

# *The Western Humanities*

VOLUME I: Beginnings through the Renaissance      FOURTH EDITION



ROY T. MATTHEWS

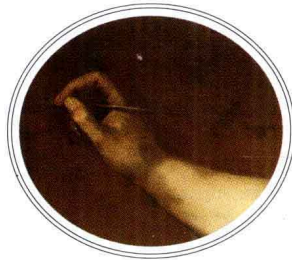
F. DEWITT PLATT

VOLUME I: BEGINNINGS THROUGH THE RENAISSANCE

*The*  
*Western*  
*Humanities*

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FOURTH EDITION



*Roy T. Matthews & F. DeWitt Platt*

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



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*To Lee Ann and Dixie*

There is nothing nobler or more admirable than when two people who see eye to eye keep house as man and wife, confounding their enemies and delighting their friends, as they themselves know better than anyone.

—HOMER, *Odyssey*

# PREFACE

We offer this new edition of *The Western Humanities* with a great sense of satisfaction. From the start of this project we wrote from a particular perspective on the arts and humanities, and we wondered how many others shared our point of view. Today, we are gratified to know that our textbook has helped many students develop an understanding and, we hope, an enthusiasm for the arts and humanities. And now, with this fourth edition, we continue in the same spirit with which we first approached the arts and humanities. In the first edition, we placed Western cultural achievements within their historical context. In the second and especially the third editions, we expanded coverage of the contributions of women and other artists outside the traditional canon. And, in this edition, we are adding a multicultural dimension, with the expectation that students will gain a greater appreciation of world cultures beyond the Western traditions. It is our hope that the fourth edition of *The Western Humanities* will continue to assist instructors in meeting today's teaching challenges as well as help the next generation of students understand and claim their cultural heritage.

## AIMS OF THE WESTERN HUMANITIES

When we sat down to write the first edition of *The Western Humanities*, we feared that the world of the late twentieth century was in danger of being engulfed by present-minded thinking. Now, we believe this fear is even more real. As historians, we know that history has always had its naysayers, but it seems to us that an ahistorical view is even more prevalent today. For many people, the past is viewed as either a burden to

be overcome or simply irrelevant—and thus safely ignored. Students merely mirror the wider society when they show little knowledge of or even concern about the great artistic and literary monuments and movements of the Western tradition or about the political, economic, and social milestones of Western history. What intensifies present-minded thinking among today's students is their close involvement in popular culture, with its obsessive faddishness, and the Internet, which provides information and voluminous data but not knowledge.

In *The Western Humanities*, we address the problem of present-mindedness by discussing not only the works that were produced in successive periods but also the prevailing historical and material conditions that so powerfully influenced their form and content. Our intention is to demystify the cultural record by showing that literature and the arts do not spring forth spontaneously and independently of each other but reflect a set of specific historical circumstances. By providing this substantial context, out of which both ideas and artifacts emerge, we hope to give students a deeper understanding of the meaning of cultural works and a broader basis for appreciating the humanities.

At the same time that we point out the linkages between cultural expression and historical conditions, we also emphasize the universal aspects of creativity and expression. People everywhere have the impulse to seek answers to the mysteries of human existence; to discover or invent order in the universe; to respond creatively to nature, both inner and outer; to delight the senses and the mind with beauty and truth; to communicate their thoughts and share their visions with others. Thus, another of our intentions is to

demonstrate that the desire to express oneself and to create lasting monuments has been a compelling drive in human beings since before the dawn of civilized life. We believe that this emphasis will help students see that they, along with their ideas, questions, and aspirations, are not isolated from the past but belong to a tradition that began thousands of years ago.

Our third aim is to help students prepare themselves for the uncertainties of the future. When they examine the past and learn how earlier generations confronted and overcame crises—and managed to leave enduring legacies—students will discover that the human spirit is irrepressible. In the humanities—in philosophy, religion, art, music, literature—human beings have found answers to their deepest needs and most perplexing questions. We hope that students will be encouraged by this record as they begin to shape the world of the twenty-first century.

In its origin *The Western Humanities* was an outgrowth of our careers as university teachers. Instructing thousands of undergraduate students throughout the years had left us dissatisfied with available textbooks. In our eyes, the existing books failed in one of two ways: They either ignored material developments and focused exclusively on cultural artifacts without context or perspective, or they stressed political, social, and economic history with too little or too disjointed a discussion of literature and the arts. Our goal in writing this book was to balance and integrate these two elements—that is, to provide an analysis and an appreciation of cultural expression and artifacts within an interpretive historical framework.

## ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

*The Western Humanities* is organized chronologically, in twenty-one chapters, around successive historical periods, from prehistory to the present. In our introduction for students we distinguish three sweeping historical periods—ancient, medieval, and modern—although we do not formally divide our study into parts. We explain that the first of these periods extends from about 3000 B.C. to A.D. 500 and includes the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome (covered in Chapters 1–7). The second period extends from about 500 to 1500, when Western civilization became centered in Europe and was largely dominated by the Christian church (Chapters 8–10). The third period, beginning in about 1400 and extending to the present, witnessed the gradual birth of the modern world (Chapters 11–21). Timelines are provided in the introduction to support these distinctions and to give students a basic framework for the study of the humanities.

In the body of the book, the first part of every chapter covers the material conditions of the era—the historical, political, economic, and social developments. From the mass of available historical information we have distilled what we consider the crucial points, always aiming to capture the essence of complex periods and to fashion a coherent narrative framework for the story of Western culture. In this discussion many of the major themes, issues, and problems of the period come into view.

The remaining part of each chapter is devoted to cultural expression, both in the realm of attitude and idea—philosophy, history, religion, science—and in the realm of cultural artifact—art, music, drama, literature, and film. In this part we describe and analyze the significant cultural achievements of the age, focusing on pervasive themes, choices, and elements of style. We examine how intellectuals, artists, writers, and other creative individuals responded to the challenges presented to them by their society and how they chose values and forms by which to live. Included among these individuals are those whom the Western tradition has often neglected or discounted, namely, women and members of racial and ethnic minorities. Their experiences, roles, and rich contributions are given their rightful place alongside those of the more conventionally favored artists, thinkers, and writers.

*The Western Humanities* strives to balance the historical background with cultural and artistic achievements. We believe that the clearest and most effective way to present this closely woven web of experience and expression is to untangle the various realms and discuss them separately. Thus, our treatment of cultural achievements is broken down into sections on art, architecture, music, literature, and so on. These sections vary in length, order, and focus from chapter to chapter, just as preferred or more developed forms of expression vary from one period to another. This approach gives students an unobstructed view of each form and reveals the continuities—as well as the strains and disruptions—in that form from one period to the next.

At the same time, we work from a unified perspective and stress the integrated nature of the humanities. We emphasize that the creative works of a particular period represent a coherent response to the unique character and deepest urges of that period. By pointing out linkages and reverberations, we show that the various areas of expression are tied together by shared stylistic elements and by the themes and issues that inform and shape the era. Rather than weave our own synthesis so tightly into this discussion that instructors would have to spend their class time sorting out our point of view from the true subject of the book, we prefer to present the material in as direct a

way as possible. We believe this approach gives instructors the flexibility to teach from their own strengths and perspectives, and we invite them to do so. We have paid special attention to sorting out and explaining complex ideas and sequences of events carefully and clearly, to make the study of the humanities accessible to a broad range of students.

Each chapter ends with a brief section describing the cultural legacy of that era. Here we show what achievements proved to be of lasting value and endured into succeeding periods, even to the present day. Students will find that some ideas, movements, or artistic methods with which they are familiar have a very long history indeed. They will also discover that the meaning and ascribed value of cultural objects and texts can change from one time and place to another. Our goal here is not only to help students establish a context for their culture but to show that the humanities have developed as a dynamic series of choices made by individuals in one era and transformed by individuals in other eras. We hope to convey both the richness and the energy of the Western tradition, to which so many have contributed and from which so many have drawn.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

In addition to the overall distinctive features of *The Western Humanities*—its interpretive context for the humanities, its balanced treatment of history and culture, its focus on the cultural legacy of each period—the book has some special features that we believe contribute to its usefulness and appeal. Chapter 8 includes an extended discussion and analysis of Islamic history and culture, broadening the horizons of the Western tradition to cover this important area. Chapter 15 presents a concise discussion of the seventeenth-century revolutions in science and political philosophy that laid the foundations for what we consider modern thinking. Chapter 21 extends the narrative of Western history and culture to the present day and includes expanded coverage of the global style known as Post-Modernism. Throughout the book, we consider not just art, literature, and music but also less commonly covered topics such as history, theology, and technology.

## CHANGES TO THE FOURTH EDITION

The major change to this fourth edition of *The Western Humanities* is the “Windows on the World” feature—timelines that outline the most important events in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. These two-page en-

tries, through text and art illustration, summarize historical developments and highlight cultural contributions of selected societies. Limited by reasons of space, we have focused on regional cultures in Africa; Andean, Mesoamerican, and North American cultures in the Americas; and China, India, and Japan in Asia. This new feature helps to expand students’ cultural horizons by giving them the opportunity to see how other societies were developing and to note their contributions to the arts and humanities. The twelve “Windows on the World” timelines complement the major time periods covered in *The Western Humanities*.

Another innovation is “A Humanities Primer: How to Understand the Arts,” which has been added to the Introduction. In order to make the West’s achievements more familiar to students, this new feature includes a set of general terms and concepts used across the arts and humanities plus some basic terms that apply to the arts, architecture, literature, music, theater, history, philosophy, and religion. We have also outlined the major analytical methods used for understanding cultural works.

We have revised the art program for this edition. More than 50 new artworks are included, either replacing works previously illustrated or adding to the overall art program. Each new artwork is discussed in both a detailed caption and the text. The revised art program includes four new sections: the rise of printmaking in late medieval times; the origin of the Venetian School of Renaissance painting; and, in the Post-Modern period, video art and installation art. The new illustrations come from sculpture, painting, architecture, photography, and other media, including the *Torso of Miletus*, the Dura Europas Synagogue, *Leisure Time at the Bath* from the *Medieval Housebook*, Hans Memling’s *Madonna and Child with Angels*, Giovanni Bellini’s *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, Rachel Whiteread’s *Untitled (Yellow Tub)*, and Nam June Paik’s *My Faust—Channel 5—Nationalism*.

We made specific changes to the text to address reviewers’ suggestions. In Chapter 13, we rearranged the chronology of the main topics: northern humanism, the religious reformations, the Northern Renaissance, and Late Mannerism. We also expanded it to include the Golden Age of Spanish literature and shifted Hieronymus Bosch from Chapter 10 to Chapter 13. We then added Hans Memling to Chapter 10. We extended Chapter 21 to include developments in the late 1990s.

Finally, we continued with our goal of expanding our discussion of women writers and artists as well as artists from cultures beyond the Western traditions. Some of these new additions include Toni Morrison, Ann Hamilton, Nam June Paik, Rachel Whiteread, Emily Dickinson, and Frederick Douglass. We replaced nine “Personal Perspectives” (a feature added in the last edition to bring history to life for the reader) with



new eyewitness accounts from such historical figures as Amenemope, Solon, Henry Knighton, Samuel Pepys, and Charlotte Brontë.

## TEACHING RESOURCES

As instructors, we are keenly aware of the problems encountered in teaching the humanities, especially to large, diverse classes. We have therefore created an Instructor's Manual, as well as a comprehensive package of ancillary resource materials, designed to help solve those problems.

The fourth edition of the Instructor's Manual has been revised and expanded. For each chapter this manual includes teaching strategies and suggestions, test items, learning objectives, key cultural terms, film and reading suggestions, and a detailed outline revised to accompany the fourth edition of *The Western Humanities*. Additionally, there is background on the "Personal Perspective" boxes found throughout the book and, new to this edition, there is "Windows on the World Background," which provides additional information on the cultures and artworks described in each Windows feature. Also new to this edition of the manual are suggested Web sites that instructors will find useful for lecture preparation and additional images.

In addition to chapter-by-chapter materials, you'll find the following features in the Instructor's Manual:

- Five basic teaching strategies
- Seven lecture models
- Timeline of developments in non-Western cultures
- Music listening guides
- Comparative questions covering material from more than one chapter (designed to test students on broader patterns and comparisons)

*The Mayfield Quick View Guide to the Internet for Students of the Humanities* has been thoroughly revised and updated by Jeffrey Hodges of Michigan State University. This guide provides step-by-step instructions on accessing the Internet and finding and using information on the humanities. It also helps students evaluate the credibility of online information sources, use listserves and newsgroups, and even create a Web page. The guide is available to students at no additional cost.

*Music in the Western Tradition* offers expanded coverage of music concepts and history. This supplemental text is available to students at a minimal cost.

### Electronic Ancillaries and Presentation Aids

New to this edition is an interactive Web site, which can be accessed at [www.mayfieldpub.com/mp](http://www.mayfieldpub.com/mp).

Instructor's resources on the site include PowerPoint slides, a custom syllabus generator, and links to recommended Western and global humanities Internet sites. Resources for students include interactive quizzes for each chapter, a tutorial for doing research using the Internet, and links.

The *Electronic Study Guide*, developed by Julius J. Jackson, Jr., San Bernardino Valley College, has been thoroughly revised and updated. This CD-ROM offers students several ways to review and expand their knowledge, with study aids for each chapter that include guided tours to highlight important concepts; pronunciation guides for key terms; flash cards; true-false, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the-blank questions; and mini-lectures that provide an in-depth study of selected concepts. The study guide can be used with either Windows- or Macintosh-based computers.

For use in presentations, particularly in large lecture settings, there are two slide sets available. The art slides present 100 artworks reflecting the range of art and architecture covered in *The Western Humanities*. The 25 map slides reproduce the maps found in the text.

The complete test bank is available in both Windows and Macintosh formats. The MicroTest III testing program allows you to design tests using the questions included with *The Western Humanities*, to edit those questions, and to incorporate your own questions.

Finally, additional multimedia resources, including videotapes and CD-ROMs, are available to qualified adopters.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Preparing the fourth edition of this text has been a rewarding experience for us. The task has been made more enjoyable by the participation and support of many people. We acknowledge and express gratitude for the help of former students over the years. Their questions and insights have affected the way we address certain issues and frame particular arguments.

Beyond the confines of Michigan State University we are grateful for the many comments and suggestions provided to us by the following reviewers: Judith Chambers, Hillsborough Community College; Robert Eisner, San Diego State University; Connie Frankel, Pasco Hernando Community College; Robin Hardee, Brevard Community College; Grant Hardy, University of North Carolina, Asheville; Sara Hollis, Southern University at New Orleans; Kimberley Jones, Seminole Community College; Seth R. Katz, Bradley University; Sandi S. Landis, St. John's River Community College; Michael Phillips, Brigham Young University; Robert Prescott, Bradley University; William Stockton, Johnson County Community College.



We have also benefited from the staff at Mayfield Publishing Company. First and foremost, we wish to thank Holly Allen, the sponsoring editor, who remains patient and supportive all the way. Thanks also to Barbara Armentrout and Kate Engelberg, the developmental editors who helped us especially with the new features in this edition. Susan Shook, developmental editor, helped us pull together all the teaching supplements. Joan Pendleton, the copyeditor, has done an outstanding job, checking our grammar, spelling, and punctuation. She has made it easier for all of us with her fine sense of humor. We also wish to thank the Mayfield production team. Once again, senior production editor Julianna Scott Fein has shep-

herded the manuscript through the production process with care and grace. Brian Pecko, photo researcher, has done an excellent job ensuring that the art reproductions are of the highest quality. Credit for the beautiful cover goes to the cover designer, Linda Robertson; for the elegant interior design to the designer, Anna George, and to the design manager, Jean Mailander; and for the handsome timelines and maps to the art manager, Robin Mouat. Manufacturing manager Randy Hurst is responsible for the printing and paper that make *The Western Humanities* so attractive. The efforts of Marty Granahan, permissions editor, ensured the integrity of the work. To all we express our thanks.

# INTRODUCTION

## Why Study Cultural History?

*To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child.*

—CICERO, FIRST CENTURY B.C.

*Anyone who cannot give an account to oneself of the past three thousand years remains in darkness, without experience, living from day to day.*

—GOETHE, NINETEENTH CENTURY A.D.

The underlying premise of this book is that some basic knowledge of the Western cultural heritage is necessary for those who want to become educated human beings in charge of their own destinies. If people are not educated into their place in human history—five thousand years of relatively uninterrupted though sometimes topsy-turvy developments—then they are rendered powerless, subject to passing fads and outlandish beliefs. They become vulnerable to the flattery of demagogues who promise heaven on earth, or they fall prey to the misconception that present-day events are unique, without precedent in history, or superior to everything that has gone before.

Perhaps the worst that can happen is to exist in a limbo of ignorance—in Goethe's words, "living from day to day." Without knowledge of the past and the perspective it brings, people may come to believe that their contemporary world will last forever, when in reality much of it is doomed to be forgotten. In contrast to the instant obsolescence of popular culture, the study of Western culture offers an alternative that has passed the unforgiving test of time. Long after today's heroes and celebrities have fallen into oblivion, the achievements of our artistic and literary ancestors—those who have forged the Western tradition—will remain. Their works echo down the ages and seem fresh in every period. The

ancient Roman writer Seneca put it well when he wrote, in the first century A.D., "Life is short but art is long."

When people realize that the rich legacy of Western culture is their own, their view of themselves and the times they live in can expand beyond the present moment. They find that they need not be confined by the limits of today but can draw on the creative insights of people who lived hundreds and even thousands of years ago. They discover that their own culture has a history and a context that give it meaning and shape. Studying and experiencing their cultural legacy can help them understand their place in today's world.

### THE BOUNDARIES OF THE WEST

The subject of this text is Western culture, but what exactly do we mean, first, by "culture" and, second, by the "West"? *Culture* is a term with several meanings, but we use it here to mean the artistic and intellectual expressions of a people, their creative achievements. By the *West* we mean that part of the globe that lies west of Asia and Asia Minor and north of Africa, especially Europe—the geographical framework for much of this study.

The Western tradition is not confined exclusively to Europe as defined today, however. The contributions of peoples who lived beyond the boundaries of present-day Europe are also included in Western culture, either because they were forerunners of the West, such as those who created the first civilizations in Mesopotamia and Egypt, or because they were part of the West for periods of time, such as those who lived in the North African and Near Eastern lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea during the Roman and early

Christian eras. Regardless of geography, Western culture draws deeply from ideals forged in these lands.

When areas that had been part of the Western tradition at one time were absorbed into other cultural traditions, as happened in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and North Africa in the seventh century when the people embraced the Muslim faith, then they are generally no longer included in Western cultural history. Because of the enormous influence of Islamic civilization on Western civilization, however, we do include in this volume both an account of Islamic history and a description and appreciation of Islamic culture. Different in many ways from our own, the rich tradition of Islam has an important place in today's world.

After about 1500, with voyages and explorations reaching the farthest parts of the globe, the European focus of Western culture that had held for centuries began to dissolve. Starting from this time, the almost exclusive European mold was broken and Western values and ideals began to be exported throughout the world, largely through the efforts of missionaries, soldiers, colonists, and merchants. Coinciding with this development and further complicating the pattern of change were the actions of those who imported and enslaved countless numbers of black Africans to work on plantations in North and South America. The interplay of Western culture with many previously isolated cultures, whether desired or not, forever changed all who were touched by the process.

The Westernization of the globe that has been going on ever since 1500 is perhaps the dominant theme of the twentieth century. What human greed, missionary zeal, and dreams of empire failed to accomplish before 1900 has been achieved in this century by modern technology, the media, and popular culture. The world today is a global village, much of it dominated by Western values and styles of life. In our time, Westernization has become a two-way interchange. When artists and writers from other cultures adopt Western forms or ideas, they are not only Westernizing their own traditions but also injecting fresh sensibilities and habits of thought into the Western tradition. The globalization of culture means that a South American novel or a Japanese film can be as accessible to Western audiences as a European painting and yet carry with it an intriguingly new vocabulary of cultural symbols and meanings.

## HISTORICAL PERIODS AND CULTURAL STYLES

In cultural history the past is often divided into historical periods and cultural styles. A historical period is an interval of time that has a certain unity because

it is characterized by the prevalence of a unique culture, ideology, or technology or because it is bounded by defining historical events, such as the death of a military leader like Alexander the Great or a political upheaval like the fall of Rome. A cultural style is a combination of features of artistic or literary expression, execution, or performance that define a particular school or era. A historical period may have the identical time frame as a cultural style, or it may embrace more than one style simultaneously or two styles successively. Each chapter of this survey focuses on a historical period and includes significant aspects of culture—usually the arts, architecture, literature, religion, music, and philosophy—organized around a discussion of the relevant style or styles appropriate to that time.

The survey begins with prehistory, the era before writing was invented, setting forth the emergence of human beings from an obscure past. After the appearance of writing in about 3000 B.C., the Western cultural heritage is divided into three sweeping historical periods: ancient, medieval, and modern.

The ancient period dates from 3000 B.C. to A.D. 500 (Timeline 1). During these thirty-five hundred years the light of Western civilization begins to shine in Mesopotamia and Egypt, shines more brightly still in eighth-century-B.C. Greece and Rome, loses some of its luster when Greece succumbs to Rome in 146 B.C., and finally is snuffed out when the Roman empire collapses in the fifth century A.D. Coinciding with these historical periods are the cultural styles of Mesopotamia; Egypt; Greece, including Archaic, Classical (or Hellenic), and Hellenistic styles; and Rome, including Republican and Imperial styles.

The medieval period, or the Middle Ages, covers events between A.D. 500 and 1500, a one-thousand-year span that is further divided into three subperiods (Timeline 2). The Early Middle Ages (500–1000) is typified by frequent barbarian invasions and political chaos so that civilization itself is threatened and barely survives. No single international style characterizes this turbulent period, though several regional styles flourish. The High Middle Ages (1000–1300) is a period of stability and the zenith of medieval culture. Two successive styles appear, the Romanesque and the Gothic, with the latter dominating culture for the rest of the medieval period. The Late Middle Ages (1300–1500) is a transitional period in which the medieval age is dying and the modern age is struggling to be born.

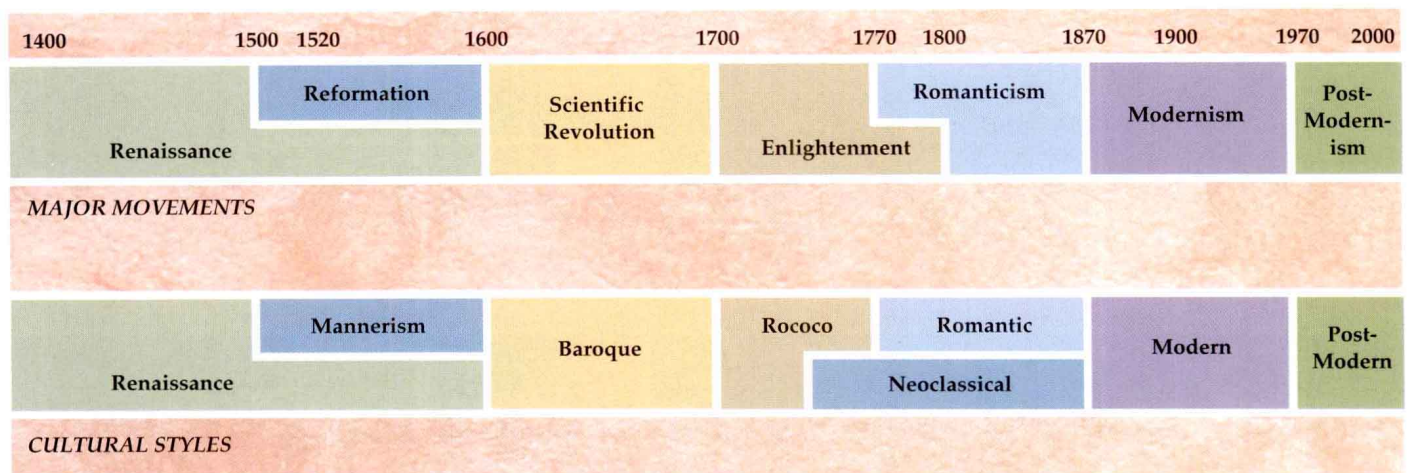
The modern period begins in about 1400 (there is often overlap between historical periods) and continues today (Timeline 3). With the advent of the modern period a new way of defining historical changes starts to make more sense—the division of history into







## Timeline 3 THE MODERN WORLD



revived taste for the Gothic and a love of nature, is the perfect accompaniment to this movement.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Modernism (1870–1970) arises, bent on destroying every vestige of both the Greco-Roman tradition and the Christian faith and on fashioning new ways of understanding that are independent of the past. Since 1970 Post-Modernism has emerged, a movement that tries to make peace with the past by embracing old forms of expression while at the same time adopting a global and multivoiced perspective.

Although every cultural period is marked by innovation and creativity, our treatment of them in this book varies somewhat, with more space and greater weight given to the achievements of certain times. We make these adjustments because some periods or styles are more significant than others, especially in the defining influence that their achievements have had on our own era. For example, some styles seem to tower over the rest, such as Classicism in fifth-century-B.C. Greece, the High Renaissance of sixteenth-century Italy, and Modernism in the mid-twentieth century, as compared with other styles, such as that of the Early Middle Ages or the seventeenth-century Baroque.

### AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO CULTURAL HISTORY

Our approach to the Western heritage in this book is to root cultural achievements in their historical settings, showing how the material conditions—the political, social, and economic events of each period—influenced their creation. About one-third of each chapter is devoted to an interpretive discussion of material history, and the remaining two-thirds are devoted to the arts, architecture, philosophy, religion, literature, and music

of the period. These two aspects of history do not occur separately, of course, and one of our aims is to show how they are intertwined.

As just one example of this integrated approach, consider the Gothic cathedral, that lofty, light-filled house of worship marked by pointed arches, towering spires, and radiant stained-glass windows. Gothic cathedrals were erected during the High Middle Ages, following a bleak period when urban life had virtually ceased. Although religion was still the dominant force in European life, trade was starting to flourish once again, town life was reviving, and urban dwellers were beginning to prosper. In part as testimonials to their new wealth, cities and towns commissioned architects and hired workers to erect these soaring churches, which dominated the landscape for miles around and proclaimed the economic well-being of their makers.

We adopt an integrated approach to Western culture not just in considering how the arts are related to material conditions but also in looking for the common themes, aspirations, and ideas that permeate the artistic and literary expressions of every individual era. The creative accomplishments of an age tend to reflect a shared perspective, even when that perspective is not explicitly recognized at the time. Thus, each period possesses a unique outlook that can be analyzed in the cultural record. A good example of this phenomenon is Classical Greece in the fifth century B.C., when the ideal of moderation, or balance in all things, played a major role in sculpture, architecture, philosophy, religion, and tragic drama. The cultural record in other periods is not always as clear as that in ancient Greece, but shared qualities can often be uncovered that distinguish the varied aspects of culture in an era to form a unifying thread.

A corollary of this idea is that creative individuals and their works are very much influenced by the times

in which they live. This is not to say that incomparable geniuses—such as Shakespeare in Renaissance England—do not appear and rise above their own ages, speaking directly to the human mind and heart in every age that follows. Yet even Shakespeare reflected the political attitudes and social patterns of his time. Though a man for the ages, he still regarded monarchy as the correct form of government and women as the inferiors of men.

## THE SELECTION OF CULTURAL WORKS

The Western cultural heritage is vast, and any selection of works for a survey text reflects choices made by the authors. All the works we chose to include have had a significant impact on Western culture, but for different reasons. We chose some because they blazed a new trail, such as Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (see Figure 19.21), which marked the advent of Cubism in painting, or Fielding's *Tom Jones*, one of the earliest novels. Other works were included because they seemed to embody a style to perfection, such as the regal statue called *Poseidon* (or *Zeus*) (see Figure 3.21), executed in the Classical style of fifth-century-B.C. Athens, or Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which epitomized the ideals of the High Middle Ages. On occasion, we chose works on a particular topic, such as the biblical story of David and Goliath, and demonstrated how different sculptors interpreted it, as in sculptures by Donatello (see Figure 11.11), Verrocchio (see Figure 11.12), and Michelangelo (see Figure 12.19). Still other

works caught our attention because they served as links between successive styles, as is the case with Giotto's frescoes (see Figure 10.19), or because they represented the end of an age or an artistic style, as in the haunting sculpture called *The Last Pagan* (see Figure 7.15). Finally, we included some works, especially paintings, simply because of their great beauty, such as Ingres's *Madame Jacques Louis Leblanc* (see Figure 17.7).

Through all the ages of Western cultural history, through all the shifting styles and tastes embodied in painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, and song, there glows a creative spark that can be found in human beings in every period. This diversity is a hallmark of the Western experience, and we celebrate it in this book.

## A CHALLENGE TO THE READER

The purpose of all education is and should be self-knowledge. This goal was first established by the ancient Greeks in their injunction to "Know thyself," the inscription carved above the entrance to Apollo's temple at Delphi. Self-knowledge means awareness of oneself and one's place in society and the world. Reaching this goal is not easy, because becoming an educated human being is a lifelong process, requiring time, energy, and commitment. But all journeys begin with a single step, and we intend this volume as a first step toward understanding and defining oneself in terms of one's historical and cultural heritage. Our challenge to the reader is to use this book to begin the long journey to self-knowledge.



# A HUMANITIES PRIMER

## How to Understand the Arts

### INTRODUCTION

We can all appreciate the arts. We can find pleasure or interest in paintings, music, poems, novels, films, and many other art forms, both contemporary and historical. We don't need to know very much about art to know what we like, because we bring ourselves to the work: What we like has as much to do with who we are as with the art itself.

Many of us, for example, will respond positively to a painting like Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks*. The faces of the Madonna and angel are lovely; we may have seen images like these on Christmas cards or in other commercial reproductions. We respond with what English poet William Wordsworth calls the "first careless rapture," which activates our imaginations and establishes a connection between us and the work of art. However, if this is all we see, if we never move from a subjective reaction, we can only appreciate the surface, the immediate form, and then, perhaps subconsciously, accept without question the values it implies. We appreciate, but we do not understand.

Sometimes we cannot appreciate because we do not understand. We may reject Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O. J. No. 1), for it presents us with images of women that we may not be able to recognize. These women may make us uncomfortable, and the values they imply may frighten us rather than please or reassure us. Rather than rapture, we may experience disgust; but when we realize that this painting is considered a groundbreaking work, we may wonder what we're missing and be willing to look deeper. (*The Virgin of the Rocks* and *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O. J. No. 1) are discussed in the text on pages 310–311 and pages 530, 532–533, respectively.)



LEONARDO DA VINCI. *The Virgin of the Rocks*.



To understand a work of art (a building, a poem, a song, a symphony), we need to keep our “rapture” (our emotional response and connection) but make it less “careless,” less superficial and subjective, less restricted to that which we recognize. We need to enrich our appreciation by searching for a meaning that goes beyond ourselves. This involves understanding the intent or goal of the artist, the elements of form present in the work, the ways in which those elements contribute to the artist’s goal, the context within which the artwork evolved, and the connections of the work to other works. Understanding an artwork requires intellectual involvement as well as an emotional connection. The purpose of this primer is to provide you with some of the tools you will need to understand—as well as appreciate—literature, art, and music.

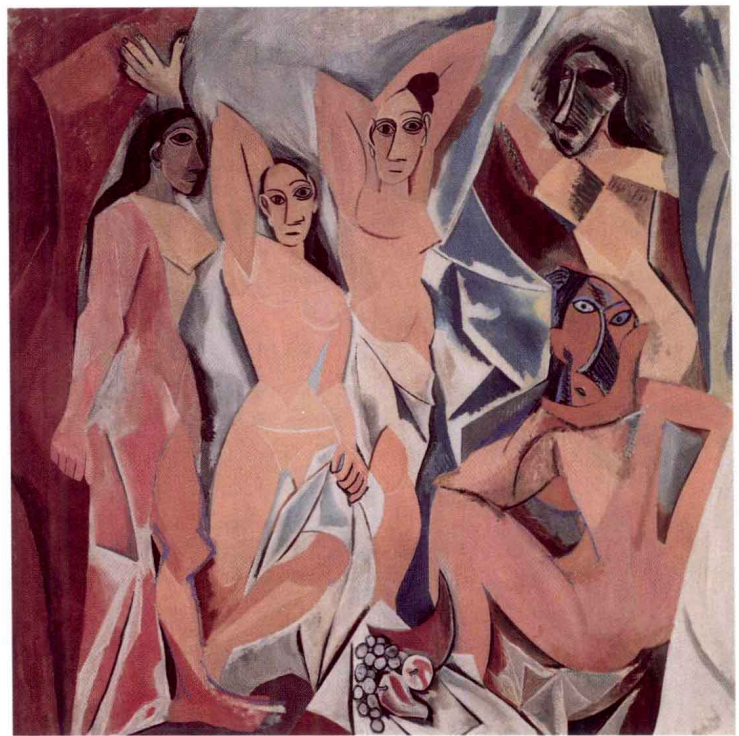
## APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE, ART, AND MUSIC

When we analyze a work of art, we ask two questions: What is the artist trying to do, and how well is it done? We want to identify the intent of the work, and we want to evaluate its execution. To answer these questions, we can examine the formal elements of the work—an approach known as formalism—and we can explore its context—known as contextualism.

### Formalism

A formal analysis is concerned with the aesthetic (artistic) elements of a work separate from context. This type of analysis focuses on medium and technique. The context of the work—where, when, and by whom a work was created—may be interesting but is considered unnecessary to formalist interpretation and understanding. A formal analysis of a painting, sculpture, or architectural structure examines its line, shape, color, texture, and composition, as well as the artist’s technical ability within the medium used; it is not concerned with anything extraneous to the work itself. A formal analysis of a literary work, such as a short story or novel, would explore the relationships among theme, plot, characters, and setting, as well as how well the resources of language—word choice, tone, imagery, symbol, and so on—are used to support the other elements. A formal analysis of a film would also explore theme, plot, characters (as developed both verbally and non-verbally), and setting, as well as how the resources of cinematography—camera techniques, lighting, sound, editing, and so on—support the other elements.

A formal analysis of *The Virgin of the Rocks* would examine the artist’s use of perspective, the arrangement



PABLO PICASSO. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*.

of figures as they relate to each other and to the grotto that surrounds them, the technical use of color and line, the dramatic interplay of light and shadow (known as *chiaroscuro*). The same technical considerations would be explored in a formal analysis of *Les Femmes d'Alger*. The fact that the two paintings were completed in 1483 and 1907, respectively, would be important only in terms of the technology and mediums available to the artists. In a formal analysis, time and place exist only within the work.

### Contextualism

In contrast, a contextual analysis focuses on factors outside the work: why it was created, in response to what artistic, social, cultural, historical, and political forces, events, and trends; who the artist is, and what his or her intent and motives were in creating the work; how the work fits in with other works of the same genre of the same or different eras; and how the work fits in with the rest of the artist’s body of work. Time and place are very important.

A contextual analysis of the da Vinci and Picasso paintings would include information about where and when each painting was completed; the conditions from which it arose; the prevailing artistic styles of the times; the life circumstances of the artists; and so on. The paintings alone do not provide enough information for contextual inquiry. Similarly, contextual analysis of a novel by Dostoevsky would consider both his personal circumstances and the conditions in Russia



and Europe when he wrote. A contextual analysis of a chorale and fugue by Bach would include information on Bach's life, his religious beliefs, and the political climate of Germany in the eighteenth century.

### An Integrated Approach

In a strictly contextual analysis of an artwork, the work itself can sometimes be lost in the exploration of context. In a strictly formal analysis, important knowledge that can contribute to understanding may remain unknown. The most effective analyses, therefore, combine and integrate the two approaches, examining the formal elements of the work and exploring the context within which it was created. Such an approach is more effective and, in a sense, more honest than either the formal or the contextual approach alone. A work of art, whether a poem or a painting, a cathedral or a cantata, is a complex entity, as are the relationships it fosters between the artist and the art and between the art and its audience. The integrative approach recognizes these relationships and their complexity. This is the approach to artistic and cultural analysis most frequently used in *The Western Humanities*.

### A Variety of Perspectives

Many students and critics of culture, while taking an integrative approach, are also especially interested in looking at things from a particular perspective, a set of interests or a way of thinking that informs and influences their investigations and interpretations. Common perspectives are the psychological, the feminist, the religious, the economic, and the historical.

Someone working from a psychological perspective look for meaning in the psychological features of the work, such as sexual and symbolic associations; they do a kind of retroactive psychological analysis of the artist. They might look for meaning in the facial expressions, gestures, and body positions of Mary and the angel in *The Virgin of the Rocks*. They might be interested in da Vinci's attitudes toward women and his relationships with them, and they might compare this painting with the *Mona Lisa* in a search for clues about who he was.

Someone working from a feminist perspective would examine the art itself and the context in which it arose from a woman's point of view. To take a feminist perspective is to ask how the work depicts women, what it says about women and their relationships in general, and how it may or may not reflect a patriarchal society. Many people have discussed the apparent hatred of women that seems to come through in Picasso's

*Les Femmes d'Alger*. At the same time, the work, in its size (8 feet by 7 feet 8 inches) and in the unblinking attitude of its subjects, suggests that these women have a kind of raw power. Feminist critics focus on such considerations.

Analysis from a religious perspective is often appropriate when a work of art originated in a religious context. The soaring spires and cruciform floor plans of medieval cathedrals reveal religious meaning, for example, as do Renaissance paintings depicting biblical characters. Many contemporary works of art and literature also have religious content. Religious analyses look to the use of symbolism, the representation of theological doctrines and beliefs, and intercultural connections and influences for meaning.

Someone approaching a work of art from an economic perspective focuses on its economic content—the roles and relationships associated with wealth. Often drawing upon Marx's contention that class is the defining consideration in all human relationships and endeavors, an economic analysis would examine both purpose and content: Was the work created as a display of power by the rich? How does it depict people of different classes? What is the artist saying about the distribution of wealth?

The historical perspective is perhaps the most encompassing of all perspectives, because it can include explorations of psychological, religious, and economic issues, as well as questions about class and gender in various times and places. Historical analysis requires an understanding of the significant events of the time and how they affect the individual and shape the culture. *The Western Humanities* most often takes a historical perspective in its views of art and culture.

### The Vocabulary of Analysis

Certain terms and concepts are fundamental to the analysis of any artwork. We review several such general concepts and terms here, before moving on to a consideration of more specific art forms.

Any artwork requires a relationship between itself and its audience. **Audience** is the group for whom a work of art, architecture, literature, drama, film, or music is intended. The audience may be a single person, such as the Medici ruler to whom Machiavelli dedicated his political treatise *The Prince*. The audience can be a small group of people with access to the work, such as the monks who dined in the room where Leonardo da Vinci painted *The Last Supper* on the wall. The audience can also be a special group of people with common interests or education; for example, films like *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Scream* are intended for a youthful audience. Sometimes the audience is limited