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Burke, Peter. Hybrid Renaissance: Culture, Language, Architecture

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Burke, Peter.

Hybrid Renaissance: Culture, Language, Architecture.

The Natalie Zemon Davis Annual Lecture Series. Budapest: Central European University, 2016. Pp. xii, 271 + 20 ill. ISBN 978-963-386-087-8 (paperback) US\$24.95.

Whoever dares to posit a new interpretive model for the European Renaissance must allow for gaffes, gaps, and fuzzy edges. In *Hybrid Renaissance: Culture, Language, Architecture*, Peter Burke expands on his talk for the Natalie Zemon Davis Annual Lectures at Central European University, as well as on his earlier work *Cultural Hybridity* from 2009. Burke applies his model of hybridization to the European Renaissance (which he dates from the fourteenth century to its “disintegration” in the seventeenth century). His work should be commended more for his general thesis and theoretical apparatus than for the details.

Hybrid Renaissance is divided into nine chapters, plus an introduction and a coda. Burke argues for the importance of understanding hybridity and interactions in the period known as the Renaissance, with his examples of hybridization—and thus, the Renaissance—stretching across Europe (Western and Central/Eastern) and including Asia and the Americas. He argues for understanding this period through a lens of hybridity, focusing not on the Renaissance as a discrete temporal and cultural period in Europe, but rather on the Renaissance as defined by its interactions and encounters between different cultures: old and new, pagan and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, global and local, imperial and colonial. Burke thus argues for studying a European Renaissance as one marked predominantly by cultural interactions, hybridity, and hybridization. He defines hybridization as a “process” filled with varieties of encounters and mixes. Burke enjoys the flexibility that the word “hybridization” has to offer, rather than other words and concepts that come with scholarly baggage (5).

Burke’s chapters, highlighting architecture, language, literature, philosophy, and religion, all embrace the idea of hybridization. Burke consistently stretches past the “famous” examples (eschewing a high Great Renaissance for a more everyday one) to use lesser-known buildings, texts, and linguistic samples. Here, Burke should be commended for using material from the wider, non-Western world: from a curved elephant tusk from West Africa designed to cater to the European art market (89–90) to the presence of the

rites and doctrines of Orthodox Christianity in the minds of Western European humanists and priests (194–95). Burke widens the geographic and cultural boundaries of the traditional Renaissance in order to make it a pan-European, and global, phenomenon. His Renaissance relies on the interactions of differing worlds, not on its own discrete and European existence.

Burke's greatest strengths here are twofold but related: his theoretical background, applied to hybridization, culture(s), and the Renaissance (among other terms), and his insistence on the murkiness of hybridization as practised in the past as a process. The first strength marks the first two chapters and the coda where Burke defines hybridization and his other theoretical concepts; his first and second chapter are grounded in the work of several major theories and ideas about what is culture, and how to understand it—coming from his years of practice. His second strength, the insistence on hybridization as a wide-ranging concept, allows him to play with several different examples of cross-cultural interactions without forcing the details into a straightjacket. Using, for example, buildings with both Gothic and Renaissance architectural styles, interactions between different religions during the confessional age, and a fascinating discussion on macaronic Latin, an artificial merging of humanist Latin and the vernacular in Italy and France (102–04), Burke fleshes out his idea of Renaissance-as-hybridization-process through careful and close attention to the movement and mingling of cultures instead of simply listing examples. Burke uses and understands his theory quite admirably, and his argument for interpreting the Renaissance as a period of constant interactions and hybridizations between cultures remains strong.

That being said, Burke's hybridization can sometimes flatten the dynamics of historical interactions. Burke seems to misunderstand the role that power and agency can play. While postcolonial historians are cited throughout the text, Burke's emphasis on cultural hybridity and interactions between groups globally and within Europe continually misprizes these interactions, as if they had been happening on a level playing field. Thus, while West African artisans did cater some of their products towards a European market, and while Jewish philosophers did engage with Christian theology—and vice versa—very few of these interactions happened in an area where both players held equal power. His analysis of European empires and the religious syncretism happening in the New World, especially in the case of Spain, Portugal, and the Jesuits (187–91), lacks the wider understanding that the European empires and their colonized

peoples did not participate equally in the establishment of local cultures in the Americas. Burke's insistence on the interaction, mixing, and hybridization of cultures globally and within Europe thus seems to ignore wider issues of imperial power, colonization, and oppression, rampant in the early age of empires.

This revision of a public lecture draws on wider ideas that Burke continues to ponder and publish. *Hybrid Renaissance* suggests that we change our thinking about the Renaissance as a discrete European "thing" and see it rather as a series of interconnected meetings of different cultures, and the repercussions of those meetings. The Renaissance, for Burke, should be viewed as a process of transformation of cultures, not the great and formalized period that historians have turned it into. And for that, Burke's monograph should be commended. His grounding in theory on how to understand what culture is, his argument for the Renaissance as a process of cultural interactions, and his suggestion regarding the importance of hybridization theory to study the period between 1300–1700 makes this lecture-turned-book a useful and important argument for scholars studying the early modern world and reflects the importance of studying the Renaissance not solely for Kings and Things but for its wider cultural diffusion.

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Caravale, Giorgio.

***Beyond the Inquisition: Ambrogio Catarino Politi and the Origins of the Counter-Reformation.* Trans. Donald Weinstein.**

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017. Pp. xv, 419. ISBN 978-0-268-10008-7 (hardcover) US\$60.

In the newly translated volume by Donald Weinstein, *Beyond the Inquisition: Ambrogio Catarino Politi and the Origins of the Counter-Reformation*, originally published in Italian in 2007, Giorgio Caravale has reconsidered the life and work of Ambrogio Catarino, who is famously known as an unstoppable hunter of Protestant heretics. This revisionist study should be of interest to all students of sixteenth-century European religious history. Through a biographical approach,