

# CULTURE AND VALUES

A SURVEY OF THE WESTERN HUMANITIES, VOLUME II, FOURTH EDITION



LAWRENCE CUNNINGHAM

JOHN REICH

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OF THE  
WESTERN  
HUMANITIES

*Volume II*

*Fourth Edition*

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# PREFACE

It is now nearly twenty years since we finished the manuscript which would become this textbook. In the various additions, updatings, and rewriting that constitutes the various editions of *Culture and Values* we have not repented of our earliest convictions about what this book should represent. We repeat here what we said in the first edition, namely, that our desire is to present, in a chronological fashion, the most crucial landmarks of Western culture with clarity and, in such a way, that students might react to this tradition and its major accomplishments with the same enthusiasm as we experienced when we first encountered them and began to teach about them.

We believe that our own backgrounds have enhanced our appreciation for what we discuss in these pages. Lawrence Cunningham has degrees in philosophy, theology, literature, and humanities while John Reich is a trained classicist, musician, and field archaeologist. Both of us have lived and lectured for extended periods in Europe. There is very little art or architecture discussed in this book which we have not seen at firsthand.

In developing the new editions of *Culture and Values* we have been the beneficiaries of the suggestions and criticisms of classroom teachers who have used the book. We have also consulted closely with the editorial team in meetings at the publisher's offices in Fort Worth. Our own experiences as teachers both here and abroad have also made us sensitive to new needs and refinements as we rework this book.

In this new edition we have done some obvious things: updated and pruned the suggested readings; brought the final chapter up to date; and made additions to the glossary. Furthermore, we have expanded some of the discussions, art representations, and readings to reflect the ever growing retrieval of women's voices in the history of Western culture. Finally, we came to a consensus that each chapter should have a new boxed figure which would highlight, in a few paragraphs, a salient feature of the culture of a given period in order to alert the student to an idea or concept or ideal that is conspicuous but perhaps implicit in the discussion of a given chapter. We are also very much pleased that the editorial team has obtained some newer art reproductions, redrawn some of the timelines, and generally utilized the latest in technology to make the book so attractive.

While it is true that the newer and ever expanding information technologies as well as the emergence of a global socio-political economy may render the notion of a purely occidental culture somewhat skewed (think, for example, of the globalization of popular music) we have stayed within the traditional parameters of the West for two very simple reasons. First, we could not do justice to the great cultures of the East and, secondly, the shape of a newer, more interdependent "world" culture, is not at all clear since it is in the very process of emergence. Perhaps, in the edition that appears in the new millennium we will address that issue in a significant way.

One of the more vexatious issues with which we have had to deal is what to leave out. Our aim is to provide some representative examples from each period, hoping that the instructors would use their own predilections to fill out where we have been negligent. In that sense, to borrow the Zen concept, we are fingers pointing the way—attend to the direction and not to the finger. We refine that direction using input from instructors making those decisions and would like to acknowledge the reviewers of the fourth edition:

Deborah Patterson Butler, Edison Community College; Michael Call, Brigham Young University; Judith Chambers, Hillsborough Community College; Kimberley Jones, Seminole Community College; Barbara Kramer, Santa Fe Community College; Carla M. Kranz, Pasco-Hernando Community College; Joyce Porter, Moraine Valley Community College; Charlie Schuler, Pensacola Junior College; John Sclaro, Valencia Community College; and Katherine Wyly, Hillsborough Community College.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to those who have helped us in preparing this fourth edition. Special thanks go to Barbara Rosenberg, senior acquisitions editor; Terri House and Stacey Sims, developmental editors; Laura Hanna, senior project editor; Serena Manning, production manager; Vicki Whistler, art director; and Carrie Ward, picture and rights editor.

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# THE ARTS: AN INTRODUCTION

One way to see the arts as a whole is to consider a widespread mutual experience: a church or synagogue service. Such a gathering is a celebration of written literature done, as least in part, in music in an architectural setting decorated to reflect the religious sensibilities of the community. A church service makes use of visual arts, literature, and music. While the service acts as an integrator of the arts, considered separately, each art has its own peculiar characteristics that give it shape.

*Music* is primarily a temporal art, which is to say that there is music when there is someone to play the instruments and sing the songs. When the performance is over, the music stops.

The visual *arts* and *architecture* are spatial arts that have permanence. When a religious service is over, people may still come into the building to admire its architecture or marvel at its paintings or sculptures or look at the decorative details of the building.

*Literature* has a permanent quality in that it is recorded in books, although some literature is meant not to be read but to be heard. Shakespeare did not write plays for people to read but for audiences to see and hear performed. Books nonetheless have permanence in the sense that they can be read not only in a specific context but also at one's pleasure. Thus, to continue the religious-service example, one can read the psalms for their poetry or for devotion apart from their communal use in worship.

What we have said about the religious service applies equally to anything from a rock concert to grand opera: artworks can be seen as an integrated whole. Likewise, we can consider these arts separately. After all, people paint paintings, compose music, or write poetry to be enjoyed as discrete experiences. At other times, of course, two arts may be joined when there was no original intention to do so, as when a composer sets a poem to music or an artist finds inspiration in a literary text or, to use a more complex example, when a ballet is inspired by a literary text and is danced against the background or sets created by an artist to enhance both the dance and the text that inspired it.

However we view the arts, either separately or as integrated, one thing is clear: they are the product of hu-

man invention and human genius. When we speak of *culture*, we are not talking about something strange or "highbrow"; we are talking about something that derives from human invention. A jungle is a product of nature, but a garden is a product of culture: human ingenuity has modified the vegetative world.

In this book we discuss some of the works of human culture that have endured over the centuries. We often refer to these works as *masterpieces*, but what does the term mean? The issue is complicated because taste and attitudes change over the centuries. Two hundred years ago the medieval cathedral was not appreciated; it was called Gothic because it was considered barbarian. Today we call such a building a masterpiece. Very roughly we can say that a masterpiece of art is any work that carries with it a surplus of meaning.

Having "surplus of meaning" means that a certain work not only reflects technical and imaginative skill but also that its very existence sums up the best of a certain age, which spills over as a source of inspiration for further ages. As one reads through the history of the Western humanistic achievement it is clear that certain products of human genius are looked to by subsequent generations as a source of inspiration; they have a surplus of meaning. Thus the Roman achievement in architecture with the dome of the Pantheon both symbolized their skill in architecture and became a reference point for every major dome built in the West since. The dome of the Pantheon finds echoes in 6th-century Constantinople (Hagia Sophia); in 15th-century Florence (the Duomo); in 16th-century Rome (St. Peter's); and in 18th-century Washington D.C. (the Capitol building).

The notion of surplus of meaning provides us with a clue as to how to study the humanistic tradition and its achievements. Admittedly simplifying, we can say that such a study has two steps that we have tried to synthesize into a whole in this book:

1. **The work in itself.** At this level we are asking the question of fact and raising the issue of observation: What is the work and how is it achieved? This question includes not only the basic information about, say, what kind of visual art this is (sculpture, painting, mosaic) or what its formal elements are (Is it geometric in style?

bright in color? very linear? and so on) but also questions of its function: Is this work an homage to politics? for a private patron? for a church? We look at artworks, then, to ask questions about both their form and their function.

This is an important point. We may look at a painting or sculpture in a museum with great pleasure, but that pleasure would be all the more enhanced were we to see that work in its proper setting rather than as an object on display. To ask about form and function, in short, is to ask equally about context. When reading certain literary works (such as the *Iliad* or the *Song of Roland*) we should read them aloud since, in their original form, they were written to be recited, not read silently on a page.

**2. The work in relation to history.** The human achievements of our common past tell us much about earlier cultures both in their differences and in their similarities. A study of the tragic plays that have survived from ancient Athens gives us a glimpse into Athenians' problems, preoccupations, and aspirations as filtered through the words of Sophocles or Euripides. From such a study we learn both about the culture of Athens and something about how the human spirit has faced the perennial issues of justice, loyalty, and duty. In that sense we are in dialogue with our ancestors across the ages. In the study of ancient culture we see the roots of our own.

To carry out such a project requires willingness really to look at art and closely read literature with an eye equally to the aspect of form/function and to the past and the present. Music, however, requires a special treatment because it is the most abstract of arts (How do we speak about that which is meant not to be seen but to be heard?) and the most temporal. For that reason a somewhat more extended guide to music follows.

## HOW TO LOOK AT ART

Anyone who thumbs through a standard history of art can be overwhelmed by the complexity of what is discussed. We find everything from paintings on the walls of caves and huge sculptures carved into the faces of mountains to tiny pieces of jewelry or miniature paintings. All of these are art because they were made by the human hand in an attempt to express human ideas and/or emotions. Our response to such objects depends a good deal on our own education and cultural biases. We may find some modern art ugly or stupid or bewildering. We may think of all art as highbrow or elitist despite the fact that we like certain movies (film is an art) enough to see them over and over.

Our lives are so bound up with art that we often fail to recognize how much we are shaped by it. We are bombarded with examples of graphic art (television commercials, magazine ads, CD jackets, displays in stores) every

day; we use art to make statements about who we are and what we value in the way we decorate our rooms and in the style of our dress. In all of these ways we manipulate artistic symbols to make statements about what we believe in, what we stand for, and how we want others to see us.

The history of art is nothing more than the record of how people have used their minds and imaginations to symbolize who they are and what they value. If a certain age spends enormous amounts of money to build and decorate churches (as in 12th-century France) and another spends the same kind of money on palaces (like 18th-century France) we learn about what each age values the most.

The very complexity of human art makes it difficult to interpret. That difficulty increases when we are looking at art from a much different culture and/or a far different age. We may admire the massiveness of Egyptian architecture but find it hard to appreciate why such energies were used for the cult of the dead. When confronted with the art of another age (or even our own art, for that matter) a number of questions we can ask of ourselves and of the art may lead us to greater understanding.

**For what was this piece of art made?** This is essentially a question of *context*. Most of the religious paintings in our museums were originally meant to be seen in churches in very specific settings. To imagine them in their original setting helps us to understand that they had a devotional purpose that is lost when they are seen on a museum wall. To ask about the original setting, then, helps us to ask further whether the painting is in fact devotional or meant as a teaching tool or to serve some other purpose.

Setting is crucial. A frescoed wall on a public building is meant to be seen by many people while a fresco on the wall of an aristocratic home is meant for a much smaller, more elite, class of viewer. A sculpture designed for a wall niche is going to have a shape different from one designed to be seen by walking around it. Similarly, art made under official sponsorship of an authoritarian government must be read in a far different manner than art produced by underground artists who have no standing with the government. Finally, art may be purely decorative or it may have a didactic purpose, but (and here is a paradox) purely decorative art may teach us while didactic art may end up being purely decorative.

**What, if anything, does this piece of art hope to communicate?** This question is one of *intellectual* or *emotional* context. Funeral sculpture may reflect the grief of the survivors or a desire to commemorate the achievements of the deceased or to affirm what the survivors believe about life after death or a combination of these purposes. If we think of art as a variety of speech we can then inquire of any artwork: What is it saying?



An artist may strive for an ideal ("I want to paint the most beautiful woman in the world" or "I wish my painting to be taken for reality itself" or "I wish to move people to love or hate or sorrow by my sculpture") or to illustrate the power of an idea or (as in the case with most primitive art) to "capture" the power of the spirit world for religious and/or magical purposes.

An artist may well produce a work simply to demonstrate inventiveness or to expand the boundaries of what art means. The story is told of Pablo Picasso's reply to a woman who said that her ten-year-old child could paint better than he. Picasso replied, "Congratulations, Madame. Your child is a genius." We know that before he was a teenager Picasso could draw and paint with photographic accuracy. He said that during his long life he tried to learn how to paint with the fresh eye and spontaneous simplicity of a child.

**How was this piece of art made?** This question inquires into both the materials and the skills the artist employs to turn materials into art. Throughout this book we will speak of different artistic techniques, like bronze casting or etching or panel painting; here we make a more general point. To learn to appreciate the *craft* of the artist is a first step toward enjoying art for its worth as art—to developing an "eye" for art. This requires *looking* at the object as a crafted object. Thus, for example, a close examination of Michelangelo's *Pietà* shows the pure smooth beauty of marble while his *Slaves* demonstrate the roughness of stone and the sculptor's effort to carve meaning from hard material. We might stand back to admire a painting as a whole, but then to look closely at one portion of it teaches us the subtle manipulation of color and line that creates the overall effect.

**What is the composition of this artwork?** This question addresses how the artist "composes" the work. Much Renaissance painting uses a pyramidal construction so that the most important figure is at the apex of the pyramid and lesser figures form the base. Some paintings presume something happening outside the picture itself (such as an unseen source of light); a cubist painting tries to render simultaneous views of an object. At other times, an artist may enhance the composition by the manipulation of color with a movement from light to dark or a stark contrast between dark and light, as in the *chiaroscuro* of Baroque painting. In all these cases the artists intend to do something more than merely "depict" a scene; they appeal to our imaginative and intellectual powers as we enter into the picture or engage the sculpture or look at their film.

Composition, obviously, is not restricted to painting. Filmmakers compose with close-ups or tracking shots just as sculptors carve for frontal or side views of an object. Since all these techniques are designed to make us see in a particular manner, only by thinking about com-

position do we begin to reflect on what the artist has done. If we do not think about composition, we tend to take an artwork at "face value" and, as a consequence, are not training our "eye."

**What elements should we notice about a work of art?** The answer to this question is a summary of what we have stated above. Without pretending to exclusivity, we should judge art on the basis of the following three aspects:

*Formal elements.* What kind of artwork is it? What materials are employed? What is its composition in terms of structure? In terms of pure form, how does this particular work look when compared to a similar work of the same or another artist?

*Symbolic elements.* What is this artwork attempting to "say"? Is its purpose didactic, propagandistic, to give pleasure, or what? How well do the formal elements contribute to the symbolic statement being attempted in the work of art?

*Social elements.* What is the context of this work of art? Who is paying for it and why? Whose purposes does it serve? At this level many different philosophies come into play. A Marxist critic might judge a work in terms of its sense of class or economic aspects, while a feminist might inquire whether it affirms women or acts as an agent of subjugation and/or exploitation.

It is possible to restrict oneself to formal criticism of an artwork (Is this well done in terms of craft and composition?), but such an approach does not do full justice to what the artist is trying to do. Conversely, to judge every work purely in terms of social theory excludes the notion of an artistic work and, as a consequence, reduces art to politics or philosophy. For a fuller appreciation of art, then, all the elements mentioned above need to come into play.

## HOW TO LISTEN TO MUSIC

The sections of this book devoted to music are designed for readers who have no special training in musical theory and practice. Response to significant works of music, after all, should require no more specialized knowledge than the ability to respond to *Oedipus Rex*, say, or a Byzantine mosaic. Indeed, many millions of people buy recorded music in one form or another, or enjoy listening to it on the radio, without the slightest knowledge of how the music is constructed or performed.

The gap between the simple pleasure of the listener and the complex skills of composer and performer often prevents the development of a more serious grasp of music history and its relation to the other arts. The aim of this section is to help bridge that gap without trying to provide too much technical information. After a brief

survey of music's role in Western culture we shall look at the "language" used to discuss musical works, both specific terminology, such as *sharp* and *flat*, and more general concepts, such as line and color.

## Music in Western Culture

The origins of music are unknown, and neither the excavations of ancient instruments and depictions of performers nor the evidence from modern primitive societies gives any impression of its early stages. Presumably, like the early cave paintings, it served some kind of magical or ritual purpose. This is borne out by the fact that music still forms a vital part of most religious ceremonies today, from the hymns sung in Christian churches or the solo singing of the cantor in an Orthodox Jewish synagogue to the elaborate musical rituals performed in Buddhist or Shinto temples in Japan. The Old Testament makes many references to the power of music, most notably in the famous story of the battle of Jericho, and it is clear that by historical times music played an important role in Jewish life, both sacred and secular.

By the time of the Greeks, the first major Western culture to develop, music had become as much a science as an art. It retained its importance for religious rituals; in fact, according to Greek mythology the gods themselves invented it. At the same time the theoretical relationships between the various musical pitches attracted the attention of philosophers such as Pythagoras (c. 550 B.C.), who described the underlying unity of the universe as the "harmony of the spheres." Later 4th-century-B.C. thinkers like Plato and Aristotle emphasized music's power to affect human feeling and behavior. Thus for the Greeks music represented a religious, intellectual, and moral force. Once again, music is still used in our own world to affect people's feelings, whether it be the stirring sound of a march, a solemn funeral dirge, or the eroticism of much modern "pop" music (of which Plato would thoroughly have disapproved).

Virtually all the music—and art, for that matter—to have survived from the Middle Ages is religious. Popular secular music certainly existed, but since no real system of notation was invented before the 11th century, it has disappeared without trace. The ceremonies of both the Western and the Eastern (Byzantine) church centered around the chanting of a single musical line, a kind of music that is called *monophonic* (from the Greek "single voice"). Around the time musical notation was devised, composers began to become interested in the possibilities of notes sounding simultaneously—what we would think of as harmony. Music involving several separate lines sounding together (as in a modern string quartet or a jazz group) became popular only in the 14th century.

This gradual introduction of *polyphony* ("many voices") is perhaps the single most important development in the history of music, since composers began to think not only horizontally (that is, melodically) but also vertically, or harmonically. In the process the possibilities of musical expression were immeasurably enriched.

## The Experience of Listening

"What music expresses is eternal, infinite, and ideal. It does *not* express the passion, love, or longing of this or that individual in this or that situation, but passion, love, or longing in itself; and this it presents in that unlimited variety of motivations which is the exclusive and particular characteristic of music, foreign and inexpressible in any other language" (Richard Wagner). With these words one of the greatest of all composers described the power of music to express universal emotions. Yet for those unaccustomed to serious listening, it is precisely this breadth of experience that is difficult to identify with. We can understand a joyful or tragic situation. Joy and tragedy themselves, though, are more difficult to comprehend.

There are a number of ways by which the experience of listening can become more rewarding and more enjoyable. Not all of them will work for everyone, but over the course of time they have proved helpful for many newcomers to the satisfactions of music.

1. *Before listening* to the piece you have selected, ask yourself some questions:

What is the historical context of the music? For whom was it composed—for a general or for an elite audience?

Did the composer have a specific assignment? If the work was intended for performance in church, for example, it should sound very different from a set of dances. Sometimes the location of the performance affected the sound of the music: composers of masses to be sung in Gothic cathedrals used the buildings' acoustical properties to emphasize the resonant qualities of their works.

With what forces is the music to be performed? Do they correspond to those intended by the composer? Performers of medieval music, in particular, often have to reconstruct much that is missing or uncertain. Even in the case of later traditions, the original sounds can sometimes be only approximated. The superstars of the 18th-century world of opera were the *castrati*, male singers who had been castrated in their youth and whose voices had therefore never broken; contemporaries described the sounds they produced as incomparably brilliant and flexible. The custom, which seems to us so barbaric, was abandoned in the 19th century, and even the most fanatic musicologist must settle for a substitute today. The case



is an extreme one, but it points the moral that even with the best of intentions, modern performers cannot always reproduce the original sounds.

Does the work have a text? If so, read it through before you listen to the music; it is easiest to concentrate on one thing at a time. In the case of a translation, does the version you are using capture the spirit of the original? Translators sometimes take a simple, popular lyric and make it sound archaic and obscure in order to convey the sense of “old” music. If the words do not make much sense to you, probably they would seem equally incomprehensible to the composer. Music, of all the arts, is concerned with direct communication.

Is the piece divided into sections? If so, why? Is their relationship determined by purely musical considerations—the structure of the piece—or by external factors, the words of a song, for example, or the parts of a Mass?

Finally, given all the above, what do you expect the music to sound like? Your preliminary thinking should have prepared you for the kind of musical experience in store for you. If it has not, go back and reconsider some of the points above.

## 2. *While you are listening* to the music:

Concentrate as completely as you can. It is virtually impossible to gain much from music written in an unfamiliar idiom unless you give it your full attention. Read written information before you begin to listen, as you ask yourself the questions above, not *while* the music is playing. If there is a text, keep an eye on it but do not let it distract you from the music.

Concentrating is not always easy, particularly if you are mainly used to listening to music as a background, but there are some ways in which you can help your own concentration. To avoid visual distraction, fix your eyes on some detail near you—a mark on the wall, a design in someone’s dress, the cover of a book. At first this will seem artificial, but after a while your attention should be taken by the music. If you feel your concentration fading, do *not* pick up a magazine or gaze around; consciously force your attention back to the music and try to analyze what you are hearing. Does it correspond to your expectations? How is the composer trying to achieve an effect? By variety of instrumental color? Are any of the ideas, or tunes, repeated?

Unlike literature or the visual arts, music occurs in the dimension of time. When you are reading, you can turn backward to check a reference or remind yourself of a character’s identity. In looking at a painting, you can move from a detail to an overall view as often as you want. In music, the speed of your attention is controlled by the composer. Once you lose the thread of the discourse, you cannot regain it by going back; you must try to pick up again and follow the music as it continues—and that requires your renewed attention.

On the other hand, in these times of easy access to

recordings, the same pieces can be listened to repeatedly. Even the most experienced musicians cannot grasp some works fully without several hearings. Indeed, one of the features that distinguishes “art” music from more “popular” works is its capacity to yield increasing rewards. On a first hearing, therefore, try to grasp the general mood and structure and note features to listen for the next time you hear the piece. Do not be discouraged if the idiom seems strange or remote, and be prepared to become familiar with a few works from each period you are studying.

As you become accustomed to serious listening, you will notice certain patterns used by composers to give form to their works. They vary according to the styles of the day, and throughout this book there are descriptions of each period’s musical characteristics. In responding to the general feeling the music expresses, therefore, you should try to note the specific features that identify the time of its composition.

3. *After you have heard the piece*, ask yourself these questions:

Which characteristics of the music indicated the period of its composition? Were they due to the forces employed (voices and/or instruments)?

How was the piece constructed? Did the composer make use of repetition? Was there a change of mood and, if so, did the original mood return at the end?

What kind of melody was used? Was it continuous or did it divide into a series of shorter phrases?

If a text was involved, how did the music relate to the words? Were they audible? Did the composer intend them to be? If not, why not?

Were there aspects of the music that reminded you of the literature and visual arts of the same period? In what kind of buildings can you imagine it being performed? What does it tell you about the society for which it was written?

Finally, ask yourself the most difficult question of all: What did the music express? Richard Wagner described the meaning of music as “foreign and inexpressible in any other language.” There is no dictionary of musical meaning, and listeners must interpret for themselves what they hear. We all understand the general significance of words like *contentment* or *despair*, but music can distinguish between a million shades of each.

## Concepts in Music

There is a natural tendency in talking about the arts to use terms from one art form in describing another. Thus most people would know what to expect from a “colorful” story or a painting in “quiet” shades of blue. This metaphorical use of language helps describe characteristics that are otherwise often very difficult to isolate, but

some care is required to remain within the general bounds of comprehension.

**Line.** In music, *line* generally means the progression in time of a series of notes: the melody. A melody in music is a succession of tones related to one another to form a complete musical thought. Melodies vary in length and in shape and may be made up of several smaller parts. They may move quickly or slowly, smoothly or with strongly accented (stressed) notes. Some melodies are carefully balanced and proportional, others are irregular and asymmetrical. A melodic line dictates the basic character of a piece of music, just as lines do in a painting or the plot line does for a story or play.

**Texture.** The degree to which a piece of music has a thick or thin *texture* depends on the number of voices and/or instruments involved. Thus the monophonic music of the Middle Ages, with its single voice, has the thinnest texture possible. At the opposite extreme is a 19th-century opera, where half a dozen soloists, chorus, and a large orchestra were sometimes combined. Needless to say, thickness and thinness of texture are neither good nor bad in themselves, merely simple terms of description.

Composers control the shifting texture of their works in several ways. The number of lines heard simultaneously can be increased or reduced—a full orchestral climax followed by a single flute, for example. The most important factor in the texture of the sound, however, is the number of combined independent melodic lines; this playing (or singing) together of two or more separate melodies is called *counterpoint*. Another factor influencing musical texture is the vertical arrangement of the notes: six notes played close together low in the scale will sound thicker than six notes more widely distributed.

**Color.** The color, or *timbre*, of a piece of music is determined by the instruments or voices employed. Gregorian chant is monochrome, having only one line. The modern symphony orchestra has a vast range to draw upon, from the bright sound of the oboe or the trumpet to the dark, mellow sound of the cello or French horn. Some composers have been more interested than others in exploiting the range of color instrumental combinations can produce; not surprisingly, Romantic music provides some of the most colorful examples.

**Medium.** The *medium* is the method of performance. Pieces can be written for solo piano, string quartet, symphony orchestra, or any other combination the composer chooses. A prime factor will be the importance of color in the work. Another is the length and seriousness of the musical material. It is difficult, although not impossible, for a piece written for solo violin to sustain the listener's interest for half an hour. Still another is the practicality of performance. Pieces using large or unusual combinations of instruments stand less chance of being frequently pro-

grammed. In the 19th century composers often chose a medium that allowed performance in the home, thus creating a vast piano literature.

**Form.** *Form* is the outward, visible (or hearable) shape of a work as opposed to its substance (medium) or color. This structure can be created in a number of ways. Baroque composers worked according to the principle of unity in variety. In most Baroque movements the principal melodic idea continually recurs in the music, and the general texture remains consistent. The formal basis of much classical music is contrast, where two or more melodies of differing character (hard and soft, or brilliant and sentimental) are first laid out separately, then developed and combined, then separated again. The Romantics often pushed the notion of contrasts to extremes, although retaining the basic motions of classical form. Certain types of work dictate their own form. A composer writing a requiem mass is clearly less free to experiment with formal variation than one writing a piece for symphony orchestra. The words of a song strongly suggest the structure of the music, even if they do not impose it. Indeed, so pronounced was the Baroque sense of unity that the sung arias in Baroque operas inevitably conclude with a repetition of the words and music of the beginning, even if the character's mood or emotion has changed.

Thus music, like the other arts, involves the general concepts described above. A firm grasp of them is essential to an understanding of how the various arts have changed and developed over the centuries and how the changes are reflected in similarities—or differences—between art forms. The concept of the humanities implies that the arts did not grow and change in isolation from one another or from the world around. As this book shows, they are integrated both among themselves and with the general developments of Western thought and history.

## HOW TO READ LITERATURE

"Reading literature" conjures up visions of someone sitting in an armchair with glasses on and nose buried in a thick volume—say, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The plain truth is that a fair amount of the literature found in this book was never meant to be read that way at all. Once the fact is recognized, reading becomes an exercise in which different methods can serve as a great aid for both pleasure and understanding. That becomes clear when we consider various literary forms and ask ourselves how their authors originally meant them to be encountered. Let us consider some of the forms that will be studied in this volume to make the point more specifically:

**Dramatic literature.** This is the most obvious genre of

literature that calls for something more than reading the text quietly. Plays—ancient, medieval, Elizabethan, or modern—are meant to be acted, with living voices interpreting what the playwright wrote in the script. What seems to be strange and stilted language as we first encounter Shakespeare becomes powerful and beautiful when we hear his words spoken by someone who knows and loves language.

A further point: Until relatively recent times most dramas were played on stages nearly bare of scenery and, obviously, extremely limited in terms of lighting, theatrical devices, and the like. As a consequence, earlier texts contain a great deal of description that in the modern theater (and, even more, in a film) can be supplied by current technology. Where Shakespeare has a character say “But look, the morn in russet mangle clad/Walks o’er the dew of yon high eastward hill,” a modern writer might simply instruct the lighting manager to make the sun come up.

Dramatic literature must be approached with a sense of its oral aspect as well as an awareness that the language reflects the intention of the author to have the words acted out. Dramatic language is meant to be *heard* and *seen*.

**Epic.** Like drama, epics have a strong oral background. It is a commonplace to note that before Homer’s *Iliad* took its present form it was memorized and recited by a professional class of bards. Similarly, the *Song of Roland* was probably heard by many people and read by relatively few in the formative decades of its composition. Even epics that are more consciously literary echo the oral background of the epic; Vergil begins his elegant *Aeneid* with the words “Arms and the man I sing” not “Of Arms and the man I write.”

The practical conclusion to be drawn from this is that these long poetic tales take on a greater power when they are read aloud with sensitivity to their cadence.

**Poetry.** Under this general heading we have a very complicated subject. To approach poetry with intelligence we need to inquire about the kind of poetry with which we are dealing. The lyrics of songs are poems, but they are better heard sung than read in a book. On the other hand, certain kinds of poems are so arranged on a page that not to see them in print is to miss a good deal of their power or charm. Furthermore, some poems are meant for the individual reader while others are public pieces meant for the group. There is, for example, a vast difference between a love sonnet and a biblical psalm. Both are examples of poetry, but the former expresses a private emotion while the latter most likely gets its full energy from use in worship: we can imagine a congregation singing a psalm but not the same congregation reciting one of Petrarch’s sonnets to Laura.

In poetry, then, context is all. Our appreciation of a poem is enhanced once we have discovered where the poem belongs: with music? on a page? for an aristocratic circle of intellectuals? as part of a national or ethnic or religious heritage? as propaganda or protest or to express deep emotions?

At base, however, poetry is the refined use of language. The poet is the maker of words. Our greatest appreciation of a poem comes when we say to ourselves that this could not be said better. An authentic poem cannot be edited or paraphrased or glossed. Poetic language, even in long poems, is economical. One can understand that by simple experiment: take one of Dante’s portraits in *The Divine Comedy* and try to do a better job of description in fewer words. The genius of Dante (or Chaucer in the *Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*) is his ability to sketch out a fully formed person in a few stanzas.

**Prose.** God created humans, the writer Elie Wiesel once remarked, because he loves a good story. Narrative is as old as human history. The stories that stand behind the *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* have been shown to have existed not only for centuries but in widely different cultural milieus. Stories are told to draw out moral examples or to instruct or warn, but, by and large, stories are told because we enjoy hearing them. We read novels in order to enter into a new world and suspend the workaday world we live in, just as we watch films for the same purpose. The difference between a story and a film is that one can linger over a story, but in a film there is no “second look.”

Some prose obviously is not fictional. It can be autobiographical like Augustine’s *Confessions* or it may be a philosophical essay like Jean-Paul Sartre’s attempt to explain what he means by existentialism. How do we approach that kind of writing? First, with a willingness to listen to what is being said. Second, with a readiness to judge: Does this passage ring true? What objections might I make to it? and so on. Third, with an openness that says, in effect, there is something to be learned here.

A final point has to do with attitude. We live in an age in which much of what we know comes to us in very brief “sound bites” via television and much of what we read comes to us in the disposable form of newspapers and magazines and inexpensive paperbacks. To read—*really* to read—requires that we discipline ourselves to cultivate a more leisurely approach to that art. There is merit in speed-reading the morning sports page; there is no merit in doing the same with a poem or a short story. It may take time to learn to slow down and read at a leisurely pace (leisure is the basis of culture, says Aristotle), but if we learn to do so we have taught ourselves a skill that will enrich us all our lives.

## GENERAL EVENTS

## LITERATURE &amp; PHILOSOPHY

## ART

1400

**15th cent.** Florence center of European banking system; renaissance in exploration outside Europe begins

THE FIRST PHASE

**1417** Council of Constance ends "Great Schism"



**1432** Florentines defeat Sienese at San Romano

1434

**1434** Cosimo de' Medici becomes de facto ruler of Florence

**1439–1442** Ecumenical Council of Florence deals with proposed union of Greek and Roman churches

**1453** Fall of Constantinople to Turks; scholarly refugees bring Greek manuscripts to Italy

**1464** Piero de' Medici takes power in Florence after death of Cosimo

**1469** Lorenzo de' Medici rules city after death of Piero

**1478** Pazzi conspiracy against the Medici fails

**1489** Savonarola begins sermons against Florentine immorality

**1492** Death of Lorenzo de' Medici

1494

**1494** Medici faction in exile; Savonarola becomes de facto ruler of Florence; Charles VIII of France invades Italy, beginning foreign invasions

**1498** Savonarola burned at stake by order of Pope

1503

**1512** Medici power restored in Florence; Machiavelli exiled

1520



**1446–1450** Gutenberg invents movable printing type

**1456** Gutenberg Bible printed at Mainz

**1462** Cosimo de' Medici founds Platonic Academy in Florence, headed by Marsilio Ficino

**1465** First Italian printing press, at Subiaco

**1470–1499** Laura Cetera's humanist writings

**1470–1527** Height of humanist learning  
**1475** *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, printed by William Caxton, first book published in English

c. **1476–1477** Lorenzo de' Medici begins *Comento ad Alconi Sonetti*

**1482** Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*

**1486** Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*

**1490** Lorenzo de' Medici, *The Song of Bacchus*

**1491** Lorenzo de' Medici, *Laudi*

c. **1494** Aldus Manutius establishes Aldine Press in Venice

**1496** Burning of books inspired by Savonarola

**1502** Erasmus, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*

**1506** Erasmus travels to Italy

**1509** Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*

**1513** Machiavelli, *The Prince*

**1516** Erasmus, *Greek New Testament*

**1401** Competition for North Doors of Florence Baptistery won by Ghiberti's *Sacrifice of Isaac*

**1403** Ghiberti begins Baptistery doors; Brunelleschi, Donatello study Roman ruins

c. **1416–1417** Donatello, *Saint George*

**1423** Fabriano, *The Adoration of the Magi*, International Style altarpiece

**1425** Masaccio begins frescoes for Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence; *The Tribute Money* (1425), *Expulsion from the Garden* (c. 1425)

c. **1425–c. 1452** Ghiberti sculpts panels for East Doors of Florence Baptistery; *The Story of Jacob and Esau* (1435)

Use of linear perspective to create three-dimensional space; naturalistic rendering of figures; return to classical ideals of beauty and proportion: Masaccio, *The Trinity*, Santa Maria Novella, Florence (c. 1428)

c. **1430–1432** Donatello, *David*, first free-standing nude since antiquity

**1445–1450** Fra Angelico, *Annunciation*, fresco for Convent of San Marco, Florence

c. **1455** Donatello, *Mary Magdalene*; Uccello, *Battle of San Romano*

**1459–1463** Gozzoli, *The Journey of the Magi*

c. **1467–1483** Leonardo works in Florence

**1475** The Medici commission Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi* for Santa Maria Novella

**1478–c. 1482** Botticelli, *La Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus*, *Pallas and the Centaur*



**1498–1499** Michelangelo, *Pietà*

late **15th–early 16th cent.** Leonardo, *Notebooks*

c. **1495–1498** Leonardo, *Last Supper*

c. **1496** Botticelli burns some of his work in response to Savonarola's sermons

c. **1503–1505** Leonardo, *Mona Lisa*

**1506** Ancient *Laocoön* sculpture discovered

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## ARCHITECTURE

## MUSIC



**1417–1420** Brunelleschi designs and begins construction of Florence Cathedral dome (completed 1436)

**1419–1426** Brunelleschi, Foundling Hospital  
Use of classical order and proportion to achieve rational harmony of elements; Brunelleschi, Pazzi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence (1430–1433)

**1434** Jan Van Eyck, *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride*



c. **1489** Michelangelo begins studies in Lorenzo's sculpture garden;  
*Madonna of the Stairs* (1489–1492)

**1437–1452** Michelozzo,  
Convent of San Marco,  
Florence

**1444–1459** Michelozzo,  
Palazzo Medici-Riccardi,  
Florence



c. **1450–1500** Johannes Ockeghem,  
motets, chansons, masses;  
*Missa pro Defunctis*, earliest  
known polyphonic requiem  
mass

**1479–1492** Heinrich Isaac, court  
composer to Medici family  
and organist and choirmaster  
at Florence Cathedral, sets  
Lorenzo's poems to music

**1501–1504**  
Michelangelo,  
*David*

