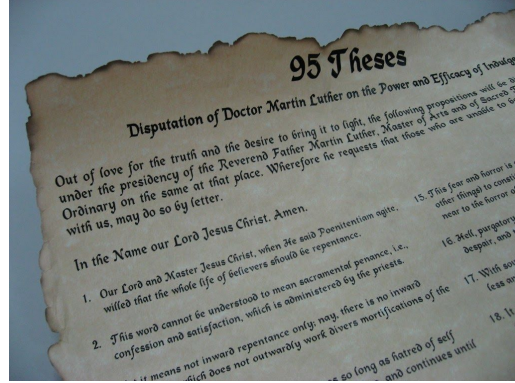


THE RENAISSANCE NOTES



INTRODUCTION

Michelangelo rushed from the Vatican. He yanked tight the straps of his saddle and flung himself onto his horse. No one treated him like that, he swore silently. Not even the pope! Within moments, Michelangelo was galloping out of Rome's northern gate, homeward bound toward Florence. As he rode, the great artist thought about the scene that had just ended in the Vatican. He could not believe that Pope Julius II had rejected the project they had planned so carefully for years. Even more humiliating, the pope had had Michelangelo thrown out by a groom!

Before long, the pope and the artist forgot their quarrel, and the pope set Michelangelo to work on an even greater project. He would create a huge mural to decorate the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. It was an enormous task. For four years, Michelangelo lay on his back on a wooden platform suspended just a few inches below the chapel ceiling. Paint dripping in his face, he painstakingly illustrated the biblical history of the world, from the Creation to the Flood.



(the Creation)

The Renaissance

The Renaissance was a time of REBIRTH in creativity in Europe in the 1300s. It brought change in many areas - political (government), social (people), economic (business, trade, money), and cultural (traditions in art, literature, etc.). Most important however, were the changes in the way that the people viewed themselves and their world. During this time, there was a renewed interest in classical learning, especially the culture of ancient Rome. This was a time of rebirth after the disorder and disunity of the Middle Ages.

Some elements of the Middle Ages remained however. After all, the Middle Ages had preserved much of the classical heritage. Latin had survived as the language of the Church and of educated people. Mathematics of Euclid, the astronomy of Ptolemy, and the works of Aristotle were well preserved as well and carried on into the Renaissance.

Yet the Renaissance did produce new attitudes toward culture and learning. Unlike medieval scholars, who debated the nature of life after death, Renaissance thinkers were eager to explore the richness and variety of human experience in the here and now. At the same time, there was a new emphasis on individual achievement. Indeed, the Renaissance ideal was the person with talent in many fields.

The Renaissance supported a spirit of adventure and a wide-ranging curiosity that led people to explore new worlds. Columbus, who sailed to the Americas in 1492, represented that spirit. So did Nicolaus Copernicus, the scientist who revolutionized the way people viewed the universe. Renaissance writers and artists, eager to experiment with new forms, were also products of that adventurous spirit.

Italian Beginnings

The Renaissance began in Italy in the mid-1300s, then spread north to the rest of Europe. It reached its height in the 1500's. It began in Italy because Italy was the center of ancient Roman history. Architectural remains, antique statues, coins and inscriptions were all visible reminders to Italians of the "glory that was Rome." Italy also differed from the rest of Europe, as its cities had survived the Middle Ages. In the north, cities like Florence, Milan, Venice, and Genoa grew into prosperous centers of trade and manufacturing. Rome, in central Italy, and Naples in the south, also contributed to the Renaissance cultural revival. Finally, a wealthy and powerful merchant class in these city-states further promoted the cultural rebirth. These merchants exerted both political and economic leadership, and their attitudes and interests helped to shape the Italian Renaissance. They stressed education and individual achievement. They also spent lavishly to support the art.

Florence and the Medicis

The city of Florence, perhaps more than any other city, came to symbolize the Italian Renaissance. Florence was home to many gifted poets, artists, architects, scholars, and scientists in a short space of time.

In the 1400s, the Medici family of Florence organized a banking business. The business prospered, and the family expanded into wool manufacturing, mining and other ventures. Soon, the Medicis ranked amongst the richest merchants and bankers in Europe. This money gave the family cultural and political power. Cosimo de'Medici gained control of the Florentine government in 1434, and the family continued as uncrowned rulers of the city for many years.

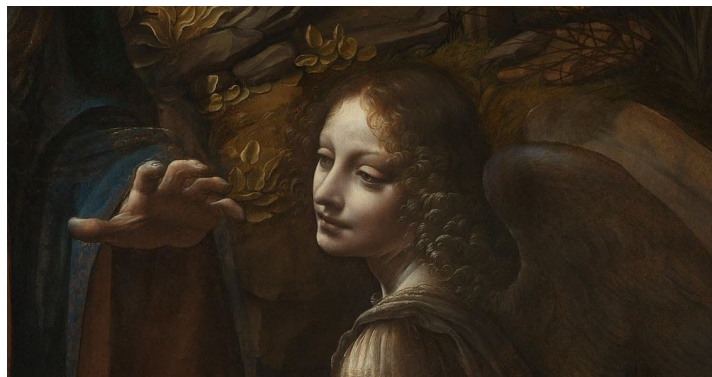
Best known of all the Medicis was Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo. He was a generous **patron**, or financial supporter of the arts. Poets and philosophers frequently visited the Medici palace. Artists like Michelangelo learned their craft by sketching ancient Roman statues collected in the Medici gardens.

Humanism

At the heart of the Renaissance was an intellectual movement known as **humanism**. Humanism focused on worldly subjects rather than on religious issues that had occupied medieval thinkers. Humanist scholars hoped to use the wisdom of the ancients to increase their understanding of their own times.

Renaissance art reflected humanist concerns. Like artists of the Middle Ages, Renaissance artists portrayed religious figures such as Mary, Jesus, and the saints. However, they often set these figures against Greek or Roman backgrounds. Painters also produced portraits of well-known figures of the day, reflecting the humanist interest in individual achievement.

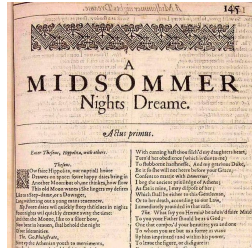
Renaissance artists learned the rules of **perspective**. By making distant objects smaller than those close to the viewer, artists could paint scenes that appeared three-dimensional. They also used shading to make objects look round and real. Renaissance artists studied human anatomy and drew from live models. This made it possible for them to portray the human body more accurately than medieval artists had done.



Leonardo DaVinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*

Gargantua and his son, Pantagruel. On the surface, Rabelais's book is a comic adventure of travel and war. But, he uses his characters to offer opinions on a wide variety of serious subjects, such as education and religion.

William Shakespeare



Shakespeare was an English poet and playwright. Between 1590 and 1613, he wrote 37 plays that are still performed around the world. Shakespeare's comedies, such as ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, laughs at the follies and joys of young people in love. His history plays, such as ***Richard III***, chronicle the power struggles of English kings. His tragedies show human beings crushed by powerful forces or their own weakness. In ***Romeo and Juliet***, two teenagers fall victim to an old family feud. In ***Othello***, a noble warrior is driven mad by jealousy. In ***Macbeth***, he depicts an ambitious couple whose desire for political power leads them to commit murder.

Miguel de Cervantes



Best known for his entertaining tale that mocks romantic notions of medieval chivalry called ***Don Quixote***. The novel follows the adventures of Don Quixote, a foolish but idealistic knight, and his faithful servant, Sancho Panza. Quixote imagines himself involved in one dangerous adventure after another. Panza tries without success to convince the knight that the "castles" he sees are really humble inns and the "jousting knights" that he tries to fight are in fact windmills. Quixote, however, is unable to understand the modern world, which requires the skills of practical men like Sancho Panza rather than those of romantic and battle-ready knights.

The Printing Press

The great works of the Renaissance reached a large audience. The way this was possible is through the development of printing in Europe.

The Chinese had learned to make paper and had printed books centuries earlier. By 1300, methods of papermaking had reached Europe. By the 1400s, German engravers had developed movable type. In 1456, Johann Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany, printed a complete