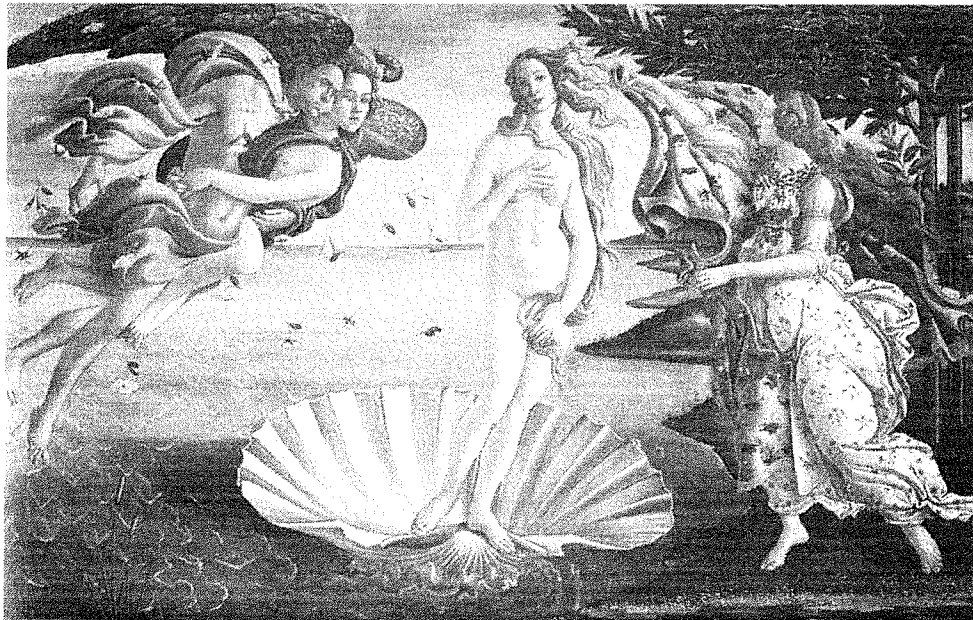


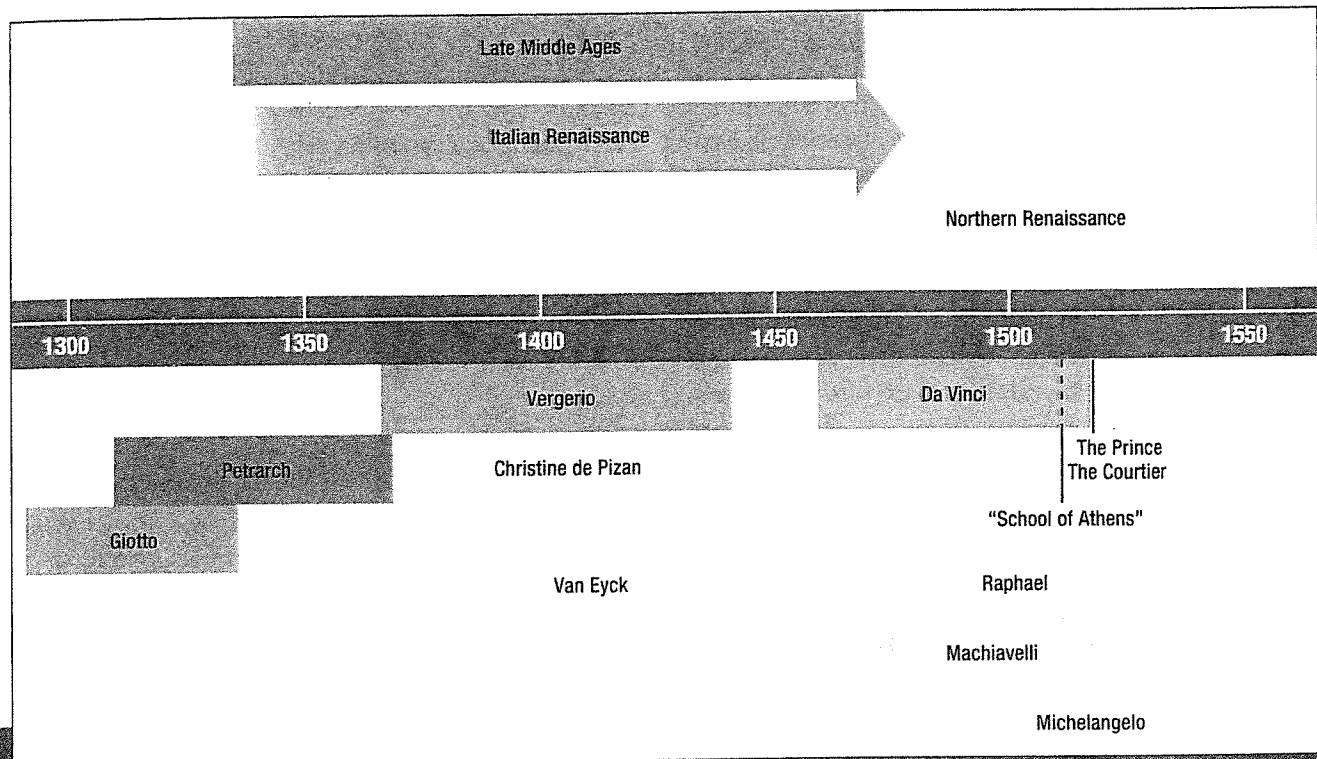
CHAPTER 12: THE AGE OF THE RENAISSANCE DOCUMENT SET

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The Birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli, 1486. Uffizi Gallery, Italy.



1 The Renaissance

Although in many ways a period of decline and disintegration, the Late Middle Ages also witnessed an extraordinary outburst of cultural and intellectual creativity known as the Renaissance. The Renaissance started in the fourteenth century in the cities of northern Italy, where scholars and a social elite became more interested in the literature and ideas of ancient Greece and Rome. As interest in Classical civilization grew, so did a tendency to reject many of the ideas and practices of medieval civilization. While remaining deeply religious, people of the Renaissance concerned themselves more with the secular, physical world than medieval people did. The term that best encompasses the meaning of the Renaissance is *humanism*: a new concern with people as powerful, creative individuals in a dynamic secular world. All this was reflected in the literature, art, and societies of northern Italian cities from the fourteenth century through the beginning of the sixteenth century, when invasions and other problems led to a decline of the Renaissance in Italy.

In Northern Europe the Renaissance started during the fifteenth century and lasted through most of the sixteenth century. This Renaissance was heavily influenced by the earlier Italian Renaissance; indeed, it was common for people to travel south across the Alps and return north with the ideas and styles they were exposed to in northern Italy. Nevertheless, the Northern Renaissance had some roots and characteristics that distinguished it from the Italian Renaissance. Above all, it was more integrated with Christian concerns. For example, more emphasis was placed on learning Classical languages to improve translations of the Bible, studying Classical literature for its relation to Christian ideals and life, and producing artistic creations with predominantly religious themes.

This chapter concentrates on one broad issue: the Renaissance. Examined here are traits historians define as typical of the Renaissance, such as literary humanism, humanistic education, and humanism in general. What was literary humanism? How was the development of

humanism reflected in educational changes such as the new emphasis on the liberal arts? What problems were faced by those involved in humanism? Artistic and political trends that reflect this humanism are also explored. In what ways did Renaissance art differ from medieval art? How are some of the main elements of the Renaissance reflected in the art of the period? How did political theory mirror characteristics of the Renaissance? What was the nature of the Renaissance in the North? How were some of the connections between medieval concerns and Renaissance style reflected in the art of the Northern Renaissance? Above all, the materials concern efforts by people of that time as well as modern scholars to distinguish the Renaissance as a whole from the preceding Middle Ages. How did important figures of the Italian Renaissance view the Middle Ages? How sharp was the

break, if any, with the Middle Ages? How should the Renaissance be interpreted as a whole? Efforts to answer questions such as these have caused considerable scholarly disagreement, most notably over the interpretation by Jacob Burckhardt, which emphasizes the modernity and distinctness of the Italian Renaissance. Secondary sources exemplify this tradition of controversy over the meaning of the Renaissance.

For Classroom Discussion

What was the Renaissance? Draw from the primary sources by Petrarch, Vergerio, de Pizan, Castiglione, and the paintings to answer this question. Several secondary sources deal with this question as well.



Primary Sources

Using Primary Sources: A Letter to Boccaccio: Literary Humanism

Primary sources are briefly defined and discussed in the Preface. What follows is a more specific guide to the use of primary sources, focusing on our first primary source, *A Letter to Boccaccio: Literary Humanism*, which immediately follows as an example.

1. When reading a written primary source such as the following selection from *A Letter to Boccaccio*, try to think of every line as evidence. Assume that you are a historian who knows very little about the Renaissance and that this document falls into your hands. Your job is to use this document as evidence to support some conclusions about the Renaissance.

Actually, before you read this source you already know something about the Renaissance from the chapter introduction, the time line, and the headnote preceding this source. You can use this information to place the document in a historical context better, to gain a sense of how the evidence in the source can be used.

2. Think of questions as you read a primary source. This can keep you alert to how words and lines and sections of the source can be used as evidence. A general question to keep in mind might be, "What does this tell me about this civilization, about how people behaved, how they thought,

what they believed?" Try reading each line as a piece of evidence to answer part of this general question. More specific questions can be derived from the headnote and the "consider" points just before the beginning of a source. Here the headnote and the "consider" points indicate that the source might be particularly useful for providing evidence about literary humanism, opposition to literary humanism, and connections between literary humanism and religion.

3. There are several ways you might use the material in this source as evidence. Read the first sentence. It might be argued that this line is evidence that some opposed literary humanism on religious grounds. ("Neither exhortations to virtue nor the argument of approaching death should divert us from literature.") The same line may provide evidence for how literary humanism was defended and even what helped account for its appeal ("in a good mind it excites the love of virtue, and dissipates . . . the fear of death").

Read the second sentence. It may provide additional evidence that there was opposition to the study of literature on religious grounds ("To desert our studies . . .") and that for the elite, educated members of society ("the properly constituted mind") humanistic literature ("letters") is beneficial ("facilitate our life").

Read the rest of the paragraph. Here Petrarch adds to his argument that for the right people (those with “an acute and healthy intellect”), literary humanism is good, and in the process of making this argument, he provides evidence that central to literary humanism was an admiration of Classical literature and the values expressed in Classical writings. Petrarch cites with admiration Roman figures (Cato, Varro, and Livius Drusus), Roman literature (“Latin literature”), Greek literature, and secular literature (Livius Drusus’ “interpretation of the civil law”).

Read the second paragraph. Here there may be evidence that literary humanism (“literature” and “secular learning”) was not in opposition to Christianity (“our own religion”).

Read the third paragraph. What does this paragraph tell us about how different people perceived the relationship between literary humanism and

Christianity (“no one . . . has been prevented by literature from following the path of holiness”)? For whom might literary humanism have the most appeal (“one takes a lower, another a higher path”)?

4. After working on various parts of the source, pull back and consider the source as a whole. Among other things, this aggressive defense of literary humanism provides evidence for what literary humanism was (a movement to revive Classical literature), what it was not (it did not reject Christian virtue or piety), and to whom it appealed (the educated elite). Further, consider the author. Here, the headnote tells us that the letter was written by Francesco Petrarch, who was important in spreading literary humanism; consider whether this colors the source or gives it greater weight as evidence.

A Letter to Boccaccio: Literary Humanism

Francesco Petrarch

Literary humanism, a movement to revive Classical literature and the values expressed in Classical writings, was central to the early Renaissance. This trend, which originated in northern Italy during the fourteenth century, represented a broadening in focus from otherworldly concerns and people as religious beings, which was typical of the Middle Ages, to include the problems of people and nature in this world. The individual most commonly associated with it and perhaps most responsible for its spread was the Florentine Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374). Best known for his love sonnets to Laura, he also collected and translated many Classical works and wrote numerous letters—often extolling the Classical authors and even writing in their style. In the following selection from a 1362 letter to his friend Boccaccio, Petrarch offered reassurance and responded to charges typically made against humanistic learning.

CONSIDER: *The nature of the charges Petrarch is refuting; how Petrarch related humanism to religion; Petrarch’s perception of the benefits of literary humanism.*

Neither exhortations to virtue nor the argument of approaching death should divert us from literature; for in a good mind it excites the love of virtue, and dissipates,

or at least diminishes, the fear of death. To desert our studies shows want of self-confidence rather than wisdom, for letters do not hinder but aid the properly constituted mind which possesses them; they facilitate our life, they do not retard it. Just as many kinds of food which lie heavy on an enfeebled and nauseated stomach furnish excellent nourishment for one who is well but famishing, so in our studies many things which are deadly to the weak mind may prove most salutary to an acute and healthy intellect, especially if in our use of both food and learning we exercise proper discretion. If it were otherwise, surely the zeal of certain persons who persevered to the end could not have roused such admiration. Cato, I never forget, acquainted himself with Latin literature as he was growing old, and Greek when he had really become an old man. Varro, who reached his hundredth year still reading and writing, parted from life sooner than from his love of study. Livius Drusus, although weakened by age and afflicted with blindness, did not give up his interpretation of the civil law, which he carried on to the great advantage of the state. . . .

Besides these and innumerable others like them, have not all those of our own religion whom we should wish most to imitate devoted their whole lives to literature, and grown old and died in the same pursuit? Some, indeed, were overtaken by death while still at work reading or writing. To none of them, so far as I know, did it prove a disadvantage to be noted for secular learning. . . .

While I know that many have become famous for piety without learning, at the same time I know of no one who has been prevented by literature from following the path of holiness. The apostle Paul was, to be sure,

SOURCE: James Harvey Robinson and Henry Winchester Rolfe, *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters* (New York: Haskell House, 1898), pp. 391–395.

accused of having his head turned by study, but the world has long ago passed its verdict upon this accusation. If I may be allowed to speak for myself, it seems to me that, although the path to virtue by the way of ignorance may be plain, it fosters sloth. The goal of all good people is the same, but the ways of reaching it are many and various. Some advance slowly, others with more spirit; some obscurely, others again conspicuously. One takes a lower, another a higher path. Although all alike are on the road to happiness, certainly the more elevated path is the more glorious. Hence ignorance, however devout, is by no means to be put on a plane with the enlightened devoutness of one familiar with literature. Nor can you pick me out from the whole array of unlettered saints, an example so holy that I cannot match it with a still holier one from the other group.

On the Liberal Arts

Peter Paul Vergerio

*Closely associated with the rise of literary humanism was a new emphasis on the more broadly defined "liberal arts." This emphasis was manifested in a new concern with education; a change in educational curriculum constituted an institutional development that was enduring and that had wide-ranging effects. The first to express this emphasis systematically in an educational program was Peter Paul Vergerio (1370–1444). He taught in several Italian universities, and in his main treatise, *On the Liberal Arts*, he rejected much of the content and methods of medieval education. Vergerio presents his views on the growing importance of the liberal arts in the following selection from a letter written to Ubertinus of Carrara.*

CONSIDER: *What is particularly humanistic rather than scholastic or medieval about this view; how Vergerio justifies his choice of the three subjects in this proposed curriculum; what Petrarch might think of this letter.*

Your grandfather, Francesco I, a man distinguished for his capacity in affairs and for his sound judgment, was in the habit of saying that a parent owes three duties to his children. The first of these is to bestow upon them names of which they need not feel ashamed. For not seldom, out of caprice, or even indifference, or perhaps from a wish to perpetuate a family name, a father in naming his child inflicts upon him a misfortune which clings to him for life. The second obligation is this: to provide that his child be brought up in a city of distinction, for this not only concerns his future self-respect, but is closely connected with

the third and most important care which is due from father to son. This is the duty of seeing that he be trained in sound learning. For no wealth, no possible security against the future, can be compared with the gift of an education in grave and liberal studies. By them a man may win distinction for the most modest name, and bring honour to the city of his birth however obscure it may be. But we must remember that whilst a man may escape from the burden of an unlucky name, or from the contempt attaching to a city of no repute, by changing the one or quitting the other, he can never remedy the neglect of early education. The foundation, therefore, of this last must be laid in the first years of life, the disposition moulded whilst it is susceptible and the mind trained whilst it is retentive.

This duty, common indeed to all parents, is specially incumbent upon such as hold high station. For the lives of men of position are passed, as it were, in public view; and are fairly expected to serve as witness to personal merit and capacity on the part of those who occupy such exceptional place amongst their fellow men. . . .

We come now to the consideration of the various subjects which may rightly be included under the name of "Liberal Studies." Amongst these I accord the first place to History, on grounds both of its attractiveness and of its utility, qualities which appeal equally to the scholar and to the statesman. Next in importance ranks Moral Philosophy, which indeed is, in a peculiar sense, a "Liberal Art," in that its purpose is to teach men the secret of true freedom. History, then, gives us the concrete examples of the precepts inculcated by philosophy. The one shews what men should do, the other what men have said and done in the past, and what practical lessons we may draw therefrom for the present day. I would indicate as the third main branch of study, Eloquence, which indeed holds a place of distinction amongst the refined Arts. By philosophy we learn the essential truth of things, which by eloquence we so exhibit in orderly adornment as to bring conviction to differing minds. And history provides the light of experience—cumulative wisdom fit to supplement the force of reason and the persuasion of eloquence. For we allow that soundness of judgment, wisdom of speech, integrity of conduct are the marks of a truly liberal temper.

The City of Ladies

Christine de Pizan

Most of the great cultural figures of the Renaissance were men. Nevertheless, some women were able to produce works, achieve recognition, and defend women against male detractors. The most famous of these was Christine de Pizan

SOURCE: From William Harrison Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press; New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963), pp. 96–97, 106–107. Reprinted by permission.

SOURCE: Excerpts from *The Book of the City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan, translated by Rosalind Brown-Grant (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1999) pp. 29, 30, 139–141.

(c.1363–c.1431). Born in Venice, she moved with her family to Paris, where her father became a physician and astrologer at the French royal court. Unusually well educated, she wrote several poems and books, the most widely read of which was *The City of Ladies* (1405). In the following excerpt Christine de Pizan questions an allegorical figure representing Lady Reason about women's political and educational abilities and about men's low opinions of women.

CONSIDER: What the common assumptions and arguments about women are; how Christine de Pizan attacks those assumptions and arguments; ways in which her writing embodies traits of the Renaissance.

35. Against those who claim that women aren't intelligent enough to learn the law.

Even though God has often endowed many women with great intelligence, it would not be right for them to abandon their customary modesty and to go about bringing cases before a court, as there are already enough men to do so. Why send three men to carry a burden which two can manage quite comfortably?

"However, if there are those who maintain that women aren't intelligent enough to learn the law, I would contradict them by citing numerous examples of women of both the past and the present who were great philosophers and who excelled in many disciplines which are much more difficult than simply learning the laws and the statutes of men. I'll tell you more about these women in a moment. Moreover, in reply to those who think that women are lacking in the ability to govern wisely or to establish good customs, I'll give you examples from history of several worthy ladies who mastered these arts. To give you a better idea of what I'm saying, I'll even cite you a few women from your own time who were widowed and whose competence in organizing and managing their households after their husbands' deaths attests to the fact that an intelligent woman can succeed in any domain."

36. Against those men who claim it is not good for women to be educated.

After hearing these words, I, Christine, said, "My lady, I can clearly see that much good has been brought into the world by women. Even if some wicked women have done evil things, it still seems to me that this is far outweighed by all the good that other women have done and continue to do. This is particularly true of those who are wise and well educated in either the arts or the sciences, whom we mentioned before. That's why I'm all the more amazed at the opinion of some men who state that they are completely opposed to their daughters, wives or other female relatives engaging in study, for fear that their morals will be corrupted."

Rectitude replied, "This should prove to you that not all men's arguments are based on reason, and that these men in particular are wrong. There are absolutely no grounds for assuming that knowledge of moral disciplines, which actually inculcate virtue, would have a morally corrupting effect. Indeed, there's no doubt whatsoever that such forms of knowledge correct one's vices and improve one's morals. How could anyone possibly think that by studying good lessons and advice one will be any the worse for it? This view is completely unthinkable and untenable. I'm not saying that it's a good idea for men or women to study sorcery or any other type of forbidden science, since the Holy Church did not ban people from practising them for nothing. However, it's just that it's not true to say that women will be corrupted by knowing what's right and proper. . . .

"Therefore, it is not all men, especially not the most intelligent, who agree with the view that it is a bad idea to educate women. However, it's true that those who are not very clever come out with this opinion because they don't want women to know more than they do. Your own father, who was a great astrologer and philosopher, did not believe that knowledge of the sciences reduced a woman's worth. Indeed, as you know, it gave him great pleasure to see you take so readily to studying the arts. Rather, it was because your mother, as a woman, held the view that you should spend your time spinning like the other girls, that you did not receive a more advanced or detailed initiation into the sciences. But, as that proverb which we've already had occasion to quote says, 'What is in our nature cannot be taken away.' Despite your mother's opposition, you did manage to glean some grains of knowledge from your studies, thanks to your own natural inclination for learning. It's obvious to me that you do not esteem yourself any less for having this knowledge: in fact, you seem to treasure it, and quite rightly so."

The Prince

Niccolò Machiavelli

The Italian Renaissance developed in an environment in which politics took on an increasingly competitive, secular tone. Within each Italian state, parties fought for power while at the same time the states fought each other for dominance or advantage. After 1492, Italy was invaded numerous times by Spain, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. These developments are reflected in the life and work of the great Renaissance political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527).

SOURCE: From *The Prince and the Discourses* by Niccolò Machiavelli, translated by Luigi Ricci and revised by E. R. P. Vincent (1935), pp. 56, 65–66, by permission of Oxford University Press.

Born in Florence when it was under the rule of the Medicis, Machiavelli initiated his career in the Florentine civil service in 1498 during the period when the Medicis were out of power, replaced by a republican government. He rose to important diplomatic posts within the government, but was forced into retirement when the Medici family came back to power in 1512. He never gave up hope of returning to favor, and he wrote his most famous work, *The Prince* (1513), in part as an application to the Medici rulers for a job in the Florentine government. The book has since become a classic treatise in political theory, above all for the way that it divorces politics from theology and metaphysics. The following selections from *The Prince* illustrate its style and some of its main themes.

CONSIDER: *The ways in which this work reflects values or practices typical of the Renaissance; how these same principles might be applied to twentieth-century politics.*

It now remains to be seen what are the methods and rules for a prince as regards to his subjects and friends. And as I know that many have written of this, I fear that my writing about it may be deemed presumptuous, differing as I do, especially in this matter, from the opinions of others. But my intention being to write something of use to those who understand, it appears to me more proper to go to the real truth of the matter than to its imagination; and many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation. A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it, according to the necessity of the case. . . .

It is not, therefore, necessary for a prince to have all the above-named qualities, but it is very necessary to seem to have them. I would even be bold to say that to possess them and always to observe them is dangerous, but to appear to possess them is useful. Thus it is well to seem merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, religious, and also to be so; but you must have the mind so disposed that when it is needful to be otherwise you may be able to change to the opposite qualities. And it must be understood that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which are considered good in men, being often obliged, in order to maintain the state, to act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion. And, therefore, he must have a mind disposed to adapt itself according to the wind, and as the variations of fortune dictate, and, as I said before, not deviate from what is good, if possible, but be able to do evil if constrained.

A prince must take great care that nothing goes out of his mouth which is not full of the above-named five qualities, and, to see and hear him, he should seem to be all mercy, faith, integrity, humanity, and religion. And nothing is more necessary than to seem to have this last quality, for men in general judge more by the eyes than by the hands, for every one can see, but very few have to feel. Everybody sees what you appear to be, few feel what you are, and those few will not dare to oppose themselves to the many, who have the majesty of the state to defend them; and in the actions of men, and especially of princes, from which there is no appeal, the end justifies the means. Let a prince therefore aim at conquering and maintaining the state, and the means will always be judged honourable and praised by every one, for the vulgar is always taken by appearances and the issue of the event; and the world consists only of the vulgar, and the few who are not vulgar are isolated when the many have a rallying point in the prince.

The Book of the Courtier

Baldesar Castiglione

In the Italian states, the most prestigious life took place in the courts of rulers. While Machiavelli wrote about methods and rules for the successful prince, others described the qualities necessary for men or women hoping to rise or maintain their position in court life. The most famous of these writers was the Italian diplomat Baldesar Castiglione (1478–1529), who wrote The Book of the Courtier while a member of the Duke of Urbino's court. In the following excerpt, Castiglione describes first, the best qualities of the courtier—the ideal “Renaissance man”—and second, the virtues and actions best suited to women of the court.

CONSIDER: *Why Castiglione considers noble birth important; what talents Castiglione thinks are most important for the courtier's success; how a woman's path to success at court differs from a man's.*

“Thus, I would have our Courtier born of a noble and genteel family; because it is far less becoming for one of low birth to fail to do virtuous things than for one of noble birth, who, should he stray from the path of his forebears, stains the family name, and not only fails to achieve anything but loses what has been achieved already. For noble birth is like a bright lamp that makes manifest and visible deeds both good and bad, kindling and spurring on to virtue as much for fear of dishonor as for hope of praise. . . .

Source: Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Charles S. Singleton (New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 28–30, 32–34, 70, 206.

Besides his noble birth, I would wish the Courtier favored in this other respect, and endowed by nature not only with talent and with beauty of countenance and person, but with that certain grace which we call an 'air,' which shall make him at first sight pleasing and lovable to all who see him; and let this be an adornment informing and attending all his actions, giving the promise outwardly that such a one is worthy of the company and the favor of every great lord." . . .

"But to come to some particulars: I hold that the principal and true profession of the Courtier must be that of arms . . . which I wish him to exercise with vigor; and let him be known among the others as bold, energetic, and faithful to whomever he serves. . . . The more our Courtier excels in this art, the more will he merit praise; although I do not deem it necessary that he have the perfect knowledge of things and other qualities that befit a commander, for since this would launch us on too great a sea, we shall be satisfied, as we have said, if he have complete loyalty and an undaunted spirit, and be always seen to have them. . . .

Therefore, let the man we are seeking be exceedingly fierce, harsh, and always among the first, wherever the enemy is; and in every other place, humane, modest, reserved, avoiding ostentation above all things as well as that impudent praise of himself by which a man always arouses hatred and disgust in all who hear him."

"I would have him more than passably learned in letters, at least in those studies which we call the humanities. Let him be conversant not only with the Latin language, but with Greek as well, because of the abundance and variety of things that are so divinely written therein. Let him be versed in the poets, as well as in the orators and historians, and let him be practiced also in writing verse and prose, especially in our own vernacular; for, besides the personal satisfaction he will take in this, in this way he will never want for pleasant entertainment with the ladies, who are usually fond of such

things. . . . These studies, moreover, will make him fluent, and (as Aristippus said to the tyrant) bold and self-confident in speaking with everyone. However, I would have our Courtier keep one precept firmly in mind, namely, in this as in everything else, to be cautious and reserved rather than forward, and take care not to get the mistaken notion that he knows something he does not know."

I think that in her ways, manners, words, gestures, and bearing, a woman ought to be very unlike a man; for just as he must show a certain solid and sturdy manliness, so it is seemly for a woman to have a soft and delicate tenderness, with an air of womanly sweetness in her every movement, which, in her going and staying, and in whatever she says, shall always make her appear the woman without any resemblance to a man.

"Now, if this precept be added to the rules which these gentlemen have taught the Courtier, then I think she ought to be able to follow many such and adorn herself with the best accomplishments, as signor Gasparo says. For I hold that many virtues of the mind are as necessary to a woman as to a man; also, gentle birth; to avoid affectation, to be naturally graceful in all her actions, to be mannerly, clever, prudent, not arrogant, not envious, not slanderous, not vain, not contentious, not inept, to know how to gain and hold the favor of her mistress and of all others, to perform well and gracefully the exercises that are suitable for women. And I do think that beauty is more necessary to her than to the Courtier, for truly that woman lacks much who lacks beauty. Also she must be more circumspect, and more careful not to give occasion for evil being said of her, and conduct herself so that she may not only escape being sullied by guilt but even by the suspicion of it, for a woman has not so many ways of defending herself against false calumnies as a man has."



Visual Sources

Using Visual Sources: The School of Athens: Art and Classical Culture

Visual sources are briefly defined and discussed in the Preface. What follows is a more specific guide to the use of visual sources, focusing on our first visual source, *The School of Athens*, which immediately follows as an example.

1. Try to look at visual sources as if they were written, primary documents. As with primary documents, assume that you are a historian who knows very little about the Renaissance and who discovers this visual source, *The School of Athens* by Raphael. Your goal is to try to "read" it as evidence to support some conclusions about the Renaissance.

Without some guidance, "reading" a visual source as historical evidence is more difficult than using a



Here you might say that Burckhardt concludes that the Italian Renaissance was a definitive break from the Middle Ages and the beginning of modernity characterized by rationalism and individualism.

Secondary Sources:

The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy

Jacob Burckhardt

Modern interpretations of the Renaissance almost uniformly start with the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt's The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, first published in 1860. Burckhardt rejected a chronological approach and pictured the Italian Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a whole, strikingly distinct from the preceding Middle Ages and clearly a superior civilization. Until the 1920s, historians almost unanimously accepted his interpretation. After that time various aspects of his thesis were attacked, particularly by medievalists. In recent decades, however, Burckhardt's work has gained new respectability, at least as an idealized cultural history of the Italian Renaissance. In any case, all historians who approach this topic must deal with Burckhardt's argument, some of the central points of which appear in the following excerpt.

CONSIDER: *What most distinguishes the Italian Renaissance from the preceding Middle Ages according to Burckhardt; any support the primary documents might provide for this argument; how a proud medievalist might respond to this argument.*

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within as that which was turned without—lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, and recognised himself as such. In the same way the Greek had once distinguished himself from the barbarian, and the Arabian had felt

SOURCE: Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1890), p. 129.

Finally, do you agree with the author? From the headnote and "consider" points, you might keep in mind how controversial this interpretation has become. Indeed this controversy is the subject of the next secondary source, *The Myth of the Renaissance*.

himself an individual at a time when other Asiatics knew themselves only as members of a race. . . .

In far earlier times we can here and there detect a development of free personality which in Northern Europe either did not occur at all, or could not display itself in the same manner. . . . But at the close of the thirteenth century Italy began to swarm with individuality; the charm laid upon human personality was dissolved; and a thousand figures meet us each in its own special shape and dress. Dante's great poem would have been impossible in any other country of Europe, if only for the reason that they all still lay under the spell of race. For Italy the august poet, through the wealth of individuality which he set forth, was the most national herald of his time. But this unfolding of the treasures of human nature in literature and art—this many-sided representation and criticism—will be discussed in separate chapters; here we have to deal only with the psychological fact itself. This fact appears in the most decisive and unmistakable form. The Italians of the fourteenth century knew little of false modesty or of hypocrisy in any shape; not one of them was afraid of singularity, of being and seeming unlike his neighbours.

The Myth of the Renaissance

Peter Burke

Many historians attacked Burckhardt's interpretation and the legacy built up around it. These historians argued that Burckhardt overemphasized how modern the Renaissance was. They stressed how much the Renaissance, even in Italy, was still part of the medieval world. Other historians have responded that criticisms of Burckhardt go too far. In the following selection Peter Burke criticizes Burckhardt's idea of the Renaissance as a myth and describes the main objections to it.

CONSIDER: *Why, according to Burke, Burckhardt's idea of the Renaissance is a myth; how a supporter of Burckhardt might respond; whether the sources give greater support to Burckhardt's or Burke's interpretation.*

SOURCE: From Peter Burke, *The Renaissance*, pp. 1, 3–5. Reprinted with permission by Humanities Press International, Inc., Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 07716; and The Macmillan Press, Ltd.

Jacob Burckhardt defined the period in terms of two concepts, "individualism" and "modernity." "In the Middle Ages," according to Burckhardt, "human consciousness . . . lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. . . . Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category." In Renaissance Italy, however, "this veil first melted into air . . . man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognised himself as such." Renaissance meant modernity. The Italian was, Burckhardt wrote, "the first-born among the sons of modern Europe." The fourteenth-century poet Petrarch was "one of the first truly modern men." The great renewal of art and ideas began in Italy, and at a later stage the new attitudes and the new artistic forms spread to the rest of Europe.

This idea of the Renaissance is a myth. . . .

Burckhardt's mistake was to accept the scholars and artists of the period at their own valuation, to take this story of rebirth at its face value and to elaborate it into a book. To the old formulae of the restoration of the arts and the revival of classical antiquity, he added new ones such as individualism, realism, and modernity. . . .

This nineteenth-century myth of the Renaissance is still taken seriously by many people. Television companies and organisers of package tours still make money out of it. However, professional historians have become dissatisfied with this version of the Renaissance, even if they continue to find the period and the movement attractive. The point is that the grand edifice erected by Burckhardt and his contemporaries has not stood the test of time. More exactly, it has been undermined by the researchers of the medievalists in particular. Their arguments depend on innumerable points of detail, but they are of two main kinds.

In the first place, there are arguments to the effect that so-called "Renaissance men" were really rather medieval. They were more traditional in their behaviour, assumptions and ideals than we tend to think—and also more traditional than they saw themselves. Hindsight suggests that even Petrarch, "one of the first truly modern men," according to Burckhardt, had many attitudes in common with the centuries he described as "dark". . . .

In the second place, the medievalists have accumulated arguments to the effect that the Renaissance was not such a singular event as Burckhardt and his contemporaries once thought and that the term should really be used in the plural. There were various "renascences" in the Middle Ages, notably in the twelfth century and in the age of Charlemagne. In both cases there was a combination of literary and artistic achievements with a revival of interest in classical learning, and in both cases contemporaries described their age as one of restoration, rebirth or "renovation."

Machiavelli and the Renaissance

Federico Chabod

Reactions to and appreciations of Machiavelli's thought in The Prince form an apparently contradictory history in themselves. On the one hand, few thinkers in the history of political theory rank more highly than Machiavelli; he is recognized as being the first modern political theorist. On the other hand, there is a more popular tradition of rejecting his ideas as immoral; the term Machiavellian is pejorative, referring to political opportunism and ruthlessness. In the following selection Federico Chabod, an Italian historian who has written extensively on Machiavelli, analyzes Machiavelli and the significance of his ideas.

CONSIDER: Why Machiavelli's ideas are so appropriate to the historical realities of his time; how the selections from *The Prince* support this interpretation of Machiavelli.

The *leitmotiv* of Machiavelli's posthumous life was his great assertion as a thinker, representing his true and essential contribution to the history of human thought, namely, the clear recognition of the autonomy and the necessity of politics, "which lies outside the realm of what is morally good or evil." Machiavelli thereby rejected the medieval concept of "unity" and became one of the pioneers of modern spirit. . . .

For Machiavelli accepted the political challenge in its entirety; he swept aside every criterion of action not suggested by the concept of *raison d'état*, i.e., by the exact evaluation of the historical moment and the constructive forces which *The Prince* must employ in order to achieve his aim; and he held that the activities of rulers were limited only by their capacity and energy. Hence, he paved the way for absolute governments, which theoretically were completely untrammelled, both in their home and in their foreign policies.

If this was made possible by the Florentine Secretary's recognition of the autonomy of politics, it depended, conversely, on his own peculiar conception of the State, which he identified with the government, or rather with its personal Head. Accordingly, in *The Prince* all his attention was riveted on the human figure of the man who held the reins of government and so epitomized in his person the whole of public life. Such a conception, determined directly by the historical experience which Machiavelli possessed in such outstanding measure and presupposing a sustained effort on the part of the central government, was essential to the success and preeminence of his doctrine.

SOURCE: Federico Chabod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, trans. David Moore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 116–118. Copyright © 1958 by Federico Chabod. Reprinted by permission.

This was a turning-point in the history of the Christian world. The minds of political theorists were no longer trammelled by Catholic dogma. The structure of the State was not yet threatened in other directions by any revolt of the individual conscience. An entire moral world, if it was not eclipsed, had at any rate receded into the shadows, nor was any other at once forthcoming to take its place and to inspire a new fervour of religious belief; hence, political thought could express itself without being confused by considerations of a different character. It was an era in which unitarian States were being created amid the ruins of the social and political order of the Middle Ages, an era in which it was necessary to place all the weapons of resistance in the hands of those who had still to combat the forces of feudalism and particularism. It was, in short, an era in which it was essential that the freedom and grandeur of political action and the strength and authority of central government should be clearly affirmed. Only thus was it possible to obliterate once and for all the traces of the past and to offer to the society of the future, in the guise of a precept, the weapons which would preserve the life of the united nation in the face of disruptive elements old and new.

This was the great achievement of Niccolò Machiavelli, who accordingly became the legitimate representative of politics and government, the man who was at once admired and hated, followed and opposed, throughout two centuries of European history; and it was on him that the eyes of men were to be fixed, because only he, a poor, weary citizen of a city divided against itself, had proclaimed with an eloquence that was now muted the nature of the arms which the sovereign authority must employ in order to achieve victory.

Northern Sources of the Renaissance

Charles G. Nauert

Most modern scholars argue that there were some differences between the Italian and Northern European Renaissances. Perhaps most obviously, the Northern Renaissance came later. More importantly, while heavily influenced by Italian humanism, humanism in Northern Europe was more tied to Christian culture and concerns. In the following selection Charles Nauert explains differences between the Italian and Northern Renaissance and argues that the North accepted Renaissance culture only when that culture came to suit the particular historical needs of the North.

CONSIDER: *The ways the Northern Renaissance differed from the Italian Renaissance; how Nauert explains these differences.*

The North itself would never have accepted Renaissance culture if that culture had not suited its needs. The reorganized, powerful monarchies of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries needed a new ideal for their servants and courtiers, and the emphasis on public service, on personal merit, and on learning provided an attractive substitute for the traditional manners of the unlettered, unruly, and discredited feudal classes. The new ideal contained enough emphasis on social class and military prowess to make it credible to a society where the hereditary nobility still counted for much. For the kings, it offered the added advantage of servants who were refined and cultivated, and who would wield the pen as well as the sword for their master.

In addition to the monarchs and their courts, other important groups in the North also found humanistic culture attractive. The powerful, self-confident merchant oligarchies that governed the important towns, especially the prospering towns of the Rhine Valley and of south Germany, found in humanism a cultural ideal far more suited to the needs and prejudices of urban magistrates than were the chivalric and scholastic traditions of the Middle Ages. The large group of would-be Church reformers found the characteristic Renaissance repudiation of the recent past and the desire to return to the original sources quite attractive, for the Roman past included the apostolic and early patristic age, when the Church was still pure and uncorrupted. . . .

The humanism that grew up in the North was not a mere copy of the Italian culture, but a grafting of Italian elements into a cultural tradition that varied from country to country. Obviously, for example, Germans or even Frenchmen could not revere the ancient Romans as their ancestors in quite the same sense that Italians could.

What did develop everywhere was a revulsion against the heritage of the immediate past (often more open and violent than in Italy because scholastic traditions and a clerical spirit had much greater strength in the North), and the conscious adoption of an idealized Greek and Roman Antiquity as the model for reforming literature, education, and the whole ideal of the educated man. Even more than in Italy, Northern humanists enthusiastically looked to the apostolic and patristic age of the Church as a valuable part of the ancient heritage they sought to restore. This emphasis on ancient Christianity, combined with the widespread movements of lay piety that flourished in the lower Rhine Valley and other parts of Northern Europe, explains why humanism north of

SOURCE: From Charles G. Nauert, *The Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, pp. 116–117. Reprinted by permission of Charles G. Nauert, Jr. © 1981.

the Alps directed much of its reformist activity toward reform of the Church and deepening of personal religious experience.

developments be minimized or reinterpreted as an evolutionary continuation of the Middle Ages?

2. According to the sources in this chapter, what was particularly humanistic about the cultural productions and the attitudes of the Renaissance?

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. In what ways was the Renaissance a new development, strikingly different from the preceding Middle Ages? How might the "newness" of these

order within their cities. Merchant oligarchies reasserted their power and sometimes brought in powerful military leaders to establish order. These military leaders, called *condottieri* (kahn-duh-TYER-ee; singular *condottiero*), had their own mercenary armies, and in many cities they took over political power once they had supplanted the existing government.

Many cities in Italy became *signori* (seen-YOHR-ee), in which one man—whether *condottiero*, merchant, or noble—ruled and handed down the right to rule to his son. Some *signori* (the word is plural in Italian and is used for both persons and forms of government) kept the institutions of communal government in place, but these had no actual power. As a practical matter, there wasn't much difference between

oligarchic regimes and *signori*. Oligarchies maintained a façade of republican government, but the judicial, executive, and legislative functions of government were restricted to a small class of wealthy merchants.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the *signori* in many cities and the most powerful merchant oligarchs in others transformed their households into **courts**. Courtly culture

afforded *signori* and oligarchs the opportunity to display and assert their wealth and power. They built magnificent palaces in the centers of cities and required all political business to be done there. Ceremonies connected with family births, baptisms, marriages, and funerals offered occasions for magnificent pageantry and elaborate ritual. Cities welcomed rulers who were visiting with magnificent entrance parades that often included fireworks, colorful banners, mock naval battles, decorated wagons filled with people in costume, and temporary triumphal arches modeled on those of ancient Rome. Rulers of nation-states later copied and adapted all these aspects of Italian courts.

City-States and the Balance of Power

Renaissance Italians had a passionate attachment to their individual city-states: political loyalty and feeling centered on the city. This intensity of local feeling perpetuated the dozens of small states and hindered the development of one unified state.

In the fifteenth century five powers dominated the Italian peninsula: Venice, Milan, Florence, the Papal States, and the kingdom of Naples (Map 12.1). The major Italian powers controlled the smaller city-states, such as Siena, Mantua, Ferrara, and Modena, and competed furiously among themselves for territory. While the states of northern Europe were moving toward

centralization and consolidation, the world of Italian politics resembled a jungle where the powerful dominated the weak. Venice, with its enormous trade empire, ranked as an international power. Though Venice was a republic in name, an oligarchy of merchant-aristocrats actually ran the city. Milan was also called a republic, but the *condottieri*-turned-*signori* of the Sforza (SFORT-sah) family ruled harshly and dominated Milan and several smaller cities in the north from 1447 to 1535. Likewise, in Florence the form of government was republican, with authority vested in several councils of state, but the city was effectively ruled by the great Medici (MEH-duh-chee) banking family for three centuries, beginning in 1434. Though not public officials, Cosimo, his son Piero, and his grandson Lorenzo ruled from behind the scenes from 1434 to 1492. The Medici were then in and out of power for several decades, and in 1569 Florence became no longer a republic, but the hereditary Grand Duchy of Tuscany, with the Medici as the Grand Dukes until 1737. The Medici family produced three popes, and most other Renaissance popes were also members of powerful Italian families, selected for their political skills, not their piety. Along with the Italians was one Spaniard, Pope Alexander VI (pontificate 1492–1503), who was the most ruthless; aided militarily and politically by his illegitimate son Cesare Borgia, he reasserted papal authority in the papal lands. South of the Papal States, the kingdom of Naples was under the control of the king of Aragon.

In one significant respect, however, the Italian city-states anticipated future relations among competing European states after 1500. Whenever one Italian state appeared to gain a predominant position within the peninsula, other states combined against it to establish a balance of power. In the formation of these alliances, Renaissance Italians invented the machinery of modern diplomacy: permanent embassies with resident ambassadors in capitals where political relations and commercial ties needed continual monitoring. The resident ambassador was one of the great political achievements of the Italian Renaissance.

At the end of the fifteenth century Venice, Florence, Milan, and the papacy possessed great wealth and represented high cultural achievement. Wealthy and divided, however, they were also an inviting target for invasion. When Florence and Naples entered into an agreement to acquire Milanese territories, Milan called on France for support, and the French king Charles VIII (r. 1483–1498) invaded Italy in 1494.

Prior to this invasion, the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498) had preached in Florence a number of fiery sermons attended by large crowds predicting that God would punish Italy for its moral vice and corrupt leadership. Florentines interpreted the French invasion as the fulfillment of this prophecy

signori Government by one-man rule in Italian cities such as Milan; also refers to these rulers.

courts Magnificent households and palaces where *signori* and other rulers lived, conducted business, and supported the arts.



Map 12.1 The Italian City-States, ca. 1494 In the fifteenth century the Italian city-states represented great wealth and cultural sophistication, though the many political divisions throughout the peninsula invited foreign intervention.

and expelled the Medici dynasty. Savonarola became the political and religious leader of a new Florentine republic and promised Florentines even greater glory in the future if they would reform their ways. (See "Primary Source 12.1: A Sermon of Savonarola," page 362.) He reorganized the government; convinced it to pass laws against same-sex relations, adultery, and drunkenness; and organized groups of young men to patrol the streets looking for immoral dress and behavior. He held religious processions and what became known as "bonfires of the vanities," huge fires on the main square of Florence in which fancy clothing, cosmetics, pagan books, musical instruments, paintings, and poetry that celebrated human beauty were gathered together and burned.

For a time Savonarola was wildly popular, but eventually people tired of his moral denunciations, and he

was excommunicated by the pope, tortured, and burned at the very spot where he had overseen the bonfires. The Medici returned as the rulers of Florence.

The French invasion inaugurated a new period in Italian and European power politics. Italy became the focus of international ambitions and the battleground of foreign armies, particularly those of the Holy Roman Empire and France in a series of conflicts called the Habsburg-Valois wars (named for the German and French dynasties). The Italian cities suffered severely from continual warfare, especially in the frightful sack of Rome in 1527 by imperial forces under the emperor Charles V. Thus the failure of the city-states to consolidate, or at least to establish a common foreign policy, led to centuries of subjection by outside invaders. Italy was not to achieve unification until 1870.

(13)

12-3 | A Description of the Ideal Courtier

BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE, *The Book of the Courtier* (1528)

Baldassare Castiglione (ball-duh-SAH-ray kahs-teel-YOH-nay) (1478-1529) was an Italian diplomat who spent many years traveling through the courts of Europe. Based on his experiences, he wrote *The Book of the Courtier* as a manual on the proper education, manners, dress, and skills of a companion to and defender of royalty. The book was written in the form of a conversation among some of the leading nobility in Italy and was a bestseller in its time. As you read this excerpt, think about the models upon which Castiglione might have drawn. To what extent does his courtier resemble the ideal medieval knight? To what extent does he seem to be a product of humanist education and training?

I wish then, that this Courtier of ours should be nobly born. I am of the opinion that the principal and true profession of the courtier ought to be that of arms,¹ which I would have him follow actively above all else, and be known among others as bold and strong, and loyal to whomsoever he serves. . . .

Therefore let the man we are seeking be very bold, stern, and always among the first, where the enemy are to be seen; and in every other place, gentle, modest, reserved, above all things avoiding ostentation and that impudent self-praise by which men ever excite hatred and disgust in all who hear him. . . .

And so I would have him well built and shapely of limb, and would have him show strength and lightness and suppleness, and know all bodily exercises that befit a man of war: whereof I think the first should be to handle every sort of weapon well on foot and on horse. . . .

There are also many other exercises, which although not immediately dependent upon arms, yet are closely connected therewith, and greatly foster manly sturdiness; and one of the chief among these seems to me to be the chase,² because it bears a certain likeness to war; and truly it is an amusement for great lords and befitting a man at court, and furthermore it is seen to have been much cultivated among the ancients. It is fitting also to know how to swim, to leap, to run, to throw stones, for besides the use that may be made of this in war, a man often has occasion to show what he can do in such matters; whence good esteem is to be won, especially with the multitude, who must be taken into account without. Another admirable exercise, and one fitting a man at court, is the game of tennis, in which are well shown the disposition of the body. . . .

I think that the conversation, which the Courtier ought most to try in every way to make acceptable, is that which he holds with his prince; and although this word "conversation" implies a certain equality that seems impossible between a

¹arms: Weaponry.
²the chase: Hunting.

From Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Leonard Opdycke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 22, 26, 29, 31, 93-94.

lord and his inferior, yet we will call it so for the moment. Therefore, besides daily showing everyone that he possesses the worth we have already described, I would have the Courtier strive, with all the thoughts and forces of his mind, to love and almost adore the prince whom he serves, above every other thing, and mold his ways to his prince's liking. . . .

Moreover it is possible without flattery to obey and further the wishes of him we serve, for I am speaking of those wishes that are reasonable and right, or of those that in themselves are neither good nor evil, such as would be a liking for a play or devotion to one kind of exercise above another. And I would have the Courtier bend himself to this even if he be by nature alien to it, so that on seeing him his lord shall always feel that he will have something agreeable to say. . . . He will not be an idle or untruthful tattler, nor a boaster nor pointless flatterer, but modest and reserved, always and especially in public showing the reverence and respect which befit the servant towards the master.

READING QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of a good courtier? How would you explain the stress Castiglione places on military aptitude and training?
2. What role does the courtier play in royal government? How does he facilitate his master's success?
3. Would you describe Castiglione's courtier as a medieval or a Renaissance figure? Why?

12-4 | A Humanist Prescription for the Education of Princes

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516)

Desiderius Erasmus (1462-1536) of Rotterdam was the foremost northern humanist. A priest, theologian, and teacher, Erasmus placed humanist scholarship in the service of religious reform. His work combines a humanist's respect for reason and the value of the individual with an equally profound commitment to his faith. In this excerpt from *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus begins by discussing a classical metaphor for the relationship of a ruler to the state, and then uses this as a starting point for exploring the relationship between a Christian prince, his subjects, and God. As you read it, pay particular attention to the way in which he mixes classical and Christian concepts.

[R]emember this idea also, which was known and handed down by the pagan philosophers, that the rule of a prince over his people is no different from that of the mind over the body. The mind dominates the body because it knows more than

From Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, trans. Lester K. Born (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), pp. 175-178.

the physical body, but it does so to the great advantage of the latter rather than to itself. The blessed fortune of the physical form is this rule of the mind. What the heart is in the body of a living creature, that the prince is in the state. If the heart is sound, it imparts life to the whole body, since it is the fountain of the blood and life spirit; but if it has been infected, it brings utter collapse to every part of the body. The heart is the last part of a living body to be broken down, and the very last traces of life are thought to survive in it. Consequently the prince should keep himself clean and undefiled from all corrupting folly whenever any such disease lays hold of the people. In a man it is the finely organized part (namely, the mind) that exercises the control. Likewise, in the mind it is its finest element, reason, that asserts itself. And God, who rules the universe, is the very essence of all things. Therefore, whoever assumes the functions of rule in a state, as in a sort of great body, should excel all others in goodness, wisdom, and watchfulness. The prince should be superior to his officers in the same degree that they are to the common people. If there is any evil in the mind it springs from infection, and contact with the body, which is subject to the passions. Any good that the body possesses is drawn from the mind as from a fountain. How unbelievable it would be and how contrary to nature, if ills should spread from the mind down into the body, and the health of the body be corrupted by the vicious habits of the mind. It would be just as absurd for wars, seditious uprisings, profligate morals, debased laws, corrupt officials, and every similar curse to a state, to spring from the prince whose wisdom should lay the storms stirred up by the folly of the common folk. But we often see states (*civitates*), well established and flourishing under the diligent activity of the people, overthrown by mismanagement of the princes. How unlike a Christian it is to take pleasure in the title "Master," which many who were not in the fold of Christ have shunned; that which in their ambition they desire to be but do not want to be called because of the odium attached to the name. Yet will a Christian prince think it just in the eyes of God for him to be the same [sort of man] and be called "The Magnificent"? The emperor Augustus, even though he had gained the imperial throne through foul intrigue, considered it an insult to be called "Master;" and when this title was used by an actor before all the people, he showed his disapproval by his facial expression and his remarks, as if it were a term of reproach applied to tyrants. And shall the Christian prince not imitate this propriety of the pagan? If you are master of all your subjects, they must of necessity be your slaves. Then have a care that you do not fulfill the ancient proverb: "You have as many enemies as you have slaves."

Nature created all men equal, and slavery was superimposed on nature, which fact the laws of even the pagans recognized. Now stop and think how out of proportion it is for a Christian to usurp full power over other Christians, whom the laws did not design to be slaves, and whom Christ redeemed from all slavery. Recall the instance when Paul called Onesimus (who was born a slave) the brother of his former master Philemon, from the time of his baptism. How incongruous it is to consider them slaves whom Christ redeemed with the same blood as He did with whom He declared free along with all others; whom He

fostered with the same sacraments as He did you; whom He calls to the same heritage of immortality! And over them, who have the same Master as you, the Prince, Jesus Christ, will you impose the yoke of slavery?

There is only one Master of Christian men. Why, then, do those who assume His functions, prefer to take their pattern of government from anyone except Him, who alone is in all ways to be imitated? It is proper enough to gather from others whatever virtues they have; but in Him is the perfect example of all virtue and wisdom. This seems the [essence of] foolishness to those outside the faith, but to us, if we are really faithful, He is the goodness of God and the wisdom of God. Now I do not want you to think that this means that you should be a slave, not a ruler. On the contrary, it illustrates the finest way to rule, unless, of course, you think God is only a bondsman because He governs the whole universe without recompense, because everyone and everything has felt His kindness, although they give Him nothing in return, and unless the mind seems a slave because it looks out so zealously for the welfare of the body, which it does not need, or unless you think the eye is a slave to all the other parts of the body because it sees for them all. You may well consider this: if someone should turn all these men whom you call your own into swine and asses by the art of Circe,¹ would you not say your ruling power had been reduced to a lower level? I think you would. And yet you may exercise more authority over swine and asses than over men. You may treat them as you please, divide them off as you will, and even kill them. Surely he who has reduced his free subjects to slaves has put his power on a meaner level. The loftier the ideal to which you fashion your authority, the more magnificently and splendidly will you rule. Whoever protects the liberty and standing of your subjects is the one that helps your sovereign power. God gave the angels and men free will so that He would not be ruling over bondsmen, and so that He might glorify and add further grandeur to His kingdom. And who, now, would swell with pride because he rules over men cowed down by fear, like so many cattle?

READING QUESTIONS

1. What metaphors did Erasmus use to describe the relationship of a prince to his people?
2. In Erasmus's view, what qualities should a Christian prince embody? Why?
3. Erasmus argued that the ideal Christian prince ruled over a "free" people. How might he have explained this apparent contradiction? What similarities and differences do you see between his understanding of the meaning of freedom and your own?

¹Circe: An enchantress who turned the legendary Greek hero Odysseus and his men into pigs.

12-5 | A Female Author Argues for the Education of Women

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *The Book of the City of Ladies: Against Those Men Who Claim It Is Not Good for Women to Be Educated* (1404)

Christine de Pizan (ca. 1363–1434) may have been the first European woman to earn her living as a writer. The daughter of a Venetian nobleman and scholar, de Pizan grew up in the court of Charles V of France, where her father had accepted a position as royal astrologer and physician. There, de Pizan was given the opportunity to develop her intellectual interests and abilities. In 1390, when her husband died in an epidemic and left her with three children, de Pizan began her literary career. Her works were popular among the French nobility, and she even enjoyed the financial support of the French queen. Humanists were divided in their opinions on the education of women. Some thought women were simply not capable of learning. Others thought a limited form of education in good morals was sufficient. De Pizan challenged both of these ideas, and some scholars now regard her as one of the first Western feminists.

I realize that women have accomplished many good things and that even if evil women have done evil, it seems to me, nevertheless, that the benefits accrued and still accruing because of good women — particularly the wise and literary ones and those educated in the natural sciences whom I mentioned above — outweigh the evil. Therefore, I am amazed by the opinion of some men who claim that they do not want their daughters, wives, or kinswomen to be educated because their mores would be ruined as a result.

Here you can clearly see that not all opinions of men are based on reason and that these men are wrong. For it must not be presumed that mores necessarily grow worse from knowing the moral sciences, which teach the virtues, indeed, there is not the slightest doubt that moral education amends and ennobles them. How could anyone think or believe that whoever follows good teaching or doctrine is the worse for it? Such an opinion cannot be expressed or maintained. I do not mean that it would be good for a man or a woman to study the art of divination or those fields of learning which are forbidden — for the holy Church did not remove them from common use without good reason — but it should not be believed that women are the worse for knowing what is good.

Quintus Hortensius, a great rhetorician and consummately skilled orator in Rome, did not share this opinion. He had a daughter, named Hortensia, whom he greatly loved for the subtlety of her wit. He had her learn letters and study the science of rhetoric, which she mastered so thoroughly that she resembled her father. Hortensius not only in wit and lively memory but also in her excellent delivery and order of speech — in fact, he surpassed her in nothing. . . . That is, during the time when Rome was governed by three men, this Hortensia began to support the cause of women and to undertake what no man dared to undertake. There was a question whether certain taxes should be levied on women and on their jewelry during a

needy period in Rome. This woman's eloquence was so compelling that she was listened to, no less readily than her father would have been, and she won her case.

Similarly, to speak of more recent times, without searching for examples in ancient history, Giovanni Andrea, a solemn law professor in Bologna not quite sixty years ago, was not of the opinion that it was bad for women to be educated. He had a fair and good daughter, named Novella, who was educated in the law to such an advanced degree that when he was occupied by some task and not at leisure to present his lectures to his students, he would send Novella, his daughter, in his place to lecture to the students from his chair. And to prevent her beauty from distracting the concentration of her audience, she had a little curtain drawn in front of her. In this manner she could on occasion supplement and lighten her father's occupation. . . .

Thus, not all men (and especially the wisest) share the opinion that it is bad for women to be educated. But it is very true that many foolish men have claimed this because it displeased them that women knew more than they did. [My] father, who was a great scientist and philosopher, did not believe that women were worth less by knowing science; rather, as you know, he took great pleasure from seeing your inclination to learning.

READING QUESTIONS

1. How does de Pizan defend a woman's ability to learn?
2. What examples of learned women does she provide?
3. According to de Pizan, why do some men not want to see women educated?

SOURCES IN CONVERSATION

A Female Painter Tells Stories About Women

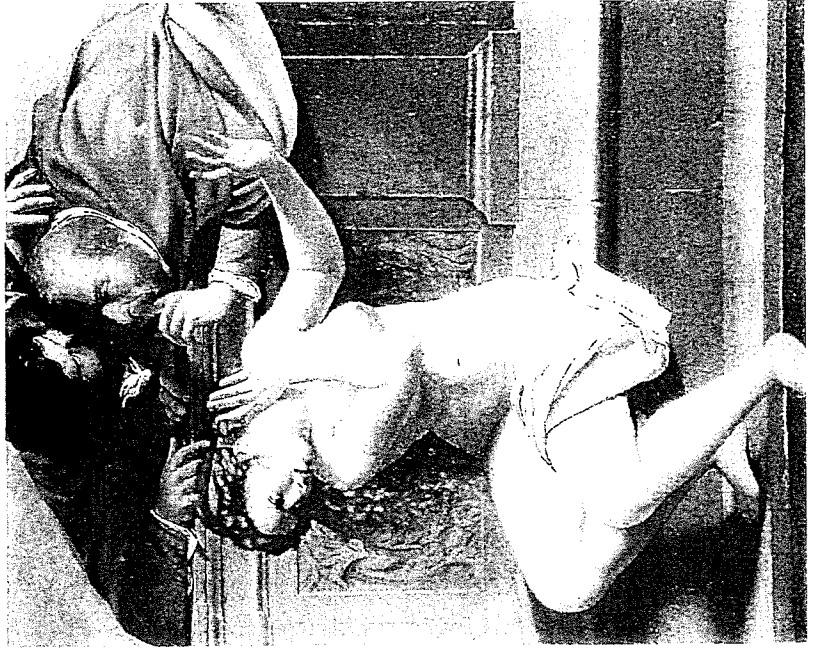
Renaissance and Early Modern artists drew heavily for their inspiration on Christianity and the Classical past, but this does not mean that they were uninterested in the present. In the hands of a skilled artist, the past became a vehicle for commenting on what was important to the artist, his or her patron, and the community to which they both belonged. The work of the Roman painter Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–ca. 1656) is a case in point. The daughter of painter Orazio Gentileschi, Artemisia was perhaps the most successful female artist of her day. Her paintings *Susannah and the Elders* and *Judith and Holofernes*, both depicting scenes from the Old Testament, demonstrate how deeply personal such works could be. *Susannah and the Elders*, Artemisia's first work, was completed in 1610 when she was seventeen. Between that



by one of her father's colleagues, Agostino Tassi. As you examine these two works, consider the connections between the content and themes of the paintings and Gentileschi's own experiences. How did she use these paintings to comment on the power dynamics that shaped women's lives?

12-6 | ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI, *Susannah and the Elders* (1610)

Taken from the Book of Daniel, the story of *Susannah and the Elders* centers on a false accusation of adultery. As Susannah, a young wife, bathes in her garden, two elders of her community watch secretly. Filled with lust, the two men threaten to denounce her as an adulteress if she refuses to have sex with them. When she resists their attempts at blackmail, they follow through on their threat. Only the intervention of Daniel, who exposes inconsistencies in their story, saves Susannah from execution. As you examine the painting, pay particular attention to the way Gentileschi composed it. How does the placement of the three figures help to amplify its message?



READING QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe Gentileschi's Susannah? How does the position of her arms and head help to convey her reaction to the unwanted advances of the elders?
2. How would you characterize the two elders? How does their placement in the painting reflect their power? What might explain Gentileschi's decision to depict them whispering to one another at the very moment they accost Susannah?

12-7 | ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI, *Judith and Holofernes* (1610)

Like *Susannah and the Elders*, *Judith and Holofernes* depicts a scene from the Old Testament, this time from the Book of Judith. In order to save Israel from Assyrian domination, Judith seduces the Assyrian general Holofernes. After he falls asleep drunk, Judith and her maid servant cut off his head. The personal importance of the story to Gentileschi is underscored by the fact that she chose to depict herself as Judith and Agostino Tassi, her rapist, as Holofernes. As you examine the painting, compare its composition to that of *Susannah and the Elders*. In what ways does this painting invert the power relationships of the earlier work?



READING QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe Gentileschi's Judith? How would you characterize her facial expression?
2. What might explain Gentileschi's decision to focus attention on Judith's arms and those of her maid?
3. Compare this work to *Susannah and the Elders*. Taken together, what do the two paintings tell us about the connections Gentileschi made between gender, power, and violence?

■ COMPARATIVE AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ■

1. Compare and contrast Petrarch and Machiavelli. Should they both be considered humanists? Why or why not?
2. Compare and contrast Erasmus's depiction of the successful prince with Machiavelli's. How does each one envision the Renaissance state? What does each think is necessary for a government to function well?
3. What light do the works of Christine de Pizan and Artemisia Gentileschi shed on the challenges faced by women of their day? How would you explain the success of each in male-dominated fields?
4. What marks Erasmus's *Education of a Christian Prince* as a work of the northern Renaissance? How does it differ from some of the other works included in this chapter?

13

Reformations and Religious Wars

1500–1600

Even before Martin Luther posted his "Ninety-five Theses on the Power of Indulgences," numerous Catholic practices had come under widespread criticism. The specific political situation in the Holy Roman Empire enabled Luther and other reformers to spread their ideas. Strong local governments and high nobles, who exercised more power in their territories than did the central government of the Holy Roman Empire, welcomed Lutheran ideas and offered safe havens to the Protestants. Protestant reform extended to social thought as well—for example, priests were no longer required to remain celibate in the Protestant tradition. Some reformers adopted beliefs that were far more radical than those of Luther or other reformers and were condemned by Protestants and Catholics alike. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church developed its own plans for reform, both to counter Protestant attacks and to revitalize the church. The age of Reformation was also an age of religious violence, as religious and political conflicts merged and overlapped, fueling war, riots, and the persecution of dissenters and outsiders.

Cassandra Fedele on Humanist Learning

Italian humanists detailed the type of education that they regarded as ideal and promoted its value to society and the individual. Several women from the bustling cities of northern Italy became excited by the new style of learning and through tutors or self-study became extremely well-educated. One of these was the Venetian Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558), who became the best-known female scholar in her time, corresponding with humanist writers, church officials, university professors, nobles, and even the rulers of Europe. She gave this oration in Latin at the University of Padua in honor of her (male) cousin's graduation.

"I shall speak briefly on the study of the liberal arts, which for humans is useful and honorable, pleasurable and enlightening since everyone, not only philosophers but also the most ignorant man, knows and admits that it is by reason that man is separated from beasts. For what is it that so greatly helps both the learned and the ignorant? What so enlarges and enlightens men's minds the way that an education in and knowledge of literature and the liberal arts do?... But erudite men who are filled with the knowledge of divine and human things turn all their thoughts and considerations towards reason as though toward a target, and free their minds from all pain, though plagued by many anxieties. These men are scarcely subjected to fortune's innumerable arrows and they prepare themselves to live well and in happiness. They follow reason as their leader in all things; nor do they consider themselves only, but they are also accustomed to assisting others with their energy and advice in matters public and private.

And so Plato, a man almost divine, wrote that those states would be fortunate in which the men who were heads of state were philosophers or in which philosophers took on the duty of administration... The study of literature refines men's minds, forms and makes the bright power of reason, and washes away all stains from the mind, or at any rate, greatly cleanses it. It perfects the gifts and adds much beauty and elegance to the physical and material advantages that one has received by nature. States, however, and their princes who foster cultivate these studies become more humane, more gracious, and more noble. For this reason, these studies have won for themselves the sweet appellation, "humanities."... Just as places that lie unused and uncultivated become fertile and rich fruits and vegetables with men's labor and hard work and are always made beautiful, so are our natures cultivated, enhanced, and enlightened by the liberal arts...

But not enough on the utility of literature since it produces not only an outcome that is rich, precious, and sublime, but also provides one with advantages that are extremely pleasurable, fruitful, and lasting-benefits that I myself have enjoyed. And when I meditate on the idea of marching forth in life with the lowly and execrable weapons of the little woman- the needle and the distaff [the rod onto which yarn is wound after spinning]- even if the study of literature offers women no rewards or honors, I believe women must nonetheless pursue and embrace such studies alone for the pleasure and enjoyment they contain.

Evaluate the Evidence:

1. What does Fedele see as the best course of study and purposes of study?
2. Compare Fedele's oration to Pico della Mirandola's essay "On the Dignity of Man". In what ways does gender appear to shape the two authors ideas about humanist learning?
3. What does Fedele believe a humanist education will do for women? Why might she find this so important?

Source: Excerpt from Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, pp. 159-162, ed. and trans. Diana Robin. Copyright ©2000 by The University of Chicago Press. Used with permission of the publisher.

Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man"

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the son of an Italian count, was a brilliant student who studied Hebrew and Arabic along with the standard Latin and Greek. Based on his reading, Pico developed 900 theses, or points of argumentation, regarding philosophical, religious, magical, and other subjects, and he offered to defend them against anyone who wanted to come to Rome to debate him. The Pope declared some of these theses heretical, blocked the debate, and had Pico arrested. Through the influence of Lorenzo de' Medici, his friend and patron, Pico was freed, and he settled near Florence. At the death of Lorenzo in 1492, Pico came under the influence of Girolamo Savonarola, a strict Dominican friar who took over Florence during the French invasions. Under Savonarola's influence, he gave away all his money, and renounced his former writings and ideas. He died unexpectedly shortly afterward. Forensic tests on his remains done in 2008 indicate he died of arsenic poisoning, and the suspicion is that the Medici family, which had just been ousted from Florence by the French invasion and the rise of Savonarola, had him poisoned. Pico's life and death were full of drama, and so is his writing. As an introduction to his 900 theses, he wrote the essay "On the Dignity of Man," an impassioned and eloquent summary of humanist ideas about human capacities. His Oration has been called the "Manifesto of the Renaissance" due to its articulation of the core values held by many humanists, and employs syncretism (the fusion of the Christian and classical traditions) in his praise of man and of man's free will.

Now the Highest Father, God the Architect, according to the laws of his secret wisdom, built this house of the world, this world which we see, the most sacred temple of His divinity. He adorned the region beyond the Heavens with Intelligences, He animated the celestial spheres with eternal souls, and He filled the excrementary and filthy parts of the lower world with a multitude of animals of all kinds. But when His work was finished, the Artisan longed for someone to reflect on the pan of so great a creation, to love its beauty, and to admire its magnitude. When, therefore, everything was completed as Moses and the Timaeus [Plato's dialogue] testify, He began at last to consider the creation of man. But among His archetypes there was none from which he could form a new offspring, nor in His treasure houses was there any inheritance which He might bestow upon His new son, nor in the tribunal seats of the whole world was there a place where this contemplator of the universe might sit. All was now filled out; everything had been apportioned to the highest, the middle, and the lowest orders. But it was not in keeping with the paternal power to fail, as though exhausted, in his last act of creation; it was not in keeping with his wisdom to waver in a matter of necessity for a lack of a design; it was not in keeping with his beneficent love that the creature who was to praise the divine liberality with regard to others should be forced to condemn it with respect to himself. Finally the Great Artisan ordained that man, to whom He could give nothing belonging only to himself, should share in common whatever properties whatever properties had been peculiar to each of the other creatures. He received man, therefore, as a creature of undetermined nature, and placing him in the middle of the universe, said this to him: "Neither an established place, nor a form belonging to you alone, nor any special function we have given to you, O Adam, and for this reason, that you may have and possess, according to your desire and judgement, whatever lace, whatever form, and whatever judgment you desire. The nature of other

creatures, which has been determined, is confined within the bounds prescribed by Us. You, who are confined by no limits, shall determine for yourself your own nature, in accordance with your own free will, in whose hand I have placed you. I have set you at the centre of the world, so that from there you may more easily survey whatever is in the world. We have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that more freely and more honourably the moulder and maker of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever form you shall prefer. You shall be able to descend upon the lower forms of being, which are brute beasts; you shall be able to be reborn out of the judgement of your own soul into the higher beings, which are divine.

O sublime generosity of God the Father! O highest and most wonderful felicity of man! To him it was granted to have what he chooses, to be what he wills. AT the moment when they are born, beasts bring with them from their mother's womb, as Lucilius [the classical Roman author] says, whatever they shall possess. From the beginning or soon afterwards, the highest spiritual beings have been what they are to be for all eternity. When man came into life, the Father endowed him with all kinds of seeds and the germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow and bear fruit in him. If these seeds are vegetative, he will be like a plant; if they are sensitive, he will become like the beasts; if they are rational, he will become like a heavenly creature; if intellectual, he will be an angel and a son of God. And if, content with the lot of no created being, he withdraws into the centre of his own oneness, his spirit, made one with the God in the solitary darkness of the Father, which is above all things, will surpass all things.

Who then will not wonder at this chameleon of ours, or who could wonder more greatly at anything else?

Evaluate the Evidence:

1. Why, in Pico's view, does man have great dignity and capacity?
2. What does Pico see as the purpose of human life?
3. Renaissance humanism has sometimes been viewed as opposed to religion, and especially to the teachings of the Catholic Church at the time. Do Pico's words support this idea? What do you find in them that fits with Christian ideas, and what stands in opposition to Christianity?
4. Would everyone have agreed with Pico's words at the time? Were all men truly born with the same dignity and capacity?

Source: "On the Dignity of Man" by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, translated by Mary M. McLaughlin, from The Portable Renaissance Reader by James B. Ross and Mary M. McLaughlin, editors, copyright 1953, renewed ©1981 by Viking Penguin Inc.