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HIST - 150

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Individualism Final Essay

The identification of one's self, as well as their purpose to society, is an ongoing debate that was shaped through emerging characters during The Renaissance time period. Previously, the majority of focus was placed upon the undeniable strength and prowess of a single god, thus driving the purpose of self further away. This focus was later shifted towards *individualism*, the essence of being self reliant and progressive, through Renaissance artwork, literature, and humanism. Society was given a chance to become *unique* and defy the boundaries that citizens used to blindly follow. With these new boundaries, relationships and connections between unlikely combinations of citizens grew alongside a more socially diverse population. The creation of the individual and how personality is no longer restricted from blossoming was enhanced during the Renaissance time period more than any other.

The blaringly obvious depiction of individualism and expression of self is the massive outbreak of exceptional art forms. Prior to the time period of the Renaissance, people believed that only *God* had the power to create and be in a position of excellence. Moving forward, we see how credit to artistic creativity and achievement was brought to light during the Renaissance.

¹ This led to artists incorporating pride and confidence in their abilities, thus producing more profound work overall. Artists during the Renaissance began to *sign* their paintings during this

¹ "Guided History." Guided History Madeleine Atkinson Comments. Accessed December 07, 2017.
<http://blogs.bu.edu/guidedhistory/moderneurope/madeleine-atkinson/>.

era. This further instilled confidence in artists' work, thus proving the idea of individualism during the Renaissance even further. Social class and specific sanctions of economic success are metaphorically thrown out the window when it comes to art. The men of the Renaissance era used art to express their religious and individual views regardless of where they stood on the ladder. This exemplifies the wholesomeness that can be achieved with one's self when expressing personal opinions and disregarding the overarching worry of social status. A prime example of an artist who led the motion for individuals and their expression of self is Michelangelo. While Michelangelo had upwards of ~40 sculptures, the most significant in expressing individualism was his creation of the biblical hero, David. David was constructed in a manner to display true strength and confidence in one's self through his relaxed yet staggered posture. This proposes how every individual has the possibility to create *their own* image and stand up to the authority that directs them in their place. Michelangelo constructed several other art masterpieces under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici, who heavily fueled his individualistic drive. While Michelangelo was a primary leader in the movement, he was not alone in sharing these views of identification of self. Art became more advanced through self portraits that depicted themselves as who they truly felt they wanted to be. With the continual growth of positivity within one's own of self, the quality of these portraits increased tremendously. Several other major figures, such as William Shakespeare and Leonardo da Vinci, portrayed plenty of motions of individualism through their literature and art pieces that would later on go down as some of the greatest in the world (such as Hamlet, Macbeth, and the Mona

Lisa respectively.) Artwork influenced identification of self during the Renaissance by allowing for a release of true creativity and developing confidence in the capabilities of man.

Written work during the Renaissance time period reflected individualism through expression of individual liberty. These works created ideas from those who now felt as if they were relieved of the constraint that society had placed upon them. Individualistic writing during the Renaissance time period reflected the profound respect and knowledge that had been learned from ancient Greek and Roman writing. These writers *took* the Greek and Roman previous literature and adapted their views and concerns into a then-modern approach of individualistic propositions. Often times *religion* was used in these writings to differentiate the human ideals from what they previously had been following under an ‘almighty god.’ Despite the rich and content heavy writings that were drafted during the Renaissance, the accessibility to the public was made possible through a revolutionary device deemed as the *printing press*. Johannes Gutenberg created this invention in 1452 with a motive to deliver mass amounts of writing and publications to society and assimilate them to these individualistic ideals. Had the printing press not made its debut, citizens during the Renaissance would be much less knowledgeable and have significantly less access to the revolutionary pieces of literature by creators such as Shakespeare and Milton.² Due to the growing economic prosperity during the Renaissance as well, the printing press’ ability to sustain the amount of copies produced heavily influenced the spread as well. Overall, the literature and process of spreading said literature through the printing press

² "The effect of the printing press in the Renaissance in the 15th century, Italy." ETEC540 Text Technologies.

Accessed December 07, 2017.

<http://blogs.ubc.ca/etec540sept10/2010/11/09/the-effect-of-the-printing-press-in-the-renaissance-in-the-15th-century-italy/>.

exposed those during the Renaissance to the individualistic ideals formed from modern adaptations of Greek and Roman works.

There have been several individuals who played meaningful roles within the development of individualism throughout the course of history. Despite its fictional construct, Carlo Ginzburg conjures a character deemed Menocchio to reflect a role of individualism during the sixteenth century. Menocchio, being a common day miller, had a unique knack for exquisite knowledge of political systems and religious histories. This displays how the *common man* can defy social barriers and culture norms and create individual thinking. Menocchio was questioned and even tried for said knowledge, which was a hindering aspect upon his individualistic ideals. However, conflict often drives individuals to prove the authority wrong, as Menocchio attempted to by backing his knowledge and disproving the claims from the trials of him being corrupt. Ginzburg puts Menocchio in a tough individualistic situation when he is torn between sticking true to his own knowledge and views or “allowing the Inquisition to control.”³ Menocchio stays true to his word, and despite the outcome he embodies what an individualist would exemplify.

The Renaissance had great influence upon the individualistic view of true confidence and acceptance of what man can do. Through methods of artwork and literature and creators such as Michelangelo and Shakespeare, the transition to appreciation of man was initiated. The printing press enforced the mass publication of these pieces representing individualism. Citizens during the Renaissance were able to express themselves and their pride through these methods much easier compared to previous times such as the Middle Ages.

³ Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms, The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi. New York, N.Y. :Penguin Books, 1982.