are prone to such tendencies. In music, for example, there exists a number of compositions from the end of the Gothic period, around 1400, of a highly complex notation and rhythm, that can scarcely have been performable but were, rather, intellectual caprices. Similarly there was a moment, around 1200, of extreme sophistication in the evolution of the Byzantine icon. To such things the application of our term is legitimate, but only by extension, as we talk of 'baroque' moments within other stylistic periods; none of them represents a full-blooded period in itself, nor is it manifested in all artistic aspects of a civilization.

True Mannerism was such a thing, and, since the meaning of the word is that it is extravagantly accomplished, it must have fed upon a previous period of supreme accomplishment; these conditions were provided by the High Renaissance which reconquered the classical form and language. In the almost complete absence of antique music, the terms Renaissance and, to a great extent, Mannerism can hardly be defined for music except by analogy; but in literature and the visual arts an argument is possible.

In Italy the evolutions of literature and the visual arts are not strictly comparable before about 1500. It becomes natural however, to compare Sannazzaro's *Arcadia* and Raphael's *Parnassus*, and not only because of a similarity in their subject



15. *Joseph's Coat brought to Jacob.* After Jacopo Pontormo



16. Medal-portrait of a Lady. Alfonso Ruspagiarì

matter. Both are deeply inspired by antiquity and have reconquered it to the same degree, and in both there is an ideal balance between artistic perfection, or an ideal of beauty in its own right, and technique in the service of an idea. But one notices less readily that *Arcadia* was begun about twenty years before the painting. There is an interesting literary development that we now call *Bembismo* which has about the same chronological relationship with Mannerism in the visual arts.

The history of Italian literature of the Renaissance is as much about Latin works as vernacular. The dominant literary movement in early sixteenth-century Rome was Ciceronianism – ‘Il bello scrivere latino’; it reached its peak in Sadoleto, Bembo and Inghirami, and it was marked by an obsession with *style*. It led on the one hand to cultivated, elegant artificiality, and on the other to a natural interest in the notions of good style expounded in the rhetorical literature of antiquity. Alongside it was a sympathetic movement in the vernacular, also dedicated to the artificial cultivation of a past style, but with Petrarch as its ideal rather than Cicero. Bembo, whose position is a little ambiguous, was generally credited with the leadership, particularly by the Latinists who felt betrayed, though in fact it may have been a battle he led from behind; in any case this battle – the image is prompted by the contemporary published Dialogues on the subject – between Latin and vernacular is chiefly characteristic of Ciceronianism and *Bembismo* in that

it is itself artificial; the real function of the Dialogues was to provide a serious discussion of what style should be. In the vernacular movement also, style is the main preoccupation; matter is its servant.

A cycle in the ancient history of rhetoric is thus repeated, the inversion – in Asianism and later Roman rhetoric – of the ‘classical’ formula: *Rem tene, verba sequuntur* (roughly: concentrate on the subject, and let the style follow from that). Bembo, for example, held that if a brutal, ignoble or passionate *argomento* threatened by its expression to spoil the beauty of a work it was better to scrap it. This is the real sense in which *Bembismo*, like Mannerism in the visual arts, is un-classical: it is founded on a reversal of the normal relationship of form and content.

However, *Bembismo* also resembled Mannerism in the sense in which it was, by a perverse paradox, also classical. The perfect vernacular literary style was to have two sources. Bembo argued that it was right for every man to write in his own language, but he did not mean the spoken language, which he despised for its corruptness, but a dead language revived, the language of classics; by definition, they could not be Latin or Greek, so the ideal of eloquence was provided by Petrarch above all, Boccaccio less so, and emphatically not Dante. Secondly, the objective was to raise the vernacular to the highest level of latinity in matters of elegance, richness of ornament, figures of speech and copiousness of vocabulary, chiefly by a transference of forms from one language to the other. The process had, in fact, begun spontaneously long before Bembo, but it was now formalized – almost, one might say, institutionalized. In a word, what he wanted to give the language was *art*; it was Aristotle’s responsibility that *art* had come to mean *rules*; and this was the sense in which Bembo wished literature to be *artificial*. Just as genuine sentiment, like all coarseness, was to be excluded, so necessarily the patterns of expression themselves must be divorced from those natural ones in everyday use. This looks like a prescription for disaster, but it was not.

A typical product of *Bembismo* was the enormously gifted Agnolo Firenzuola, who came to maturity in the Rome of Leo X (Pope from 1513 to 1521). Strangely, at first sight, he is most celebrated for translation, above all that of Apuleius’s *Golden Ass* (soon after 1520): precious, refined and beautiful in marked degrees. Firenzuola’s *L’Asino d’oro* is, however, much

more than a translation; it has some changes in the story, but above all it represents the creation for the vernacular of a *style* as polished and sophisticated as that of Apuleius himself, whose Latin was greatly admired for just these qualities. Firenzuola prefers translation, in fact, because it restricts the creative problem to matters of form, not of content; however un-classical this may be, he classicizes linguistically. The criticism that he is purely a technician misses the point; the statement that he is artificial is exactly the point, but today it is usually made under the influence of a prejudice, and makes negative something that was positive. *L'Asino d'oro* is a very sensitive, and legitimate, work of art.

The modern line of attack is, in any case, not new; G. B. Giraldi, whom we shall meet repeatedly as a middle-of-the-roader in criticism and theory, was not unsympathetic towards Bembo's aims, partly because they could be justified to a surprising extent by ancient authority, but he thought Bembo went too far. In his *Discorso* on the Romance (1549-54) he advised, for example, the imitation of Petrarch's 'necessary' and 'natural' rhyme but noticed that Bembo, with admitted grace, mixed this kind with those that were unnatural; the latter were without meaning and forced, present only to make a rhyme ('posto per ornamento, e non per bisogno'). Consistently, Giraldi disapproved of embellishments and technical improvements in the final revised version of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532).

Mannerism was as widespread in literature as it was in the visual arts (and probably lasted longer). Bernardo Tasso, especially in his Romance *L'Amadigi* [75] of 1560, is perhaps the most perfect Italian example; in Bernardo Tasso's earlier lyric style, by the way, Aretino recognized grace and *maniera*. For the North it may be sufficient for the moment simply to mention Philippe Desportes in France, and in England Edmund Spenser, George Pettie, and above all John Lyly, whose *Euphues* (1579) is directly linked in style with *Bembismo*.

CAUSES

There has been a great deal of argument over the causes of Mannerism. Disputes arise mainly because the historical factors which are thought to have determined the evolution of the style are so often of a kind very remote from the processes of artistic creation. The invasion of Italy, the Sack of Rome and

subsequent economic collapse were responsible, it has been suggested, for an intellectual and cultural climate of crisis peculiarly favourable to the development of Mannerism – the fact that similar political and economic conditions in other periods and places did not have similar artistic results being conveniently overlooked. In Venice, for example, the wars of the early sixteenth century ushered in a period of economic and social disturbance eminently suited, one might suppose, to the growth of a Mannerist style. Yet Venetian artists seem to have gone on working very much as before, in untroubled serenity, quite oblivious to the disastrous events which had overtaken their native city. Many other similar instances of the apparent indifference of artists to current conditions can be found. It is, in fact, very hard to determine how directly the political, military and economic events can ever affect artistic styles; and still more difficult to understand why they should be supposed to do so only in some periods and places but not in others. Of the creative process we still know very little but it is clear enough that most works of art are insulated in the mind of the artist even from his personal crises, joys and tragedies, as a child is protected in the womb.

More reasonable are explanations of Mannerism in sociological and religious terms; in these cases we may be near the function of the work of art, and it is not hard to show the influence of these factors on the life of artistic forms; more difficult, but not impossible, is their influence on the life of styles. Most relevant, however, to the real problem are factors within the artistic context itself: aesthetic convictions of the artist's environment, which may become fashions, and conditions of patronage.

In so far as we may distinguish between permissive and effective causes, we should place among the first the surprising licence given by the ancient critical tradition, particularly for pure decoration and non-functional embellishments. On the other hand the whole classical tradition repeats Aristotle's warnings of excess in these matters; ornamentation must be controlled by judgement and taste: two elastic yardsticks, as Quintilian observed. In interpreting ancient and sixteenth-century texts we must be aware of this problem of calibration, for the point at which affectation begins can clearly be shifted. In Vasari, there is an apparent conflict between moderation in theory and excess in practice. It is clear that Vasari did exercise a judgement, admitting the dangers of an excess of

maniera, for example, or blaming the followers of Michelangelo for an obsession with *difficoltà*, both qualities of which, in principle, he approves more than we would. Similarly Zarlino writes in praise of polyphony, but rudely of extravagant polyphonic effects.

When we turn to the literature of manners, however, it becomes clear that the threshold of excess was placed abnormally high.

Giovanni della Casa's *Il Galathea* (1551-5) seems, at first sight, to give eminently sensible and balanced instructions for our general bearing, but it is an indication of the artificiality he in fact expects that even the behaviour of one's horse may be proper or improper. Best of all is Stefano Guazzo's *La civil conversazione* (1574 - immensely popular, with thirteen more Italian editions before 1600, four French, two English). In the first three, theoretical, books he seems to observe the middle way as sensibly as Alberti or Palmieri in the previous century, firmly demanding decency, the integrity of the family, and the avoidance of affectation. The last book is an illustration of his ideas in practice, a report of a society dinner at Casale attended by real characters; it is presumably also a faithful account of typical society behaviour, and by our standards it is far from moderate in its artificiality. It is a picture of an insulated society, self-sufficient in its amusements and in conversation elaborately stylized (frequently quoting Aristotle, Cicero, Martial, Ariosto and above all Petrarch). They drink out of glasses shaped like boats. They play elaborate and artificial games, tests of invention and wit in which the matter of the answer is irrelevant and only an artful display is required; they expect quantity production of synthetic laments from an arbitrarily chosen lover to one of the ladies, and they then criticize them. Fundamentally neither the guests nor the author believe passionately in anything (except style, and style they certainly have). For instance Guazzo's earlier praise of the sanctity of marriage is illuminated now by a long passage in which the guests practise brinkmanship, at least, in the discussion of marital fidelity. Thus for Guazzo - and for Vasari - the exhortations to moderation, of classical descent, belong in great part to the genre and give it classical tone; for us they are a symbol of the Renaissance context, and for the author they are an ornament to his work, a literary convention that he cannot ignore; in other words they are themselves an aspect of style rather than of content. The same is true of Vasari's

stress on the study of nature and the expression of emotions, which at first reading seem to have more to do with Alberti than with the arts in Vasari's circle.

To return to the causes of Mannerism: it would not have occurred to any Renaissance scholar to query the ancient truth that taste and judgement should place a check upon excesses of style; but, on the other hand, there is not in antiquity, nor is there absolutely, a point at which the line may be drawn, or a scale of standard calibration. Opinions differed from one person to the next in the sixteenth century as at other times, and it is no more than a general tendency that accepts an uncommonly high proportion of ornamental graces and complexities. What matters is that it was as easy to justify these 'excesses', in the visual or literary arts, on the basis of ancient precept, as it was to condemn them.

In the visual arts it must have been important, in the Renaissance, that reading Vitruvius or Pliny could lead one to believe that in antiquity architecture and sculpture progressed towards elegance in proportion and refinement in detail. This is crucially important in relation to the concept of an intervening period of coarseness and lack of style: *L'età rozza* (the coarse age), as Vasari called it in his *Ragionamenti*. The proximity of this preceding period must have made artists conscious, as Vasari was, that the fifteenth century was still sub-classical in its plainness and lack of elegance, and that the High Renaissance represented a swing towards a good style; they could not see, as we tend to see now, that the High Renaissance was the moment of equilibrium, in the Aristotelian sense, between clarity and fitness to purpose on the one hand and embellishment by elegance and graces of ornament (arising naturally from the matter and never obtrusive, or without inner motivation) on the other. They could reasonably see Mannerism as a continuation of a refining process begun in the High Renaissance, and they had little incentive to notice that the swing had gone beyond the mean. There is certainly interesting adverse comment on this evolution in the sixteenth century, and the observers responded to it no more unanimously than the artists, but it was not until about 1600 that a completed cycle could be generally perceived, and a dispassionate choice could be made.

Among the effective causes of Mannerism we may place the literary movements outlined above. It is not accidental that these were centred on Rome, and that it was in Rome that



Mannerism was first established. There is no question that letters carried more prestige there than the visual arts, and it is also certain that Michelangelo and Raphael were closely associated there with the leading literary figures, so it is reasonable that the course of the one art should influence that of the others by a transference of ideals.

Then, moving to the circumstances of the visual arts themselves, we should notice a new development in patronage, which is, in turn, a symptom of a new conception of a work of art. Around 1520, and thereafter, we find that works are commissioned for no other reason than the desire of the patron to have, for example, *a Michelangelo*: that is to say, an example of his unique *virtù*, or his *art*; the subject, size or even medium do not matter. This is the birth of the idea of a work of art made, in the first instance, to hold its place in a gallery. In January 1519 Michelangelo heard from Paris that 'François 1^{er} has no greater wish than to have some work, even small, of yours'; even more explicit is a reminder in 1523 from Cardinal Grimani in Venice, about 'that painting for a *studiolo*, already requested and promised by you, of which the choice of material and subject is yours, whether painting, or bronze, or marble – do whatever is most convenient to you'. In 1524 Castiglione is charged by Federico Gonzaga with obtaining anything from Sebastiano del Piombo, as long as it is not about saints, but graceful and beautiful to look at. The same commission is mentioned in 1527 in a letter to Federico from Aretino, who says that Sebastiano 'has sworn to produce something stupendous'. Later, there is a letter from Annibale Caro to Vasari about a painting of which the subject is left to the artist. The idea in these cases is, no doubt, a crystallization of vaguer notions that produced, for example, Leonardo's 'one-man show' when he exhibited his *Saint Anne* in 1501, and which probably existed in the fifteenth century and in antiquity. But they assumed an altogether new importance early in the sixteenth century, and they must have led to two results in the mind of the artist, both central to Mannerism: the concept of the work of art as an enduring virtuoso performance ('something stupendous') and the concept of the 'absolute' work of art.

This is emphatically not Art for Art's sake, which implies independence of, and even contempt for, the approbation of the public. On the contrary, Mannerism is based upon an obsession with a favourable audience-reaction, the stimulation



18.
Bowl and cover.
Pierre Reymond

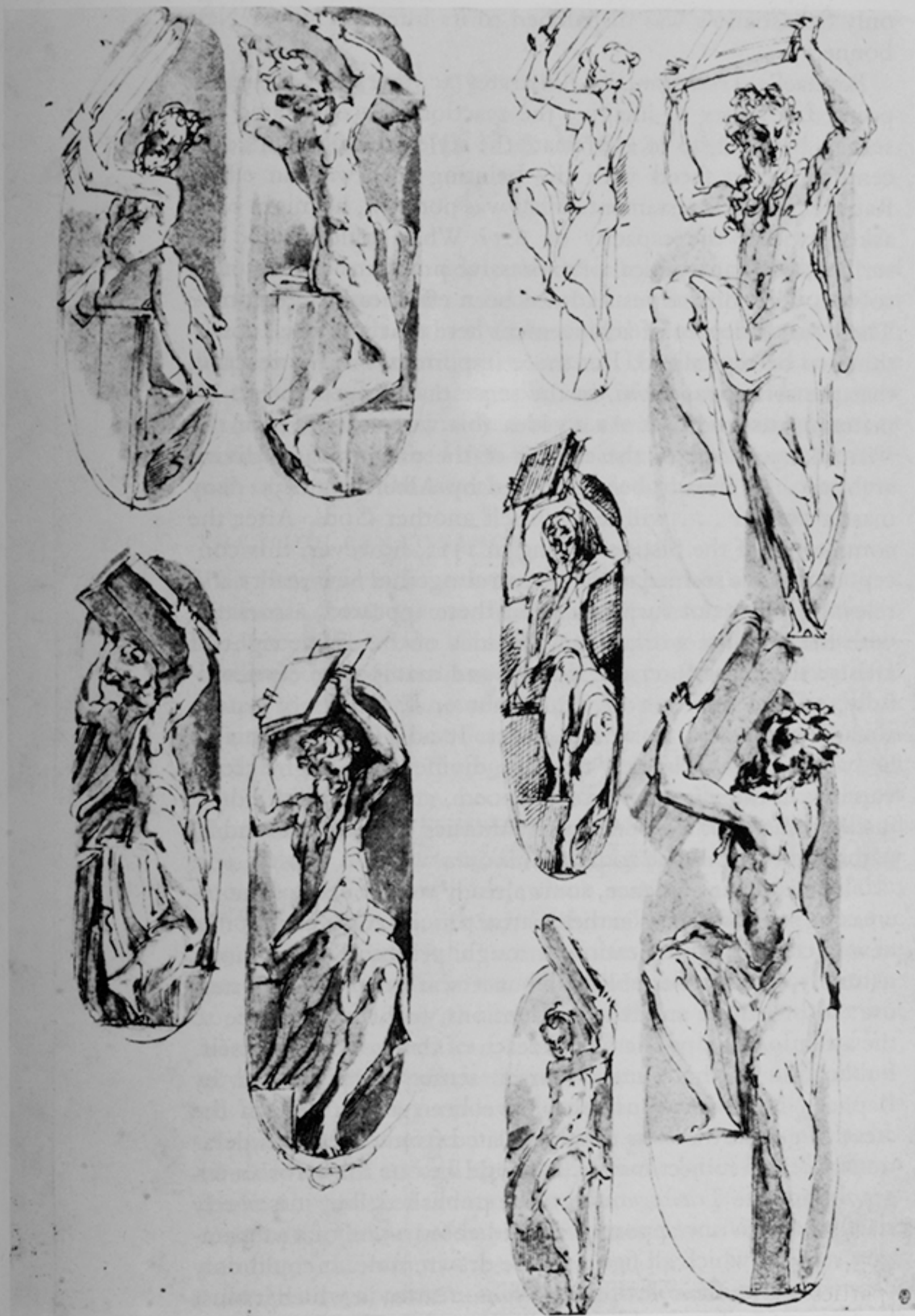
of which is a more important part of the work's function than ever before.

We are concerned here with a shift in emphasis among the constituents of the function of a work of art: less devotional, practical, ceremonial, and more self-sufficient, or absolute; it is a tendency – widely but not universally approved – to reduce or elevate, according to the point of view, the function to that of simply being a work of art. The more Art the better.

It is now time to look at an example of this idea in practice. In 1522 a group of artists met in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence, and admired Masaccio's facility which showed his conquest of artistic difficulty (how typical is this remark of the period, and how irrelevant to ours!). Among them was Perino del Vaga, hot from Rome, who claimed that a modern artist could make figures as well, and more beautifully. When challenged, Perino began work on a fresco of an apostle next to one by Masaccio as an example of the new Roman style: not commissioned, for he had to ask the prior's permission, and not functional in any sense, except as a demonstration of *virtù*.

This notion is related to a new meaning of the idea of competition, and to a concept of 'classics'. Masaccio was put forward as a peak of perfection, to be over-reached. In the same sense Josquin was a 'classic' in music, for example to Glareanus, and Petrarch in poetry, for example to Michelangelo. In the visual arts the concept is a symptom of the long evolution in social status from craft to vocation; another symptom is the concept of the 'Old Master'. This is first encountered in the sixteenth century, and is reflected in the continuing demand for copies after Leonardo, Raphael or Andrea del Sarto. The establishment of classics, in this sense, naturally provoked the ambition to scale yet higher peaks, as in the case of Perino.

But competition between the living was as great a stimulant to the pursuit of a perfect style. A new idea was implied in the commissions given to Raphael and Sebastiano del Piombo (the latter backed by Michelangelo) by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici in 1517, for two altarpieces, respectively the *Transfiguration* (now in the Vatican Gallery) and the *Raising of Lazarus* (National Gallery, London). Competitions were not in themselves new, but the prize in this case was not employment, for both works were to be accepted. It was recognized by all parties that what was at stake was reputation. (Raphael's painting so triumphantly won that it was kept in Rome and



19. *Studies for a figure of Moses.* Parmigianino

only Sebastiano's was dispatched to its intended site at Narbonne.)

Raphael's *Transfiguration* illustrates another, rather similar point. Let us try to imagine the reaction of a cultivated observer, brought up to appreciate the style of the late fifteenth century, when faced with the painting that was, in effect, Raphael's artistic testament. What was not now, he might have asked, within the capacity of Art? What could not be described, what anatomical or expressive problems could not be solved, what difficulties had not been effortlessly overcome? There was a degree of achievement here that was itself something to be capitalized. But more important was the reaction that the artist was *divino*, in the sense that his relation to his material was god-like. As an idea this was not new, for the Vitruvian analogy of the creator of the universe as a divine architect had already been inverted by Alberti in 1435: 'any master painter . . . will feel himself another God'. After the completion of the Sistine Ceiling in 1512, however, this concept must have seemed to take on an altogether new reality and relevance. It is not surprising that there appeared, associated with the absolute work of art, the idea of the divine right of artists: the right to create, invent and manipulate even wilfully, not in imitation of nature but on the basis of nature already conquered in works of art. It is the same principle by which Tasso claimed that the divine poet might create varieties in the microcosm of his poem, and Sir Philip Sidney justified the poet's invention of fantasies not to be found in nature, but 'within the zodiac of his own wit'.

There is other evidence, some already mentioned, of the increasing self-awareness in the creative process. One remarkable new factor was publication through prints. The medium, naturally, was well-established but it was now put to a new use: to broadcast an artist's inventions, to bring his style to the attention of a public out of reach of the work of art itself. Publication in this almost literary sense was pioneered by Raphael. Yet there must also have been an interest in the creative genius that was totally isolated from other considerations, such as subject matter. It would be one thing for an engraving of the *Transfiguration* to be published; but it is surely startling when one appears, as it did about 1520, of a preparatory stage at which all figures were drawn nude. It could only bear witness to the role of the artist as creator, in which it must have been felt that a public was now interested.