Bernardo’s opposition to the establishment of the Inquisition in nearby Naples forced his departure from that position. During the 1550s, Torquato traveled with his father, who had to take a series of insecure court positions in Northern and Central Italy to support the family. While on these travels, Tasso acquired an excellent education, but he also became familiar with the uncertainties that could plague a courtier’s life if he failed to please his prince. In 1560, he entered the University of Padua, where his father wanted him to pursue a legal career that would free him from the need to secure literary patronage. Young Tasso, though, preferred poetry and philosophy to the law, and in these years, he began some of the poems that eventually established his fame. He began the chief of these works, Jerusalem liberata or Jerusalem Delivered, at this time, although he did not finish it until many years later. He conceived the poem as a chivalric epic similar to those of Ariosto, Boiardo, and Pulci. Its tastes, though, were more moral and religiously profound than these earlier works. While Tasso did not completely abandon the complex plot twists, eroticism, or adventure of the chivalric romance, he sublimated these features to the higher themes of love and heroic valor. Completing Jerusalem Delivered, though, proved to be a lifelong, tortuous task. After leaving university, Tasso received patronage from a wealthy and influential cardinal. He had few duties except to write and amuse the cardinal’s court in the city of Ferrara. In this environment Tasso circulated his poems, realizing that his works might cause offense in the heightened moral climate of the day. Over time, Tasso grew suspicious of his critics, and he feared that he would be denounced to the Inquisition. He went to confess his wrongdoings to the body when he had not even been summoned. Eventually, he stabbed a household servant whom he suspected of spying on him and he fled Ferrara. He left behind his manuscripts for Jerusalem Delivered and spent several years wandering through Italy. Later he returned to Ferrara where he denounced his former patrons, who imprisoned him, believing him to be mad. After seven years spent in an asylum, Tasso was finally released and had his writings returned to him. He regained his sanity and completed his masterpiece. His exaggerated, often paranoid fears of being persecuted by the Inquisition colored Jerusalem Delivered, and Tasso seems to have practiced a thorough self-censorship to avoid giving offense. Nevertheless, in his capable hands he still raised the chivalric tale he told to the level of high art.

**SOURCES**


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**THE NORTHERN RENAISSANCE**

**SPREAD OF HUMANISM.** In the final quarter of the fifteenth century humanism’s influence began to spread beyond Italy, into France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, and England. The timing of the arrival of this New Learning differed from place to place. In most countries pockets of scholars active in the first half of the fifteenth century had tried to revive ancient Latin grammar and rhetoric and to imitate the ancients’ style in their work. Many of these proto-humanists were teachers, and their interests nourished in their students a hunger to learn about the studia humanitatis. By the 1460s and 1470s, an increasing number of northern European scholars journeyed to Italy to learn firsthand about the Italians’ textual scholarship and their historical discoveries. As these figures began to return home, they frequently faced resistance from more traditional faculties in the universities. By 1500, though, the dogged persistence of this first generation of humanists had paid off and the movement was now established in many places outside Italy. As humanism matured in the sixteenth century, it helped to inspire a literary Renaissance. Inspired by the study of the classics, humanist scholars labored to revive ancient Latin and to reinvigorate their own native literary traditions. Their efforts resulted in a brilliant flowering of poetry and prose in sixteenth-century Europe.

**LATIN.** Latin had long been the lingua franca of Europe, a shared language that had allowed literate people from every corner of the continent to communicate with each other. During the Middle Ages the language had never ceased growing, as theologians, philosophers, and
government officials had constantly coined new terms and phrases in Latin to fit changing realities. Over the centuries, the native languages spoken in Europe had influenced medieval Latin, as writers often latinized terms drawn from their own spoken vocabulary. But Latin’s influence on the development of the vernacular languages—that is, on French, German, English, and the other languages spoken in Europe—was even greater. As these native languages developed more and more into literary languages in the later Middle Ages, Latin provided a constant well from which writers drew words and phrases that had no equivalent in their own tongue. By contrast, the Renaissance humanists bypassed medieval Latin and worked to revive the language of ancient Rome, a Latin that differed enormously from the many medieval forms in use throughout Europe. Ancient Latin was an extremely precise language with a rich vocabulary and a complex and highly structured grammar. Latin now had to be mastered as a foreign language and it required years of instruction and practice to become fluent. Sixteenth-century intellectuals proved more than equal to this task. During this period more Latin literature would be written in Europe than at any other time in history, and while many works were of a mediocre quality, much of this writing was also distinguished by its technical brilliance and learning. The roll call of distinguished Latinists included Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More, Juan Luis Vives, Philipp Melanchthon, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, and Michel de Montaigne. Many Latin writers translated or arranged to have their works translated into vernacular languages, and in this process classical Latin enriched the style and vocabulary of the vernacular languages, as medieval Latin had once done. There were few signs of any decline in Latin’s importance throughout the sixteenth century. The period was instead a great autumn harvest in the uses of Latin. Most intellectuals were bilingual, and while the language was used for every kind of writing, its precision and literary sophistication were seen as absolutely essential to those who wished to discuss theological, scholarly, or technical issues in their writing.

**Vernacular Languages.** At the same time as the revival of classical Latin was occurring throughout Europe, the continent’s rich variety of spoken dialects were more and more coalescing into the forms we recognize today as modern national languages. Spoken dialects persisted in European countries until modern times, and the gulf between many of these spoken dialects and the national written language continues even now to be enormous. Yet by the end of the Middle Ages, vernacular French, German, English, Italian, and Spanish began to challenge Latin’s dominance as a literary language. At least three factors had stimulated the development of these languages as written forms of expression. First, in the high Middle Ages Europe’s aristocracy had evidenced a taste for chivalric themes and epic literature written in their own languages. The literary traditions that had been born in this period—epic poetry, chivalric romances, and ballads, to name just a few—continued to live on in the later Middle Ages. The language used to retell these tales was the vernacular, a written approximation of the spoken dialect of a region. Government was a second force that stimulated the rise of the vernacular. By the end of the Middle Ages, government documents, court records, and wills were being kept in many parts of Europe in native languages rather than Latin. These practical uses created a demand for notaries, secretaries, and other officials who were trained in both Latin and the native language. Governmental usage helped elevate the importance of the vernacular language, which had long been seen as a form of expression inferior to Latin. The final factor that aided the rise of vernacular languages was the invention of the printing press. In the first generation of the press, most printers devoted their attentions to printing copies of ancient classics, theological works, and other texts useful to scholars, typically published in Latin. Though less common, vernacular works printed during this early period of the development of the press resulted in the circulation of hundreds of copies, influencing later writers to adopt the vernacular. The press, moreover, played an important role in standardizing the form of the vernacular languages. In Germany, Luther’s translation of the Bible into German helped establish the reformer’s own Saxon German as the dialect many later German writers preferred. In England, the publication of the Great English Bible and the Book of Common Prayer played similar roles in standardizing English. While great regional variations in usage and vocabulary persisted in written forms of the national languages, the economies of printing tended to fix the style, vocabulary, and spelling of the early-modern national languages. Authors and printers concerned with maximizing their earnings favored the emerging standard forms of English, French, and German used in the press at the expense of other regional dialects. In adopting these standard vernacular forms their works could be read by the broadest possible audience.

**French Language.** The French language possessed the longest literary tradition of all the vernacular languages of Europe and its influence spread across a great area of the continent. As a result of the Norman Conquest, French had been established in Britain, where
it shaped the development of Middle English. Even in the sixteenth century, many of the English and Scottish aristocracy continued to write and speak French rather than the native languages of their countries. French was also a language used in diplomacy in Northern Europe, and it was spoken in parts of Flanders (a province of modern Belgium), in Burgundy (an important duchy located between France and Germany), and in regions of Germany and Switzerland. Thus a large portion of Northern Europe was French-speaking in the later Middle Ages, although there were considerable regional variations in the language. Over the course of the sixteenth century these differences diminished within France itself, in part because of a royal edict of 1539 requiring all court proceedings within France to be conducted in the French language. This decision sounded the death knell for Provencal, a widely spoken and written form of French in the southern part of the country. Now attorneys, judges, and royal officials needed to adopt the northern French dialect favored by the royal government.

**Literary Traditions.** Medieval French authors had written a vast body of lyric poetry, historical chronicles, epics, and romances. In the course of the sixteenth century Renaissance humanism affected these older literary traditions, in most cases causing writers to abandon the older genres in favor of new classical forms. Enlivened by these classical examples, writers produced some of the language’s finest poetry, and in the works of François Rabelais and Michel de Montaigne, France made two undeniably great prose contributions to world literature.

**Influence of Erasmus.** Literary achievement, though, was far from the minds of the first French thinkers to develop their skills as humanist scholars. Instead religious issues stimulated the growth of humanist studies, as France’s first humanists aligned themselves with the movement because of its support of Christian reform. The example of Erasmus was particularly important to many of France’s early humanists. In his many satires Erasmus had mocked the sterile theology taught by scholastic theologians in the universities. Erasmus had acquired this distaste for traditional theology, in fact, while he was a student at the University of Paris during the 1490s. As his ideas developed in the first decade of the sixteenth century, he promoted a revival of primitive Christianity as the only sure way to enliven the reform of the church. Guillaume Budé (1467–1540) and other early French humanists took interest in these ideas and they became avid students of Greek and Latin so they could deepen their understanding of the scriptures and the early history of the church. This sure and certain understanding of primitive Christianity, though, could not be achieved without a thorough knowledge of the Greek and Roman classics. And so, like Erasmus, many French humanists argued that classical eloquence and ancient moral philosophy could play a role in helping to shape the reform of the church. Budé, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples, and other French humanists of this first generation developed this form of “Christian humanism” during the first decades of the sixteenth century.

**Initial Literary Developments.** Humanism’s impact on literary developments in France was already evident by the 1530s. At this time the first generation of Renaissance fictional writers and poets relied on the critique of the church and of medieval traditions that humanist philosophers like Erasmus, Budé, and Lefèvre d’Étaples had developed. Three figures stand out in this early period of the French Renaissance: François Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre, and Clément Marot. Of the three, François Rabelais (1494–1553) was the undisputed genius. In two novels, *Pantagruel* (1532) and *Gargantua* (1534), he wove together fantastic comic tales about a race of giants into an enormous tapestry that attacked traditional medieval religious life and learning. He had developed his disdain for the monastic life firsthand.
In his youth he had been a member of a Franciscan monastery. There, Rabelais frequently came to loggerheads with his superiors, and he soon left the convent to join a more liberal group of Benedictines. Eventually, he left the religious life altogether to pursue his classical studies and to complete a medical degree. Rabelais promoted his Gargantua and Pantagruel as mere trivialities he had created to lighten the sufferings of his sick patients. While the two books contain much buffoonery and grotesque humor, a deeply serious vein runs through these comic tales. Their satire mocks contemporary hypocriters, sophists and double-fists, humbugs and other bugs, and all folk of the same water and kidney who skulk under religious robes the better to gull the world. For they seek to persuade ordinary people that they are intent solely upon contemplation, devotion, fasts, maceration of their sensualities—and that merely to sustain the petty fragility of their humanity! Whereas, quite to the contrary, they were roistering, and God knows how they roister! As Juvenal has it “Et Curios simulant sed bacchaniali vivant, they play the austere Curius yet revel in bacchanalian orgies.” You may read the record of their dissipation in great letter of illuminated script upon their florid snout and their pedulous bellies unless they perfume themselves with sulphur.

As for their studies, they read only Pantagrueline books, not so much to pass the time merrily as to hurt some one mischievously. How so? By fouling and befouling, by twiddling their dry fingers and fingering their dry twiddlers, by twisting wry necks, by bumping, arsing and ballocking, by devils cutting, in a word by calumniating. Rapt in this task, they are like nothing so much as the brutish village clods who in the cherry season stir up the ordures of little children to find kernels to sell to druggists for pomander oil.

Flee these rascals at sight, hate and abhor them as I do myself, and by my faith, you will be the better for it. Would you be good Pantagruelists? That is, would you live peaceful, happy, healthy and forever content? Then never trust in people who peep through holes, especially through the opening of a monk’s hood.

dom between Spain and France. Marguerite’s interests were wide-ranging, and included Neoplatonic philosophy and the cause of church reform. While she remained outwardly loyal to Rome, her court harbored a number of Protestants, and those suspected of Protestant sympathies. She was a prolific writer, although most of her works were not published during her lifetime. In many of these she develops a consistent theme, first outlined in the *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*. In that long work she describes the soul as constantly in danger from temptation, but still moving along toward the path of salvation. Many of Marguerite’s poems were allegories that described her own religious turmoil and the consolation she received from Christ. She modeled her greatest work of fiction, the *Heptameron*, on Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. In it, a flood traps a group of ten French noble men and women. While they wait to be rescued, they tell tales to pass the time. After each of these, the group considers the moral message of the fable. Like Rabelais, Marguerite’s tales are often marked by a frank sexuality, which caused some scholars to discount its value. More recent examinations of the *Heptameron* have shown that it is filled with dynamic female characters, complex observations, and a subtle morality. For a time Marguerite of Navarre was also patron of Clément Marot, a figure who influenced much later sixteenth-century French verse. Marot fell under suspicion of Protestant sympathies at more than one point in his life, and his persecution became the subject for several of his poems. When he was not yet thirty, he abandoned the traditional medieval style of verse that he had used until that point, and adopted a lighter and more elegant style. At Marguerite of Navarre’s urging, he translated the Old Testament Psalms into French verse, and these soon became...
wildly popular. They were used at the royal court and adopted by congregations of French Protestants. During the sixteenth century French presses published more than 500 editions of Marot’s poetic versions of the Psalms, even though the theological faculty at the University of Paris had condemned them. Fears about his religious orthodoxy forced Marot into exile later in his life, and he died in the Northern Italian city of Turin. Importantly, Marot became the first French poet to learn of the Italian movement of Petrarchism, the imitation of Petrarch’s style. He wrote the first sonnet in the French language, and his other verses, which included a number of short poems and epigrams, influenced poets in the second half of the sixteenth century.

**THE PLEIADES.** Around 1550, a group of seven poets known as the Pleiades self-consciously tried to separate themselves from France’s medieval traditions of verse. In the place of native verse forms, they adopted a strictly classicizing style based on poetic models found in Greek and Roman literature. The group took its name from the heavenly constellation, which according to Greek myth had been formed to immortalize the memories of seven great poets. The Pleiades rejected France’s medieval poetry as barbaric, and instead they wanted to endow literary French with the same kind of elegance that was to be found in the works of Homer, Vergil, Horace, and other ancient figures. They fashioned the manifesto for the movement after Joachim Du Bellay’s treatise *Defense and Illustration of the French Language*, which he published in 1549 along with thirteen odes written in the style of Horace. Du Bellay’s friend Pierre de Ronsard soon followed with the publication of a much larger collection of odes, and over the course of the next two decades the other members of the Pleiades worked to perfect classical style in French verse. Around 1570, the movement began to die out as fashions changed. By this time the members of the Pleiades had succeeded in introducing a number of ancient poetic forms into French verse, and writers continued to return to many of these forms during the early-modern and modern periods.

**MONTAIGNNE.** In the final decades of the sixteenth century religious wars broke out in France. As the disruptions of these conflicts grew, the dream of reviving a classical Golden Age seemed increasingly unrealistic. Now Renaissance writers experimented with more personal styles, making many of their works difficult to classify within the existing French or the newly adopted classical genres. Such is the case with the greatest author of the period, Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592). He was at one and the same time a classical humanist of distinction, a critical and literary theorist, a political philosopher, and a skeptical figure of some subtlety (see *Philosophy: Trends in Sixteenth Century Thought: Montaigne*). Disgusted by the violence and intolerance that was becoming increasingly common in France, Montaigne retired from public life to his country chateau when he was not yet forty. For the rest of his life he devoted himself to his *Essays*, a collection of internal thoughts, debates, and trials of ideas which he recorded and expanded upon over a number of years. From his earliest youth Montaigne had been trained in the traditions of Renaissance humanism and he had grown up speaking classical Latin. While his mastery of that language was prodigious, he chose to write his *Essays* in French, a sign of the growing dominance of the language among writers in sixteenth-century France. The beauty of his style, his depth of classical knowledge, and the fine literary distinctions he made in recording his thoughts and feelings expanded the boundaries of literary French even farther. They would also make the *Essays* one of the milestones in the history of the language. As the sixteenth century drew to a close, Montaigne’s *Essays* came in their final form to reflect the increasingly pessimistic cast of the humanist movement in France. The century had opened in high optimism, as a new generation of scholars like Budé had seen in the imitation of classical Antiquity a force that would revitalize morality and reform Christianity. Inspired by Erasmus and other Christian humanists, French humanists had labored to revive the antique ideal of eloquence in speaking and writing. But now as religious intolerance and violence punctuated the final years of the sixteenth century, figures like Montaigne questioned the civilizing effects of these efforts. “Between ourselves,” he wrote, “these are the things that I have always seen to be in remarkable agreement: supercelestial thoughts and subterranean conduct.”

**SPANISH LANGUAGE.** In Spain, Renaissance humanism did not produce the great flowering of Latin works that the movement did elsewhere in Northern Europe and Italy. In the second half of the fifteenth century the humanist Antonio de Nebrija helped to establish the study of classical Latin in Spain by publishing a textbook about the language in 1481. Queen Isabella of Castile soon encouraged Nebrija to translate the work into Spanish so that a wider audience could study his text. By 1500, small groups of Spanish humanists wrote literature in a revived classical Latin, and some of these scholars worked on the great Polyglot Bible project that began at the University of Alcala in 1506. But Spanish humanists wrote largely in their own language, and despite the intensely orthodox character of religious life in Spain at the time, they adopted many of the ethical and
moral teachings that humanists did elsewhere in Europe. Erasmus was a key figure in the Spanish Renaissance—so key, in fact, that humanism came to be known in parts of Iberia as Erasmianism. As elsewhere in Europe, written Spanish was being standardized during the sixteenth century, its vocabulary, spelling, and phonetic structure acquiring its modern elements. In the creation of this national language, the Castilian dialect grew to be dominant. The expansion of Castilian hastened in the sixteenth century as the union of Castile and Aragon that had first been forged by the marriage of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella grew tighter over time. Like France, Spain had a distinguished medieval tradition of chivalric romances, epic poetry, and love lyrics. In the course of the sixteenth century, these native traditions would be influenced by Petrarchism, which popularized the writing of sonnets, and by the revival of knowledge of ancient poetry.

**The Novel.** In the writing of novels, the sixteenth century in Spain was a distinguished prelude to the Golden Age of Spanish literature in the seventeenth century. As in France, the traditions of chivalric romance had been strong in medieval Spain. Novels about knightly love affairs formed a widely popular genre in Renaissance Spain. The most successful of these was *Amadís de Gaula*, a tale which had been written by several authors before being given its final form by García Rodríguez de Montalvo and published in 1508. *Amadís* recounted the tale of an idealized knight and his love for an equally idealized lady. The success of the work gave rise to an entire genre of knightly romance in which military figures embodied Christian virtues. But by the end of the sixteenth century, the popularity of these tales had begun to wane in favor of new kinds of fiction. Tragicomedy, as evidenced in the success of Spain’s greatest sixteenth-century novel *La Celestina*, also attracted new readers. Published in 1502, Fernando de Rojas’s great masterpiece relates in dialogue form the love interests of the noble Calisto, who tries to seduce the lovely, but lowborn woman Melibea. She rebuffs his advances, and Calisto, offended by this assault to his honor, appeals to the sorceress Celestina for aid. After many twists and turns, the novel ends uncharacteristically with Celestina’s gruesome murder, the accidental death of Calisto, and the suicide of the deflowered Melibea. The picaresque novel was another important form of fiction that emerged in sixteenth-century Spain. Instead of recounting the heroic deeds of great lovers or knights errant, these stories treated society’s downtrodden and outcasts. These novels are notable for their moral ambiguity since their heroes are, in reality, anti-heroes. Vagabonds, thieves, and other deviants populate the pages of these works, and writers often used the genre to satirize society’s absurdities. The first novel in this vein, *The Life of Lazarillo of Tormes* is often judged the best. It was published in 1554, and by the end of the century many authors had imitated its formula. As a genre, the picaresque novel proved important in the seventeenth century in forging more realistic kinds of fiction. A final fictional form that was popular in sixteenth-century Spain was the pastoral romance. In 1559 Jorge de Montemayor published the first of these works in Spanish entitled *Diana*. Modeled after the *Arcadia* of Jacopo Sannazarò, *Diana* included scenes in which nymphs and shepherds engaged in airy discussions of Platonic love. By century’s end, Spanish authors had published a number of other pastoral romances; most notable among these was Miguel de Cervantes’ *Galatea*, first published in 1585.

**Vives.** Spain’s most accomplished sixteenth-century humanist philosopher, Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540), was also a literary figure of distinction. When he was only seventeen Vives left Spain for the University of Paris. He soon attracted the attention of Erasmus, Budé, and other humanists in northern Europe, and he lived for a time in Louvain in Flanders before moving on to England where he was appointed a lecturer at the University of Oxford. He remained in England for several years, but eventually fell out of favor when King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his Spanish wife, Catherine of Aragon. He moved on to Bruges, the home of his wife, and spent the remainder of his life there. He continued in these years to nourish a correspondence with Thomas More and other humanists, both in England and throughout Europe. Vives made powerful contributions to the study of philology and philosophy, but he was also an advocate of social and educational reform. In 1526, for instance, he wrote a tract entitled *On Aid to the Poor* which he sent to the magistrates of his wife’s city Bruges. Vives recommended that the increasingly large number of refugees present in Europe should be treated as natives in those places in which they settled, a visionary plan when judged against the restrictive citizenship requirements common at the time. In his educational tracts he outlined plans for the education of children and women. One of these, *On the Right Method of Instruction for Children*, was written for Princess Mary of England, the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. In *On the Education of the Christian Woman*, Vives advocated the education of women in the classics. These tracts influenced court societies throughout Europe in the sixteenth century, and where the advice of
On the Education of Women was followed the status accorded women's education was elevated. Vives today is best remembered for one of his early works, The Fable of Man, a parable that expounds the Christian humanism and Neoplatonism that were popular at the time.

**German Language.** In comparison to France, Italy, and Spain, the development of a national language proceeded more slowly in Germany and England. The Holy Roman Empire, the political confederation that governed Germany, Austria, and much of Central Europe, was comprised of more than 300 individual territories loosely joined together under the rule of an elected monarch. Most people within this complex political entity were German-speaking, although there were large minorities that spoke other languages. In addition, enormous differences characterized the German spoken and written in the various regions of the empire, so that the language of one area was often unintelligible to people from another area.

**Written German.** Many different written forms of German developed from these local dialects, and this complex variety did not give way decisively to a single standard literary German until the late seventeenth century. Spoken dialects, on the other hand, have persisted in Central Europe ever since to confound natives and travelers alike. The origins of written forms of German stretched back to the High Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century, some German states began keeping their records in native forms of their language, rather than in Latin. During the fourteenth century the emperor Charles IV (1346–1378) helped to stimulate the growth of the empire's first shared form of written German. Charles ruled from Prague, but his officials adopted both a new form of Latin based upon the writings of the early Italian humanists and a standard German. They based this written German on the spoken dialects of Austria and South Germany and the eastern and central parts of the empire. Johannes von Tepl used this language, known as “Common German,” around 1400 to write The Ploughman of Bohemia, one of the first literary classics of early-modern German. In the fifteenth century the imperial court continued to develop a standard form of written German, but the Austrian Habsburg emperors who ruled at this time now favored their own local South German dialects in comparison to the more broad-based “Common German” that had been used in the fourteenth-century court. Around 1500, another form of written German developed and began to compete against the Habsburg court’s language. The powerful electors of Saxon developed a new literary form of German based upon their own dialect. The use of this form of written German was greatly expanded during the sixteenth century as a result of the rise of Protestantism, since Martin Luther used it to write his tracts condemning the pope and the Roman Church. As Luther’s career continued, he translated the Bible into this same Saxon German. Eventually, Luther’s German Bible became the most powerful tool in establishing a standard written language throughout Germany. By the time of his death in 1546, more than three hundred editions of the Luther Bible had been printed and as many as three million copies of the German Bible may have been in circulation throughout the empire. During the remainder of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Luther’s idiom, ensconced in this biblical translation, became the dominant force in establishing a standard form of written German throughout the empire. While he did not single-handedly create modern German as some might suppose, his forceful and colorful use of the language exerted a powerful influence on shaping the language’s style, vocabulary, and grammar. At the same time, vast regional differences in written German persisted, and while the press had originally aided in the dissemination of a standardized form of literary German through the publication of books like the German Bible, it also kept alive regional differences. Local printers, concerned to satisfy their readership, continued to use written forms of local dialects for years to come.

**Renaissance Styles.** Humanism appeared in Germany slightly earlier than in France and Spain and, by 1500, it had established itself in a pattern similar to other places in Northern Europe. The movement was present in small circles throughout the country, where it often faced the opposition of the scholastics. The first German humanists of distinction, Rudolph Agricola (1444–1485) and Conrad Celtis (1459–1508) devoted themselves to writing poetry in the style of Petrarch as well as mastering the languages and literary styles of Antiquity. Celtis became the most accomplished poet of early humanism, although he wrote most of his important creations in Latin, rather than German. One undisputed classic of the early German Renaissance was Das Narrenschiff or The Ship of Fools written by Sebastian Brant (1457–1521) and published in 1494. The work was a long allegorical poem that mocked the foibles of humankind. It served as a prelude to Erasmus’ great Latin oration, The Praise of Folly of 1509, a work which also criticized human stupidity. Although Brant was less thorough and biting in his attacks than Erasmus, a similar spirit animates his long work, which is divided into 112 chapters each devoted to mocking a different kind of human fool. Satire was one of the genres in which
German humanists excelled during the Renaissance. Among the many achievements in this vein, *The Letters of Obscure Men* of Ulrich von Hutten were particularly brilliant and influential. Written in a mock scholastic style, they poked fun at the absurd conventions of Germany’s university theologians. Composed to defend the German humanist Johann Reuchlin during the height of a controversy over the study of Jewish books, von Hutten’s works became the model for a truly widespread genre of satirical tracts and polemics that would be published during the Protestant Reformation. Later Protestant and Catholic writers made use of the broad humor and satirical techniques that von Hutten perfected in his *Letters*, spawning one of the most universally consumed literatures of sixteenth-century Germany.

**Religious Crisis.** The controversies of the Reformation and Counter Reformation often dominated sixteenth-century German literature. Critical analysis has only begun to digest the enormous amount of pamphlet literature published during the period. Although most of these tracts were not of high literary quality, one does find fine allegorical poems and humanist-inspired dialogues amidst the thousands of short tracts defending the Roman Church or promoting the ideas of the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant reformers, including Thomas Müntzer and Martin Luther, also wrote some of the finest lyric poems of the period and these often served as hymns in the developing Protestant churches. Another genre that arose in Lutheran territories was the funeral sermon, of which more than 100,000 printed copies survive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Originally, the Protestant reformers had been reluctant to allow eulogies to accompany the sermons preached at the burial of the dead. Over time, however, eulogies treating the life of the deceased crept into these sermons, which were printed in the days and weeks following a funeral and circulated as a memorial to the dead. While many of these texts show that the task of writing and delivering a funeral sermon was frequently a perfunctory one, in some cases and in the hands of some gifted preachers these Lutheran funeral sermons could rise to the level of high art. In addition, the tradition of the Meistersinger continued unabated in sixteenth-century Germany, and in Protestant towns this late-medieval form of singing was placed into the service of the Reformation. The Meistersinger, immortalized in Richard Wagner’s famous opera, *The Meistersinger from Nuremberg* were usually members of local guilds who met at certain times to perform musical works they had written. They performed their works as unaccompanied solos, and their compositions were judged according to strict rules that had long been laid down by their society. The city of Nuremberg was the most famous center of this art, and during the sixteenth century as the town became a center of Protestantism, the Meistersinger focused increasingly on using their songs to promote Lutheran ideas. The most fertile of all the Meistersinger at Nuremberg was Hans Sachs, (1494–1576), a dramatist and poet, and the central character of Wagner’s opera. During his long life Sachs wrote more than 4,000 of these songs, and an additional 2,000 other short verses, dramas, and dialogues.

**Fiction.** The excitement that religious disputes created in sixteenth-century Germany helped to increase the number of readers throughout the population. As the German audience grew, new forms of fiction appeared to satisfy an increasingly diverse public of readers. By mid-century collections of short, humorous stories, written either in prose or verse, appeared. The most popular of these were *Humor and Seriousness*, written by the Franciscan monk Johannes Paul, and *The Carriage Booklet*, by Jörg Wickram. Wickram, from Colmar in the far western province of Alsace, was illegitimate and had little more than a rudimentary education. He did read widely in German works, but was apparently unschooled in Latin. In several fictional works he pioneered the form of the novel in the German language. These longer narratives had central characters, more involved plots, and better character development than the short German fiction that had been written up to his time. His most fully developed work was *Of Good and Bad Neighbors*, a tale of a merchant family across several generations. The values that he praised in his works included hard work, thrift, respect for authority, and kindness to one’s neighbors. Another great achievement of late sixteenth-century German fiction was the *History of Dr. Johann Faustus*, a short anonymous book published at Frankfurt in 1587. It was an overnight success and was soon translated into a number of other languages. In its original form the plot of *Dr. Faustus* treats the story of a young theologian who turns from his studies to take up magic. To strengthen his knowledge of the new art, he concludes a pact with the devil to enjoy 24 years of prosperity and mastery of magic. At the conclusion of this period the devil returns to take him to hell. *Dr. Faustus* soon became the basis upon which other writers constructed more complex plots in other fictional and dramatic works. The most famous Renaissance adaptation of the tale of Faustus was Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, which he apparently wrote within just a few years of the original. The story of Faustus is one of the most enduring tales in European history; it survived long
A STATESMAN IMAGINES A PERFECT SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION: In his *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More imagined a tightly controlled society that was free from many of the vices common in Europe at the time. In this passage, he describes how his imaginary Utopians are all engaged in useful occupations, thus avoiding the poverty that is common among Europeans.

The chief, and almost the only business of the syphogrants, is to take care that no man may live idle, but that every one may follow his trade diligently: yet they do not wear themselves out with perpetual toil, from morning to night, as if they were beasts of burden, which, as it is indeed a heavy slavery, so it is everywhere the common course of life among all tradesman everywhere, except among the Utopians; but they dividing the day and night into twenty-four hours, appoint six of these for work; three of them are before dinner, and after that they dine, and interrupt their labor for two hours, and then they go to work again for the other three hours; and after that they sup, and at eight o’clock, counting from noon, go to bed and sleep eight hours. And for their other hours, besides those of work, and those that go for eating and sleeping, they are left to every man’s discretion; yet they are not to abuse that interval to luxury and idleness, but must employ it in some proper exercise according to their various inclinations, which is for the most part reading. … After supper, they spend an hour in some diversion: in summer, it is in their gardens, and in winter it is in the halls where they eat, and they entertain themselves in them, either with music or discourse. They do not so much as know dice, or any such foolish and mischievous games: they have two sorts of games not unlike our chess; the one is between several numbers, in which one number, as it were, consumes another: the other resembles a battle between the virtues and the vices, in which the enmity in the vices among themselves, and their agreement against virtue, is not unpleasantly represented; together with the special oppositions between the particular virtues and vices; as also the methods by which vice either openly assaults or secretly undermines virtue, and virtue on the other hand resists it … But this matter of the time set off for labor is to be narrowly examined, otherwise you may perhaps imagine, that since there are only six hours appointed for work, they may fall under a scarcity of necessary provisions. But it is so far from being true, that this time is not sufficient for supplying them with a plenty of all things, that are either necessary or convenient, that it is rather too much; and this you will easily apprehend, if you consider how great a part of all other nations is quite idle. First, women generally do little, who are the half of mankind; and if some few women are diligent, their husbands are idle: then consider the great company of idle priests, and of those that are called religious men; add to these all rich men, chiefly those that have estates in land, who are called noblemen and gentlemen, together with their families, made up of idle persons, that do nothing but go swaggering about. Reckon in with these all those strong and lusty beggars that go about pretending some disease, in excuse for their begging; and upon the whole account you will find that the number of those by whose labors mankind is supplied, is much less than you perhaps imagined. Then consider how few of those that work are employed in labors that Men do really need; for we who measure all things by money [and] give occasion to many trades that are both vain and superfluous, and serve only to support riot and luxury. For if those who are at work were employed only in such things as the conveniences of life require, there would be such an abundance of them that the prices of them would so sink that tradesmen could not be maintained by their gains; if all those who labor about useless things were set to more profitable employments, and if all that number that languishes out their life in sloth and idleness, of whom every one consumes as much as any two of the men that are at work do, were forced to labor, you may easily imagine that a small proportion of time would serve for doing all that is either necessary, pleasure being still kept within its due bounds.


after the Renaissance to become the subject for operas, plays, and novels. While the original work warned of the dangers of magic and curiosity, the Faustian tale has come to be seen since then as symptomatic of the dangers that lurk in humankind’s search after knowledge.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE.** The reception of humanism followed a similar path in England as elsewhere in Northern Europe. Toward the end of the fifteenth century a group of scholars, inspired by Italian examples, devoted themselves to the study of Latin and other ancient languages. Over time Neoplatonism and the Christian humanism popularized by figures like Erasmus in the early sixteenth century developed in circles of scholars throughout the island. The greatest member of this group, Sir Thomas More, produced a number of works
that inspired later generations of English writers. Until 1550, though, most humanists in England wrote in Latin. Even More’s immensely popular work of political philosophy, *Utopia* did not have an English translation until a quarter century after its Latin publication. In England, Latin was usually the language of scholarship, while most of the country’s nobles preferred to speak and write in French. This situation, though, began to alter quickly and dramatically in the first half of the sixteenth century. At the same time as humanism was maturing in England, the use of written forms of English was also expanding greatly. Long thought by English aristocrats and intellectuals to be an inferior form of expression, English gradually replaced Latin in the course of the sixteenth century as the preferred written language. These developments occurred at a time of rapid change for the English language. Chaucer completed his *Canterbury Tales* around 1400 in a form of Middle English, and in the century that followed English changed dramatically. By 1600, the English vocabulary underwent a serious expansion, aided by the publication of William Tyndale’s English New Testament in 1525, by the English Great Bible in 1539, and by the Protestant *Book of Common Prayer* adopted throughout England in 1549.

**QUESTIONS OF STYLE.** By 1550, it had become increasingly clear that English would eventually triumph over Latin, and humanist-trained intellectuals now debated what direction English style should take. During the so-called “Inkhorn Controversy” opponents of Latin style and eloquence like Thomas Wilson argued that English possessed a clear and forceful style and that it should be kept free of Latin, Greek, and French words and phrases. Against this purist pose, others supported borrowing phrases from Latin and other languages for which there was no ready English equivalent. Over the remainder of the century, the practice of adapting words from other languages gradually won out over the purist perspective, although purists continued to defend native words and styles into the seventeenth century. Despite the purists’ opposition, borrowing from other languages continued, and a tremendous expansion in vocabulary transformed the language into an elegant and malleable vehicle for written and spoken expression. The masters of sixteenth-century English who had helped to expand the language included Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542), who was influenced by Italian Petrarchism and introduced the sonnet into English; Sir Thomas Elyot (1490–1546), who was a prolific writer and whose courtesy book, *The Book of the Governor*, helped to establish standards of civility in English aristocratic life; and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517–1547), who among his other literary accomplishments translated Vergil’s *Aeneid* into English. These figures had laid the foundation for the incredible flowering of English verse and prose that would occur in the final years of the Elizabeth period, the era of Marlowe and the early Shakespeare.

**STUDY OF HISTORY.** Outside Italy, Renaissance scholars also devoted themselves to the study of history. Humanist historiography varied greatly in quality and sophistication throughout Europe. Nationalistic concerns often dominated the writing of history, as humanists from England, Germany, France, and Spain became interested in treating the glories of their nations’ past. Other authors saw in the central characters of history morality lessons; they stressed that certain figures were worthy of emulation. As a rule, though, humanist historiography in Europe downplayed the role of God in shaping human events, and instead saw history as the product of great men working with and against fortune. Toward the end of the sixteenth century a more objective, less moralistic spirit began to prevail among some scholars, particularly in France. The standards of proof these historians applied laid the foundations for a more
modern and unbiased writing of history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

**German Trends.** History was a central concern of the German humanists. In the early sixteenth century these scholars began to form a recognizable group within the court of the emperor Maximilian I, and many of these figures wrote histories. In the fifteenth century Italian humanists had frequently pointed to the works of Latin Antiquity to confirm their dark judgments about German culture—that is, that Germans were barbaric and their learning was inferior to Italians. As a result, the early German humanists frequently focused on rehabilitating their own heritage. Their histories celebrated the bravery and independence of the early German tribes and these writers posed Germanic valor against effete Italian culture. They pointed to the early Christianization of the German tribes, a sign of the depth of German piety and religious sentiments. But humanists also devoted themselves to writing local histories, as Italians had done in the fifteenth century. In scores of works like Johannes Aventinus’ *Bavarian Chronicle*, Germany’s new historians tried to reconstruct the history of Germany’s many regions. Much of this work was uncritical, merely relying on ancient myths that had long circulated in older chronicles. But every now and then, a new critical spirit sometimes shone through. The Strasbourg historian Beatus Rhenanus (1486–1547) was a friend of Erasmus who questioned the uncritical tactics of many of his fellow humanist historians. Rhenanus constructed more reliable histories of the German past by examining the surviving documents. One of the insights that Beatus Rhenanus had—his suggestion that the Franks were also a Germanic tribe—would spark a great deal of controversy in France. Longstanding myths about French history had traced the French to the descendants of Francus, a refugee from the destroyed city of Troy. Beatus Rhenanus debunked these myths, instead interpreting the early history of the Germanic tribes according to the documents and artifacts that survived from the early-medieval period. Even though Beatus Rhenanus helped to debunk myths about France and Germany’s past, new legends developed in the sixteenth century. The Protestant Reformation had a profound influence on shaping ideas about the German past. Many German historians at the time had been trained as humanist scholars, and as Protestants, men like Martin Bucer at Strasbourg and the Lutheran theologians Philip Melanchthon and Matthias Flacius Illyricus developed the notion of a medieval “Roman yoke.” In their works they celebrated the Protestant Reformation for freeing Germany from the weight of Roman oppression. This Protestant view of history interpreted the Middle Ages as a dark period of decay and degeneration in which the Roman papacy had tyrannically ruled over the human conscience. The revival of the New Learning and the Reformation’s restoration of true Christian teaching in Germany had rescued the nation from the oppression of a thousand years of medieval history.

**History in France.** In France, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also saw a revival of interest in history. Philippe de Commines (1445–1509) was one of the first of a new breed of historians in France who applied a more distanced and objective spirit to his retelling of the past. He was not a humanist scholar, but he served as a member of the court of Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy. At the time Burgundy was one of the most powerful territories in Europe, and Commines recorded many of the great events he had witnessed in his *Mémoires* in a relatively unbiased way. As humanists devoted themselves to writing history after Commines, they downplayed the role of divine providence in shaping history. Instead they stressed the role that human actors had
played in shaping their countries' history, and like many Italian Renaissance historians, they identified virtuous individuals in history who were worthy of emulation. Among the many humanist scholars who practiced history in the sixteenth century, Jean Bodin, Étienne Pasquier, and Jacques Auguste de Thou stand out. In his works treating history, Jean Bodin (1530–1596) tried to develop a theory for interpreting the past and for undertaking study in the discipline itself. He stressed the importance of acquiring a broad knowledge of the past before specializing one's study in a particular era. By contrast, Étienne Pasquier (1529–1615) was a lawyer who adopted legal methods of proof in his histories. He worked in the royal government in France and, like Guicciardini before him, had unprecedented access to state documents. Through this experience he acquired a critical understanding of France's past as well as a broad picture of how government had developed over time. When he was thirty years old, he began his *Researches on France*, a work he did not complete until forty years later. The *Researches* eventually comprised ten thick volumes. Pasquier intended his work to stir an admiration in his readers for the glories of French history, but he applied a judicious standard to do so, carefully documenting his conclusions. In constructing his French history he did not rely on past chronicles, but went instead to the primary legal and court documents that contained more reliable information about developments. His work did much to advance notions about documentary proof and the necessity for an historian to adopt an unbiased spirit. The last great genius of French sixteenth-century historical writing was Auguste de Thou (1533–1617). De Thou was also a trained lawyer, and in his works he strove for a similarly objective presentation of the past. He wrote his works in a commanding and eloquent Latin. As Pasquier had been before him, de Thou was also a Gallican—that is, he supported the notion that the French Church should develop as a national church and be kept free from papal intervention. He believed that this tradition of relative French independence had deep roots, and he attempted to demonstrate the origins of Gallicanism in medieval history. These sentiments did not endear him to church authorities outside France. Although the histories he wrote of sixteenth-century France were erudite and largely objective, his judgments about Gallicanism resulted in the placing of at least one of his histories on the *Index of Prohibited Books*, the organ of censorship in the Roman Catholic Church.

**Martyrs.** While Pasquier and de Thou favored a distanced objectivity, the religious crises of the second half of the sixteenth century in France, England, and other parts of Europe stimulated the popularity of another more emotional historical work: the martyrology. Martyrologies treated the lives and deaths of those who had sacrificed themselves for their faith, and these sometimes gruesome books had both Catholic and Protestant versions throughout the sixteenth century. Among the most astute authors in this genre were the English historian John Foxe and the French Protestant Jean Crespin. Crespin published his *Book of Martyrs* in 1554, and the work continued to be edited and re-issued after his death, becoming an enormously popular text among French Calvinists at the end of the sixteenth century. Since the publication continued over time, new editions of the work added accounts of those who had been killed for their faith during the Wars of Religion. In England, John Foxe drew upon Crespin’s example for his *Actes
and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Days first printed in 1563. Foxe included many stories of European martyrs drawn from Crespin’s text, but, in particular, he focused on those recently executed in England during the reign of Mary I. Together both Crespin and Foxe hoped that these tales of suffering would invigorate readers to defend the Reformation against those who would subvert it. Martyrologies like these remained a tremendously popular genre throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Foxe’s Book of Martyrs as it came to be popularly known, would be published many times, and influenced later writers, including the seventeenth-century authors John Bunyan and John Milton.

TRENDS IN ENGLAND. In England it was the Italian Polydor Vergil (1470–1555) who established the genre of humanist historical writing. Vergil was a native of Urbino and he had been sent to England in 1502 on a minor diplomatic mission. He stayed on in England, eventually publishing his English History in Latin in 1534. Vergil cast doubt on the traditional myths of Britain’s origins which traced England’s kings to Brutus the Trojan, a figure who had reputedly liberated England from the rule of giants. Vergil’s history served Tudor purposes, since throughout his history he did celebrate the “great deeds of England’s kings and those of this noble people,” and these included the deeds of the ruling Tudor dynasty. But the skeptical eye he cast on some of the legends of English history irritated native scholars, and his humanist-styled history of England and the “great deeds” of its people would not be imitated until very late in the sixteenth century. Another humanist work of history was Sir Thomas More’s History of Richard III, a book that More wrote in both English and Latin editions about the same time. The picture he drew of this hated king has largely persisted until the present, although recently some have questioned Richard’s villainy, and historians have never conclusively decided whether Richard was a hunchback, as More treated him. More had been a child when many of the pivotal events of Richard III’s reign had occurred, and he probably based his accounts on the testimony of his father and others who had been adults at the time. As a literary work, though, More shaped his account of the king’s life relying on Roman history, particularly the works of Tacitus. He injected imaginary dialogue into the account, and he made maximum tragic use of Richard’s alleged slaying of the “little princes,” the two sons of Edward IV. His version of events became canonical, and survived to be read by William Shakespeare and immortalized in the playwright’s masterpiece Richard III.

SPANISH HISTORY AND THE NEW WORLD. In Spain, a country recently unified from separate kingdoms, history took on a special importance during the Renaissance. Both the monarchy and the scholars hired to write histories of the country were keenly interested in the distant past, as they searched for a source of Spain’s sixteenth-century greatness and imperial expansion. In the early sixteenth century King Ferdinand hired several historians to undertake historical studies. He desired to justify his expansionist policies, but unfortunately most of these projects, although undertaken by capable scholars, were left unfinished. Similar problems dogged later monarchical histories, too. The most important literary histories to emerge in sixteenth-century Spain were not those that dealt with Iberia’s distant past, but with more recent events. Spain produced a distinguished lineage of humanist and non-humanist scholars who turned their attentions to Spain’s conquests in the New World. These writers produced a record of events, which if not always factual, was of a consistently high literary quality and was often characterized by profound human insight. Christopher Columbus had helped to stimulate this attention to the New World discoveries by publishing accounts of his voyages. Peter Martyr D’Anghiera, an Italian, studied Columbus’ accounts intently and published the first historical treatment of his journeys. It was Martyr who actually coined the term, “New World,” through using it as the title of a history he published in several stages between 1511 and 1530. Bartolomeo de Las Casas built upon these efforts with his History of the Indies, which he finished around 1550. De Las Casas based his work on documentary evidence, and upon his own firsthand observations of conditions in Spain’s American possessions. His account still proves useful today for the insights it offers concerning native peoples and their treatment at Spanish hands. The greatest historian of the period, though, was Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, who lived for a decade in the New World, undertaking various jobs before being appointed official historian of the Indies. Oviedo amassed a valuable collection of documents about the conquest and he used them to write a history of the early conquest and settlement of Mexico and Peru. His career as a professional historian of the Spanish territories inspired a lineage of later sixteenth-century New World historians, who often treated in detailed fashion the establishment of Spanish rule within the various regions of Central and South America. Many of these turned in particular to treat the establishment of Spain’s control over the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru. While these later accounts often celebrated the conquistadors’ bravery in subduing native populations, some were more critical. Some of
Spain’s New World historians, particularly those that treated the history of Peru, attacked the Conquest for unleashing the unbridled individualism of the conquistadors and for destroying the Incas’ basically peaceful and orderly way of life.

SOURCES


Renaissance Women Writers

WOMEN’S LIVES. Social class and wealth were the chief determinants of the path a woman’s life would take in the Renaissance. At the bottom of the social ladder the poorest women often faced bleak prospects, and daily life could become a quest for survival. High social status and family wealth, not unsurprisingly, enhanced a woman’s choices, and also granted her greater leisure. An increasing number of women learned to read and write their native languages during the Renaissance, although female literacy continued to be rare. Literacy was prized in the cities, where it was necessary for both men and women from certain sectors of society to be able to read. Merchants who were frequently away on business needed wives who could manage their business interests while they were away from home. In cities, then, many merchants’ wives could read and write. Reading was also important to artisans, and since many women helped their husbands in their businesses, there were also many artisans’ wives who could read as well. While many urban women probably possessed basic literacy during the later Renaissance, most women as a rule had little time to indulge in reading or studies. They were usually far more interested in their account ledgers than in literature. Only a few women, moreover, were ever taught Latin, the dominant language of scholarship until the late Renaissance. Widespread male prejudice and even Renaissance medical wisdom taught that women were not cut out for a life of scholarship, their intellect being of a more delicate and sensitive nature than men’s. Despite these enormous barriers to women’s literary and scholarly careers, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw an increasing number of women writers, many of whom left behind subtle and refined works of fiction, poetry, and scholarship. This trend first appeared in the fifteenth century in Italy and France. During the sixteenth century women writers appeared in every major European country, and although the career of a woman author was still extraordinary, there were more women who wrote in this period than at any other time in the past. Humanism was one important force in producing this change; many humanists elevated the importance given to women’s education. The list of humanists who advocated a more thorough education for women was long, and included Giovanni Boccaccio, Leonardo Bruni, Baldassare Castiglione, and Juan Luis Vives. At the same time even the most enlightened Renaissance men continued to think that women’s capabilities as writers and scholars were distinctly inferior to men. A woman who wrote and recorded her thoughts and who did so elegantly was often described as “surpassing her sex.” Still, the groundwork was being laid in Renaissance Europe for women to compete in the arena of literature, philosophy, and the humanities. By the end of the sixteenth century, although women still wrote far less than men, they had begun to take their place beside their male counterparts, a trend that would persist and expand further in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Christine de Pizan. Although Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) is known today primarily as a French writer, she was an Italian who was born in Venice and whose family was originally from Pizano, a village outside the