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Strier, Richard. The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton

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reproductions throughout the whole of the text, as little descriptive content is provided. In other words, a more sophisticated weaving of visual descriptors with the book's wonderful textual analyses would have benefitted the reader.

Aside from my concerns over the presentation of the book's visual data, the book is wonderful in its originality and the author's willingness to take on the tedious task of highlighting the subtlety of meaning in Italian Renaissance culture. For those interested in the nuances and complexities that existed among astronomy, astrology, and theology, Mary Quinlan-McGrath's *Influences* is a must read, with text rich in content and data.

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Strier, Richard.

The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. xii, 304. ISBN 978-0-226-77751-1 (hardcover) \$45.

Richard Strier's timely study proclaims itself as "a return to Burckhardt" and an alternative to the dour and repressed picture of the Renaissance proposed by Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism, and its more recent inheritor, the "new humoralism" of Michael Schoenfeldt. Treating an impressive range of poets, playwrights, philosophers, and theologians from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century—including Petrarch, Luther, Ignatius, Erasmus, More, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Montaigne, Descartes, and Milton—Strier argues that the authors he analyzes oppose (or do not accept as unassailable) the "Christian-Stoic-Platonic synthesis that produced the 'official' and, one might wrongly think, unquestioned values of the period" (2). In this sense, they are unabashedly "unrepentant." The chapters consider texts that reject the values and virtues of, in order, reason and the moderation of anger, the inferiority of the physical to the spiritual, ordinary decency and morality, the denial of materialism and worldliness, and the need for humility (1). Taking up where Burckhardt's Italian Renaissance individualism left off, Strier contends that the Reformation and Counter-Reformation contributed to the elevation of the ordinary layperson, and made possible expressions of "self-assertion, perversity,

and worldly contentment” (8) obscured by the critical emphasis on the regulatory mechanisms of self-fashioning or the humoural regime.

The first section of the book, “In Defense of Passion and the Body,” examines rejections of the call to sublimate “baser” emotions and impulses in the name of reason, judgment, and morality. Chapter 1 examines attitudes towards passion in the period, and establishes that both the humanist and Reformation traditions laid claim to the legitimacy and in fact desirability of ordinary human emotions—even the supposedly “negative” passions. Strier reads critiques of Stoic detachment by Petrarch, Salutati, Erasmus, and Luther that praise instead human imperfection and an affective life in the world. He then considers literary critiques of remaining “unmoved,” including the defense of impatience in *The Comedy of Errors* and “anger’s privilege” in *King Lear*, a play tragically aware of the costs of anger that yet sees it as an indispensable ethical response. Finally, the raw complaint of Herbert’s poetry is shown to embody the Reformation’s privileging of affect in devotion.

Chapter 2 considers the willing surrender to erotic passion. Strier reads Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* alongside Shakespeare’s sonnets, and finds continuity in place of the traditional view of the latter as “anti-Petrarchan.” According to Strier, both authors deny the priority of the soul over the body. Petrarch is entirely lucid in his analysis of his psychological and spiritual condition, and yet prefers to continue in “dolce error” (67)—he regards erotic obsession as something to live with. This revaluation makes for a fresh reading of Shakespeare’s sonnets that views Petrarch as a formative influence rather than a model to be rejected.

In chapter 3, Strier turns to defenses of immoral behaviour and argues that Shakespeare’s dramatic career increasingly demonstrates a quasi-Nietzschean sense of the “limitation of the moral perspective” (99). Popular theatre creates a space that transcends moral judgment. For example, the metatheatricality of Richard III prompts an awareness of our pleasure in the hero-villain. The power and charm of Falstaff again betrays the more straightforward rejection of vice: Hal’s final repudiation of him in the name of decorum and responsibility is nonetheless experienced as a kind of cruelty. Strier contends that Shakespeare spent much of his career atoning for this high-minded act. Most notably, *Antony and Cleopatra* affords a special value for the aesthetic and passionate over the moral and prudential.

The second part of the book, "In Defense of Worldliness," focuses on Luther's privileging of the ordinary social life of a "priesthood of all believers." In chapter 4, Strier reads *The Comedy of Errors* as Shakespeare's unambiguous celebration, even sanctification, of urban and commercial bourgeois life. The play is set in a world of "honest, generous, and admirable" merchants—an illustration of the "inner-worldly" holiness of Max Weber's Protestant ethic (154–55). Part and parcel is the ideal of companionate marriage, which is shown to triumph in the final contest between abbess and wife, two competing versions of the "sacred." In an appendix, Strier demonstrates that this move to sanctify a life in the world was not unique to Protestantism, but also figured in the "devout humanism" passed down from Ignatius Loyola to François de Sales to non-Puritan English figures like Donne and Herbert.

The third and final section of *The Unrepentant Renaissance*, "In Defense of Pride," addresses authors who defy the period's call to self-abnegation and humility. Over two chapters, Strier asks why the authors he reads were driven to write about themselves openly and unrepentantly, and in print. Chapter 5 analyzes self-revelation and self-satisfaction in Montaigne's essay "On Repentance" and Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*. Montaigne writes about not an exemplary but an idiosyncratic self, and rejects penitence as the denial of the individual's ineluctable will, whereas Descartes makes a complicated negotiation of pride and humility in the anonymous autobiography that introduces his philosophical method. Chapter 6 argues that the central Reformation ethic of humility features surprisingly little in the work of Milton, who instead embraces the classical ethic of *megalopsychia*, or "proper pride," throughout his oeuvre, from his political prose to *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes*, and *Paradise Regained*.

At times Strier's argument can seem somewhat diffuse, as he takes on an astonishing range of values and texts; yet, this feature is also his work's strength, as it constitutes an ambitious, broad-scale re-visioning of our approach to early modern identities and mores. The authors of the texts Strier reads are unrepentantly angry, self-indulgent, badly behaved, worldly, immodest, and prideful. They represent a refreshing return to a Burckhardtian celebration of individualism and autonomy that enriches and complicates more conservative views of the "Elizabethan world picture." Strier's aim is to provide "a sense of the period as more bumptious, full-throated, and perhaps perverse than that which has prevailed" (2). He is himself unrepentant in his revisionist approach, and whether or not readers accept his argument, his highly stimulating book

represents a significant contribution to early modern studies, and essential reading for scholars of the period.

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