
THREE TITANS

By

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WITH PORTRAITS

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PREFACE

ANYONE who has ever seen the "Fettered Slaves" in the Louvre, or the Prophets in the corners of the Sistine ceiling, will be reminded of their Promethean emotions when he listens to the Ninth Symphony or one of Beethoven's last quartettes. The fire infused by Michael Angelo into the attitude of Moses has its analogue in the rebellious mood of the "Egmont" overture, and the melancholy of the earth-bound form sobs from many a great Adagio of Beethoven's.

A second path leads us from Beethoven to Rembrandt. The half-light flickering through certain passages in the later symphonies, the conflict between shadow and light which is to be perceived in the trios and sonatas of his middle period, formed Rembrandt's fundamental problem. And if the classical Michael Angelo assuredly differs from the naturalistic Rembrandt, the Florentine's lyric from the Dutchman's epic vein; no less assuredly are the two connected by and through Beethoven. In the last analysis the art of all three has yet another kinship, for each in his old age did—if not entirely abandon, at any rate alter and well-nigh repudiate his own method; the veteran Beethoven relaxed his chosen laws of rigorous construction, melodic phrasing, even of definitely appointed limi-

tations, and could find an outlet for his vast emotions only in an unbounded freedom of the imagination. Michael Angelo in his extreme old age forsook beauty, complexity of design, variety in pose and draping, and went back to the simplest linear forms; Rembrandt, who had been chary, sometimes timid, in his use of colour, eventually loaded his brush with a vivid red and yellow which till then he had always shunned.

Even in their destinies the three masters are comparable, for their characters were essentially akin and so drew down on each a similar fate. They were all, throughout life, misanthropical, enigmatic, distrustful; and at certain periods each approached the borderland of madness. Despite their prodigious successes, all three had been perpetually in conflict with the world; Michael Angelo strove for power, Rembrandt for luxury, Beethoven for love; but each attained his desire only by fits and starts, and always at the cost of bitter experiences. All three lost the few men and women whom they loved.

Look at the three heads, and you have the dæmonic affinity! Are they not all what the bourgeois calls ugly? The countenance of one was permanently disfigured by a blow which broke the nasal bone, and made his aspect inharmonious and sardonic; the features of the second grew more and more bloated from every kind of sensual indulgence; the third is the very type of the fallen Titan. None would have charmed a woman; no woman fell in love with any of them. And yet if those three heads, even though they were wholly unknown, should be distributed among thirty others of the kind one can observe in any street, and all were

hung on one long wall—everybody would be attracted by them, everybody would pause and inquire: “Who is that strange personage, regarding me with his unfathomable eyes? Is it a demi-god?” And we should answer: “Those are beings, more than men and less than gods. They are three Titans, who accepted battle with the gods.”

E. L.

CHRONOLOGY

MICHAEL ANGELO

- 1475 March 6. Born at Caprese.
1475-94 In Florence.
1488-89 Studies under Ghirlandajo and Bertoldo.
1489-92 At the court of Lorenzo de' Medici.
1491 His nose broken.
1494-95 In Bologna.
1496-1501 First Roman sojourn. *Pietà*.
1501-05 Florence; *David*; Cartoon of Soldiers Bathing.
1505-06 Second Roman sojourn. Tomb of Pope Julius II.
Quarrel with Julius II.
1506-08 Bologna. Reconciliation with the Pope.
1508-17 Third Roman sojourn.
1508-12 Ceiling of Sistine Chapel.
1513 Death of Julius II. Pope Leo X.
1517-34 In Florence.
1521 Death of Leo X.
1520-34 Chapel, and Medici tombs.
1523-34 Pope Clement VII.
1529 Siege of Florence. Director of Fortifications. Flight
and return.
1530 Fall of Florence.
1531-64 Friendship with Cavalieri.
1532-33 In Rome.
1534 Death of his father.
1534-64 His house and life in Rome.
1535-41 *The Last Judgment*.
1535-47 Friendship with Vittoria Colonna.
1542-50 Pauline Chapel frescoes.
1547 Death of Vittoria Colonna.
1547-64 Head-Architect of St. Peter's.
1555 Death of his servant Urbino.
1564 February 18. Michael Angelo dies at Rome.

REMBRANDT

- 1606 July 15. Born at Leyden.
 1620 Student.
 1624-27 Studies under Swanenburgh.
 1627 In Amsterdam.
 1628 (*circa*) First etching.
 1629 First self-portrait.
 1630-40 Self-portraits and Saskia.
 1631 Death of his father.
 1632-69 Lives in Amsterdam.
 1632 First *Anatomy* (The Hague).
 1634 Marries Saskia von Ulenburgh.
 1635 Self-portrait (London).
 1635 Self-portrait with Saskia (Dresden).
 1636 *Danaë* (Petersburg).
 1640 Death of his mother.
 1641 Birth of his son Titus.
 1642 Death of Saskia. *Night-Guard* (Amsterdam).
 1643 *Three Trees* (Etching).
 1649-62 Lives with and marries Hendrikje Stoffels.
 1649 (*circa*) A hundred gulden for a sketch.
 1654 Birth of his daughter Cornelia. Portrait of Jan Six (Amsterdam).
 1656 Bankruptcy. Second *Anatomy*. *Jacob's Blessing*.
 1658 Auction.
 1661 Last etchings. Business-partnership of wife and son.
 1662 Death of Hendrikje Stoffels.
 1665 (*circa*) *Saul and David*.
 1668 Death of his son Titus.
 1668 (*circa*) *Return of the Prodigal Son*.
 1669 Last self-portrait.
 1669 October 8. Rembrandt dies at Amsterdam.
 1673 Birth of Cornelia's son, Rembrandt.

BEETHOVEN

- 1770 December 16. Born at Bonn.
 1778 First public appearance at Cologne.

- 1781 Three sonatas for pianoforte.¹
- 1782 Makes acquaintance with Wegeler and Breuning.
- 1787 Death of his mother.
- 1787-1827 In Vienna.
- 1792 Studies with Haydn.
- 1792 Death of his father.
- 1795 Three Trios. Op. 1.
- 1796 Goes to Prague and Berlin.
- 1799-1800 Six string-quartettes. Op. 19.
- 1800 Begins to grow deaf.
- 1801 First Symphony.
- 1802 Second Symphony. *The Heiligen stadt Will.*
- 1803 *Kreutzer Sonata.*
- 1804 Third Symphony (*Eroica*).
- 1805 *Fidelio.*
- 1806 Fourth Symphony.
- 1805-07 Fifth Symphony.
- 1807 Sixth Symphony (Pastoral).
- 1809 Yearly income assured to him.
- 1811 B-major Trio. Op. 97.
- 1812 Seventh and Eighth Symphonies.
- 1812 Cast taken of his face; letter to the "Immortal Bel-loved."
- 1814-18 Illness and domestic misery.
- 1815 Death of his brother Karl. Guardianship of nephew.
- 1816-23 Ninth Symphony.
- 1818-22 *Missa Solemnis.*
- 1822 C-minor Sonata. Op. 111.
- 1824 E-major Quartette. Op. 127.
- 1825 A-minor Quartette. Op. 132. B-major Quartette. Op. 130
- 1826 C-minor Quartette. Op. 131. F-major Quartette. Op. 135.
- 1826 Dropsy. Nephew's attempted suicide.
- 1827 March 26. Beethoven dies at Vienna.

¹ The dates always refer to the approximate time of composition, not to that of publication.

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THREE TITANS

MICHAEL ANGELO

"I could only gaze and wonder. The master's inward certainty and virility, his greatness, transcend all expression."—*Goethe*.

CHAPTER I

FOUNDATIONS

1

A STILL dark river rises near Caprese, winds through hill and dale to the Florentine plain, soon broadens out, to stream masterfully through the capital of the world, castle and church of the Popes reflected in its waters; then it rushes onward to the sea. A still dark boy opened his eyes in Caprese, grew up in Florence, then masterfully entered the town of the Popes, castle and church reflected in his spirit; and when after long decades he left the Eternal City and this temporal life, on the river's banks there had risen forms shaped by his mortal hand and yet immortal, and close to the river there soared, grey-blue, the boldest dome in the world—for thus it had been dreamed by the old man who, ninety years earlier, was born near the source of the Tiber.

Life, too, flowed still and dark there, with scarcely any women in it. The boy had no sisters; his mother had immediately handed him over to a woman at Settignano; and because she was a stone-mason's wife, he used to say in later life that he had sucked in his art at the breast. When at six he lost his mother, he probably knew little of her, and from his father he seems to have experienced nothing but rigour—for the father

was of noble birth, poor and often out of office, and so he was ill-tempered and hard on his sons. At that time he had recently become Mayor of the little place; but before long Buonarotti returned to Florence and proposed to put all his five sons into business, for that was the ambition of every true Florentine. Was not Lorenzo throned yonder in the Palace, grandson of a sagacious banker, ruling the city like a doge? Had not gold and trade brought power and good fortune to all those Medici, Strozzi, Pitti?

What possessed the thirteen-year-old boy—what possessed Michael Angelo—to declare that he wanted to be a painter? There he sat, a reticent lad, gazing with serious eyes at anything that happened to stand or lie before him, and scrawling an image of it—or what seemed to him such—on a sheet of superlative paper. Not the father only, but the brothers too scolded him, for this was a poor, inglorious calling, and he was so often cuffed and beaten by his parent that even in his old age he would still talk of it. There was no mother to protect him; men ruled the gloomy household. But as he seemed to be good for nothing else, the father was in the end obliged to yield and take him to Messer Ghirlandajo, who was painting the walls of Santa Maria Novella, surrounded by apprentices and colour-grinders. The contract was for three years; the distrustful man grumbled and handed over his money and his hopes of making something out of his son; for how could anyone suppose that he would ever do as well as his present teacher, or the great Donatello of old?

If he had had a morsel of tact, he might more easily have got commissions. But he had not been long at his

new craft before there was trouble with fellow-workers, and even with his teacher. When the apprentices were learning to copy draperies from sketches, he would draw the lines with a powerful stroke but would alter them as his eye told him they ought to go, thus improving on the teacher. When he had to copy a drawing of the *Temptation of Anthony* (by the German Shongauer), he went of his own accord to the fish-market, made studies of eyes, scales, fins, for himself, and then painted all the creatures somewhat differently from those in the original. The master was startled by this picture. Narrow-minded and jealous by nature, as he had often shown himself before now, Ghirlandaio caused this copy to figure as a "studio-piece"—which meant that the master had had a hand in it. Thus it made less of a sensation and nobody asked any questions about his astonishing pupil.

A terrible pang for the soul of a sensitive youth! What was his crime? To have painted with more verve and diligence, displaying greater gifts. Was it forbidden, then, to express oneself in paint? Was one punished if one did, robbed of the thing one had produced? The harshness and gloom he had known throughout his youth, the coldness and antagonism of his father, had already made the child distrustful; now this first experience of the envy and dislike of his fellow-men fell on a heart oppressed.

But he was still young, every morning his work made fresh demands on him, and so he soon had a new idea—to paint his teacher and apprentices from below, as he saw them daily on the scaffolding in the Church; and he did it with such a sense of perspective that the

master began to fear him. So he withheld his own sketch-book from the boy, though usually it was passed around among the pupils, that so they might learn to draw heads, sheep, dogs, ruins. What did this pupil do now? Twice snubbed, simply because he had done well, he took his first little revenge—if the master deceived the world with his pupil's work, why should not the pupil deceive the master? And he copied an old yellowed sketch of his teacher's, smoked it, and handed it in, so that Ghirlandajo believed he had got back his own original drawing.

Before a year had gone by the teacher discovered a way of honourably ridding himself of the troublesome youth. Old Bertoldo, who had ceased to do any carving on his own account, was on the look-out for capable young men who were to learn the sculptor's art from the recently excavated antiques in the Medici garden. Michael Angelo's hands, designed by God to counterfeit the human form, were itching to study this loftier of the two arts; and when he had once more prevailed upon his reluctant father, who did not like the idea of his son's being degraded to a stone-mason, it was not long before he was standing in the garden where he had often wandered with ardent eyes, and learning to hew his first block of marble, for many lay about, and the owner wanted them used for his new library. Among his fellow-students was a powerfully-built youth, very loquacious and the terror of them all when he frowned; he looked like a young warrior, did this Torrigiano. There they stood, side by side, trying their hands at depth of relief and chiselling. Michael Angelo had chosen an antique head, the mask

of a faun; but standing before it and meaning to copy it, he found it transforming itself under his fingers, becoming a grotesque caricature of an old man.

One morning the owner of the garden arrived, looked at the young men's work, stopped when he came to the caricature, glancing alternately from it to the original and thence to the boyish copyist. Lorenzo the Magnificent was then forty-one years old; but his face (at no time a youthful one), with its irregular broad nose, was now distorted by neuralgic pain and was of jaundiced complexion, so that he looked older than his years. He was not imposing, he affected simplicity—partly because he was ugly, but more because ostentation might have irritated those of whom he always spoke as "my fellow-citizens," for it was essential that his dictatorship should be carefully disguised. Before him he now saw a boy of fourteen, a slip of an adolescent in blooming health, and at that time undoubtedly handsome. Perhaps, though secretly attracted, he envied the freshness that irradiated the boy's earnest face, his sunburnt olive skin, his straight nose. Or was it the gaze, half-awe-struck, half appealing, of those young eyes? Or the audacity of this child, who dared to parody the Greek work? "You ought to know that old people don't keep all their teeth," said Lorenzo after a while, and went on his way.

Lorenzo had spoken to him! So thought the excited boy, and set to work at chiselling a hole in his mask, so artfully that it looked as if a tooth *had* fallen out. When soon afterwards the proprietor saw the sculpture again, how could he help laughing? How could he fail to be pleased by such youthful ardour? He asked

about the boy's plans, his parents; and it was not long before he took him into his house as a guest.

2

Michael Angelo was between 14 and 15 when he was spirited away to the Palazzo Medici. Must he not have felt as if it were all fantastic as a dream, when for the first time he awoke in his beautiful room, high above the loggia and the old garden, free as a prince to go where he would, urged daily to his work by his own ardour alone, responsible to none but his own aspiring soul? Where now was the morose father, always reproaching him with the expense of his training, the ingloriousness of his calling? Where was the elder brother who looked down on him? Where the poverty-stricken house, so dark and narrow, in which they lived together? One word from Lorenzo had prevailed on the father; a minor post in the customs, given him by the great man, had completely reconciled him; and when he heard that Lorenzo had presented his son with a violet cloak and a seat at table, allowed him to play and study with his own children, and moreover gave him five ducats a month, he probably reflected that not only silk and a banking concern, but marble too, could make a man's fortune for him. From now onwards he ceased to say that his son was a stone-mason; henceforward he called him a sculptor. Otherwise he had scarcely an idea of the high culture which now for two years was poured into the thirsty young mind. It was literally the sum of all the science, all the art of life, as then known to men, which competitively united all the best intellects in Italy at the Medici Palace and villas. There