

# WESTERN EUROPEAN HISTORY – Early Modern Period

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## POLITICAL HISTORY

### GOVERNMENT

**Perspectives.** The early modern period may be viewed either as a distinct break from the ‘mediaeval,’ or as a more or less covert continuation of that earlier millennium. One easily notes—in reviewing the developments of trade, gender relations, or military affairs, during the three hundred year period in question—conspicuous features of change, evolution, of what with the 19th century came increasingly to be called ‘progress.’ These are the milestones of the future, for sure, and concern our brief survey, but such a survey should not fail to mention the important relics of the past, which cling inside the ‘early modern story.’

**Vestiges.** The corporate view of society, with the conviction that certain classes enjoyed certain legal rights and protections—and the corresponding confidence that an underlying servant class (serfs) were the appropriate underpinning of society—this view prevailed without major challenge through the three centuries in question, centuries (in western Europe) which preceded a truly revolutionary era, in France and the United States, not to mention globe-influencing revolutions in Russia, China, Mexico. In 1800, as in 1500, the Holy Roman Empire (though just a vestige of its old self) still existed, while the Pope still exercised considerable temporal power. A descendant of the Capetians was still King of France. In most European countries it was still assumed that religion and the state were tightly interinvolved with each other, the ruler—typically a monarch—serving as and support to the Church.

**‘Progress.’** To nineteenth century thinkers like Bury, who framed the notion of progress as they surveyed the centuries that preceded them, the drift toward centralized secular government, the secular bureaucratic state as Weber analyzed it, was the keynote of development. The servant state, there to shape policy, administer powers, and guarantee the laws; this state was to be the stepping stone for all post-mediaeval development. (Though the Ottoman Empire was a frequent rival to the European West, during the Early Modern Period, there was no sense of a unity of ‘Christendom’ activated to preserve ‘European culture,’ but rather the powerful self-confidence, of the newly self-realizing Western States, served as the perceived bulwark against Islam or the nations supported by it.)

**Servant state.** It was a hallmark of this servant state, with its power concentrated in a fatherly ruling monarch, that it was able to create the laws it needed and wanted, uninhibited by the Mediaeval governmental assumption, that God (or our transcendent condition) was the ultimate maker and guarantor of the laws. It should be added that this authority, which the post classical government arrogated to itself, was fortified by the power of the national exchequer. National banks, a generative creation of the early modern economy, became storage centers for vast expendable sums, from which armies could be subsidized, and increasingly heavy bureaucracies subsidized.

### MILITARY

**Soldiers.** The evolution of the proto modern state, after the transition from the late Middle Ages, with its first steps toward urbanization and an external economy in touch with distant markets, inevitably brings

along with it changes in the way new social arrangements protect themselves. During the course of mediaeval military formation, the widespread role of armored knight and cavalry became increasingly incorporated into that of soldier, both citizen soldier and mercenary, the soldier for pay whom we will see prominently, in the service of states and wealthy principalities, especially during the first half of the early modern period.

**Navy.** In addition to such groupings of soldiers, armies in construction, there was much stress—say in the Franco English Wars--on the exercise of sea power for military protection purposes. As certain navies, like the British and Spanish, became key elements of international economics and foreign policy, the role of ships and sailors gained prominence. The Royal Navy was ,throughout the three hundred year period before us, an example of an effective force, indispensable to its mother land, in which the latest in evolving post mediaeval marine technology—120 gunnery emplacements per vessel, copper sheathing for boats' bottoms, facilities for long term food preservation—made life on these floating homes tolerably comfortable, and combat with them maximally dangerous.

**Sieges.** If any innovation drove the increasing frequency and potency of major wars, in the complex period of European history before us, it will be the ever evolving sophistication of gun powder and gunfire. The Chinese invention of gunpowder, which that nation was relatively slow to use for military purposes—a millennium at least, before lethal military operations, in China, were to employ serious use of powder firing weapons. In the western transition, from High Middle Ages into early modern warfare techniques, we find that gunpowder and appropriate firing weapons have seriously changed the game of states. By the seventeenth century, mobile siege engines were employed by monarchs like Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, to undertake (usually successfully) prolonged assaults on enemy fortifications. It was no longer a question of ladder scaling, or thrown catapults, nor was it a question of tall circular castles to wear down, but rather an issue of firing arquebuses or flintlock muskets into low walled, often polygonal or star shaped fortifications, such as studded the newer European landscape through the eighteenth century.

**Skirmishes.** Both infantry and cavalry were involved in frequent skirmishes, during the second half of the Early Modern Period. One could see, in these death struggles among citizen militias and mercenaries, in the fight for this or that small city state, new fighting styles thrown into action;; while in the 15th century we saw the use of the arquebus and crossbow , which were to be replaced by the bayonet (after 1650) and the flintlock musket (after 1650), which could (with some degree of accuracy) penetrate steel armor at one hundred yards distance. This fact should prepare us for the general discovery, that by the end of the Early Modern Period wars were growing increasingly lethal, involving many more men and vastly more potent weapons.

**Armies.** Armies, as we know well from observing today's nations' annual budgets, eat up a great deal of the income of a city state or state. By the end of the pre modern period it was common for modern states and mega communities to make extensive bank loans from the Central Banks increasingly crucial to the growth and security of individual polities. This strategy of self-protection for the larger corporate social entity puts us within shouting distance of the contemporary state, which co-exists with its army, and recovers through citizen taxes the costs of 'protecting itself.'

## SOCIAL HISTORY

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

**Individualism.** The very concept of the High Middle Ages, the period bridging from the Middle Ages properly speaking to that long development that leads into the early modern, is fragile and ambiguous. During the Renaissance, say in fifteenth century Northern Italy, there is an explosion of artistic personality, scientific inventiveness, and political astuteness—Cf. Macchiavelli's thought, in *The Prince*—yet the estates of faith, labor, and war were embedded life-concepts which shaped even the most individualistic behaviors. Individualism, within the world of the estates, was won at the cost of stepping into the modern market, with all its risks and challenges.

**Markets.** As we observe, in the development of international trade, the contact of persons from other cultures, the development of national products under increasingly industrial conditions, and the innovations in agricultural technology, which led to richer crops to feed rapidly growing urban populations—in all these milestones of a new economy and culture the validation of market culture is prominent. The full bloom of the estate-culture, in Western Europe, needed to fade—giving way in the High Middle period to a diversification of wage earning modalities. ‘The general category of those who labour (specifically, those who were not knightly warriors or nobles) diversified rapidly after the eleventh century into the lively and energetic worlds of peasants, skilled artisans, merchants, financiers, lay professionals and entrepreneurs, which together drove the European economy to its greatest achievements.’

**The Middle Class.** The early modern period is marked by the growth of a mercantile class, for which the old estates, of the Middle Ages, are being replaced by competitive enterprises in business, military affairs, diplomacy, and in which one’s class origins are increasingly irrelevant. At the same time, though, the older world has not been forgotten. Literature, as often, helps us to see what the class climate of the time—the early modern climate—is. Examples drawn from writers like Cervantes, Moliere, Shakespeare, or Ben Jonson bring this point to the stage, where public opinion and taste are most clearly on display; the characters they display for us show us persons enacting the tensions of class change.

**Literature.** Don Quixote is an early modern man playing at being a man of the High Middle Ages, and as he moves among his pretensions and dreams we see both the dynamics of the early modern, and the irrelevance of the now passé estates world. No middle class figure, the Don, and yet in his break throughs of self-awareness, he is enabled to see himself in a newer and freer world than that of the ‘knight’ himself. He is becoming a middle class man in his mind. Jonson, Shakespeare, and Moliere all use the shifting gazes of early modernity to reflect bits of the mediaeval. Shakespeare is the most complex of these depictees of the mediaeval, for he is the least time bound of these great writers. Polonius wants to clear his conscience in confession, before he passes away; the friar *really* wants to guarantee Romeo and Juliet a Christian marriage; Prince Hal truly wants his father to bless him, before he inherits the Kingship. The same vestiges of the mediaeval adhere to the character formations of playwrights like Jonson and Moliere. Think of *Volpone*, or *The Alchemist* or *Every Man in his Humour*, in which stock characters, embodiments of mediaeval humours, play out into stylized (but subtle) plot resolutions; or of Moliere’s *Tartuffe*, say, who ‘embodies’ the idea of the hypocrite, picking it up from the tradition of Theophrastus’ *Characters*, a formative text for the middle ages.

## GENDER RELATIONS

**Splendor.** From the early Renaissance on, there is social space for women to shine, and for women of fortune and character to build strong positions. In business, politics, the arts and high society; we are talking the power figures, like Lucrezia Borgia, who step out from the pages of illustrious families and are everywhere—conspicuously in those culture cities of Northern Italy (close neighbor to France), through which the goods and ideas of the Renaissance were beginning to flow. There is that face to the splendor of women in early modern society, just as in the eighteenth century French salon, with Mme. De Sevigne et. al., Parisian ladies of great cultivation were to dominate and shape social/literary trends.

**Males.** Nevertheless, throughout this early modern period of emergence from the mediaeval perspective, and into the implications of capitalism, there is arguably an inclination toward the male perspective, toward the captains of industry whether in the market place or the battlefields of politics. (Even the Church, or churches, are growing lofty male superstructures, astride which are the power figures of *those* institutions.) The underlying energies of the capital system implicitly superseded those of

the feminine. Which is not to say that the element of money, the currency of capitalism, was of no interest to western European women—who were after all on their ways to forming the largest ‘consumer market,’ the market for ‘retail goods,’ invented by western need. But it is to say that men had gained frontal position in the conflict between the genders. Whose, after all, were the voices of literature, the spiritual insider voices of the ‘early modern period,’ except those men—Marlowe, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Jonson, Donne, Racine, Boileau, Descartes—who were the interpreters of the world to the early moderns?

## ECONOMIC HISTORY

### INNOVATIONS

**Renaissance** The early period of Renaissance sculpture was firmly built on the work of the High Gothic period, and reflects the same exuberant historical awareness that had preceded it. If anything, the energy of stone creation is higher than before, and the Renaissance reflects in the greatest names of the early period: Ghiberti, Donatello, and Andrea del Verocchio. The period of High Renaissance Sculpture (1490-1530) was dominated by the work of Michelangelo (1475-1564), painter, sculptor, poet, and supreme genius of the Renaissance.

**Baroque.** Growing out from the Renaissance, the Baroque period of sculpture (1600-1700), latching onto the strong Roman Catholic Counter Revolution, with its passion to draw people back to the ‘true church,’ devoted all its skills to charming and delighting the faithful. Saint Peter’s Square was redesigned, under the direction of the greatest sculptor of the time, Bernini, so that the columns embracing Saint Peter’s itself seemed to embrace the returning worshipper. Bernini’s individual pieces of sculpture, like *The Vanquished Gaul killing himself and his Wife*, captured the sculptural moment in a brilliant instantaneity, an effect both stunning and forward looking—toward increasingly illusionistic work to come in the next centuries. The Baroque, still defining as part of the Renaissance perspective, continues to unfold throughout Europe, as the Renaissance spirit, which took first wing out from north Italy, developed into other cultures which like the Italian were finding new directions in which to win friends spiritually.

**Rococo.** As a reaction against the severity of the baroque, sculptors in France, especially, found their ways to a lighter hearted treatment of painting and sculpture. 1700-1789 marks out the Rococo period, sophisticated and genial, as was the thinking of the court of Louis XIV at Versailles, and readily settling into academic style solutions. Director of the *Académie Française*, from 1707 on, Guillaume Coustou was the most successful sculptor of the early part of this movement, while a variety of court sculptors, many the favorites of the great ladies of the court, held sway in competition with one another. We might say, in retrospect of the Revolution which was just around the corner, that art was having fun for a hundred years before the blood letting.

**Reflection.** We have been moving fast, from the Neolithic art explosion, 35,000 years ago, through quiet and almost hidden early Christian art, which only gradually—but then unstopably—outspread into monumental architecture and highly developed sculptures, both free standing and parts of narrative suites, which were to morph toward the muscular power of Renaissance pluri-genius, culminating, we might say, in the supreme works of Michelangelo’s sculpture and painting, only to soften out into Baroque and Rococo stages.

**Drivers.** This reflection is about the nature of change in art styles. It could be styles of moral value or of domestic architecture: the central question is the same—what is the driver to change? In art historical development it is as though human consciousness initially hooks itself into a project, like that of transforming nature into some of the metaphorical meanings inherent in nature, and then, once engaged in a segment of the challenge—say the challenge to transform the mere coexisting with caves into the depicting of the cave world—from within the cave—the drive of consciousness prosecutes its effort at ‘improvement,’ at expressing more fully what it feels it is pursuing, until, at some point, the energy of the quest plays itself out, transforming itself, if that is the way to put it, into its replacement, as Renaissance

sculpture, for example, replaces High Gothic which has already expressed what it could of the energy supplied it by its culture.

## TRADE

**Transition.** During the high middle ages, and what in the arts we call the Renaissance, the gradually forming nation states of Western Europe were advancing technologically, enriching their international profiles, and bringing great new wealth to the 'mercantile classes,' the new class of trader-businessmen-investors-venture- capitalists, who were the heart of the growing economies of Western Europe. (The older class systems, deeply embedded in the Feudal World, were basically agricultural, prioritizing the Lord of the Manor, and organized around the descending hierarchies of vile in field labor, which took its cut off the bottom of the economic pie.) Writing this transitional period requires, however, more than profiling the broad categories of change, for the 'quality of life' in Western Europe was during this early modern period almost eradicated by a series of plagues, weather crises, and disastrous harvests.

**Setbacks.** The Hundred Years War (1337-1453) put France and England at one another's throats, when they required cooperation, if only to let developing economies take their forward pace. On top of that self-obstructing behavior, and partly because rampaging armies degraded land and society, western Europe was hit by terrible plagues, bad harvests, and famines during precisely the period new 'nation states' were forming. The Black Death plague of 1347, imported by ship from Asia, entered Europe by the port of Messina, in Sicily, and rapidly spread throughout Europe, arguably wiping out a third of the population, conceivably as many as two hundred million victims. The population of France, which was the largest and most development-ready country of western Europe, in the Renaissance, declined from seventeen million to twelve million in 130 years, until, in the 1450's, a cycle of recuperation set in.

**Recuperation.** That period of recuperation saw the gradual strengthening and emergence of France, the Italian city states, and England, as the forthcoming powers of Modernity in Western Europe: all of them, in fact, bolstered by the growth of the Columbian exchange-- the cultural and biological trade-offs between Old Europe, new America, and West Africa—were beginning to take shape and self-definition.

**Columbian Exchange.** What we now call the Columbian Exchange is a useful marker for the opening of a new period in Western European trade. As a byproduct of the increasing globality of world trade, in the period of discovery, certain commercial patterns assumed a formal and durable existence, bringing continual advantage to those who conducted it. This particular economic experiment, which brought new crops (tomatoes, potatoes, maize, tobacco) to Europe from the New World, interacted with the trade in slaves between West Africa and the same new world, which took New World produce back to England and the continent. On the heels of this 'experiment' European cities pursued the monetary and lifestyle advantages of global trade.

**Imports.** The import of luxury goods (fine fabrics and spices) from East Asia flourished—abetted by the new ability of shipping to pass around the Cape of Good Hope, rather than across central Asia; Spain established the most muscular European trading presence throughout the sixteenth century, mastering the art of terrifying and looting the raw and artificial gold to be gathered aplenty by the Conquistadores, from very much living Aztec and Mayan cultures. The closeness of internal economic conditions to trading practice is evident in the tandem developments, within European nations, in industrial equipment and agricultural equipment, the raw materials of which had often to be imported, while the output, foodstuffs or fabrics, created a steady outflow of products from Western European ports.

**France.** Prior to 1800, France was the most populated country in Europe, and the most effectively poised for trade. (Population was 28 million in 1789. By 1800 Paris was the largest city in Europe, with a population of 650,000). A number of factors, in addition to population growth, contributed to the marked development of France. There was extensive import of agricultural products from the New World—beans, corn, squash, tomatoes, potatoes—a sharp rise in the production of silk and wool, and the benefit of royal exemption from taxes for many industrial products. With the growth of trade fairs—four times a year—in Lyons, that city took over as the banking capital of France, a home away from home for various prominent Italian monetary families, like the Medicis, but by the following century, when the economy had

succumbed to serious inflation, life for the lower income peasants grew seriously difficult, and the crown was forced to make what were (for it) damaging tax and revenue concessions to the masses.

**England.** The imperial power of England grew slowly, through the mercantile processes already set in movement in the sixteenth century, the time of the great fleet building and adventure sailing, which made of English a fierce competitor to the France we have just mentioned. By the end of the seventeenth century, the British economy had comfortably settled into its pattern of self-enrichment through the mutual interfructuation among the increasingly prosperous British colonies. The modern British Empire was based on the English empire which took flight in the 18th century with the nation's extensive colonization in the Caribbean, Canada, and among the thirteen colonies of America. The mercantile turn of this empire involved the British government working in close collaboration with leading national merchants throughout the colonies, in a trade collaboration which effectively excluded other nations from participation in the advantages of the British Empire itself.

**France** France was the most heavily populated country in Europe in the Early Modern Period. (The population rose to 28 million in 1789.) The rapid development of this now mercantile-industrial country laid the foundations for an increasing national and international trading capacity. France remained a ninety percent agricultural nation, during this period, but Paris, a banking and commercial capital, by was by the end of the eighteenth Both imports and exports flourished from their mercantile matrix in the capital. Silk, wool, hemp and linen were among the competitive exports, and helped France to maintain a favorable balance of trade over against England and Spain, throughout the eighteenth century. Vast market fairs occurred quarterly throughout France, and among other things promoted were glass, silks, dyes, and spices from the international customers displaying there.

**18<sup>th</sup> Century The British Trade.** Mercantilism is the right name for the economic system by which the British, as well as the French, were negotiating themselves into a potent commercial Empire in the early modern period. The spread of that Empire throughout the eighteenth century—which embraced territories as widely separated as India and Ceylon and the Caribbean and Canada—was largely due to the working relations set up among the British government, the major business holders in the colonized area, and business moguls in London, who contributed to the commercial transactions being established in the colonies. Slavery on the Atlantic coast became the lynchpin for the development of this commercial empire, which succeeded in creating a strict monopoly over its possessions, excluding all competition. (Trade barriers, regulations, and taxes on outsiders functioned seamlessly, to build what was essentially a commercial empire.)

## **CULTURAL HISTORY**

### **VERBAL ARTS**

#### Literature

**Mindset change.** Renaissance literature expresses diverse aspects of the new mindset that stage by stage replaces the main features of the mediaeval literary mind.

**Rebirth.** Rediscovery of the literature of ancient Greece and Rome was a principal driver of the period of Western Culture we know as the Renaissance. The tales of Homer, the histories of Herodotus, the dialogues of Plato, and the moralities of Seneca: all these works shone with a fresh secular life in which the citizen of the new Western European states was able to taste and hear the pleasures offered by the dramas of the fallen world, radiantly fallen and unredeemed. That this enriched new perspective began to find itself spread was due to diverse enabling causes. Two demand attention: the growth of energetic and viable cities, and the emergence of the movable type printing press, which owed its vigor to the genius of Johannes Gutenberg ( 1400-1468).

**Economy.** Throughout Europe a quickening economy intertwined with a new spirit of travel, wider spheres of personal contact, and a growing trade in commodities which 'spread the wealth,' and with it

the investments-- in institutions (like Universities, Banks, and Exploratory Undertakings—through which culture as well as capital evolved.) Included in the cultural opening were startling discoveries in (for instance) astronomy, especially in the study of planetary motions and the centrality of the sun in our galaxy, the mind adventures of Galileo and Copernicus. Urban life itself began to configure—especially in centers like Genoa, Florence, Pavia, but also in Spain, France, and England. We are at the moment of Shakespeare's London and the social intellectual life that gathered around the Globe Theater!

**Printing.** The invention of a practical way of printing, with to us today such cumbersome manipulations of moveable type, was a lightening powerful discovery, which vastly increased the inter-cultural communicative powers of Renaissance culture. The very discovery of the classical world, after all, was based on the new facilities for recording, preserving, and distributing 'ancient texts.' Contemporary writers—imaginative tellers, poets, jurists, moralists and churchmen—now found a venue to which to bring their thoughts and opinions. The opening of a new industry, the book making business, began gradually to add its dynamic to that of the whole society.

**Writers.** Most relevantly, for the history of western European literature, the printing press gave to the emerging body of 'modern' writers, a way in which to embody and share a corporate sense—the community of writers—and to give substance to the beginnings of a culture of readers. By contrast with this opening Renaissance perspective, the mediaeval writer can barely have thought of himself as a 'writer,' and certainly not as a 'mediaeval writer.' The notion of the 'medium aevum,' of the middle age, was not coined and refined until the early Renaissance, by which time writing had become a widespread action in society.

**Diversity.** The great writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries worked on all the major genres, maintained a classical fervor for the epic, especially as it celebrated new nationalisms, opened powers of drama which spoke to a newly gregarious and literate public, and coaxed the lyric into new self-reflective postures.

**Lyrics.** For examples of the latter move, the lyric, we can recall the intimate declarations of love, death-fear, and sense of place, which glisten around the French Pléiade, in particular pervading the mid-sixteenth century French work of Ronsard, DuBellay, and Marot. John Donne, a 'metaphysical' as T.S. Eliot called him, proved the power of lyric intricacy to talk its way through love and death.

**Fiction.** If only to introduce the name of Cervantes, it would be essential to peek into the ripe origins of early Western European fiction. With the *Don Quixote* (1612) Cervantes makes fun of the chivalric hero of late mediaeval romance, and yet he does his job so well that we fall for the humanity of this dreaming idealist. Montaigne's self-awareness is replicated by Don Quixote's inability to act, without thinking of himself as at the same time a comic figure extracted from history.

**Epics.** Gone the Homeric days when the 'epic' was as natural as God's own creation. Present the days when, reaching back to the great Roman self-glorification, Virgil's *Aeneid*, an 'anointed' court poet gives voice to the praises of some majestic leader. From *Os Lusíadas* of Camoens, celebrating the grandeur of the Portuguese Empire in the fifteenth century, to the vast attempt to 'justify the ways of God to man,' in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is a century comfortable with grandeur of concept and the technical afflatus necessary to carry it through, to the level of centuries bursting with new aspirations, and a taste for the glitter of gold.

**Drama.** The sixteenth century is pregnant with significant plays, not only by Elizabethans (Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson)—risking and imaginative in their particularly triumphant century—but by Spaniards like Lope de Vega and Gil Vicente—the latter the Plautus of modern comedy. One can look back from here, over the shoulder, to the miracle and morality plays that served as drama for the Church, for a thousand 'mediaeval' years, and take deep measurement of the distances separating dramatic moments in culture. Not since Athenian tragedy in the fifth century B.C., had there been such intense understanding of the stage, as raised the curtains within the Renaissance theater.

## SEVENTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

**Inquiry.** In an essay from the middle of the sixteenth century Montaigne asks 'que sais-je?', 'what do I know'? He thereby heralds his skepticism—though far it is from cynicism—which is a probing inquiring look at the perplexing world we are placed in. More or less in a similar vein, the other towering intellects of high 17th century literature—Donne, Descartes, Pascal, Bacon, Hobbes—raise searching inquiries into the nature of both nature and of human nature. (One might say that the early modern phase, of western European literature, is a way of restoring reason and balance, after the effervescence of Renaissance culture.).

**Reason.** Montaigne pries apart the secular human person. Reformation and counter-Reformation, swirling around him, raising questions about man's essential nature, broke like waves against a critical mind like Montaigne's, which always raised, about questions of faith and doctrine, examples, questions, and doubts drawn stylishly from everyday life; stylishly, drolly, modestly/immodestly. Descartes and Pascal, writers of great finesse, were at the same time affirmers of the supreme being, God, around the conception of whom they wrote some of their most telling meditations. In a famous riff within his *Pensées*, Pascal invites the thinker, in each of us, to choose between the meaningfulness of a god filled universe and the emptiness of a universe deprived of god. Descartes, like Pascal one of the forwarding geniuses of modern mathematics—worked a sublime god, the perfection of whose being was indirectly substantiated by the formative axioms underlying the algebraic-geometry of its precocious author. Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* accompanies these advances in human and empirical inquiry, by declaring the essential importance, for man in society, of a broad and humane rationalism, which thinks us ahead to the progressive rationalism of the following century—the 'good sense' of a Voltaire or Diderot.

**La Querelle.** The benchmark argument, of this age of new perspectives, and great science, is the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, a running dispute, among the writers and intellectuals of the century, over the relative merits of Ancient literature and culture, and Modern trends in literature and culture. The split comes down to style, in the widest sense. In Spanish, French, and English the Moderns --the *conceptismo* partisans in Spain, the Royal Society in England, the Descartes-followers in France—spoke out for clean language, clear thinking, and an accompanying 'modern perspective'; the supporters of the *Anciens* sustained a traditional view of the Greco Roman heritage, the origin of good thought and solid culture.

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

**Split.** Two major themes divide the literature of the eighteenth century in Western Europe. On the one hand, there is a clear continuation, in 'progressive' and modern thinking, from the daring scientific advances of the previous century into the rationalism that marked much of the literature and thought of the eighteenth century: the thinking of Diderot, de Lamettrie, Voltaire and ultimately Jean Jacques Rousseau, in whom scientific modernism blends with the rare sentimentality we have learned to call Romanticism. On the other hand there are developments in fiction and poetry which can be seen as trends toward Romanticism, thus toward the fierce adulteration of the Enlightenment mode.

**The Encyclopédistes; Rousseau.** Denis Diderot, Voltaire, Jean d'Alembert picked up on the empirical/scientific/social thinking of the previous century. The faith centered perspective of great scientific thinkers like Descartes and Pascal yielded to atheism (or militant skepticism) in the creators— Denis Diderot was the editor in charge-- of the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772), the compendium of human knowledge to that date, and viewable as an *Encyclopedia Britannica* with a strong anti-clerical and populist slant, expressing the views of many of the leading liberal thinkers of Europe's then most idea-driven country, France. The 'rationalism' dominating this seventeen volume text—the *Encyclopédie*-- was by no means sectarian or doctrinaire, and in fact it led creatively, in Jean Jacques Rousseau, a fellow spirit (1712-1778) registering the tenor of the age, into new horizons in pedagogy, psychology of human development, and the origin of human passions.

**Sentiment.** Rousseau blended high sensibility—to nature, to beauty, to curiosity—with a strong literary sense of passion and especially feminine wisdom of the heart. (We might think Goethe --1749-1832—at

this point, for in his youthful shock classic, *Die leiden des jungen Werthers*—1774—he portrays a romantic young man, Werther, for whom the passions of unrequited love lead straight to suicide, and who has the Rousseauian character stamp written all over him. In the earlier part of the century, especially in England, the relatively new literary form of the novel was budding forth to meet a new literate reading public—a rarity still, in European culture—and from that garden of imaginative texts rose innovative and socially oriented works—Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, not to mention the acid and erudite social sweeps undertaken in poetry and memoir by Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, and Jonathan Swift.

## Languages

**Diversity.** With the advent of all the Renaissance meant to western Europe—cities and their packing in of verbal thinkers; Universities and soon printing press facilities, which abet language invention and transmission, even translation; public conflicts of language, such as those touched off by the conflict between the Protestants and Catholics in the Reformation; a great widening of the audience for imaginative literature, and uptick in the population of literary creators, whose business is enriching and reinterpreting language—it is no surprise that the three language phyla we are tracking should have with the climate of the Renaissance confirmed and refined their distinctive characteristics.

**Nationalism.** Another byproduct of the Renaissance, which was certain to shape the way languages evolved during the period, was the growth of nationalism, which involved, in its desire for integrity and independence, the languages central to the nation in question: France and England, especially, were by 1500 administratively independent and proud functioning entities, with armies, universities, law systems; and with all those appurtenances these social power horses prided themselves on a national language and all that went with it. Nothing could more fully have satisfied this ambition than the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) which was compiled and published by Samuel Johnson, and which was devoted to standardizing both English as a language and the ways English 'should be' used. Both England, and France through the *Académie française* (founded 1634), moved to reify the language central to their culture, and thus to establish the national language on a throne.

## Script

**Type.** By the time of the Renaissance the Latin alphabet had diffused widely, proving itself the central vehicle for communication, business, international trade, and the arts of writing. The rapid spread of universities of course promoted the need for an effective alphabet, as well as for the tools that go with it—paper, parchment, pens, notebooks. In all of these services the Latin alphabet evolved into a global usage pad. Nothing was so central to consecrating this alphabet as the printing press, which in the mid-fifteenth century set Europe on fire with new things to do with its collective intelligence. (One struggles still to encompass the implications of movable type, and will struggle longer and harder to understand the implications of the internet.)

**'Hands.'** Within the elite style making fraternities of printers, illustrators, and textual scholars, of Renaissance Italy, followers let's say of the poet Petrarca, there was a turning back to ancient 'hands' in an effort to restore the true classical style, instead of what these modernists considered the dark Gothic writing style of the late Postclassical period. By an accident, however, the Renaissance writing stylists mistook the fine light hand of the Carolingian scribes for the ancient, with the result that the new script forms generated during the Renaissance came to resemble the finest work accomplished at the court of Charlemagne.

**Florence.** Two Florentine friends, secretaries at the Papal Court from 1403, set an enduring style. Poggio Bracciolini blended the rounded lower case letters of the Carolingians with square capitals,

images taken directly from the style of inscriptions on Roman monuments. Niccolo Niccoli, Poggio's friend and fellow stylist, made two innovations: by sloping the pen of the stylist he invented a comfortable script angle, at which it was convenient to establish a bridge from one letter to the next, creating a newly useable *cursive*. The style established by Bracciolini, upright but rounded, morphed into the fifteenth century style called *roman*. Another great Italian printer of the time, Aldus Manutius, seeking for a small sized font in which to print a 'pocket' edition of Virgil, developed a style called *italic*, still in common use at our time. We were, in other words, at a time of high inventiveness for the Latin script. (Our finest historicizing poet, Ezra Pound, makes seminal use of the workshop of Aldus Minutius, in the *Cantos*.)

### Mythology

**Retrospection.** The culture and mythology generated by the early Christian centuries in Scandinavia were longer and more deeply pervasive than, say, the similar cultural products of ancient Greek mythology, which segued fairly neatly into the categories, if never exactly the *espiritu*, of the Roman mind. Thus it was when Scandinavian intellectuals and scholars stepped into the tradition that had been hailed in the two thirteenth century *Eddas*. In 1514, just as the craft of printing was sharing out its transformational energies, the culture of the northern nations was prepared to offer an eager audience for news of the Norse past. In 1514 appeared the first printed edition of the *Gesta Danorum* (*Deeds of the Danes*) written by Saxo Grammaticus in the thirteenth century; in 1555 Olaus Magnus' *History of the Northern People* was printed (in Latin). In Britain, which had during the later middle ages been victim of savage attacks and oppression from Norse invaders, there had long been an awareness of the presence of Norse Runes on the British landscape, as well as of innumerable smaller archeological evidences of a former Norse presence. (Among the interesting mistakes of British antiquaries, in their search for Norse relics, was the attribution of such a structure as Stonehenge to the Norse, or the confusion of Iron Age artefacts with the Norse.)

### Folklore

**Shakespeare.** While the folklore repository of postclassical Britain rested heavily on oral tales and customary rituals, the increasingly literate-verbal period of the Renaissance shifted a lot of the verbal materials of folklore to the brilliant dramas of writing. We need look no farther than Shakespeare, for a verbal world oozing with the juices of the folklore of his time, turned into words: it seems as though Shakespeare never failed to find just the illustration he required in the popular lore for which he had a native instinct. He takes out his pen and it gives birth to fairies, witches, ghosts and demons; birds, animals, plants, insects and reptiles; folk medicine, calendrical customs; rings and precious stones, sports and pastimes; dances, punishments, proverbs; the entire repertoire of the nameable lore of the British folk. Does Shakespeare know he is a folklorist, or is he just a folklorist, from his own brilliant presence to his time?

### Painting

#### Renaissance

**Awakening.** The Renaissance, as we know, is often described as the period of the rediscovery of the ancient classics, and in fact it was a time when, with the advent of the printing press, the growth of cities with their libraries and universities, and the rise of international trade and commerce, new ranges of achievement for the human imagination were swimming into sight. How such ambient circumstances blend with imaginative painting achievements on the ground—Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519); Michelangelo (1475-1564); Raphael (1483-1520); —is the *mystery of a fructuant culture* at its high period—Athens, St. Petersburg, San Francisco, Florence-- when a culture is, as we say today, at its hottest. Let's just say, *something happens*, and within a century painting has become, not just an ancillary art to monumental architecture, certainly not just a stiff posture of hieratic fidelity (the Byzantine saint) but a full expression of a culturally enabled genius, replacing his life with art. Leonardo enables our thinking

of the whole perfection of the human body, updating thereby the deep humanism of a Greek sculptor like Praxiteles, who was part of the background being discovered through the Renaissance; Michelangelo—say in the Sistine Chapel, where he painted out his high period—was devoted to the complex and colorful world of proportions and etherealities that made up his divine faith; Raphael, with a faultless sense of movement-color, was above all a visual master of the Holy Family, but above all of the human face, his portraits compacting in themselves all that his French contemporary, Montaigne, wanted to say about both the nobility and the baseness of the human condition.

**Baroque.** A slider concept, like early modern, may help to carry us over to the deeply different painting world of the Baroque, say 1660—1800. Arrival on those shores will leave us breathless with new scenarios—not only the deep and dark of antiquity expunged, but the struggle of paganism with Christianity on its last legs. A whiff of the great names may have to suffice—Caravaggio, Rubens, Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, Greuze, Watteau—the names of masters of grace—yes, of course, also violence to the fulness of life—grace in the sense that the art which invested these geniuses in lives of artifice, was in fact truly a life in which life and art were intertwined. The tribute to artifice, always implicit in this Baroque period work, always inflects the painter's interest in the real world. One thinks of antique scenes in Lorrain, ports and harbors and misty evening landscapes, or of vast historical conflict of armies and men, in which every tree seems to proclaim *I am a tree Claude painted*; the history of art seemed one with history in actuality.

**Question** A slider concept is useful, but what in fact was going on between Leonardo and Lorrain. Can we say that in those one hundred and fifty years something like a modern world view was being sketched? By the baroque period, the existential immediacy of the Renaissance is absent, that fury of excitement that emerged with the rediscovery of the classical, that is with the energies of an open and intense cultural zone not hampered by religious strictures or social niceties. In place of that immediacy there is now a pulling back from the requirement that the painter should say all and look everything in the face. The pulling back may simply be 'forgetting how to do it,' and needing time, which could be code language for needing revolution, which was not far away.

## Sculpture

**Renaissance** The early period of Renaissance sculpture was firmly built on the work of the High Gothic period, and reflects the same exuberant historical awareness that had preceded it. If anything, the energy of stone creation is higher than before, and the Renaissance reflects in the greatest names of the early period: Ghiberti, Donatello, and Andrea del Verocchio. The period of High Renaissance Sculpture (1490-1530) was dominated by the work of Michelangelo (1475-1564), painter, sculptor, poet, and supreme genius of the Renaissance.

**Baroque.** Growing out from the Renaissance, the Baroque period of sculpture (1600-1700), latching onto the strong Roman Catholic Counter Revolution, with its passion to draw people back to the 'true church,' devoted all its skills to charming and delighting the faithful. Saint Peter's Square was redesigned, under the direction of the greatest sculptor of the time, Bernini, so that the columns embracing Saint Peter's itself seemed to embrace the returning worshipper. Bernini's individual pieces of sculpture, like *The Vanquished Gaul killing himself and his Wife*, captured the sculptural moment in a brilliant instantaneity, an effect both stunning and forward looking—toward increasingly illusionistic work to come in the next centuries. The Baroque, still defining as part of the Renaissance perspective, continues to unfold throughout Europe, as the Renaissance spirit, which took first wing out from north Italy, developed into other cultures which like the Italian were finding new directions in which to win friends spiritually.

**Rococo.** As a reaction against the severity of the baroque, sculptors in France, especially, found their ways to a lighter hearted treatment of painting and sculpture. 1700-1789 marks out the Rococo period, sophisticated and genial, as was the thinking of the court of Louis XIV at Versailles, and readily settling

into academic style solutions. Director of the *Académie Française*, from 1707 on, Guillaume Coustou was the most successful sculptor of the early part of this movement, while a variety of court sculptors, many the favorites of the great ladies of the court, held sway in competition with one another. We might say, in retrospect of the Revolution which was just around the corner, that art was having fun for a hundred years before the blood letting.

**Reflection.** We have been moving fast, from the Neolithic art explosion, 35,000 years ago, through quiet and almost hidden early Christian art, which only gradually—but then unstoppably—outspread into monumental architecture and highly developed sculptures, both free standing and parts of narrative suites, which were to morph toward the muscular power of Renaissance pluri-genius, culminating, we might say, in the supreme works of Michelangelo's sculpture and painting, only to soften out into Baroque and Rococo stages.

**Drivers.** This reflection is about the nature of change in art styles. It could be styles of moral value or of domestic architecture: the central question is the same—what is the driver to change? In art historical development it is as though human consciousness initially hooks itself into a project, like that of transforming nature into some of the metaphorical meanings inherent in nature, and then, once engaged in a segment of the challenge—say the challenge to transform the mere coexisting with caves into the depicting of the cave world—from within the cave—the drive of consciousness prosecutes its effort at 'improvement,' at expressing more fully what it feels it is pursuing, until, at some point, the energy of the quest plays itself out, transforming itself, if that is the way to put it, into its replacement, as Renaissance sculpture, for example, replaces High Gothic which has already expressed what it could of the energy supplied it by its culture.

Architecture

**Mysteries.** The Renaissance, or rebirth, of Classical Culture introduced a significant revision of the Gothic mode in European architecture. As we explore high gothic cathedrals, like Notre Dame or Chartres, we see that they are all about mysterious spaces, dark naves and nooks, places where the spirit can indulge itself in that sense of mystery which for so many Christians, then as now, was an essential part of the religious experience. When we say that the Renaissance was a turn back to classical sensibility—remember the Parthenon, the Zeus temple at Olympia, the temple at Agrigento in Sicily—we mean in part that the clear and balanced lines of the ancient Greek temple were rediscovered, as were the open and sculptured spaces which were transparent to all in the interior of the Renaissance structure. We talk here, then, of a wide variety of building types—under the category of Renaissance—great Basilicas like St. Peter's (construction begun 1506); palazzi, great homes for noble families like the Medici; elite living quarters for people of high substance in the Catholic hierarchy.

**Textbooks.** The repercussions of the printing press made themselves felt throughout the Renaissance of architecture. The order and classical discipline we treasure in Renaissance building construction had its roots in texts which were widely studied, and which established models for architecture. In 1562, Giacomo da Vignola published the influential *Canon of the Five Orders of Architecture*, which was a textbook study designed for the use of architects. Vignola, who had worked on St. Peter's and the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, was a practical architect whose book featured how-to-do examples of column and balustrade construction. A second, and even more influential text of the time was Antonio Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture*, published in 1570. (Palladio was one of the most accomplished practitioners of his time, and his work in the 1550's in Venice, on the churches Il Redentore and San Giorgio Maggiore, establishes Palladio's own principles with stunning clarity.) The windows, doors, and floor plans, on the typical Palladian structure, share an openness, lightness and clarity which forged new directions in architectural history. A particularly well known example, of the rage for the Palladian, was Thomas Jefferson's home in Monticello, based on Palladio's own home, La Rotonda.

## Dance

**Dancing masters.** We often think of the Renaissance as the rebirth of awareness of the ancient classics, which is part of the story. But in subtle ways the Middle Ages, too, became parts of the Renaissance. By the end of the Middle Ages—say the early fifteenth century—the jongleurs of the mediaeval period, who were men of all skills where entertainment was wanted, as dancers, jokesters, stealers, cut ups—think of Jof in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*—these jongleurs were morphing into a new profession, needed from them by the new dance-loving and often quite secular-erotic Italian noblemen, who were ready to employ. This was the profession of dancing master, which will be influential throughout the development of Western European dance history. Throughout the fifteenth century many of these dancing masters, who were often highly educated, wrote manuals on the art of dancing—exercises to improve the dance skills of the nobility. Many of these instructors, incidentally, were Jewish, and brought with them, into Western culture, what we could call the harmonies of today's klezmer band music.

**France and England.** While Italy was the leading force in Renaissance dance development, there were separate and rich traditions developing in France, where from the simple *branle*, a country round dance, there emerged versions of the ballet, and of the pantomime—instance: a dinner ballet, featuring the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece, was performed at the wedding of the Duke of Milan, in 1489. In England the peasant tradition of bumptious round dances was persistent, while the court showed a thorough understanding of European dance styles, to which they hewed in grand masques or royal festivals. Queen Elizabeth I was an enthusiast for English country dance, and was gifted at dancing the galliard and the volt, leaping country dances in which the two dance partners clung tightly to each other. It was not long, be it said, until France itself opened the new direction for dance, the ballet, in courtly performances, often including the Royal Majesties, danced to the celebration of its own harmony, and of the harmony for which France—then torn apart by civil wars—had great need.

**Ballet**, as it happened, was a rich point of departure for the development of dance in Western Europe. Slipping into the seventeenth century we find that not only ballet, but house-party entertainments, and show-off occasions for debutantes were all surrounded by the display of dance. It was in this environment that Moliere's dancing master mocks himself, when addressing M. Jourdain, in *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670):

*There is nothing so necessary to human beings as the dance...Without the dance a man would not be able to do anything...All the misfortunes of man, all the baleful reverses with which histories are filled, the blunders of politicians and the failures of great leaders, all this is the result of not knowing how to dance...*

**Minuet** was the dance form most ready to follow the preparations laid for it by the country dances of England and France, by pantomimes such as flourished at the courts of England and France, by great balls and festivals in the courts of the Italian nobility during the Renaissance. The minuet, a gentle-stepped position-exchange among the powerful and elegant; what could better have typified the stability of the old order, a stability toward which the court dancing of the fifteenth century was a prelude; what could more fatefully have symptomized the Falling of the old Social Political Order, which was to be manifest in Western Europe by the end of the eighteenth century?

## Music

### RENAISSANCE

Cities like Dijon and the court of Burgundy were by the fifteenth century rich centers of musical entertainment—that is essential parts of cultured living among the higher, and more sensitive, aristocracy; generally centers where an acclaimed musical group would take up temporary residence, bringing its instruments with it. It is hard to locate a Renaissance for Western European music history, in the senses in which it applies to a rather distinct period for the history of European painting or literature; and yet the growth of cultural matrices like the two mentioned sites above is so widely spread, throughout the Europe of the late fifteenth century, that we can usefully call this period the Renaissance. It was the foundation for

a rapid uptick in secular music—of course the mass-centered music of the High Christian period was no longer hot—with much of singing madrigal, and finally the wonderful new discoveries among instruments, and the ways in which the technology of making new instruments—organ, stringed keyboard instruments—led to the discovery of new musics for the mind to do with those instruments.

## SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

**Baroque.** The baroque era (1600-1750) introduced a critical turn in musical practice in Western Europe. In short, the system of musical modes, which was based on the eight principal church services of each year, was replaced, as the wear and tear of time and new expressive needs pushed it aside; that mode system found itself replaced by a system of tonality which would shape Western music until at least 1900, a new system based on 'contrasting keys, or sets of interrelated notes and chords deriving from a major or minor scale.'

**Opera.** Opera, a manifestation both of ancient text, and new tonality, was one of the first dramatic expressions of what we would be most comfortable calling the Renaissance in Western Music, for the opera forged in that period of discovery and risk has remained one of the vivid hallmarks of our entire musical background. The impulse into opera was given by the early seventeenth century Camerata group in Florence. Foremost among the composers close to this group was Monteverdi, who himself wrote two operas—*Orfeo*, 1607; *L'arianna*, 1608—before returning to Venice. The masters of French opera, which characteristically exploited dance sequences and strongly emotional episodes from Greek mythology, were Jean-Baptiste Lully and Jean-Philippe Rameau. England gave the world Henry Purcell, with his *Dido and Aeneas* and other masque-like opera forms. Important to say, in this context, is that other singing and instrumental forms—like the cantata and oratorio—were simultaneously pulling in widening audiences, from among the newly moneyed middle class that was starting to announce itself throughout Europe, in the mid-seventeenth century. The same groups, baptized now into a taste for the new kinds of composition made possible by new kinds of instruments, proved now equally susceptible to those new forms of instrumental composition, the *sonata* and *concerto*, which were beginning to feature in many public venues, and which were to feature as major cultural display cases until our day. Antonio Vivaldi was among the many geniuses of this new form of growingly personal (but infinitely shaded) instrumental entertainment.

**Bach and Handel.** With these two German composers, each born in 1685 in the same part of Germany, both reared as organists in the Lutheran Church, the brilliance of the baroque became both intense and mature: Handel, because of his training in Italy, went into dramatic works—secular cantatas, opera, oratorio—especially after he moved his life to England; Bach, who was lifelong employed as an organist, by the Lutheran Church, tended to work within those spiritual terms, excelling in 'passions, cantatas for church services, liturgical organ pieces, and harpsichord compositions, many instructional in purpose.' This last rider takes us to the mysterious heart of the work of Bach, arguably (the humble editor opines) the climax of Western musical achievement. One might say that the rigor of the originally mediaeval effort to adjust tropes and scrutinize notational values falls, with Bach, into the more advanced tonal system that had developed with the Renaissance, and that had opened the expressive ground for the finest of spiritualities working in the confines of an immaculately precise productive system.

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

**Rococo.** The Rococo style, thriving on the increasing richness of instrumental possibilities, and the growing finesse of audience attention, opened out into the eighteenth century with particular aplomb in Germany, where one of Johann Sebastian Bach's son, Carl Philip Emmanuel, helped to motivate the 'sentimental style' movement, within the framework of what was coming to be called Rococo. This style foregrounded the subtle dance impulses coming from France, and the inheritance of Father Bach's rich spirituality. The German century of genius, out and around this growing rococo tradition, was to bring to full expression the work of German composers who were flourishing by the second half of the eighteenth century; for the first time in western music history instruments, and not human voices, were serving as the main drivers of new work. In the at that time highly favored movement within German musical creativity, we were already familiarizing ourselves with creators like Joseph Hayden, and with the young Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), who (like his literary contemporary,

Johann Goethe) was to overlap the classical and the romantic expressions of his time, if not erase the release of time-bonding altogether, in the case of the greatest music.

**The symphony.** In a music creativity world in which sonatas, trios, piano concertos, and symphonies were the chief attention, the symphony gradually moved to front rank, for social relevance, and availability to deep and complex expression. It was not long before the symphony, in the hands of powerful conductors, and composers like Beethoven, took over the task of representing large cultural waves, and at least aspired to providing a voice for its time. (It was for this kind of claimed grandeur of articulateness that the philosopher Hegel admired the Beethoven symphony as a true historical action.) At the same time the symphony rises to the eighteenth century's highest level of claim and aspiration, intimate counterpart forms, like that of the originally eighteenth century chamber music quartet, to our day remain a factor in in-house musical entertainment in Europe.

Theatre

## RENAISSANCE

**Commedia dell' arte.** From 1575 on, originating in Italy, the *Commedia dell'arte* was a loosely organized actor-centered kind of theatrical movement, which made its way across Europe—let's say a far more urban and sophisticated folk theater move than that of the fairly disorganized and folksy bands of jongleurs and comedians who had for centuries provided a base level of entertainment for country Europeans. The *commedia* plays utilized stock characters—the *lover*, the *master*, the *servant*—involving a cast of thirteen or fourteen, who took a share of the company's profits—whose fortunes and slapstick misfortunes became stock material for 'the masses' in the following centuries, and who remain til today reminders of the great comedic traditions of Plautus.

**Playhouses.** Building on many native theatrical traditions, and meeting entertainment needs in the more cohesive and sophisticated cities, 'companies of players'—or equivalents in other countries than Britain—were formed, attached to the households of leading aristocrats—as inhouse performers. So much appreciated were these relatively proficient actors, something new, that the older acting groups, were banned and labelled 'vagabonds.' In this case the special patronage of the Queen, Elizabeth I, was important in supporting the new acting companies. Theaters sprang up in the suburbs of major cities, from London to Paris. The popularity of this new form of entertainment—after all we're talking about Elizabethan drama in England, and one of the world's most creative stage moments—was high throughout the sixteenth century. It was a period during which Shakespeare and Marlowe, to name only two of many brilliant writers, showed how to be both a popular dramatist and a complex, erudite, and potently imaginative playwright, touching the farthest limits of human thought in speech. It was a period of seeming incandescent power but it ran out into the roadblock of the Puritan Revolution, and of the powerful contempt of Charles I for anything like public entertainment; in 1642, at the outbreak of the English Civil War, the performance of all plays was banned within the city of London.

## SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

**Restoration.** With the end of the Civil War (1642-1651) the Restoration Theater—Congreve and Wycherley will spring to mind—was ready to make its own of the thriving British theater of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that point-- the greatest period of truly people-based, genius-led, widely ranging theater in British history comes to a sliding transition. But it is at that point that we need to step back, for there is no limiting ourselves to the story in England.

**Spain and France**—whose theatrical greatness belong to the same brilliant rush of discovery which had bowled us over when we discovered Shakespeare, Marlowe, or Kyd—were deploying their theatrical mastery at the same time that the British were creating a new dramatic world around the Globe Theater, in the sixteenth century. In France, Moliere, (1622-1673), Corneille (1606-1684), and Racine (1639-1699); in Spain Lope de Vega (1562-1635) and Calderon de la Barca (1600-1681): both sets of names reference powerful theatrical minds which share with Shakespeare their intrepid grasp of the whole strange human adventure, and do so in poetic language which is at the same intertwined with the rough

hewn street base of the writer's language. Never before, since ancient Athenian audiences gathered in outside theaters for awe of their great tragedians, has civic culture aligned so deeply with artistic power.

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

**Bourgeoisie.** The middle class began to replace the aristocracy—which was itself declining as a social force—and to require entertainment that reflected its own values. Hundreds of new theaters were built across Europe at this time--Milan's La Scala opera house, completed in 1778, provided room for more than 2000 spectators--and in lieu of great dramatists there was a fervent theatrical industry, with acting companies, distinguished actors, and various kinds of popular spectacle, to meet the leading requirements of the time. Spectacles—what were called 'English opera'--were immensely popular, and enthralled audiences with their carnivalesque showmanship, magic tricks, flying actors and fireworks; the Disneyesque crowd pleasers of the eighteenth century stage throughout Europe.

**Audiences.** (Many audiences—higher in class and education—who had sucked in their breath at the elegance, or the careful irony, of Moliere, were now content with the *drame bourgeois* of Diderot the encyclopédiste, the sharp edged satirical dramas of Voltaire, or the tearful, and ultimately feel-good comedies of Colly Cibber in England. What may have fallen short in inherent artistic power, on the eighteenth century stage, was compensated by the great acting of geniuses like David Garrick, the greatest of interpreters of Shakespeare, who became Manager of the Drury Lane Theater in London, setting as he did demanding new standards for stagecraft and décor—and, in a move typical of the time, clearing the spectators off the stage, as Voltaire had also done in France.

**Sturm und Drang.** Achievements were boiling on the German stage where the *Sturm und Drang* movement was taking the sentimental turn of French and English drama into far deeper and nobler perspectives, frequently harking back to the Greek foundations, and making the verse theater of such as Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller into masterpieces of world theater.

## WORLDVIEW

### Philosophy

#### EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

**Renaissance.** The Renaissance, 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, introduces a new set of perspectives into Western European philosophy. By this time—a time when the actual manuscripts of Greco Roman thought are being unearthed, when major universities are introducing higher culture in the new cities, when secular world views are proliferating, and the Church is compromising or being ignored—by this time a range of new philosophies is spreading throughout western Europe. Travel becomes easier, there is more money to spend on personal development, and the first steps toward scientific experiment are being taken.

**Humanism.** In the thinking of such men as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Michel de Montaigne (1533--1592) we meet the Humanistic vigor of a fresh period in thought: both men fully committed to a human universe--sceptical believers you might call them--and restlessly inquiring into man's possibilities for self-understanding and social coherence. Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605), for example, is an ardent plea to the King of England, to support scientific and artistic inquiry among his people. The Church is no longer, for such a thinker as Bacon, the main shaper of thoughts, as it had been in the Middle Ages. Nor is Church doctrine intimately involved with the evolution of thought, or the life and teaching of Jesus taken so singly as the example for human ethic and social behavior. Montaigne, in his essays, looks at himself as an historically conditioned creature, with intermixed faults and virtues, and in the same way looks outward like an anthropologist, to take an interest in other men in other cultures, even to dandle fascination with the noble savage, a cultural import from Europe's growing 'understanding' of the Americas.

**Mind.** Many factors contribute to a new and vigorous flowering of philosophical thought in the West, during the centuries we call the Renaissance. These centuries saw the reawakening of interest in the

secular classics of the ancient Greco Roman world, in the actual reading of those texts, and in the incorporation of them into University curricula. The replacement or reshaping of Christian theology marks much of the most forceful thought of the time, as does the turn toward 'science,' which in the seventeenth century leads the way to fundamental new perceptions of the cosmos.

**New philosophies.** The determinant philosophies, of the mature passage into early modern thought, are those that kick in toward the end of that seventeenth century which was opened by such as Montaigne and Bacon. We come onto the moments of Rene Descartes (1596-1650.) or Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who exposed self, thought, and society to lucid scrutiny as free as they could make it from 'inherited prejudices.' Descartes, for whom 'je pense, donc je suis' heralds the inroads of epistemology, over against the ghosts of theology, brings together the genius of mathematical reason with brilliant inspection, seeking to know 'myself or the great book of the world.' Hobbes turns a pessimistic and searching insight onto the nature of the state, and of man's greed for power.

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

**Enlightenment.** The eighteenth century has commonly been designated The Enlightenment. During that period in Europe the liberation of thought, from inherited 'prejudices,' became a banner for the fresh breezes of 'progress.' Far in the past was the recourse to holy scripture, or to theology based on it. Spinoza (1632-1677) and Leibniz (1646-1716) created vast intellectual structures in which to formulate scientifically and mathematically coherent images of the human universe and our prospects in it. Locke (1632-1704), Hume (1711-1776), and Kant (1724-1804) all addressed the human mind from the view point of its limitations and potentials, wishing us well as minds reshaping a meaningful universe without the direct impact of its creator.

**Kant.** For each of these three thinkers is the critical climate so maturing, that they bring into view comprehensive glimpses of the power locked in the very limitations of man's mind as knowing. (Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is an ultimate in this adventure of learning blended with intellectual strictures. Immanuel Kant devoted his three *Critiques* (*Pure Reason*, 1781; *Practical Reason*, 1788; *Judgment*, 1790) to the issue of the possibility of knowledge, and carried us to an altitude from which we can perceive both our limitations and our ultimate powers of understanding. So rich is the development of philosophy, in these western generations, that the West (and by increments the global community) is manifestly starting to feel a new synthesis on the horizon. Such a synthesis—universal perspectives on the human condition—is already adumbrated in the *Encyclopedia* of Hegel (1817), with its effort to synthesize all human knowledge as living philosophy.

## Religion

By the time of its fullest mediaeval development, more than a millennium after the death of its salvation figure, the Catholic Christian church had elaborated its theology, down to the fine points, deeply remodeled the structure of daily life for its believers, and in important ways modified (or distorted) the teachings of its founder and of its most luminous apologists. With the opening up of the early modern world, with its broad and competitive perspectives, it was to be expected that the capital conflicts which drove society would also find their expression in new religious directions within that society. The most vivid proof of that justification was to be found in the Protestant Reformation, which attempted to redirect the essentials of the Christian religion.

**Dissatisfaction.** Early modern religion in Western Europe comes down to a long drawn out conflict between the Catholic Church and the protests raised against it, for corruption, complacency, and immodest manipulation of its flock. Church reformers, both within and without the Catholic Church, had abounded in western Europe for more than a century prior to the date by which we mark the 'formal beginning of the Reformation, the posting of ninety-five theses by Martin Luther, in 1517, or the Catholic response to that hammer attack, the Holy Roman Emperor's *Edict of Worms*, 1521, condemning and threatening Martin Luther for his Theses. (Among the names of the earliest protestors we should mention Arnold of Brescia, Jan Hus, John Wycliffe, and Girolamo Savonarola—churchmen all, from diverse communions, joined in a demand for house cleaning in Rome.

**Protest.** Martin Luther himself was an Augustinian monk—also a professor of theology—whose highly critical views of the Catholic Church of his time were intended as critiques from within. (The critiques he raised were simply protests, over a wide variety of abusive profit-making offers-- the sale of indulgences (reduced time in purgatory,) the priority given to law and sacraments, over against scripture; the mistaken emphasis on good works, rather than faith alone, as the path to salvation). Luther had for a long time no desire to overthrow, but only to reform, and yet the sharply reprimanding response of the Catholic Church—in its *Edict of Worms*, 1521, set the battle lines between Pope and Reformers, lines which would string out into the nineteenth century, as Catholics and soon-called Protestants would by turns diversify and then mollify their causes for disagreement. In other words, a demand for housecleaning, from within the Catholic Church, was to prove a recruiting move for all kinds of dissension against the institution which had been the backbone of Western European religion, since the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in the fifth century.

**Counter-reformation.** From within the Catholic Church there came a Counter-Reformation movement, which developed sharply by the mid-sixteenth century. The Augsburg Confession (1530), the Council of Trent (1535); both hierarchy-heavy pronouncements doubled down on the issues of reform from within, and hostility toward, the rigidifying position of the 'Protestants.' On the geopolitical level Europe was to remain largely Catholic until the 19th century—northern Europe largely shifting toward the new Protestant sects of Christianity, while Catholicism dominated the South. Catholicism, as we soon see, found itself in continuing inner conflict, over its response to the ever more complex and secular demands of society, while Protestantism generated a variety of new sect-faces—Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals—as new faith and attitude groups made space for the distinctive versions of Christological Christianity to which they remained true.

Science

## EARLY MODERN PERIOD

**Transition.** The period we leave, at this point, is carelessly called 'the dark Ages,' a misnomer given the energy of study, not to mention the splendor of art and music, expended during the 'mediaeval' period, the 'period in between antiquity and the modern,' as it was viewed by many historians, from the eighteenth century on. The period we enter, correspondingly, is only by convention described as a Renaissance, a rebirth for the energetic opening out of the classics, the construction of real cities, the advancement of a nascent urban economy with ever more active trade—for indeed the makings of this situation were already to hand in the Late Middle Ages—for just those areas of trade, economy, international interactions, empirical investigation, which typically characterize the Renaissance.

**Issues.** Many of the questions of natural science, which concerned late mediaeval thinkers, flowed into the thought of the early Renaissance: one packet of concerns involves the trajectory of moving bodies, and the ambience of projection, resistance, and diversion which wants describing in any account of those bodies. Early Renaissance science, along with Grosseteste and Bacon, was one in excluding, from an account like the above, any reference to supernatural causality. The continuity of ages was just starting to weld together when the Black Plague (1348) came along and wiped out one third of the population of Europe. The thinking through of scholastic issues, such as the above, gave way after the disaster of plague to what we identify as a typical Renaissance fascination, with the wonder of mankind in a world no longer as directly shadowed by its creator.

**Sequences.** By the fifteenth century the Arab and Greek cultural wealth of Byzantium had begun to pass the Bosphorus heading west, into the hands of Western European scholars, especially in Northern Italy. And there was other, and abundant, evidence that the world was changing, that man's capacity to analyze and contextualize natural phenomena was growing. The seventeenth century willingness to think along the edges of new concepts was startling, and self-generating; with the increasing subsidization, and effectiveness of scientific undertakings—Vesalius *On the Workings of the Human Body*; *On planetary revolutions*, by Copernicus; Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*; Galileo, *Dialogue concerning the two chief world systems*. Wherever the observant student turned, by the end of the

seventeenth century, there were active investigations into realms of nature which required access by increasingly refined methods and tools.

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

**Advances.** Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (mid eighteenth century) incorporated his century's headlong fidelity to the achievements of the preceding two centuries, and ushered in a period of mathematics, physics, and technology—Euler (infinitesimal calculus); Lomonosov, (conservation of mass in chemical reactions); d'Alembert (fluid mechanics; musical tonality)—these men were simply part of a phalanx of eighteenth century thinkers who were to herald in the evolved mathematical, biological, and cosmological thinking of the following two centuries.

**Society.** By the eighteenth century the major advances of science—in astronomy, medicine, physics—were not only factors of seemingly endless promise, but were diffusing into society, and meeting with a new audience of (in nascent form) popularized consumers. By an oversimplification, we might say that eighteenth century science, in Western Europe, was less original than seventeenth century science—the age of the worldview-changing studies of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton—or than will be the giant astronomical and medical strides made by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; but then we would need to add that eighteenth century Western European science was a period of absorption, of the huge strides of its predecessors, and of plateau laying for its future. Broadly speaking the West European society was in the eighteenth century being acculturated to the new world of experimental science, of a universe orderly but god-free, of institutions—like monarchy and the Church—which were essentially fossils, and of course relatively 'understood' at last, so that man and society could be as enlightened as allowable for them.

**Advances** in scientific theory and practice were of course not stalled, during the century which preceded the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. Those significant advances—in math and physics, in medicine and biology, in the understanding of electricity—were themselves fed into the growing *awareness* of the sciences, which was finding its way out to a broad public—a public of rapidly growing literacy, of increased mutual interaction, and of ever higher expectations, for the quality of its daily life. This growing public was one in which university level education was increasing rapidly, in which Academies of Learning were springing up throughout Europe, in which public lectures—widespread, from coffeehouses to municipal centers—were becoming a part of civic life, in which dictionaries and encyclopedias were available in bookstores and libraries, and in which popular books on Newton's laws of physics were available around the corner.

**Universities.** Science (physics, chemistry, geology, zoology, anatomy) was typically taught, in 1700, under the heading of natural philosophy—in the one hundred and five Universities open in Europe. In these Universities not only were 'the sciences' taught, but the lectures given were typically—as had not prior to 1700 been the case—accompanied with lab demonstrations, part of the bringing home to the culture the actual practices of the sciences. Throughout the nations of the continent, Universities began to assume specialized roles: in France the instruction in science was increasingly carried out by Academies, like the French Academy of Sciences; in England Newtonian physics became a favored topic at the University of Cambridge, while the Scottish universities were renowned for medical studies; German universities became renowned for the liberty they provided their science faculty to plan their own courses: in return for which there was already a strong implicit demand for faculty research and writing in the sciences.

**Academies and Journals.** Mention was made of the French Academy of Sciences. The fact is that academies of and for scientific learning and sharing were surging upward in all the major capitols and university strongholds throughout Europe. With that rapid growth developed a market and taste for learned journals, by which by century's end every branch of science was able to find specialized expression, and to introduce itself, so to speak, to the ever larger reading public.

**Dictionaries and encyclopedias.** As with journals, encyclopedias and dictionaries began to occupy the shelves of bookstores, as well as of privileged private homes. (The same comfortable residents were by

this century likely to be daily readers of the newspapers which were now the talk of the town in the cafes of all large European cities.) For sake of example, and because the example was of worldwide importance, one can think of the *Encyclopédie* (*Encyclopedia or explanatory dictionary of sciences, arts, and crafts*), which was edited (and in part written) by Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert, and which began publication in 1751. The final publication consisted of 71,000 separate entries, and was distributed over thirty five volumes. Many of the entries dealt with specifics of sciences and crafts, so that the work as a whole could be used both as a scientific reference work and as part of a continuous text dealing with the acquisition of knowledge by the animal man.