

Lesson 62: Renaissance Notes

World History

The Renaissance Period: 14th-17th Centuries

1. Renaissance means rebirth or revival – historical period of approximately 300 years marked by a revival in art, literature, and learning.
2. The Renaissance period served as a bridge or transition between **medieval** and **modern** Western Europe.

Distinctive Features:

1. It began with the rediscovery of **Greco-Roman Civilization** which had been neglected during the **Middle Ages**.
2. It emphasized reason, a questioning attitude, experimentation, and free inquiry.
 - This contrasted with the medieval concern with faith, authority, and tradition.
3. It glorified the individual and approved worldly pleasures, viewing life as worthwhile for its own sake, not chiefly as a preparation for the life to come (salvation).
4. Focused attention upon **secular society** rather than the medieval preoccupation with the Church and religious affairs.
5. Featured great achievements in literature, art, and science.

Origin of the Renaissance in Italy:

1. Italy had been the center of Greco-Roman Culture. It contained sculpture, buildings, roads, and manuscript that excited curiosity about **classical civilization**.
2. Located on the Mediterranean, Italy had absorbed stimulating new ideas from the more advanced **Byzantine and Moslem Worlds**.
3. Benefiting from the revival of trade that resulted from the Crusades, Italy had wealthy influential people who became **patrons** (supporters) of literature, art, and science.

Leading Patrons:

1. Certain Popes in Rome
2. The **Sforza** family in **Milan**
3. The **Medici** family in **Florence**

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Florence: Preeminent Renaissance City:

1. 15th Century: Florence came under the control (rule) of the **Medici** family.
 - Originally a merchant family who amassed a fortune in the wool trade and then expanded into banking.
2. The Medicis (especially **Lorenzo the Magnificent**, 1469-1492) became outstanding patrons of Renaissance Art.
3. Florence attracted people of talent from elsewhere in Italy, and the city acquired many priceless works of art.

The Renaissance Spreads:

1. In the 15th century, Renaissance ideas began to spread from Italy to France, the German states, Holland, and England.
2. The spread of these ideas resulted from religious, military, and commercial contacts.
3. Many northern scholars also traveled to Italy to absorb Italian art and learning.

Humanism – Illustrated the Spirit of the Renaissance (a literary movement that began in the 14th Century Italy)

1. Concerned themselves not with religious matters, but with everyday human problems.
2. Drew inspiration from classical civilization – eagerly seeking, studying, and publicizing ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts.
3. Revived interest, chiefly among educated people, in literature and writing.

Early Humanist Writers:

1. **Petrarch** (1304-1374)
 - Italian who studied the classics and wrote in both Italian and Latin
 - Imitated the style of classical writers.
2. Pico della **Mirandola** (1463-1494)
 - An Italian who lived for a while near Florence and was a scholar of law, philosophy, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic.
 - He spoke in praise of the **dignity of human beings**.
3. **Erasmus** (1466?-1536)
 - He was Dutch and a brilliant classical scholar.

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- In his book, *Praise of Folly*, he ridiculed superstition, prejudice, upper class privileges, and Church abuses.
 - By satirizing social evils, Erasmus encouraged people to think about reforms.
4. **Sir Thomas More** (1478-1535)
- An Englishman, he wrote *Utopia*, a book about an ideal country that was free from war, injustice, poverty, and ignorance.

The Vernacular Replaces Latin in Literature:

1. In the **Middle Ages**, Latin was the language of literature, of the Church, and of educated people.
2. Over the centuries, other languages had been evolving through **everyday usage**.
3. French, Italian, Spanish, German, and English are **vernacular** (national) languages.
4. At the end of the Middle Ages, writers began to use the vernacular instead of Latin.

Writers of the Vernacular:

1. **Dante** (1265-1321)
 - An Italian, born in Florence, who served that city in various governmental positions until he was exiled by political opponents.
 - Known as the **Father of Modern Italy**, he was the first to write an important piece of literature in the vernacular.
 - His *Divine Comedy* is a long poem in which he describes an imaginary trip through hell, purgatory, and heaven during which one of his guides is the Roman poet, **Virgil**.
2. **Boccaccio** (1313?-1375)
 - An Italian who lived in Florence during his formative years and was influenced by the Renaissance spirit of Humanism.
 - He is best known for his **Italian prose** in a collection of short stories called The Decameron.
 - These stories were related by a group of young men who fled to a villa outside Florence to escape the **Black Death** (plague).
3. **Chaucer** (1340?-1400)
 - An Englishman who became familiar with the works of Dante and Boccaccio while traveling in Italy.

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- Chaucer used English in his collection of stories in verse, The Canterbury Tales.
 - Supposedly these stories were related by pilgrims journeying to the religious shrine at Canterbury.

The Invention of Printing – Encourages Literature:

1. During the Middle Ages books had to be hand copied (time-consuming and expensive) on parchment (goat skin).
2. 12th Century: Europeans discovered paper from the Moslems.
3. ca. 1450: printing with **movable type** was invented by a German, **Johan Gutenberg**.
4. Impact: printing tremendously increased output and accuracy and decreased the cost.
 - Inexpensive printed materials afforded all people opportunities for literacy and learning and encouraged talented people to write.

Renaissance Literary Achievements:

1. **Machiavelli** (1469-1527)
 - An Italian born in Florence who served the **Florentine Republic** as a secretary and diplomat.
 - When the Medici family was restored to power in Florence, Machiavelli was dismissed from office and permitted to retire to his country home where he devoted himself to writing.
 - *The Prince*: major work on ethics and government describing how rulers maintain power by methods that ignore right or wrong and accept the philosophy that “**the end justifies the means.**”
 - The word **Machiavellian** has come to mean “cunning and unscrupulous” – a prototype for a totalitarian dictator, right or left wing.
2. **Rabelais** (1494?-1553)
 - A Frenchman who wrote the romance *Gargantua and Panatagruel*.
 - A **humorist** who portrayed a comic world of giants whose adventures satirized education, politics, and philosophy.
3. **Montaigne** (1533-1592)
 - A Frenchman who wrote a series of essays.

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- He expressed **skepticism** toward accepted beliefs, condemning superstition and intolerance and urging people to live nobly.
- 4. **Cervantes** (1547-1616)
 - A Spaniard who ridiculed feudal society, especially knighthood and chivalry, in relating the adventures of the mad knight of La Mancha, *Don Quixote*.
- 5. **Shakespeare** (1564-1616)
 - His plays employed a dramatic technique to probe historical events and human character.
 - Best known plays:
 - **Histories:** *Henry IV* and *Henry V*
 - **Comedies:** *Twelfth Night* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*
 - **Tragedies:** *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*.
- 6. **Milton** (1608-1674)
 - Englishman
 - *Paradise Lost* – an epic poem that retold the Biblical story of creation and the Garden of Eden
 - *Areopagitica* – advocated freedom of the press.
- 7. **Moliere** (1622-1673)
 - Dominated French literature as its leading comic dramatist.
 - Best known plays: *The Misanthrope* and *The Imaginary Invalid*

Characteristics of Renaissance Art:

1. Influenced by the artistic achievements of **Classical Greece and Rome**, particularly in sculpture and architecture – Renaissance artists often imitated classical works.
2. Renaissance painting emphasized realism, attention to detail, and a desire for perfection.
3. **Early Renaissance** painters dealt with **religious themes** but with a lifelike approach.
4. **Later Renaissance** painters also employed a realistic style and continued to recreated Biblical themes. They also depicted worldly subjects, landscapes, portraits, and scenes of everyday life.

Italian Artistic Achievements of the Renaissance:

1. **Giotto** (1266?-1337)
 - A painter and architect born near Florence.

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- Portrayed religious themes in many **frescos** (wall paintings); designed the Cathedral of Florence with its famous bell tower (known as Giotto's Tower)
- 2. **Ghiberti** (1378-1455)
 - A Florentine who sculpted a series of exquisite biblical scenes for the bronze doors of the baptistry in Florence.
- 3. **Donatello** (1386?-1466)
 - A Florentine sculptor best known for his life-size statue of St. George.
- 4. **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519)
 - He worked in Florence, Milan, and Rome.
 - He was a skilled painter, sculptor, architect, musician, engineer, and scientist.
 - In military engineering, he improved the method of loading cannons and devised equipment for scaling walls.
 - He devised the possibility of a parachute and a flying machine
 - In painting, he is best known for his Self Portrait, The Last Supper, and the Mona Lisa
- 5. **Michelangelo** (1475-1564)
 - He worked in Florence and Rome; was talented as a painter, sculptor, poet, and architect.
 - Famed for the biblical scenes he painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.
 - As a sculptor, he is best known for his Pieta, David, and Moses
 - He also designed the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- 6. **Titian** (1477-1576)
 - A painter associated with Venice and known for his portrait of famous people and his scenes from mythology and the Bible, such as the Assumption of the Virgin.
- 7. **Raphael** (1483-1520)
 - Worked in both Florence and Rome
 - Known for the frescos he painted in the Papal Library at Rome.

Spanish Artistic Achievements of the Renaissance:

1. **El Greco** (1547-1614)
 - A Greek who settled in Spain, painted religious scenes such as the Assumption, portraits of church officials, and the famous landscape, View of Toledo.
2. **Velasquez** (1599-1660)

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- Official painter to the court of King Philip IV of Spain; also did many paintings of royalty.
- Commemorated a Spanish victory against the Dutch in his Surrender of Breda.

Dutch Artistic Achievements of the Renaissance:

1. **Hals** (1580-1666)
 - Painted portraits of ordinary people and scenes of everyday life. He is famous for his Laughing Cavalier.
2. **Rembrandt** (1606-1669)
 - Considered the greatest painter of Northern Europe.
 - Portrayed everyday life and common people in his paintings.
 - Notable works: The Night Watch, The Anatomy Lesson, and Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer.

Flemish Artistic Achievements of the Renaissance:

1. **Rubens** (1577-1640)
 - Depicted action in religious and historical paintings. Most famous for The Adoration of the Magi.