

RAPHAEL'S *PORTRAIT OF A YOUTH* FROM THE CZARTORYSKI COLLECTIONS

Summary

Portrait of a Youth by Raphael, since the beginning of the 19th century in the possession of the Czartoryski family in Poland, disappeared during World War II. The research works on the painting, carried out since the mid-19th century, have focused mainly on Raphael's authorship, which has been questioned by some scholars, and on the attempts to establish the identity of the person portrayed.

In favour of Raphael's certain authorship spoke, among others: J. D. Passavant (1839), W. Bode (1886), G. Gronau (1915), M. Logan-Berenson (1915), H. Ochenkowski (1916), O. Fischel (1916), T. Gerevich (1918), W. Suida (1948), L. Dussler (1966, 1971), L. Becherucci (1968), W. Kelber (1979) and J. P. Cousin (1985).

Some scholars, among others: F. A. Gruyer (1881), E. Münz (1886), S. Ortolani (1940) and Camesasca (1956), admitted of the possibility of Raphael's having co-operated with a disciple or a helper.

Still other scholars tried to link the portrait with other artist, among others with: Parmigianino (J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, 1882), Jacopo Palma the Elder (S. H. Fraser, 1883), or Sebastiano del Piombo (B. Berenson, 1910). Raphael's authorship was also questioned by S. J. Freedberg in 1961.

In the sitter's person some researchers tried to perceive: 1) Raphael himself (that is how the person in Paulus Pontius' illustration was referred to in the 1st half of the 17th century; also J. D. Passavant thought the painting to be a self-portrait), 2) the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria della Rovere (Gruyer compared the portrait from the Czartoryski collections with the alleged representation of that duke in Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens* in the person of the beautiful youth in white in the group of philosophers on the left; Gruyer's conception was accepted by M. Sokołowski in 1892), 3) the Duke of Mantua, Federigo Gonzaga (E. v. Liphardt, 1912, H. Ochenkowski, 1916), 4) a woman (O. Fischel, 1915, S. J. Freedberg, 1961). J. Burchardt was of an individual opinion that this is not a representation of a concrete person but a freely expressed study, which- while being elaborated - became elevated to the rank of a painting.

The history of the *Portrait of a Youth* prior to its purchase by the Czartoryskis is not exactly known. After Raphael's death in 1520, the picture may have passed into the hands of his disciple, Giulio Romano, who carried it to Mantova. There, in 1623, the portrait attracted the attention of Anton van Dyck, who executed according to it a free drawing in his travel sketchbook. Next, the painting landed in

Venice, where around 1800 it was purchased by Adam Jerzy and Konstanty Czartoryski, who offered it to their mother Izabela Czartoryska, for the museum at Puławy being arranged by her. The painting, since 1809 on show in the Gothic House, remained at Puławy until 1830, from where, during the November Uprising, it became evacuated to Sieniawa and then to Paris. Following the transfer of the Czartoryski collections back to Poland, Raphael's panel came to occupy a prominent place in the Czartoryski Museum in Cracow, opened in 1876. Deposited at the Dresden Gallery during World War I, it returned to Cracow in 1920. In 1939, stolen by the Nazis from Sieniawa, where it had been hidden, the painting was moved to Berlin. Next, it came into Governor Frank's possession and during the war adorned his residence on Wawel. From here the Hitlerites removed it at the close of the war and at that time the portrait became lost.

An attempt at a formal analysis of the painting. The sitter's person has been posed in such a way that it can be easily inscribed into a circular form, thought to be perfect in the Renaissance. Raphael, in the early Roman period, readily applied a composition based on circular arrangements, among others in the Vatican frescoes. It is worth noticing that in *The School of Athens* Plato holds in his hand his own dialogue *Timajos*, containing an extensive discussion on the perfection of the circle, which – according to this Greek philosopher – constitutes the leading principle of the entire cosmic order. The way of showing the sitter, decidedly spatial, contains a hidden dynamics resulting from a slanting position of his trunk in relation to the picture's surface and the turn of his head in the opposite direction. Such an arrangement suggests the rotation of the body around its own axis and gives an impression of catching the person in one short phase of such a movement. Circular forms have been superimposed on a rigorous network of the verticals and the horizontals fixed by the lines and edges of the window, wall and table at which the youth is sitting. All these elements, balanced and very precisely arranged in the painting, produce a harmonious unity. Noteworthy is a clear colour-rhythm of the painting, arranged diagonally: from the bottom left towards the top right corner the blues follow one another, while from the bottom right corner towards the top left one the brownish-gold tones are arranged. The painting has been constructed on the basis of only four colours: white, black, blue and brown. The colour green has only a limited application.

An important element in the picture's composition is the juxtaposition of the surface of the table, covered with a patterned carpet, with a landscape seen through the window, which seems to illustrate a conscious contrast between the world of art and the world of nature. Order, balance, calm, solemnity and spiritual loftiness characterize this painting, which manifests the highest degree of constructional perfection, even against the entire *oeuvre* of Raphael himself.

A painterly image of the epoch's ideal man. A question arises whether the *Portrait of a Youth*, the painting formally perfect, could also constitute an attempt at representing the ideal man. This would have been in accordance with the spirit of the Renaissance, which brought several trials of creating model figures. The fullest such conceptions was voiced by Baldassare Castiglione in his famous work *Il Cortegiano*, written in the years 1508–1516 and published later, in 1528. It is highly probable that Castiglione, while preparing his treatise about the ideal man of his epoch, discussed the subject with Raphael, whom he knew well and with whom he worked together for Pope Leo X. Not through a coincidence did Castiglione become the addressee of Raphael's remark about the ideal image of a woman: "I'm saying that in order to paint one beautiful woman I would have to see many beauties, and only on condition you are with me, to make a choice. And for the lack of good judgements and beautiful women, I make use of a certain idea which was born in my mind".

We can assume that Raphael's *Portrait of a Youth* constitutes a painterly counterpart of Castiglione's literary proposal, an attempt at constructing – on the basis of a perfect idea born in the artist's mind and supported by observations of concrete persons – the image of the Renaissance *uomo ideale*, combining all optimal features. At the foundation of this conception, both literary and painterly, lies – doubtlessly – the Neo-Platonian idea of the perfect man, enjoying a considerable interest in the Renaissance, especially in the Florentine circles, with which Raphael had contact before he arrived in Rome. Raphael's young man is shown in a special moment of his life, in the full bloom of his beauty, charm and strength, by which he calls to mind certain creations of classical Greek art, above all of Praxiteles, whose *Resting Satyr* might have even been considered by Raphael while working on the portrait.

In the youth's image the analysing specialists discerned both male and female features, which takes on a deeper sense once we accept the painting to be a representation of the perfect person. This is connected with the problem of *androgyny*, vivid in Hellenism and finding a wide response in the philosophical and artistic conceptions of the mature Renaissance. They all were directed towards capturing a full picture of the world and the man containing in himself the whole *coincidentia oppositorum*, thus the combination within one single form of various opposing elements: divine and human, male and female, etc. It cannot be entirely precluded that Raphael, while construing this ideal personage, had also an artist and his high skills in mind. Assured of his own place in the world and convinced of the value of his art, flourishing at the time, without literally calling in his own physical similarity, Raphael, in a sense, created an image of the artist as a refined *cortegiano*, who among many various acquirements possesses also the mastery of the brush, which

he does not, however, need to demonstrate in the picture by means of special signs such as e.g. a brush or a palette. In this the *Portrait of a Youth* is suggestive, in a sense, of Albrecht Dürer's well-known self-portraits.

The lost *Portrait of a Youth* from the Czartoryski collections is nowadays generally acclaimed as Raphael's unquestionable work. The analysis of the painting demonstrates its closest connections with the outstanding works from the crowning period of the artist's creativity, that is around 1509–1516, when – among others – the frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura, *The Triumph of Galatea* and *The Sistine Madonna* were born. All those works are characterized by a similar compositional discipline in the construction of monumental clear-cut forms. The painting is, indubitably, one of the best portraits by Raphael and at the same time one of the most outstanding portraits that originated in Italy in the heyday of the Renaissance. "A moment of free and stirred life" (H. Wölfflin), captured in the picture and expressed in the way already close to mannerism, causes it to exert a powerful impression even through the mediation of a reproduction.