Renaissance Hybridity: Christian Humanism
Week 4 – Lecture 2
1 October 2004

Introduction to the Italian Renaissance
O’Neill Media N 6915 .I58 1999

REVIEW → → → → → → → → → → → → → → → →

Rome ➔ Byzantium ➔ “Byzantine Empire”

“HIERATIC”:
Portait: Roman Philosopher, 400s --- Icon: Christ, 700s

NB: EYES in the hieratic style:
a window on to the eternal world behind the eyes....
“realism” only captures the surface; the reality lies deep within
End of Viking invasions [ca. 1000] → “Re-birth” of Antiquity

- RECAP: From 2 dimensions to 3 dimensions:
  - 1) Architecture and landscape: use of perspective
  - 2) Light and dark gives volume: use of chiaroscuro
    - Italian: chiaro, "light"; scuro, "dark"
  - 3) Balance and weight in sculpture: contrapposto
    ["opposite"]

Two Davids

1295 -- 1425

contrapposto

Renaissance:

“realist” perspective. The “real” is here-and-now — not somewhere beyond the eyes...

Light and dark gives volume: chiaroscuro

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Renaissance Hybridity:
Christian Humanism

Was the “Renaissance” an age of “secularization”?

Renaissance Italy:
The “Birthplace of Secular Modernity”?

• Maybe it was more about what Burckhardt wanted for 1800s Germany than about 1400s “Italy”?

Leo Steinberg: Sexuality of Christ in the Renaissance and Modern Oblivion (1983)

“Post-modern” scholarship, i.e., post-“secularization thesis”

Steinberg: we find in the Renaissance not only all kinds of religious subjects; but we also find their bodies emphasized, and especially their sexuality

Ayatollah Khomeini: Time Man of the Year, 1979

Was the “Renaissance” more a society modernizes, the more secular it becomes.

1960s: especially popular
1970s: Islamic revolutions
---Problem: “modern” societies that are “religious”
1989: end of Communism in USSR


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Renaissance Italy:
The birthplace of Secular Modernity”?

• Jacob Burckhardt, 1858:
Civilization of the Renaissance

• Renaissance “Italy”— all that was “modern” [realism; science; republicanism]

• NB!: Burckhardt is German!
– Invention of “Germany”: 1870
– Invention of “Italy”: 1871

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“Father, if it is possible, let this cup of suffering pass away…”

CHIAROSCHURO

Allows for human drama; for the depiction of suffering, even of the Divinity; for the tragic moments of human history

God who enters human history: a way of answering the problem of the crisis of mediation --- the distance of an aloof “eternalist” God
POINT: To take on human form is to take on suffering.
Against “docetism”:

*dokeo* = “to seem”

Since the Divinity cannot suffer [*passio*], Christ only “seemed” to be suffering / dying.

“Humanist” way of dealing with problem of God’s seeming arbitrariness.
Sexuality has come in from margins to sacred center of Christian story.

Significance??

Opening words of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*:
Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti . . .
Human(e) it is to have compassion on the afflicted . . .

Christian / Humanism hybridity: Divinity became Humanity and suffered as we do.

NB: Post-Plague turn to this world as the center of attention / value. Not “secularization” – same religious images, but hybridized with humanism.
What does Steinberg mean by “modern oblivion”?

Oblivion = “to wipe out of existence”

Moderns have literally “erased” the memory of Christ’s sexuality---we are fundamentally Puritans! Too embarrassed!

Conclude:

Was Renaissance an age of “secularization”?

• Don’t think linearly in terms of “progress”
  – E.g., “secular” replaces “religion”, “perspective” replaces “hieratic”
  – Think: Picasso! Cubism!

• RATHER: think “cultural hybridity”

• Renaissance “Christian Humanism”
  – a hybrid of two cultures
  – Christianity + “Pagan” Humanism of “antiquity”
Christian-Humanist Hybrid: Musical Examples

Can we represent 3-dimensional “realism” musically?

Monody: “one voice”
Gregorian Chant / Hildegard of Bingen

Polyphony: “several voices”

Three Renaissance concepts:
- Polyphony [cf. perspective]
  - “many voices”
- Counterpoint [cf. contrapposto]
  - voices singing “counter” to one another
  - provides 3-dimensions
- Cantus firmus – i.e., “song solid [firm]”
  - “solid [unchanging] song in bass”
Guillaume Dufay, "Missa 'Se la face ay Pale'" [1460] 
[Si la face est pale] 
Mass based on the song "If the face is pale"

- Guillaume Dufay, France
- Polyphony
- Mass:
  - five musical movements:
    - Kyrie; Gloria; Credo; Sanctus; Agnus

If the face is pale
the cause is love.
This is the main cause,
and Love is so bitter to me that
I think he would fancy
seeing me drown
in the high seas.
Now one can plainly see
that without
the beautiful one I pursue,
I can have nothing good.

-- Anonymous

I wish you'd look at me
that way
Your beautiful eyes
lookin' deep into mine
Telling me more than
any words could say
But you don't even know
I'm alive
Baby to you all I am
Is the invisible man

--98 Degrees

Love bites, love bleeds
It's bringin' me to my knees
Love lives, love dies
It's no surprise
Love begs, love pleads
It's what I need

--Def Leppard

-- Toni Braxton

Piece #1: Ballad, “If the face is pale” : a song of unrequited love!!!

Love bites, love bleeds
It's bringin' me to my knees
Love lives, love dies
It's no surprise
Love begs, love pleads
It's what I need

--Def Leppard

I sit in the crowd
And close my eyes
Dream you're mine
And you don't know
You don't even know that I exist

-- Toni Braxton

Piece #2: Kyrie, eleison! [Lord, have mercy!]

- Kyrie: hybrid!!!: first movement of the Mass + If my face is pale...

Christian Humanism: Musical hybrid

- Lowest voice [cantus firmus] sings the love song to words of "Kyrie".

- Upper voices: sing against [contra] this voice: “counterpoint”

- Safe + Danger?