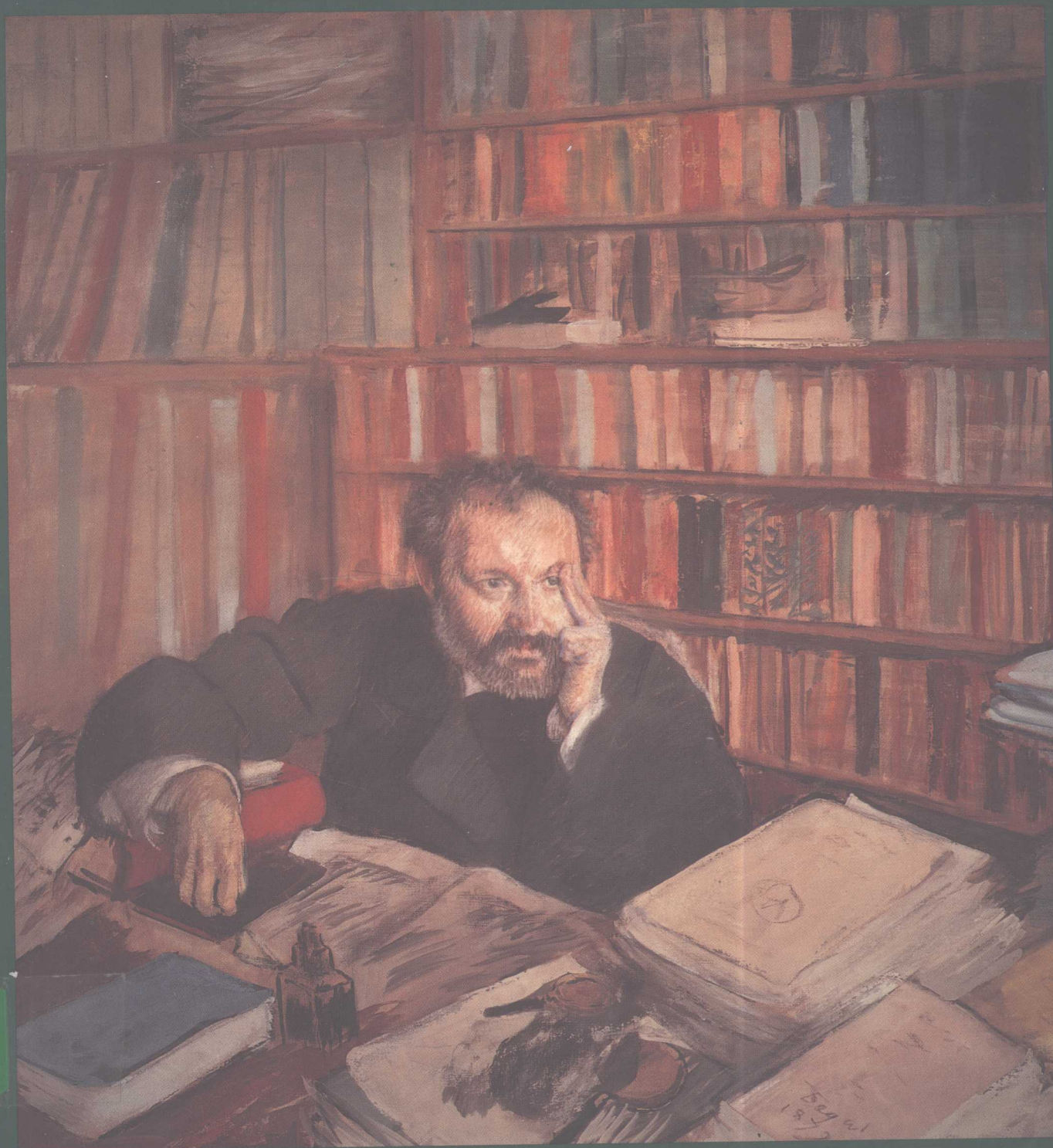


READINGS IN

VOLUME II

The Western Humanities

FOURTH EDITION



Roy T. Matthews

F. DeWitt Platt

READINGS IN THE WESTERN HUMANITIES Volume II

Fourth Edition

Edited by

ROY T. MATTHEWS

F. DEWITT PLATT

Michigan State University



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READINGS IN THE WESTERN HUMANITIES, VOLUME II

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

7 8 9 0 MAL/MAL 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN 0-7674-1597-3

Sponsoring editor, Holly J. Allen; production editor, Deneen M. Sedlack; manuscript editor, Kay Mikel; design manager, Jean Mailander; text designer, Jean Mailander; cover designer, Violeta Díaz; manufacturing manager, Danielle Javier. The text was set in 9/11 Palatino by Archetype Book Composition and printed on 45# Re-Comm Matte by Malloy Lithographing, Inc.

Cover credit: *Portrait of Edmond Duranty*. 1879. Edgar Degas. Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Scotland/© Bridgeman Art Library. (tempura, w/c and pastel on linen)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Readings in the Western humanities / edited by Roy T. Matthews,
F. DeWitt Platt.—4th ed.

p. cm.
"Volumes 1-2."

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7674-1596-5 (v. 1).—ISBN 0-7674-1597-3 (v. 2)

1. Civilization, Western—History—Sources. I. Matthews, Roy T.

II. Platt, F. DeWitt.

CB245.R39 2000

909'.09821—dc21

00-023187

CIP

www.mhhe.com

PREFACE



We are pleased once again to present this new edition—the fourth—of *Readings in the Western Humanities*. From its inception this anthology was designed to complement our textbook, *The Western Humanities*, currently also in its fourth edition, and both books continue to reflect the educational ideal of the nineteenth-century poet and critic Matthew Arnold—that to be truly educated, students need to be exposed to “the best that has been thought and said.” Now, more than ever before, we are convinced that this ideal offers the best alternative to the cultural forces threatening to engulf our era and isolate people from their historical roots. The forces we refer to are a cyberspace culture divorced from history and a mass culture catering to the lowest common denominator. This anthology will give students an understanding of the West’s literary and philosophical heritage and thereby empower them to expand their horizons and establish vital linkages to the great achievements of the constantly evolving Western tradition.

That tradition, beginning in about 3000 B.C. and developed over five thousand years, consists of a vast, diverse, and complex group of literary and philosophical writings. To keep this anthology to a manageable length, we have kept two principles in mind as we made our selections: include works that have significantly influenced Western culture, and offer as many diverse and representative voices as possible. The readings, placed in chronological order, are arranged in twenty-one chapters, just as is *The Western Humanities*, and divided into two volumes. Volume I covers ancient Mesopotamia through the Renaissance; Volume II, the Renaissance through the twentieth century.

Volume II of the fourth edition retains many of the selections found in previous editions, but about one-fourth of the selections are new to this edition. New authors and their works include selections from *The Commentaries*, the memoirs of Pius II, the outstanding Renaissance pope; the poetry of Gaspara Stampa, the finest Italian woman poet of the Italian Renaissance; Martin Luther’s “Ninety-Five Theses,” the document that sparked the Protestant Reformation; Galileo Galilei’s *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems—Ptolemaic and Copernican*, one of the defining works of the Scientific Revolution; the poetry of William Butler Yeats, one of the founders of literary Modernism; Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a central text in aestheticism and the Decadent cult; and *The Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison, the first African American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. To make room for this new material, we deleted the selections by Henry David Thoreau, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Kenzaburo Oe, Michel Foucault, Milan Kundera, and Francis Fukuyama. We captured additional space by reducing the length of the selections by Virginia Woolf and James Baldwin and by deleting Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* while keeping in place the excerpt from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

A second major change involved replacing old materials with new selections that we thought more representative of a particular author. Hence, we replaced a poem by Aphra Behn

with an excerpt from *Oroonoko*, a short story that is an ancestor of the modern novel; we exchanged Walt Whitman's poem eulogizing Lincoln for sections from "Song of Myself," a poem showing the author's typically sensual vocabulary; and, in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, we selected Molly's monologue, a classic example of stream-of-consciousness writing, in place of the relatively obscure episode known as Proteus.

We also chose new and better translations for two selections: Voltaire's *Candide*, by Lowell Bair, and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, by Francis Steegmuller. These translations are rendered in language that we believe American students will find more accessible than that used in the previous edition. In a survey of teachers of French literature in translation, Steegmuller's version of *Madame Bovary* was voted the best available.

* * *

We want to express our appreciation to Holly Allen, our sponsoring editor, who made the initial project possible and who continues to support our work. We also thank Kay Mikel, the copy-editor, whose well-trained eye has saved us from many mistakes. Special thanks go to Deneen Sedlack for shepherding the manuscript through the various production stages. To our former humanities students at Michigan State University who served as guinea pigs for most of the anthology's selections, we offer our gratitude; their informed responses helped hone the way we interpret literature and philosophy. If our headnotes are clear and apposite, then part of the praise must be shared with those students.

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11

THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

Return to Classical Roots

1400–1494



PIUS II

Selection from *The Commentaries*

Aeneas Sylvius (Enea Silvio) Piccolomini (1405–1464), who became Pius II, was born into an impoverished aristocratic Italian family. He struggled to receive a humanistic education and pursued studies in civil law in Siena. These studies would be the foundation of his understanding of history, the realities of politics and power, and human behavior. With his talent for writing, Aeneas in his youth dashed off a racy love novel and later in his life composed poems, a play, several popular histories, a study of geography, and *The Commentaries*. He combined the teachings of the ancients with his Christian faith during this transitional period that witnessed the end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the modern world. In essence, Piccolomini personified the Renaissance Man through his Classical learning. He used both his reason and his faith to survive in an uncertain world and a changing society and to comprehend life and the human experience.

As a young man Aeneas served as secretary to several cardinals, attended church councils, and traveled on diplomatic missions across Europe. After sharpening his oratorical skills and observing ecclesiastical politics, he went to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III in 1442, where he was crowned poet laureate. He also worked, without much success, to heal divisions within the church; however, he did settle some differences between a group of German princes and the pope. While in Austria, in 1446, Aeneas took sacred orders, a step that increased his opportunities for a career in the church. In the service of Frederick III he gained an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Holy Roman Empire, the complexities of European diplomacy, and the importance of the military—invaluable knowledge and experience that he drew on as pope.

In 1447, a year after his ordination as priest, Aeneas was made a bishop and continued to practice his diplomatic skills, now in the service of the church. Pope Calixtus III soon rewarded him with a cardinalate. Upon the death of Calixtus III in 1458 Aeneas was elected pope, taking the name Pius II—the name he chose either in memory of Pius I, the early Christian martyr, or Pius Aeneas, Vergil's hero (see the selection from *The Aeneid*) and a model for Renaissance scholars.

Pius II put his energies and experiences to the church's advantage. He methodically won control of the Papal States and thwarted the French from seizing the Kingdom of Naples. He strengthened the papacy by asserting its supremacy over any church council and by forcing Louis XI, the king of France, to give up certain claims over the church. Aware of the menace of the Turks, particularly after they took Constantinople in 1453, Pius II worked to launch a crusade

against them in 1464. He assembled a small group of soldiers and sailors in Ancona on the east coast of Italy, where he died before he could set sail for Turkey.

Pope for only six years, he reformed certain religious orders and brought the conciliar movement under control. Pius II also held onto the papal lands and extended the church's influence in European relations. As a student and supporter of humanistic studies, he patronized the new learning. His enduring legacy is *The Commentaries*, memoirs that provide much information on life in fifteenth-century Europe and glimpses into the mind and character of a pivotal figure in these times.

Reading the Selection

The Commentaries, which Pius II wrote while pope, focus primarily on the political, military, and diplomatic conflicts that beset Italy and Europe in the fifteenth century. The church's control over affairs was in decline, and the old medieval kingdoms were disintegrating. At the same time new states of various sizes, including the Italian city-states, small principalities, and the early modern nation-states, were emerging. Interspersed in the narrative of these dramatic changes are the author's observations on friends and enemies, his comments on daily events, and his general thoughts on life. *The Commentaries*, originally written in Latin and recorded in thirteen books, have been translated into five volumes. In this excerpt taken from Book I, Pius II records the final stages leading up to his election as pope and the impact of this news on the crowds in Rome. In a manner typical of his style, Pius II describes these events in the third person.



When the result of the scrutiny was made known, it was found, *as we have said before*, that nine cardinals (Genoa, Orsini, Lerida, Bologna, San Marco, Santi Quattro Coronati, Zamora, Pavia, and Portugal) had voted for Aeneas; the Cardinal of Rouen had only six votes, and the rest were far behind. *Rouen was petrified when he saw himself so far outstripped by Aeneas and all the rest were amazed, for never within the memory of man had anyone polled as many as nine votes by scrutiny.* Since no one had received enough votes for election, they decided to resume their seats and try the method that is called "by accession," to see if perhaps it might be possible to elect a pope that day. *And here again Rouen indulged in empty hopes.* All sat pale and silent in their places as if entranced. For some time no one spoke, no one opened his lips, no one moved any part of his body except the eyes, which kept glancing all about. It was a strange silence and a strange sight, *men sitting there like their own statues; no sound to be heard, no movement to be seen.* They remained thus for some moments, those inferior in rank waiting for their superiors to begin the accession.

Then Rodrigo, the Vice-Chancellor, rose and said, "I accede to the Cardinal of Siena," *an utterance which was like a dagger in Rouen's heart, so pale did he turn.* A silence followed and each man looking at his neighbor, began to indicate his sentiments by gestures. By this time it looked as if Aeneas would be pope and some, fearing this result, left the conclave, *pretending physical needs, but really with the purpose of escaping the fate of that day.* Those who thus withdrew were the Cardinals of Ruthen and San Sisto.

However, as no one followed them, they soon returned. Then Jacopo, Cardinal of Sant' Anastasia, said, "I accede to the Cardinal of Siena." *At this all appeared even more stunned, like people in a house shaken by unprecedented earthquakes, and lost the power of speech.*

Aeneas now lacked but one vote, for twelve would elect a pope. Realizing this, Cardinal Prospero Colonna thought that he must get for himself the glory of announcing the pope. *He rose and was about to pronounce his vote with the customary dignity, when he was seized by the Cardinals of Nicaea and Rouen and sharply rebuked for wishing to accede to Aeneas.* When he persisted in his intention, they tried to get him out of the room by force, resorting even to such means to snatch the papacy from Aeneas. But Prospero, who, though he had voted for the Cardinal of Rouen on his ballot, was nevertheless bound to Aeneas by ties of old friendship, *paid no attention to their abuse and empty threats.* Turning to the other cardinals, he said, "I too accede to the Cardinal of Siena and I make him pope." When they heard this, *the courage of the opposition failed and all their machinations were shattered.*

All the cardinals immediately fell at Aeneas's feet and saluted him as Pope. Then they resumed their seats and ratified his election without a dissenting vote. At this point Bessarion, Cardinal of Nicaea, speaking for himself and for the others who had voted for the Cardinal of Rouen, said, "Your Holiness, we approve your election, which we do not doubt is of God. We thought before and still think that you are worthy of this office. The reason we did not vote for you was your infirmity. We thought your gout the one thing against you; for the Church needs an active man who has the physical strength to take long journeys and

meet the dangers which we fear threaten us from the Turks. You on the contrary need rest. It was this consideration that won us to the side of the Cardinal of Rouen. If you were physically strong, there is no one we should have preferred. But, since God is satisfied, we must needs be satisfied too. *God Himself, who has chosen you, will make good the defect in your feet and will not punish our ignorance.* We revere you as Pope, we elect you again, so far as is in our power, and we will serve you faithfully."

Aeneas answered, "Your Eminence of Nicaea, your opinion of us, as we understand it, is much higher than our own, when you attribute to us no defect except that in our feet. We are not ignorant that our imperfection is more general and we realize that our failings, which might justly have caused us to be rejected as pope, are almost innumerable. As to any virtues which might raise us to this post, we know of none; and we should declare ourselves utterly unworthy and should refuse the honor offered us, if we did not fear the judgment of Him Who has called us. For what is done by two thirds of the sacred college, that is surely of the Holy Ghost, which may not be resisted. Therefore we obey the divine summons and we praise you, Your Eminence of Nicaea, and those who voted with you. If, following the dictates of your conscience, you thought we ought not to be elected as being inadequate, you will still be welcomed by us, who attribute our calling not to this man or that but to the whole college and to God Himself, from Whom cometh every good and perfect gift."

With these words he took off the garments he was wearing and put on the white tunic of Christ. When asked by what name he wished to be called, he answered, "Pius," and he was at once addressed as Pius II. Then after swearing to observe the capitulations that had been announced in the college two days before, he took his place by the altar and was again revered by the cardinals, who kissed his feet, hands, and cheek. After that the election of a pope was proclaimed to the people from a high window and it was announced that he who had been Cardinal of Siena was now Pope Pius II.

The attendants of the cardinals in the conclave plundered Aeneas's cell and *meanly* carried off all the plate (though it was very modest), his clothes, and his books; and the infamous rabble not only pillaged his house in the

city but actually demolished it, taking away even the blocks of marble. Other cardinals, too, suffered losses, for while the people were waiting in suspense, various rumors got about and as now this cardinal, now that was reported elected, the crowd would rush to their houses and plunder them. The Cardinal of Genoa, whose name was mistaken for Siena, lost part of his possessions. Though many names were mentioned, none was received with enthusiasm except that of the Cardinal of Siena. *When the cry arose that Rouen or Genoa or Lerida (for there were reports of them too) had been elected, all cast down their eyes and cursed the college. Only their personal friends were pleased; the rest shared the general sorrow. But when it was certain that Aeneas had been seated on Peter's throne, there was no one who did not rejoice. You might have seen not men only but the very animals and the buildings of the city exulting. Everywhere was heard laughter and expressions of joy and the cries of men shouting, "Siena! Siena! O happy Siena! Viva Siena!" Though the city was under arms and no one seemed to have confidence in anything but the sword, presently, when the people were told that the papacy had fallen to Aeneas, the aspect of the capital was completely changed. What had a little time before been the city of Mars all at once became the city, I will not say of Venus, the mother of that ancient Trojan Aeneas, but of Peace and Quiet, and joy and tranquillity reigned everywhere.*

Meantime the new Pope after taking a little refreshment was escorted to the Basilica of St. Peter and conducted to the high altar, under which lie the bodies of the blessed Apostles. Shortly after, he took his seat according to custom on the high throne and in the apostolic chair itself. There the cardinals and bishops and after them many of the people kissed his feet and revered him on his throne as Christ's Vicar. Then after a brief interval, when evening was coming on, they escorted him back to the palace. At nightfall fires blazed at every crossroad and on every tower; singing could be heard; neighbors called to neighbors; everywhere horns and trumpets blared and there was no spot in all the city which did not share in the general rejoicing. The older men said they had never seen such enthusiasm among the Roman populace.

. . .

GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA

Selections from *On the Dignity of Man*

The Latin oration *On the Dignity of Man* is a tour de force by Pico (1463–1494), a son of the noble house of Mirandola (Italy). Written when Pico was twenty-four, the oration is a mixture of Aristotelean, Hebraic, Arabic, Persian, and Aramaic notions held together by Neo-Platonism—a blend of Plato's ideas and Christian beliefs. Its central Neo-Platonic motif is that love is the

divine glue unifying the universe. Christian in structure, this heady synthesis of ideas breaks free of its frame to become a nonsectarian philosophy.

Pico's oration embodies the Renaissance spirit. In its appeal to wide-ranging sources, it expresses Renaissance zeal for the Classic texts of Greece and Rome as well as hitherto ignored ancient sources. Its theme is the Renaissance belief that the findings of reason and the truths of the Bible share a basic unity that is reflected in the history of thought. Most of all, its view that human nature has no limits is the prototype of the Renaissance idea of unlimited possibility. Today this idea, with its corollary of free expression, is a defining trait of Western culture.

The oration was composed to introduce a debate Pico scheduled for Rome in 1487. In this debate, Pico proposed to defend nine hundred theses gleaned from his vast readings; he even offered to pay his potential opponents' travel expenses. The debate, however, did not take place because Pope Innocent VIII forbade it. The pope also appointed a commission to examine the debate topics, with the result that seven theses were condemned as heretical, and six more were suspect. Threatened by church officials, Pico subsequently settled in Florence, where he was caught up in the anti-Renaissance crusade of the monk Savonarola. Pico's plan to wander as an evangelist was cut short in 1494, when he suddenly died at age thirty-one.

Reading the Selections

The first selection from the oration *On the Dignity of Man* begins with a greeting—"Most venerable fathers"—thus establishing that the work was meant to be recited orally, ostensibly before a group of clergy. The major insights to be gained from this selection are Pico's concept of human nature and his style of reasoning.

Pico's concept of human nature is his major contribution to Western thought. For him, human nature is not fixed, and the will is perfectly free. In a burst of lyricism he claimed that human beings are shape-shifting creatures who may be vegetative, bestial, rational, divine, or even co-equal with God: When humanity's quest ends, "We shall . . . not be ourselves, but He himself who made us." Brushing aside medieval ideas, Pico expresses the radiant faith of Renaissance humanism, that human beings are not flawed by original sin but are capable of becoming godlike.

Pico's style of reasoning reflects the Renaissance trend of treating old problems in new ways. To deal with the question of human nature, he takes the Platonic concept of the Great Chain of Being, which maintains that creation is a linked cord reaching step-by-step from the simplest life to God, and gives it a modern twist. Ancient thinkers had used the Great Chain of Being to argue that human potential is limited, since the place of human beings in the chain is fixed, and that change would destroy the whole creation. In contrast, Pico claimed that human beings may make of themselves anything they please, because as hybrids of the whole creation, they exist both outside and above the Great Chain of Being.



Most venerable fathers, I have read in the records of the 1
 Arabians that Abdul the Saracen, on being asked what
 thing on, so to speak, the world's stage, he viewed as most
 greatly worthy of wonder, answered that he viewed nothing
 more wonderful than man. And Mercury's, "a great
 wonder, Asclepius, is man!" agrees with that opinion. On
 thinking over the reason for these sayings, I was not satisfied
 by the many assertions made by many men concerning
 the outstandingness of human nature: that man is the
 messenger between creatures, familiar with the upper and
 king of the lower; by the sharp-sightedness of the senses,
 by the hunting-power of reason, and by the light of intelligence,
 the interpreter of nature; the part in between the

standstill of eternity and the flow of time, and, as the Persians say, the bond tying the world together, nay, the nuptial bond; and, according to David, "a little lower than the angels." These reasons are great but not the chief ones, that is, they are not reasons for a lawful claim to the highest wonder as to a prerogative. Why should we not wonder more at the angels themselves and at the very blessed heavenly choirs?

Finally, it seemed to me that I understood why man is the animal that is most happy, and is therefore worthy of all wonder; and lastly, what the state is that is allotted to man in the succession of things, and that is capable of arousing envy not only in the brutes but also in the stars

and even in minds beyond the world. It is wonderful and beyond belief. For this is the reason why man is rightly said and thought to be a great marvel and the animal really worthy of wonder. Now hear what it is, fathers; and with kindly ears and for the sake of your humanity, give me your close attention:

Now the highest Father, God the master-builder, had, by the laws of his secret wisdom, fabricated this house, this world which we see, a very superb temple of divinity. He had adorned the super-celestial region with minds. He had animated the celestial globes with eternal souls; he had filled with a diverse throng of animals the cast-off and residual parts of the lower world. But, with the work finished, the Artisan desired that there be someone to reckon up the reason of such a big work, to love its beauty, and to wonder at its greatness. Accordingly, now that all things had been completed, as Moses and Timaeus testify, He lastly considered creating man. But there was nothing in the archetypes from which He could mold a new sprout, nor anything in His storehouses which He could bestow as a heritage upon a new son, nor was there an empty judiciary seat where this contemplator of the universe could sit. Everything was filled up; all things had been laid out in the highest, the lowest, and the middle orders. But it did not belong to the paternal power to have failed in the final parturition, as though exhausted by child-bearing; it did not belong to wisdom, in a case of necessity, to have been tossed back and forth through want of a plan; it did not belong to the loving-kindness which was going to praise divine liberality in others to be forced to condemn itself. Finally, the best of workmen decided that that to which nothing of its very own could be given should be, in composite fashion, whatsoever had belonged individually to each and every thing. Therefore He took up man, a work of indeterminate form; and, placing him at the midpoint of the world, He spoke to him as follows:

"We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by Us. In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hand We have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself. I have placed thee at the center of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have We made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honorable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine."

O great liberality of God the Father! O great and wonderful happiness of man. It is given him to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills. As soon as brutes are born, they bring with them, "from their dam's bag," as Lucilius says, what they are going to possess. Highest spirits have been, either from the beginning or soon after, that which they are going to be throughout everlasting eternity. At man's birth the Father placed in

him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If the seeds of sensation, he will grow into brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God. And if he is not contented with the lot of any creature but takes himself up into the center of his own unity, then, made one spirit with God and settled in the solitary darkness of the Father, who is above all things, he will stand ahead of all things. Who does not wonder at this chameleon which we are? Or who at all feels more wonder at anything else whatsoever? It was not unfittingly that Asclepius the Athenian said that man was symbolized by Prometheus in the secret rites, by reason of our nature sloughing its skin and transforming itself; hence metamorphoses were popular among the Jews and the Pythagoreans. For the more secret Hebrew theology at one time reshapes holy Enoch into an angel of divinity, whom they call *malach hashechina*, and at other times reshapes other men into other divinities. According to the Pythagoreans, wicked men are deformed into brutes and, if you believe Empedocles, into plants too. And copying them, Maumeth [Mohammed] often had it on his lips that he who draws back from divine law becomes a brute. And his saying so was reasonable: for it is not the rind which makes the plant, but a dull and non-sentient nature; not the hide which makes a beast of burden, but a brutal and sensual soul; not the spherical body which makes the heavens, but right reason; and not a separateness from the body but a spiritual intelligence which makes an angel. For example, if you see a man given over to his belly and crawling upon the ground, it is a bush not a man that you see. If you see anyone blinded by the illusions of his empty and Calypso-like imagination, seized by the desire of scratching, and delivered over to the senses, it is a brute not a man that you see. If you come upon a philosopher winnowing out all things by right reason, he is a heavenly not an earthly animal. If you come upon a pure contemplator, ignorant of the body, banished to the innermost places of the mind, he is not an earthly, not a heavenly animal; he more superbly is a divinity clothed with human flesh.

Who is there that does not wonder at man? And it is not unreasonable that in the mosaic and Christian holy writ man is sometimes denoted by the name "all flesh" and at other times by that of "every creature"; and man fashions, fabricates, transforms himself into the shape of all flesh, into the character of every creature. Accordingly, where Evantes the Persian tells of the Chaldaean theology, he writes that man is not any inborn image of himself, but many images coming in from the outside: hence that saying of the Chaldaeans: *enosh hu shinuy vekamah tevaoth baal chayim*, that is, man is an animal of diverse, multiform, and destructible nature.

But why all this? In order for us to understand that, after having been born in this state so that we may be what we will to be, then, since we are held in honor, we ought to take particular care that no one may say against us that we do not know that we are made similar to brutes and mindless beasts of burden. But rather, as Asaph the prophet says: "Ye are all gods, and sons of the most high," unless by abusing the very indulgent liberality of the Father, we

make the free choice, which he gave to us, harmful to ourselves instead of helpful toward salvation. Let a certain holy ambition invade the mind, so that we may not be content with mean things but may aspire to the highest things and strive with all our forces to attain them: for if we will to, we can. Let us spurn earthly things; let us struggle toward the heavenly. Let us put in last place whatever is of

the world; and let us fly beyond the chambers of the world to the chamber nearest the most lofty divinity. There, as the sacred mysteries reveal, the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones occupy the first places. Ignorant of how to yield to them and unable to endure the second places, let us compete with the angels in dignity and glory. When we have willed it, we shall be not at all below them. . . .



. . . Not only the Mosaic or Christian mysteries but also the theology of the ancients show the advantages for us and the dignity of these liberal arts about which I have come here to dispute. For what else is meant by the degrees of initiation that are customary in the secret rites of the Greeks? First, to those who had been purified by moral and dialectic arts, which we have called, as it were, purgative, befell the reception of the mysteries. And what else can this reception be but the interpretation of more hidden nature by means of philosophy? Then lastly, to those who had been thus prepared, came that *ἐποπτεία*, that is, a vision of divine things by means of the light of theology. Who does not seek to be initiated into such rites? Who does not set all human things at a lower value and, contemning the goods of fortune and neglecting the body, does not desire, while still continuing on earth, to become the drinking-companion of the gods; and, drunken with the nectar of eternity, to bestow the gift of immortality upon the mortal animal? Who does not wish to have breathed into him the Socratic frenzies sung by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, that by the oarlike movement of wings and feet he may quickly escape from here, that is, from this world where he is laid down as in an evil place, and be carried in speediest flight to the heavenly Jerusalem. We shall be

possessed, fathers, we shall be possessed by these Socratic frenzies, which will so place us outside of our minds that they will place our mind and ourselves in God. We shall be possessed by them if we have first done what is in us to do. For if through morality the forces of the passions will have been so stretched to the [proper] measure, through due proportions, that they sound together in fixed concord, and if through dialectic, reason will have moved, keeping time in her forward march, then, aroused by the frenzy of the muses, we shall drink in the heavenly harmony of our ears. Then Bacchus the leader of the muses, in his own mysteries, that is, in the visible signs of nature, will show the invisible things of God to us as we philosophize, and will make us drunk with the abundance of the house of God. In this house, if we are faithful like Moses, holiest theology will approach, and will inspire us with a twofold frenzy. We, raised up into the loftiest watchtower of theology, from which, measuring with indivisible eternity the things that are, will be, and shall have been, and looking at their primeval beauty, shall be prophets of Phoebus, his winged lovers, and finally, aroused with ineffable charity as with fire, placed outside of ourselves like burning Seraphim, filled with divinity, we shall now not be ourselves, but He himself who made us.



LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI

Selection from *On Painting*

Alberti's *On Painting* helped ensure the triumph of the new Renaissance style over older medieval art. Published in Latin (1435) and Italian (1436) just as the Renaissance was picking up steam, this was the first modern treatise on the theory of painting. It became the era's authoritative guide for painters, both within and outside Florence, including Fra Angelico (about 1400–1455), Piero della Francesca (1420–1492), and perhaps Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). From 1600 until 1800, Alberti's treatise was invoked as an authority for painting practices approved by Europe's art academies. Today's historians still find this work invaluable, for it prepared the way for the art, the artist, and the patron of the Renaissance.

Alberti wrote his treatise "as a painter speaking to painters." The work is divided into three "books," or parts. Book I presents a mathematical method for creating perspective—the

illusion of depth on a flat surface. Some perspectival ideas had long been used in Italy, but he was the first to codify them into an accessible work. Book II deals with painterly matters, such as color, drawing, and grace and beauty in poses and movements. Book III sets forth a type of humanist painting that uses Greco-Roman themes and depicts the soul's condition through bodily gestures and facial expressions.

Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) was the “universal man,” the beau ideal of the age, and his achievements rivaled those of the later Leonardo da Vinci. Besides painting, Alberti also mastered music, mathematics, engineering, architecture, sculpture, poetry, drama, and civil and canon law, and he wrote books on most of these fields. A friend of Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464), the merchant-banker who dominated Florence, Alberti was active in Cosimo’s Platonic Academy, the club of artists and thinkers who studied Plato (see *Phaedo* and *The Republic*). Alberti’s spirit had such force that his friends called him the complete genius, hence the authority attributed to his works.

Reading the Selection

This selection from Book II of *On Painting* shows Alberti as a Renaissance humanist, making the case for a radical new role for the age’s painters. These painters are characterized by intellect, with the ascendancy of mind over hand visible in their art. Humanism is the theme: “[P]ainting contributes to the most honorable delights of the soul.” This argument echoes the familiar rationale of humanists that studying and practicing grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy—the seven liberal arts—are good exercises for the soul. What is radical in Alberti’s claim is the ranking of painting with the liberal arts. In fact, in the Middle Ages, painting ranked low, on a par with crafts (shoemaking, weaving, and such). The favorable reception of this treatise encouraged the rise of independent artists, as evidenced around 1500 in the careers of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raphael.

Alberti also argued that painting should be part of the core curriculum of the schools. To prove his case, he used examples from antiquity showing that the best families required that painting be taught to their sons and daughters. By 1513, Alberti’s hope was realized in the well-rounded backgrounds of the idealized lady and gentleman of Castiglione’s highly influential *The Book of the Courtier*.

Finally, Alberti was a pioneer in his claim for the sovereign power of painting: “Who can doubt that painting is the master art?” A generation later Leonardo gave voice to the identical claim.



Book II

Because this [process of] learning may perhaps appear a fatiguing thing to young people, I ought to prove here that painting is not unworthy of consuming all our time and study.

Painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive. Even after many centuries they are recognized with great pleasure and with great admiration for the painter. Plutarch says that Cassander, one of the captains of Alexander, trembled through all his body because he saw a portrait of his King. Agesilaos, the Lacedaemonian, never permitted anyone to paint him or to represent him in sculpture; his own form so displeased him that he avoided being known by those who would come after him. Thus the face of a man who is already dead certainly lives a long life through painting.

Some think that painting shaped the gods who were adored by the nations. It certainly was their greatest gift to mortals, for painting is most useful to that piety which joins us to the gods and keeps our souls full of religion. They say that Phidias made in Aulis a god Jove so beautiful that it considerably strengthened the religion then current.

The extent to which painting contributes to the most honourable delights of the soul and to the dignified beauty of things can be clearly seen not only from other things but especially from this: you can conceive of almost nothing so precious which is not made far richer and much more beautiful by association with painting. Ivory, gems and similar expensive things become more precious when worked by the hand of the painter. Gold worked by the art of painting outweighs an equal amount of unworked gold. If figures were made by the hand of Phidias

or Praxiteles from lead itself—the lowest of metals—they would be valued more highly than silver. The painter, Zeuxis, began to give away his things because, as he said, they could not be bought. He did not think it possible to come to a just price which would be satisfactory to the painter, for in painting animals he set himself up almost as a god.

Therefore, painting contains within itself this virtue that any master painter who sees his works adored will feel himself considered another god. Who can doubt that painting is the master art or at least not a small ornament of things? The architect, if I am not mistaken, takes from the painter architraves, bases, capitals, columns, façades and other similar things. All the smiths, sculptors, shops and guilds are governed by the rules and art of the painter. It is scarcely possible to find any superior art which is not concerned with painting, so that whatever beauty is found can be said to be born of painting. *But also this, a dignified painting is held in high honour by many so that among all artists some smiths are named, only this is not the rule among smiths.* For this reason, I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting. Since painting is already the flower of every art, the story of Narcissus is most to the point. What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?

Quintilian said that the ancient painters used to circumscribe shadows cast by the sun, and from this our art has grown. There are those who say that a certain Philocles, an Egyptian, and a Cleantes were among the first inventors of this art. The Egyptians affirm that painting was in use among them a good 6000 years before it was carried into Greece. They say that painting was brought to us from Greece after the victory of Marcellus over Sicily. But we are not interested in knowing who was the inventor of the art or the first painter, since we are not telling stories like Pliny. We are, however, building anew an art of painting about which nothing, as I see it, has been written in this age. They say that Euphranor of Isthmus wrote something about measure and about colours, that Antigonos and Xenocrates exchanged something in their letters about painting, and that Apelles wrote to Pelleus about painting. Diogenes Laertius recounts that Demetrius made commentaries on painting. Since all the other arts were recommended in letters by our great men, and since painting was not neglected by our Latin writers, I believe that our ancient Tuscan [ancestors] were already most expert masters in painting.

Trismegistus, an ancient writer, judged that painting and sculpture were born at the same time as religion, *for thus he answered Aesclepius: mankind portrays the gods in his own image from his memories of nature and his own origins.* Who can here deny that in all things public and private, profane and religious, painting has taken all the most honourable parts to itself so that nothing has ever been so esteemed by mortals?

The incredible prices of painted pictures have been recorded. Aristides the Theban sold a single picture for one hundred talents. They say that Rhodes was not burned by King Demetrius for fear that a painting of Protogenes' should perish. It could be said that the city of Rhodes was

ransomed from the enemy by a single painting. Pliny collected many other such things in which you can see that good painters have always been greatly honoured by all. The most noble citizens, philosophers and quite a few kings not only enjoyed painted things but also painted with their own hands. Lucius Manilius, Roman citizen, and Fabius, a most noble man, were painters. Turpilius, a Roman knight, painted at Verona. Sitedius, praetor and proconsul, acquired renown as a painter. Pacuvius, tragic poet and nephew of the poet Ennius, painted Hercules in the Roman forum. Socrates, Plato, Metrodorus, Pyrrho were connoisseurs of painting. The emperors Nero, Valentinian, and Alexander Severus were most devoted to painting. It would be too long, however, to recount here how many princes and kings were pleased by painting. Nor does it seem necessary to me to recount all the throng of ancient painters. Their number is seen in the fact that 360 statues, part on horseback and part in chariots, were completed in four hundred days for Demetrius Phalerius, son of Phanostratus. In a land in which there was such a great number of sculptors, can you believe that painters were lacking? I am certain that both these arts are related and nurtured by the same genius, painting with sculpture. But I always give higher rank to the genius of the painter because he works with more difficult things.

However, let us return to our work. Certainly the number of sculptors and painters was great in those times when princes and plebeians, learned and unlearned enjoyed painting, and when painted panels and portraits, considered the choicest booty from the provinces, were set up in the theatres. Finally L. Paulus Aemilius and not a few other Roman citizens taught their sons painting along with the fine arts and the art of living piously and well. This excellent custom was frequently observed among the Greeks who, because they wished their sons to be well educated, taught them painting along with geometry and music. It was also an honour among women to know how to paint. Martia, daughter of Varro, is praised by the writers because she knew how to paint. Painting had such reputation and honour among the Greeks that laws and edicts were passed forbidding slaves to learn painting. It was certainly well that they did this, for the art of painting has always been most worthy of liberal minds and noble souls.

As for me, I certainly consider a great appreciation of painting to be the best indication of a most perfect mind, even though it happens that this art is pleasing to the uneducated as well as to the educated. It occurs rarely in any other art that what delights the experienced also moves the inexperienced. In the same way you will find that many greatly desire to be well versed in painting. Nature herself seems to delight in painting, for in the cut faces of marble she often paints centaurs and faces of bearded and curly headed kings. It is said, moreover, that in a gem from Pyrrhus all nine Muses, each with her symbol, are to be found clearly painted by nature. Add to this that in no other art does it happen that both the experienced and the inexperienced of every age apply themselves so voluntarily to the learning and exercising of it. Allow me to speak of myself here. Whenever I turn to painting for my recreation, which I frequently do when I am tired of more pressing affairs, I apply myself to it with so much pleasure

that I am surprised that three or four hours have passed. Thus this art gives pleasure and praise to whoever is skilled in it; riches and perpetual fame to one who is master of it. Since these things are so, since painting is the best and most ancient ornament of things, worthy of free men, pleasing to learned and unlearned, I greatly encourage our studious youth to exert themselves as much as possible in painting.

Therefore, I recommend that he who is devoted to painting should learn this art. The first great care of one

who seeks to obtain eminence in painting is to acquire the fame and renown of the ancients. It is useful to remember that avarice is always the enemy of virtue. Rarely can anyone given to acquisition of wealth acquire renown. I have seen many in the first flower of learning suddenly sink to money-making. As a result they acquire neither riches nor praise. However, if they had increased their talent with study, they would have easily soared into great renown. Then they would have acquired much riches and pleasure. . . .