An Other Raphael

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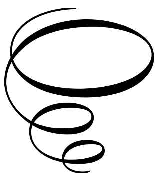
The Artist and Authority

By

Charles Burroughs

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sometimes the origin of a project sticks in the memory. The fifth centenary of Raphael's death in 1520 inspired me, like many art historians and art aficionados, to engage with the work of an artist who had always seemed evasive and for all his obvious brilliance, I have to admit, somewhat bland. However, as I explored the great frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura, at the nerve center of the Renaissance papacy (Fig. 1), I noticed discordant elements that were far from bland, but seemed to have received little or no attention in the scholarship but nevertheless echoed aspects of Raphael's later work. I also found a wonderfully provocative article by a professional philosopher, the Israeli David Heyd, who had apparently spent some time in New York with friends who were Renaissance art historians and had been inspired by conversations with them to write about the *School of Athens* (Fig. 2), a celebrated image of his own profession.

Heyd focuses on the prominent inclusion of individual thinkers – notably Diogenes the Cynic and Heraclitus – whose ideas (as well as rather strange conduct described in well-known sources) were at variance with the optimistic and stable harmony usually associated with Raphael's painting. In the following chapters I develop Heyd's insight, with a focus not only on the *School of Athens*, but also on Raphael's consistent invention of imagery that, though commissioned by successive popes, displays a subtle but definite independence of approach, as if challenging the very premise of epideictic or celebratory "official" frescoes – in short, authority. This is the "other Raphael" of this book, which explores various manifestations of authority -- as well as authorities -- of importance in his artistic career and social ascent.

Diogenes of Sinope, co-founder of the important philosophical school of Cynicism, was notorious for his dismissive attitude toward Alexander the Great and indeed toward authority in general, not least that of Plato. Raphael's emphasis on Diogenes in the *School of Athens* dramatizes the issue of the relationship of power and culture that Raphael must have confronted intellectually as he developed the cast of characters for the *School of Athens*. Certainly, he would have had some awareness of the difficulties experienced by prominent philosophers whose political convictions or even idea of politics and the state were not congenial to the authorities of the time. The fate of Socrates was well known.

The relationship to authority was surely not only an intellectual issue for Raphael. He also lived it, among others dependent on papal patronage and support, who adjusted their conduct and even sense of self according to circumstance, and not least sources of support. On the other hand, Raphael also wielded authority, primarily as a leader of other artists, and latterly as a sort of papal official. Moreover, another kind of authority was exercised by the legacy of the ancient world, embracing both the sculptures and other remains of Roman material culture, which Raphael studied assiduously, and literary works by canonical authors (*auctores*) on which he based some of his most important paintings. His response to the *auctores* is a primary theme of this volume.

For Raphael's situation, if not predicament, as a recipient of the support and perhaps whims of successive popes, there were striking ancient paradigms. Poetry famously thrived in the patronage system of the Rome of Julius Caesar's heir Augustus, who presided over a golden age of literary and architectural achievement celebrated by the humanists of Renaissance Rome, whose admiration for Virgil, Horace, and Ovid was apparently shared by Raphael. Significantly, however, it was the practice of some poets in the age of Augustus to comment on the implications of their situation, not least on the expectation to support the regime. Virgil's creation of a national epic is subtly celebrated in the Stanza della Segnatura, as is, even more explicitly, its appropriation by Augustus after the poet's death.

Though a friend of Virgil's and admirer of his epic verses, Horace declared his reluctance to write epic, preferring to retreat to his allegedly modest country estate; such evasions may have resonated strongly with Raphael and other recipients of papal favor. The fate of Ovid, moreover, exiled by Augustus far from anywhere he considered civilized, perhaps served as a cautionary episode. As for Raphael, beyond his initial role as a court painter he became increasingly and perhaps awkwardly integrated into papal service, while winning recognition as an equal by the literary luminaries of his acquaintance, the leading humanists of the papal court. Albeit with their help, Raphael's engagement at least with select passages in texts relevant to his projects can be assumed. On the other hand, Raphael's admiration for Virgil is especially well documented; indeed, he may even have come to see himself as a Virgil with the brush

A particular focus of this volume is the identification and analysis of textual sources that Raphael probably or in some cases certainly relied on, as he sought to give visual expression to subject matter that was often *prima facie* resistant to visual representation. Largely rejecting a venerable tradition of allegory, Raphael found other ways to bring ideas to life. By staging dramatic interactions among human subjects, he developed a far

more compelling imagery than he could have achieved with abstract and, at least until Rubens, somewhat bloodless symbolism (nevertheless, of course, he managed to humanize the Muses). In short, Raphael's approach to antiquity was focused on the evocation of life, as if staged in a theater; in the milieu in Rome in which he found himself, indeed, there was considerable interest in the performance or at least study of classical drama, which in crucial ways affected his approach to composition. Raphael drew also on his brilliance as a portraitist, displaying a remarkable ability to express the physical and even moral character of real and imagined persons.

Most of all, Raphael took inspiration from antiquity, perhaps not least from literary evocations of diverse and often extraordinary personages and situations such as were characteristic, most notably, of the Roman tradition of satire. I explore Raphael's response, however, not only to the pleasures of the text (even if indirectly) but also, or rather, to literary models and the mechanics of communication, to genre differences and characterization, and even to ways of conceptualizing the composition of the universe. As far as I can tell, this has not been done, at least consistently.

In view of the range of material addressed in this volume, this may well seem an impossible project. The scholarship on Raphael alone is not so much voluminous as endless, and readers may well notice gaps in the bibliography. Rather than presenting yet another rounded account of Raphael's career, therefore, many of which exist, this book is intended as a work of argument that foregrounds certain discordant motifs and compositional patterns that I perceived in Raphael's work, but did not see recognized, still less discussed, in the scholarship known to me. In short, the present discussions are above all based on my own visual experience, though with a focus also on various factors in Raphael's production of imagery.

In the Renaissance the commerce with the Classics took very different forms than now. Raphael operated in a milieu in which broad knowledge of the literature of antiquity could be assumed on the part of humanist-trained individuals for whom Latin and for some even Ancient Greek were not dead languages. Such expertise is certainly beyond my powers; in compensation, so to speak, I plunged into the secondary literature on the texts in question, in other words into studies by modern heirs of the philological tradition established in the Renaissance itself, some representatives of which were personally known to Raphael. The classical scholarship in question is, I found, often of extraordinary interest and quality, but its purpose, for me, was to supplement my own knowledge of the authors and works of the relevant authors and to bring to the surface themes and questions that, in their own way, Raphael's learned acquaintances confronted, as did he.

In short, from the frescoes in the Vatican to his later engagement with antiquarian and architectural studies and even his grotesque designs, Raphael drew on a remarkable breadth of knowledge of ancient literary and philosophical culture. Much of this was no doubt mediated by others, but there is good evidence, as I will show, for Raphael's own active and at times independent role in the development of imagery, especially after he established himself, remarkably quickly, as the leading figure among the painters in the papal apartment at the Vatican. Apart from the wit and flair he showed as a designer of complex iconography, making good use of the archive that he maintained of drawings from antiquity, there are occasional self-conscious hints at aspects of his own professional and social situation, and perhaps even his personal history.

In Raphael studies (or indeed in art history in general) an important and in many ways laudable tendency is an emphasis on the collaborative as well as entrepreneurial aspects of artistic practice.[1] This is certainly warranted in respect to Raphael's career; nevertheless, his inventiveness was inexhaustible and consistent, extending from quasi-history paintings to grotesque decoration. He worked through his assistants, or rather with them, in developing the grotesque style, as it came to be known, which he embraced at a time when there were many demands on his time and talent, and which he deployed in highly prestigious and conspicuous commissions. Of course, the somewhat macaronic character of grotesque lent itself to workshop production, with its variety of materials and image types. In Raphael's case the grotesque style, which typically involved the reconceptualization of the boundary or frame in a pictorial field, is consistent with the artist's agility as he moved across boundaries, in his art, certainly, but also in life

Raphael's use of grotesque imagery is a major theme of the present book. Here I acknowledge the inspiration I received from a conference session organized by Damiano Acciarino, with leading scholars in the field, including Maria Hansen, current doyenne of grotesque studies. As a topic the grotesque necessarily requires investigation of the ambiguous legacy of antiquity as well as its enlivening effect within Renaissance visual culture. Accordingly, a crucial ancient source both for various kinds of grotesquerie and for related theoretical notions was Ovid, poet of the *Metamorphoses*,

[1] For a compelling critique of the fashion to emphasize "context," especially patronage, at the expense of attention to the intellectual capacity of certain artists, I salute the work of Damian Dombrowski, especially his *magnum opus* to date, *Die religiösen Gemälde Sandro Botticellis. Malerei als pia philosophia* (Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2010). Sadly, this has never been translated into English, or into Italian.

the impact of which is the subject of important work by Paul Barolsky, whose knowledge of the Augustan poets I could not match, any more than his lucid and admirably concise writing style. Ovid wrote extensively and self-consciously about art from the point of view of its production, an approach to visual culture that the late Tony Cutler pushed me to think about.

The field of Raphael studies is especially dynamic. I have also taken inspiration from current or relatively recent scholarship, for example the excellent contributions of James G. Turner, Yvonne Elet, Maria Faietti, Lisa Pon, Bette Talvacchia, and Vincenzo Farinella. I returned many times to the eloquent Raphael monographs of Konrad Oberhuber and Ulrich Pfisterer, as well as Talvacchia's, with its welcome emphasis on Raphael the professional. In an echo of my own research on Rome, many years ago, I benefited from the impressive recent scholarship on social and topographical history sponsored or published by the Roma nel Rinascimento association. Most of the research for this book was accomplished, however, in New York, especially on the rather uncomfortable chairs in the Art and Architecture Room of the Public Research Library. I also took advantage of the resources and rather more comfortable chairs of the Watson Library of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I also thank the Interlibrary Loan staff of Milne Library at the State University of New York at Geneseo, near my retirement home in Rochester, NY, who answered countless request for scans and loans.

I am especially grateful to Liana De Girolami Cheney and the Association for Textual Study in Art History for the opportunity to present portions of this project at various conferences, and for Liana's generous support in general. I was also fortunate to be part of an especially lively and congenial Classics department at Case Western Reserve University. I am grateful especially to Tim Wutrich from whose knowledge especially of ancient drama and the theatrical aspect of Virgilian epic I have benefited. I owe a particular debt to Edward J. Olszewski of the CWRU Art History and Art department, whose impressive grasp of classical literary culture underlies so much of his own scholarship, including his insight into the use by Renaissance artists of the classical legacy. Michael Bennett, Curator of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the Cleveland Museum of Art, helped me think through some of the ideas presented, much later, in these pages, as did the late, marvellously learned Florin Berindeanu, my colleague at CRWU in a program on the Classical Tradition. Other absent friends, conversations with whom I still recall, include Leon Satkowski, Tony King, and, again, Tony Cutler.

During the work on the book, I have benefited from the advice and occasionally skeptical support of friends and colleagues, among them Caspar Pearson, Art DiFuria, Paul Barolsky, Nicholas Temple, Tom and Elizabeth Cohen, Albert Ascoli, the late Martin McLaughlin, Brian Steele, and, again, Liana Cheney. The artist Thomas MacPherson, whose terrific sketch appears on the cover, opened my eyes to technical issues and far more on rambles, with our wives, through various places near and far. At Cambridge Scholars Publishing in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, I have benefited from the support and patience especially of Adam Rummens and Sophie Edminson; this project has given me a welcome, albeit distant connection with my ancestral city. In Rochester, far from Rome, I have benefited from the consistent friendship and support of Andrew Seager and Cynthia Cahill, as well as Harry and Lauren Howe, also Laura Blanco and Bob Shainheit.

Finally, as often happens, the writing of this book tried the patience of the author's nearest and dearest. Accordingly, I am extremely grateful to my wife Lynette Bosch, as prolific as scholar as she is versatile, who is so much more efficient as well as proficient at writing than I am, and a far better speaker. Lynette was there when I last saw visited the Vatican and saw Raphael's frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura but also, thanks to her contacts, was able to see parts of St. Peter's Basilica now barred to visitors, as well as to disappear beneath Bernini's histrionic, hourglass-brandishing skeleton through the door in the tomb of Alexander VII. Together we have ventured through across many thresholds in various countries; I look forward to many more.

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INTRODUCTION

FACING FRAGMENTATION

An Other Raphael? Artist at Court, but not of it.

Raphael arrived in Rome probably in late 1508 or early the next year; he was just 25. He died bitterly lamented in 1520, after just two decades of service to successive popes and immersion in the Roman cultural scene. In that relatively short period, his position was transformed. From a collaborative role in the decoration of a single, though certainly illustrious room, he rose to achieve artistic and managerial leadership in the greatest construction project of the century, the construction of a new St. Peter's, and he received official responsibilities extending over the area within and even beyond the city walls. In spite of a hiatus in the heyday of medievalism and modernism, Raphael's status as one of the most admired and imitated artists in the history of the West has been largely unchallenged and has only been reinforced by the flood of recent contributions in celebration of the fifth centenary of the artist's death in 1520. This volume, however, seeks to highlight aspects of his career that at very least raise questions about the prevailing response to Raphael's achievement as an artist and to explore his highly self-conscious performance of social roles, whether imposed by others or self-chosen. It is often difficult to discern the difference.

Raphael began his Roman career after a summons from Pope Julius II della Rovere (r. 1503-1513) to contribute to the fresco decoration in the pope's office and study, known as the Stanza della Segnatura (Fig. 1), in the apartment in the Vatican Palace to which Julius had recently moved. As was probably already envisioned, the decoration of the Stanza would feature pictorial evocations of distinct fields or even worlds of learning, subjects to which Raphael responded with remarkable originality, effectively beginning in 1509 with a fresco, the *School of Athens* (Fig. 2), which remains one of his greatest achievements and must have confirmed his position in the papal court. On Raphael's arrival in the Vatican, indeed, a group of artists was already at work in the new papal apartment; within a year at most the young artist assumed control of the mural decoration in the Stanza as leader of a team that followed his directions.[1] Though the pace of

work remained impressive, Julius's apparent initial focus on speed of execution yielded to the prospect of a qualitative advance, if not perhaps to a new understanding of the power of cultural expression, or even what we might now refer to as cultural capital.

The starting point for the following discussions was direct observation, beginning with the frescoes in the Stanza that Raphael, as a relative newcomer to Rome, created for Pope Julius II, and which remain among his most admired works.[2] Raphael's astonishing achievement has been often described. In a single room (Fig. 1), the Stanza della Segnatura, Raphael's initial commission in the Vatican (c.1509-11), he evoked the theological and institutional foundations of the Roman Church; the major figures in the history of Ancient Greek philosophy; the legacy of ancient poetry continuing into the artist's own time; and law and justice. Essentially celebratory in character, the imagery belongs to a category of oratorical performance known to the classical rhetoricians as epideictic, i.e., designed to honor and praise the respective subject.[3] No doubt, there was also a concern with persuasion, the fundamental objective of rhetoric, in terms of the claims made in the frescoes about the status and sanctity of the papal patron and the venerable institution that he led. Nevertheless, a main objective of the imagery was certainly to flatter the pope, whose brainchild it ultimately was and whose portrait appears in one of the frescoes (Fig. 32), as well as visitors confronted with motifs that might inspire their own feats of erudite interpretation. This is very far from what today would qualify as propaganda; indeed, it was all the more effective for that.

Raphael's work in the Stanza earned him rapid recognition and he was soon appointed as leader of the equipe of painters working in the papal apartment. In this way, Raphael received a commission that implicitly placed him on or at least near the level of the two other great artists employed by Julius in the Vatican complex, in which Michelangelo and Bramante, both considerably senior to Raphael, were also already at work on projects that would redefine the practice and principles of art and architecture. Shortly after arriving in Rome, Raphael, who was close to Bramante, would have been well aware of the expectations and challenges associated with working for a notoriously impatient and demanding, but also discerning patron such as Julius II.

History, Quasi-History, and Non-History

In the course of his Roman career, Raphael's areas of responsibility expanded and changed, requiring him to become increasingly dependent on trusted assistants, some of whom were or became significant artists in their

own right. In particular, by dramatizing select incidents in the history of the Church and the papacy, members of the workshop contributed to the sequence of fresco cycles in the papal apartment that together form a visual epic; appropriately, one of the series, the *Fire in the Borgo* (Fig. 3), includes an unmistakable quotation from Virgil's great epic poem, the *Aeneid,* the image of three generations of refugees fleeing a burning city. As I argue in Chapter 7, Raphael's insertion in an image from papal history of an unmistakable motif from the *Aeneid,* a poem he greatly admired*,* is entirely typical of the artist's *modus operandi* from at least the beginning of his Roman career. In this painting, in my view, Raphael expressed defiance of the basic classical rules of compositional and thematic unity, the Aristotelian ideal that in a much-quoted article Kurt Badt nevertheless found embodied in the *Fire in the Borgo* (Fig. 3).[4] On the contrary I posit a correspondence with a pictorial fashion that was certainly far from epic, that for the so-called "grotesque," which Raphael embraced with particular energy and inventiveness, encouraging one of his most important and original assistants, Giovanni da Udine, to became a major specialist in an incipient genre. Inherent in this genre is the insertion of elements differing – e.g., by iconography, genre, derivation, or material -- from the surrounding pictorial field. This could certainly be said of Aeneas's intrusion into a ninth-century emergency in the *Fire in the Borgo*.

Julius II died in February 1513. For his successor Leo X de' Medici (r.1513-1520), from about 1517 Raphael and his workshop designed striking decorations in the "grotesque" manner. These dramatize the range of styles and genres in which Raphael worked and certainly have nothing obviously in common with the historical paintings in the papal apartment, in which Leo continued the existing pattern of commissions. Of course, the latter made sure that his own portrait, rather than that of Julius, was integrated into the frescoes as a virtual witness of great events or even as a participant in them.

The history paintings in the papal apartment, as well as the anachronic but quasi-historical images in the Stanza della Segnatura, on the whole show actions occurring as if on a kind of stage in a defined moment of space and time.[5] In the grotesque decorative paradigm, in contrast, a remarkable and fantastic variety of motifs and figures, some hybrid or even monstrous in character, disport themselves across the surface in accordance with a fluid and apparently irrational and emphatically anti-perspectival mode of composition (Fig. 6). The inclusion, within inset vignettes, of relatively conventional styes of representation only enhances the overall effect of licentious freedom from prevailing, if recently established, principles of composition.

In large part thanks to Raphael's embrace of the grotesque style, which I discuss further in the following chapter, it became increasingly a distinct genre of decorative art. "The grotesque" was famously grounded in Roman antiquity, though its emergence challenged existing protocols of *all'antica* art. A key development in the early Renaissance was the development of the idea of the frame setting a boundary to an image seen, as Leone Battista Alberti famously theorized in his treatise on painting (1435-1436), through a rectangular window and constituting a unified visual field, organized by one-point perspective. Such a frame assumed canonical form through the incorporation of classical pilasters to the sides and a horizontal entablature across the top.[6]

The model of a unified, bounded image was challenged, however, by new paradigms arising from antiquarian discoveries.[7] These include Roman wall paintings and to a lesser extent such objects as Roman sarcophagi reliefs, sought-after objects of display in the newly established sculpture collections of Rome, which typically lack framing elements of the type that emerged in the Quattrocento.[8] In his panel paintings, however, Raphael observed the limits of the frame, as he does for example in the four spandrel panels in the vault of the Stanza della Segnatura (I discuss the *Apollo and Marsyas* below). Nevertheless, already in his earliest major Roman mural project, the frescoes in the Stanza, Raphael challenges boundaries and perhaps even the idea of boundary itself. In subtle ways, I contend, innovations in the Stanza can be seen as pointing the way to the experimentation of the few years before Raphael's untimely death.

In the following chapters I will argue, more generally, that in studies of Raphael's *modus operandi* known to me a crucial aspect has been left out of account. In crucial respects, there is a remarkable yet seemingly paradoxical consistency between the Stanza frescoes and later projects of very different type connected to Raphael's experimentation with the new fashion of grotesque ornament, to his adoption of the relatively new technology, as well as economic enterprise, of print making, and to his ermergence as an architect and antiquarian. This range of activity is evidence of a willingness not only to cross boundaries – whether professional, iconographical, or medial – but also to flout expectations that we can include under the general rubric of *decorum*.

On occasion, notably, Raphael responded to prominent commissions with a subtle but unmistakable departure from what may have been an official program or the likely intentions of a patron. As we will see, this assertion of independence, enabled though the rapid recognition of his artistic and intellectual powers, is also perceptible in Raphael's approach to life, in particular to his role as a man of the court in papal employ.

The striking rise in social and professional status, and no doubt also in self-regard, that Raphael accomplished with remarkable speed in his early years in Rome, was only enhanced by later events. The obvious question arises: how could Raphael do it? Obviously, he possessed skill and fluency in drawing that set him apart even from the other, highly qualified artists working in the papal apartment. In his biography of the artist, first published in 1550 in the first edition of his *Lives of the Artists*, Giorgio Vasari applied to Raphael a term of key importance in his account of the development of art from the "stiffness" of the late Quattrocento to the new "Third Age" initiated by Leonardo and dominated by Michelangelo and Raphael. The much-discussed term *grazia*,[9] applies in personal terms to the quality of charisma undoubtedly possessed by Raphael, in fact more clearly than by Vasari's real hero, the difficult and moody Michelangelo. In relation to epochal change, however, it has to do with the observance or rather transcendence of rules in an artist's approach to image making. However, there were still rules to master.

The Art that Conceals Art

As is well known, the notion of *grazia* is closely connected to that of *sprezzatura*, a term made famous by Baldassare Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier,* which he began writing at the papal court a few years before Raphael's death, completed in the 1520s, and finally published in 1538 in response to the appearance of pirated copies.[10] The reception of Castiglione's book is one of the most important developments in early modern culture, making the concept of *sprezzatura* known across Europe as an indispensable characteristic of a courtier or "gentleman."[11] It refers, in short, to an assumed nonchalance and facility carried off without evident effort or without betraying the study and practice necessary for most aspiring courtiers.[12]

The book mentions and carries the imprint of Castiglione's friend Raphael,[13] whose talent as a courtier was perhaps hardly less than that as an artist, though he died long before Castiglione had finished his book, on which he inevitably drew on his own experience as a diplomat, military commander, and courtier with literary aspirations. Nevertheless, the concept brilliantly expressed by Castiglione's *sprezzatura* had had a long history in ancient literary culture, whether in connection with conduct or with literary or artistic performance. The basic idea is that simulation is required: it is preferable to conceal the effort taken to achieve a level of skill or expertise in a discipline or profession. In a familiar formulation, art should conceal

art (*ars est celare artem*).[14] As noted below, the idea has particular currency in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

The overriding aim is to seem natural rather than to be natural, even when benefiting from extensive training and the attentions of educators. As we will see, Raphael's naturalness as an artist, his *facilità,* was greatly admired, though certainly he worked very hard to amass an archive of drawings, especially after ancient sculptures, that he mostly made himself and that provided models and inspiration for various projects. It is likely, however, that Raphael did not conceal his engagement with ancient sculpture, especially in view of the interest in antiquity on the part of many if not most intellectuals in Rome, including some important collectors. His drawings may have served as a calling card in his exploration of the resources of Rome. In Raphael's case, then, for the art that conceals art we must look elsewhere.

The Call for Harmony

A recurrent concept in the literature on Raphael is that of harmony. This is in a sense a corollary of the idea of naturalness, in that in a harmonious painting or indeed personality the various parts or elements fit together without being forced. Though rarely the subject of analysis,[15] harmony is a quality often perceived to be inherent in Raphael's work or even embodied in his person, in a mirroring of art and life that is not uncommon in writing about Renaissance artists.[16] There is certainly good reason for an emphasis on harmony in relation to Raphael's work, especially in view of the cosmic as well as psychic connotations of the term in the Pythagorean and Platonist traditions that were prominent in humanist culture as well as in Raphael's image of Philosophy, or at least of philosophers, in the *School of Athens,* in which both Plato and Pythagoras are prominent (Fig. 2, at lower left).[17]

Such an emphasis distracts, however, from the effect of certain motifs in this and other paintings that might at first sight be dismissed as marginal, but that I will argue undermine claims often made or implied in the literature about the harmony, on different levels, of Raphael's multi-figure compositions, or even more generally in relation to his approach to composition as such. As we will see, certain of Raphael's more ambitious works contain within themselves a challenge, however sly and even covert, to their own iconographical and semiotic coherence.

A reader conversant with Renaissance aesthetics might object that such motifs simply exemplify the central principle of *varietas* (the Latin equivalent of the Greek *poikilia*), often associated with the idea of *copia,* abundance.[18] Certainly, the idea of organic unity is an essential element of

the classical conception of a work of art[19] (I discuss the influential *Art of Poetry* of Horace later), but it tolerates or even requires the presence of highly disparate or varied elements that reinforce overall coherence. The obvious model is a body formed of limbs and parts that contrast individually in function and form, though each is necessary for the whole organism to flourish or even survive; the ideological implications especially of the idea of the "body politic" are readily apparent, especially in a period of shifting political models and growing authoritarianism.[20]

An alternate metaphor is that of a mosaic composed of numerous distinct pieces that only together constitute a composition. A related and especially relevant example might be the inlay stonework known as Cosmatesque which is composed of fragments of marble typically sawn or cut from antique columns and organized in geometric designs. In view of the abundance of material it is unsurprising that the style was especially prevalent, in the medieval centuries and early Renaissance, in and around Rome. A striking example is the pavement of the Stanza della Segnatura (Fig. 1), which was in existence when Raphael arrived on the scene, and in which the effect of wholeness presupppposes prior fragmentation.[21]

It is possible, then, that Raphael's deployment of inlaid and "marginal" elements owed something to a Cosmatesque model. In some of his projects, however, there seems to be no comforting conception of variety in unity. Instead, there is the suggestion of a slyly subversive or rebellious attitude somewhat at variance with the conventional view of the charming, compliant, and above all *grazioso* Raphael. I will suggest, further, that this somewhat edgy aspect of Raphael's activity as artist can also be understood in connection with and in the light of his handling of his major role in his years in Rome, that of court artist. His ability to maneuver with agility and remarkable success in the complex and potentially perilous environment of the papal court raises questions about the qualities and experience that enabled him to understand and to adjust to the "rules of the game," both at court and in various social situations while largely maintaining an impressive degree of independence from courtly pressures. In these discussions, "another Raphael" will emerge.

Alternate Harmonies: The Lesson of Marsyas

The god Apollo appears three times in the Stanza, not to speak of his implied presence in the view, no longer possible, from "the window in Parnassus" (Fig. 4) toward the god's legendary shrine on the Vatican Hill. As we will see, Apollo appears in two wall frescoes as the god of culture and order, perhaps even as an analogue to Pope Julius II himself, as well as

in a spandrel panel that depicts his violent revenge on the satyr Marsyas, who had unwisely challenged the god to a musical contest (Fig.5). Neverthless, even as he is about to order an assistant to commence stripping the satyr's skin from his body, the god sits unperturbed, with his lyre by his side, a symbol of musical and cosmic harmony. Not least in the wake of Giorgio Vasari's conception of Raphael the man and artist (composed 35 years after Raphael's death), scholars tend to emphasize his relations with the various milieus in which he operated as free from conflict or rancour, or in a word in harmony with his surroundings and in himself, not least in his role as artist.

No doubt there is much justification for such a view, though I will argue that in many cases Raphael undermines or dispenses with harmony as an aesthetic value, and implicitly with its wider connotations. My argument is indebted to the late Jutta Held's discussion of what she has called "harmonious interpretation,"[22] by which she refers to the imposition of ideologically determined coherence, and indeed harmony, to works of art -- her admittedly extreme example is Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas* -- that display characteristics that undermine any such assumptions (it is pointless to include a photograph, which would have to be black and white).[23]

The image of Marsyas in the Stanza della Segnatura in the spandrel between the walls of Poetry and Theology (Fig. 5) has none of the gruesome violence of Titian's image, which is a pitiless evocation of Ovid's description (*Metamorphoses* 6.382-400) of the satyr's ruined and bloody body as "all wound" after his skin has been stripped from him, a gruesome punishment for his hubris, as perceived by the god of the lyre. In the Stanza panel (presumably at least designed by Raphael), on the other hand, Marsyas is represented as about to meet his fate while an attendant crowns Apollo, the victor of the contest, with a laurel wreath; the god holds his lyre in his left hand. With hands tied together above his head, Marsyas hangs from a tree in what we can presume is an agony of expectation. The ideological dimension is evident: in his hubristic challenge to Apollo Marsyas tried /to pit his own rustic pipes, an emblematic instrument of the pastoral world of peasants, against the god's lyre, as much a symbol as an instrument of a refined court, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The story of Marysas has multiple resonances with the Stanza frescoes, as well as with the grotesque imagery, discussed later, in which the punishment of satyrs is a rather frequent motif, even if without the excess of Ovid or Titian. Deprived of skin a human body, like that of Marsyas, reveals nothing but the sinews that connect raw flesh and bone[24]; it is an apt metaphor for the buildings of ancient Rome, as Raphael encountered them stripped not only of their bodily stability and integrity but also their skin,

the ornamental facing that fascinated and inspired Raphael. In the following chapter, we will see how Raphael created perhaps what he saw as a manifesto for a public-facing architecture in accordance with his understanding about the principles of Roman interior design, the character and importance of ornament, and the aesthetic qualities and even emotional mood of the environments inhabited at least by more affluent Romans. In his remarkably diverse oeuvre, however, Raphael shows his awareness, based on careful study, of the range and diversity of Roman visual culture, including occasional evocations of the well-known violence of Roman entertainment and even domestic life. As is not least apparent in his grotesque designs, the contradictions of ancient Roman civilization – as well as that of his own time – did not escape Raphael, though mitigated through his unerringly moderate and polite approach, part of his exercise of *grazia*.

Nevertheless, the tensions even within Raphael's most conspicuous commissioned works are real. A symptomatic case of the response to Raphael's art is the eloquent essay by Marzia Faietti that opens the catalogue of the recent exhibition in Rome on the fourth centenary of the artist's death. In Faietti's view the *School of Athens* can be seen as "a programmatic manifesto" for "the hope for harmony between all faiths and philosophies," though she rightly pushes back against the older, too emphatic claim for the painting as a call for harmony through institutional and personal reform.[25] This would be, she notes, to disregard the probable role of the complex figure of Julius II in the development of the imagery, not to speak of Raphael's own agency. There is much to be said for Faietti's nuanced account of Raphael's achievement, though I will argue that nevertheless there are important instances where the imagery he designed takes issue with itself, sometimes in a markedly unharmonious way.

A Fresh View of the Stanza

The epideictic aspect of the frescoes does not preclude certain awkward and even discordant details that seem to me to unsettle or question the apparent visual rhetoric of the Stanza. It is no doubt true that Raphael left interpretive puzzles, especially through the anonymity of so many of the figures in two of the frescoes in the Stanza, and many modern viewers have accepted the challenges that he apparently set to those hoping to attach names to persons. Despite my own skepticism about such an approach to the frescoes, I too will offer some suggestions below. Apart from a brief passing comment here and there, however, in the voluminous scholarly literature on Raphael there is a striking absence of attention to what we

might call the rhetorical complexity of the frescoes, and certainly not to discordant elements.[26] This is surely a corollary of the insistence on harmony mentioned above.

In the elucidation of the frescoes in the Stanza, a key notion is genre, the regularities of format that provide a useful instrument for approaching literary abundance. As discussed in Chapter 5, the classifying role of genre is especially true of the image of the poets of the *Parnassus* fresco, but applies more generally. As we will see, certain passages inserted into larger compositions are distinguished by their character as narrative from the surrounding imagery, which as is often pointed out, is blatantly anachronic.[27] Accordingly, the various personages gathered in Raphael's frescoes may represent moments in the history of philosophy or theology, but they are largely removed from any historical sequence. Like the difference between allegorical and non-allegorical imagery that is also fundamental to the organization of the Stanza, that between narrative and non-narrative elements is one of genre, in modern terminology, implying a sensitivity on Raphael's part to the kinds of distinctions, notably between modes of speech or communication, that feature in the handbooks of rhetoric.

An Unexpected Continuity

A crucial step in the argument connects Raphael's earliest Roman works, the paintings in the Stanza, to some of the last commissions that he tackled before his premature and unexpected death, in particular the grotesque decorations designed by Raphael from about 1517 largely for Julius's successor, Leo X; the most famous are those in the Loggia of Leo X (Fig. 6). As is well known, the fashion for grotesques was famously inspired by the wall paintings of the *Domus aurea* (Golden House) of Nero, which had recently been discovered and explored by enthusiastic artists. These subterranean spaces or *grotte* (caves), from which the term "grotesque" is derived, were buried under construction carried out later in the empire, not incidentally cancelling the memory of Nero. Their discovery was a sensation, leading to a burst of creative license in Cinquecento art. Raphael was a key figure in this development, albeit with his usual moderation.

Two features of the paintings in the *Domus aurea* especially caught the attention of Renaissance artists. One was the irrational insubstantiality and hybridity, even monstrosity, of many motifs, all floating in undifferentiated, non-perspectival space on the walls; it was to these motifs that the term "grotesque" and its equivalents in many European languages mainly refer.

The other important feature, which I wish to emphasize here, is the presence of various realistic small scenes and motifs among the more conventionally grotesque elements (Fig. 7). Accordingly, "the grotesque" became a familiar genre of decoration that in part involved the incorporation of elements that, considered singly, were not grotesque at all. Beside such *naturalia* as birds or lizards, many such elements are themselves the representations of representations, including stucco reliefs referring to the wealth of imagery of ancient visual culture, e.g., in coins and medals.

The effect is somewhat paradoxical: when inset among grotesque decoration such material contributes to the grotesque effect, but in most cases, it takes the form of a realistic and far from "grotesque" vignette of some sort, framed off from its surroundings. In the latter respect there is a clear difference with the vignettes in the Stanza frescoes, which lack formal enframement. Nevertheless, they constitute largely unrecognized "enclaves" within the imagery surrounding them.

Over two decades, therefore, Raphael's approach to pictorial composition remained consistent at least in the inclusion of vignettes, albeit of different formal character. In the Stanza frescoes the vignettes exemplify a mode of communication, that of narrative, that marks them off from their non-narrative context, even without a literal border or frame. Raphael's apparently self-conscious handling of the contrast reveals, I will argue, a grasp of distinctions that must have come naturally to authors or visual artists familiar with the shifts in canonical literary texts (notably in Virgil's *Aeneid*, which every educated person knew), for example from narrative to dialogue or from one genre to another. We can assume familiarity, even to some extent on Raphael's part, also with devices and strategies of expression and communication outlined in the handbooks and treatises of classical rhetoric.

The art of Rhetoric covered far more than the formalization of verbal communication, especially oratory; under the heading of *actio* it included consideration of the (always male) orator's use of his body through modulation of his voice, gesture, and the use of visual props. Especially in Cicero's writings there is a striking overlap between the cultivation of rhetoric and the ordering of conduct, and between eloquence and moral character. The literature on rhetoric was therefore closely allied in the Renaissance to the emerging genre of literature on conduct, which includes, but was transcended by, Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, with its elegant and nuanced discussions. Judging by his successful negotiation of the the difficult and sometimes perilous environment of the papal court, Raphael had some of the same sensitivity to modes of social performance that shines from the book of his friend Castiglione.

The Game of the Court: The Dilemma of the Courtier

In short, to anticipate later discussions, both as a maker of imagery and as a man of the court Raphael had both the wit and the understanding to master what we might call, with a nod to Castiglione's use of the term, the rules of the game. Raphael took part, we might say, in various social "games," each requiring an effort to understanding the formal or informal rules and the stakes involved, both for himself and others.[28] However defined, games were an important element of courtly society,[29] though by the sixteenth century a contrast was becoming evident between the games played at court and vernacular games.[30] In any case, Castiglione surely wrote from experience when he included in the *Book of the Courtier* the idea of a game as a model for participation in courtly life. Early in the book (I.6), moreover, Castiglione defines the project of defining a perfect courtier, the fundamental subject of the book, as itself a game, albeit played seriously.[31]

This textured understanding of the rules inherent in a game or other structured social process is consistent with the contemporary realization that such major artists as Michelangelo and increasingly Raphael transcended the rules and principles of the classical tradition; this is at the heart of Vasari's notion of *grazia.* This is also reflected in Raphael's fantastic yet in their own way ordered grotesque decorations, which visitors would certainly have admired for their prolixity, variety, and sophistication, as if entering into the visual game contrived by Raphael, at very least with the approval of the pope.

The stucco reliefs inserted along the grotesque ornament, moreover, offer a plethora of *all'antica* motifs and incidents that surely served to express the range and rich variety of classical culture (Fig. 7) while flattering potential visitors able to recognize specific objects and scenes and familiar with the classical derivation of the various intermingled styles of decoration on the walls. I discuss Raphael's various grotesque projects in the following chapter.

Rivalry and Strife

As in his grotesque decorations, in some of Raphael's most famous and intensively-studied paintings certain motifs seem to be in dialogue with the compositions of which they are part. A possible counter argument to such a view would emphasize the familiar Renaissance interest both in copious variety and in the related quality of vividness, technically known as *enargeia* or *evidentia*. Through the device of *ekphrasis*, strictly the

description of a work of art, literary texts assumed or sought to assume the qualities of a visual image: Virgil's *Aeneid* includes several famous examples, as discussed in Chapter 7.[32] The contrast and sometimes rivalry of visual and verbal means of expression became institutionalized in the so-called *paragone*, a familiar subject in Renaissance studies, though its heyday was later than Raphael's lifetime.

There was however serious interest in Raphael's milieu in one of the key texts of the *paragone* literature, Horace's so-called *Art of Poetry*, which moves readily between verbal and visual material. The text, presented as an informal letter to friends of the poet, includes the fateful phrase *ut pictura poesis* ("as is painting, so is poetry") that inspired so much discussion. In the *School of Athens,* certainly, Raphael accepted the challenge of giving visual expression to the rather recalcitrant subject of Ancient Greek thought, or at least representative thinkers, known for their interior lives (Fig. 2). Perhaps in accordance with the wishes of the pope, Raphael did not resort to the obvious and traditional device of allegory (as we will see, this was largely restricted to the vault) or to an array of separate imaginary portraits. He sought not only to individualize and humanize the philosophers themselves but also to give them expressive life by setting them in credible groups of diverse colleagues and students, or just admirers, with whom many of them interact. Though there is little respect for historical time, the *School of Athens* has the undoubted air of a history painting

Of course, Raphael can hardly have achieved his collective images of theologians, philosophers, or poets without some collaboration on the part of scholars able to steer him to relevant sources and help him with construing them. There has been considerable discussion about the various figures at the papal court who might have played such a role, as we will see. Eventually, in any case, Raphael was comfortable enough in the company of "his" philosophers that he portrayed himself striding confidently into their assembly (Fig. 2, at lower right), as if he belonged among them, or at least among the geometricians, geographers, and astronomers into whose immediate company he ventures. Not by chance, surely, the latter are dependent – and this was perhaps the point – on visual communication by means of diagrams and physical models, such as the fresco shows. As might be expected, moreover, Raphael's intrusion does not appear in the cartoon in the Ambrosiana that shows most of the composition; his addition of his own likeness to the finished fresco was a major indication of his rise in status. However, it was also typical of him to share the credit by placing himself next to a colleague, perhaps Il Sodoma who had been working in the Stanza prior to Raphael's arrival.

Beyond Appearances

An emphasis on formal variety, as mentioned above, does not invalidate the stronger characterization of inset vignettes that I have proposed. In the *School of Athens* and related frescoes, especially, Raphael emphasizes differences of human type and affect among the figures in the fresco, while dramatizing certain interactions and even, in some cases, hinting at the process of thought, though thoughts themselves were obviously beyond even Raphael's powers of representation. Beyond appearances, however, I will argue for the expression of profound theoretical or philosophical issues about which Raphael could have gained basic but sufficient knowledge from the sources available to him.

As we saw, the fresco is often claimed to evoke or embody harmony not only within ancient philosophy but also of the latter with Christianity. However, Raphael emphasizes cases of dissension not only as a dramatic device but also, more importantly, as a concept of importance in ancient thinking both about the natural and the social world. In short, the *School of Athens* is not just an image of men who communally represent philosophy; it can claim to be itself a philosophical work. Part of Raphael's deep dive into the classical legacy was an engagement with theoretical texts and with discussions of method and intellectual process, as well, no doubt, as the stories of gods and heroes. These too, however, might well have philosophical relevance.[33]

A key theme in prominent ancient philosophical systems is the operation of strife, as a a kind of cosmic discord, instituting dynamism and change in the universe. I will argue that Raphael shows himself aware of the theoretical stakes in part by giving emphasis to thinkers for whom strife (*eris*) is a contral concept. In spite of a tradition of claims for the concord of the thought of Plato and Aristotle, further, as represented by Raphael the two "princes of philosophy" are distinguished by age and by emphatic physical characteristics, and by a very explicit opposition of gesture and gaze.[34] The concern with the operation of strife or discord in the world is far older, however, than the emergence of "philosophy." Notably, as the famous Renaissance philologist Poliziano understood, discord is connected to the theme of conflict between gods in Homer's *Iliad,* the ur-text of the classical legacy; strife is "arguably the epic theme par excellence."[35] And as we will see in Chapter 7, the strife that arises as a result of the Judgment of Paris leads to the destruction not only of the city of Troy, but also to the eventual elimination of the race of heroes, as emphasized by Hesiod, the other great epic poet of archaic Greece (*Works and Days* 161-66).[36]

Young and Old

Simply as types of humanity the opposition of Plato and Aristotle points to a further important theme in the *School of Athens*, and indeed, as we will see, in the Stanza as a whole. Beside their association with contrasting areas of philosophical concern, symbolized in the books they carry, Raphael's Plato and Aristotle emphatically represent different "ages of man." Plato is a frail elder fixated on the metaphysical realm indicated by his upward pointing gesture, as well as the text, the *Timaeus*, that he holds upright under his left arm and which links Plato's metaphysics with his conception of the nature of the universe. Accordingly, the cosmic dimension in Raphael's late great print *The Judgment of Paris,* discussed in Chapter 7, echoes his earlier intellectual preoccupations.

Next to Plato in the *School of Athens*, Aristotle is a markedly vigorous figure in the prime of life. To mark the contrast with Plato's more otherworldly concerns Aristotle holds a book in a roughly horizontal position, requiring some effort, and makes a sweeping gesture with his right hand that seems directed to his fellow humans. Indeed, the gesture emphasizes the major concerns of his book, the *Nicomachean Ethics,* which discusses the social and even economic relations of humanity as well as the topic of moral standards.

In short, the contrast of the two great thinkers addresses the topic of generational opposition or even conflict that, as we will see, recurs several times in the Stanza; Raphael's own youthful appearance among the greybeards is a case in point. Further, the look that Aristotle gives to Plato suggests that Raphael knew of Aristotle's critique of Plato's metaphysics, the theory of the Forms, or at least of the existence of rival camps or schools in antiquity. Two of the most important were formed by Plato and his followers of at the famous Academy, and by Aristotle at the Lyceum, the shrine of Apollo *lukeios*, "wolfish Apollo," already a known space for philosophical exchanges.[37] Both were situated beyond the city walls, though appropriately in view of Platonic idealism the Academy was in a markedly less urban location.[38] Later, of course, the names referred to "schools" rather than places.

The organization of learning into rival schools is a familiar feature of the history of philosophy, from antiquity to Raphael. However, especially with the rise of Platonic and Neo-Platonic studies in the Florentine Renaissance and the reaction against Aristotelian scholasticism, the relationship of the legacies of the two great philosophers remained an urgent question, in spite of the existence of other schools. The *School of Athens* expresses both the rivalry and importance of Plato and Aristotle as the

central figures; at the same time, as we scan the painting as a whole, it shows the rich diversity of Ancient Greek thought.

As registered in the *School of Athens*, finally, discord is a matter of philosophical inquiry that however does not belong to some ideal world separate from messy human affairs, such as Raphael's fresco at first sight seems to indicate. The character in the *School of Athens* most associated with discord is Diogenes the Cynic, whose preferred haunt was the marketplace, not unlike Socrates, as discussed in Chapter 3. Further, the admission of discord as a theme, albeit somewhat subtle and secondary, in the fresco implies a link to the repercussions within the papal court of the unsettled international context and of the rivalries and hostilities between nations, not to speak of their representatives and partisans in Rome. Even Raphael's painting in the Stanza can be seen as a riposte to the imagery in the apartment on the floor beneath of Alexander VI Borgia, a most unpopular pontiff whose election confirmed the growing Spanish presence in Rome. With its images of branches of knowledge, Alexander's apartment clearly supplied a point of reference for Raphael but also, in its emphatic use of allegory, a model to be transcended.

Raphael and Authorship

Apart from the philosophical positions and theories described in the Platonic corpus, in the texts in which Socrates is a major interlocutor Plato attributes to him a basic model of doing philosophy, the combative method of dialogue known as the *elenchos*.[39] Needless to say, the dialogues in question were well-known to Renaissance humanists, who prized the literary as well as philosophical genre of dialogue (as in the *Book of the Courtier*), as well as the harsher genre of invective.[40] In the *School of Athens*, as we will see, Raphael includes Socrates's rather fierce engagement in philosophical dialogue within an assembly of apparently more passive contemplators, as if overcome by the great man's seductive argumentation (Fig. 33).

No doubt, the daunting task of decorating the Stanza with highly learned imagery was a project beyond any individual's capacity to realize, and Raphael's own independent writings indicate a relatively scanty education, especially in contrast to the intellectuals that clustered in and around the papal court.[41] Accordingly, there can be no doubt that Raphael worked with at least one learned adviser to develop the large and diverse cast of characters that populate the Stanza frescoes presumably with the aim making their physical appearance and hints of their inner life correspond in a credible way to what was known about the character of their thinking. In