

Spring Breeze of Renaissance

Analysis on Artistic Spirit in Botticelli's Works *Spring*

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Abstract—Botticelli is one of the important Italian painters in European Renaissance Period. His unique artistic style and artistic thought are deeply appreciated and pursued by later generations. This article centers on his representative works *Spring* to further set forth his artistic concept and makes in-depth analysis on artistic connotation of *Spring* and artistic spirit of Botticelli from four aspects, namely, origin of artist and Medici Family and the work, religious characteristic and implied meaning of plants in the work, unique method for foreshortened figure and framing techniques, as well as artistic characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood deeply influenced by his artistic influence.

Keywords—renaissance; *Spring*; Botticelli; artistic spirit

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, many artists and art critics end in a deadlock in arguing the meaning of Botticelli's works *Spring*, which is not only a wood oil painting, but also prediction of Florence in the late 1400s and spring breeze of Italian Renaissance. For hundreds of years, countless fans and followers tirelessly analyze and try to reveal the meaning in it. Some people say it depicts a party to indulge emotions. The robust West Wind God represents masculine charm. Some say the key point of this painting is not delicate art but original nature and agriculture. Botticelli uses exquisite technique and elaborate drawing to depict plants in the painting and makes flowers in the garden seem like portrait works. Some people think this painting make them feel nervous. Looking at the work, audiences as if stare at a magic crystal ball and there are too many beautiful things in it, but mythological figures trapped in it cannot get away. Some people also have favorable impression and love on the painting and feel it has magical and unending magic. With extraordinary refined beauty, *Spring* enlightens the nature and human society. At the meantime, the amazing work also becomes work of Botticelli that reaches the peak of perfection.

II. ORIGIN OF ARTIST AND MEDICI FAMILY AND THE WORK

Florence in the 15th century was influenced by powerful Medici Family in politics, economy and culture as well as art. In 1434, bank Cosimo di Medici returned to Florence and began the long-term ruling carried out by Medici Family for Florence. When his descendant Lorenzo

wields power in Florence, the art has reached its peak. The creation of the most important artworks is almost completed in this period. The governing idea of Lorenzo is different from that of his elder generation. He loves art and composes poems. Meanwhile, he also participates in activities of humanism. Lorenzo greatly supports construction of local university, arrangement of ancient academic works, development and expansion of humanism as well as appointment of artistic creation.

Spring first was considered being hanged in country villa of Medici Family. People think it is the first home of *Spring* for centuries. About less than 30 years ago, when researching historical accounts of past events in Florence, experts of art history found a document. Contents in it thoroughly overturned our deduction for *Spring*. The massive record showed that the painting had been listed in the item in 1498. It even set a price for the painting. The record describes, "The wood painting with nine men and women in it is hanged above the sofa, valued at 100 lira." The record reveals that *Spring* is not showed in any villa but hanged in bedroom of a residence in Florence. The master of the house is not Lorenzo but his nephew De Pierre Francisco. Although he was not historical personage, he had reputation in Florence at that time. The reason why he can leave a name behind is that he seems to be the real owner that appoints the artwork of *Spring*. Because of political layout of the family, young Francisco has to accept political marriage. The bride's side is the daughter of hostile forces of his family. The marriage that has nothing to do with love becomes the opportunity for production of the great work with Venus as the protagonist. Although at that period, the appointment of painting for marriage was very common, for young Francisco who was just 18 years old, it was no small thing. So to speak, *Spring* was painted for marriage of the two young people. Therefore, it is more like genre painting that presents festive scene than artwork. Because Botticelli had stood firm in art circles of Florence at that time, the probability for him to receive the important order is very high. He used painting means of Middle Ages with romantic color and expressed delicacy and grace of ancient mythology incisively and vividly. His painting has readable expression of emotion and modesty and courtesy. The style appealed to Medici Family, the sponsor that receives higher education.

Botticelli is the favorite of nobility Medici Family as well as student of Fiippol Lippi, the monk painter daring to show mundane life. Botticelli was born in the home of craftsman.

It makes his thought complicated. He had fantasy for the future as well as felt confused in the reality. It may be the reason why his works give people complicated and confusing mysterious feelings.

III. RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPLIED MEANING OF PLANTS IN THE WORK

A. *Religious Characteristics*

Since the fourteenth century, humanism spirit treaded the arena of history quietly. The spiritual core is human-centered instead of god-centered human-fundamental characteristics. It mainly opposes fatuous and superstitious theological thought and rendering of sacred religious and affirms human dignity and human value. It proposes that the aim of life is to pursue happiness in real life rather than self-atonement. It advocates individual liberation and thinks people are master and creator in real life. Therefore, under the influence of this ideological trend, humanism spirit permeated in artistic creation of renaissance naturally. The emotional sustenance for society, nature and life becomes the greatest motivation for painters to create works. Previously, paintings of mythological themes were not valued by Italians. So to speak, it is Botticelli who breaks religious art tradition first. He created works with mythological themes by using seriousness and grand scale of religious painting. Florence in the 1470s had large requirements for new-style paintings of mythological themes. Most of the local families have some works of religious art. Even impoverished person born of low extraction are no exception. The Crucifixion of Christ was pretty common traditional theme, but the most popular was portraits of Madonna and Child. Meanwhile, it also included *Spring* full of style of paganism.

B. *Implied Meaning of Plants in the Works*

Painting of *Spring* is a quite tedious and huge project. Even drawing master like Botticelli spent at least one year to work at it with great care. Of course, we can use more approachable way to appreciate this work. In the *Spring*, there are numerous and a great variety of flowers. All kinds of things fill with the painting. There are hundreds of different kinds of plants. Some are familiar to us but some are not. Some plants cause heated debate of botanists. It is easy for them to reach a consensus on most of the varieties, including the most common variety—citrus. In Renaissance Period, citrus was regarded as medicative apple. Medica has the meaning of health or medical treatment. The quirkish function reminds people of Medici Family. Therefore, people often connected tangerine with Medici Family. Citrus is very typical Mediterranean plant. It will bloom and bear fruits at the same time in March and April every year. Although the name for the painting of *Spring* lets people think plants in it completely belong to spring. But Botticelli quietly released his imagination and creativity. In order to show scenery that all flowers bloom together in the *Spring*, the artist put time and energy to delineate flowers and plants. Some of them are created by him. Some are new plants created by him through integrating traditional template of flowers and plants with flowers of other types. Although not all are portrayed

according to real flowers and plants, most styles refer to real plants.

Most people think the painting was drawn in early spring, but there are roses blooming in summer day and coltsfoot blooming in late winter. The work combines flowers and plants at different times. Although Botticelli followed no set form and integrated a large number of flowers blooming at different seasons in the same work, the portrayal of each flower is extremely accurate. Artists pay highest attention to German calamus. Because calamus has peculiar translucent effect, Botticelli preferred to it, so it is eye-catching and perfect. Lorenzo Medici once said, "People shall not think flowers are unmeaning".

IV. UNIQUE FORESHORTENED FIGURE AND FRAMING TECHNIQUES

Paintings in Renaissance Period have obvious characteristics, namely a wide range of using scenography and anatomy. The two kinds of new aiding methods of painting rapidly attracted interests of humanists. These aiding methods had gotten rapid development after a century of accumulation before Botticelli used it. Since the era of Giotto, western artists have resolutely and determinedly abandoned artistic style of Byzantine and turned to in-depth research on visible world. In this process, the linear perspective, the perspective of light and shade as well as perspective of ancient Greece received energetic development and support. Artists during this period had been trying to seek realistic tendency, structure, shape, accurate portrayal of proportion of things in daily life. However, Botticelli was an exception. He ignored the restriction of these "theoretical framework" and insisted on bringing artistic characteristics such as plane and poetic quality into his works. Characters shaped by him (such as Mourning of Christ) seem to have no strong three-dimension effect as well as no accurate character modeling. The technique of expression that lacks of three-dimension effect may be influenced by Byzantine art, which emphasizes plane sense and spirituality of the painting.

V. THOUGHT OF RENAISSANCE AND *SPRING*

Although *Spring* is a secular works, it follows some traditions of religious painting or altar painting. Natural arch formed by plants surrounds Venus in center of the painting. It is easy to remind people of Virgin Mary under the arch. The garden is secluded from mortal world through spruces and orange trees on the background. But the garden is not paradise for human but sacred land for gods. They get together in the garden because of some reasons, without being bothered by the outside world. Botticelli turns the garden that belongs to Virgin Mary in traditional Christian painting into garden of Venus and endows Venus the image like Virgin Mary. It shows that the painting of mythical theme is similar to paintings of Christian religion to some extent. At the meantime, Christ child Cupid of Venus also spreads wings to fly above her. The work shows important virtue of Christianity—love. The presentation of the Graces is a great challenge for Botticelli on technology and social

convention. Thin clothes can only cover their bodies. It may be the first female body over more than one thousand years. The main reason why Botticelli can present them is that they are not real women. Goddess was unique product of imagination in Renaissance Period. Goddess can make people pleasant and let people yearn for their beauty without evil thoughts. Three maids in the left side of the painting are regarded as goddesses beside Venus.

In any case, reading implied meaning of *Spring* with thought of Renaissance, the great work that spread through the ages finally moves later generations who know nothing about Neo-Platonism and humanism during Renaissance Period after hundreds of years. Although the work does not have obvious theme, we yearn for blindingly bright harmony. With Venus as the protagonist, the painting shows love. Although love makes us happy, its complication, difficulty and danger cannot be ignored.

VI. BOTTICELLI AND PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD

Compared with artists keen on exploring natural world through rationalism and experimentalism, Botticelli is obviously against the grain. He subjectively ignores scientific knowledge acquired by people in experimental arts.

In the early 19th century, an upsurge to research art history sprung up in Italy. Museum in Florence decided to show some historical researches that present art history of Florence in the gallery. In the mid-nineteenth century, *Spring* once more saw the light of day in Italy. Its emergence also brought the last hope for ambitious British artists who looked for inspiration. These young people established Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1848. They aimed at looking for new ways to express realistic issues in the past works. They could not bear education received for any time, were anxious to getting rid of shackles in heyday of Renaissance and not willing to facsimile works of Raphael, etc. When looking for paintings to replace models provided by Royal Academy of Arts, they found works of artists such as Botticelli.

In ancient Greece, Members of Pre-raphaelite Brotherhood showed extreme admiration for art of paganism without moral restraint in Rome. They carefully appreciate *Spring* and projected their sorrow sensibility onto the work. These avant-garde artists keenly perceived sadness of women that undertook heavy responsibilities in work of Botticelli. Venus, who reveals disgust of existence forever, is unable to bear so many responsibilities on her weak shoulders. Meanwhile, flowers blooming in the painting seem to be in the edge of withering away and show warning significance or fear. It was the fear full of death that painters of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood struggled to look for. They began to imitate painting style of Botticelli in their works.

Ophelia is representative works of this style. It is also one of the most famous paintings in art history of British. The painter John Everett Millais turned flowers on cloth of protagonist and bouquet in her hand into death and desperation. *Spring Song*, another work at the same period, and *Spring* echoed each other at a distance. The reflection of spring in the work is clear. The protagonist in the center of

the painting is also a woman. Although with two hands playing the piano, she does not stretch out them to bless, the vertical posture of the upper limb is different in approach but equally satisfactory in result with Venus in *Spring*. Two women standing by each other at the corner of the painting look at the distance blankly. The posture happens to have the same view with that of the Graces. The man in the left side of the work is changed into an elegant young man who wears five pants and holds flowering branches. *Spring Song* of Simon Solomon has mild and fascinating charm. But sometimes it inevitably reveals strong sadness. The painter sees abstract human body and expression of emotional desire from the sadness. We as if feel deeper appeal for desire in his *Spring Song* than in *Spring*. The appeal may exist all the time. But for restrained society in Victorian era, it was a desire that cannot reveal.

VII. CONCLUSION

Spring of Botticelli makes numerous artists become interested in it and countless worshipers show extreme admiration. For hundreds of years, painters use the theme of eternity to narrate a lot of stories and depict countless characters. His life is full of twists and turns. His art reaches the height beyond the reach of later generations. He also leaves huge space for his followers. The space is enough for them to carefully appreciate works of Botticelli and make in-depth research and bold reasoning. His consistent pursuit for art influences artists from generation to generation.

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