



A Grand Master's Deathly Fever

The Owl

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Dear Inquiring Traveler,

I'm not sure which story is the most exciting in today's issue: the tale of Raphael's flamboyant death or the fresh produce you'll find at the local markets of the artist's homeland. Please read on and discover for yourself.

Regards,

Catherine Lapp

Editor, *The Owl*

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A Grand Master and the Unsung Influence of his Origins (part 3)

by Duncan Campbell

Raphael's final painting, *The Transfiguration*, on display at the Vatican museum, is often regarded as his finest work, and is one of the most studied paintings in the history of art. It was an obligatory stop on the Grand Tour of the 17th and 18th centuries, drawing accolades and admiration



from established scholars and freshmen alike.

In his *Travels Through France and Italy* of 1765, Scottish author Tobias Smollett described Raphael as “perhaps the best ethnic painter that ever the world produced”. In spite of wanting to cut *The Transfiguration* in two, he was impressed not only by “the expression of divinity on the face of Christ; but also in the surprising lightness of the figure, that hovers like a beautiful exhalation in the air.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson similarly honored Raphael by asserting his ability to “paint wisdom”. Of *The Transfiguration*, he wrote in 1841 that its beauty “goes directly to the heart”, eliciting such personal emotion as to “almost to call you by name.”

But perhaps the greatest compliment paid to this timeless piece comes from a compatriot of Raphael's, one who knew him well. Fellow painter Giorgio Vasari—widely acknowledged as the father of art history writing through his biographies of the great masters—had this to say in the 16th century: “Christ reveals the Essence and Godhead of all three Persons of the Trinity, fused in him by the perfect art of Raphael. And Raphael seems to have summoned up all his powers to demonstrate the strength and genius of his art in His countenance; for having finished this, the last thing he was to do, he died without taking up the brush again.”

Pomp and Circumstance ... to the End

Raphael died in Rome in 1520 on his 37th birthday. It's said that his reticence to reveal the source of his deathly fever (a night of excessive passion) resulted in a misdiagnosis, and the prescription of a treatment that accentuated rather than arrested his condition.

Being (according to contemporary biographer Giorgio Vasari) an atheist, it is ironic that Raphael is buried in a temple originally dedicated to all the gods—the Pantheon. Built by Hadrian in 125 AD, it's an amazing feat of construction even today, boasting the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world, and was itself a required stop on the Grand Tour for its architectural merit.

The pomp accompanying Raphael's burial was unprecedented for an artist, and the public outpouring of grief surpassed even that shown for Leonardo, who had died the previous year. Indeed, the honor of burial in the Pantheon had previously been reserved for canons of the church. Such was Raphael's popularity that the entire papal court turned out for the funeral, and the pope himself is said to have wept publicly during the burial rites.

The tomb is adorned by a statue carved by student and friend Lorenzo Lotti (*Madonna del Sasso*), but it's the words of Cardinal Pietro Bembo that show the stature that the artist had acquired: “Here lies Raphael, by whom Nature feared to be outdone while he lived, and when he died, feared herself to die.”

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When it comes to the classical and most time-honored of culinary traditions, you will find that the *cucina povera* is simply the best. *Cucina povera* are dishes that have rural, peasant roots. Le Marche is known for its fantastic and fresh seafood with specialties like *brodetto* (fish soup), as well as its attention to the quality of the local products. Meat dishes (including beef, lamb, goat, poultry, pheasant, duck, rabbit, pork, and wild boar) dominate the inland areas. You will also find that some areas combine rural flavors with the fresher flavors of the Adriatic: not surprisingly, the territory combines the cultures of both the mountain and the sea. Picture some of the finest seasonal ingredients, homemade pastas, cheeses, truffles, and bread, and you will have all the right elements for creating an excellent and healthy eating experience.



Dairy specialties.
Information and photo courtesy
of [La Tavola Marche](#).

The area is predominantly cheese, mushroom, and truffle country. Other delicacies include prosciutto and salami. Most villages and towns host a weekly market that is an invaluable source for buying fresh food at competitive prices. The Le Marche region produces a large range of wine, including 13 varieties of DOC (Denominazione di Origine Controllata).

The Owl Turns One! **Our New Photo Contest.**

The Owl celebrates its first birthday! We journeyed to a number of fabulous countries together during the last 12 months, from Italy to France, Great Britain, Greece, Turkey, and even China. We traveled in the riveting company of Lord Byron, Claude Monet and Antonio Canaletto, to mention just a few.

Join in the celebration! Select a photo of a birthday party or of a festivity of any kind that you participated in in Europe, add a short commentary to let us know where it was taken, and e-mail it in jpeg format to: theowl@agorapublishinggroup.com.

Should you win the contest, we'll publish your photo in *The Owl*, offer you a free subscription to our travel magazine, *International Living*, for two years, and send a complimentary copy of our anthology of the masterpieces of ancient literature, *The Essential Classics*.

Photos are accepted until the end of August. The winner will be selected in September.

Terms and conditions

- By submitting your picture you agree that you took it and are not infringing anybody else's copyright or privacy.
- The winner of the contest grants *The Owl* the non-exclusive right to publish his/her picture in the context of "The Owl Turns One" Photo Contest.
- The cash value of the price (\$123.95) is not redeemable for cash or any equivalent products.
- Our photo contest is entirely free. No purchase is necessary.

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