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Victoria Duehring is a fourth-year history major who will attend graduate school for Public History and Culture. Thanks to her AP Art History teacher in high school, she has always been interested in analyzing visual culture and reading between the brush strokes. It was a pleasure to write this paper for HIST 304: Historiography, with Dr. Matthew Hopper.

The Literary Controversies of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling

Victoria Duehring

***Abstract:** This literary review will focus on Michelangelo's most significant work of color: the Sistine ceiling. Michelangelo's work has spawned a plethora of literature, but this paper will focus on three main controversial topics: assistants (or lack thereof), the ignudi's purpose, and restoration. I will also apply a psycho-historical approach to these controversies and identify potential avenues for future research.*

It was early December in Firenze, Italy. There was a slight drizzle in the air, but it was nothing my wool coat could not handle. It was my first time traveling alone — not “without my parents,” but truly *all alone*. I had made Firenze my number one study abroad destination for a single reason: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), the famous sculptor, poet, painter, and architect during the High Renaissance in Italy. I poured over readings for months while studying him and his work in my art history courses, because like many, I am fascinated with his authentic genius. On the first day I saw *The David*, and the second I spent three hours in the Uffizi Museum. The *Doni Tondo* brought me to tears with its sublime perfection and incredible colors. That long weekend in Firenze I was simply one of the many tourists, historians, and artists dedicating my trip to seeing his fantastic works.

Any member of the art community, history world, or even the general public has heard of Michelangelo, and is at least familiar with the Sistine Chapel's existence. This holy landmark in the Vatican features two of Michelangelo's greatest works of color: the last

judgement and the vaulted ceiling. When delving into the literary works concerning Michelangelo, I will focus on the Sistine ceiling. Historians studying the Sistine Chapel tend to focus on one of three controversial topics: whether Michelangelo finished his work alone (assistants vs. solitary work), the purpose of the *ignudi* (or lack thereof), and the current school of thought on restoration of the ceiling (or “ruination,” as some might call it).

Assistants: Fact or Fiction

One of the most hotly debated topics in relation to the Sistine ceiling is the question of whether Michelangelo completed the work alone or with the help of assistants. It is no secret that Michelangelo did not want this commission, as he is cited in many sources “pleading [to the Pope] that [painting] was not his art.”¹ It is for that reason, among many others, that many scholars are under the impression that Michelangelo without a doubt had some form of help during this commission. While there is debate on the topic, most modern-day scholars believe that Michelangelo had at least some level of assistance throughout the project.

In Howard Hibbard’s *Michelangelo*, he dedicates forty-four pages to The Sistine ceiling alone. Throughout these pages he goes into extensive detail about iconography, how the *al fresco* method works, and unsurprisingly how Michelangelo had help throughout this process. From the very start Michelangelo wanted to work alone on this project, but according to Hibbard he had help from the get-go with his “iconographic program” which was “drawn up with the help of a [Vatican] theologian...for Michelangelo himself may not have been

¹ Howard Hibbard, *Michelangelo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 99.

capable of working out the program he painted in all its allusive subtlety.”² Not only does Hibbard mention this hands-off type of help, but he also writes about actual painting assistants. Michelangelo was a free-spirited man and “had his usual trouble with assistants. The *Flood* [was] painted by several hands, with Michelangelo’s part in the center. He then dismissed the assistants...and painted the rest almost wholly by himself although he surely had help with the preparation of the plaster and other such menial tasks.”³ The dismissal of assistants cannot mean, in Hibbard’s eyes, that Michelangelo would be spending time grinding pigments all day. Although, Hibbard does mention that Michelangelo claimed he was given no help, and worked as much as he physically could.

Also siding with Hibbard is William E. Wallace in his article “Michelangelo’s Assistants in the Sistine Chapel.” Wallace explains how the restoration of the work (discussed at length later) has “revealed the clear presence of several hands, not only in the painting of the architecture and decoration, but also in some of the secondary figures.”⁴ Wallace talks about the “dozens of assistants who are known to have collaborated with [Michelangelo]”, and he goes on to prove this with a detailed chart that denominates each person, how long they knew Michelangelo, and if they left voluntarily, were dismissed, or never left.⁵ While it is possible, explains Wallace, that Michelangelo dismissed the assistants later on, it is very unlikely that he “painted every foot of bead

² Hibbard, 105.

³ Hibbard, 118.

⁴ William Wallace, “Michelangelo’s Assistants in the Sistine Chapel,” in *Michelangelo, Selected Scholarship in English: The Sistine Chapel*, ed. William Wallace (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 1.

⁵ Wallace, 1, 4.

and reel molding himself.”⁶ He also mentions how Michelangelo’s old friend Giuliano, an architect, most likely “assisted Michelangelo with the revolutionary scaffolding device to paint the vault.”⁷ This intellectual assistance is similar to the theological aid Hibbard mentioned previously, and is still a form of help. The rest of Wallace’s work explains the close personal relationships Michelangelo had with men that are proven assistants for this project, and how these close relationships lasted even after the Sistine project. Therefore, it is unlikely that Michelangelo fired them all while maintaining such close relationships with those same men. There are confirmed dismissals, and a few early departures, but even so “we are still left with at least seven assistants...examination of the ceiling from the scaffolding clearly reveals the presence of helping hands especially in the architecture, decoration, and many of the secondary figures.”⁸ There were many menial tasks that Wallace believes Michelangelo would have not wasted his time on, because they “required competence but not imagination.”⁹ It is, in his opinion, important that this work is still seen as Michelangelo’s masterpiece while maintaining that it he did not accomplish it entirely on his own.

To further develop the idea of intellectual assistance, historian Charles Robertson examines the relationship between Michelangelo and his contemporary Bramante in “Bramante, Michelangelo and the Sistine Ceiling.” Robertson pulls no punches with his opening statement, explaining “Michelangelo was neither a generous nor a

⁶ Wallace, 1.

⁷ Wallace, 2.

⁸ Wallace, 5.

⁹ Wallace, 5.

particularly truthful man.”¹⁰ It is Robertson’s belief that Michelangelo wanted to prove a point by claiming that he finished the ceiling alone: “...for by executing it virtually unaided Michelangelo proved to himself and to others that he could achieve what had seemed impossible.”¹¹ Robertson goes on to explain that not only did Michelangelo probably have assistants — “a letter [was sent] to [Michelangelo] from Francesco Granacci concerning assistants for the ceiling” — but he also delves into the similarities of Michelangelo’s work to Bramante’s. It is extremely likely, Robertson’s research explains, that direct inspiration was drawn from Bramante’s work due to the fact that “the form of the cross band [on the pilasters] [was] strikingly similar...to Santa Maria presso San Satiro,” a work by Bramante. There are anecdotal stories from their contemporaries that show Michelangelo and Bramante to have been friends, but there are also countering stories showing them to be enemies. With such speculation Robert turns to the primary sources, concluding that “once that commission had fallen to Michelangelo it was natural that he should turn to Bramante for help. The two must have frequently have come in contact between 1504 and 1506.”¹² It made sense for Michelangelo to respect Bramante and his work due to the fact that Bramante was close to Dante, who was one of Michelangelo’s greatest heroes.¹³ To further prove this admiration, or at the very least respect, Robertson points to the ceiling: “[Michelangelo] acknowledg[ed] his debt on the ceiling itself by making the figure of Joel a portrait of Bramante...The head of Joel pays tribute to one of the most remarkable artist [he] had known, and one who affected him

¹⁰ Robertson, Charles, "Bramante, Michelangelo and the Sistine Ceiling," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986): 91-105. Accessed May 17, 2020. doi:10.2307/751291. 91.

¹¹ Robertson, 91.

¹² Robertson, 100.

¹³ Ibid.

profoundly.”¹⁴ Since it was known that Michelangelo was not one to simply do as he was told, Robertson concludes that Michelangelo was thanking Bramante for his inspiration on the trompe l’oeil, and perhaps even for his advice along the way.

In accordance with modern historians, Michelangelo’s contemporary Vasari also claims that Michelangelo had some form of assistance during this project in *The Lives of Artists: Michelangelo*. Vasari first brings up assistance in the form of intellectual or structural aid from Bramante, as previously discussed. He writes that “the pope ordered Bramante to build the scaffolding in order to paint [the Sistine ceiling],”¹⁵ but differing from Robertson, he claims that Michelangelo took the entire structure down and rebuilt it according to his own standards. Although Michelangelo denied that form of intellectual assistance, it was written that “Michelangelo sent for men...lacking the necessary experience, he brought some painters who were friends of his to Rome from Florence to assist him in the project and also see their method of working in fresco.”¹⁶ In dealing with the more traditional assistance debate, Vasari makes similar claims as many contemporary authors. Vasari later mentions that these assistants may have returned to Florence later during the project, but what is most important is that they were present at the beginning. Without assistants, it is very unlikely that Michelangelo would have picked up the fresco technique as quickly and expertly as he did. It is also important to note these assistants were not simple artisans, but many were great artists:

¹⁴ Robertson, 105.

¹⁵ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of The Artists*, ed. and trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 439.

¹⁶ Vasari, 440.

“Granacci, Jacopo di Sandro, the elder Indaco...”¹⁷ According to Vasari these assistants were vital in Michelangelo’s completion of the Sistine ceiling.

Few scholars are on the opposing side of this assistance argument, and most of those who are base their claims on Michelangelo’s word. In James M. Saslow’s work “The Poetry of Michelangelo,” he provides detailed and modern translations for Michelangelo’s poetry. The poem that previous authors have cited concerning how Michelangelo publicized his solitary achievements is in this collection of works. Michelangelo sends his Sistine poem (that includes a self-portrait of him looking up while painting) to close friend Giovanni da Pistoia. His poem is dark, depressing, and essentially glorified venting. He explains how he is doing all this incredible work on the Sistine by writing “With my beard toward heaven, I feel my memory box atop my hump...I am bent like a Syrian bow.”¹⁸ In his footnote for this work, Saslow does not mention whether Michelangelo had any assistants, but simply points out the bowed self-portrait.

The final work is a more contemporary look at this issue: *The Life of Michelangelo*, by his beloved apprentice and friend Ascandio Condivi. This was written as a response to the biography *Lives* by Vasari, because Michelangelo did not like the way he was portrayed in the latter. Knowing that Condivi was so close to Michelangelo, it is important that this work is taken with a grain of salt. Condivi dedicated twenty pages (out of only one hundred and nine) to the Sistine ceiling, and throughout those pages, explains iconography, technique, problems

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ James Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

with the pope, and the assistant question. He claims that “[Michelangelo] finished [the] entire work in twenty months, without any help whatever, not even someone to grind his colors for him.”¹⁹ This perspective differs not only from the modern perspective, but also from Vasari’s contemporary explanation. Condivi wants to express the great hardship that Michelangelo went through while laboring for this painting:

After he had accomplished this work, because he had spent such a long-time painting with his eyes looking up at the vault, Michelangelo then could not see much when he looked down; so that if he had to read a letter or other detailed things, he had to hold them in his arms over his head.²⁰

Condivi not only dismisses the idea of assistants, but he also makes it very clear that in choosing to work alone, Michelangelo suffered greatly. Sacrifice for the church and God is a reoccurring theme throughout his entire biography.

Igundi and their Purpose

More important than how the Sistine was created is the work itself — it is a complex theological plan that has been outlined in great detail by contemporary and modern historians, but there remains one mysterious subject among this work: the ignudi. The *ignudi* are the

¹⁹ Ascanio Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, ed. and trans. Alice Sedgwick Wohl and Hellmut Wohl (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 58.

²⁰ Condivi, 58.

nudes that adorn the Sistine ceiling, and whose iconographical purpose has not been fully fleshed out to this date.

Howard Hibbard, of course, does not ignore the ignudi in his vast explanations of the Sistine ceiling. Hibbard claims the ignudi “form one of the clearest case-histories as well as showing a characteristic side of Michelangelo’s art.”²¹ He goes on to explain that they are “the most personal and revealing contribution to the ceiling, having no necessary function — their ostensible purpose, holding the ten bronze-colored medallions, hardly calls for such a powerful corps of workers.”²² Hibbard’s opinion was that the ignudi do not serve a complex iconographical purpose, but are simply “unique artistic daemon.”²³ Hibbard saw the ignudi as a way for Michelangelo to showcase his true talent of sculpture by making the figures appear to be relief sculptures. All of the ignudi “are in a sense ideal restorations of the famous Belvedere Torso,” of which Michelangelo was enamored, claiming it to be beyond nature in its perfection.²⁴ By having these auxiliary figures adorn the Sistine ceiling, Michelangelo was able to show more humanistic emotions in the figures’ faces, and create body types that went beyond the norm for theological characters. The ignudi, in Hibbard’s opinion, were Michelangelo’s way of “showing purely stylistic dynamism, [while] achiev[ing] an exalted emotional goal.”²⁵ He also states that he does not believe them to be angelic or anyone specific from Michelangelo’s life.

²¹ Hibbard, 121.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hibbard, 122.

²⁵ Ibid.

Hibbard, of course, gathered much of his information about the ignudi from Michelangelo's contemporary and biographer, Condivi. When it comes to the ignudi, Condivi claims off the bat that they "do not appertain to the narrative."²⁶ He describes the ignudi in plain detail, explaining that they are nude figures who hold up golden medallions in between scenes on the ceiling. Although, Condivi does seem to adore the ignudi, explaining that "in beauty of [their] compartments, in the diversity of poses, in the contradiction of the contours of the vault, Michelangelo displayed consummate art."²⁷ Condivi's admiration goes so far that he felt explaining their detail would be "an endless undertaking." He chooses instead to move onto further descriptions of the iconographic images. Condivi "passed over [the ignudi] briefly, wishing to cast a little light on the whole rather than to go into details as to the parts."²⁸ Even as "brief" as Condivi's explanations of the ignudi were, they do answer the key question of the ignudi's purpose: essentially, to look beautiful and showcase Michelangelo's mastery of corporality.

Vasari gives the ignudi slightly more purpose. He does still claim that the ignudi serve a purpose of displaying Michelangelo's immeasurable skill, explaining that the figures:

possess grace and delicacy...in which [Michelangelo] demonstrates the extremes and perfection of his craft, by creating nudes of all ages, all different in their expressions and forms, both in their faces and in their features, some with slimmer bodies and other with larger ones.²⁹

²⁶ Condivi, 48.

²⁷ Condivi, 48.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Vasari, 444.

Vasari clearly admired the ignudi, but he believed that they had a larger purpose than to exist as simply beautiful displays of Michelangelo's aptitude. Vasari thought that the medallions held up by the ignudi dawned "garlands of oak and acorn leaves representing the coat of arms and insignia of Pope Julius [II] and signifying the fact that the period during his rule was an age of gold..."³⁰ Vasari did acknowledge that the figures played a role outside of the main narrative, but he did not believe them to be completely devoid of any iconographic purpose.

Another author that follows Vasari's train of thought in attempting to divulge the iconography of the medallions is Joost-Gaugier in her work "Michelangelo's Ignudi, and the Sistine Chapel as a Symbol of Law and Justice." Similar to all of her predecessors, Joost-Gaugier acknowledges the ignudi's independence from the general story of the ceiling, stating that they are "generally regarded as auxiliary figures who attend their more important painted colleagues."³¹ Joost-Gaugier followed in the footsteps of Vasari, and diverged from a lot of her modern colleagues, in the importance she placed on the oak leaves and acorns that accompany the ignudi throughout the ceiling. She explains that the oak leaves and acorns being so "major in size and location, provokes the thought that the association between the oak tree and these youthful figures is unique and specific."³² Following this, she went into detail about the "stylized oak tree...associated with the reign of Sixtus," for whom the chapel was built.³³ Joost-Gaugier also goes into some allegorical stories of law and justice from Greco-Roman

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, "Michelangelo's Ignudi, and the Sistine Chapel as a Symbol of Law and Justice," *Artibus Et Historiae* 17, no. 34 (1996): 20.

³² Joost-Gaugier, 22.

³³ Ibid.

mythology, claiming that the oak trees represent a “pristine age which was the ‘Golden’ age blessed with the fruit of the trees *before* men learned to defile their lips with the blood of animals and to dread the judgement of the Law.”³⁴ In clearer terms, Joost-Gaugier later explains that by pairing the *ignudi* with “festoons of oak leaves and acorns, [Michelangelo] suggests that the governance of Pope Julius constituted a Golden Age for Italy.”³⁵ Joost-Gaugier went to great lengths in researching contemporary sources to validate her claims, and provides more insight into the real purpose of these figures than previous scholars.

“Restoration or Ruination”

As time goes on, the Sistine ceiling remains one of the most significant works of art in human history, but sadly the passage of time also results in the depreciation of *al fresco* works. Along with other literary sources for this work, the concept of restoration also has two main schools of thought: one urges that preservation and maintenance is necessary to respect the art, and one focuses on the ruin that can occur — often from human error — during the restoration process.

Howard Hibbard touches on this in his vast examination of the Sistine ceiling and takes the first approach towards appreciating what restoration has done for the ceiling. He explains that certain questions regarding how specific aspects were painted will be answered by the restoration process. For example, the matter of “whether the lunettes were painted along with the other scenes, or all at once” will be clarified during the restoration process.³⁶ Along with teaching us how this work

³⁴ Joost-Gaugier, 25.

³⁵ Joost-Gaugier, 27.

³⁶ Hibbard, 142.

was completed, Hibbard highlights that the restoration process shows that “the coloration of the whole ceiling [has] revealed a masterly, broadly painted harmony of daring color juxtapositions: green shot with gold; rose; blue; gold.”³⁷ Hibbard’s highlight that the restoration process involves adding value that the original work had is very important to the literature on this topic.

Corresponding with Hibbard’s viewpoint is historian and restorer Gianluigi Colalucci. In his essay “Michelangelo Buonarroti: Restoration of the Frescos on the Vaulted Ceiling and the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel,” Colalucci explains the benefits of restoration. Colalucci first notes that the antiquated form of restoring works and adding in “brighteners, varnishes, heavy retouching and repainting” has been completely done away with. In fact, he states that “anything that has been added during past restoration work, nowadays, tends to be removed.”³⁸ Having debunked the opposing arguments, he then begins explaining how the restoration of this specific work has given us more insight into Michelangelo’s methodology; “[the] cleaning has helped bring to light the true colors of [his] masterpiece...”³⁹ Colalucci clarifies that “the most visible and continuous damage [to the ceiling] over the years was due to the infiltration of rainwater from the roof and the endless smoke from candles, torches, and braziers which constantly rose toward the ceiling and along the walls of the Chapel.”⁴⁰ This darkness, explains Colalucci,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Gianluigi Colalucci, "Michelangelo Buonarroti: Restoration of the Frescoes on the Vaulted Ceiling and the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel," *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage* [Online] 16, no. 1 (July 2017): 89.

³⁹ Colalucci, 89.

⁴⁰ Colalucci, 91.

gives the viewer a false sense of Michelangelo's true intentions, which were actually to show extravagant color juxtaposition. Thankfully due to the science now involved in restoration the "cleaning of the frescoes, [has] allow[ed] them to return to their original state with the colors almost intact."⁴¹ Colalucci makes it known that without restoration, Michelangelo's true vision would have never been discovered, and the work would still have this false sense of "black melancholia" that was never intended nor desired for this work.⁴²

Turning away from evaluating direct restoration process as entirely good or bad, A. H. Maude focuses on something that restoration has revealed in "The Cracks in the Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel." Maude goes on to explain that during the restoration process, a friend "saw many cracks, natural cracks, but he also saw that nearly half of the cracks were cracks painted by Michelangelo himself."⁴³ Maude highlights restoration as an important factor in this discovery, because without attempts to clean and fix the ceiling, all of the cracks would have simply been seen as effects of age. The cracks were eventually deduced by the author to be Michelangelo's retaliation for being "forced" into this commission. Without this restoration, claims Maude, the world of art history would know nothing of this clever trick Michelangelo played on the Pope.

Taking the opposing side of this argument is Charles Hope in his article "Restoration or Ruination?" Hope's main argument for this work is that restoration creates unauthentic representations of classic works. He explains that "restoration is seldom undertaken solely to

⁴¹ Colalucci, 103.

⁴² Colalucci, 91.

⁴³ A. H. Maude, "The Cracks in the Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 13, no. 65 (Aug. 1908): 292.

counter physical threats...it aims to improve [the works] appearance.”⁴⁴ Hope thought that altering the appearance of works from antiquity to make them more visually appealing “[did] not necessarily give a fair idea of how they originally looked.”⁴⁵ Hope finds the restored Sistine ceiling to be “gaudy” in its colors, and he even claims that it now creates a sense of discomfort for him and other patrons. Hope writes that, “as a colorist, Michelangelo now seems almost closer to Disney than to his contemporaries.”⁴⁶ Hope’s disdain for the restoration is not limited to the colors; he also believes that “most of [the] shadow, regularly shown in later copies, disappeared during the present cleaning.”⁴⁷ This lack of shadows takes away from the chiaroscuro, which Hope mentions is commonly found in Michelangelo’s work. Hope urges art historians to work towards preservation, and to stray from restoration, as he finds it risky to subject masterpieces to such dangerous processes.

A Freudian Perspective

All of these controversial subjects about the Sistine ceiling are extremely prevalent in art historiography, but there is little literature that looks at these issues from a psychoanalytical perspective. The psychoanalytical perspective, often applied to concepts in history, was created originally by Sigmund Freud. Freud, commonly referred to as the father of psychology, was an Austrian theorist that developed psychoanalytic theory. What that means in Freudian terms is one of two things: “1) a particular method of treating nervous disorders and 2) the

⁴⁴ Charles Hope, “Restoration or Ruination,” *The New York Review of Books* (Nov. 1993): 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Hope, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

science of unconscious mental processes, which has also been appropriately described as ‘depth-psychology’.”⁴⁸ In his most significant publication *Civilization and its Discontents*, he highlights what he believed to be the natural progression of primal sexual instincts into the development of civilization. Essentially, the driving force of man is in his innate sexual desires that can be satisfied by either “genital love” or through human bonds like friendship and family (leading to a sense of community). The first few generations of men would have to overpower their fathers, and then through the bonds of working together, the building blocks of society would be laid. The female role in Freud’s eyes was one of childrearing, and the desire to protect their children at all costs (excluding them from sexual instincts or pleasure in sex). To Freud, being a part of society takes away from a person’s sexual energy, and forces them to conform; even so, it is worth the loss of energy and repression due to the protection that living in a community offers. In his words, “civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security.”⁴⁹ Freud also saw the notion of “trusting thy neighbor” as something unnatural. He thought that we betrayed our immediate reaction of suspicion towards our neighbor for the benefits of established modern society. In Freud’s eyes this did not come without a price on our subconscious mind; he thought our aggression, irrationality, and even desire for war were a result of the repression of our innate sexual desires.

Freud had many theories about the relationship between children and their parents, and the effect of that relationship on their

⁴⁸ “Sigmund Freud on psychoanalysis” (6 November 2014) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sigmund-Freud-on-psychoanalysis-1983319>, accessed 9 June 2020.

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1929), 73.

later life. The effect that our past has on our unconscious mind is something that is now more widely accepted, but most of Freud's other theories have been debunked or are best taken with a grain of salt. Freud relied heavily on personal experience and his own clients' struggles (which could have been projected upon by Freud himself), not clinical trials, and this has resulted in many of his theories later being disproven. Even so, the idea of psychoanalysis is still largely important and used in the study of history via psychohistory. Authors of psychohistory aim to "study the behavior and motivations not only of individuals but of groups in the past"; for example, Erik H. Erikson's analysis of Adolf Hitler's childhood, or Fawn M. Brodie's findings on Sally Hemmings through Thomas Jefferson's *parapraxis* (more commonly known as 'Freudian Slips').⁵⁰

In *The Legend of Hitler's Childhood*, Erikson chooses to psychoanalyze a section of *Mien Kampf*, in which Hitler sheds light on his parents and childhood. The excerpt is a meager sentence long, but Erikson draws four main points from Hitler's work: his sense of German and Bavarian pride, a complicated relationship with his father, slight obsession with his mother, and a rebellion in adolescence. Hitler was a part of a German minority group in Austrian territory, and Erikson believed that the struggle of the German people Hitler presented was actually a parapraxis for the struggle between his mother and father. He diagnoses Hitler (as well as the larger German populace) with an Oedipus complex: Hitler's controlling father represented the old Austrian state, while his mother was the "young and beloved Reich"

⁵⁰ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A critical reader in the twentieth-century history and theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 62.

who was manipulated into an unjust and horrible an alliance with Austria.⁵¹

This hatred for his father is evident to Erikson based upon later passages in *Mein Kampf*, where Hitler represents him as a weak civil servant that dominates and abuses his family, but acts cowardly towards his superiors and fails in rebelling against the state. Erikson believed that this father-son relationship was common in Germany, and that this sense of relatability is what gave Hitler the ability to persuade the German people into becoming his puppets. The relationship to his father is also closely tied to the idea of German adolescent rebellion: Erikson thought that because Germany had not had large scale rebellions, they had more pent-up aggression, rage, and angst that came out in the way of teenage rebellion. Hitler convinced his audience that he never let his adolescent rebellion die, because in the end he dominated his father, not the other way around, and because of this he would not allow Germany to be dominated again either. Hitler makes himself into a brother-like figure — the Führer. Someone who is sympathetic to women, due to his love for his incapable mother, but who would never let his relationship with another person (be it child or wife) overtake his connection to his national brethren or the German state. The main point that Erikson is trying to make in his analysis of Hitler is one that ties Hitler's personal woes to the German people as a group. Erikson wants to establish a pattern that would partially explain the successful takeover of the Nazi regime.

Fawn M. Brodie takes a more empirical approach, while weaving in psychohistory, in her book *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* with a focus here on Chapter XVII: Sally Hemmings. Brodie uses empirical evidence in the form of letters from Sally Hemmings'

⁵¹ Green and Troup, 72.

son, account receipts, and even a lack of evidence such as the mysteriously disappeared volume of Jefferson's letters in the year 1788 — when he was with Sally.⁵² On top of this more physical evidence, Brodie also employs psychoanalysis when examining Jefferson's letters. After meeting Sally, Jefferson began to write a diary almost daily, and in this diary he used the word *mulatto* eight times to describe the landscape during his travels. This is notable because in previous writings he uses words like “dark, reddish-brown or dark brown” to describe the earth; Brodie makes the claim that he must have been thinking of Sally (who was of mixed race) so much that it began to subconsciously come out in his writing.⁵³ Jefferson has these “Freudian slips” several times in both his diary and letters. For example, in a letter to a former lover, he wrote about the beauty of a painting of Agar and Abraham — Agar was a concubine and house maid from biblical times, given to Abraham by his wife so that he might produce children and be pleased. Brodie ties this to Jefferson's desire to bed Sally, and equates his job as a devout diplomat and politician to a figurative wife: Sally would serve his needs without requiring him to give anything up. Brodie uses psychology to read between the lines of Jefferson's writing, but does not make claims based upon this analysis alone. She also takes primary sources that prove an infatuation and obsession — the payment of a smallpox vaccine or the procuring of a nice room close to Jefferson's while they travel. This empirical data gives her psychoanalysis more weight and validity, making her different from Freud or Erikson, who rely solely on theory.

Applying Psychohistory

⁵² Fawn McKay Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 228-33.

⁵³ Brodie, 229-30.

THE FORUM

Freud was the “father of psychology” and gave the modern world a lot to think about: the subconscious mind, developmental stages, parapraxis, and the effect of childhood on an adult’s future life. Knowing the basics of his theories, and the field of psychohistory, my aim in future research is to apply said methodology to the three controversial topics that shroud the Sistine ceiling.

Ideally, I will travel to Italy in order to do the proper archival research needed for a psychohistorical approach. My first stop would be Firenze, where I would access Michelangelo’s personal archives at Casa Buonarroti. Here I will focus my search on the topics of assistants and the ignudi. Casa Buonarroti has archives full of Michelangelo’s personal letters, sketches, and diaries. Those specific types of primary sources are perfect for a psychohistorical approach because they provide a more intimate look into Michelangelo’s mind. I will focus my efforts on documents that are linked to the Sistine Chapel, Rome, Pope Julius II, assistants, finances of the project, the ignudi, and Tommaso dei Cavalieri. Tommaso has been somewhat accepted to be Michelangelo’s lover, but is at the very least confirmed to be his best friend. Due to that close connection, it is likely that Michelangelo let his guard down more with Tommaso, and that those texts would aid in psychoanalyzing him. While still in Firenze, I will pop over to the Medici Archives. The Medici had extremely close ties to Michelangelo, and their archives may have letters from him that give more insight into why he painted the ignudi or if he did finish the Sistine all alone. By looking at close confidants I will try to get into Michelangelo’s head to see his things from his, admittedly distorted, perspective.

My last stop in Italy will be Vatican City, Rome. This portion of the journey could take approximately a month, but with my E.U. citizenship I will not have to worry about travel visas and can stay for

as long as necessary. In Rome, I will attempt to unearth from the archives more information surrounding Michelangelo's work in the Sistine. Looking into Pope Julius II's personal archives would be especially useful to see what kind of a man Michelangelo was working for. Could the pressure that such a powerful man exerted over Michelangelo affect why he painted the ignudi, or decided to work on the project without "armatures"? Finishing with the topics of the ignudi and assistants, I would turn my attention towards the question of restoration. My plan of action for the psychoanalysis of restoration is to conduct a series of interviews from the Vatican's conservation team, asking them why they felt restoration was vital. I would do the same series of interviews with those who do not believe in restoration. Then I would analyze these interviews and look for parapraxes: is restoration actually what is best for the work, or is it simply something people want to do from an aesthetic perspective? Analyzing their speech and the type of evidence the interviewees give would aid me in giving a psychoanalytic answer to the ever-important question of restoration.

The controversial literature surrounding the Sistine chapel is expansive beyond the limits of this review, but for the most part it does fall into the three categories discussed: assistants, the ignudi, and restoration. This literature is both from the contemporary world Michelangelo lived in, and from our modern world that is so heavily influenced by new technologies and sciences. Given the amount of debate amongst some of these topics, in my opinion it would be extremely beneficial to approach them from another historical perspective: psychohistory. However, even without this extra layer of analysis, art history lovers will never run out of literature to gobble up when it comes to the Sistine Ceil

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