on Milton's poetics, a subject treated suggestively by Stanley Fish in *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (1972). Fiore then offers us a study that can usefully direct us to central points of agreement in doctrine between Milton and Augustine, but which, as the result of its aims and methods, cannot do full justice to the richness, complexity, and originality of either writer.

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Richard C. Trexler. *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*. New York: Academic Press, 1980. Pp. xxvi, 591. \$45.00

For more than a decade, Richard Trexler has been exploring the ritual life of Renaissance Florence. He has studied sacred images and propitiatory processions, nunneries and confraternities, charity, charivari, and martyrdom; and he has published the results of his studies in the scholarly journals of two continents and several academic disciplines. Now he has gathered the results of these scattered studies into one volume, revising his earlier work and integrating it with fresh material to produce what is clearly the most substantial of the several recent books on religious life in the Italian Renaissance.

Trexler combines long study in the Florentine archives with unusually wide reading in the social sciences, and he aims his book at both historians and social scientists. There are some signs that he intends his book to be encyclopedic: in discussing Renaissance Florence, he draws parallels with Australian aborigines, early Chinese cities, and the American peace marches of the 1960's, and a glance through his index turns up entries for hair, hands, and hats, as well as heresy and humanism. He certainly intends it to be a comprehensive re-interpretation of Renaissance history, in the light of insights gleaned from cultural anthropology. Trexler insists that ritual was "obviously as broad in function as civic life itself" (p. 127). For him, "all urban dwellers were actors, one way or another, in the ritual drama. The city is the theatre; the play presents the past, present, and future of participants and audience" (p. 10). He extends the meaning of ritual to cover not just religious rites imbedded in and explicated by a coherent body of dogma, but interpersonal relations and diplomatic activity, and so collapses the distinction I would make between ritual proper and rote behaviour, leaving no way of differentiating between taking communion and saying "gesundheit." Indeed, he is principally interested in just that sort of formalized behaviour that greets a sneeze – the words and gestures that Florentines used automatically both in ordinary daily life and in moments of personal and political crisis.

But Trexler offers his reader more than the thrill of learning singular things, for he always adduces his examples of curious behaviour in support of some more general idea. He begins by extracting from Florentine behaviour implicit notions of time, space, and community, and showing how these notions affected the ways in which Florentines dealt with friends and family. He then proceeds to analyze the role of ritual in the political arena. He starts from the position that "for many years the main problem of communal government was that it had no real access to ritual honor" (p. 256). The adult males who formed the Florentine political class, while wealthy, were

not nobles, and so lacked the sort of honour that by definition accompanied nobility. They tried to generate honour for themselves, and for the commune they governed, by staging rituals of celebration, of exchange, and of crisis. Throughout the period of the "classical commune," the members of the political class monopolized the starring roles in these ritual dramas, while all those who were excluded from power – women, children, youths, and plebs – were relegated to the audience. By their enthusiastic approbation of the rituals they witnessed, these excluded groups validated the ritual authority of the ruling group.

Starting around 1470, Florence witnessed a "ritual revolution," as one by one the groups formerly excluded from formal Florentine ritual took their places in the procession. Children were organized in confraternities, youths in a militia, and workers in festive *potenze*, while women participated in crisis processions. This ritual development proceeded despite political changes, and Trexler's concentration on formal behaviour leads him to conclude that "the Lorenzan charismatic center passed unbroken to his successors: Savonarola, Soderini, Leo and Clement. Patterns of formal behaviour in and around that center had been initiated that no Florentine political revolt could alter" (p. 421). By the end of the last Republic in 1530, the ritual structure of Florence had been permanently transformed. The city-wide rituals that united all Florentines in the commune had been replaced by a network of rituals binding specific groups to the single family that had emerged as enobled rulers. "The city was no longer ritually unified in the old fashion, but had become a plurality of neighborhoods, occupations, and social groups to whose hallowed grounds the master gave and took life by his visits or their absence" (p. 453).

This is a deliberate challenge to current interpretations of Renaissance Florence, and Trexler presents it aggressively. He explicitly rejects schemata of economic, social, or political periodization in favor of one based on ritual forms, and chastizes earlier historians for their neglect of formal behaviour. He even chooses his vocabulary provocatively, using "deities" when any Florentine knew the difference between the one God and the multitude of saints, and using "credit" and "contrast" to mean something quite different from the mundane loans and business agreements that fill the archives of Florence. This sort of belligerence will not make it any easier for Trexler to persuade his readers that his new interpretation has merit. Nor will his odd rhetorical mix of sociological abstractions and metaphorical fancies: even in context, it is hard to know what to make of a statement like "The Times of Day ponder the effects of culture beneath their captains, vestiges of a society past. In this work, honor and credit have remained only ethological facts" (p. 552). But the fundamental question is not how Trexler phrases his conclusions, but what evidence he uses to support them, and how he uses it.

Trexler argues by selective example, and a contrary example can always be cited. To give but one example, Trexler makes the interesting claim that Florence opposed the sacralization of its own countryside: "the city never sponsored a pilgrimage or procession to a place outside the walls, and required Florentine pilgrims to return by sunset and spend the evening in town" (p. 6). Yet in a letter of 28 September 1399 the politically prominent jurist messer Rosso d'Andreozzo degli Orlandi described how he had gone on a ten-day pilgrimage to Vallombrosa and La Verna to collect the indulgences there, together with some of the *signori* and council members who had just left office (ASF, Corporazioni religiose sopresse, Badia de Firenze, 78, filza

315; letter 212). This sort of example and counter-example could easily be multiplied. But more important, selective examples cannot prove a shift of emphasis of the sort Trexler proposes in his "ritual revolution" – especially when so many of the examples he uses to define the ritual of the classical commune are taken from the period *after* the ritual revolution.

In reading this profusely documented book, the reader occasionally gets the odd impression that Trexler does not really care about the evidence, that to a greater extent than most historians he is working with an ideal construct, a Florence of the mind. This leads him to idiosyncratic interpretations of his material. It leads him to such peculiar statements as "written sources have not yet yielded confirmation of a procession showing the queen going to Solomon ... but it is a safe assumption that such processions or *trionfi* did take place" (p. 402, n. 163); or "Here is an idea in search of evidence to be sure, but one whose synthetic imagination is irresistible" (p. 512). And it leads him to come dangerously close to fabricating evidence: what appears to be a single quotation on p. 247 is actually a conflation of passages from two different sources, neither of which said quite what Trexler wanted to find.

Trexler's inflated rhetoric, his delight in overstatement, his espousal of extreme positions, and his dubious manipulation of evidence all help to obscure his basic accomplishment. It is clearly excessive to claim, as he does, that the history of Renaissance Florence is "the story of Florence's thrust toward a legitimate charismatic center" (p. 492) – whatever that may be. And the officials who struggled with threats of war abroad and social unrest at home, and with the enormous fiscal challenge of financing the operations of their government, would no doubt have laughed at the idea that their main problem was that they had no real access to ritual honour. But if access to honour was not their *main* concern, it certainly was one of their many concerns – and here lies Trexler's virtue. Once his exaggerated claims have been discounted, a core of truth remains: Florentines cared deeply about, and acted on the basis of, issues of honour and piety. The precise nature of their sense of honour and piety, and the ways in which it affected their behaviour, still need further elaboration.

Trexler admits the crudity of the beginning he has made here. He invites other scholars to explore more carefully the field he has mapped out, and I am sure that many will accept his invitation: in this book he has presented them with a multitude of hypotheses to test, prove or disprove. In pursuing this line of research, historians would be well advised to be aware of the metaphors they are using. Trexler's "thespo-religious" approach derives in great part from Clifford Geertz's theater-state and Victor Turner's social drama and ritual process, and these cultural anthropologists have in turn been influenced by literature and literary theory. This literary parentage leads Trexler to take terribly seriously figures of speech in his evidence, and to use metaphorical connections at crucial points throughout his interpretation. If other scholars wish to follow Trexler in reading ritual behaviour like a text, they should be conscious of what they are doing, and sensitive to ambiguity and the multiplicity of often contradictory meanings contained in any text. And they should be wary of substituting metaphorical connections for logical argument.

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