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The “Pagan” Renaissance: Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance

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its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long have been put under ground." (p. 253). Worse, the dependence effect has impeded the economy from providing itself with adequate margin for technological progress and a sound defense program. To solve the difficulty, Galbraith proposes a two-point program which includes the Cyclically Graduated Compensation, by which dependence of security on production may be broken, and an increased sales tax in order to correct the social imbalance between private and public goods.

Galbraith's analysis, basically sound, suffers perhaps from the overemphasis of exaggeration—as if the consumer's real wants no longer had any effect on the direction of production, or as if the consumers could not, by determined action, insist on buying the things they want, advertising pressure to the contrary (as happened in 1957 when consumers insisted on choosing the type of cars they wanted, not the type of cars most advertised.)

But Galbraith's book is interesting from a Southeast Asian economic point of view. Because national economies are isolated, there are affluent societies which have to create unnecessary wants despite the presence of other societies where the most elementary needs are not and cannot be supplied. A world economy perhaps is needed where production can be perpetually increased to meet the real needs of people everywhere.

ANTONIO V. AYALA

THE "PAGAN" RENAISSANCE

PAGAN MYSTERIES IN THE RENAISSANCE. By Edgar Wind.
Faber and Faber, Ltd. London. 1959. Pp. 230. 77 plates.

Not many students of the Renaissance will support M. Gilson's thesis that scholasticism and the 14th, 15th, and 16th century revival of interest in the classics are movements within the one Christian culture; but not a few modern scholars admit with him a positive influence upon the Renaissance by the much-maligned "Dark Ages." Historians not only of philosophy and of literature but also of art have published within the past three decades discoveries establishing conclusively a real and an organic relationship between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. From definitely medieval traditions, indeed, have issued some of the peculiar characteristics of Renaissance culture. With

modern scholarship's deepening apprehension of the tradition of allegory and of iconography in the Middle Ages, critics have begun to discover the metaphysical and religious meanings of such a poem, for instance, as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (beyond the first book) and such paintings as Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and the *Primavera*, which some followers of Burchhardt may label as utterly pagan.

One of the monumental books of the past thirty years, proving this medieval-Renaissance link, is M. Jean Seznec's *La Survivance des dieux antiques*. Oxford's Professor Edgard Wind in the book under review, supplements M. Seznec's work; he applies M. Seznec's conclusions about medieval allegorical and iconographical traditions to his own analyses of a few Renaissance paintings and emblems, thereby confirming, though not explicitly in the particular field of art, the Renaissance's beginnings in the Middle Ages.

In his introduction Mr. Wind distinguishes three meanings of *mystery* as understood by the ancients themselves: the ritual, the *mystères littéraires* or the figurative, and the magic. Following the lead of late-antique sources such as Plutarch, Plotinus, and Proclus, the Renaissance mystagogues, according to Professor Wind, adopted in their studies of the ancient works the *mystères littéraires*, that is, "the figurative use of terms and images which were borrowed from the popular rites but transferred to the intellectual disciplines of philosophical debate and meditation." Though he implies it throughout his introduction and in his allusions and footnotes, Mr. Wind does not mention the important fact noted by Seznec that the Renaissance humanists inherited their attitude towards mythology and poetry not solely from late-antique thinkers, but especially from medieval grammarians and humanists as well as from patristic exegetes of Sacred Scriptures. One discovers this figurative approach in St. Augustine (who learned it from Cicero), in the grammarians of the 12th century renaissance, and in Petrarca, Boccaccio and Salutati.

Against accusations, that all antique poetry was a pack of heathen lies, the classical students claimed that pagan poems contained truths, sometimes biblical in their origins, *sub corticibus fabularum*: the classical poets expressed absolute truths under the "veils of fables" purportedly in order to prevent these sacred truths from falling into "profane" hands. It is to this medieval allegorical tradition that Mr. Wind refers when, as his starting point, he quotes Pico della Mirandola on poetic theology: "It was the opinion of the ancient theologians that divine subjects and secret mysteries must not be rashly divulged... That is why the Egyptians had sculptures of sphinxes in all their temple, to indicate that divine knowledge, if committed to writing at all, must be covered with enigmatic veils and poetic dissimulation..."

Ficino and the Florentine Neoplatonists influenced ultimately by Plotinus, conceived all Being as emanations from the transcendent One, and all Becoming as the movement of all beings back towards assimilation with The One. Love directs this process of emanation and movement back to The One. The One as the principle of Being is Beauty because it attracts all being back to itself. The object of this movement is Pleasure because the final union of being with The One produces delight. It is, therefore, with justification that the Neoplatonists conceived the triad of Graces as Beauty (the *terminus a quo*), Love (the means or the directing energy), and Pleasure (the union or the *terminus ad quem*).

Circulus... prout in Deo incipit et allicit, *pulchritudo*: prout in mundum transiens ipsum rapit, *amor*; prout in auctorem remeans ipsi suum opus coniungit, *voluptas*. *Amor igitur in voluptatem a pulchritudine desinit.* [Ficino, *De Amore*].

It seems well to distinguish, at this point, between the *Voluptas* commonly associated with Epicureanism (itself, unfortunately, a misunderstood philosophy) and the *Voluptas* concomitant with the Neoplatonic union with The One. This Professor Wind sets out to do when he treats on the much abused proverb: Love is blind.

The cosmic dimensions of Neoplatonic Love, like any philosophy with a "mystic" [we use the term loosely] or voluntaristic bent, seems immediately to postulate a dark night of the intellect in man's approach towards union with the Supreme. Giordano Bruno, in his *Eroici Furori*, has written of the blindfolded Cupid of Renaissance iconography as "the sacred blindness produced by the immediate presence of the deity: wherefore the most profound and divine theologians say that God is better honored and loved by silence than by words, and better seen by closing the eyes to images than by opening them: and therefore the negative theology of Pythagoras and Dionysius is so celebrated and placed above the demonstrative theology of Aristotle [sic] and the scholastics." Ficino's preface to the *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius the Areopagite, perhaps stimulated by the name Dionysius, describes as Bacchic the approach to God through a negation of the intellect:

The spirit of the god Dionysus was believed by the ancient theologians and Platonists to be the ecstasy and abandon of disencumbered mind [the blind *Amor* in a state of *Voluptas*], when partly by innate love, partly at the instigation of the god, they transgress the natural limits of intelligence and are miraculously transformed into the beloved god himself: where inebriated by a certain new draft of nectar and by an immeasurable joy, they rage, as it were in a bacchic frenzy (*ubi novo quodam nectaris haustu, et inexistentabili gaudio velut ebriose, ut ita dixerim, debacchantur*).

It is this union, more directly experimental than intellectual to which, according to Mr. Wind, Pico della Mirandola's *Pulchritudo-Amor-Voluptas* triad refers. *Voluptas* is, therefore, a supra-intellectual pleasure of the human entity, not of sensuality or the beastly in man (often associated with Epicurean pleasure).

From these Neoplatonic and Orphic principles, Professor Wind derives an approach towards the interpretation of a well-known master-

piece of Renaissance art, Botticelli's *Primavera*. Mustering texts from the Homeric Hymns, Ovid's *Fasti*, Horace's Odes, Cartari's *Imagini de i dei degli antichi*, Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentium*, and Ficino's *Opera* to document the medieval and Renaissance bases for his interpretations of the figures in the painting, Mr. Wind demonstrates how the *Primavera* portrays the *Pulchritudo-Amor-Voluptas* triad. He shows how the different figures depict not separate personifications of diverse beauties of Spring, but "two consecutive phases [represented by the two contrasting groups on either side of Venus] of one coherent theory of love." The group of Zephyr-Chloris-Flora on Venus' left presents *emanatio* or *pulchritudo*; the dance of the Graces *conversio* or *amor*; and Mercury touching the clouds with his wand *remeatio* or *voluptas*. It is the same circular movement, energized by Love, from the One to the Many back to the One. "As for Vasari's recollection that the picture 'signifies spring' (*dinotando la primavera*), this does not imply, as has been occasionally supposed, a separate personification of *Primavera* herself. In the poems of Lorenzo de' Medici, spring is the season 'when Flora adorns the world with flowers'—*la primavera quando Flora di fiori adorna il mondo*." And *Primavera* is Love's emanation in universal nature.

In *The Birth of Venus*, Botticelli, according to Professor Wind, restates more simply the same philosophy of love. Here the artist has used "four figures in place of eight... so grouped that a plain triad emerges from their configuration." The "plain triad" is depicted in the figures of Zephyr, Venus, and Flora. The painting expresses much more clearly than the *Primavera* the Neoplatonic tenet that man encounters Heavenly Beauty within the universe only as imperfectly mirrored by earthly beauties; it portrays Venus as inspired into being by love out of the chaos represented by the eternally moving sea and blown towards the world only to be wrapped or hidden in the folds of Flora's flowery mantle. Mr. Wind stresses that in *The Birth of Venus* Botticelli has presented Heavenly Venus or Divine Love or Beauty, not Earthly Venus or human love; Venus in the painting issues out of the sea, is born of the sea without a mother. Earthly Venus or Venus Pandemos, on the contrary, is the daughter of Zeus and Dione. The distinction merits special mention because it assumes essential importance in the interpretation of the works of other Renaissance painters such as Raphael and Titian. The reader must be careful to note also Professor Wind's insistence on the noble and chaste character of both Venuses in Neoplatonic iconography.

In the Galleria Borghese in Rome, there is a painting by Titian entitled *Sacred and Profane Love*. The title, "of which no trace has been found earlier than 1700," is indeed a misnomer. The picture depicts the two Venuses sitting by a fountain of love, one nude and the other draped in elegant Renaissance finery. Professor Wind writes that "to a conventional view of Christian virtues, there could be no

doubt that Sacred Love would be decently clothed, and that the naked figure represented the profane." But the piece's composition gives the lie to such an interpretation; the superior role definitely falls upon the nude form. "Her greater height, her more vigorous posture, her lifted arm, her condescending address, all seem to raise her above the listening figure whom she appears to persuade or admonish; and as if to stress her sacred nature, Titian painted a church in the background behind her, whereas a castle appears opposite, as an accompaniment to the figure elegantly clothed. Since, furthermore, according to a well-established tradition [and Professor Wind has an array of texts with which to confirm his assertion], the absence of adornment is a sign of virtue and candour ('naked Truth', 'intrinsic Beauty'), there would seem to be an excellent case for ascribing a nobler character to the naked figure, and a more wordly nature to the figure that is clothed." The reliefs with which the fountain is decorated allegorize the purification of love: "a man is scourged, a woman dragged by the hair, and an unbridled horse is led away by the mane. As the horse is a Platonic symbol of sensuous passion or *libido*, or of what Pico called *amore bestiale*, the fierce scenes of chastisement on the fountain of love show how animal passion must be chastened and bridled."

Professor Wind's studies in the iconography of the Neoplatonic mystagogues lead him finally to a principle for further inquiries into Renaissance art and literature, a principle for which he finds symbols in the pagan mysteries of Pan and Proteus. In Pan we discover the Many in a One, while in Proteus and his power to be transformed into diverse shapes the One in the Many. The doctrine that Pan is in Proteus suggests "that mutability is the secret gate through which the universal invades the particular." It is a rediscovery of Pico della Mirandola's contention that he who understands the triadic rhythm of the Graces in relation to Venus holds the key to the whole Orphic theology. It is the emanative philosophy of Neoplatonism unfolded with great clarity.

Professor Wind has provided students of the Renaissance with a valuable book, priceless not only for its interpretations of Renaissance artistic masterpieces, but also, and more important for scholars, for its wealth of footnotes and detailed references to primary sources from the late-medieval and the early Renaissance periods. The plates add value to the book.

In his last chapter, the professor offers an apology "for a book devoted to a manifest eccentricity." This reviewer feels that no apology need be extended, for he has made it possible for us to understand better the Renaissance humanists and philosophers.