

MEDIEVAL LITERATURE. RENAISSANCE (V-XVI c.).

LECTURE 2

PLAN

2.1 Peculiarities of Medieval and Renaissance literature.

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2.1 Peculiarities of Medieval and Renaissance literature

In the study of world literature, the medieval period and the Renaissance represent two distinctly different eras. Not only did the language itself change between the two periods, but the scope and subject of literature changed. Broadly speaking, medieval literature revolved around Christianity and chivalry, while Renaissance literature focused on man himself, the progress of arts and sciences, and the emergence of humanism.

Medieval literature was written in Middle English, a linguistic period running from 1150 to 1500. Middle English incorporated French, Latin and Scandinavian vocabulary, and relied on word order, rather than inflectional endings, to convey meaning. “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” an Arthurian tale penned by an unknown author, is a prime example of literature produced during this linguistic period. Renaissance literature was written in Early Modern English, a linguistic period running from 1500 to 1700.

The earliest Renaissance literature appeared in 14th century Italy; Dante, Petrarch, and Machiavelli are notable examples of Italian Renaissance writers. From Italy the influence of the Renaissance spread at different rates to other countries, and continued to spread throughout Europe through the 17th century. The English Renaissance and the Renaissance in Scotland date from the late 15th century to the early 17th century. In northern Europe the scholarly writings of Erasmus, the plays of Shakespeare, the poems of Edmund Spenser, and the writings of Sir Philip Sidney may be considered Renaissance in character.



The literature of the Renaissance was written within the general movement of the Renaissance that arose in 13th century Italy and continued until the 16th century while being diffused into the western world. It is characterized by the adoption of a Humanist philosophy and the recovery of the classical literature of Antiquity and benefited from the spread of printing in the latter part of the 15th century. For the writers of the Renaissance, Greco-Roman inspiration was shown both in the themes of their writing and in the literary forms they used. The world was considered from an anthropocentric perspective. Platonic ideas were revived and put to the service of Christianity. The search for pleasures of the senses and a critical and rational spirit completed the ideological panorama of the period. New literary genres such as the essay and new metrical forms such as the sonnet and Spenserian stanza made their appearance.


2.2 Italian literature (Dante, Boccaccio)

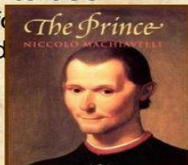
The 13th century Italian literary revolution helped set the stage for the Renaissance. Prior to the Renaissance, the Italian language was not the literary language in Italy. It was only in the 13th century that Italian authors began writing in their native vernacular language rather than in Latin, French, or Provençal. The 1250s saw a major change in Italian poetry as the Dolce Stil Novo (Sweet New Style, which emphasized Platonic rather than courtly love) came into its own, pioneered by poets like Guittone d'Arezzo and Guido Guinizelli. Especially in poetry, major changes in Italian literature had been taking place decades before the Renaissance truly began.

The Italian Renaissance was a period in Italian history that covered the 14th through the 17th centuries. The period is known for the development of a culture that spread across Europe and marked the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity.

Accounts of Renaissance literature usually begin with the three great Italian writers of the 14th century: [Dante Alighieri](#) (*Divine Comedy*), [Petrarch](#) (*Canzoniere*), and [Boccaccio](#) (*Decameron*).

Characteristics of Italian Renaissance Literature

- Written in the vernacular
 - Dante was the first to write in his native tongue rather than Latin
 - *Divine Comedy*
 - *The Inferno*
- Secular
 - Everyday lives
 - Politics
- Role of individual stressed
- Humanistic
 - People are capable of accomplishing anything
- Petrarch
 - “Father of Humanism”
 - Sonnets
- Castiglione → 
 - *The Courtier*
- Machiavelli
 - *The Prince*
 - “Father of Political Science”
 - Encourages rulers to use all means “fair or foul” to gain power and



Giovanni Boccaccio

Petrarch's disciple, Giovanni Boccaccio, became a major author in his own right. His major work was *The Decameron*, a collection of 100 stories told by ten storytellers who have fled to the outskirts of Florence to escape the black plague over ten nights. *The Decameron* in particular and Boccaccio's work in general were a major source of inspiration and plots for many English authors in the Renaissance, including Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare. The various tales of love in *The Decameron* range from the erotic to the tragic. Tales of wit, practical jokes, and life lessons contribute to the mosaic. In addition to its literary value and widespread influence, it provides a document of life at the time. Written in the vernacular of the Florentine language, it is considered a masterpiece of classical early Italian prose.



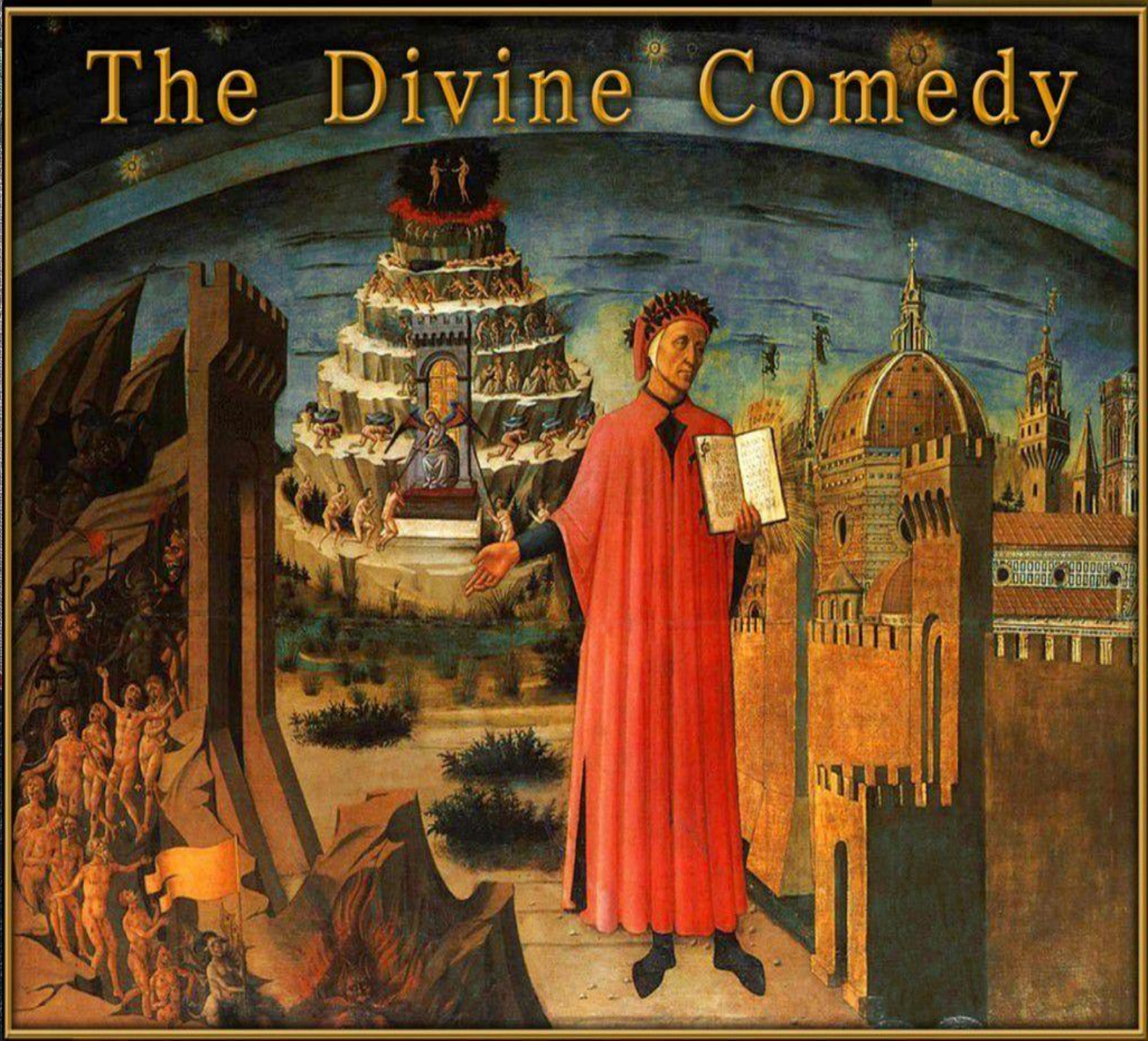
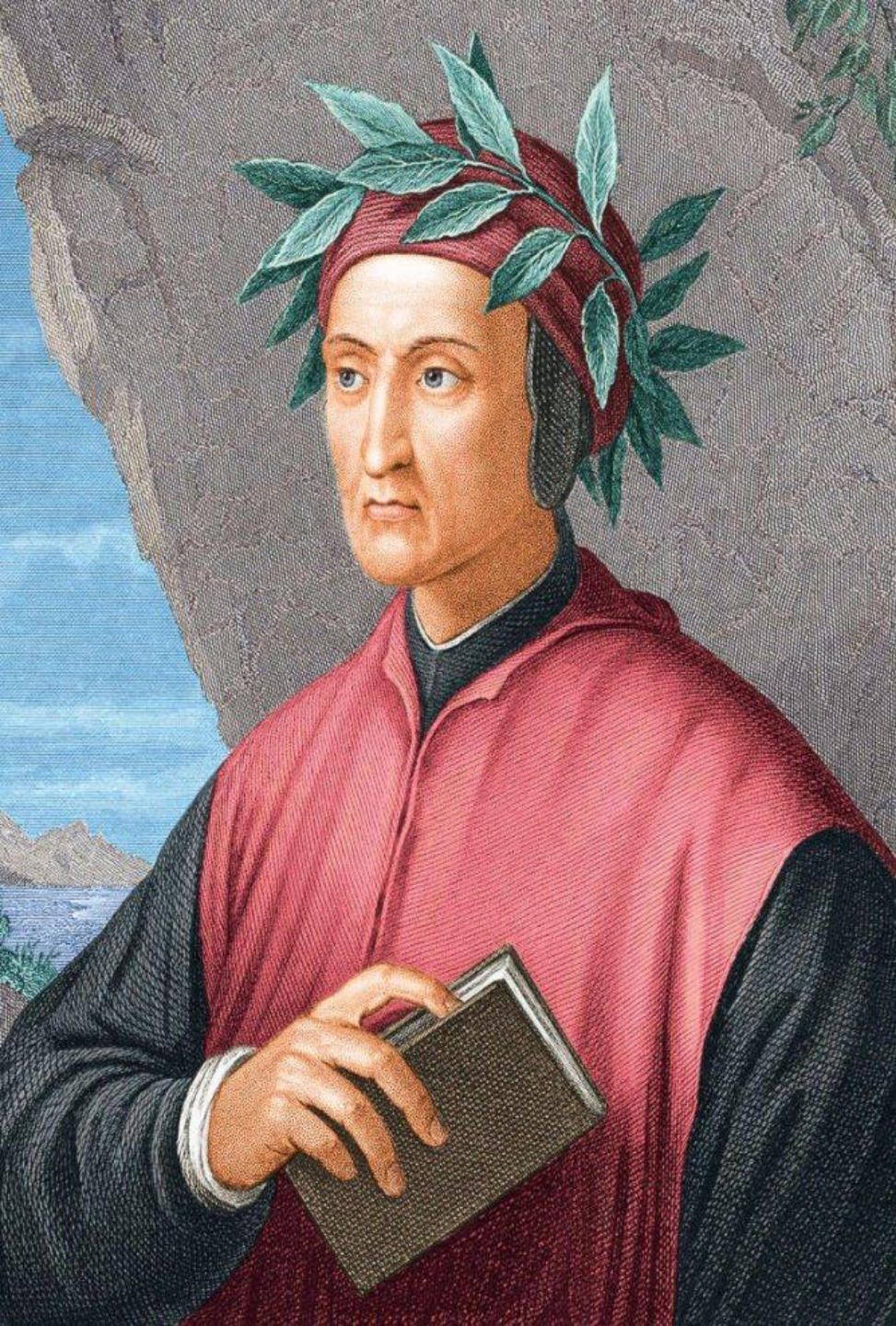
Discussions between Boccaccio and Petrarch were instrumental in Boccaccio writing the *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, the first edition was completed in 1360 and it remained one of the key reference works on classical mythology for over 400 years. It served as an extended defense for the studies of ancient literature and thought. Despite the Pagan beliefs at the core of the *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, Boccaccio believed that much could be learned from antiquity. Thus, he challenged the arguments of clerical intellectuals who wanted to limit access to classical sources to prevent any moral harm to Christian readers. The revival of classical antiquity became a foundation of the Renaissance, and his defense of the importance of ancient literature was an essential requirement for its development.



Dante Alighieri

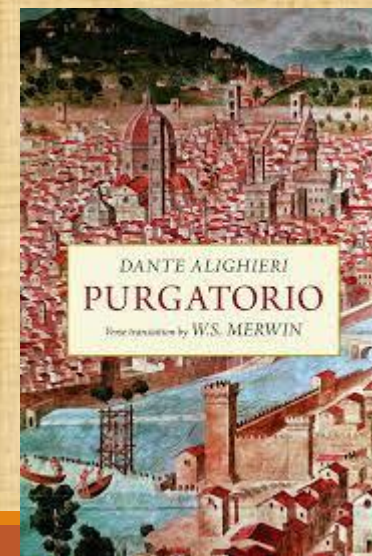
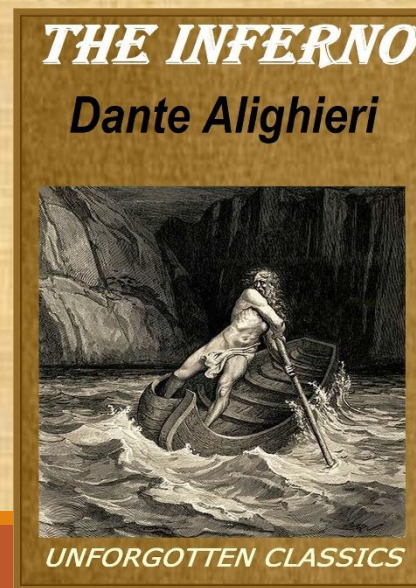
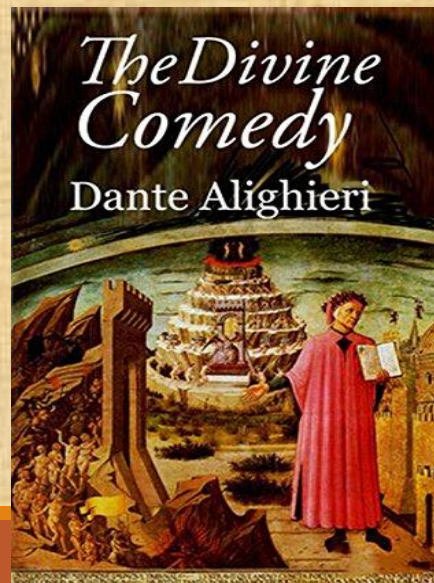
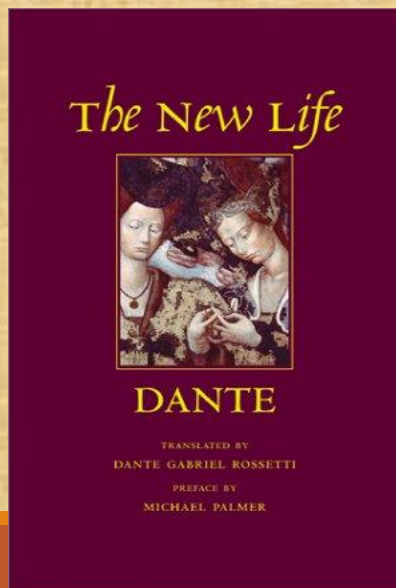
A generation before Petrarch and Boccaccio, Dante Alighieri set the stage for Renaissance literature. His *Divine Comedy*, originally called *Comedia* and later christened *Divina* by Boccaccio, is widely considered the greatest literary work composed in the Italian language and a masterpiece of world literature.

In the late Middle Ages, the overwhelming majority of poetry was written in Latin, and therefore was accessible only to affluent and educated audiences. In *De vulgari eloquentia* (On Eloquence in the Vernacular), however, Dante defended use of the vernacular in literature. He himself would even write in the Tuscan dialect for works such as *The New Life* (1295) and the aforementioned *Divine Comedy*; this choice, though highly unorthodox, set a hugely important precedent that later Italian writers such as Petrarch and Boccaccio would follow. As a result, Dante played an instrumental role in establishing the national language of Italy.



Dante, like most Florentines of his day, was embroiled in the Guelph-Ghibelline conflict. He fought in the Battle of Campaldino (June 11, 1289) with the Florentine Guelphs against the Arezzo Ghibellines. After defeating the Ghibellines, the Guelphs divided into two factions: the White Guelphs—Dante's party, led by Vieri dei Cerchi—and the Black Guelphs, led by Corso Donati. Although the split was along family lines at first, ideological differences arose based on opposing views of the papal role in Florentine affairs, with the Blacks supporting the pope and the Whites wanting more freedom from Rome. Dante was accused of corruption and financial wrongdoing by the Black Guelphs for the time that he was serving as city prior (Florence's highest position) for two months in 1300. He was condemned to perpetual exile; if he returned to Florence without paying a fine, he could be burned at the stake.

At some point during his exile he conceived of the *Divine Comedy*, but the date is uncertain. The work is much more assured and on a larger scale than anything he had produced in Florence; it is likely he would have undertaken such a work only after he realized his political ambitions, which had been central to him up to his banishment, had been halted for some time, possibly forever. Mixing religion and private concerns in his writings, he invoked the worst anger of God against his city and suggested several particular targets that were also his personal enemies.



2.3 German renaissance (Hutten, Luther)

The late Middle Ages in [Europe](#) was a time of decadence and regeneration. A proliferation of literary forms, including [didactic](#) literature, prose renderings of classic works, and mystical tracts, was one symptom of this double tendency. The age's preoccupation with death produced a [macabre](#) flowering of art: the [dance of death](#), a large body of sermon literature on the *memento mori* theme, tracts on the art of dying well (*ars moriendi*), as well as a rich body of visual and plastic art.



The Renaissance in Germany—rich in art, architecture, and learned humanist writings—was poor in German-language literature. Works from Italy were eagerly received and translated, especially those of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and the humanist scholar [Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini](#). Rabelais's works found a vigorous imitator in [Johann Fischart](#). For [Germany](#) the 16th century was an age of [satire](#). One of its most popular works was [Ship of Fools](#) by [Sebastian Brant](#), who thus inaugurated a [genre](#) of [“fool” literature](#).

The 16th century, although poor in great works of literature, was an immensely vital period that produced extraordinary characters such as the revolutionary humanist Ulrich von Hutten, the Nürnberg artist [Albrecht Dürer](#), the Reformer Luther, and the doctor-scientist-charlatan [Paracelsus](#). In the early modern period, as in various periods before and after, Germany was subject to division and party wrangling.

Ulrich von Hutten

Ulrich von Hutten, born in a castle near Fulda in Hesse, was sent at age 11 to a monastery to become a Benedictine monk. After 6 years he escaped and led a vagabond life, attending four German universities. In Erfurt he befriended Crotus Rubianus and other humanists. He went to Italy, took service as a soldier, and attended universities, spending some time in Pavia and Bologna. In Germany he served in the imperial army (1512). Because of the death of a cousin, Hans, at the hands of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, he published sharp Latin diatribes against the duke, which have been compared with the *Philippics* of Demosthenes and which brought him fame. In 1519 he played a part in the expulsion of the duke.

In 1517 he was crowned [poet laureate](#) by Emperor Maximilian I in Augsburg for his Latin poems. His protector was Archbishop-Elector Albrecht of Mayence, at whose court he often appeared. In 1517 too he played a part in the defense of [Johann Reuchlin](#) against the Cologne Dominicans; he probably wrote the second part of the famous *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*.

Unwilling to submit to monastic discipline, however, he escaped and wandered from town to town, eventually arriving in Italy, where he became a student at the universities of Pavia and Bologna. On his return to [Germany](#) in 1512, he joined the armies of the [Habsburg](#) emperor [Maximilian](#) I. His essays and poetry gained him acclaim from the emperor, who named him [poet laureate](#) of the realm in 1517.

His best works

- ❑ **The Art of Prosody (1511);**
- ❑ **The Nemo (1518);**
- ❑ **Morbus Gallicus (1519);**
- ❑ **The Vadismus (1520);**
- ❑ **Letters of Obscure Men**

Ulrich von Hutten.



Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the author of substantial body of written works at the service of the Reformation. All his life Luther published theological writings. His commitment also induced him to write political and polemical texts. His works in Latin and in German widely spread thanks to printing.

Luther left considerable body of written works. If one takes into account the more or less accurate transcript of some lectures, they amount to over 600 titles. He was first and foremost a theologian, but also a preacher and a writer, who could express difficult subjects in a simple language, be it in Latin or in German. According to Yves Congar, a Dominican, "Luther was one the greatest religious geniuses in History... who redesigned Christianity entirely."

His best works

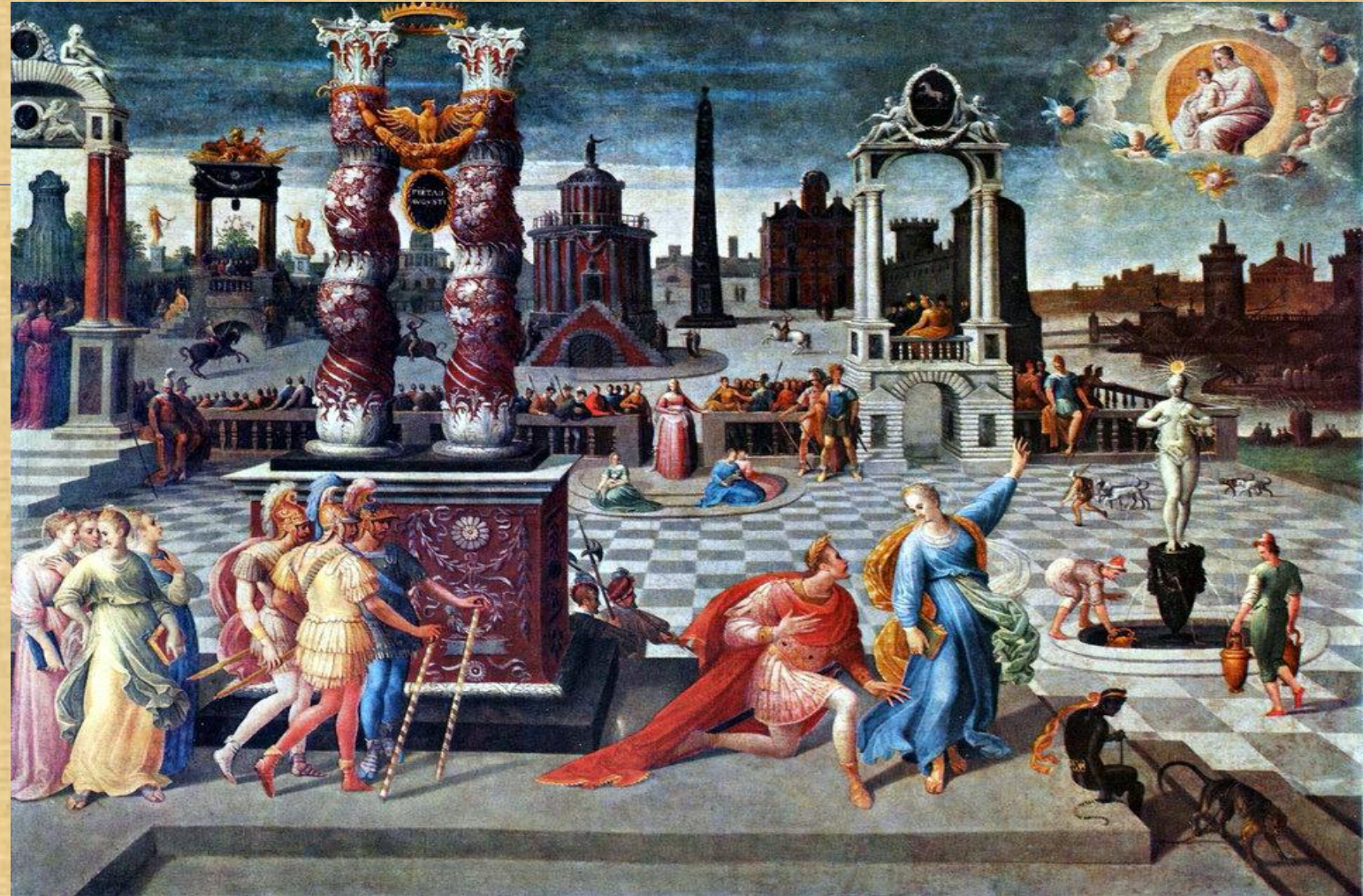
- ❑ Lectures on Genesis
- ❑ Let Your Sins Be Strong
- ❑ Against the Papacy at Rome Founded by the Devil
- ❑ On the Councils and Churches



2.4 Renaissance in France (Rabelais, Montaigne)

The late 15th and early 16th cent. saw the flowering of the Renaissance in France. Three giants of world literature—François [Rabelais](#), Pierre de [Ronsard](#), and Michel Eyquem de [Montaigne](#)—towered over a host of brilliant but lesser figures in the 16th cent. Italian influence was strong in the poetry of Clément [Marot](#) and the dramas of Étienne [Jodelle](#) and Robert [Garnier](#). The poet Ronsard and the six poets known collectively as the *Pléiade* (see [Pleiad](#)) reacted against Italian influence to produce a body of French poetry to rival Italian achievement.

The French Renaissance reached its peak in the mid-16th century, a time during which prominent poets and writers included La Pléiade, Joachim Du Bellay and Pierre de Ronsard. Other notable poets included Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné and Jean de Sponde, who incorporated tragedy and anguish into their works, trying to reflect the tumultuous times of **religious war between Catholics and Protestants**. Michel de Montaigne was a well known essayist, broaching a whole range of topics from the humanist viewpoint.



Francis Rabelais

Francis Rabelais, pseudonym **Alcofribas Nasier**, (born *c.* 1494, Poilou, France—died probably April 9, 1553, Paris), French writer and priest who for his contemporaries was an eminent physician and humanist and for posterity is the author of the comic masterpiece [*Gargantua and Pantagruel*](#).

Details of Rabelais's life are sparse and difficult to interpret. He was the son of Antoine Rabelais, a rich [Touraine](#) landowner and a prominent lawyer who deputized for the *lieutenant-général* of Poitou in 1527. After apparently studying law, Rabelais became a [Franciscan](#) novice at La Baumette (1510?) and later moved to the Puy-Saint-Martin convent at Fontenay-le-Comte in Poitou. By 1521 (perhaps earlier) he had taken holy orders.

Rabelais studied medicine, probably under the aegis of the Benedictines in their Hôtel Saint-Denis in Paris. In 1530 he broke his vows and left the Benedictines to study medicine at the University of Montpellier, probably with the support of his patron, Geoffroy d'Estissac. Graduating within weeks, he lectured on the works of distinguished ancient Greek physicians and published his own editions of [Hippocrates' Aphorisms](#) and [Galen's Ars parva](#) ("The Art of Raising Children") in 1532. As a doctor he placed great reliance on classical authority, siding with the [Platonic](#) school of [Hippocrates](#) but also following Galen and Avicenna.

His works

Gargantua and Pantagruel

Theleme

Pantagruel

The Art of Raising Children



Michel de Montaigne

Michel de Montaigne is widely appreciated as one of the most important figures in the late French Renaissance, both for his literary innovations as well as for his contributions to philosophy. As a writer, he is credited with having developed a new form of literary expression, the essay, a brief and admittedly incomplete treatment of a topic germane to human life that blends philosophical insights with historical anecdotes and autobiographical details, all unapologetically presented from the author's own personal perspective. As a philosopher, he is best known for his [skepticism](#), which profoundly influenced major figures in the history of philosophy such as Descartes and Pascal.



Montaigne's works

- ❑ **Essays**
- ❑ **Apology for Raymond Sebond**
- ❑ **Les Trois Véritez**
- ❑ **La Sagesse**



2.5 Spanish literature (Cervantes, Lope de Vega)

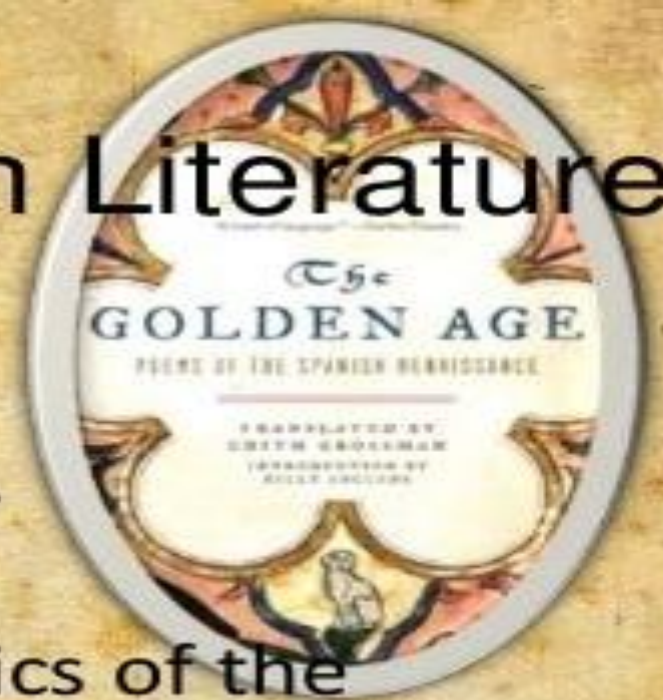
In the late 15th and the 16th centuries, the combination of Italian influences and burgeoning humanism rendered the gradual transformation of Spanish literature. Noblemen relished Petrarchan poetry and chivalric fiction, and the growing middle class demanded literature that told of their daily worries and pleasures. As a result, Spanish letters engendered a rich and affluent body of Renaissance literature characterized by classicism and Petrarchanism, philosophical humanism, and many forms of social protorealism.



Development of Spanish Literature

- Renaissance

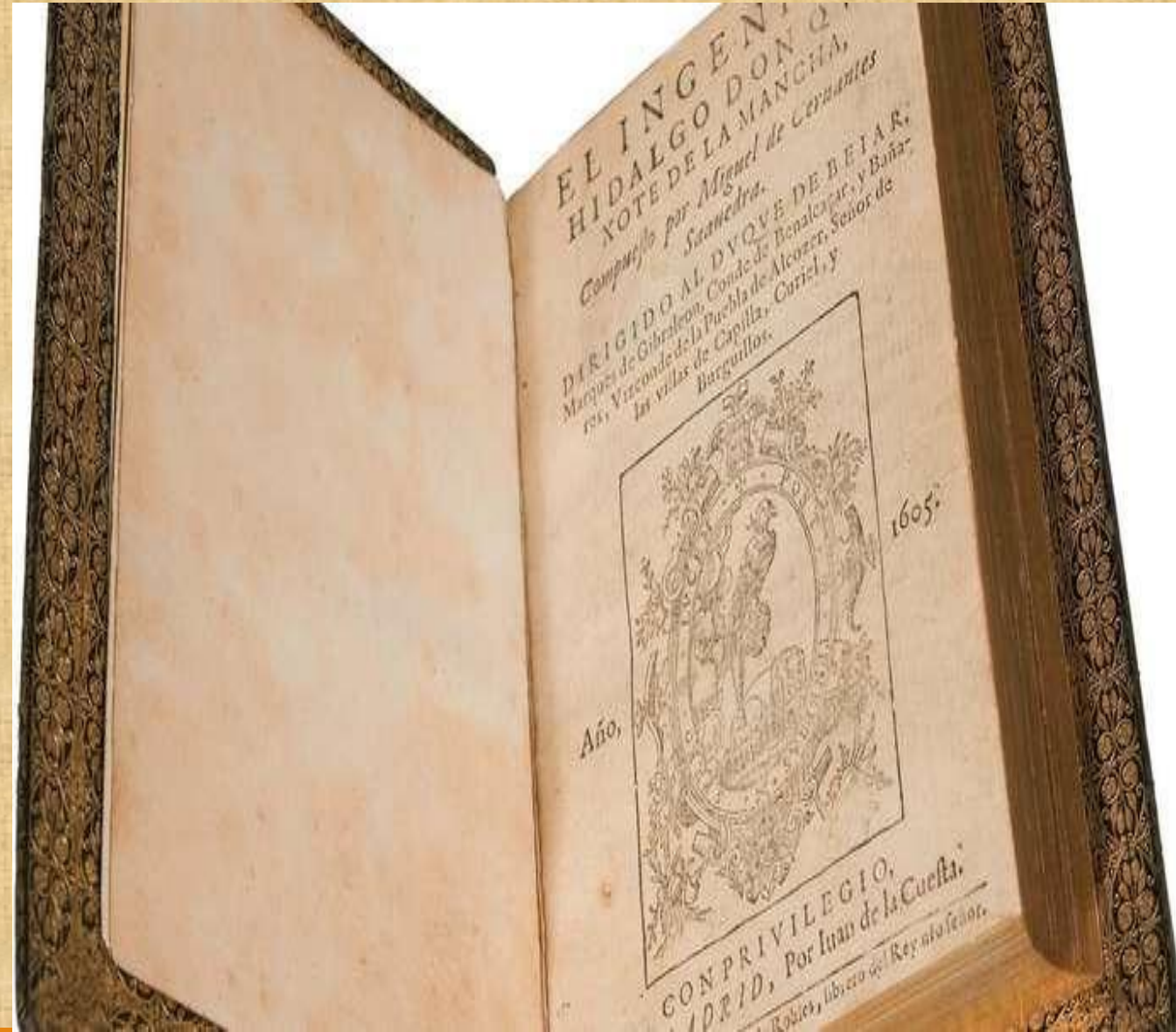
- During the 15th century the **pre-Renaissance** occurs.
- The most important characteristics of the Renaissance:
 - The language in this age is dominated by naturalness and simplicity.
 - The preferred themes are, fundamentally, love, nature, pagan mythology, from which the histories of gods and the female beauty are reflected, following always the same classical ideal.



Miguel de Cervantes

Miguel de Cervantes, in full **Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra**, (born September 29?, 1547, [Alcalá de Henares](#), Spain—died April 22, 1616, Madrid), [Spanish](#) novelist, playwright, and poet, the creator of [Don Quixote](#) (1605, 1615) and the most important and celebrated figure in [Spanish literature](#). His [novel](#) [Don Quixote](#) has been translated, in full or in part, into more than 60 languages. Editions continue regularly to be printed, and critical discussion of the work has proceeded unabated since the 18th century. At the same time, owing to their widespread representation in [art](#), [drama](#), and [film](#), the figures of [Don Quixote](#) and [Sancho Panza](#) are probably familiar visually to more people than any other imaginary characters in world literature. Cervantes was a great experimenter. He tried his hand in all the major [literary genres](#) save the [epic](#). He was a notable [short-story](#) writer, and a few of those in his collection of *Novelas exemplares* (1613; *Exemplary Stories*) attain a level close to that of *Don Quixote*, on a miniature scale.

First edition of volume one of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605).



Publication of *Don Quixote*

In July or [August](#) 1604 Cervantes sold the rights of *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* (“The Ingenious Hidalgo [Don Quixote](#) of La Mancha,” known as *Don Quixote*, Part I) to the publisher-bookseller Francisco de Robles for an unknown sum. License to publish was granted in September and the book came out in January 1605. There is some evidence of its content’s being known or known about before publication—to, among others, [Lope de Vega](#), the [vicissitudes](#) of whose relations with Cervantes were then at a low point. The compositors at Juan de la Cuesta’s press in Madrid are now known to have been responsible for a great many errors in the text, many of which were long attributed to the author.

The [novel](#) was an immediate success, though not as sensationally so as [Mateo Alemán's](#) [Guzmán de Alfarache](#), Part I, of 1599. By August 1605 there were two Madrid editions, two published in Lisbon, and one in [Valencia](#). There followed those of [Brussels](#), 1607; Madrid, 1608; [Milan](#), 1610; and Brussels, 1611. Part II, "Second Part of the Ingenious Knight Don Quixote of La Mancha", came out in 1615. [Thomas Shelton's](#) English translation of the first part appeared in 1612. The name of Cervantes was soon to be as well known in [England](#), [France](#), and Italy as in [Spain](#).

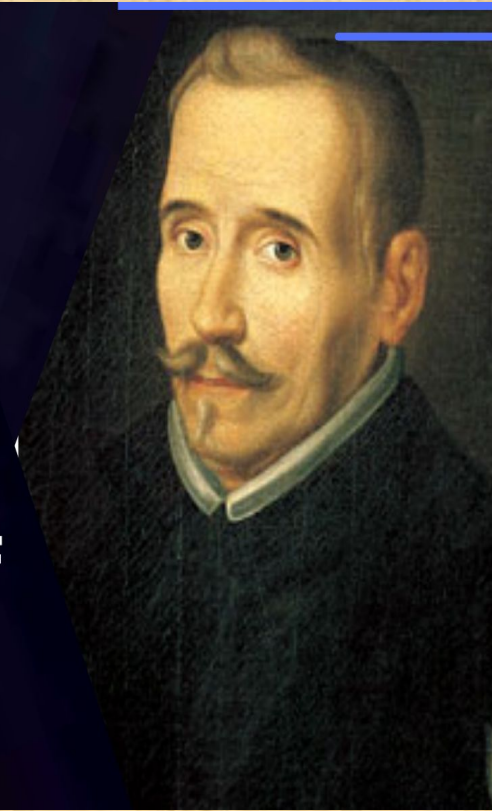


Lope de Vega

Lope de Vega, in full **Lope Félix de Vega Carpio**, (born Nov. 25, 1562, Madrid, Spain—died Aug. 27, 1635, Madrid), outstanding dramatist of the Spanish [Golden Age](#), author of as many as 1,800 plays and several hundred shorter dramatic pieces, of which 431 plays and 50 shorter pieces are [extant](#). He was the second son and third child of Francisca Fernandez Flores and Félix de Vega, an embroiderer. He was taught Latin and Castilian in 1572–73 by the poet [Vicente Espinel](#), and the following year he entered the Jesuit Imperial College, where he learned the rudiments of the humanities. [Captivated](#) by his talent and grace, the bishop of Ávila took him to the [Alcalá de Henares](#) (Universidad Complutense) in 1577 to study for the priesthood, but Vega soon left the Alcalá on the heels of a married woman.



**LOPE
DE VEGA**
AN
**OUTSTANDING
DRAMATIST OF
THE SPANISH
GOLDEN AGE**

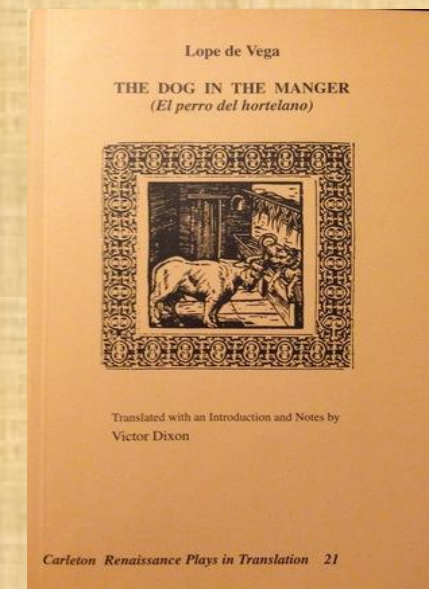
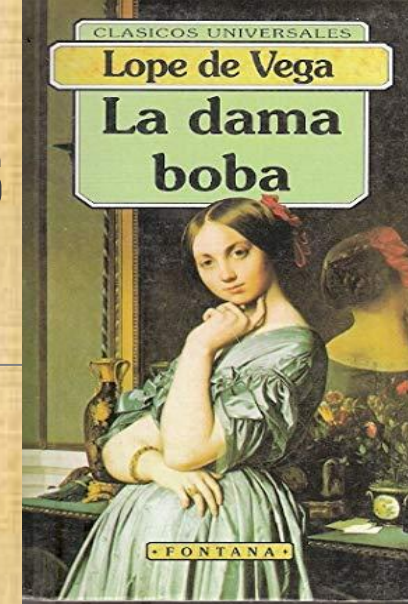


Vega became identified as a playwright with the comedia, a [comprehensive](#) term for the new drama of [Spain's Golden Age](#). Vega's productivity for the stage, however exaggerated by report, remains phenomenal. He claimed to have written an average of 20 sheets a day throughout his life and left untouched scarcely a vein of writing then current. Cervantes called him "the prodigy of nature."

The earliest firm date for a play written by Vega is 1593. His 18 months in Valencia in 1589–90, during which he was writing for a living, seem to have been decisive in shaping his vocation and his talent. The influence in particular of the Valencian playwright Cristóbal de Virués (1550–1609) was obviously profound. Toward the end of his life, in *El laurel de Apolo*, Vega credits Virués with having, in his "famous tragedies," laid the very foundations of the comedia. Virués' five tragedies, written between 1579 and 1590, do indeed display a gradual evolution from a set imitation of Greek tragedy as understood by the Romans to the very [threshold](#) of [romantic comedy](#).

Lope de Vega's best works

- ❑ The Dog in the Manger
- ❑ Punishment Without Revenge
- ❑ The Knight from Olmedo
- ❑ The Best Mayor, The King
- ❑ The Lady Boba: A Woman of Little Sense



Literature

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