

Humanism

Renaissance Literature



عمادة التعلم الإلكتروني والتعليم عن بعد
Deanship of E-Learning and Distance Education

[2]

جامعة الملك فيصل
King Faisal University



Humanism

❖ The Renaissance is one of two or three moments in the history of Europe that has been most transformative. It is comparable in its magnitude to the Scientific Revolution and the Industrial Revolution.

❖ Previous lectures illustrated how the Renaissance created new economic, geographical and military realities. Now we will address the new cultural realities that this period produced.

❖ The culture that the Renaissance brought with it is called: Humanism. It is a culture that is still with us today and many writers, intellectuals, artists and philosophers still call themselves today “humanists.”



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Humanism - Definitions

- ❖ Originally, Humanism meant that important questions of life and death, good and evil, politics and governance, etc. ceased being talked about exclusively from the perspective of the Church.
- ❖ These questions and many others could now be investigated and discussed by average human beings, from their perspectives and for their own interests.
- ❖ That the human mind can now operate without the supervision of the Church dictating the questions and the answers is, broadly speaking, the meaning and the essence of Humanism.



Evolution of Humanism

- ❖ Most historians say that Humanism appeared first in Italy, but scholarship is showing that the Renaissance, Humanism, the Scientific Revolution would not have been possible without the translation of Islamic books 300 years before (11th century) in Toledo, al-Andalus, from Arabic into Latin. We will focus on Italy only here.

The reason why Humanism emerged in Italy are many:

- ✓ It's the home of the Roman Empire and its Latin culture, and much of Humanism consisted in reviving the Latin literature and poetry of classical Rome.



Evolution of Humanism

- ✓ Because a substantial amount of the Latin literature of Classical Rome was still available in the churches, monasteries and private villas of Italy. The Church did not allow these texts to circulate before, but the weakness of the Church, the invention of printing and the increased wealth made these texts and book available to the public to read, translate and imitate.
- ✓ The emerging states in Europe have a need for administrators, secretaries, writers and educated people to manage the new wealth they have now from the new trade routes they have established.
- ✓ The Humanists were these writers, secretaries and administrators.



Evolution of Humanism

- ❖ Humanists were educated people at the services of kings and princes.
- ❖ They provided these kings and princes with what the Church could not provide: a secular education
- ❖ And it was the pursuit of that secular education that made humanists travel across Europe looking for classical texts from Ancient Rome and Greece.
- ❖ This informal movement spread from Italy to Holland, Germany, France, and England and was responsible for the great literature and science that became a feature of this era and which influenced Europe and the world.



Some important Italian Humanists

❖ **Francesco Petrarca**, known as Petrarch (1304-1374) the Father of Humanism, a Florentine who spent his youth in Tuscany and lived in Milan and Venice. He was a collector of old manuscripts and through his efforts the speeches of Cicero and the poems of Homer and Virgil became known to Western Europe. Petrarch's works also led to the rise of people known as *Civic Humanists*, or those individuals who were civic-minded and looked to the governments of the ancient worlds for inspiration. Petrarch also wrote sonnets in Italian. Many of these sonnets expressed his love for the beautiful Laura. His sonnets greatly influenced other writers of the time.



Some important Italian Humanists

❖ **Giovanni Pico della Mirandola** (1463-1494) was an Italian who lived in Florence and who expressed in his writings the belief that there were no limits to what man could accomplish.

Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444), who wrote a biography of Cicero, encouraged people to become active in the political as well as the cultural life of their cities. He was a historian who today is most famous for *The History of the Florentine Peoples*, a 12-volume work. He was also the Chancellor of Florence from 1427 until 1444.



Some important Italian Humanists

❖ **Giovanni Boccaccio** (1313-1375) wrote *The Decameron*. These hundred short stories were related by a group of young men and women who fled to a villa outside Florence to escape the Black Death. Boccaccio's work is considered to be the best prose of the Renaissance.

❖ **Baldassare Castiglione** (1478-1529) wrote one of the most widely read books, *The Courtier*, which set forth the criteria on how to be the ideal Renaissance man. Castiglione's ideal courtier was a well-educated, mannered aristocrat who was a master in many fields from poetry to music to sports.



Humanism and Medieval Supernaturalism

❖ In the Medieval period, the church restricted the intellectual life to priests and monks, and even these men were not free to think, analyze and read, not even the Bible. Intellectual life had been formalized and conventionalized by Church limitation, until it had become largely barren and unprofitable.

❖ The whole sphere of knowledge (ALL questions) had been subjected to the mere authority of the Church's narrow interpretation of the Bible.

❖ Scientific investigation was almost entirely stifled, and progress was impossible. The fields of religion and knowledge had become stagnant under an arbitrary despotism.



Impact of Humanism: Historical Thought

- ❖ The advent of humanism ended the Church's dominance of education and the pursuit of knowledge.
- ❖ Written history started being written from a secular perspective instead of from the supernatural perspective of Church dogma.
- ❖ This is where we get the division of history into: Ancient, Medieval and Modern that is still commonly in use today.
- ❖ Vergil, Cicero, Aristotle, Plato were no longer regarded as mysterious prophets from a dimly imagined past, but as real men of flesh and blood, speaking out of experiences that were remote in time but no less humanly real.



Impact of Humanism: Languages and Education

- ❖ During the Middle Ages in Western Europe, Latin was the language of the Church and the educated people. Humanists began to use the *vernacular*, and helped develop the national languages of their countries – Italian, French, English, German.
- ❖ Humanists also had a great impact on education. They supported studying grammar, poetry, and history, as well as mathematics, astronomy, and music. They promoted the concept of the well-rounded individual (Renaissance man) who was proficient in both intellectual and physical endeavors.



Impact of Humanism: *Civitas*

- ❖ Humanism also revived the Roman idea that an educated man should have civic duties and participate in the politics and the management of his own society and its improvement
- ❖ The word “human” became a catchword, as opposed to the “supernatural” explanations of the Medieval Church. Everything – history, politics, science, commerce, religion, good and evil – started being explained from a human perspective, hence the word “humanism.”
- ❖ Humanism understood that these questions had been addressed and investigated by the classics (Greeks and Romans), and an unprecedented effort began in Europe for the recuperation of those ancient cultures and their texts.



Impact of Humanism: Art and Paganism

- ❖ The discovery of ancient texts and treasures was accompanied by new creative enthusiasm in literature and all the arts; culminating particularly in the early sixteenth century in the appearance of some of the greatest painters in Western history: Lionardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo.
- ❖ But also the Light of the Renaissance had also its darkness. Breaking away from the medieval bondage often also meant a relapse into crude paganism and the enjoyment of all pleasures with no restraints. Hence the Italian Renaissance is also often called Pagan, and many in England and France protested against the ideas and habits that their youth were bringing back with them from their studies in Italy.



The Renaissance Spreads

- ❖ From Italy, the Renaissance spread northward, first to France, and as early as the middle of the fifteenth century English students were frequenting the Italian universities.
- ❖ Soon the study of Greek was introduced into England, first at Oxford. It was so successful that when, early in the sixteenth century, the great Dutch student and reformer, Erasmus was too poor to reach Italy, he went to Oxford.
- ❖ The invention of printing helped the multiplication of books in unlimited numbers (before there had been only a few manuscripts laboriously copied page by page). Easier to open universities and scholarly circles everywhere.



The Renaissance Spreads

- ❖ In England, the Renaissance had a profound impact, especially in the Court, where literature took center stage.
- ❖ Because the old nobility had perished in the wars, Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor line, and his son, Henry VIII, adopted the policy of replacing it with able and wealthy men of the middle class.
- ❖ The court therefore became a brilliant and crowded circle of unscrupulous but unusually adroit statesmen, and a center of lavish entertainments and display.
- ❖ Under this new aristocracy, the rigidity of the feudal system was relaxed, and life became somewhat easier for all the dependent classes. Modern comforts, too, were largely introduced, and with them the Italian arts and literature.

