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# Pictures at an Exhibition: Milton, Machiavelli, Monet, Mussorgsky and marketing

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## Abstract

Looks at the current state of marketing through the mediating eyes of Milton, Machiavelli, Monet and Mussorgsky. Mussorgsky's emotional and relational music *Pictures at an Exhibition* is used as a interlinking inspirational pastiche of characters and events as we promenade and observe some of the remorseless characters and creative passion that drives marketing ever onward. Milton is perceived as the great mediator and defender of the true faith, and is symbolised by the music portraying the Great Gate of Kiev through which truth passes to gain entry to paradise, symbolising our discipline's ultimate goal. Machiavelli reflects the enquiring mind, enlightenment and is perceived as the true advocate of the realities of the discipline and the search for power. Monet provides the creative guiding light and insight into the perceived image. Contemporary marketing concepts are also added to the thoughts of the mediators. Marketing needs to regenerate itself and not fear change or ambiguity in its quest to seek the truth. It needs to avoid shibboleths, false and unarmed prophets, learn from history and show passion and courage or be deemed beyond redemption.

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## Prologue

Milton's chosen audience was the strenuous few who care, the dedicated, those who cannot know what is right without acting upon it, at whatever cost: those who "hate the cowardice of doing wrong" (Hill, 1977, p. 475).

This quote seems appropriate at a time when academics – the strenuous few – attempt to lead marketing into a new, redeemed post-modern hereafter. To this end the entrails of marketing need to be examined and the portents for the future understood. This is an opportunity to develop the "rethinking of marketing" (Brownlie *et al.*, 1999) and facilitate its advancement.

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## Framework

The framework for this paper is Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. He wrote this work in 1874. As a set of piano pieces it is intensely original in its use of texture, and has lent itself well enough to re-arrangement for the entire colour of a full orchestra. The orchestrated version we are most familiar with was by Ravel and not performed until 1922. (Similarly, Mussorgsky's other famous work *Night on a Bare Mountain* had its orchestration finished by Rimsky-Korsakov.) The music depicts ten of his recently deceased friend Victor Hartman's pictures. These pictures have the titles: Gnomus, The Old Castle, The Tuileries, Bydlo, Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, Limoges Market, Catacombs: Sepulchrum Romanum Cum Mortuis in lingra mortua, Hut on Fowl's Legs and The Great Gate of Kiev.

The all pervading and structuring Promenade Theme interlink each picture. The Promenade Theme is used throughout this paper to symbolise the linking creativity of marketing across human interactivity – marketing as an exchange process.

Marketing moves through the exhibition. It stops at selected pictures – pictures that are analogous of the men whose works are under consideration as inspiration to the development of the true vitality of marketing. Machiavelli ("Gnomus"), Mussorgsky ("The Old Castle"), Monet ("Tuileries") and Milton ("The Great Gate of Kiev"). One picture also depicts Marketing in its many guises ("Limoges Market"). At each picture the promenading marketing discipline/disciple may gain insights into its current and future state. Marketing on its remorseless march first pauses in front of "Gnomus" and the patron saint of marketers Niccolò Machiavelli.

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## Machiavelli – Gnomus

Much has and will be said about the relationship between Machiavelli and Marketing (Hunt and Chonko, 1984; Harris *et al.*, 1998). Some may even be "Mached Out", but there are points that need to be reiterated here for the benefit of the promenading marketing. Machiavelli would tell marketing what is really going on not what marketing academe would like to think is happening. Machiavelli was an exceptionally bright and perceptive observer of the reality of life. In June 1498, the *fin de siecle*, at the age of 28 he was elected Chancellor of the Second Chancery of the Florentine Republic following the fall of the first republic and the burning of Savaronola and his Dominican supporters at the stake. He served the Republic well. He was a contemporary of Michaelangelo, Raphael, Galileo and Cellini. A Humanist, he lends himself to being seen as one of the first great scientific observers of what goes on in the market place of life. He believed in civic society and powerful rulers to defend their own people. He was a great believer in firm action and resolution. Florence throughout his life was regularly

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besieged, laid waste, looted yet was the great smelting pot of the Renaissance where much of the enlightenment was born.

He despised falsehood and shibboleths. Contrary to popular myth he did not have any strong views on religion and felt that some individuals were destroyed because of their own actions and a lack of practical awareness of the realities of power. Machiavelli was excluded from office with the fall of the Republic in 1512 and the return to Florence of the Medici. He retired to the country waiting for the call to serve the people that never came. He wrote *The Prince* in 1513, in which he attacks the writers whose inconsistent moralism allows them to admire great deeds but not the cruel acts necessary to accomplish them.

*The Prince* came to be seen as the most notorious and shocking piece of literature of the Italian Renaissance, and via abuse and misuse gave birth to the negative epithet "Machiavellian" now commonly used in all languages. Bull (1961) has often quoted one priest who referred to *The Prince* as "a Prayer Book loaded with dynamite".

He also wrote a number of plays that were performed regularly and more known in his day than any of his books. His prose style is elegant and his great work the *Discourses on Livy* a masterful book which in the words of Mansfield and Tarcov (1996) is a "decent and useful book that advises citizens, leaders, reformers, and founders of republics on how to order them to preserve liberty and avoid corruption". His words are direct and have a clarity which in his times some found alarmingly too clear and yet five hundred years or so later have not lost their impact or originality. As a civil servant he was told to write more boringly but Machiavelli could never write boringly (Gilbert, 1958; Bull, 1961; Skinner, 1981; Wooton, 1994). The Catholic Church banned all his books shortly after his death. Perhaps the ultimate way to ensure the market success of a text.

He is one of the first modern writers to use the powerful stylistic device of the "either or" choice. His epigrammatic prose style lends itself to the development of high quality aphorisms that transcend time and place, for example: "It is by the nature of men to be bound by the benefits they confer as much as by those they receive" (*The Prince*, 1513); "Wars begin when you will, but they do not end when you please" (*History of Florence*, 1521-5) and "A neutral is bound to be hated by those who lose, and despised by those who win" (*The Prince*, 1513).

Machiavelli in *The Prince* abandons the moral teachings of the classical and biblical traditions for a new conception of virtue as the willingness and ability to do whatever it needs to acquire and maintain what one has acquired.

Niccolò Machiavelli, would advise marketing to be aware of its uses and reputation in the real world. He would warn against obfuscation and too much navel gazing. He would also warn against throwing the useful marketing tools and concepts out with the post-modern proverbial bath water. For example, one still needs to test, prove and benchmark the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. Marketing now moves to the picture entitled "The Old Castle" depicting the troubadour Mussorgsky.

### Mussorgsky – The Old Castle

Modest Mussorgsky, a Russian composer, was born in 1839. After leaving the army, Mussorgsky held various positions in the civil service. Russian folk music and folk tales influenced his music. At his death in 1881, the result of epilepsy induced by alcohol, he left a great deal of his musical work unfinished. He had no success with his two most famous operas *Boris Godunov* (also touched up by Rimsky-Korsakov) and *Khovanshchina* (arranged first by Rimsky-Korsakov and later by Shostakovich) during his lifetime (much like Machiavelli). *Boris* – a Russian version of Richard III and according to Denis Forman (1994) quite different from any other opera in the book! – reflects the grand passion and warmth of Mother Russia, its distinctive earthy history, counter plot, darkness and light. *Khovanshchina*, depicts yet another tussle to rule Russia. A feel for the rich brown earth of the Steppe and a pretty good grasp of Russian political history is needed, to come to grips with this opera. It may not be the best of operas but as Forman (1994) points out it throbs out love for Russia. Mussorgsky supplied the brilliant bare bones which others like Rimsky-Korsakov applied their technical abilities to, smoothing out apparent crudities in these and other works to show the full blown passion of Russian nationalism and its deep roots and love of nature.

The main message here is about the passion for the subject of marketing even if the picture is not yet complete. The bare bones, the ideas, the framework, the basic concept that can be reused, reworked, reinvented, rethought, post modernised, networked, critiqued and even if necessary matrixed. Marketing must build on what it has achieved with passion. It must beat the drum loudly and remember the recurring themes of knowing the customer and meeting their needs or end up in the eternal inferno based on the pitch burners which Dante observed with such clearness at the great Arsenale.

Marketing now promenades remorselessly on from the "Old Castle" towards the "Tuileries".

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## Monet – The Tuileries

As marketing finds itself at the end of its own *fin de siècle*, Claude Monet (1840-1926), provides a perspective from the last *fin de siècle*. He was born in Paris and spent his youth in Le Havre where he met Boudin, who encouraged him to work outdoors. One of his paintings – “Impression: soleil levant” gave the name to the movement. The first Impressionist exhibition with Renoir, Pissaro and Sisley was held in 1874. Monet displays stark contrasts in his colours – from the darkness of his Valley of the Creuse paintings, through the clarity of the Grainstack works, the shadow-like quality of the Rouen set and the splendour of the London and Venice paintings. He also showed a notable liking of steam engines stemming from the practical realities of having a studio in cheap rooms adjacent to the Gare du Nord.

The last years of his life were spent at Giverny where he suffered from cataracts and partial blindness, which led to dark painted textures before he regained his sight and experimented and reworked and reached his ultimate paradise. In Giverny he built a water garden and began to see its pictorial possibilities. The water lilies became an addictive, almost intoxicating scene that he painted over and over again till his death.

Shimmering with mingling colours and reflections, his water-lily pond (1899) is airy and saturated with light. He achieved this effect by covering his canvas with individual brushstrokes of different colours, creating a rich mist of blues, reds and greens that glint light on the surface of water. Monet was not only a leading member of the impressionist movement, but his experiments with paint, colour and light also formed a starting point for abstract art. His near-contemporary Cezanne described him as “only an eye, but by God, what an eye”.

A Monet exhibition even today engenders creativity, flair, and verve and continues to stimulate and open up and introduce more consumers to the joys and sensitivities of art, colour and texture. Monet provides the theme of working and reworking of ideas. This is evinced by the multiple paintings of the same subject, for example *Cathedrales de Rouen, Meules, Fin de Lete, Haystacks, Femme a Lombrelle* and *Water-lilies*.

Marketing will need to work and rework its ideas before it is content. Monet would urge marketers to experience their role in a complex manner – *éprouver*. As Tucker (1989, p. 95) points out there is no equivalent to the word *éprouver* in the English language – “It refers not only to participation in or perception of an event and the feelings directly associated with it, but also to a broad range of sensations, with things revealing

themselves slowly so that they become known in their fullest dimension”. Even modern day marketers recognise the need to embrace rather than fear complexity. Some (Wensley, 1997; Chaston, 1999) call for a more hybrid approach to marketing in order to cope with this very complexity.

Marketing moves on contemplating the examples provided by Machiavelli, Mussorgsky and Monet. There is a need for passion, working and reworking and an eye to what is really happening amongst the constituents of marketing. Marketing now stands in front of the painting, the Market at Limoges.

## Marketing – Market at Limoges

Here Marketing is confronted by a cacophony caused by the various stall-holders at the Market at Limoges shouting out to Marketing and trying to sell their various tinctures, theories and wares:

Buttle (1996) and Gummesson (1996) cry out from their stall about the merits of Relationship marketing versus Transactional marketing. From another stall Newman and Sheth (1987), O’Shaughnessy (1990), Harris and Lock (1996) are arguing about the differences between propaganda, and marketing and voter behaviour and consumer behaviour and political choice behaviour. Close by, Rees (1998a) and Sargeant (1999) plead for some attention to be paid to not-for-profit marketing – even if there is not much money in it. Berry and Parasuraman (1993) and Grönroos (1994) take us through the development of Services marketing with help from Baron and Harris (1995).

There is a lot of activity on the stall where the P’s of Marketing are being traded. Some are reductionist (McCarthy, 1971), whilst others want to add more P’s to the marketing mix. Booms and Bitner (1981) want to add three more P’s to aid service marketing and Kotler (1986) wants to add Power and Politics in his Megamarketing approach.

The Consumer marketing stall is very colourful, covered as it is in many pictures. Holbrook (1997) cries out to marketing about stereography and the 3D effect in consumer research (glasses provided). Belk (1995) emphasises hyperreality drawing on images of Las Vegas. Meanwhile on another stall Industrial marketing has repositioned itself as Business marketing (Chisnall, 1989, 1995) or is it Network marketing (Hakansson, 1982; Ford, 1990) or Organisational relationship marketing (Hakansson and Snehota, 1989). University lecturers on the didactic stall talk of marketing as a function or philosophy.

The wailing and gnashing of teeth emanate from a stall where the death and rebirth of

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marketing is being peddled (Brown *et al.*, 1995) with a touch of mid life crisis (Kotler, 1994) and rethinking (Brownlie *et al.*, 1999) to liven things up. Whilst Brown (1995, 1998) preaches from the pulpit of post-modern marketing, the Cyber stall displays the nascent delights of E-Commerce. As marketing begins to move away from the market it passes the stall of Advertising and Promotion and wonders why so many people find this a popular display of marketing.

Finally marketing now totally bewildered by the last painting moves on and the "Promenade" theme emerges into the quintessential and over arching vision of the "Great Gate of Kiev" depicting the seventeenth century writer and poet John Milton.

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## Milton

The theme of this article is *Paradiso* – and here is a man whose greatest works concern the loss and regaining of paradise.

In its total scheme it is a divine comedy, a tragic vision of the human experience and history which ends with a measure of happiness and hope (Bush, 1966, p. 146).

Milton was born in 1608 and died in 1674 and was the greatest English publicist and pamphleteer of the seventeenth century. Arguably the first spin doctor (unlike Machiavelli who said it as it really was). Milton was the man who put the spin on the English Revolution. The man who wrote pamphlets in support of the Commonwealth and managed to retain his life at the Restoration – good marketing indeed! (Indeed there is speculation he was offered the job of Latin Secretary to Charles II). Milton could create elegant arguments to support what he considered should be the reality of the world. A number of themes in Milton's work may be of some assistance to the promenading Marketing.

### The blame culture

Those in "receipt" of marketing may feel they are having something "done" to them (Kell *et al.*, 1997). Just as Adam and Eve wanted to blame someone else for their misdeeds, so those in "receipt" of marketing want to place the blame elsewhere.

Thus it shall befall  
Him who to worth in women overtrusting  
Lets her will rule; restraint she will not  
brook,  
And left to herself, if evil thence ensue,  
She first his weak indulgence will accuse.  
Thus they in mutual accusation spent  
The fruitless hours, but neither self-  
condemning  
And of their vain contest appear'd no end  
(*Paradise Lost*, Book IX, Milton, 1891).

But as Milton argues with passion the recipients of marketing are mutable and possess reason and free will:

God made thee perfect, not immutable:  
And good he made thee, but to persevere  
He left it in thy power, ordained thy will  
By nature free, not over-ruled by fate  
Inextricable, or strict necessity;  
Our voluntary service he requires,  
Not our necessitated . . .

*Paradise Lost*, Book V, pp. 524-30 (Milton, 1891).

There is, nevertheless a role for marketing in pointing this out or perhaps making the message a pleasant experience:

The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear  
So charming left his voice, that he awhile  
Thought him still speaking, still stood fix'd to  
hear

*Paradise Lost*, Book VIII, pp. 1-3 (Milton, 1891).

Just as Milton sought to be the mediator of divine truth to his fellow men (Spencer Hill 1979), so marketing needs a mediator to project a positive image:

Good, the more  
Communicated, more abundant grows

*Paradise Lost*, Book V, pp. 71-2 (Milton, 1891).

### Regeneration

If marketing is suffering from a sort of disintegration amongst academics – he would call for regeneration. His doctrine of salvation is all about personal vocation, renovation and regeneration (Spencer Hill, 1979). Ideas like man must be mutable; if they don't work they must be changed. Milton would have approved of gatherings where ideas were being discussed with a view to regeneration. Much of the theme of *Paradise Regained* is about Jesus' voyage of self discovery and vocational insight (Spencer Hill, 1979). Even Satan realises early on (*Paradise Regained* Book II) that Jesus will not be as easy to manipulate as Adam and Eve were. At the end of *Paradise Regained* Satan has to admit that Jesus is above all temptation and is himself vanquished. Milton would advise marketing to stand steadfast but would however warn against replacing one marketing orthodoxy with another. Milton's great theme was iconoclasm (Hill, 1977). He became disillusioned with Cromwell and the Generals when they wanted to create a new established church – that is, replace one set of idols with another. Thus marketing should be wary of throwing out the marketing mix or marketing concept in favour of outright replacement with new shibboleths such as relationship marketing or coming soon new improved . . . marketing.

### Marketing as a philosophy

The positional move by Milton at the restoration to turn his attention away from the national to the individual vocation and

restoration can be likened to marketing moving away from being a departmental function to more of a philosophy practised by all individuals in the organization. Like *Paradise Regained* which is duller than *Paradise Lost*, marketing may need to be less flamboyant and concentrate on inward and individual strength.

### Faith in marketing

We must be wary of being falsely led away from the church of marketing. Maybe all this doubting of marketing is the wrong way:

The seraph Abdiel faithful found,  
Among the faithless, faithful only he;  
Among innumerable false, unmoved,  
Unshaken, unsexed, unterrified  
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;  
Nor number nor example with him wrought  
To swerve from truth, or change his constant  
mind  
Though single.

*Paradise Lost*, Book V, pp. 896-903 (Milton, 1891).

If we have faith in marketing, our faith will be rewarded with greater understanding and knowledge. Remember that some groups in society are only just beginning to see the point of marketing and to find it useful (Rees, 1998b). As Hill (1977) points out: "Adversity had not led Milton to abandon the beliefs to which he had given his life and his eyes". Additionally "From the start of his pamphleteering until the his death, Milton was attacked, at length or in brief gibes, about four times as often as he was cited with approval, and the chorus of abuse was loudest in 1660" (Bush, 1966).

### Shibboleths of marketing

Which group do we want to belong to (transactional v. relationship marketing)? Are we some sort of badge wearers exclusively debating the topic of marketing? There are no answers but the creating of shibboleths will not help.

As marketing moves away from Milton and the Great Gate of Kiev, it has a sense of uncertainty, no doubt engendered by the ambiguity and teasing for which Milton is renowned (Hill, 1977). (Marketing Agonistes?)

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### The end of the promenade

Milton is unlike Machiavelli. Milton was a seventeenth century spin-doctor, whereas Machiavelli was very concerned with the realpolitik. All the pictures exude passion – this is the unifying thread. Do not dampen this passion by arcane outpourings and obfuscation. We need a new dawn: we need to regain paradise if indeed it has been lost. If we think we know the answers we have not asked all the questions. The need to search for reality, the truth, the passion, colour and

meet citizens' (consumers') desires and needs are all unifying themes deriving from the great marketing mediators we have met on our journey through the exhibition. They all display pragmatic realism. Thus marketing, the exchange process, must strike a balance between the beautiful academic reasoning and the real politik of what the constituents of marketing need.

Milton and Monet gained greater clarity through periods of blindness. The demonised Machiavelli wrote also of the cleansing properties of darkness and despair to bring about light.

I think that this would be the true way to go to paradise:  
to learn the way to hell in  
order to flee it  
(Letter to Guicciardini, 1515).

Mussorgsky generated ideas that were recognised after his death as the early heritage and foundations of the birth of the great Russian musical tradition. Machiavelli was given public office early in his lifetime, but never allowed to fulfil his complete promise after the fall of the Republic. His books were barely known in Florence on his death, but his clarity of ideas, language and insights into human interaction and the use of power have made *il Principe* the leading management and politics primer of the last five hundred years.

Monet was recognised throughout his lifetime and like Machiavelli his prestige has steadily risen after his death. Milton was recognised and valued in his own lifetime and has set out the basic tenants of the search for truth and has attacked less rigorous argument and censorship.

All spent periods away from society, either locked away in prison or in the countryside where they reflected on the meaning of truth, passion, power and colour. Their achievements are an inspiration to marketing – the need for passion linked to pragmatic reality. As we reach the *fin de siecle* – marketing must draw on the lessons of its masters and mistresses to push forward the discipline. Which marketers will be remembered in 500 or 400 or 300 or 200 or 100 years' time?

Who will argue the truth, supply the passion, understand power and explore the complex cadences and cascades of colour of the future?

*Tanto Nomini Nullum Par Elogium*  
"No epitaph can match so great a name"  
(Niccolo Machiavelli's Tomb, Santa Croce, Florence).

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