

*With Reference to Giotto's "Kiss of Judas" discuss Giotto's humanisation of religious figures, his use of space and light, his approach to narrative painting, his choice of setting and his use of colour.*

Giotto (1267-1337) was the most important painter of the 14th century. He was a revolutionary painter breaking decisively from the Italo-Byzantine tradition, which consisted of elongated two-dimensional figures that lacked weight. Giotto's most important and famous works were the frescos at the Arena chapel 1305-1310. He was commissioned to paint the frescos by Enrico Scrovegni, who built the chapel in order to get his father into heaven, due to his father being a non-Jewish money lender (a usurer), which was a great sin at the time. Giotto was commissioned because he was the most prestigious artist at the time. In this essay I will discuss Giotto's humanisation of religious figures, his use of space and light, his approach to narrative painting, his choice of setting and his use of colour in reference to "Kiss of Judas" one of the frescos in the Arena chapel.

Contemporary scholars, who were very interested in humanism, influenced Giotto's humanisation of religious figures. In the 'Kiss of Judas' the figures are made to look human, unlike earlier painters who were more concerned with making the figures have elegance and grace, Giotto made his figures have flesh and blood. They are weighty, rounded three-dimensional and down to earth. However the thing he did that was most important was the human emotion he had in his paintings. Unlike the Italo-Byzantine style which made religious figures look divine with no expression on their

faces, Giotto uses emotion to not only make the figures look human but also for the narrative of the paintings. It is clear from the expressions on the onlooker's faces as Judas kisses Jesus that they are shocked and angry about it, also Jesus' stare into Judas' eyes show great power and disgust. This helped the viewer sympathize with the figures, which gave them a better understanding of the stories. This is another reason why Giotto was so important. His strength in conveying narrative. He created dramatic tension by selecting scenes carefully. Gestures, facial expression and pathetic fallacy involve the viewer. Giotto's settings were more convincing than in earlier styles. He would set the paintings in believable a contemporary setting, rather than just a gold backgrounds like the Byzantine style. The figures also wore contemporary clothes, which helped the viewer relate and understand the stories; this also helped them to sympathize with the characters. As most people at the time were illiterate and did not understand Latin these pictures were the only way to understand the bible. They were known as the poor man's bible as they could follow the pictures along the church like a book.

Earlier painters stacked their figures or suspended them in space. Giotto placed figures in more convincing spaces, in 'kiss of Judas' the figures look natural due to their positioning and the distribution of light and shadow, which gives the figures rounded solid form. The figures are also not only anchored to the ground but there is suggested measurable distance between them.

Giotto's use of colour was less jewel like than the Byzantine style as he used far less gold leaf. However he did use a vast amount of lapis lazuli which was a very deep blue colour that was made from a very precious expensive stone that came from Afghanistan, This was even more grand than gold leaf especially as he used it in such vast quantities. He also uses colours for symbolic purposes. For example in 'Kiss of Judas' Judas' cloak, which is draped around Jesus, is yellow. This was the symbol for treachery and deceit and this would have also added to people's understanding of the paintings.