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SPIRITUAL AND NATURAL LIGHT IN MICHELANGELO'S SISTINE CHAPEL FRESCOES

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ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL AND NATURAL LIGHT IN MICHELANGELO'S SISTINE CHAPEL FRESCOES

Despite the controversy surrounding the restoration and cleaning of the Sistine Chapel, it has provided an opportunity to explore a new aspect of Michelangelo's ceiling frescoes; namely, his conception of light and shadow. Beautifully accentuated figures, such as the Delphic Sibyl and Adam and Eve from the Expulsion fresco, can now be examined in terms of the manipulation of light and shadow upon them. Michelangelo's handling of light and shadow appears, however, inconsistent. He takes great care to harmonize the lighting and shadows in the scenes which, in Michelangelo's chronological development, lead up to the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise . The scenes change in character after this point. The figures begin to occupy a different kind of space, one that is less defined and structured -- a space which also reduces the demand for renderings of perspective and shadow.

This thesis examines the causes for this apparently contradictory and inharmonious handling of light and shadow. It argues that Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes in fact represent two distinct yet interdependent forms of "light". This thesis also explores the means by which these forms of light emerge and ultimately converge in the Sistine Chapel.

Accompanying the rise of naturalism in Renaissance art were

emerging concerns for humanism, perspective, anatomy, light and shadow. Because these ideas have their roots much earlier than the Renaissance, this thesis begins its exploration with Medieval art. Medieval artists did not make use of natural light or its effects in paintings; however, as the Renaissance artists begin to explore the empirical world, their use and understanding of light changes. Michelangelo inherits this long and rich history of painting light before he begins work on the Sistine Chapel ceiling itself. This detailed examination of Michelangelo's use of light and shadow reveals that the completed frescoes are a culmination and synthesis of Medieval conceptualism and Renaissance naturalism.

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INTRODUCTION

During the cleaning and restoration, in the early 1990's, of the Sistine Chapel something new emerged. Amidst the scaffolding, tarps and restorers to many peoples' surprise and outrage, the bright and lively colors of Michelangelo's frescoes appeared. Historians, for years, have suggested that the "ceiling's greatness resided in its drabness".[1] H.W. Janson, in the History of Art, stated, "if he here (in the Sistine Chapel) restricts his palette to 'stony' colors, it is to give his figures the quality of painted sculpture and integrate them with their architectural setting. His narrative scenes are the pictorial counterpart of reliefs rather than illusionistic 'windows.'" The acceptance of Michelangelo, in the 1700's, as "the greatest of all draftsmen and the weakest colorist"[2] held in our judgments and interpretations of the ceiling frescoes. If our modern assessment of the 450 year old frescoes has been clouded by grime and soot and poor restoration attempts, imagine what we have passed over without even realizing it. Now that the frescoes are cleaned they afford us a view with a clear eye.

The frescoes begin in the temporal and empirical world at the east

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[1]David Van Biema, "A Clear View of Heaven: A controversial restoration of the Sistine ceiling reveals its true colors," Life November 1991, vol 14, no 14: 38.

[2]ibid.

end of the chapel with the Drunkenness of Noah (fig 1) and proceed to the Flood (fig 2) and the Sacrifice of Noah (fig 3). Next is the Original Sin (fig 4) and Expulsion (fig 4) of Adam and Eve from Paradise, followed by the Creation of Eve (fig 5) and the Creation of Adam (fig 6). They then progress to the Congregating of the Waters (fig 7), the Creation of the Sun, Moon and Planets (fig 8) and culminate in the Separation of Light from Darkness (fig 9), the actual creation of light, or the creative power of light, before the light of the sun itself, over the altar. These narratives are flanked by 12 Old Testament prophets and Sibyls, (fig 10 & 11) 40 ancestors of Christ and various other figures.

The underlying meaning of the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel has been explained in numerous ways. Many scholars, such as de Tolnay, seek refuge in Neo-Platonic interpretations, suggesting the cycle represents the liberation of the soul from its human confines. This may undoubtedly be true, but what is allowed us for the first time now is to examine Michelangelo's use of light when composing the frescoes.

An examination of the overall use of light in the narrative frescoes is curious for its inconsistent distinction between light and shadow; yet, this should not be surprising for it is in keeping with Alberti's tenant that light is used by the artist to make the natural world surrounding us visible on a painted surface. It is not used symbolically, but rather functionally. Light is

a unifying quality which Michelangelo uses to enhance the vibrant colors and to model figures, to create something solid and muscular, which exists within a pictorial space. This is not far removed from Giotto's use of light in the Arena Chapel 200 years earlier, where one witnesses his use of light as a unifying quality, rather than light from a directional source which would cast shadows. There are, however, scenes in the Genesis Cycle from the Sistine ceiling in which Michelangelo disregards this convention and depicts natural, visible light. These are the Drunkenness of Noah (fig1), The Flood (fig 2), the Sacrifice of Noah (fig 3), and the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (fig 4). All these scenes depict slight shadows which would suggest the presence of a physical source of light. In the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, for example, Michelangelo depicts a slight shadow under the spurned and despondent figures of Adam and Eve.

But what does this indicate? It has been suggested that Michelangelo was aware of Masaccio's Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (fig 18) in the Brancacci Chapel of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence and stylistically modelled his Adam and Eve after Masaccio's. It is not surprising that Masaccio would include cast shadows for he is one of

the first artists to depict natural light.[3] But does the inclusion of shadows in Masaccio's scene influence Michelangelo? Or does the inclusion of shadows also signify Adam's and Eve's relocation to this world, the world where natural light gives shape to forms and in which shadows exist? It is possible that Michelangelo borrowed the imagery for Adam and Eve, but how does one then address the question of shadows in regards to the Genesis scenes or the Sibyls, Prophets and ancestors when they are conspicuously absent from other scenes?

The light in the Genesis scenes does hold for us an interesting quality, for while it does not consistently cast shadows other than to accentuate the musculature of the figures, it is the source of light by which the Sibyls, Old Testament Prophets and ancestors are illuminated; this is seen in the manner in which they receive light and cast shadows on the wall behind them. Take for example the Delphic Sibyl (fig 10), whose body faces in the direction of the altar while her face is shown head on. The light strikes the front of her body and the right side of her face with full force and throws the left side into shadow. Her left arm reaches across

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[3]If, for example, one examines the Tribute Money from this chapel one sees the use of cast shadows which not only helps establish the figures solidly on the ground and within a perspectival space, but the shadows also indicate from which direction the light is coming. Masaccio is one of the first Renaissance artists who consistently and naturally depicts the empirical phenomena of light.

her body to hold up a scroll. Her forearm receives the most direct light and the triceps and shoulder are cast in shadows. Her physical presence is further solidified by the shadow on the wall behind her and the shadow cast by the arm of her chair. The same physical presence is also found in the Ignudi (fig 12), which flank each Genesis Cycle fresco. The Ignudi, even more than the Prophets and Sibyls, appear to strive toward a firm sculptural representation. They are an integral part of the architecture of the Chapel and are depicted as free standing sculptures rather than flat, two dimensional painted surfaces. Other examples, which are closely related to the style in the Prophets and Sibyls, are the ancestors of Christ, found in the lunettes. Even further examples of such treatment of light are found in the four angular cloister vaults with the scenes of Judith and Holofernes (fig 13), David and Goliath (fig 14), The Crucifixion of Haman (fig 15) and The Brazen Serpents[4] (fig 16).

One can not help but ponder Michelangelo's apparent lack of consistency in depicting light. One might also find it curious why Michelangelo chose to depict both the creation of natural light, sun light, as well as light which has no physical resemblance or parallel in the empirical world. Is light in this second instance merely a means of illuminating the scene, as Alberti calls for, or is it something else? One can

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[4]These frescoes will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter one.

find possible answers in the frescoes themselves.

Michelangelo, in choosing to depict the separation of light from darkness through the figure of God, who is depicted in a swirl of clouds, expounds upon the notion proposed by St. Bonaventura and others, that divine light is analogous to the creative force of God and was created three days before the light of the sun. One can pause for a moment and wonder, if Michelangelo in depicting the figure of God separating light from darkness and thus evoking the creative force of the divine light to generate the sun, is he not also expressing his own view of the artist as one who, through light and color, calls into being the images of the fresco. The creative process which brings into our world the sun and its light is beautifully analogous to the creative process of painting which brings forth the work of art. Is Michelangelo concerned with more than illustrating the narrative, is he also interested in bringing out the importance of the very act of painting itself? We see this same notion later in Velazquez' painting Las Meninas, where the artist depicts himself in the process of painting. It is admittedly tempting to want to see in Michelangelo the break from the artist as one who imitates nature to one whose painting and process actually becomes the subject of the work. In many respects Michelangelo's notions of art are very modern, especially when one considers that one of the central tenants of the Early

Renaissance is the issue of imitation. Regardless of what might be present in this particular fresco, we do see that art is no longer mimetic. It requires the artist to call upon his Imagination to form a correspondence between the viewer and the Idea, which is being symbolically represented. If the art of the High Renaissance and Michelangelo in particular is no longer mimetic, how does it reach this point? How does Michelangelo come to depict the world with two seemingly different kinds of light in the Sistine Chapel and more importantly, why? If one is natural light, what is the other? Is Michelangelo conceiving of a duality in light, or is he simply being awkward? When do questions regarding light and its rendering in paintings and frescoes start, is it here with Michelangelo, earlier with the artists of the Early Italian Renaissance, or even before?

In chapter one I will detail the visual representations of light and shadow in the Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes. Chapter two traces the historical development and emergence of natural light in painting. In Chapters three and four I will discuss Michelangelo's own style of painting and sculputure from his earliest works through the Medici Chapel. And finally, in the conclusion I will touch upon the significance of Michelangelo's use and understanding of light as it is manifest in two frescoes; the Temptation and Expulsion and the Separation of Light from Darkness . After all is said, this examination will conclude that light is

related to his notion of Being and reveals the special position which art has in Michelangelo's Weltanschauung.

CHAPTER ONE

The Sistine Chapel

Michelangelo referred to himself on several occasions as a sculptor rather than a painter, especially during the difficult timess while he was painting the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. In fact he entreats his family and friends to mail his correspondences to "Michelangelo, sculptor in Rome", for he feels painting is not his true profession and he is only creating "dead paintings"[5] . Despite all of his complaining and pain the frescoes appear to us alive with vibrant colors and illusionistic relief. The frescoes deviate from the established ceiling decoration for a chapel in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Traditionally, the vault would be painted over in blue and sprinkled with thousands of tiny gold stars while the walls would be covered with religious narratives. Such was the scheme of the Sistine Chapel itself until Michelangelo was asked to renovate it. The project began for Michelangelo in 1508 and was completed in 1512. Michelangelo was allowed the freedom by Pope Julius II to alter this popular convention. As de Tolnay points out, the frescoes were completed in four sections. The first included all the Noah stories and the second consisted of scenes from the Original Sin to the

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[5]Valerio Mariani, Michelangelo The Painter (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1964) 52

creation of Adam. The third section included almost all the remaining figures except the ancestors of Christ and the figures in the lunettes around the windows.

Upon careful consideration and observation one sees that Michelangelo not only altered the convention of chapel decoration but that his own style changed in the course of completing the frescoes. The figures become more robust and less detailed as our eye passes from the temporal world of Noah to the trans-empirical realm of God and the Creation. This change in figural style was evident even before the recent restoration, but what was covered over by years of soot and grime was Michelangelo's conception of light and shadow. Now not only are the figures more spirited and dynamic due to the cleaning and restoration, but their incorporation into the architectural setting becomes more evident as we see emerge the shadows cast by the figures.

The frescoes in the genesis cycle begin in the temporal and empirical world at the east end of the chapel with the Drunkenness of Noah (fig 1). Here one witnesses the intricate play of light and shadow on the figures and drapery, especially that of Noah, giving the figures an almost sculptural appearance. The figure of Noah is reminiscent of the

classical sculptural renderings of the Rivers,[6] this bestows upon him an almost timeless quality yet at the same time endowing him with the temporality of human life. His weighty body is slumped on the ground and his Darkness shadow is sharply contrasted with the bright green of the billowy cloth upon which he lies. His sagging muscles and rolls of flesh are pronounced because of Michelangelo's acute awareness of how light reacts when it hits a solid surface. The listless figure of Noah differs from his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, who populate the right portion of the scene. They stand, agitatedly, as one youth places a purple translucent cloth over Noah's head. Their garments swirl about them and their hair is tousled, giving their demeanor an unsettled quality. The attention which Michelangelo pays to every detail, whether that be color, perspective, anatomy, facial expression, shadow or light, helps him to relate this lively scene of the Drunkenness of Noah (fig 1) spectator below. Not only are we invited to recall the story of Noah but in a subtle manner we become aware of Michelangelo's ability to create figures which are solid and exist within a set space. This realization is emphasized by his consistent use of light which comes into this scene from the left. As if the sunlight which comes in through the chapel windows were actually the light which

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[6]ibid notes to plate V

illuminates this scene, it strikes the figures of Noah and his sons, modeling them and firmly establishing their presence on the ground.

The next fresco in the Genesis cycle is the Flood (fig 2). This chaotic scene shows the frightened people clinging to one another and trying to seek shelter from the impending flood. The torrential wind rushes through the landscape and the water threatens to swallow those who cannot reach shelter. Again we can observe Michelangelo's naturalistic treatment of figures and landscape. His regard for perspective and rendering space is evident in the diminution of figures and objects. Unlike the figures in Giotto's Arena Chapel frescoes which appear disconnected from their painted surroundings, Michelangelo's figures are not only integrated into the painted landscape but also into the architectural setting itself. The scene is like an illusionistic window revealing the story from the Book of Genesis. Those condemned to perish in the flood are represented climbing into a boat, running onto high land or seeking shelter under a tent. The viewer is never forced to make this action come alive for himself, it magically unfolds before his eyes. This vignette of dramatic action is contrasted with the static sculptural frame around it. In the corners of this frame rest four Ignudi, which appear to be rendered in sculptural relief rather than paint. Their stony colored bodies cast shadows

on their architectural setting just as the figures of the Prophets and Sibyls, as if the light which strikes them comes from the windows of the chapel itself.

While there appears a dissimilarity between the scenes from the Book of Genesis and their painted setting, one can not help but notice the consistent use of natural light within the fresco cycle; the sort of manifestation of light which comes through empirical observation and the Renaissance desire to strive toward naturalism. Within the scene representing the Flood, the figures cast shadows just as they did in the scene of the Drunkenness of Noah. Both scenes and their architectural settings seem to be governed by the same principles of light, shadow and perspective. This consistent rendering of light as it strikes objects which appear to be painted and those which strive toward sculptural likeness is interesting to notice in these first two scenes, and tends to harmonize the entire fresco cycle.

The Sacrifice of Noah (fig 3), the next in the series, is consistent with the conventions of light, shadow and perspective established in the first two scenes. This scene, however, as related in the Bible, follows the end of the Flood. After the flood had subsided and the earth was completely dry Noah built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 8.20):

> "he took one of each ritually clean animal and bird, and burned them whole as a sacrifice on the altar. The odor of the sacrifice pleased the Lord, and he said to himself, Never again will I put the earth under a curse because of what man does; I know that from the time he is young his thoughts are evil. Never again will I destroy all living beings, as I have done this time. As long as the world exists, there will be a time for planting and a time for harvest. There will always be cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night" (Genesis 8.21-22).

In the biblical story, the emotional climax comes when the Lord decides he will not curse man for his actions and concludes in the revelation of faith for Noah; a moment filled with relief and perhaps confidence, for he has done what was good and what pleased the Lord. The visual representation, on the other hand, is of the moment when Noah burns the ritually clean animals on the altar. This is the moment of thanks and penitence, a gesture also made by the viewer below as he not only recalls this story of Noah, but also as he partakes of the sacrament during Mass.

Stylistically this scene is similar to the other two Noah scenes. The three scenes themselves are densely populated, the figures are more detailed and smaller than the remaining frescoes in the Genesis cycle. In the Sacrifice of Noah, like the other Noah scenes, there is an inner tension and emotional fervor. The youths in the foreground struggle to bring in the sacrificial animals, carry in kindling and stoke the fire in the altar. Their young, muscular bodies strain under the exertion, but together they

accomplish their tasks. Noah stands behind the altar, looking much calmer than his two companions standing to either side of him. Because the two groups occupy most of the composition very little room is left for detail in the architectural setting behind them, making it seem almost inconsequential. But it is present and gives the central figures something solid to stand in front of. The arrangement of figures creates a sweeping effect from the upper left corner, with the sacrificial animals, down to the center, with the sacrifice of the ram, and back to the upper right corner with the youth carrying wood; the circle is then completed by the three figures behind the altar. Our eye follows the increasing and decreasing tension as we move through the scene, much as it did in the Drunkenness of Noah, and the Flood. This dramatic tenor is made even more pronounced by Michelangelo's confident handling of light and shadow. Consistent with the light in the two previous scenes, it comes from the left and helps to create the illusion of volume and space.

The next fresco in the Genesis cycle is the Original Sin and the Expulsion From Earthly Paradise (fig 4). The conflation of these two stories into one scene gives a unique view of Adam and Eve at the moment when they submit to their temptations and the consequences of their actions. The Tree of Knowledge and Life visually divides the fresco in half,

but it is curiously not the separation of right from left. The separation is much more subtly suggested. Eden is depicted as lush green, with rocks and trees. Outside the gates of Paradise the world is barren and pale. The different representation of Eve in these two scenes is astonishing. As she resides in the Garden of Eden her facial features are tranquil and delicate. The beauty of her face and body is carefully rendered by Michelangelo. This beautiful Eve is transformed into a haggard old woman as she is expelled from Paradise. The visual dichotomy is made even more pronounced by the different handling of light.

As before, the light which radiates in this scene appears to come from the left. It shines on Adam and Eve, the serpent, the tree and the rocks in relatively the same fashion as it shines on the figures of Adam and Eve after their expulsion and the angel who banishes them. The figures' musculature is beautifully rendered through light and shade and the texture of their bodies is unmistakably different from the hard, fissured surface of the rock. But, as the figures in the previous frescoes cast shadows on the ground, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden do not. This is curious indeed for in the same scene after the Fall they do.

The logical question now seems to form: is there a precedence for such a rendering? It has been suggested by various scholars that

Michelangelo drew his inspiration for the Expulsion scene from the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (fig 18) by Masaccio, in the Brancacci Chapel of Santa Maria del Carmine. In Masaccio's representation of the Expulsion he renders the figures of Adam and Eve in much the same manner as Michelangelo, so indeed it seems plausible that Michelangelo drew upon this scene for some of his inspiration. There are, however, distinct differences. Whereas Masaccio shows the golden rays of light emanating through the gate to Paradise in contrast with the natural light which hits the figures and casts shadows on the ground, Michelangelo chooses to depict these two manifestations of light in a more subtle manner. For Masaccio they are easily separated and understood to have different physical qualities. The golden rays which radiate from the Garden of Eden stream through the archway. Their painted character unmistakably reminds us of the Medieval tradition of representing divine light, whereby the artist would apply gold to represent the close proximity of God. Given the subject matter, it is not surprising for Masaccio to represent the Expulsion in such a manner. What is interesting to note is the different path Michelangelo chose to follow in order to represent the Garden of Eden and the Expulsion. His Eden is lush and green, with no hint of the Medieval iconography of Masaccio. Instead Michelangelo took

quite a new and unexplored approach. There is no doubt that Michelangelo meant to represent a divine presence and "pure" place in this Garden of Eden, but we have never before seen an artist who chose to achieve this through the use of light or rather the absence of natural light.

Another fresco from the Brancacci Chapel which warrants investigation is the Temptation of Adam and Eve (fig 17) by Masolino, because of its proximity and historical relationship to Masaccio's Expulsion. Despite the similarity between the two Expulsion frescoes, Michelangelo does not appear to have drawn inspiration from the Temptation by Masolino. The beautiful, languid body of Eve replaces Masolino's flat, stiff and unexpressive pose. In Masolino's Temptation, the only communication between Adam and Eve is in a slight glance. The snake appears disconnected from their actions, not at all the imagery one expects from this tempting creature. Michelangelo, however, manages to heighten the fall from this idyllic landscape. The expulsion appears somehow more tragic because of this scene. To say that Michelangelo drew inspiration from Masaccio and Masolino can not be disputed, but one can question the influence of this particular scene. There is however one similarity; namely, there are no cast shadows on the ground in either

representation. The ground in both scenes is noticeably void of shadows. Whether Michelangelo consciously made the decision to represent his landscape without shadows based on Masolino's rendering is dubious.

The episode which follows this pivotal scene is the Creation of Eve (fig 5). Here Adam lies on the ground in a deep sleep , his torso supported by a tree stump. Eve stands slightly behind him, her right leg still not fully emerged from his side and her hands are outstretched toward God, whose body barely fits within the confines of the painted fresco. The contrasting positions of the figures establish a different emotion then did those in earlier frescoes such as the Sacrifice of Noah or the Flood. But there are similarities, such as the relationship between the figure of Adam and God in this scene and that of Noah and his sons in the Drunkenness of Noah. The figures of Adam and Noah are slumped on the ground, insensible to the action of the story which goes on around them. While, on the one hand, the aversion and almost repugnance of Noah's sons can be read not only on their faces, but also in their postures, the quiet, restrained presence of God creates quite a different mood.

The light in this scene, as in the Original Sin, is curious for while it is used to help model the figures, it does not appear to cast shadows on the ground. The Ignudi which flank the scene, as before, emerge as if

executed in sculptural relief rather than on a flat painted surface. The shadows behind them visually act to separate them from the ceiling. Their painted arms, heads and legs all cast very distinct shadows on the surface behind and the pedestals below them. The Nude in the upper right corner even obscures part of the scene from the Genesis cycle as if his presence were three dimensional and closer to the viewer below. The light within the Original Sin scene appears somehow different. It is rather like that used by the early Renaissance artist Giotto. It is of a uniform quality; it is more like color than it is natural light, which shines into the chapel and onto the frescoes. This change in quality has an interesting effect on the scenes. Whereas previously Michelangelo sought to relate the lighting of the scenes in to the lighting of the architectural setting, creating illusionistic windows; this change in quality of light now tends to detach the scenes from their frames. By altering the way the figures and landscape react to light Michelangelo has removed this scene from the physical realm of the chapel. It is no longer regulated by the same laws of nature which govern the other scenes and the Ignudi. It has light which is self-contained and, therefore, different from the light of the chapel.

The next fresco, the Creation of Adam (fig 6), is perhaps the most famous scene in the Sistine Chapel. The personification of God as the

creative force appears, accompanied by genii, enveloped in a voluminous purplish mantle. There is no ground below nor sky above him, he hangs in a space which is curiously undefined. The force of this moment, the moment when God gives the spark of life to Man, is sensed in every muscle, gesture, and glance, in God's wind-swept hair and garment. The whole scene crescendos in anticipation of the touching of the two fingers. Adam's arm is outstretched and he glances over his left shoulder as God approaches him. The shadow from his head falls on his left shoulder and the shadows on his torso are more pronounced on his left side thus suggesting that the source of light which falls upon Adam comes from that direction. This light helps to model every subtle aspect of the human body. The gentle curve of his forehead, the strong line of his jaw, the fold of flesh in his right arm and the protrusion of his knee into space.

The use of chiaroscuro is not lost on the figures of God and his entourage, for Michelangelo uses it to create and enhance the depth of the space within the garment and therefore within the fresco. As the genie under God's left arm peer out from behind God's body the light grazes his head and shoulder, but the figure behind this genie is almost lost as the shadows of the garment envelope him.

With all the care and concern Michelangelo took to create figures which appear lifelike and solid, there is one element which is incongruous, and that is the landscape upon which Adam lies. It is amorphous. The thin sliver of blue which borders the green earth is barely suggestive of the sky and the land seems more like a colored background used to offset the figure of Adam. Interestingly we see, as in the scene of the Original Sin, that there are again no shadows on the ground.

The Separation of the Land from the Waters (fig 7) is the next fresco in the Genesis cycle and, as in the Creation of Adam, illustrates the personification of the creative force of God. Similar to the Creation of Adam, God is pictured in a swirl of purplish garment. Michelangelo's awareness of the principles of foreshortening allows him to depict God as if he were reaching out toward us. He is suspended in a vacuous and seemingly quiet space, but the theatrical actions of the Ignudi around him leave us with a feeling nothing short of drama and awe. The four Ignudi flanking this scene are consistent with those painted previously. They are each rendered as if they were sculpted rather than painted. They cast shadows on the ceiling behind them as if they were raised from it and as if the natural sunlight from the chapel windows were blocked by their marble surface. Even the pedestals upon which they sit react naturally to

the sunlight in the chapel, as if they project from the ceiling as do the Ignudi. On the other hand, the scene of the Separation of the Land from the Waters itself appears differently lit.

Perhaps, because there is no solid ground upon which God rests, he appears to be bathed in an unusual light. It is somehow brighter yet diffused and does not appear to come from any one direction. Although it helps, as elsewhere, to model the figures, it does not contribute to an illusion of space or depth. Except for the presence of the solid figures, there is no indication of depth.

The Creation of the Sun, the Moon and the Planets (fig 8) is possibly one of the most extraordinary frescoes in the Genesis cycle, especially if one is examining them in order to understand Michelangelo's use of light. The gold-colored sun in the center has replaced the natural sunlight in the chapel as the evident source of light for this scene. One sees this most directly in the genie in the center who raises his arm to shield his eyes from the intensity of the light. This light bathes the two figures of God as he creates the different, yet interdependent, celestial bodies. The sun, which God here creates, generates its own light, whereas the moon does not. The light of the sun illuminates our days, gives warmth to the world and helps plants to grow. The sun's light is also what we witness at night as it

reflects off the moon. The generative power of the sun, on this one level, mirrors the creative force of God.

As in the Separation of the Land from the Waters, the use of light, shadows and space is here conceived differently from that in the pre-Lapsarian scenes. The space which God and his genii occupy in the Creation of the Sun is shallow and undefined. Partially because there is no tangible ground which they rest upon or float above, which would give us a hint of recession back into space. But also because the space around them is void of shadows. The same can be said for the figure of God as he creates the moon. We see that his back is closest to the sun, for the color on his garment is lightest there. The volume of his body is suggested by the darkening color as we look around to his front. Were it not for this slight change in color, the viewer would have no idea where God was in relation to the sun.

The final scene in the Genesis cycle is, according to the Bible, the beginning of all time, the Separation of Light and Darkness, (fig 9) or the Lord Gives Order to Chaos. In this early moment in time, when God gives the initial spark to create the universe, "the earth was formless and desolate" (Genesis 1.1-2). This is a description fitting to these final three scenes. The scenes are relatively empty, but the magnitude of each act is

not lessened by the barren background. In this scene as in the Creation of Sun, Moon and Planets God's gesture is emphatic and his body is monumental, occupying the entire scene. Compared to the figures of Noah and Adam in the earlier frescoes, God is larger in relationship to the frame and less precisely defined. The body under his garment is less emphasized, and the previously established use of space, light and shadows is almost lost. There is no hint of a directional source of light. The light from the chapel is not the source of illumination for this scene.

The Ignudi which flank this scene, however, are unchanged from the previously painted figures of this kind. The light of the chapel still appears to shine on their bodies revealing their musculature and anchoring them firmly into the space of the chapel. Their incorporation into the architectural setting is unquestionable, but the scene which they border is removed from the realm of the physical observer.

As was mentioned earlier the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel were completed in four sections. We have investigated the Noah scenes, the scenes from the Original Sin and the Creation of Adam, what therefore seems logical for us to examine next in our study of light and shadow in the Chapel are the figures of the ancestors and the figures in the lunettes. In the previous scenes one witnesses a gradual shift from figures which are

well defined and firmly anchored into the space and architectural setting of the chapel to figures which are large, even monumental and less expressly established in space. But most of all, there is no directional source of light in these scenes.

The angular cloister vault with the scene of Judith and Holofernes (fig 13) is one of the two vaults painted in the first phase of the ceiling decoration. One notices the clarity of the drawing and the detailed modeling of the figures similar to that found in the Noah scenes. The triptych-like partition of the scene appears to emphasize the flight of Judith and her maid from the lifeless and inert body of Holofernes. The quiet rustle of their garments is almost audible as they steal away with his head.

The decapitated body of Holofernes lies heavily on the bed. The shadows of the wall and the curtain which hangs above him partially obscure his body. There is a distinction between the darkness which shrouds his dead body and the light which reveals the two women as they quietly slip away. The light is subtle and yet enhances the drama of the scene. It is naturalistic and reacts so. Unlike the light which we found in the later Genesis frescoes, this light conforms to the physical laws of nature. The source of light is outside the fresco itself. It comes from within

the Chapel to illuminate this fresco, as it does for other Pre-Lapsarian scenes in the Sistine Chapel.

The second angular cloister vault above the main entrance is the battle between David and Goliath (fig 14). The clarity of drawing and sculptured composition tie it to the other frescoes of the first phase. Similar to the figures of Judith and Holofernes and those in the Noah scenes, David and Goliath are robust with well defined muscles and facial features. The well-developed muscles in David's leg stands out as he struggles to maintain his hold over Goliath. The massive figure of Goliath stretches from one side of the vault to the other and at the very pinnacle of the vault is the sword, which in its downward sweep will slay the giant. The composition of the two figures echoes the architectural confines of the vault. The tight space at the bottom of the vault restricts the movements of Goliath. Whereas, the open space at the top of the vault frees David, allowing him to use all of his strength and momentum. This very moment is frozen in time and we anticipate the downward stroke. Even while the sword is poised and we are intent on the drama in the scene, the curve of the knife blade mirrors the curve of the vault and we are reminded that this scene is closely tied to its architectural setting.

The inclusion of the fresco David and Goliath in the Sistine Chapel,

not merely as part of the decorations, is further emphasized by the use of light in the scene. The light is consistent with that used in the scenes of Noah, Judith and Holofernes and the other scenes leading up to the fall of man. The light comes in as if from the chapel window and illuminates the figures. In this particular fresco the light comes from the right and shines most brightly on the upper body of Goliath, and the back and arm of David. David's body casts a shadow over much of Goliath, firmly anchoring him into the ground and below David.

The next angular cloister vault is located along the wall of the Last Judgement. It represents the Punishment of Haman (fig 15). It was one of the last frescos to be painted in the Sistine Chapel. The emphasis has moved away from the clearly defined and articulated figures. Instead the artist is interested in the subtle recessions in space. One can see in this scene a freer composition, bolder foreshortening with more daring angles. While the fresco of David and Goliath echoed the architectural setting, this breaks away from its confines. David and Goliath nicely fit into their architectural setting. The figures in the Punishment of Haman strain to break free of their setting.

The central figure of Haman is shown in a dramatic foreshortened pose. His legs and torso are shown frontally, but his arms are twisted so

one reaches out toward the viewer and the other reaches back into the room he occupies. His finger-tips almost expand beyond the top of the arch. The three seated figures on the left recoil from the contorted figure. Whereas, the reclining figure of the King on the right points toward the punished man. His gesture is reminiscent of God as he gives life to Adam and his left hand is similar to that in the statue David (fig 38).

The light in this scene is again from some source outside the fresco, perhaps from the Chapel itself. The figures closest to the foreground receive the most direct light. For example, the figure in yellow, who emerges from the adjacent room, is more clearly defined while the figures in the corner of the room are dark and partially obscured. Another example of Michelangelo's use of light and shadow is on the figure of Haman himself. His left quadriceps is fully lit, while the lower leg and foot is partially shaded by the right leg. The strain in his neck is emphasized by the shadows around the tendons and jaw. Michelangelo uses light here in a naturalistic manner, but he also uses it to heighten the emotion of the scene.

The final fresco in this architectural style is the Brazen Serpent (fig 16). Of the four angular vaults, this scene is the culmination of Michelangelo's studies of muscular forms, dramatic poses, light and shadow. The entangled figures reminds one of the Laocoon group, where, in the statue as here, the dramatic play of light and shadow intensifies the horror that is felt as they fight to free themselves from the serpent's grip.

In this fresco the brightest concentration of light is at the center, while the figures in the corners are lost to the shadows. The figure who is closest to the center of the vault, for example, receives the most direct light. His left arm casts a dark shadow across his right leg. The dark green of the snake gradually takes on lighter tones as it worms its way up his body and across his neck. The sky behind him is bright blue. As our eye moves to either side the contorted figures begin to fade into the dark terror.

The four large cloister vaults result from the curve of the ceiling. The architectural setting for these scenes no doubt played an important role in Michelangelo's design and the evolution of his style is perhaps nowhere as evident as in these four frescoes. The quiet , well-defined figures of Judith and Holofernes are echoed in the fresco of David and Goliath. This quiet

and contained ambience begins to decay in the dramatic fresco of the Punishment of Haman. One senses the monumentality in the figure of Haman, and he also begins to challenge the architectural setting, striving to reach beyond its confines. Finally, in the Brazen Serpent, Michelangelo is barely able to restrain the figures from overflowing the edges of this fresco.

As we have seen, the recent cleaning and restoration of the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel has given us a new appreciation for Michelangelo's genius. His sure handling of form, perspective, light, shadow and space can now be fully appreciated. But this observation has left us with certain inconsistencies which need to be accounted for. Michelangelo was obviously deeply aware of how light reacts when it hits a solid object, and he took great care to harmonize the lighting and shadowing in the scenes up to the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (fig 4). The scenes change in character after this point. The figures begin to occupy a different kind of space, one that is less defined and structured; therefore, space which also reduces the demand for renderings of perspective and shadows. But this does not sufficiently account for the differences encountered.

CHAPTER TWO

Inherited Traditions

In the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo has created a unique and awe-inspiring program. After the cleaning and restoration his colors radiate from the surface of the ceiling and the stories from the Book of Genesis seem to come alive before our very eyes. However, the revelation does not end with his use of color. We also noticed, more subtly articulated, his discernment between light and shadow. In the stories of Noah and the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (fig 4) the light which shone in the frescoes seemed to come from a source outside them, rendered perhaps as if it came from the windows of the Chapel itself. As a result his desire to integrate the frescoes into the architectural setting was beautifully and skillfully executed and achieved. One of the finest achievements which Michelangelo brought to this series of frescoes is the almost sculptural appearance of the Ignudi. These figures seem three-dimensional and are a part of the architecture of the ceiling itself, reacting to the natural light in the chapel as if they were statues. The illusionistic windows, which relate the stories of the Drunkenness of Noah (fig 1), the Flood (fig 2), the Sacrifice of Noah (fig 3), the Original Sin (fig 4) and the Expulsion (fig 4) are vignettes and the amount and angle of light in these earlier frescoes ties them into their architectural surroundings.

Yet somehow after those scenes, Michelangelo's need for light within the frescoes changed and subsequently the effect of light and shadow was altered. We are left with the question, why? Michelangelo, as we will see, is working during a time of artistic innovation and revelation. But it is still a Christian world ruled at times by metaphysical laws. The systems and conventions which he inherits are part of the culture. Michelangelo interprets and personalizes them to give us, as he would see it, an art which will endure time and which ties him to the tradition of the use of light and shadow in painting. Paul Hills in The Light of Early Italian Painting discusses the changing treatment of light from the 13th to the 15th centuries and concludes with the appearance of natural light in Masaccio. His studies can be continued and a progression of the treatment of light can be traced through the Renaissance. Such a study would be exhaustive beyond the scope of this examination; therefore, only those artists who represent a major change in style or had direct influence on Michelangelo will be discussed.

Accompanying the rise of naturalism in Renaissance art were emerging concerns for humanism, perspective, anatomy, light, and shadow. These changes took time to evolve. More and more as the Middle Ages are left behind, light, shadow and perspective are treated

differently. According to Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), light and color are essential to the construction of a painted space. He advised artists to distance themselves from the use of gold, a convention in Medieval art, because it only detracted from the tonal gradations and produced the illusion of spacial recession. He conceives of light as strictly a means to an end. It had neither aesthetic value, nor symbolic significance. Its purpose, as Moshe Barasch observes, is to illuminate the scene, to make it visible to the viewer: "To Alberti light is not simply the condition of visual experience, regardless of what is perceived; he conceives of it as of the revealer of form, of the structure and volume of material bodies. Light should show the sculptural solidity, the material firmness of the body."[7] One can see the beginnings of this kind of concern for light in the paintings of Giotto. Giotto's practice anticipates Alberti's theory by over 100 years.

Giotto is generally considered to be the first "Renaissance artist", not only because of his reintroduction of the narrative scene into painting, but also because of his attempts at perspectival renderings. Along these lines, Paul Hills in The Light of Early Italian Painting has introduced the application of a particularly interesting theory to Giotto's frescoes in the

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[7]Moshe Barasch, Light and Color in the Italian Renaissance Theory of Art (New York: New York UP, 1978) 16.

Scrovegni Chapel ca. 1305. In his discussion he states the importance of light in relation to perspective and he suggests that the nearer an object is the clearer and brighter it appears to be: the antithesis logically states that the farther away the object the darker and hazier it becomes.[8]

Light, for Giotto, acts as a unifying factor, it helps to model figures and establish them within a defined space as opposed to against a flat background. Giotto's concern to illustrate figures in a somewhat logical perspective marks a distinct break from the Medieval tradition. When one compares, for example, the Crucifixion by Giotto (fig 19) from the Scrovegni Chapel to the Crucifixion by Duccio (fig 20) from the Maesta ca. 1308-11, the first thing one notices is the distinction between the figures on the ground in the two works. In keeping with medieval tradition, Duccio represents the faces of every figure so that each is discernible. The stacking effect achieved here contrasts with the more naturalistic perspective of Giotto. Giotto places his figures so that faces overlap and are partially hidden by a figure who may stand in front of another, in the

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[8] The argument which Paul Hills takes up was originally put forth by Roger Bacon in Perspectiva. Perspectiva dealt with the relationship between vision and geometry and had addressed the nature of light. Mr. Hills does not suggest that Giotto would have read Perspectiva, nor do I, but he rightfully suggests that similar ideas are present in both works, at roughly the same time. His application of Bacon's theory is intriguing if one thinks of the great changes which are about to take place in the history of painting.

same manner as if we looked out at a crowd we would see all the people in the front and the people behind would be partially obscured.

The light in the Scrovegni Chapel is used to enhance the clarity of the scene and solidify the figures in the frescoes. Like Giotto's perspectival renderings, it also differs from his contemporaries--Duccio for example. For instance, let us look at The Vision of Anna (fig 21). The scene includes two rooms, one in which a servant sits, and the other where Anna is visited by the angel. The action in this scene takes place towards the front of the rooms; therefore, if one accepts Bacon's theory of perspective, the back of the rooms should be less defined and darker, which they are. What is more interesting, however, is the conspicuous lack of gold in the scene. The golden nimbus has been retained for the halos of Anna and the angel, but the scene itself is no longer set against a gold background nor are there gold striations in the garments, both Medieval traditions. The garments are instead modelled through graduated shades of color. But perhaps the most profound deviation Giotto undertakes in all the frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel is to replace the typical gold background with a blue sky; for it returns the figures to this world and moves them away from a purely conceptualist rendering. Return for a moment to the Crucifixions by Duccio and Giotto. The absence of a gold background in Giotto

marks a definite break. Duccio's Crucifixion still belongs to another time and should be interpreted within those conventions; it is the concept or the meaning which is essential to understanding this painting, rather than the history of one man's sufferings for our redemption.

We have not yet witnessed the emergence of cast shadows to signify the existence of physical light, but here in the Scrovegni Chapel we have established a painterly depiction of another kind of light, one which is treated uniformly throughout the frescoes and helps to suggest depth and volume. But there is also a different type of light rendered, specifically in the Annunciation (fig 22).

The Virgin Mary is shown kneeling in the presence of the Annunciate Angel. The rays of light emanate from Gabriel as he raises his hand to impart the salutation from God that Mary will bring forth the Christ child. The light falls upon Mary, who calmly accepts her fate. Perhaps it is not Giotto's intention to draw attention to the light itself, but rather to fix in the viewer's mind the God-given moment of conception. None the less, as Hartt has remarked, "in the Annunciation we have emerged from a world where every scene is bathed in the same dispassionate light into a world of mysticism and revelation."[9] This statement is not only fitting, it also

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[9] Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1987) 68.

recognizes that there are two distinct kinds of light in this artist's vocabulary. Our latter investigation will see if it is not also fitting to Michelangelo. The statement by Hartt also suggests that Giotto's separation from Medieval art lies not only in his narrative style but also in his decision to execute in painterly fashion what previously would have been rendered through gold. His conception of light still holds on to the vestiges of Medieval Conceptualism where light is not only God given, but God himself, but it has now also taken on a new dimension.

The next artist, whose works are important to the evolution of this historical process and which Michelangelo might have seen, is Taddeo Gaddi. The Annunciation to the Shepherd (fig 23), ca. 1328, is a work Michelangelo would have been familiar with purely because of its location in the Baroncelli Chapel in Santa Croce, Florence. However, the real significance of this work is its location within a historical process. It, like the frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel, reveals through painterly means the inclusion of a divine source for light. The Annunciate Angel appears in a cloud of light, which radiates down on the shepherd, who lies on the side of a mountain. The light of the angel is so bright that the definition in the rocky landscape begins to dissolve and the surface appears washed out. One shepherd raises his hand to protect his eyes from the light, because

the direct light of God can not be observed by man; it is only the reflection which our eyes can comprehend. Despite its symbolic significance, light here also reacts naturally to the landscape and figures. The trees which face the angel, are fully illuminated, whereas those which are further down the opposite side of the mountain are in darkness. The animals in the foreground appear to be below the ridge, because the ground upon which they sit is dark and only the tops of their coats are lit. One can see that Taddeo Gaddi is concerned with the concept of light and its divine properties, but it is also evident that he has examined its physical principles as well.

The use of light by Gaddi appears to be consistent throughout his works. If one looks to the fresco, The Tree of Life (fig 24), 1355-1360, in the Refectory in Santa Croce, Florence, one finds comparable manifestations of light treated similarly to those found in the Baroncelli Chapel. The fresco depicts Christ hung upon the symbolic Tree of Life. At the left are The Stigmatization of St. Francis and a Scene from the Life of St. Louis of Toulouse; at the right St. Benedict in the Desert and the Feast in the House of Levi; and below is the Last Supper, a scene which is found in many refectories. Examine, for example, the Stigmatization of St. Francis. The scene illustrates St. Francis kneeling in the bottom left corner and gazing in

astonishment at the image of Christ, in the upper right. The image of Christ is surrounded by light and this light radiates down onto St. Francis and the landscape in essentially the same naturalistic way we observed in the Annunciation to the Shepherd (fig 23). Light strikes the hills from the right, from the direction of Christ, and as our eye gradually moves around the hills to the left we see the shadows become consistently darker. This form of modeling gives the illusion of shape and contours, but most of all the illusion of space. There is a clear distinction between the foreground, which St. Francis occupies; the middle ground, with the two hills and the huts on top; and the background, in which can be found dark, distant hills and trees. The execution of pictorial light is again compatible with Roger Bacon's notions put forward in Perspectiva. What is curious, however, and what ultimately leads us to conclude that the light used here is conceptual or divine in origin and nature, is the lack of cast shadows; for if it were natural sun light, it would surely cast them. If Taddeo Gaddi had been concerned with depicting empirical phenomena, if he had wanted to depict the natural world, and natural light he certainly would have secured his figures to the ground through the inclusion of shadows. Giotto, Taddeo Gaddi and all the Early Renaissance artists work within established conventions, but one can not help but notice the different approaches

these two artists in particular represent. Giotto does not concern himself with light and shadow to suggest space, but Taddeo Gaddi does. This clear modification of the convention marks a point in the evolution of light and space within painting, a progression which will ultimately lead the artist to depictions of natural light.

One final artist who should be examined before we witness the revelation of natural light in paintings, however, is Gentile da Fabriano. The Strozzi altar, finished in 1423, further discloses a later stage in the transition from Medieval conceptualism to Renaissance naturalism. The main panel depicts the Adoration of the Magi (fig 25). This rich and elaborate panel contrasts dramatically with the simple predella panels below. Joseph, Mary, the Magi and their entourage crowd the scene to witness the miracle of Christ. Gold halos adorn the holy family and the Magi, which mystically separates them from the common observers. The figures themselves are modelled through tonal gradations of color, with the purely decorative inclusion of gold on the garments to demonstrate the wealth of the patrons, the Strozzi family. The entire scene is crowded and disquieting. Amongst such confusion it is not surprising that the figures would overlook a small, radiant ball of light above Joseph's head, all save the groom, who stares in bewilderment at the light. Is this the Holy Spirit

visiting this mystical moment? This is curious indeed, for it casts light onto the cave behind it , but does not appear to strike the facade of the building behind the Holy Family. This inconsistency can be forgiven, because of what one finds in the predella.

The predella is divided into three panels; the left depicting the Nativity (fig 26), the center the Flight into Egypt (fig 27), and the right the Presentation at the Temple (fig 25). The Nativity is a nocturnal scene. The foreground is lit by light which emanates from the Christ child, and which shines onto the figures of Mary, Joseph, the donkey and ox, as well as the woman who peers around the corner of the hut. The angel, who illuminates the background, also announces to the shepherds Christ's birth. These two sources of light create a void in the middle ground, making it difficult to comprehend the space between the holy family and the shepherds. They do, however, create a dramatic visual play between light and dark, foreground and background, and up and down, which not many artists had experimented with up to this time. This is interesting, but it is finally the Flight into Egypt which is the crucial panel to examine in this altar.

This scene shows Joseph walking along a road followed by Mary and the Christ child, who ride on a donkey. In the upper right can be

seen a distant city and in the upper left the sun. As far as we know, Gentile da Fabriano is the "first Italian painter to depict shadows cast consistently by light from an identifiable source".[10] This is undoubtedly true, but to this statement we can add that, as far as we know, he is also the first Italian painter to include the source of natural light in his work; namely, the sun. The sun consistently models the landscape, but the figures themselves do not cast shadows on the ground. It is not until Masaccio that we find an artist who faithfully looks at the natural world and depicts in his work what he observes. His concerns enhance the physical presence of his works as well as the psychological and emotional side of the figures.

The Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence is adorned with frescoes by Masolino as well as Masaccio, who came, in 1425, to collaborate with Masolino. The narratives illustrate scenes from the Life of St. Peter, the first pope. For the first time, in these frescoes, we see the inclusion of shadows on the ground cast by figures. The source of light is not illustrated, but one immediately realizes that the kind of light Masaccio and Masolino are concerned with depicting is no longer the conceptual understanding of light and its divine implications; but rather,

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[10] ibid. pg. 182

they are depicting natural sun light, the empirical phenomena of light. Look for a moment at the Healing of the Cripple and the Raising of Tabitha (fig 28)ca. 1425 by Masolino. The awkward architectural setting in the foreground appears incongruous to the city behind and the figures appear flat and stiff. Besides these technical difficulties Masolino has successfully rendered, in a natural, outdoor setting with the sunlight coming from the left foreground, the conflation of these two narratives. On the right, St. Peter and St. John are shown in the house of Tabitha, raising her from the dead; on the left, the two appear before the cripple and command him to stand and walk. The two episodes are visually connected by the two messengers, who stride through the foreground, engaged in conversation with one another. When one compares this scene to one by Masaccio, one is immediately struck by the technical superiority of Masaccio, and it is for this reason that Masaccio merits further investigation. It is in him that we find the first Renaissance artist who truthfully and consistently looks to the empirical world for inspiration.

The Tribute Money (fig 29)ca. 1425, from the Brancacci Chapel, effectively illustrates the difference in technical ability between Masolino and Masaccio. The composition of this scene is much more complex than Masolino's. The spacial relation between one apostle and another is

visually complicated, yet well conceived and convincing. Each figure stands firmly on the ground of this stark landscape and the physical presence of each body beneath the garment is strengthened by the sensitive use of chiaroscuro. The figures retain the gold halos, but the shadows which each casts on the ground establish them firmly in this world. Conceptual representation has now given way to something else.

St. Peter Healing with His Shadow (fig 30) ca. 1425, also from the Brancacci Chapel, holds for us something else, crucial element. The narrative is not only a beautiful example of the differences in the technical ability between Masolino and Masaccio, but also in their distinctive use of light and shadow. Upon examination we can also see distinguishing factors between Medieval conceptualism and Early Renaissance symbolism and, if one may call it naturalism. The stage-like surface of Masolino's scene has given way to the integration of the figures and their landscape. Masaccio, here, creates a street scene inhabited by the crippled man, St. Peter and St. John, and their disciples. The physical presence of each body is again observed beneath the garments and there appears to be more attention given to facial expression; both of these elements lend themselves to the scene and create a moment pregnant with emotion and communication between the figures.

Something we did not witness in Masolino. The symbolic use of gold and light has all but disappeared, leaving in its place the mimetic representation of this world. Hartt suggests that the subject of St. Peter healing with his shadow was rare and difficult "in an era before cast shadows had entered an artist's repertory".[11] This statement seems inappropriate in light of the artists, such as Taddeo Gaddi, we have seen experimenting with light effects. We should rather applaud Masaccio for representing such a scene which demands the inclusion of light and shadow. As a consequence of what has been examined, Masaccio's decision to illustrate the absence of light as something divine, something symbolic, is rather daring, and should be examined because it brings to light the differences between conceptualism, symbolism and naturalism. St. Peter's healing would, indeed could, not have been illustrated in Medieval art. It is only because of the gradual shift to include this world, its empirical phenomena and our senses that such a subject can be rendered. Medieval conceptualism did not lend itself to subjects such as St. Peter Healing with his Shadow (fig 30). The narrative element was absent: the reliance on the senses was lacking and this kind of symbolic use of light was missing from their perception of art.

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[11] ibid. pg. 191

The fresco from which we can draw the most direct connection between Michelangelo and his predecessors is the Expulsion (fig 18) by Masaccio, dated ca. 1425, from the Brancacci Chapel. In this scene the angel Gabriel forcefully banishes Adam and Eve from the Paradise. He hovers above the dejected and shameful figures and golden rays of light stream from the arch which separates the now temporal figures from their previous innocent world. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the composition of this scene is similar to that of Michelangelo's in the Sistine Chapel. And one also notices, as in the fresco by Michelangelo, there are shadows on the ground below the figures of Adam and Eve; however, the light which illuminates this scene is not provided by the golden rays of light which come from the arch behind them. The light which hits the figures and casts shadows on the ground comes from in front of them, from outside the picture itself. We therefore have two different forms of light represented here; the golden rays which emanates from Paradise and suggests the divine presence of God, and natural light which illuminates the temporal world.

From the moment natural light entered the Renaissance artist's vocabulary, light was used most effectively and to different ends. It enhanced the angles of an architectural setting such as in the

Annunciation (fig 31) by Fra Filippo Lippi ca. 1440 or in the Madonna and Child with Saints (fig 32) and the Annunciation (fig 33) from the St. Lucy altarpiece by Domenico Veneziano ca. 1445. Light was also used to add volume and further distinguish the foreground from the background as in Piero Della Francescas' Flagellation of Christ ca. 1463-64. In this particular scene illustrating three distinct stages in space, perspective is made more convincing by the subtle manipulation of light as it strikes the ground, the architecture, and the figures. For example, as the light strikes the ceiling above the flagellation, it casts a short shadow in the coffers of the ceiling while the coffers further in the interior of the portico have longer shadows, thus suggesting distance from the source of light.

There were, however, other Renaissance artists who chose not to depict natural light. Sandro Botticelli, for example, creates beautiful, classical scenes which are void of shadows. La Primavera is populated with graceful, delicate characters in a landscape of trees, grass, and flowers. Similar to the light Giotto employed, Botticelli illuminates the scene with light that is incidental rather than a tangible participant. Besides Botticelli's application there are artists who manipulate light to achieve a specific effect.

One distinctive manifestation is found in one of Michelangelo's

contemporaries, Leonardo Da Vinci. He is as competent and sure of his handling of light as is Michelangelo. But Da Vinci also has his own distinctive manner. Leonardo Da Vinci, perhaps as equally well known and admired throughout history as Michelangelo, was a scientist as well as an artist. He studied a variety of subjects from optics to anatomy to the light of the moon and many of his paintings reflect his variety of interests. The Annunciation (fig 34), a work from the late 1470's, is clearly a continuation of the tradition of Annunciation scenes in the Renaissance. The angel comes to visit Mary, who gracefully accepts the news that she will bear the Christ Child. In Da Vinci's painting the two are enclosed in a neatly manicured garden which opens out onto a vast landscape of bushes and trees and in the far distance a hazy mountain. From this description one is immediately reminded of Roger Bacon's book Perspectiva in which he suggests that the nearer an object appears the clearer and sharper the image, whereas the farther away it is the darker and hazier it becomes. This scene seems to illustrate Bacon's perspective theory quite well. The temporal setting is further indicated by the shadows which the Annunciate Angel and Mary cast. These figures are exquisitely rendered. The soft, delicate nature of Mary is told through her gestures and gaze, yet the weight and solidity of her body is undeniable beneath

the folds of her garment.

The distinct clarity of Da Vinci's Annunciation (fig 34) can be sharply contrasted to his later works, The Madonna of the Rocks ca. 1483, or Madonna and St. Anne ca. 1508-1513; a work which was executed at the same time as Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel. The Madonna and St. Anne seems in many respects to be the antithesis of his Annunciation. Neither the foreground nor the background is particularly sharp; the figures are larger and more robust, yet a similar sentiment can be felt as the figures gaze at one another tenderly. The light in this scene, as in the Madonna of the Rocks, is completely different from any we have yet encountered. It is not particularly suggestive of a divine presence, but is rather a misty, atmospheric light. There are no distinctive shadows on the ground, but the light which strikes the figures clearly comes from a particular direction. Leonardo Da Vinci's distinctive use of light and shadow is unquestionably as individual as Michelangelo's and as interesting to ponder. Indeed one could examine each artist in the history of the Italian Renaissance.

Of all these Renaissance artists who added their own interpretation and style to the development of light and shadow in painting, there is still one who remains to be examined, because of his connection to

Michelangelo. This artist is Domenico Ghirlandaio. He is important to this study not only because his renderings of light and shadow are clearly defined and naturalistic, but he was also Michelangelo's teacher. There are legends which state that Michelangelo was uneducated to the art of fresco painting before he began work on the Sistine Chapel, but coming from Ghirlandaio's workshop this can hardly be true. Domenico Ghirlandaio has been described as an "almost perfect technician".[12] Indeed by looking at his frescoes in Santa Trinita, Florence one can imagine the young Michelangelo examining them both for their technical merit and aesthetic quality. In Santa Trinita, Ghirlandaio proceeds in the same manner as Masaccio. Ghirlandaio's convincing use of perspective in St. Francis Raises the French Notary's Son (fig 35) on the altar wall reminds one of St. Peter Healing With His Shadow (fig 30) where both frescoes depict an open courtyard flanked by tall buildings. The architecture in both scenes is secondary to the action of the narrative but nonetheless demands some attention. The Dark and shadowy doorways and windows are sharply contrasted to the brightly lit facade. The figures are proportional to the architecture and like Masaccio's are engaged in the drama which unfolds around them. They are weighty, solid figures

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[12] Gardner Hale, Fresco Painting (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1933) 7.

who occupy a physical space in the fresco.

Not only would the young Michelangelo become familiar with various techniques of fresco painting by working in the studio of Dominico Ghirlandaio, but he was also exposed to the blossoming tradition of painting light, shadow and color.

Each of these artist's has his own use and need for light. Part of the effect will be dictated by the subject, the setting, and the message which is told, but it is becoming increasingly clear that light in the Renaissance has many different applications and interpretations. It is fascinating to notice how these artists, Giotto, Taddeo Gaddi, Gentile da Fabriano, Masaccio and Ghirlandaio, in particular choose to depict light. With the emergence of natural light into the Renaissance artist's vocabulary each artist has a new tool to work with. Some artists, such as Taddeo Gaddi, chose to depict a more symbolic kind of light which nevertheless illuminates the landscape and figures in a realistic manner. Gentile da Fabriano depicted the sun itself, but curiously enough shadows were missing from his works. It was Masolino and Masaccio who solidified the use of natural light and brought to the fore the possibilities it held for the artist. Masaccio depicted natural light in conjunction with spiritual light in his Expulsion (fig 18) scene. He also demonstrates, in St. Peter Healing with

His Shadow (fig 30), that natural light can have a symbolic meaning as well. By the time Michelangelo begins to paint the Sistine Chapel many interpretations and manipulations of light have been put forth, both symbolic and natural. It is no wonder then that a man as individual as Michelangelo would also have his own perception of light and its possible meanings. Michelangelo was interested in philosophy and the natural world, but he was also an introspective person and his use of light reflected a personal belief. The perceptible inconsistencies in the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel are not mere chance.

Michelangelo inherits the two hundred year history of painting light. He, like his contemporaries, has different ways of seeing the world, which artists from the Middle Ages did not conceive. Being first and foremost a sculptor, Michelangelo shapes his art according to the eye of a sculptor. His use for light, at the beginning of his career, is therefore dictated by the laws of nature and by how it physically reacts to a surface. When he begins to paint the Sistine Chapel it is with the understanding that has come from years of looking at the world and examining forms, space, light and shadows.

Chapter Three

Michelangelo's Early Style

In his youth Michelangelo was primarily interested in how light reacted when it struck a surface. During this stage we can observe how Michelangelo begins to bring the flat surface of a marble block to life. The early works of Michelangelo illustrate his pronounced interest in the traditional representations of sculptural relief and, as artists before and since him, he strove to recount a story and elicit an emotional response. His investigation of the natural world centers primarily on the form of the human body and his interest in natural light, therefore, lies primarily in its functional and aesthetic value.

Two of Michelangelo's earliest sculptural works were done during his apprenticeship at the Medici Palace in the art school run by Lorenzo the Magnificent. The first extant sculptural relief is the Madonna of the Stairs, (fig 36) done in 1491. Many scholars, such as de Tolnay, have sought to show the Neo-Platonic influences in these works, especially in the Madonna of the Stairs. As this study will illustrate, it is compelling to try to mingle these notions with the Neo-Platonic understanding of forms and light and apply them to Michelangelo's sculptures as well as to his paintings.

The low relief and composition of this sculptural work are similar to

the Madonna and Child by Donatello ca. 1425-28. While various scholars, such as Linda Murray in Michelangelo, are quick to point out the clumsy handling of this inexperienced youth. The Madonna of the Stairs itself seems effectively ethereal and detailed. The actual piece of marble which Michelangelo had to work with was relatively thin and it has been suggested that this would account for its execution in low relief. The Madonna sits serenely on the stairs, tenderly holding the Christ Child. Her features are as delicately chiseled as the touch she places on the Christ Child, and the gentle play of light on the surface emphasizes the calm moment. The whole scene is made that much more effective in its simplicity and tenderness by the very technique with which Michelangelo renders the surface of the marble. The Madonna of the Stairs evokes an air of quietude, simplicity and contemplation, in a way that reminds one of Donatello's Madonna and Child. It is likely that Michelangelo looked to this artist and his predecessors for inspiration and guidance. The sentiment of Donatello's Madonna is quiet, reserved, and it illustrates the "Beautiful Madonna". The physicality of light is taken for granted, because one usually presumes that a piece of sculpture will not be viewed in total darkness, therefore physical light is simply assumed but never really consciously thought about.

Sculpture, unlike painting, relies on the physical presence of light to convey the appearance of form. For example, the light, as it hits the protruding ridge of the Madonna's garment, casts a shadow in the valley, thus showing the tangible depth and shape of the figure. In painting this is known as chiaroscuro and is achieved through the manipulation of graduated tones of color. The physical communication and sentiment of the Madonna of the Stairs depends upon the physical character of the marble relief, but is enhanced by the delicate and etherial quality of light which strikes its surface. The physical light which strikes the marble reveals the delicate folds in the drapery and the modelling of the figures. But this particular relief is not as adeptly rendered as Michelangelo's later accomplishments.

While the Madonna of the Stairs is executed in shallow relief and with quiet sentiment the Battle of the Centaurs (fig 37) is rendered in much higher relief, thus accentuating the musculature of the figures and enhancing the drama and movement of the scene. The intricate play of light and dark further adds to the emotional tenor of the relief. The bodies of the figures are somewhat different from sculptures of similar subject matter. Previously, bodies in such sculptures were partially clothed, but Michelangelo chose to depict them here without clothes. For example,

Michelangelo might have looked to the Battle of the Horsemen (1475) by Giovanni, which was in the Medici palace or the Crucifixion (1260) from the Pisa Pulpit by Nicola Pisano for inspiration and an illustration of how to render a scene pregnant with drama and emotion. Michelangelo's decision to render the figures completely nude allows him to examine and depict the human body in motion, in various poses, while emphasizing the musculature of the human form.

The heightened drama and vigor of the figures is achieved through the effect of light and the deeper relief cut into the marble. The scene, in fact the subject matter itself, seems to demand this sharp contrast between the presence and absence of light, and the gnarling and twisting of bodies. Both Vasari and Condivi assert that Poliziano provided Michelangelo with subjects, but the two disagree whether this particular scene represents the Rape of Dejanira or the Battle of the Centaurs. Condivi recalls that Michelangelo succeeded so well in executing this piece that he remembers "hearing him (Michelangelo) say that, whenever he sees it again, he realizes what a great wrong he committed against nature by not promptly pursuing the art of sculpture."[13] Michelangelo succeeds in revealing intertwined arms and the contorted

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[13] Ascanio Condivi trans by, Alice Sedgwick Wohl, The Life of Michelangelo (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1976) 15.

poses of figures which seem to emerge from the marble, at times appearing to be almost separate from the marble block. The scene is enhanced and enlivened by the contrast of void spaces, created by the dark shadows, to light, muscular bodies. Whether or not Michelangelo consciously conceived of the heightened emotional content through the visual play of light and dark, no one is certain; but we do know that he was attentive to the problems of verisimilitude and alert to the public perception of his works.

Michelangelo's understanding of light at this point in his career is purely physical. While various Neo-Platonic interpretations have been given for both of these sculptural reliefs, the symbolic quality of light and shadow has not yet entered Michelangelo's vocabulary. Their subject matter and technique can be accurately expounded upon in such philosophical terms, but it is not until later in his career that Michelangelo conceives of light other than physically. The Madonna of the Stairs is commonly extolled for its Neo-Platonic concept of the contemplative life. Ficino, in his theory of "natural appetite" and "natural movement"[14] asserts that all elements naturally tend to ascend or descend according to their composition. Kristeller suggests that Ficino was aware of the Aristotelian

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[14] See chapter 10 in The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino by Paul Kristeller for a discussion of Ficino's theory of natural appetites.

and Augustinian notion of the Souls ascent toward God and this influenced this theory. If indeed this is accurate, the contemplation of the Madonna of the Stairs could reflect the consequences of the contemplative life in the ascent of the soul and therefore the inattention to physical light in this scene can be more readily accepted. If, in a state of true contemplation, the soul reaches God who exists in a world of pure light, the light which is suggested by this state would exist before physical light and would therefore not be sunlight.

Further support for this claim can be found in the distinction Ficino makes between the sensuous and contemplative life. He states that the sensuous life is governed by the laws of the corporeal world. If one compares the Madonna of the Stairs to the Battle of the Centaurs one is immediately struck by the stillness of the first piece and the suggestion that the stairs represent the ascent of the soul through the contemplation of this work. In a poem by Michelangelo ca. 1522, he imagines his struggle to scale the mountain.

> The soul tries a thousand remedies in vain;
> since I was captured, it's been struggling
> in vain to get back on its earlier road.
> The sea, and the mountain, and the fire with the sword:
> I live in the midst of all of these together.
> The one who's deprived me of my mind, and taken

away my reason, won't let me up the mountain.[15]

The ascent of the mountain is like that of the stairs, but the physical body retards man from completing his journey. The soft contours and faint shadows induces a quiet, solemn mood which facilitates contemplation, unlike the Battle of the Centaurs.

These two sculptural works are the first examples we have of Michelangelo's art. Each illustrates a distinctive approach to relief sculpture, but his interest in light lies strictly in how it falls on a surface and invokes an emotional state. His concern is not misplaced for the quiet and solitude of the Madonna of the Stairs would be lost had Michelangelo carved a higher relief with deeper shadows. Whether Michelangelo consciously chose to illustrate the active and contemplative life is not in question, it is, however, our concern to examine his use of forms, light and shadow.

Another example of his use of physical light is the more skillfully executed work of the marble David (fig 38) (1501-1504), contracted by the Operai dell 'Opera del Duomo. The biblical figure had long been a symbol of Florence. The strength of Florence is personified in the youthful, morally upright, simple body of the young David. He is depicted staring

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[15] ibid p. 88

pensively to his left. The furrowed brow and the deep set eyes indicate David's concentration. The execution of this ideal human body who personifies the resolution and fortitude of Florence and its citizens is breath taking. The awkward execution of the Madonna of the Stairs by the youthful Michelangelo is nowhere evident in this sculpture. The execution of the sculpture is flawless and, as with Michelangelo's previous works, the physical play of light on its surface is strictly aesthetic.

In the span of thirteen years we see Michelangelo mature into a talented and confident artist. The skillful manner through which he executes the statue of David illustrates Michelangelo's knowledge of anatomy and the human form. His concern for light in relation to this piece, as well as his previous sculptural works, is purely aesthetic. At this time in his career there are aspects of his art which show the influence of his early exposure to the scholarly and intellectual circle at the Medici Palace. It was during his stay at the Medici Palace that Michelangelo became acquainted with Marsilio Ficino, the founder of the Platonic Academy in Florence. It was during this period that he also came together with Christo Landino, an authority on Dante's Divine Comedy; Angelo Poliziano, poet and scholar in Latin and Greek; Pico della Mirandola, scholar of Plato and Aristotle, and the man who attempted to

reconcile the Bible with Platonic philosophy;[16] and Girolamo Benivieni, who taught Michelangelo how to write sonnets.

As we saw in Linda Murray's analysis of the Madonna of the Stairs, scholars find philosophical and intellectual ideas in Michelangelo's art from the very beginning of his career. But until he begins work on the Sistine Chapel, we do not see an awareness of light which is anything other than physical. His understanding of light came first as a sculptor who represents three-dimensional objects in space. This understanding will dictate how he conceives of light on a painted surface.

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[16] Linda Murray, Michelangelo (New York and Toronto: Oxford UP, 1980) 18

Chapter Four

Michelangelo's Mature Style

In the preceding chapters, we witnessed the historical process surrounding the emergence of natural light in painting as well as Michelangelo's own adaptation and evolution. Michelangelo begins the Sistine Chapel with the understanding and desires of a sculptor, but also with the maturity of a thoughtful, reflective artist. We have seen that his perception of light is influenced by his physical surroundings, but we have barely touched upon how instrumental his idea of what art truly is in this scheme. It is prudent, therefore, to look at completely and understand Michelangelo's manipulation of natural light, beyond what the Sistine Chapel reveals. One series of works in particular are of special interest, because Michelangelo himself wrote about the light effects in the room. These works are in the Medici Chapel in Florence, Italy (fig 39-40).

As Michelangelo wrote, the tombs for the Medici Chapel were first commissioned in 1520, by Pope Leo X, but he died on December 1, 1521 and the project did not proceed until 1524 after Giuliano de' Medici became Pope Clement VII on November 18, 1523.[17] Linda Murray comments on the symbolism of the chapel in Michelangelo, describing it

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[17] Irving and Jean Stone, I, Michelangelo, Sculptor: an Autobiography Through Letters (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1962) 114-115.

as "a mixture of Christian and classical."[18] The original program was intended to have four River Gods at the ground level, which were never completed. Linda Murray suggests these figures would have represented the zone of the Underworld. The figures that were completed, however, are the four times of the day -Dawn, Dusk, Night, and Day- (fig 39-40) which "represent the zone of the transient World"[19] On top of each sarcophagus sits a statue of the deceased, Lorenzo de' Medici and Giuliano de' Medici. Both figures turn to look at the Madonna and Child, who are the crowning figures and would, therefore, represent the Heavenly sphere "to which the dead had attained."[20] The tomb of Giuliano de' Medici contains what Linda Murray calls the "positive" times of day -Day and Night- and the tomb of Lorenzo the "indecisive" times -Dawn and Dusk. What concerns us in this study, however, is the physical lighting of the chapel.

Originally the windows over Lorenzo's tomb were to be darkened, so that his side of the chapel received only dim light, while full light was allowed to illumine the side of Giuliano. The positive times of day under

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[18] Linda Murray, Michelangelo (New York and Toronto: Oxford UP, 1980) 120.

[19] ibid

[20] ibid

Giuliano's tomb -Day and Night- are imbued with determined characteristics, but are also introspective as well. The figures themselves are tense and constricted. Day turns his head to stare out at us over his right shoulder, his right arm comes across his chest and his left leg crosses over his right. The extreme angular contortion of his body makes him appear as if he is closing in upon himself. The figure of Night also reveals this same tautness and constraint. Her gaze is directed down and upon herself. Her right arm is bent with her hand resting upon her head and her elbow upon her left thigh. The poses of both figures demand introspection and contemplation but their dark and somber sentiment is sharply contrasted to the full light of the chapel. One is again reminded of the distinction between the Madonna of the Stairs (fig 36) and the Battle of the Centaurs (fig 37) and Michelangelo's well thought out handling of the marble to achieve a certain look and feel. What we realize by examining these works is that Michelangelo put great thought into not only the work itself, but its surroundings and how it should be viewed. They have special meaning to Michelangelo, beyond the mere surface.

In a poem dated ca. 1519, Michelangelo imagines a passage spoken by Day and Night:

> Day and Night speak and say: "We, in our swift course, have led Duke Giuliano to his death; it is only fair that he should take revenge on us as he does. And his revenge is this: Having been

> killed by us, he, being dead, has deprived us of light, and by closing his eyes has shut ours, which no longer shine upon the earth. What might he have done with us, then, if he had lived?"[21]

This poem was written before the actual execution of the tomb, but Michelangelo had already conceived in his mind the message to be brought out in this work. The light, referred to in this poem, is the light of the soul, which in Platonic theory shines from the eyes, but here has been extinguished by the passage of time. Giuliano's and perhaps Michelangelo's revenge is, on the one hand, no longer having to suffer under the constraints of time and mortality; and on the other, is in depriving the world of their great contributions and future accomplishments. By harmonizing the spiritual and the physical light in the chapel Michelangelo creates a program which is introspective yet also alive. The aesthetic effect is visually exciting and suggests a level of meaning beyond the mere surface.

Dawn and Dusk are intimated to be the antithesis to Day and Night, because of their sensuous character and languid poses. The light which Michelangelo intended to strike these figures was to be diminished. The reduction of light would lessen the stirring and excitable quality of the statues, much as it did in the Madonna of the Stairs. Linda Murray

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[21] ibid pg 84.

suggests that the figure of Giuliano de' Medici, in his alert pose, is the embodiment of the active life and she concludes that Lorenzo's pose invokes the contemplative life. There seems, as a result, to be a dichotomy in this analysis. The sensuous and languid poses of Dawn and Dusk suggest the temporal world and therefore the active life, yet Lorenzo's is nothing if not contemplative and introspective. A similar argument can be made for the figures of Day and Night, with their closed and introverted poses, and Giuliano, the noble and glorified statesman.

If the light in the chapel had been completed according to Michelangelo's wishes we would have entered a world of mysterious, dark shadows and dimly lit corners. What a dramatic impact this would have added to the already visually alive statues. The physical light is an integral part of the sculptural program, but unlike in the Madonna of the Stairs and the Battle of the Centaurs, it also has a symbolic function.

At times it seems that Michelangelo's struggle with his own mortality is manifested in his works. The contradictions and disparate qualities which are apparent in his art are indeed contradictions which Michelangelo sees within himself. But somehow art is a means through which he overcomes and defeats nature and light is one method used to illustrate the process. The light in the Medici Chapel is natural sun light

that has been manipulated and changed to represent a concept. The once disparate qualities of the contemplative and active life are brought together in this chapel. It is neither the statues alone nor the light which represents this union, but rather the entire experience which begins when one first enters the room.

This complex idea is again brought up when we examine Michelangelo's use of natural light in the Sistine Chapel, but it is doubly perplexing because here he is not working with natural sun light as it strikes a physical object, he is rather pictorially representing natural light on a flat surface as it would strike a three dimensional object. This abstract distancing which one senses when this analysis is first put forth is not felt when one enters the room and views the frescoes. The manipulation of light which Michelangelo employed in the Medici Chapel seems no less tangible than here, in the Sistine Chapel.

In the introduction it was established that the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel begin in the temporal world and are brought to completion in the temporal world with the Last Judgement. The only scenes in the Genesis cycle which depict natural light are those of the temporal world. This includes the Drunkenness of Noah (fig 1), The Flood (fig 2), The Sacrifice of Noah (fig 3), and the Expulsion of Adam an Eve from the Garden of Eden

(fig 4). We know from the time Michelangelo studied with Domenico del Ghirlandaio that he did pen and ink studies of the frescoes by Masaccio in the Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence. One fresco in the chapel depicts the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. The expressions of Adam and Eve tell us of their shame and remorse. It is commonly assumed that Michelangelo modelled his figures after Masaccio's, but what is most interesting about Masaccio's Adam and Eve are the golden rays of light which radiate from the open archway through which they have just passed, and the shadows on the ground below their feet. The inclusion of gold to represent a divine source of light is missing from Michelangelo's depiction of the Expulsion, but the shadows which signify Adam and Eve's temporal nature are included. The same scene, by Michelangelo, also shows Adam and Eve before the expulsion, but there are no shadows. These two episodes show the distinction between the temporal world governed by natural laws, and the spiritual world which knows no time nor imperfect shadows. In both Expulsion scenes the presence of shadows quite convincingly suggests the temporal world, while their absence in the Original Sin by Michelangelo suggests the spiritual realm. The integration of physical light with its symbolic function, as we saw, was illustrated in the Medici Chapel. In the Genesis cycle itself

light takes on a symbolic as well as a functional use, but the same demands are not made on the scenes around them.

The Genesis cycle is framed by seven Old Testament prophets and five Sibyls. As proposed in the introduction the shadows cast by the sibyls and Prophets indicates a directional source of light emanating from above, perhaps from the Genesis scenes themselves. Mariani, in Michelangelo: The Painter, comments on the prophet Joel and extols the clarity of the outline "imposed by the contrast between light and shadow."[22] He further goes on to state that "his face, chiefly characterized by the strong modeling and accentuated by the sharply slanted light, is crowned with flaming reddish white hair. The hair covers his great brow which is illuminated as if by divine knowledge."[23] This statement contradicts that of Summers, when he states "he (Michelangelo) is not so much interested in the illusions of space and light..."[24] Indeed, I would have to disagree with Summers, Michelangelo is very much interested in light, both for its natural manifestations and its divine conceptions.

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[22] Valerio Mariani, Michelangelo: The Painter (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1964) 64.

[23] ibid.

[24] David Summers, Michelangelo and the Language of Art (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1981) 71.

The same type of light can also be found illuminating the prophet Zachariah, who turns to his left as the light streams over his right shoulder, thus fully illuminating the book he studies. The intricate play of light and dark in his dazzling green robe proclaims the physical existence of a body under it. His right knee is foreshortened and appears as if it were protruding forward, this area receives the most direct light and is therefore painted in the lightest shades; whereas, the folds of fabric which fall down between his knees are shadowed and dark. His shadow is also depicted on the wall behind him. Michelangelo manipulates these elements to create the illusion of space and the sculptural quality of the figure is achieved through the painted depiction of natural light.

The remaining Prophets and Sibyls are consistent with the Prophets Joel and Zachariah, and the Delphic Sibyl mentioned in the introduction. The light which strikes each figure models them and reveals the deep folds in the fabric while also casting shadows on the throne upon which they sit. The natural effects of light used in these scenes demonstrates Michelangelo's awareness of the physical phenomena of light and its ability to enliven a figure and scene, but we should expect nothing less from such an artist. Throughout Michelangelo's career he has been deeply aware of the physical world and its plastic representation.

We witnessed in the Early Renaissance the emerging regard and curiosity for the natural world and the sense of sight. During the High Renaissance, in the midst of Neo-Platonism and talks of Platonic Love and the aspirations of the Soul, Michelangelo found himself deeply aware of the observed world. But as we discovered there is another side to Michelangelo's art, a side which is intensely personal and spiritual. It is this aspect of his art which makes Michelangelo's use of light unique to him. Other artists during the Renaissance, indeed up to the present, mingled together a spiritual and natural meaning for light, but Michelangleo was perhaps the first to do it on such a grand scale as in the Sistine Chapel. The presence of divine light in the Sistine Chapel is more complicated then the mere appearance of a shaft of brilliant light or the inclusion of gold to symbolize its proximity. It is the absence of shadows from specific scenes which signifies the presense of divine light. It is the conscious decision Michelangelo makes to render some scenes void of shadows and others not which supports our belief that he is using light for a specific effect. Whether that effect be visual, emotional or spiritual will depend solely on Michelangelo.

As was remarked earlier the Original Sin (fig 4), Creation of Eve (fig 5) and Creation of Adam (fig 6) are void of cast shadows on the

ground. The absence of shadows in the Congregation of the Waters (fig 7), the Creation of the Sun, Moon and Planets (fig 8), and the Separation of Light from Darkness (fig 9) is perhaps more easily accepted, because these scenes depict God, in the heavens, generating these enduring moments. Michelangelo's understanding of the concept of divine light and its creative power is nowhere as evident as in the depiction of God separating light from darkness. This light bestows order on chaos and begins the very creation of the world for man. For "it is for man that the incorruptible heavenly bodies have been created. It is for him too that God divides the waters with the firmaments, and calls the dry land to appear from under the waters and peoples it with animals and the green herb."[25] As suggested in the introduction, Michelangelo is perhaps interested in more than illustrating the narrative of the Book of Genesis. He is also enthralled by the very act of painting, of creating something which will endure time, in fact overcome the constraints of nature. We see in his poetry that a figure carved in stone does indeed overcome nature, why then not the creating of a painting?"[26] Light is a creative force, much as

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[25] Etienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (New York: Random House, 1966) 174.

[26] "Lady, how can that be, which each discerns, as slowly passing years the truth makes known that longer lives the image carved in stone, than he, the maker, who to dust returns? To the effect doth yield, surpassed,

the artist possesses a creative instinct. It is the mingling of the concept behind light and natural light which gives us this world and the desire for eternity and perfection. These two manifestations of light in the end are not separate for Michelangelo.

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the cause, and art of man doth nature's self subdue;..." Robert J. Clements, The Poetry of Michelangelo (New York: New York UP, 1965) 72. In this poem Michelangelo refers to the image in stone as if it could defeat nature and time be enduring through it, unlike Giuliano who was defeated by time.

"Lady, how can it be, which each discerns, as slowly passing years the truth makes known that longer lives the image carved in stone, than he, the maker, who to dust returns? To the effect doth yield, surpassed, the cause, and art of man doth nature's self subdue..."

Conclusion

The Unity of Light

As stated in the introduction, this thesis explores how light is related to Michelangelo's notion of Being and how it reveals the special position which art has in his Weltanshauung. To reflect upon Michelangelo's own writing (and especially the above poem) uncovers his notion that within him exists the ability to create something which will endure time. There are two pivotal frescoes in the Sistine Chapel which not only lead us to this same conclusion, but which expound upon it; namely, the Original Sin and Expulsion from Earthly Paradise (fig 4)and the Separation of Light from Darkness (fig 9).

In the Original Sin and Expulsion, Michelangelo's use of light changes. Before the fall of man, the scenes are bathed in a light similar to that used by early Renaissance artists such as Giotto. It is more an atmospheric quality of color than it is suggestive of natural light. After this scene and the fall of Man, one should not think that it is by pure chance that Michelangelo chose to depict the empirical manifestations of light. After the Fall the world which man inhabits is the world God created. This world is steered by natural laws and therefore natural sunlight, but for Michelangelo the two worlds are intertwined. Michelangelo sought, through his art, to illustrate the distinction between pure, spiritual light and

natural light and to ultimately reunite them. As stated previously, it is in the two frescoes which depict the Original Sin and Expulsion from Earthly Paradise and the Separation of Light from Darkness that we can most readily see the seeds of this desire.

The Separation of Light from Darkness, alternately titled God Gives Order to Chaos is the second fresco which gives us insight into Michelangelo's desire to reunite, or in this case ultimately control, the natural separation of spiritual and natural light. When the Lord gives order to chaos He, in essence, brings together unorganized matter and creates the spark which ultimately defines time. The first thing one notices is that this is a humanistic view of creation. Contrary to the natural laws of entropy, which state that chaos tends naturally to move towards order, God, who created the world in his likeness, is the force behind the ordering of the universe. This is in keeping with the Renaissance notions of humanism, whereby man is the measure of all things. Here God is in control of evolution, man's destiny and time.

Time is something which Michelangelo sought to overcome, at least its temporal effects. In the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo's frescoes represent the culmination of his understanding and thoughts about the temporal nature of life and the eternal struggle which man experiences

because of the chasm created by the Fall of Man; the fall of man into Time. Light is the vehicle through which Michelangelo illustrates his desire to reunite this chasm. From the beginning, the two kinds of light were distinct yet codependent. First, God created spiritual light which brought order to what previously had been void. Second, God created natural light which implies in this moment also the beginning of time. The natural separation of man from his spiritual self is facilitated by the passage of time and time is seen as the measurement of this mutability. If Michelangelo can create something which represents the reunion of man and which endures through time, then perhaps he himself will overcome nature.

The two frescoes, the Original Sin and Expulsion from Earthly Paradise and the Separation of Light from Darkness can be interpreted in many different ways. When examined in relation to Michelangelo's poetry , painting, light, shadow and thoughts on Neo-Platonic theory, they give us a unique insight into his notion of Being. The struggle of man can ultimately be overcome, but it would take a person who could create something which endures through time and reunite the divergent aspects of man, something which informs chaos with order.

Figures

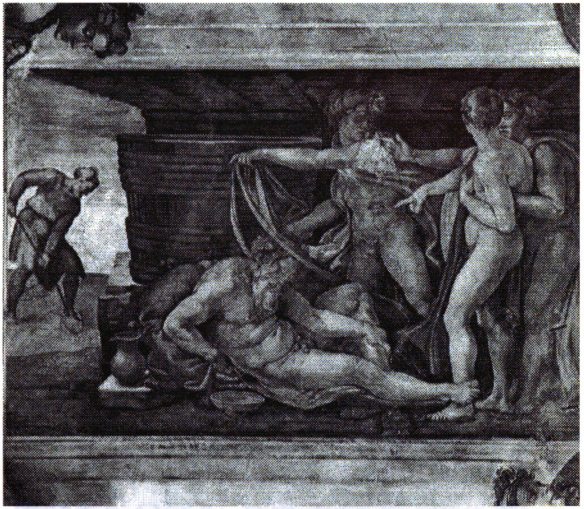

Figure 1: The Drunkenness of Noah, Michelangelo

Figure 2: The Flood, Michelangelo

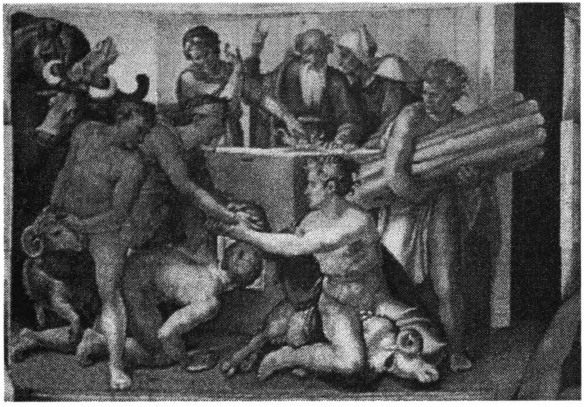

Figure 3: Sacrifice of Noah, Michelangelo

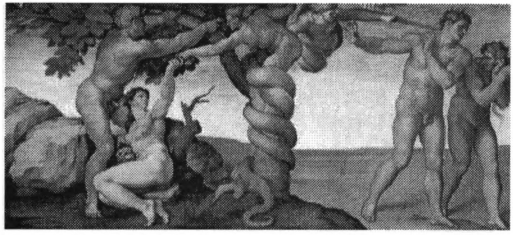

Figure 4: Temptation and Expulsion, Michelangelo

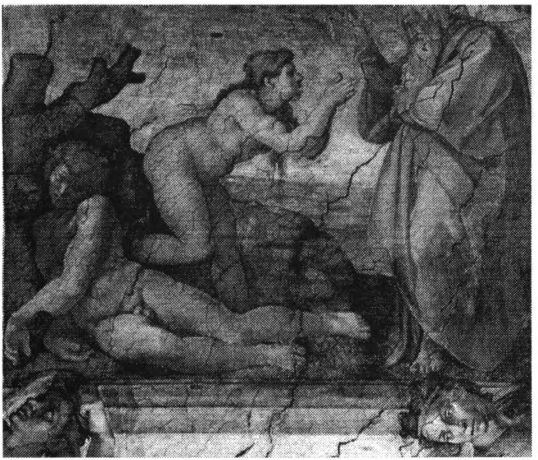

Figure 5: The Creation of Eve, Michelangelo

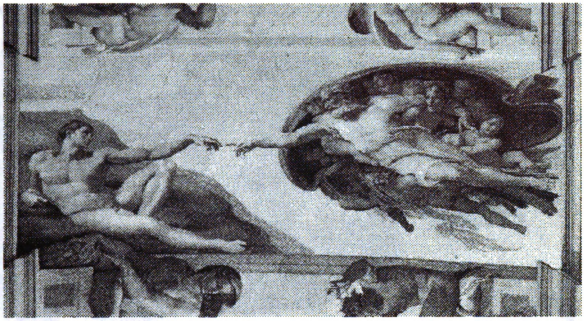

Figure 6: The Creation of Adam, Michelangelo

Figure 7: Congregation of the Waters, Michelangelo

Figure 8: Creation of the Sun, Moon and Planets, Michelangelo

Figure 9: Separation of Light and Darkness, Michelangelo

Figure 10: Delphic Sybil, Michelangelo

Figure 11: Libyan Sybil, Michelangelo

Figure 12: Ignudi, Michelangelo

Figure 13: Judith and Holofernes, Michelangelo

Figure 14: David and Goliath, Michelangelo

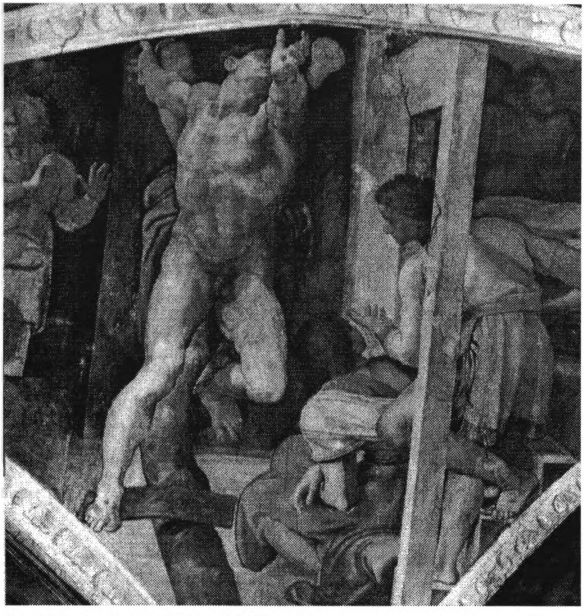

Figure 15: Punishment of Haman, Michelangelo

Figure 16: The Brazen Serpent, Michelangelo

Figure 17: The Temptation, Masolino

Figure 18: The Expulsion, Masaccio

Figure 19: The Crucifixion, Giotto

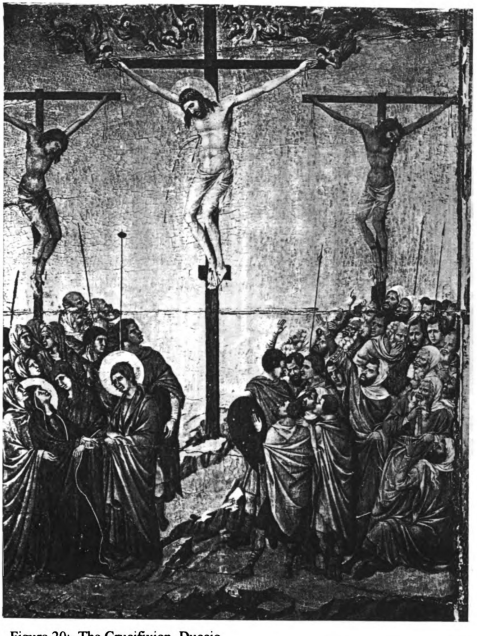

Figure 20: The Crucifixion, Duccio

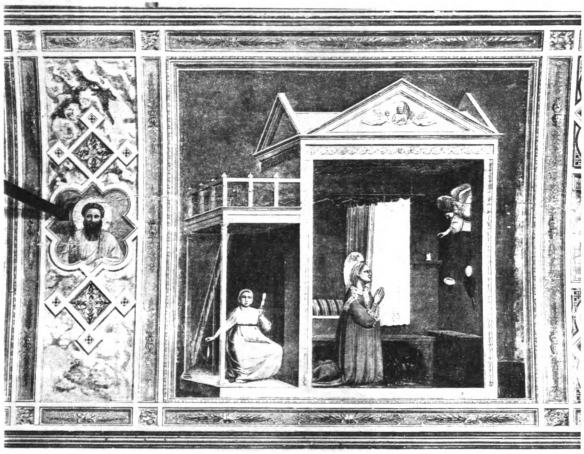

Figure 21: The Vision of Anna, Giotto

Figure 32: The Annunciation, Giotto

Figure 23: The Annunciation to the Shepherds, T. Gaddi

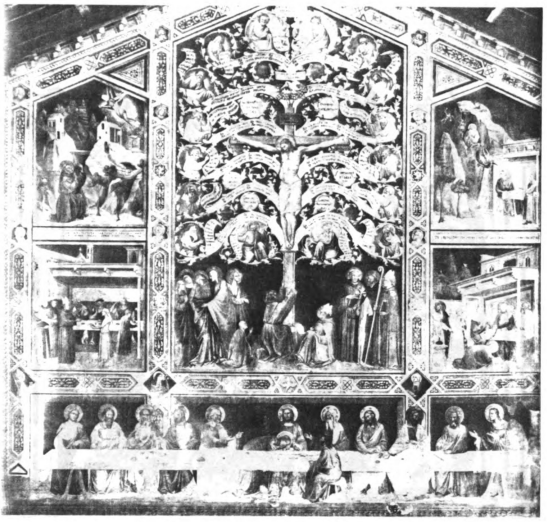

Figure 24: The Tree of Life, Taddeo Gaddi

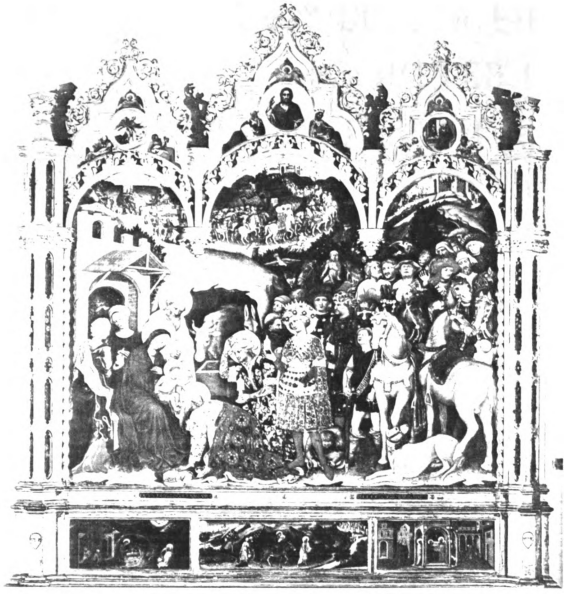

Figure 25: The Adoration of the Magi, Gentile da Fabriano

Figure 26: The Navitity, Gentile da Fabriano

Figure 27: The Flight into Egypt, Gentile da Fabriano

Figure 28: Healing of the Cripple and the Raising of Tabitha, Masolino

Figure 29: The Tribute Money, Masaccio

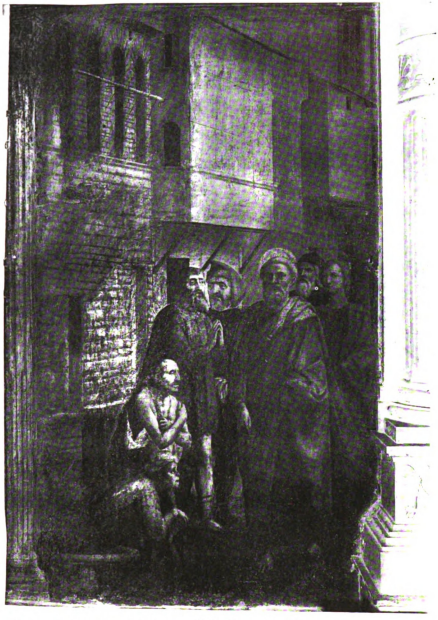

Figure 30: St. Peter Healing with his Shadow, Masaccio

Figure 31: The Annunciation, Fra Filippo Lippi

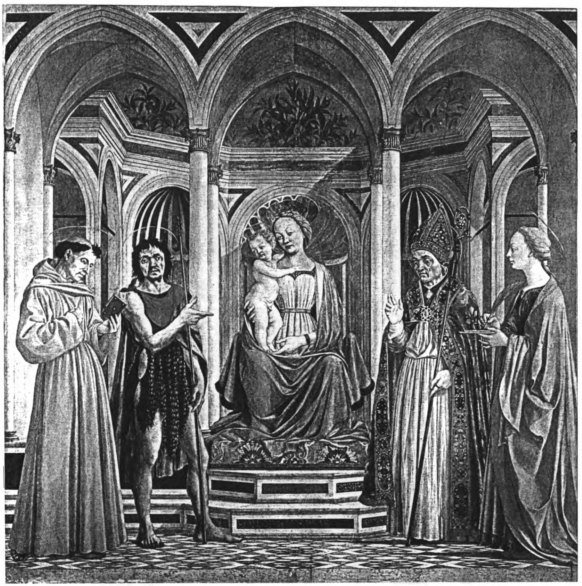

Figure 32: Madonna and Child with Saints, Domenico Veneziano

Figure 33: The Annunciation, Domenico Veneziano

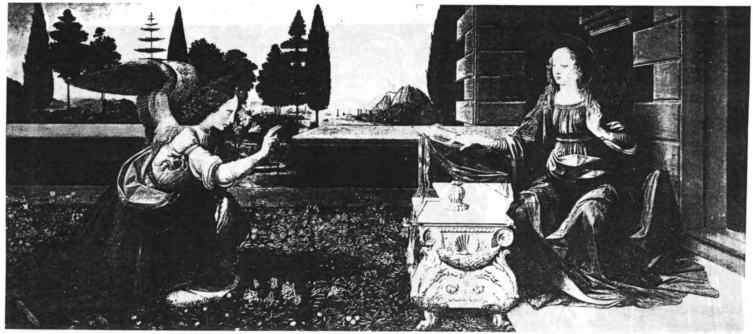

Figure 34: The Annunciation, Leonardo da Vinci

Figure 35: Miracle of the Child of the French Notary

Figure 36: Madonna of the Stairs, Michelangelo

Figure 37: Battle of the Centaurs, Michelangelo

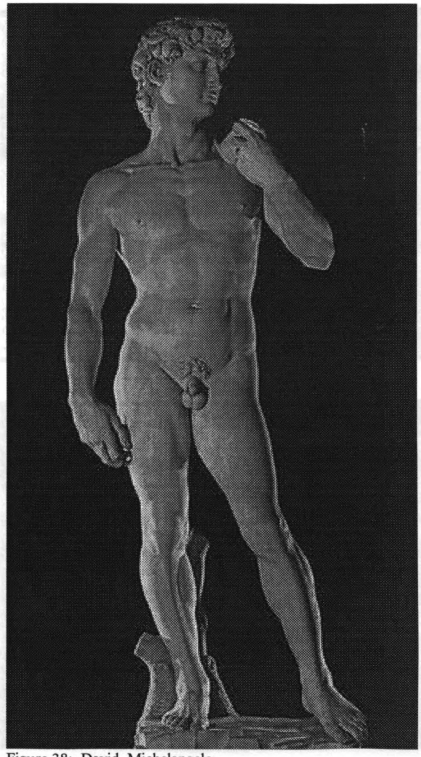

Figure 38: David, Michelangelo

Figure 39: Tomb of Guiliano de'Medici, Michelangelo

Figure 40: Tomb of Lorenzo de'Medici, Michelangelo

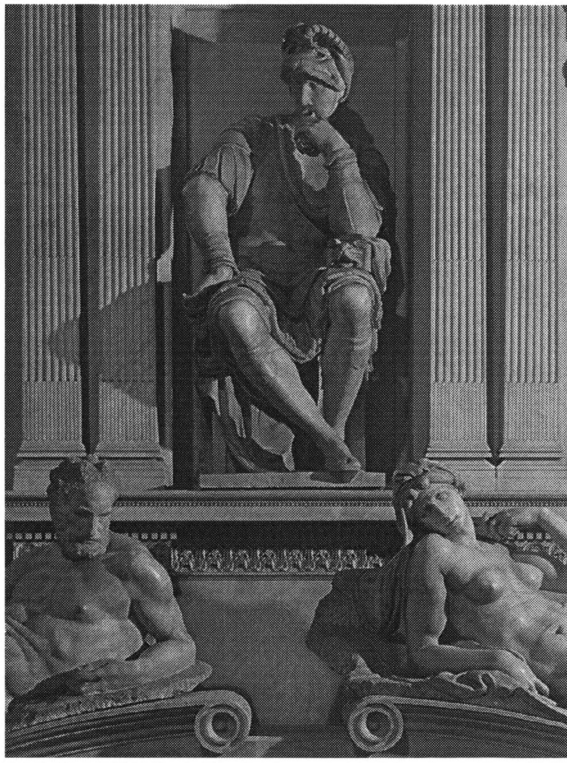

Figure 41: Tomb of Lornezo de'Medici

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