

How the Illuminated Manuscripts of the Italian Renaissance Helped Shape the Culture of the Period and Bartoloeo Sanvito's Illumination of Petrarch's "I Trionfi"

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I. THE ROLE OF THE ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT IN THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

"Books always have histories, and the links they proved to past cultures, together with the aesthetic pleasure to be had from their artistry, are essential parts of their fascination for us today"¹

Illuminated manuscripts are an oft-overlooked but essential artistic component in the development of art and culture during both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This is especially true of the Italian Renaissance, where production and ownership of illuminated manuscripts progressed from being simply religious and functional into statements of the patron or owner's socioeconomic status and cultural superiority. As the world increased its knowledge and as a result needed more ways to store and maintain ideas and cultural artifacts, books became more highly coveted objects and began to move away from being strictly functional and related to religious texts or events. This was especially true of high-end, beautifully illustrated, expensive books. The illuminated manuscript was a major artistic element in the development of the Renaissance, and this is seen through its many functions in society: educational tool, recreational object, and means of promoting the socioeconomic status of the patron/owner; beyond this, illuminated manuscripts contributed significantly to the blurring of the line between religious and secular works that became an important element of Renaissance ideology.

As art and culture developed over the centuries, so did the illuminated manuscript. In Medieval times, the manuscript served an important, though very different, function than it came to serve by the end of the Renaissance. Medieval illuminated

manuscripts were used as a way of emphasizing the importance of liturgical texts. These religion-oriented texts were generally functional instead of aesthetic; however, in the 13th century, there was an increase in personal ownership of texts. This signified a shift in the role of illuminated manuscripts that would become very visible later in the Renaissance.²

As the Renaissance progressed and development of art became more sophisticated, so did the world of inventions and technological innovation. The introduction of the printing press into Europe increased demand for books significantly and thus created a higher demand for illuminated texts. The German printer Johannes Gutenberg introduced printing with movable type in 1455.³ The influence of the printing press was seen in Rome beginning in 1467 and Venice beginning in 1469, and after 1470, the printing press began to flourish and develop throughout Italy.⁴ This led to the creation of texts that were hand-illuminated after being printed on a press.⁵ Printing accelerated the number of books purchased and made them much more accessible to people who were not necessarily wealthy.⁶

Then hand-illumination of printed texts became an important way to distinguish between classes once books became more readily available. Even though text was press-printed, accent letters and frontispieces were still done by hand, often even when there were hundreds of copies of a book.⁷

¹ Alexander, Jonathan J. G., James H. Marrow, and Lucy Freeman Sandler. *The Splendor of the Word: Medieval and Renaissance Illuminated Manuscripts at the New York Public Library*. Oostkamp, Belgium: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2005. 23.

² Alexander, J. J. G. *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*. Munich: Prestel, 1994. 11.

³ Hartt, Frederick, and David G. Wilkins. *History of Italian Renaissance Art*. Seventh ed. London: Laurence King Publishing, Ltd., 2011. 36.

⁴ Alexander, J. J. G. *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*. Munich: Prestel, 1994. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.* 35.

⁶ *Ibid.* 17.

⁷ *Ibid.* 36.

Since some of the book was still fashioned by hand, these texts came to represent the Renaissance attachment to Classical antiquity while still being an item with which an owner or patron could showcase socioeconomic status.⁸ Hand-illumination made these books retain much of their high original price and later value, even though the printing press lowered the overall costs of book production. This is clear when exploring Renaissance ideals, especially the concept that the present is dependent on and influenced by everything that has come before.

The aforementioned ideas about manuscript and book production can be evidenced well through the Renaissance preoccupation with Humanist thoughts and values. Humanism, defined as “a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values,” is a “philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual’s dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason.”⁹ During the Renaissance, this translated, in part, to a focus on education that cultivated a well-rounded, intellectually sound individual. Humanism in fifteenth century Italy in particular was a cultural phenomenon that led to a desire within the general population to be educated in all aspects of the world; from this stems the concept of the “Renaissance man,” but it is important to note that women were often included in this expansion of understanding and educated similarly to, if not alongside, men. This is notable for the fact that the education of women broke many pre-existing cultural norms, which was a major theme of the Renaissance. The people of the Italian Renaissance worked to celebrate and redefine their intellectual priorities and culture in one fell swoop. This logically led to a blurring of lines between religious and secular art, which was ironically perpetuated by the clergy and religious institutions who continued to commission pieces for the church from artists who were in the midst of developing their humanist ideals.

Long before the book-making process was expedited by the implementation of the printing press, however, personal libraries were very small. Illuminated manuscripts at this time were objects owned by and meant for the elite. The cost of producing an illuminated manuscript was such that, it could only be afforded by the wealthiest members

of a society.¹⁰ As the Renaissance began to flourish and cultures began to place heavier emphasis on aesthetics, the function of the illuminated manuscript began to evolve alongside the ideals of the time. The religious importance of the illuminated manuscript did not diminish; quite the contrary, in fact, it became an essential part of the education the nobility. These texts were paired with private reading books; professional, educational, and recreational texts; law and medical texts; and finally, Classical and humanist texts.¹¹

Books were an essential part of cultivating an image for oneself during the Renaissance. A great deal of emphasis was placed on Classical ideology and imagery, and the Italians especially saw these elements as a sort of cultural gospel. The creation of an illuminated manuscript is something that represents ideas from Classical times if for no other reason than the sheer amounts of time, dedication, and skill that are required for its completion. Only very skilled scribes and illuminators would have been able to craft manuscripts that would be coveted for generations and become important cultural artifacts. Before the advent of the printing press in the mid-15th century, mass production of texts was close to impossible. The making of a manuscript prior to the middle of the 1400s had to be done in steps that could not be completed until the previous steps were entirely finished, making the creation of a single book take a large amount of time. Everything was done completely by hand—the word manuscript stems from the Latin *manus*, meaning hand.

The first step in the process of making a manuscript is to properly prepare the material on which the book will be scribed and illuminated. Most often, preparations were done on some form of animal skin, usually from cow or a sheep. The skin would be treated by scraping, stretching, and bleaching. The sheets of vellum were then cut to size and organized into bifolios, which were then placed together to form the books themselves. The pages were marked with lines so that the artists knew where to put the text, headings, and decorations. After all of this, the scribe would begin to meticulously write the text on the page.¹²

¹⁰ Alexander, J. J. G. *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*. Munich: Prestel, 1994. 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 13.

¹² Alexander, Jonathan J.G., James H. Marrow, and Lucy Freeman Sandler. *The Splendor of the Word: Medieval and Renaissance Illuminated Manuscripts at the New York Public Library*. Oostkamp, Belgium: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2005. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.* 42.

⁹ Merriam-Webster, Inc.. “Humanism.” Merriam-Webster Online. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humanism?show=0&t=1354639451> (accessed October 29, 2012).

Once this was finished, the text could finally be illuminated. The illuminators themselves, however, still had to work within a structured set of production stages. First came the graphite drawings of what was to be illuminated. Next, gilding was laid down in the form of gold leaf or liquid gold. Once this was dry, the bifolios were bound together and covered by leather, fabric, or metal.¹³ Throughout this entire process, the artists had to adhere to a certain standard of design. Text length, size of script, and the size of the folio itself were all factors that had to be executed in a certain way to remain faithful to the customs of the time.¹⁴ These manuscripts were created by many different skilled craftsmen who worked on the individual stages of the process, but in rare instances, one person would have the ability to accomplish all the steps of the process single-handedly.¹⁵

In manuscript illumination in Italy beyond the 1400s, there were significant developments in artistry dealing with illuminated manuscripts. A specific style of script and a specific style of decoration were developed for the production of Classical and humanist texts. Some letters and typographic features developed during the creation of this script are still used even today, despite—or alongside—the advent and implementation of technology in the world of book production.¹⁶ An excellent example of this type of script can be seen in a manuscript leaf, circa 1463, whose script has been attributed to Bartolomeo Sanvito, the scribe and illuminator of Petrarch's "I trionfi" discussed in section two (see figure 1). In this leaf, the viewer sees letters that are familiar to today's viewer. This is evidence of the advances being made in the Renaissance in terms of developing the aesthetic elements of artworks. That this type of script has held value even through present times is a testament to the worth of Renaissance thought and progress. This script development was seen first and foremost in Italian works and is a way that art historians can differentiate Italian manuscript production, and in turn the entire Italian Renaissance, from the advances occurring throughout the rest of Europe. Older gothic scripts were still used mostly in religious texts, though, and this is evidence of how the present developed—though this can arguably be

very obvious, it is entirely necessary to note how much of the present was, and still is, dependent upon the conventions of the past.¹⁷

The new style of decoration that developed was again only in Italy and is known as *bianchi girari*, or white vine-stem decoration. This style originated in Italy and was influential enough that copies of it began to appear in other areas of Europe later in the Renaissance. Interestingly, it was not a style that was developed from styles used in ancient Roman or Early Christian manuscripts; instead, it has ties to 12th century Tuscan manuscripts that emphasized stylized plant scrolls and flowers.¹⁸ This is seen well in the *Calci Bible* (figure 2), a Pisan text of 1169. This text shows the visual influences that led to the *bianchi girari* of the 15th century, especially in the elaborate vine decoration that surrounds the text block. It is an especially intriguing piece because there is more decoration on the page than there is text, making it clear that this was a manuscript illuminated for the beauty of the artwork and not so much for the text of the book itself.

The fact that the *Calci Bible* did not focus as heavily on text as it did illumination is surprising because of its date of creation. It was not a common 12th century idea to place more emphasis on image than on text. The *Calci Bible* is thus an excellent work to reference here because it was so far ahead of its time, and Renaissance thought was a proponent of technological and artistic innovations that pushed through already existing boundaries. People of the Renaissance would have seen the *Calci Bible* as a work to be emulated and improved upon. This same idea is seen well in section two of this paper. Bartolomeo Sanvito's illumination of Francesco Petrarch's "I trionfi" is a work that focuses on the illumination more so than the text, but both illumination and text are important and without a significant amount of emphasis on each, the work would not hold the same aesthetic power that it does.

In Renaissance works, the illumination of a text was a way to offer elaborate visual commentary on the lessons that go beyond what is directly stated in the text, thus making it entirely viable that more of a page would be focused on the images instead of words. Patronage of illuminated manuscripts was intrinsically connected to their function in society

¹³ Ibid. 21.

¹⁴ Ibid. 22.

¹⁵ Ibid. 22.

¹⁶ Alexander, J. J. G. *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*. Munich: Prestel, 1994. 15.

¹⁷ Ibid. 15.

¹⁸ Ibid. 15.

as symbols of wealth and status.¹⁹ As previously stated, personal ownership of manuscripts increased significantly beginning in the 13th century, and by the 15th century it was commonplace for the illuminations of a text to bear the coat of arms of the patron family.²⁰ These patrons made ownership of manuscripts clear by having their family emblems interwoven into the manuscript illumination and sometimes even prefaced the texts with portraits of themselves or their families. Manuscript commissions and ownership were so important during this period, in fact, that in extremely wealthy aristocratic families, scribes and illuminators were actually employed as members of the court. During this period, personal libraries began to increase in size, and some of the most powerful families had extensive libraries full of what are today priceless manuscripts.²¹ The way books were perceived in society changed rapidly and without much warning. This is intriguing because so many Renaissance ideals and characteristics are exemplified in manuscripts and other texts of the time, despite books being seen quite often as functional objects rather than ones that hold significant pictorial value. Renaissance thought sought to emphasize the aesthetic qualities of books and thus helped elevate them to a higher place within society.

One specific example of a type of illuminated manuscript that portrays the characteristics of the changing status of books in society is the Book of Hours. These are texts that were used to combine many discrete devotional texts into a single work that could be used for private worship and meditation. Usually the core of the text would consist of the Hours of the Virgin, which were a series of prayers meant to function as texts to honor the Virgin Mary at the end of each of the canonical hours.²² Other items within a Book of Hours often included a Church calendar year with saints' days and some shorter texts that would be placed between the calendar and the Hours of the Virgin. More texts would usually follow the Hours of the Virgin.²³

The Book of Hours was a subject seen very frequently in illuminated manuscripts, especially in the Renaissance in Italy. Books of Hours remain

highly influential pieces of art for today's art historians because of their accessibility and prolific creation. They remain the most widely spread artifact from the time, providing information about a very important aspect of the culture of the Renaissance. Because these texts were more accessible to the general population, their presence in society was clearly established and they became readily available even to patrons lacking excessive wealth.

These texts were made to be admired for their looks—the beautiful illuminations trumped the importance of the text, and though they are outwardly religious works, the Book of Hours is a prime example of Renaissance art that succeeded in blurring the defining line between religious and secular art.²⁴ Books of Hours were not usually, if ever, commissioned by the Church. These were texts made almost entirely for personal, household, or family use. Because of this, there are many instances of variation, and as a result, mistakes, in the content of Books of Hours.²⁵ This made them a key place for Renaissance development to occur, especially in the blurring of lines between secular and religious artworks. Because these were individualized, the patrons commissioning the works had high levels of influence in what was put on the pages of the manuscript, and the artist was also granted more artistic freedom and the ability to interpret scenes and images in different ways than strictly what the church mandated.²⁶ The proliferation of this type of manuscript is also indicative of its Renaissance ideology: between the years 1485 and 1530, there were at a minimum 760 different published editions of press-printed Books of Hours; before the invention of the printing press, there were an even greater number of Books of Hours scribed and illuminated entirely by hand.²⁷

The illuminated manuscript's influence spans beyond simply being a record of culture and a status symbol for its wealthy patrons. There are several overarching artistic themes in Renaissance Manuscript illumination, including flora/fauna, putti adapted from Classical Roman sculpture, and trompe l'oeil.²⁸ Both putti and botanical elements can be seen in a frontispiece from an antiphonary of circa 1455-60/63 entitled *David Lifting up His Soul to God in*

¹⁹ Alexander, J. J. G. *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*. Munich: Prestel, 1994. 11.

²⁰ Ibid. 12.

²¹ Ibid. 63.

²² de Hamel, Christopher. *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*. 2nd ed. London: Phaidon Press, 1994. 170.

Ibid. 174.

²⁴ Ibid. 168.

²⁵ Ibid. 176.

²⁶ Ibid. 176.

²⁷ Ibid. 176.

²⁸ Alexander, J. J. G. *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*. Munich: Prestel, 1994. 16.

an Initial E. This leaf of a manuscript by Franco dei Russi exemplifies both the incredible attention to detail that Renaissance manuscript artists employed and a number of the predominant themes of the period (see figure 3). These themes are seen most heavily in Italian manuscript production in the late 1300s and early 1400s. By placing Classical imagery and trompe l'oeil²⁹ within the context of a modern day work, both illuminators and patrons sought to convey the status of books—especially illuminated manuscripts—in society. This helped to equate them with the ideals of antiquity.

It is clear that the illuminated manuscript had a significant impact on art of the Renaissance,

²⁹ Note: Trompe l'oeil in this case is being used to describe painted parts of the manuscripts that looked like jewels and other precious objects.

II. BARTOLOMEO SANVITO'S ILLUMINATION OF PETRARCH'S "I TRIONFI"

The illuminated manuscript was undoubtedly an influential division of the overall artistic culture of the Renaissance. Classical and humanist texts were commonly made into illuminated manuscripts, and this adds another level of depth to the cultural importance of these works. Bartolomeo Sanvito was a prolific scribe and illuminator, and his manuscript of Francesco Petrarch's "I trionfi" is a highly underrated example of the mixing of two very different but equally important art forms. This artwork is dated circa 1480 and is located at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. It is comprised of ink and paint on parchment.³⁰ There is little existing scholarship about this manuscript, but through analysis of common trends in Renaissance manuscript illumination and other artistic components of the period, it is clear that Sanvito's illumination of "I trionfi" is a piece that wholly represents Renaissance and humanist ideals.

The relationship between art and poetry that existed during the Renaissance is essential to the exploration of Sanvito's illumination of "I trionfi." This struggle, known as the *paragone*, comprised a vast portion of Renaissance thought. There was much friction between the two sides and the fight between art and poetry has become an important aspect of Renaissance discourse. Beyond this, extensive debate and struggle between all artistic disciplines existed during the Renaissance, so much that Leonardo da Vinci wrote an entire treatise on

despite the book often being seen as a lesser art form than, say, painting or sculpture. The illuminated manuscript and books in general developed alongside the cultural developments of the Medieval and Renaissance periods, and the versatility of the direction that books took in society makes them incredibly important to art historians studying Renaissance culture and artwork. As the purpose of a physical text changed in society, the accessibility of books increased. This led to developments in the way that manuscripts were produced so that they could remain a symbol of elite social and economic status.

artistic practice entitled *Paragone*. It was seen as the extension of an expansive humanist movement during the Renaissance. Leonardo saw the eye as "the superior organ" and "asked if anyone ever traveled a great distance to read a poem, while pictures are the goal of many pilgrimages."³¹ Though his writings emphasize the superiority of painting over poetry, he also recognized that poetry is a valuable and legitimate art form that is "painting which is heard and not seen."³² Leonardo was not the only artist to work with and extrapolate upon this debate, but his writings were highly influential and expressed the argument in a cohesive, organized way.

The illumination of Petrarch's "I trionfi" contradicts somewhat the ideas that Leonardo presented in his *Paragone* (see figures 4, 5, and 7 for examples of leaves in this manuscript). Even though he placed painting on a higher level than poetry, he still understood the importance of all forms of art and how they work alongside or in juxtaposition with one another to create multi-faceted cultural historical artifacts that represent the intelligence and dedication of generations. This illumination in particular serves as a piece of art that exemplifies art and poetry as they combined and were married to one another and thus are represented here as equals.

³¹ Hartt, Frederick, and David G. Wilkins. *History of Italian Renaissance Art*. Seventh ed. London: Laurence King Publishing, Ltd., 2011. 446.

³² Dundas, Judith. "The Paragone and the Art of Michelangelo." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, no. 1 (1990): 87-92. www.jstor.org (accessed November 15, 2012).

³⁰ The Walters Art Museum. "I Trionfi." The Walters Art Museum. <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/800/i-trionfi/>

It becomes, then, a portrayal of Renaissance thought in that the Renaissance placed heavy emphasis on the integration rather than the separation of ideas. Though much heated debate occurred over which art form was the most influential or important, it is clear throughout the Renaissance and especially during the Renaissance in Italy, that the culture of the time appreciated and glorified all art forms.

This particular manuscript is representative of the Renaissance mentality that art, no matter in what form, is dependent on all other ways of looking at the world that have come before. Bartolomeo Sanvito, through his depiction of Petrarch's "I trionfi," shows a viewer, or reader, depending on which side of the art world is discussing the piece—the importance of recognizing the genius and the innovation that has led the world to be capable in its current capacity. Though the competencies of the world have certainly expanded since this manuscript's creation at the end of the 15th century, it is clear that the sentiment remains: the world must respect and honor the artists and artworks that have set a precedent for contemporaries and future generations to improve upon and surpass.

The text of "I trionfi" by itself had a lot of influence in the Renaissance. It was considered an epic even though the central theme is not war, but love. Also notable is the fact that Petrarch intertwines his own life journey with the allegorical life journey of the everyman: "He reveals his love for Laura, his grief on her death, his lust for fame and hostility toward time, his conversion, and his hope for repose in eternity,"³³ while making it clear that these themes and events are representative of the entirety of the human race. Personal elements placed alongside and within ideas that encompass the values and weaknesses of humanity are perfect examples of how the artists and citizens of the Renaissance perceived the world. All aspects of life: past, present, or future, are intertwined and dependent upon one another.

"I trionfi" was appealing to the people of the Renaissance for other reasons, as well. In its six sections, Petrarch's knowledge of Classical literature and iconography is made entirely evident.³⁴ This can be seen well in one of the leaves from this manuscript (see figure 4). The viewer here sees the

application of Classical imagery alongside those of the Renaissance, the figures in this illumination are incredibly reminiscent of Classical antique sculpture, but there is a visible Renaissance element in the treatment of the figures and their interactions with others in the scene. Also important here is the incredible attention to detail that is emphasized in this illumination. The figural scene is framed by painted architectural elements that are full of Classical iconography. Composite columns border the bottom third of the composition, scrolls and volutes border the middle third, and the top third of the composition is reminiscent of a Roman or Greek pediment that would have sat on top of a building. These combine with innovative figural depictions to emulate the harmony between the past and the present that is necessary for cultural progress. This was essential to the Renaissance ideal of equating the present with the glories of antiquity whenever and wherever possible.³⁵

The glorification and elevation of antiquity was also achieved in poetry, and Petrarch's "I trionfi" is no exception. Petrarch "stands as a giant among the founders of Italian humanism,"³⁶ and he is known to have had one of the greatest personal libraries to have ever existed. It is thus fitting that his works were commemorated in illuminated manuscripts. Francesco Petrarca, known as Petrarch in English, was born in Arezzo in 1304 to an exiled Florentine notary. Petrarch devoted himself to his studies from an early age and grew up to become one of the most influential Italian poets and scholars to ever have lived.³⁷ "I trionfi," which translates to "The Triumphs," is a lesser known work of the Italian master, but that is not to say that it is any less culturally and academically significant than his other works; in fact, this poem is representative of Renaissance ideals because of its subject matter: allegorical triumphs of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity.³⁸ Each of the six triumphs can be read as individual works, but they are all intrinsically tied to one another—for Petrarch, "a triumph is not isolated and static."³⁹ Each is individualized but

³⁵ Ibid. 313.

³⁶ de Hamel, Christopher. *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*. 2nd ed. London: Phaidon Press, 1994. 232.

³⁷ "Petrarch, Francesco Petrarca." EBSCOhost. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=brb&AN=203039732&site=ehost-live> (accessed November 11, 2012).

³⁸ Coogan, Robert. "Petrarch's "Trionfi" and the English Renaissance." *Studies in Philology* 67, no. 3 (1970): 306-327. www.jstor.org (accessed November 20, 2012). 307-308.

³⁹ Ibid. 308.

³³ Coogan, Robert. "Petrarch's "Trionfi" and the English Renaissance." *Studies in Philology* 67, no. 3 (1970): 306-327. www.jstor.org (accessed November 20, 2012). 308.

³⁴ Ibid. 308.

each also relates to the others by having common foundational aspects and thus being indicative of the variety of life.

Bartolomeo Sanvito's illumination of "I trionfi" is, a piece which has not been studied extensively. This is odd considering the manuscript's place in history as a microcosm of Renaissance ideals. A viewer can clearly infer by simply exploring the manuscript that the illumination of this piece was meticulous and as a result it is a delicate and rich manuscript that offers both Classical elements and Renaissance conventions in the same space.⁴⁰

The above is illustrated well in another leaf from the manuscript. In this particular leaf, the viewer sees represented not only some of the predominant themes in Renaissance manuscript production, but also the use of the *bianchi girari* discussed in section one (see figure 5). The *bianchi girari* style of decoration is displayed in the white vines and leaves that frame the composition. Interspersed throughout these vines and leaves are putti serving their function as cherubic and generally non-religious figures.

This leaf also expresses the Renaissance acceptance that death is inevitable. The skulls that decorate this page are not menacing, but they are clearly representative of death. The figures inside the painted frame are all either dead or mourning, but again, an overwhelming sense of sadness or fear is not present. This is a new development in pictorial illustrations of death—the psychological aspects depicted here are not standard. The world and all that comes with it is shown in the most realistic terms possible, and this is a way of looking at presentations of scenes or events that has deep roots in Renaissance thought and exploration.

Beyond simply offering examples of Renaissance ideology, Bartolomeo Sanvito's manuscript is one that blurs the line between religious and secular works while maintaining the Renaissance elements discussed above. "I trionfi" is not a piece of literature with much religious connotation, but the way that these scenes are being presented is reminiscent of religious and liturgical texts. This is visible when a comparison is made between a manuscript of 1417 (see figure 6), meant to be used as a music book during Mass, and an illuminated page from Sanvito's version of "I trionfi" (see figure 7). These two manuscript

leaves, when paired next to one another, look nearly identical in terms of how the page is composed. This was standard illumination practice for leaves like these, but it is interesting to note how easily the religious history of the illuminated manuscript was appropriated for and used in the production of secular texts.⁴¹ Both of these leaves show a large first initial with a figural scene in the middle of the initial. Surrounding the figural scene and framing the entire page are flora and fauna with some architectural elements manipulated to serve as framing devices. These leaves begin to differ, however, when a viewer looks at what scenes or events are being depicted within the initial. The Gradual, meant to be used during Christmas Day Mass, shows baby Jesus in his manger in the stable with his parents and several other figures and animals surrounding him (figure 6).⁴² The leaf from "I trionfi," on the other hand, simply shows two human figures who are slightly ambiguous in terms of gender (figure 7). Though the scenes being shown to the viewer are very different indeed, the similarities in construction and application of artistic elements between these two leaves are undeniable. The Gradual, illuminated several decades before Sanvito set to work on Petrarch's "I trionfi," was obviously crafted in such a way that it and the style or styles which had influenced its production had significant influence on manuscripts which would be produced later in the Renaissance.

The leaves of the illuminated "I trionfi" are representative of Renaissance thought, ideals, and values, especially in terms of artistic expression. The viewer is able to experience foundations of manuscript illumination that are most often seen in religious texts here adopted for use in secular work. The content of Petrarch's epic "I trionfi" is itself a demonstration of the Renaissance worldview—it focuses on the path that one takes through life, including any and all negative aspects of this journey. This is not a work that idealizes the life cycle; in fact, it embraces it in all its realness. Bartolomeo Sanvito, in his illumination of this piece of literature, juxtaposes this need for reality with beautiful illustrations that recall Classical antiquity and the revival of antiquity with the current-day innovation that permeated the Renaissance. A final important element of the Renaissance that is evidenced in this manuscript is the paragone. The

⁴⁰ For more images of leaves from this manuscript, see The Walters Art Museum website. <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/800/i-trionfi/>

⁴¹ de Hamel, Christopher. *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*. 2nd ed. London: Phaidon Press, 1994. 224.

⁴² *Ibid.* 218.

relationship between the different artistic disciplines was heavily debated throughout the Renaissance, and many artists felt that one form of artistic expression was truly superior to all others. This manuscript places painting and poetry on the same level, and even serves to elevate them both through

the high levels of artistry that have been employed in the creation of this book. Through analysis of these various components, it is clear that this illuminated manuscript is a microcosm for the ideas and aesthetics of the Italian Renaissance.

Images



Figure 1. Bernardo Bembo with Script attributed to Bartolomeo Sanvito, *Oratio gratulatoria*, ink and paint on parchment. Ca. 1463. London, the British Library. Image located on page 83 of *The Painted Page*.

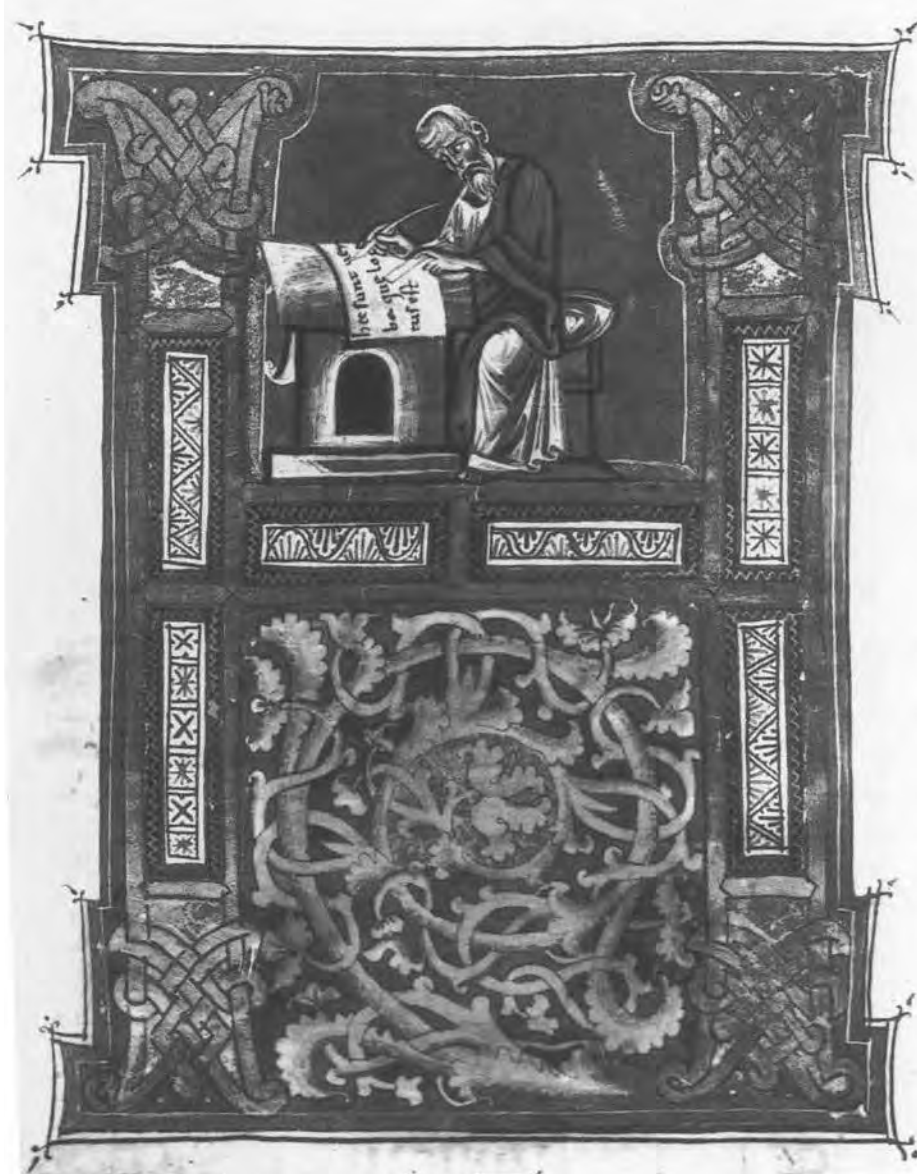


Figure 2. Alexander, J. J. G. *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550*. Munich: Prestel, 1994. Image from page 12.

Calci Bible



Figure 3. Franco dei Russi, *David Lifting up His Soul to God in an Initial E*. Tempera and gold leaf on parchment. Ca. 1455-60/63. Image located on page 85 of *Treasures of a Lost Art*.



Figure 4. Leaf from Bartolomeo Sanvito's illumination of Petrarch's "I trionfi"
The Walters Art Museum. "I Trionfi." The Walters Art Museum. <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/800/i-trionfi/>



Figure 5. Leaf from Bartolomeo Sanvito's illumination of Petrarch's "I trionfi"
The Walters Art Museum. "I Trionfi." The Walters Art Museum. <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/800/i-trionfi/>



Figure 6. Gradual: Introit for the Mass on Christmas Day, 1417. Image found on page 218 of *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*.



Figure 7. Leaf from Bartolomeo Sanvito's illumination of Petrarch's "I trionfi"
The Walters Art Museum. "I Trionfi." The Walters Art Museum. <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/800/i-trionfi/>

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