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# THE CONCEPT OF THE RENAISSANCE IN MODERN HISTORICAL FICTION

Elizabeth A. Stone  
*Longwood University*

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THE CONCEPT OF THE RENAISSANCE

IN MODERN HISTORICAL FICTION

by

Elizabeth A. Stone

Library  
Longwood College  
Farmville, Virginia

approved by sponsor  
B.C. Simonini, Jr.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE RENAISSANCE CULTURAL IDEAL

The Italian Renaissance was a splendid reawakening, a dramatic epoch of cultural achievement. This is a fact recognized and emphasized by most historians and by practically all novelists of the Renaissance. Although there is general agreement on this point, one might ask, is the attitude of modern novelists basically the same as that of Renaissance historians? Are the significant characteristics of the Renaissance as a cultural period noted by historians illustrated in the historical novels? How do the histories and the novels compare in the treatment of these characteristics?

The purpose of this paper is to make a study of the attitude of modern novelists towards the Renaissance as a cultural period and to ascertain what aspects of the period are most frequently treated by these writers. Its method is, first of all, an identification of the significant characteristics of the Italian Renaissance as a period of world civilization through a study of important contemporary works - such as those by Machiavelli, Castiglione, and Cellini - and a reading of subsequent historical treatments of the subject - such as those by Burkhardt, Symonds, Corvo, Young, and Ferguson. Secondly, an attempt is made to observe the nature of the employment of historical material in selected novels.



The traditional attitude towards the Italian Renaissance has been gleaned by reading the standard histories of the period. Among those studied are The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy by Jacob Burckhardt, Renaissance in Italy by John Addington Symonds, A History of the Borgias by Frederick Baron Corvo, The Renaissance in Historical Thought by Wallace K. Ferguson, The Medici by G. F. Young, and The Man of the Renaissance by Ralph Roeder.

A deeper understanding has also been obtained by a limited consideration of some of the all-important contemporary works of the Italian Renaissance: The Prince by Machiavelli, The Courtier by Castiglione, and Cellini's Autobiography.

A knowledge of the concept of the Renaissance held by modern novelists has been gained from reading the following novels dealing with the Italian Renaissance:

- A. J. Anderson, The Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi (London, 1909).  
 Nigel Balchin, The Borgia Testament, (Boston, 1949).  
 Robert Barr, Cardillac, (New York, 1909).  
 Werner Bergengruen, A Matter of Conscience, (London, 1952).  
 Marjorie Bowen, The Carnival of Florence (New York, 1915).  
 Edward Bulwer - Lytton, Rienzi, The Last of the Roman Tribunes (New York, 1835).  
 Nathan Gallizier, The Court of Lucifer (Boston, 1910).  
 Somerset Maugham, Then and Now (Garden City, New York, 1946).  
 Justin Huntly Mc Carthy, The Gorgeous Borgia (London, n.d.).  
 Dimitri Merejkowski, The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci, (New York, 1931).  
 K. L. Montgomery, The Cardinal's Pawn, (Chicago, 1910).  
 Frederick Rolfe, Don Tarquinio (London, 1905).

Rafael Sabatini, The Shame of Motley (Boston, 1926).

Rafael Sabatini, The Strolling Saint (Boston, 1925).

Maurice Samuel, The Web of Lucifer (New York, 1947).

Samuel Shellabarger, The Prince of Foxes (Boston, 1947).

Mrs. Lawrence Turnbull, The Golden Book of Venice (New York, 1923).

Mary B. Whiting, The Plough of Shame (London, n.d.).

S. Levett Yeats, The Honour of Savelli (New York, 1895).

From a comparison of the historical data of the Renaissance with the material included in the modern historical novels under consideration, it can be concluded that novelists follow the Renaissance tradition established by Burkhardt and followed primarily by subsequent historians. Professor De Filippis, a modern critic, summarizes the spirit of the Renaissance as the "cult for art, passion for knowledge, love for worldly glory, humanism, diffusion of 'Italianism.'"<sup>1</sup>

Many diverse criteria can be used to characterize the Renaissance. Classicism, humanism, pageantry, individualism, and opportunism seem to be acceptable to most authorities. They are discussed in this study under three main topics: the Renaissance cultural ideal, the Renaissance individual, and the Renaissance state.

From the standpoint of people of the twentieth century, humanism is probably the most important phase of the Renaissance because it has left so many tangible remains in works of scholarship, art, architecture, and literature. Nor can its importance to Renaissance contemporaries be over-emphasized. They were conscious of their cultural revival and were active in fostering and spreading it.



Certainly an important aspect of humanism is the return to classical study, but in a broad sense it is the exalting of the human phase of life with the emphasis upon ego. The individual is the center of life, and in him can the heights of human achievement be reached. The ideal of humanism incorporated a belief in the dignity and essential goodness of man. The Renaissance Man placed his greatest faith in himself. This is clearly in opposition with the Medieval concept that exalted the supernatural and divine.<sup>3</sup>

Italy claimed a large number of outstanding humanists during this period. Historians generally list Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Pico della Mirandola, and Ficino among the great humanists, emphasizing in particular the wide and varied humanistic activities of Petrarch, the "father of humanism."<sup>3</sup>

While modern historical novelists treat the subject of humanism, they often shift the emphasis to other humanists. Marjorie Bowen lists Ludovico Sforza and Cristofano degli Albizzi as humanists in her novel The Carnival of Florence. Edward Bulwer-Lytton suggests Cola di Rienzo in his novel Rienzi, The Last of the Roman Tribunes. Cosimo de' Medici meets this <sup>ideal</sup> according to The Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi by A. J. Anderson. It seems that novelists are more concerned with developing a good story than in accurately describing Renaissance humanism. They select characters that are first spectacular and secondly illustrate this Renaissance development. This does not indicate that the novelists present a false picture of Renaissance humanism, but rather that they cannot be relied upon to give an accurate picture of the Renaissance as critics.

One of the dominant qualities in humanism is classicism or the revival of learning. Symonds points out that the revival of learning was not limited to an interest in classic literature. It went much deeper to include "the emancipation of reason in a race of men, intolerant of control, ready to

criticise acceptable canons of conduct, enthusiastic in admiration of antique liberty, freshly awakened to the sense of beauty, and anxious above all things to secure for themselves free scope in things outside the region of authority."<sup>4</sup>

Men turned to the example of the ancients because they saw the heights attained by their predecessors and cherished the idea of reaching the same peak of life themselves. Merejkowski in the Romance of Leonardo da Vinci summarizes this idea in a speech between Merulla and Giovanni: "Our masters are the ancient Greeks and Romans. They have accomplished all that man can accomplish on this earth" (page 12).

It would be impossible to list all of those who supported the movement of classicism in Italy during the Renaissance. Cola di Rienzo and Adrian Colonna were among the early proponents of classicism mentioned by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in his novel Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes (pages 12 and 47). Somerset Maugham in his historical novel Then and Now says that Machiavelli "passionately admired the ancients" (pages 1 - 2). Merejkowski also points out that Machiavelli believed strongly in studying how the Greeks and Romans coped with situations, particularly those concerning civic and military affairs, and making proper application (page 391). Leonardo da Vinci also acknowledged the greatness of the ancients in all fields of human achievement except science (page 268).

It must be understood that humanism was a controversial issue during the Renaissance. It has already been pointed out that it was supported by a large number of Renaissance scholars and philosophers. However, without the ardent support of such wealthy and noble patrons as the Medici and the Borgia, classicism could never have become such a force in the Italian Renaissance. Classicism met its strongest opposition from the Church



which recognized it as an essentially pagan tendency. In many instances the Church resisted classicism ruthlessly. Merejkowski tells of a priest leading a mob to destroy a statue of ancient beauty that had recently been brought to the light. The statue was broken and burned, and the lime that remained was used to whitewash the walls of the cemetery (pages 35-36). Bowen takes up a similar incident in the destruction of the statue of Hermes by a priest and mob (pages 7-8).

Italy was rich in the ruins of the ancients. Nathan Gallizier in The Red Confessor makes the Parthenon, the Temple of Saturn, Trojan's Column, the Forum, and the Colis/eum in Rome a part of his historical setting (page 5). Merejkowski, too, has an abundance of ancient coins and medals, works of bronze and marble, fragments of busts and statues, and old manuscripts (page 6).

The visible evidence of the accomplishments of the ancients spurred Renaissance Italians on to greater classical activity. Merejkowski notes that with great fervor they restored the decaying manuscripts of their predecessors (pages 9-10). Archeologists and even peasants sought pieces of ancient art buried in places such as vineyards. We find in Bowen's novel The Carnival of Florence that the peasants realized the value of their findings and set a high price on these works they discovered (pages 7-8). In Merejkowski's Romance of Leonardo da Vinci the Italians even have mercantile agencies to collect antiquities from distant sources, such as Athens, Smyrna, Helicarnassus, Cyprus, Rhodes, and Asia Minor (page 6).

Many of the Italians had valuable collections of antiquities. Merejkowski describes Cipriano's extensive collection: "Here, as in a museum, marbles and bronzes were set and hung about the wall. Ancient coins and medals were set off to their best advantage on cloth-covered boards.



Fragments of statues, as yet unsorted, were lying in boxes. Through his multitudinous mercantile agencies he acquired antiquities from every source where they could be found" (page 6). Bulwer-Lytton shows Adrian Colonna to be another early patron of the antiquities. In his apartment "ancient statues and busts were arranged around; the pictured arras of Lombardy decorated the walls, and covered the massive seats" (page 47).

The influence of antiquity went much deeper than collections of statuary and medals. It could be felt in almost every phase of life during the early Renaissance. Herejkowski recounts that in the field of statism, Machiavelli, the great political scientist of the Renaissance, said, "I think that in matters military and civic the new nations fall into errors by declining to imitate the ancients" (page 391). Somerset Maugham points<sup>out</sup> in Then and Now that Machiavelli believed that statesmen could gain much from studying the examples of the ancients (pages 1-2).

In the realm of religion antiquity also made itself felt in the lives of many Renaissance Italians. As they copied the pagan Greeks and Romans, their own religion became tainted with paganism. It was not an overpowering outward expression so much as a gradual, scarcely noticeable skepticism creeping in, which worked up to a peak of worldliness and immorality. All of the blame for the spiritual and moral corruption of the Renaissance cannot be placed upon the influence of antiquity; rather it should be understood that this condition had its beginning in antiquity.

The influence of antiquity upon education of the Renaissance was vast and continuous. The historian Burckhardt in his Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy makes it clear that education was not limited to a study of classical antiquity, but a large part of it was directed into that channel (page 85). Rafael Sabatini in The Strolling Saint, for example, points out to what

extent Agostino d'Anguisola was influenced by the classical writers. His education included a study of Thucydides, Herodotus, Tacitus, Cicero, Livy, Lucretius, Virgil, Terrence, Ovid, Martial, and Juvenal (pages 105-107). This was a typical course of study in Italy during the Renaissance.

The Renaissance ideal education included the full development of Man, the idea of the universal man or the courtier. Burkhardt states that the courtier "must be at home in all noble sports, among them running, leaping, swimming, and wrestling; he must above all things be a good dancer and, as a matter of course, an accomplished rider. He must be master of several languages, at all events of Latin and Italian; he must be familiar with literature and have some knowledge of the fine arts. In music a certain practical skill was expected of him" (page 236). The Renaissance Man should, like Cristofano degli Albizzi in The Carnival of Florence by Bowen, be "charming in his comely elegance, in his composure, in the finish of his manners and his dress, perfect in all things, pleasing to the senses" (page 286).

Education during the Renaissance was also extended to ladies. Burkhardt states that even the daughters of the great families of the period were highly educated.<sup>5</sup> G. F. Young in The Medici describes the education of women in great detail. Their education should include the basic classical learning, a study of classic literature and composition in Greek and Latin. They should be conversant with current literature of both Italy and other countries. They should, in addition, have a knowledge of art and science and be accomplished in music, dancing, and the playing of various instruments. They should also be able to ride well and take part in field sports.<sup>6</sup> A large number of Renaissance women portrayed by modern novelists exemplify this ideal in their education. Isabella of Mantua was such a lady in



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The Golden Book of Venice by Mrs. Lawrence Turnbull (page 64). Lucrezia Borgia in The Gorgeous Borgia by Frederick Rolfe (page 27) and Giuliana Fifanti in Sabatini's novel The Strolling Saint (page 122) were also highly educated.

The influence of classicism was felt to greater or lesser degree in all of the arts. In the field of literature Burkhart lists Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio as great humanists.<sup>7</sup> Symonds points out that Renaissance architecture was greatly influenced by the work of the ancients.<sup>8</sup> However, he states further that Italians of this epoch found less in Greek and Roman painting to copy. Music and science also found scant remains upon which to build. Leonardo da Vinci, the great Renaissance scientist, is used to exemplify this idea by Merejkowski in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci (page 268). Even in the choice of names Italy was influenced by Romanism says Symonds.<sup>9</sup> Novelists occasionally give Cesare Borgia's name Latin spelling, probably to associate him in the reader's mind with Julius Caesar and his greatness. In their <sup>of</sup> entertainment Renaissance Italians also went back to the classic master. Merejkowski cites an instance of the performance of one act of Miles Gloriosus by Plautus. He analyzed the attitude, however, as "a superstitious respect for antiquity" rather than an actual appreciation of the literary value of the play. (page 84). It can be concluded then that people of the Renaissance were influenced by classicism in virtually every phase of their lives, from the weighty matters of state to the lighter subjects of pleasure seeking and the selection of names.

The height of the Renaissance was reached in the flowering of arts and culture. There were varied types of cultural advance. Professor Wilkins

lists architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature, philosophy, religion, science, education, and scholarship (page 67). Symonds states, however, that the Italians found in art a cohesion they lacked as a state. Italy's geographic and cultural location gave its art a cosmopolitan flavor. Not only was it influenced by classical Greek and Roman culture, but also by Byzantine, Oriental, French, and Spanish cultures. Professor Wilkins points out that Italian Renaissance art possessed the quality of timelessness - a broadening understanding of human nature, advancing technical skill, and beauty of form and color (page 74).

Renaissance culture had a certain undeniable pagan tone. Symonds clearly presents the idea that the flowering of art and culture did not hinge upon the corruption of the Church and the moral decay of the period.<sup>10</sup> They were, rather, merely coincidental. Merejkowski in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci and Maurice Samuel in The Web of Lucifer, as well as other modern novelists, use plentiful examples of pagan elements in the Renaissance culture.

The love of beauty was inherent in the Italian mind. The Renaissance included grace and loveliness. The term "loveliness," according to Rolfe included both physical and spiritual or psychical beauty, which was considered almost divine. The ideal loveliness was a combination of physical and spiritual beauty. Italians, according to McCarthy in The Gorgeous Borgia liked a "fresh and flagrant display of physical nakedness" (page 176). They sought their standard in the ancient tradition: Mary B. Whiting in The Plough of Shame has Ariosto state that "beauty is the soul of life" (page 93).

The ideal of beauty was developed to such an extent that Firenzuola codified the ideal of feminine beauty into a book. In The Shame of Motley



by Sabatini this ideal was discussed. It included a graceful form with long, slender limbs; an oval face; full, dark eyes and well-defined eyebrows; golden hair and a high forehead; and a white softly rounded neck (page 27).

There were vast collections of art during the Renaissance, the greatest of which was the Medici collection. Young describes the Medici Palace as "the nurse of all learning."<sup>11</sup> It contained works of both the ancient and the modern artists. Bowen describes the gem collection in the Medici Palace in The Carnival of Florence: "The gem cabinet was a small, long room, the walls of which were entirely occupied with cases which contained the jewels collected by Lorenzo dei Medici and by Piero his son" (page 191). This collection also contained masterpieces of statuary, such as Donatello's David, painting, and books.

The Medici interest in art began with Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, the founder of the Medici family who lived from 1360-1428. This was the crucial period of the birth of the arts, says Young.<sup>12</sup> Young further describes the cultural activity of the Medici by telling of Giovanni's son Cosimo, who built the Medici Palace and the Medici Library.<sup>13</sup> Lorenzo de' Medici and his son Piero are cited by Bowen as active patrons of the arts.

Art collections of the Renaissance were not limited to the wealthy collections of great Italian families, such as the Medici, Borgia, and Este. Camilla in The Prince of Foxes was an avid collector of paintings. In Rienzi, The Last of the Roman Tribunes by Bulwer-Lytton, Nina, the wife of Rienzo had an interesting collection of works of art: "The candlelabras of the silver workmanship of Florence; the carpets and stuffs of the East; the draperies of Venice and Genoa; paintings like the illuminated missals,



wrought in gold, and those lost colors of blue and crimson; antique marbles which spoke of the bright days of Athens; tables of disinterred mosaics...- all these, ... congregated in the richest luxuriance, harmonized with the most exquisite taste, uniting the ancient arts with the modern, amazed and intoxicated the sense of the beholder" (page 181). Even Anna da Siena, a cortegiana honesta, in The Web of Lucifer by Maurice Samuel was a patroness of the arts.

Churches, chapels, and tombs also served as art centers. The Sistine Chapel, for instance, claimed Rafael's famous Madonna and "The Last Judgment" by Michael Angelo. Merejkowski mentions Oswald Ingram's work on the windows of the Milan Chapel (page 15). Gallizier describes the works of art in the church Santa Maria of the Aventine in The Red Confessor: "The wonderful paintings and incrustations, the gleaming mosaics of the roof, the figures of haloed martyrs and angels and saints in their stiff, brocaded dalmatics, were sunken in the opaque gloom" (page 15). The height of splendor was reached in the gilded doors in the Palazzo San Giovanni, as described by Bowen in The Carnival of Florence (page 54). Mrs. Turnbull mentions a Renaissance tomb in The Golden Book of Venice as "a mass of sculpture, rococo, and gilding" (page 10).

Renaissance art was largely propagated by the patronage of princes. Shellabarger presents the Court of Città del Monte in The Prince of Foxes as a relatively small court; yet it contained an astrologer, a court painter and architect, a librarian and humanist, a chaplain, a secretary, and about fifteen ladies and gentlemen in waiting (page 163). According to Maugham Cesare Borgia's court included poets, painters, architects, and engineers (pages 51-52). Ercole d'Este of Ferrara patronized learned men for the

University, skilled engineers, and architects, Shellabarger points out (page 62). Young in The Medici depicts Cosimo de' Medici as a great patron of the arts. Among the artists he sponsored were Donatello, Desiderio da Settignano, Bernardo and Antonio Rossellino, Miro da Fiesole, Antonio and Piero Pollajuolo, and Filippo Lippi.<sup>14</sup> Another famous Medici, Pope Leo X, was an outstanding patron of the arts and "surrounded himself with poets, musicians, artists, and servants," according to Merejkowski (page 518). Ludovico Sforza employed a court bard, states Merejkowski, to write sonnets honoring his wife and mistress (pages 71-74). Louis XII of France was one of Leonardo da Vinci's patrons beginning in the year 1507, states Merejkowski (page 516).

The system of apprenticing youths under professional artists was another major means of propagating the arts during the Italian Renaissance. Benvenuto Cellini, who was so outstanding in the field of crafts, was apprenticed to a goldsmith, Antonio di Sandro.<sup>15</sup> Later, Cellini himself depended on apprentices to do much of his work, especially the less skilled portion. Mrs. Turnbull describes a typical example of apprenticeship in that of Paolo Cagliani and his apprentices: "Within his studio his pupils came and went, some earnest to follow in the footsteps of the master, absorbed in their tasks; others, golden youths, painting a little because Art was beautiful--not overdoing" (page 57). Merejkowski outlines the program of study of Giovanni Beltraffio, one of Leonardo da Vinci's apprentices. His curriculum included "perspective, the dimensions and proportions of the human body; drawing after the examples of good masters; drawing from nature" (page 139).



Modern novelists are concerned with the development of painting as an art. Professor Wilkins points out that the greatness of Renaissance painting rested "upon a swiftly advancing technical skill."<sup>16</sup> Merejkowski, especially, develops the craftsmanship of art in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci. He illustrates the precision of the development of painting techniques as he describes the secret skills Fra Bendetto imparted to Giovanni Beltraffio. In preparing "a fixative in painting young faces, the eggs of city hens" were used "because the yolks of such eggs are lighter than those of eggs laid by country hens" (page 17).

Merejkowski notes further the exactness of Renaissance art. Leonardo da Vinci, he states, was never satisfied with his painting because he desired perfection (page 148). Leonardo attempted to gain this perfection by a study of anatomy, according to Merejkowski (page 278). When the statue of the goddess Venus was excavated Leonardo computed the exact dimension of the body (pages 27-29). Merejkowski notes also that Leonardo bribed the hangmen to steal bodies from the gallows for him to study anatomy.

Italian Renaissance artists made decided advance in understanding human nature. Leonardo da Vinci, says Merejkowski, "loves to escort those sentenced to death, observing in their faces all the degrees of torture and horror" (page 155). Michael Angelo's works, on the other hand, says Mrs. Turnbull in The Golden Book of Venice "seemed to transcend the physical and capture the spiritual elements of his subjects" (pages 53-54).

Twentieth century historical novels furnish ample illustrations of painters and their works. Merejkowski names Rafael as the greatest painter of all ages. His art in his early works, Leonardo noted, was carefree and tranquil (page 535). Probably his masterpiece was the Madonna in the Sistine

Chapel. Young in The Medici points out that the downfall of art, strangely enough, began with the great master Michael Angelo. Instead of using art to depict the subjects, he made the fatal mistake of using the subject to display art.<sup>17</sup>

Modern novelists discuss many other Italian Renaissance artists, among which are Botticelli, Filippo Lippi (especially in The Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi by A. J. Anderson), Giotto, Titian, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, and Andrea del Sarto. Anderson suggests Filippo Lippi as "the greatest and most versatile painter of his age" (page 255).

Sculptory was a rich field in Renaissance art, although Symonds states that Italy was surpassed by the ancient Greeks in this field.<sup>18</sup> Italian sculptory was strongly influenced by the Roman tradition, especially beginning in 1410 with the work of Nanni di Banco until about the end of the sixteenth century and the appearance of the Baroque period, states Professor Wilkins.<sup>19</sup> Michael Angelo stands out as the greatest sculptor of the Renaissance. Other notable works are Laocoon, vividly described by Symonds, and David by Donatello.<sup>20</sup> Merejkowski describes at length Leonardo da Vinci's great equestrian statue Colossus (page 53).

Italy was too lacking in national unity and cohesion during the Renaissance to produce great monuments of architecture. Modern writers of historical fiction pass lightly over Renaissance architecture. One exception to this is Shellabarger's description in The Prince of Foxes of the palace in Varano (page 163). The final impression, however, is that this palace is a work of medieval rather than Renaissance art. Maugham gives a sketchy description of a Renaissance home in Then and Now (pages 45-46). It would seem then that Renaissance architecture is a subject generally omitted by modern novelists.



Crafts <sup>are</sup> is an interesting phase of Renaissance art, although <sup>they are</sup> it is not treated extensively by modern novelists. In spite of the fact that Renaissance craftsmen made outstanding progress in gold and bronze work, glassblowing, and leathercraft, modern writers of historical fiction limit their concern almost entirely <sup>to</sup> with the works of Benvenuto Cellini, the great master of gold and bronze work. Sabatini in The Strolling Saint speaks of the candlelabra at Pagliano, the work "of that great artist and rogue Benvenuto Cellini" (page 276). The fact that Cellini was a "rogue" is probably the key to his popularity with modern writers. Writers appreciate the freshness of his character.

The novelists tend to place more emphasis upon music than do the traditional Renaissance critics. Burkhardt summarizes the total musical advance of the Renaissance as the specialization of the orchestra and the perfection of some instruments, including the organ. <sup>21</sup> Professor Wilkins dismisses it with the statement that "in this case there was no Roman tradition." <sup>22</sup>

Modern novelists frequently use music for atmosphere. Montgomery in The Cardinal's Pawn says that "out of the blue silence of the sea and sky, as the boat sailed on, crept a music of lutes and cellos" (page 221). And again Montgomery has Fiamma Bonaventuri playing a little tune over and over again on the mandolin as she thinks (page 14). Leonardo in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Merejkowki arranged for musicians to entertain Mona Lisa with the viol and the silver lute while he painted her portrait (page 458). Leonardo, incidentally, invented "the silver lute" himself. Yeats adds color to the scene in The Honour of Savelli when he states:



"The coming day seemed to warm the hearts of the men, and one of them broke into song, the chorus being taken up by the others as we jogged along" (page 229). Maugham points out in Then and Now that Machiavelli sang well and played the lute. He possessed a certain amount of technical knowledge of music and had composed a few songs (pages 72-73). Maugham also states that "part singing was a common accomplishment of the day" (page 108).

Modern novelists find literary art tangible and easy to describe. They, like Renaissance historians, place considerable emphasis upon this phase of art. Professor Wilkins briefly and clearly describes the profound influence of classicism upon Renaissance literature. Maurice Samuel in The Web of Lucifer (pages 6-7) and McCarthy in The Gorgeous Borgia (page 87) emphasize the interest of Fra Matteo and Agapito respectively in classical literature. Agapito also wrote Greek and Latin verse of unusual purity. Merejkowski acknowledges the popularity of poetry when he mentions that Messer Unico supplied entertainment at a ball given by Ludovico Sforza by composing sonnets (pages 220-221). In contrast to the literary interest in poetry, the Renaissance also produced some very practical books. Alberti wrote Trattato della Famiglia which told in detail how to manage a house and be a good wife. Machiavelli in Maugham's Then and Now recognized the importance of literature when he stated, "It is not the great deeds men do that make them remembered by posterity, but the fine language with which men of letters describe their deeds" (page 183).

Contrasting the treatment of the flowering of arts and culture by modern novelists with that of accepted historians, it seems that the novelists seek to present the spectacular side more than to develop a complete picture of Renaissance art. The Romance of Leonardo da Vince by Merejkowski is

decidedly the most nearly accurate and complete novel in its treatment of art.

Because of the humanistic interest of the Italians during this period, there emerged a unique development in the Renaissance Man, the courtier. Ralph Roeder in The Man of the Renaissance describes the courtier as "the complete man, symmetrically developed, purged of personal idiosyncrasy, and fitted for his social role by his versatility, sanity, and poise. Grace is his genius, conviviality his virtue, the normal of his nature; he lives to please, to be persona grata in his glory; the pink of mediocrity, he is the model of all those primrose people whose common virtue is: Raphael pluxit."<sup>23</sup> Roeder points out, in addition, that the courtier should be well-born, well-favored, have an amateur knowledge of arms, have grace and moral grace, be well-lettered, and possess catholic and classical culture. It was well for him to also have an amateur interest in music and art.<sup>24</sup>

Castiglione, the great Renaissance authority on the courtier, wrote an outstanding work entitled The Courtier. Symonds in The Revival of Learning says that Castiglione himself embraced the qualities he pointed out in The Courtier. He was of a good family, had a sound learning, knew beauty and the arts, and excelled in athletics.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of grace, as propounded by Professor Williamson in his article, "The Concept of Grace in the Work of Raphael and Castiglione," is almost identical with the standard for the courtier. To have grace the courtier should be of noble birth, have ability, be a scholar, conceal all effort, have a "supple firm body," have a balance of mind as well as body, "master many skills," center his activities around "a core of learning, particularly classical learning," have the platonic quality, and lead his prince from evil to virtue.



Ippolito de' Medici, according to The Medici by G. F. Young, seems to be an ideal courtier: "Ippolito was by this time twenty years of age, handsome, courteous, good-natured, highly cultivated, possessed of much ability, and a universal favorite."<sup>26</sup>

The Renaissance ideal of grace seems to be universally recognized by writers of twentieth century historical fiction. Mrs. Turnbull in The Golden Book of Venice describes Marcantonio Giustiniano as "handsome, winning, pleasure-loving, after an innocent fashion, . . . but he thought life not made for pain, nor ugliness, nor hardness of any sort; he was bred to luxury, yet his intellectual inheritance made learning easy for him; he was many-sided and vacillating, an exquisite in taste and the science of trifles" (page 63). Bulwer-Lytton suggests that Pope Clement VI was "the most accomplished gentleman and the most graceful voluptuary of his time (page 26). Another Pope, Alexander VI, "must have been one of the most polished and charming men of his age "according to his son Cesare Borgia in The Borgia Testament by Nigel Balchin (page 28). McCarthy in The Gorgeous Borgia says that Lovinella Orsini "is compact of the Graces" (page 129). Bowen notes that Cristofano degli Albizzi in The Carnival of Florence was "charming in his comely elegance, in his composure, in the finish of his manners and his dress, perfect in all things, pleasing to the senses" (page 286). Yeats in The Honour of Savelli describes the grace with which Bayard managed his horse. (page 25).

Even in their speech, Italians of the Renaissance reflected the ideal of grace. Shellabarger states in The Prince of Foxes that "true of false, well-polished and courteous phrases were admirable in themselves" (page 5). Balchin adds a warning note, however: "A prince may eat flattery as he eats sweetmeats, but he must never get to enjoy it as food" (page 239).

Renaissance men added grace to their speech by the use of literary quotations and proverbs. Maurice Samuel in The Web of Lucifer emphasizes the fact that their speech was full of quotations from such literary figures as Petrarch and Dante (pages 86, 90, 93, 95). Samuel also stresses the use of proverbs (pages 10, 59, 60). Gallizier in The Red Confessor quotes the Pontiff as saying, "Fools are leaky vessels for secrets" (page 71). Merejkowski includes the proverb, "One doth not grow old at table" (page 80). He also quotes a beldame who says, "Beauty without love is like a mass without a Paternoster, while the caresses of a husband are as dreary as the games of nuns" (page 64).

Just as the ideal of the courtier developed during the Renaissance, so also his counterpart, the ideal of the court lady, developed during this period. Roeder says the court lady possessed wit, knowledge, judgment, skill, and modesty"<sup>27</sup> Young mentions two court ladies, especially Clarice de' Medici, who "was high spirited, capable, and intelligent,"<sup>28</sup> and Lucrezia Tournabuoni, who "was one of the most accomplished women of that age.... She was learned, a poetess, and a deeply religious woman. She distinguished herself not only as a noted patroness of learning, but also by her own writings."<sup>29</sup>

In the realm of historical fiction, Mrs. Turnbull discusses "the learned and illustrious lady, Isabella of Mantua" (page 64). Frederick Rolfe in Don Tarquinio speaks of Lucrezia Borgia as "a pearl of women, lovely and good, gentle and courteous to all" (page 27). Sabatini illustrates the learning of the court lady when he states in The Strolling Saint that Giuliana Fifanti wrote sonnets of very good quality (page 122).



Castiglione also developed the idea of Platonic love in The Courtier. It embodied the concept of the religion of love and beauty and of the ladder of love, by which a person could rise from physical love to the heights of the love of divine beauty.

Modern writers of historical fiction seem to be intrigued by the Renaissance revival of Platonic love. Maurice Samuel develops an instance of the ladder of love in Giacomo's love for Leonora. Giacomo was first attracted by Leonora's beauty, sweetness, and friendliness (page 88). Later he was elevated by the exalted relation of the kinship of their spirits (pages 94-96). Finally Giacomo seemed to almost worship Leonora and to realize his unworthiness of her love (page 97). This is, of course, merely a development toward the possible heights of the ladder of love. It does nevertheless, point out several of the phases of the advance in "the ladder." Agostino d'Aguissola expresses the ideal of the purity of the heights of Platonic love when he says to Bianca de' Cavalcanti in The Strolling Saint by Sabatini, "Your image drove out all the sin from my soul. The peace which half a year penance, of fasting and flagellation could not bring me, was brought me by my love for you when it woke. It was as a purifying fire that turned to ashes all the evil of desires that my heart had held" (page 388). Biancomonte in The Shame of Motley said that he loved Madonna Paola "with as pure a flame as ever burned within the heart of man" (page 106).

Among the novelists, Marjorie Bowen in The Carnival of Florence stresses Platonic love most. Cristofano degli Albizzi said in this novel that he would never love until he found "one who is Madonna and Venus in one - soul and body perfect - such I might worship if I could never attain" (page 19). In his marriage, says Bowen, Cristofano "had been able to combine the teaching



of love and beauty of the Neoplatonists with the stern precepts of San Marco, for he had served both his pleasure and his conscience in taking Aprilis" (page 127). Aprilis de Fiorivanti considers Platonic love thus: "Platonic love was the fashion, so she had always been told - a delicate game for which she felt fitted, a perilous game, yet she was sure of herself - even if she played it with Piero dei Medici" (page 147). In The Carnival of Florence by Bowen Fiora dei Visdomini, Giovanni dei Medici's lady says, "Platonic love was a Medicean fashion" (page 306). Yeats also states in The Honour of Savelli that Savelli and Doris D'Entrangues had a "Platonic friendship" (page 53).

Roeder points out that learned discussions were in vogue during the Renaissance.<sup>30</sup> Platonic love was a favorite topic for discussion. Women, states Roeder, were allowed to participate actively in these discussions - even to lead them, although their opinions were not generally considered the final word.<sup>31</sup>

Modern novelists illustrate the Renaissance discussions freely. Mary Whiting in The Plough of Shame says that Veronica, Marchesa of Alderoni "welcomed the visitors... - wits and scholars of Ferrara, who were accustomed to meet at her house for intellectual discussion after the fashion of the Platonic Academy of Lorenzo the Magnificent" (page 51). Ludovico Sforza, according to Merejkowski, planned gathering of the greatest thinkers of the age to discuss controversial issues of the times (pages 261 and 270).

Sabatini in The Strolling Saint emphasizes the position of women in these discussions. Donna Giuliana and Donna Leocadia, he states, joined in the discussion at dinner freely (pages 102-103). Even the courtesan Lena Griffa could discuss platonic love very learnedly, says Merejkowski in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci (page 394).

Undoubtedly a wide range of subjects were discussed at the Renaissance discussions, but among those noted by modern novelists was whether Platonic love allowed a kiss, says Merejkowski (page 219). In The Court of Lucifer by Nathan Gallizier "Bembo suddenly desired to be informed if one might Platonically love a lady without a front tooth" (page 75). Such was the range of Platonic discussions.

Humanism introduced many positive changes into Renaissance thinking, but it also introduced a negative change: the pagan element. Synonds states that "paganism in the minds of these self-reliant men....led...to recklessness and worldly vices."<sup>32</sup>

Renaissance men often developed their "self-reliance" to the point that they placed themselves above God. Mario Belli in The Prince of Foxes by Shella-barger said, "What do I owe God?...As I consider my life, there's more reason that God should reconcile Himself with me" (page 102). Ramiro del' Orca in The Shame of Motley by Sabatini states that "in the Citadel of Cesena...we fear neither God nor the Devil, and vows are as water to us" (page 213). Cristofano degli Albizzi's attitude toward God was characterized by indifference. Bowen says in The Carnival of Florence that "Cristofano smiled and shrugged and seemed indifferent alike to Christ or Pan, the Virgin or Venus, though he declared himself willing to devote himself to one or the other - when in one or the other he should wholly believe" (page 23). Giovanni d'Anguissola "was blinded by his arrogance to think that he could stand against the hosts of Heaven," according to Sabatini in The Strolling Saint (page 38).

Humanism also lent itself to the worship of beauty. Leo X, according to Young was "a simple epicurean Pagan. He spent his time in reveling in the



arts, literature, poetry, music, and all types of sports."<sup>33</sup> Bowen states that Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici did not believe in the religion of the Cross any more than the Borgia did, but rather he believed that the world was made to enjoy. He said, "There is no sin in love and beauty and wisdom" (pages 274-275). McCarthy says in The Gorgeous Borgia that Renaissance Man had made a religion of beauty and spent a life of unquestioning service of beauty" in many instances (page 176).

Symonds depicts the Renaissance as a period characterized by "a philosophical acceptance of variety in...faith and conduct."<sup>34</sup> Modern novelists occasionally go so far as to make the Olympian religion superior to Christianity. Machiavelli contrasts the two opposing religions in Then and Now by Maugham as follows: "Christianity had shown men the truth and the way of salvation, but it asked men to suffer rather than to do. It had made the world feeble and given it over, helpless, a prey to the wicked, since the generality, in order to go to heaven, thought more of enduring injustices than of defending themselves against them. It had thought that the highest good consisted in humility, lowliness and contempt for the things of this world: the religion of the ancients taught that it consisted in greatness of spirit, courage and strength" (page 2350.. Merejkowski cites an instance of such utter disregard of Christianity that Merulla used the chronology of the ancient Greeks and spoke of "the four hundred and fiftieth Olympiad" (page 21). Nathan Gallizier in The Red Confessor dramatically pictures the Kingdom of Satan on earth.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Renaissance cultural ideal was largely dominated by humanism. This can be observed in the influence of classicism upon Renaissance life, the magnificent flowering of arts and culture, the courtier ideal, and the intellectual paganism of the period.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Michael De Filippis, "The Renaissance Problem Again," Italica, XX (1943), 66.
- <sup>2</sup>Cf. William Flint Thrall and Addison Hubbard, A Handbook of Literature (New York, 1936), pp. 199-201.
- <sup>3</sup>Cf. Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance (Oxford, 1945), pp. 120-124.
- <sup>4</sup>John Addington Symonds, Renaissance in Italy, The Revival of Learning (New York, 1908), p. 10.
- <sup>5</sup>Cf. Burckhardt.
- <sup>6</sup>G. F. Young, The Medici (New York, 1933), p. 510.
- <sup>7</sup>Burckhardt, 120-124.
- <sup>8</sup>Symonds, 318-319.
- <sup>9</sup>Symonds, p. 287.
- <sup>10</sup>Symonds, p. 33.
- <sup>11</sup>Young, 103-106.
- <sup>12</sup>Young, 14-42.
- <sup>13</sup>Cf. Young, 45-99.
- <sup>14</sup>Young, 45-99.



15 See Cellini's Autobiography.

16 Ernest H. Wilkins, "On the Nature and Extent of the Italian Renaissance,"  
Italica, XXVII (1950), / 74.

17 Young, 272-273.

18 Symonds, 5-6.

19 Wilkins, p. 69.

20 Symonds, p. 20.

21 Cf. Burkhardt, 237-240.

22 Wilkins, p. 70.

23 Ralph Roeder, The Man of the Renaissance, (New York, 1933), p. 355

24 Roeder, 347-353.

25 Symonds, 303-304.

26 Young, p. 363.

27 Roeder, p. 375.

28 Young, 335-340.

29 Young, 135-137.

30 Cf. Roeder, 347-389.

31 Roeder, 371-377.

32 Symonds, p. 12.

33 Young, p. 303.

34 Symonds, 10-11.

THE RENAISSANCE INDIVIDUAL

The Renaissance is often called the beginning of the modern period of  
in world history. This change from the medieval to the modern was probably  
due to a great extent to the individualism characteristic of the Renaissance.  
Symonds identifies individualism in Italy as he states that: "and were  
consciously raised at what they proved themselves to be, and that as a criterion  
of genius and character appears as early as the first of Europe's greatest  
and rare specimens of individualism, the great humanist, Petrarch."<sup>1</sup>

Just Symonds speaks in *The Civilization of the Renaissance* that  
"at the close of the Middle Ages, when Italy began to emerge with individuality  
and the ideal upon whose personality was based, and a thousand figures  
rose as such in its own special shape and form."<sup>2</sup> He also proposes the  
idea that the rise of individualism was fostered by the despotic rule of Italy.  
Respecting the idea, Symonds says: "The development of the individuality of both  
the tyrant and the man of letters proceeded as hand in hand."<sup>3</sup>

Modern novelists speak of examples of individualism, but the most  
popular figure with them seems to be Don Quixote. In his *Don Quixote* in  
*The Prince of Fate* by Schiller says that "the great Don Quixote was the European  
influence which he knew that he would not have to be good." (page 14).  
Fichte speaks in his novel *The Knight's Daughter* that Don Quixote felt



## CHAPTER II

### THE RENAISSANCE INDIVIDUAL

The Renaissance is often called the beginning of the modern period of world history. This change from the medieval to the modern was probably due to a great extent to the individualism characteristic of the Renaissance. Symonds clarifies individualism in Italy as he states that "men were universally rated at what they proved themselves to be; and thus an aristocracy of genius and character grew up in Italy when the rest of Europe presented but rare specimens of individuals emergent from the common herd."<sup>1</sup>

Jacob Burckhardt states in The Civilization of the Renaissance that "at the close of the thirteenth century Italy began to swarm with individuality; the ban laid upon human personality was dissolved; and a thousand figures meet us each in its own special shape and dress."<sup>2</sup> He also proposes the idea that the rise of individualism was fostered by the despotism of Italy. Despotism, he adds, favored the development of the individuality of both the tyrant and "the men whom he protected or used as his tools."<sup>3</sup>

Modern novelists treat many examples of individualism, but the most popular figure with them seems to be Cesare Borgia. Angela Borgia says in The Prince of Foxes by Skaellabarger that "my lord Cesare does not let scruples influence policy; he knows what he wants and where he is going" (page 145). Balchin suggests in his novel The Borgia Testament that Cesare Borgia felt

that women were an unnecessary incumbrance and should never be allowed to bother a man's private life (page 178). Cesare Borgia also showed great physical prowess when he killed six bulls in succession and then to prove that his strength was still untired "he lopped off the last bull's head" says McCarthy in his novel The Gorgeous Borgia (page 32).

Individualism was not limited to any walk of life. Corvo points out in The History of the Borgias how Francisco Borgia, "a brilliant and gracious duke, master of territories and boundless wealth, father of a noble family allied with the bluest blood of Spain" gave up all of his material gains to become a humble Jesuit priest.<sup>4</sup> Victor de Cardillac in the novel Cardillac by Robert Barr is representative of individualism on the level of the small nobleman when he states "I refuse, then, to be labelled, and called King's man or Queen's man. I am in this contest for Victor de Cardillac, and I am going to fight as Victor de Cardillac orders. I ask no man's assistance, and I will assist no man" (page 321). Shellabarger lists Mario Belli, a common soldier and professional murderer, as an individualist. After a life filled with war, murder and hatred, Mario Belli announced that he intended to become a Franciscan monk in the service of Sister Lucia da Narni (pages 425-425). Diomedes seemed to also portray the qualities of the individualist in A Matter of Conscience by Bergengruen (page 31).

Individualism during the Italian Renaissance was not limited to men, however. Burkhardt points out that women had the same educational opportunities as men and that they too developed individuality.<sup>5</sup> Caterina Sforza stands at the peak of individualism among Renaissance women. Young says in his critical work The Medici that "Caterina Sforza...was regarded by those of her own time as a sort of wonder of her age, a woman of almost superhuman ability, courage, and resolution."<sup>6</sup> Maurice Samuel says in The Web of Lucifer



that Caterina Sforza, bastard of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, was one of the most famous rulers of Italy. She was sensual, cruel, and domineering. She occupied the position in governing Imola usually held by a man (pages 37-39). Montgomery also develops a young woman of great individualism in The Cardinal's Pawn. Bianca Capelli gives a summary of Fiamma Bonaventuri as an individualist when she says to her, "You are the one I saw in the bath! You who have played with death and won, not once but twice! You who have juggled even the Ten, and escaped from Venice in spite of the price upon your head - you are all of that!" (page 256).

Renaissance women, according to novelists, wanted freedom from their husbands. Shellabarger says that Camilla degli Baglioni and her husband Varona had a mutual agreement which <sup>let</sup> them have freedom, yet perfect understanding (pages 10-17). Yet, it is also Shellabarger who says that women sometimes lacked freedom in marriage, when Angela Borgia, for example, laments the fact that it was only a dream "that a woman of our House could make her own life, marry at her pleasure, take a husband she loved....Poor, simpering puppets of women!" (page 255).

Individualism was a marvelous development of the Renaissance. Symonds states that "Italy again was the land of emancipated individuality.... There was no check to the growth of personality, no grinding of men down to match the average."<sup>7</sup> However, Italian individualism was so potent a force that Italy would not go through the give and take process of unification as a single state. Individualism was too rank for the cooperative effort needed in producing great monuments of architecture, and in this field Italy was noticeably lacking during the Renaissance. Neither could she produce great drama because of lack of cooperation. Instead of a great national epic, Italy produced The Divine Comedy by Dante, the work of a single genius.

Individualism fostered opportunism, the Renaissance freedom that allowed people to develop to the greatest heights their unique natures would allow them. Burkhardt says that as "time went on, the greater the influence upon the Italian mind, the firmer and more widespread the conviction that birth decides nothing as to the goodness or badness of man."<sup>8</sup>

Modern writers of historical novels of the Renaissance are intrigued by the opportunism of the period because it lends itself to the dramatic. Bowen (page 53) and Sabatini in The Shame of Motley (page 56) mention the fact that the Sforza House rose from a "peasant, Giacomuzza Attendola surnamed Sforza for his abnormal strenght of body, who rose to great and princely height." Merejkowski points out that Ludovice Sforza "loved to create personalities out of nothing: to make the first last, the last first. Among his grandees were the offspring of stokers, of truck-gardeners, of cooks and muleteers" (page 309). Marjorie Bowen states in her novel The Carnival of Florence that the great Medici family in its early history "hawked herb pills" in Florence (page 11). Of course, they became some of the greatest tyrants of the Italian Renaissance.

Bastards comprise an interesting group of opportunists. Corvo says that many Renaissance Italians were bastards and that they suffered no disability because of it.<sup>8</sup> It is often asserted, however, that the very state of bastardry spurred these individuals into being greater opportunists. Angelo Villani says several times in Rienzi, The Last of the Roman Tribunes by Bulwer-Lytton that he, as a bastard, has his own name to win (pages 175 and 313). Radish-Head is exultant in Bergengruen's novel A Matter of Conscience when he exclaims, "Everything is in my power - in the power of a natural child whom people of Cassano mock and spurn. It is not only this woman who is subject to my will, but everything, everything!" (page 163). A prime example of the opportunistic



bastard is Cesare Borgia, who is by far the favorite Renaissance figure with modern novelists. Baglione says in The Honour of Savelli by Yeats, "It will take not a little to break Cesare - Cesare Borgia, Duke of Romagna, Imola, and Faenza, Marquis of Rimini, Count of Forli, Lord of Pesaro and Fano, Gonfaloniere of the Church - good for a low-born bastard - eh?" (page 254). Leonardo da Vinci, who is accepted today as one of the most outstanding men of the Renaissance, was the bastard son of a young notary and a servant at an inn, according to Merejkowski (pages 362-363).

During the Renaissance, youth had a marvelous opportunity to rise to success quickly. Maurice Samuel emphasizes this idea in his novel The Web of Lucifer. He states that at twenty-one Cesare Borgia, Lorenzo the Magnificent, Ippolito d'Este, and others had "ruthless maturity" and "easily matched the worldly wisdom, the sordid, penetrating shrewdness, of men of fifty and sixty." They had in addition "the gaiety, fantasy, passion and immeasurable energy of youngsters." Samuel points out also that Cesare Borgia was the Governor of Orvieto by the time he was twenty. Ippolito d'Este was a Cardinal at fifteen, and Lorenzo de' Medici succeeded his father into the rulership of Florence at twenty-one (page 3). Duchess Beatrice had been married three years and had two children by the time she was nineteen, states Merejkowski (pages 61-62). Mrs. Turnbull in her novel The Golden Book of Venice says that a youth of thirteen was one of the principal speakers in the great philosophical debates in Venice (page 11).

Renaissance ladies were often opportunists just as much as Renaissance men. Montgomery stresses this in his novel The Cardinal's Pawn probably more than any other novelists under consideration. He pictures "the Capelli" as a ruthless opportunist when "she found Pietro handsome enough to follow

him over marsh and mountain - until she murdered him, that she might step on his dead body to a throne" (pages 69-70). Fiamma Bonaventuri says in The Cardinal's Pawn also, "Yet I must not miss the opportunity that a chance has given, though I set my life upon the stake" (page 88).

Modern novelists are at their best when they describe the ruthlessness of Renaissance men. Practically every novelist includes examples of this. Shellabarger says that the opportunists were characterized by shrewdness, distrust, daring, and cruelty. They were driven by an insatiable ambition (pages 20-22). Cesare Borgia reflects in The Borgia Testament by Nigel Balchin that "I was young when I first read Alberti and didn't realize that his bargain is a hard one, and that if a man is to do anything that he will, then he must will and desire nothing else. I have slept too much and loved too much, and trusted too much, and let too many things move me, and there is no time or room for these things (page 308). Pier Luigi, in The Red Confessor by Gallizier, intends, like Cesare Borgia, to let nothing stand between him and his ambition (page 61). In the same novel Gallizier also states that "in those days men knew how to raise themselves above the human weakness of scrupulousness, pity, and regard for the ties of human blood" (page 268).

In seeking to fulfill their ambitions Renaissance opportunists frequently used deceit. Biancomonte declares in The Shame of Motley by Rafael Sabatini that deceit is "a trusty weapon with which to combat tyranny" (page 109). Maurice Samuel says that Machiavelli considered both truth and untruth instruments to be used whenever the occasion arose (page 108). Pope Alexander VI drilled into Cesare Borgia the idea that he should not trust della Rovere, according to Balchin (page 143).



Modern novelists also develop Symonds' idea that opportunists used others as tools. Cristofano degli Albizzi, for instance, used Savonarola as an instrument to help him gain influence in Florence and down the Medici in The Carnival of Florence by Bowen (page 205). This was a shrewd move of Cristofano to attach himself to the movement of a man far his superior. He could foresee the eventual fall of Savonarola, so he did not attach himself completely enough to bring about his own downfall with that of Savonarola. He intended to step in and seize the power of Florence, when Savonarola had taken it away from the Medici, and still to remain free from Savonarola. Maugham points out in Then and Now that opportunists studied human nature, and thus learned how best to use people of lesser import (pages 47 and 119). Their actions were often characterized by brutality suggests Gallizier in The Court of Lucifer: "One hint, and the Catalan would as relentlessly butcher the duke, as the duke would consign him to his doom, if it suited his purpose" (page 357).

Renaissance Italians even gave expression to their opportunism in marriage. Messer Cobelli expressed the idea, according to Samuel, that the Borgia used marriage as a stepping stone to their overall plans (page 73). Shellabarger elaborates upon it when he tells of the scandalous marriages of Lucrezia Borgia. She was betrothed at the age of eleven to a Spanish lord, and again the next year she was betrothed to another Spaniard. The following year she was married to Giovanni Sforza. She lived with him until the Pope found a better move and called the marriage off. Then she married the prince of Naples, "whom somebody recently murdered." At twenty she was a widow and ready to be used again in the opportunistic schemes of Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia (page 30). Maugham suggests that even the Renaissance statesman Machiavelli used his marriage as an expression of opportunism (page 6).

A unique development of the Italian Renaissance was the universal man. It arose from the individualism and the opportunism prevalent in Italy during the period, combined with the humanistic element. The universal man was the fully developed person. He was not only proficient in all intellectual and physical attainments, but he also excelled in one particular field. Renaissance historians and novelists alike emphasize the importance of the emergence of the universal man during this period. They list such figures as Leonardo da Vinci, Leon Battista Alberti, Lorenzo de' Medici, and Pico della Mirandola.

The name Leonardo da Vinci has come to be almost synonymous with "universal man." It was even said in the essay entitled "Renaissance Man" in Life's Picture History of Western Man that he "embodied in his vast nature almost the whole civilization of the Renaissance."<sup>9</sup> Frederick Rolfe speaks of him as "a miracle of genius" in his novel Don Tarquinio (page 9). Of all of the many historical novelists who portray the character of Leonardo da Vinci, Dimitri Merejkowski in his novel The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci is without doubt the most accurate and complete. A consensus of all of the historians and novelists under consideration would list Leonardo as a painter, sculptor, architect, musician, poet, mathematician, engineer, physiologist, humanist or wit, marksman, good swimmer, excellent horseman, and a master of fencing, but he excelled in painting.

The Medici as depicted by Young were very many-sided. Anderson in his novel The Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi states that Alberti was an artist, architect, musician, wit, student of civil and canon law, writer of Latin prose and novels, and a performer <sup>of</sup> gymnastic feats. He entered into the life around him with sympathetic intensity (page 69). McCarthy declares that by the Renaissance standards, Cesare Borgia was the "perfect man" (page 177).



Benvenuto Cellini is portrayed as an artist, goldsmith, sculptor, lover, braggart, soldier, and duelist. Michael Angelo was first an artist and second a statesman. He was not lacking in virility, however. Shellabarger develops Andres Orsini as a universal man: a skilled soldier, bold and intelligent; a politician; a swordsman, wrestler; a lover of women, as well as art and beauty; an amateur musician; and a student of literature. He was, in addition, very strong physically and possessed polished manners (pages 3-35). Another universal man was Lazzaro Biancomonte in The Shame of Motley by Sabatini. He was a courtier, nobleman by birth and training, a poet, lover, and a quick wit. He also possessed great physical strength, was trained in the use of arms, played the lute, and was well learned (pages 165-166). These are merely representatives of the many universal men listed by writers about the Italian Renaissance.

The courtier was a development of individualism as well as of humanism. He was supposed to be symmetrically developed like the universal man. He should be "charming in his comely elegance, in his composure, in the finish of his manners and his dress, perfect in all things, pleasing to the senses," according to Bowen in The Carnival of Florence (page 286). The very incidence of such a perfect, refined figure was the result of individualism in Italy.

Another unique development of the Italian Renaissance was "the prince" or the despot of the period. He embodied the ideals of opportunism and individualism, and often those of the universal man, the courtier, and the humanist as well. The Italian Renaissance abounded in figures such as Ludovico Sforza, Cosimo de' Medici, Lorenzo de' Medici, Pier Luigi, and Cesare Borgia. Of them all, Cesare Borgia is the most appealing figure to

modern historical novelists. He is the leading character in The Borgia Testament by Nigel Balchin and The Gorgeous Borgia by Justin McCarthy, and he is mentioned either directly or indirectly by almost every historical novelist of the Renaissance. We could conclude then that twentieth century novelists recognize the importance of Cesare Borgia's influence and find that his figure is easily adaptable to their dramatic purposes.

Historians of the Italian Renaissance generally consider individualism a major criterion of the period. Historical novelists, however, treat the subject lightly, preferring to merely use a few highly exemplary individualists, rather than to delve into the complex details of individualism.



## FOOTNOTES

- 1 John Addington Symonds, Renaissance in Italy, Revival of Learning (New York, 1908), p. 3.
- 2 Jacob Burkhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (Oxford, 1945), 81-84.
- 3 Burkhardt, pp. 81-84.
- 4 Frederick Baron Corvo, A History of the Borgias, (New York, 1931), 334-373.
- 5 Burkhardt, 240-243.
- 6 G. F. Young, The Medici, (New York, 1933), p. 509.
- 7 John Addington Symonds, Renaissance in Italy, The Age of Despots, (London, 1907), p. 382.
- 8 Corvo, 16-17.
- 9 "Renaissance Man," Life's Picture History of Western Man, (New York, 1951), p. 73.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RENAISSANCE STATE

That Italy was made up of a complex group of states during the Renaissance is denied by neither historians nor novelists. Both treat the political, economic, and moral life of the epoch. Historians generally deal especially with the theories of statism or economics, while novelists, though not shunning the theoretical aspect, delve more deeply into the physical life of the Renaissance.

Statism provides novelists with most of the material for their plots and general setting. Other information in historical novels is commonly subordinated to these structural elements. One novel that is a striking exception to this is The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Dimitri Merejkowski, a novel which compares well with critical works about the Renaissance as a source of information concerning the flowering of arts and culture. Some novels, however, deal more specifically with statism than others. The main character in Then and Now by Somerset Maugham, for instance, is the great Renaissance student of statism, Machiavelli. The Borgia Testament by Nigel Balchin employs Cesare Borgia, who stands as probably the most dreaded tyrant of the entire span of the Italian Renaissance, as the narrator. Naturally these novels include a great deal of information concerning statism.



Italy's political life during the Renaissance was influenced primarily by its national disunity. Symonds points out that "Italy had proved herself incapable of forming an united nation or of securing the principle of federal coherence; of maintaining a powerful military system, or of holding her own against the French and Spaniards."<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli also notes this Italian disunity. He says in the Introduction to The Prince that Italy was made up of five principal states: the Republic of Venice, the Duchy of Milan, the Republic of Florence, the Church, and the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>2</sup> The Italians managed to maintain a precarious balance of power between these states. This made it difficult, however, to offset the Spaniards and French, who were surpassing Italy in their national unity and becoming highly aggressive. In brief, the political status of Italy was in a state of delicate fluxation.

Among the modern historical novelists, Shellabarger and Balchin particularly note the precarious political situation of Italy. Shellabarger points out that Milan and Genoa had already gone under French control, while Florence was dangerously close to French control, and Naples was open to either the Spanish or French. Venice was on the offensive against everybody, Ferrara was "tight-rope walking," and Rome was scheming for greater power (page 20). Nigel Balchin, in summarizing the political influence of Rome or the Church in his novel The Web of Lucifer, states that the Pope had universal, but unreal power, while France, Spain, and Italy possessed real, but local power. Cesare Borgia, the son of Pope Alexander VI tried to make Roman power universal and real (page 142).

The internal government of Italy was largely dominated by despots. Ludovico Sforza exemplified the tyranny characteristic of the Renaissance when he usurped the throne of Milan from his nephew Gian Galeazzo, whom he

kept as a virtual prisoner for fifteen years until the death of the young man. This fact is mentioned by Corvo in his Renaissance criticism, A History of the Borgia's, as well as in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Merejkowski (page 83) and The Carnival of Florence by Marjorie Bowen (page 110).

Cesare Borgia, who is recognized as one of the most tyrannical of tyrants of the Italian Renaissance, often achieved his purposes by oppressing great families both of Rome and other parts of Italy. Shellabarger mentions his usurping the power of Varano in Città del Monte and of the several families in conquering Marches and later of his underhanded conquest of Urbino from Duke Guidobaldo (page 13). Cesare Borgia played havoc with the Orsini in Rome, according to McCarthy in his novel The Gorgeous Borgia. He killed Giovanni Orsini and his son Cosimo, caused Lauretta (Giovanni Orsini's wife) to kill herself as protection against Cesare's men, leaving only the daughter Lavinella in the entire family alive (page 66).

The Renaissance despots did not limit their tyranny to the great families who were dangerous to their plans. A man in a street mob in Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes by Bulwer-Lytton expresses the common feeling of Romans during the early part of the Italian Renaissance, as he says, "The Orsini are tyrants, and the Colonna, are, at best, as bad" (page 28). The Colonna, Bulwer-Lytton says in addition, were guilty of "outrage, fraud, and assassination, a sordid avarice in securing lucrative offices to themselves, (and) an insolent oppression of their citizens" (page 25). Shellabarger in The Prince of Foxes notes the fear of the Borgia throughout Italy (page 4). The despots selfishly used the commoners for their tyrannic purposes and then made no provision for their livelihood. Sabatini illustrates this in his novel The Strolling Saint as he describes the notorious despotism of Pier Luigi Farnese: "Having fawned upon the people that they might help him to crush the barons, Farnese



was now crushing the people whose service he no longer needed. Extortion had reduced them to poverty and despair, and their very houses were being pulled down to supply material for the new citadel, the Duke recking little who might thus be left without a roof over his head" (page 398). Mary B. Whiting gives the most vivid picture of the result of the despotism in her novel The Plough of Shame as she describes the conditions in Ferrara: "Outside in the streets of Ferrara, famine and misery ran rife; the devastating plague had scarcely abated before wars broke out on every hand, widows were weeping, the children crying for bread" (page 51).

One of the greatest political problems of the Renaissance was foreign interference. Young defines the problem in stating that "Italy had become the battlefield on which France, Spain, and Germany fought perpetually for supremacy."<sup>4</sup> The presence of Spain through the House of Aragon in Naples presented a mighty threat to Italian independence, states Balchin in The Borgia Testament (pages 70-71). The French problem was even worse than the Spanish probably. Maurice Samuel laments the fact that Lorenzo the Magnificent should use such poor judgment as to let Charles VIII of France in to help him against Ferrante of Naples (pages 33-34). Machiavelli, too, in his Prince (Chapter XXI) makes much of the point as he warns against one country making an alliance with another country more powerful than itself. Modern novelists made a great deal of the alliance between Cesare Borgia and Louis XII of France. Among those mentioning it are Merejkowski (page 325), Maugham (page 9), and Balchin (pages 138-173).

Modern historical novelists give a great many incidents regarding the actual governments of the Italian states of the Renaissance. The information is, however, for the most part sketchy with little idea of developing a

complete picture of these governments. The material used by novelists on this subject does not compare favorably in quality with that of Renaissance historians and critics. Novelists are concerned with the history of the states only as long as it fits into the period with which they are concerned. This leads to a blurred overall picture of Renaissance statism as portrayed by modern historical novelists.

Among the states treated by the historical novelists are Florence, Milan, Venice, and Rome. Somerset Maugham describes the Republic of Florence in his novel Then and Now: "The Signory was the City Council of Florence and, since the expulsion of the Medici eight years before, the chief executive body of the city" (page 4). Marjorie Bowen liberally treats the leading Florentine family, the Medici, in The Carnival of Florence. Ludovico Sferza, the tyrant of Milan is mentioned by Merejkowski and Balchin, although neither Ludovico as a leader nor Milan as a state is treated fully. The Cardinal's Pawn by Montgomery vividly presents the internal strife between the two turbulent factions, the Nicolotti and the Castellani (pages 142-148). Again, it is Nigel Balchin in The Borgia Testament who summarizes the political conditions in Romagna as he says "In theory this was Papal territory, and the local lords held their towns as vassals of the Pope. In practice, they were completely out of control and acted as petty tyrants and despots" (page 191).

It is amazing how greatly writers of twentieth century historical novels are influenced by Machiavelli's Prince, the Renaissance Bible of political science. Machiavelli's greatness has been realized by critics such as Burkhardt and Young and by the novelists. Machiavelli is the central figure in Then and Now by Somerset Maugham. Among the other novels in which he is mentioned are The Honour of Savelli by Yeats, The Web of Lucifer by Samuel,



The Court of Lucifer by Gallizier, The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Merejowski, and The Red Confessor by Gallizier.

In his Prince Machiavelli states definite rules for a prince to follow in governing. First he states how to treat conquered provinces. Balchin says that "to spare a popular ruler is folly" (page 242). Maurice Samuel has Machiavelli say, "To appease the city and to destroy its rulers is the first law of conquest" (page 324). Nathan Gallizier in his novel The Court of Lucifer also uses the technique of letting Machiavelli state maxims regarding conquered territories. Among those quoted were "Who so intends to crush his enemies, should do so with one single stroke" and "Whosoever would keep a newly acquired state must root out the whole race of the expelled prince" (pages 77-78).

Machiavelli also states that a prince who gains his power through his own initiative is usually stronger than one who inherits it. Balchin corroborates this as he states that "Those who inherit kingdoms instead of winning them are often very ordinary and ungifted" (page 133).

The prince, according to Machiavelli, should avoid employing mercenary soldiers. Somerset Maugham points out that hirelings will fight for money, but they will not die for it (page 212). He also states that mercenary soldiers will desert if they get an offer for more money (page 59). Balchin in The Borgia Testament (page 75), and Gallizier in The Red Confessor (page 277) point out that mercenary soldiers provide many problems in the life of the state. Along with them go rape, murder, and suicide. So Maugham's conclusion that native troops are better than hired soldiers for defending the state is rather obvious (page 212).

Modern historical novelists revel in Machiavelli's moral philosophy for the prince. Maurice Samuel (pages 237-238) and Merejkowski (page 406) express the basic concept - any means are justifiable in reaching the prince's end, success. The prince should use both truth and untruth as tools upon occasion. Maurice Samuel cites Alexander VI as a princely liar as he says, "There has never been a man less prone to keep his word than His Holiness, Pope Alexander VI. ... He smiles in the face of friend and foe alike, and is believed when he tells the most monstrous lies" (page 112). Balchin lists Ludovico Sforza as a professional liar. Giuliano della Rovere advises the young Cesare Borgia that "diplomats must never speak frankly," according to Balchin (page 144). In Then and Now by Somerset Maugham, Machiavelli says, "A treaty is an arrangement two states make to their common advantage and a prudent government will disavow it when its circumstances are no longer advantageous" (page 211). A man in a public house in The Honour of Savelli by Yeats expresses the moral code of the times well as he says, "What does a little lightness of finger matter? Play it in a small way, you're a thief, and food for Messer Braccio, curse him! Play it on a big scale and you're a prince" (page 29).

In ruling, a prince should without scruples use cruelty as a weapon. In The Borgia Testament by Balchin, Cesare Borgia notes that "it is possible to gain a lot more credit by stopping cruelties than by never allowing them to happen. If your men kill fifty citizens, and you hang half a dozen of them for it, the remaining citizens are very favourably impressed by your care for their safety. The fifty who are dead, who might have been more critical, are not there to criticise" (page 144). It is Cesare Borgia again who is the spokesman in Then and Now by Somerset Maugham as he says, "A state is not governed by the exercise of Christian virtues, it is governed by prudence,



boldness, determination and ruthlessness" (page 26). A prince should be wary of friendship. Cesare Borgia's motto, "Trust none, fear none," was also adopted by Benvenuto Cellini, according to The Red Confessor by Nathan Gallizier (page 51). Balchin states that Agapito "was too intelligent a man to deal in petty emotions and loyalties" (page 5). These examples typify the Renaissance moral code for the prince.

The maxim that a prince should be mercenary, but not cruel in appearance is also found in The Prince. It is seldom that the citizenry loves the prince enough to express a large degree of loyalty to him. An exception to this is the devotion of the people of Fiorano to their Lord in The Red Confessor by Gallizier (page 9). Cesare Borgia states a more generally accepted principle when he says in The Borgia Testament by Balchin that "the most that a ruler can do is to see that these people who own the town, in some way would rather belong to him than to anyone else" (page 250). Maugham states that "a prince must know both how to reward and how to punish. His generosity must be profuse and his justice severe" (page 208). Machiavelli states in the novel, The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Merejkowski that "a ruler...must first of all learn the art of appearing virtuous" (page 405).

Machiavelli also points out in The Prince that the ruler should indulge in great enterprises. It was noted in the first chapter of this work to what extent the Renaissance princes, especially the Medici, patronized arts and culture, exemplifying this Machiavellian principle.

Machiavelli elucidates the relation of the courtier to his prince. Agapito, Cesare Borgia's secretary illustrates this ability in The Borgia Testament by Balchin as he says to Borgia, "My lord, I have served you faithfully for fifteen years. I have advised you honestly; I have never cheated you, and I have never lied to you except when it was necessary to do so" (pages 4-5).

A final principle stated by Machiavelli is that the prince should keep himself attuned to Fortune. This has already been noted in the consideration of opportunism.

It would seem in conclusion, then that twentieth century historical novelists of the Italian Renaissance deal particularly with the principles of statecraft from the standpoint of the prince in their treatment of the political side of the period. They evidently use Machiavelli's Prince as a main source of information. Cesare Borgia and Machiavelli are the figures most often given to illustrate these ideas.

One of the most striking qualities of the Italian Renaissance as conceived by both historians and historical novelists is the opulence and splendor of the epoch. Symonds says that "whereas the northern races had hitherto remained in a state of comparative poverty and barbarism, distributed through villages and country districts, the people of Italy had enjoyed centuries of wealth and civilization in great cities. Their towns were the centers of luxurious life."<sup>5</sup> Somerset Maugham describes Imola, a rather unimportant Italian town, as having "about all an air, not of opulence, but of comfortable prosperity" (pages 41-42). Venice was a city of richness and brightness, according to The Prince of Foxes by Shellabarger (page 18). There were ships unloading valuable cargo - rich Oriental fabrics, spice, and marble. It possessed an "aura of splendour and pride." Shellabarger describes the throng on the street of Venice as comprising "patricians in their rich gowns, flaming gallants, substantial merchants, bearded soldiers and seamen, courtesans with bronze-dyed hair....These people reflected the arrogance of the city, as its canals reflected the splendor of its domes and palaces" (page 18).



Pope Alexander VI, according to Balchin was indiscriminately extravagant in his use of wealth (page 138).

Another manifestation of the splendor of the Renaissance was the richness and color of the frequent carnivals and festivals. Burkhardt states that the period was marked by large festivals with scenic background, especially in the large cities. These were originally religious in nature, but as time wore on they became highly secularized. Marjorie Bowen describes the carnival of San Giovanni Baptista in her novel, The Carnival of Florence as an eight day period of merry-making when the city was gaily bedecked with bright-colored silk booths of craftsmen of all trades (page 24). Rome was especially celebrated for the gaiety and beauty of its festivals. McCarthy says that "there was dance, there was song, there was torchlight, there was merry eating and merry drinking and merry making of music and merry making of love" (pages 4-5). Rafael Sanzio, states Gallizier in The Court of Lucifer, was "the chief contriver of the pagentry" in the Roman carnival (page 159). Whether it was the Church or the state, or a combination of the two, Italian pagentry reached peculiar heights of wonder during the Renaissance. Maurice Samuel notes that Italy, during this period commonly held celebrations for all of the great saints, and at times for very obscure ones (page 198).

Besides the carnivals and festivals, pagentry can be noted in the lavish ceremonies of the Italians. Nigel Balchin vividly describes these ceremonies in The Borgia Testament. Especially notable is his description of the year 1500, the Jubilee Year of the Church with its swarms of pilgrims, the huge processions, games, and entertainments (pages 204-214). Balchin also describes the magnificence of the burial ceremony of Giovanni Borgia: "The body was floated down the Tiber at night in a barge, surrounded by two hundred torches. They

had arranged him so his wounds were concealed, and he lay, surrounded by his insignia, looking as though he were asleep" (page 116). Balchin states that Italian splendor approached gaudiness in its grandeur. (page 179).

A sumptuousness in the furnishing of homes is typical of the Italian Renaissance. In this, especially, the Italians were influenced by their cosmopolitan culture. The furnishing of the Castel Sant' Angelo in The Red Confessor by Gallizier is illustrative of this with its "sombre tapestries (which) displayed visions of oriental magnificence" (page 52). The Cardinal's Pawn by Montgomery contains a vivid picture of the opulence of the furnishings: "The dusky sunlight fell upon rich hangings and cushions, and shivered its lances upon a mirror framed in Venetian glass blown into fantasies of sea nymphs sporting with dolphins: gold and silver toilet-trinkets were ranged of a cabinet embossed with lapis-lazuli and amber" (page 117). The Vatican itself probably stood at the zenith in the magnificence of furnishing with its gorgeous display of light, the glitter of the uniforms of the guards, and the opulence of the dress of the rest of the people, according to Gallizier in his novel The Red Confessor (pages 162-163).

Modern novelists point out the elegant attire of both Renaissance men and women. Mrs. Turnbull speaks of the "sumptuous attire" in The Golden Book of Venice (page 49). Gallizier notes the elegance of the appearance of Paolo Orsini in The Court of Lucifer (page 34). Gallizier in the same novel describes Pier de' Medici's "slender, but graceful form, armed in complete steel" (page 38). In contrast, Maugham points out that Machiavelli "put on the sober black raiment which was his usual wear" (page 41). Maurice Samuel says that the beauty of the pagents was added to by the fact that "ladies and knights, captains and squires and learned men (were) all honourably attired



in silk and velvet and cloth of gold" (page 12). Among the court ladies, Duchess Beatrice was particularly noted for the splendor of her wardrobe. Merejkowski describes the luxuriousness of her apparel in his novel The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci: "She (Lady Beatrice) arose, threw the mantlet off her shoulders, and descended into the tiring rooms. These contained three enormous closets. In the first, resembling a magnificent sacristy, were hung in order the four and eighty dresses she had managed to make during her married life. Some literally stood out, in consequence of their plentitude of gold and precious stones, which gave them such solidity that they could remain upright on the floor, without support; others were as diaphonous and light as cobwebs" (page 66).

In the realm of entertainment, the Renaissance was equally lavish. A good account of this subject is given in The Shame of Motley by Rafael Sabatini: "During that summer (1500) Pesaro was given over to such merrymaking as it had never known before. There was endless lute-strumming and recitation of verses by a score of parasite poets whom the Lord Giovanni encouraged, posing now as a patron of letters; there were balls and masques and comedies beyond number, and we were as gay as though Italy held no Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois, who was sweeping northward with his all-conquering flood of mercenaries" (pages 104-145).

Sumptuous dinners were often given. Maurice Samuel mentions the "feasts and pageants, with side-boards of food in the streets, cakes and mazipans and bread and cheese and meat and countless flagons of wine for all citizens" (page 12). The delicacies at a feast noted by Shellabarger in The Prince of Foxes included "swans natural as life in mimic glass pools on the top of rolling tables; peacocks with a magnificence of spreading tails; a furious boar, tusks white, back bristling" (pages 168-174).

Renaissance Italians furnished a variety of entertainment along with their dinners. Nathan Gallizier mentions the use of an orchestra in the background in The Red Confessor (page 40). Shellabarger says that they were entertained by singing and dancing (pages 168-174). They even resorted to such lewd things as having nude prostitutes dance, like Cesare Borgia did as part of the celebration of Lucrezia Borgia's marriage to Alfonso d'Este, states Balchin in The Borgia Testament (pages 257-260).

A very popular form of entertainment was provided by court jesters. Merejkowski says that the entertainment at the feast given by Ludovico Sforza celebrating the birth of his natural son Caesar included "eating, drinking and jesting - led by the little court jesters and dwarfs" (pages 77-81). Leo X's favorite fool, according to Merejkowski, was a monstrous dwarf named Baraballo (page 519). Merejkowski also describes the collection of dwarfs of Duchess Beatrice, one of the most interesting collections of this sort: "On her way out she stepped into the chambers of her dwarfs, jocosely styled 'The Dwelling of the Giants,' and constructed in imitation of just such toy chambers in the castle of Isabella d'Este....Here swarmed from the day of their birth to the day of their death...marmosets, hunchbacks, parrots, female blackamoors, female zanies, female jesters, hares, dwarfs, and other amusing creatures" (page 67). Whiting explains in her novel The Plough of Shame that "a dwarf was an object familiar enough in all great houses, where they were kept for the sport of the guests, and where the offspring of dwarf parents were as highly prized as dogs and horses of the rarest breeds" (page 179). Leo X's collection of fools also included "amusing cripples, monsters, and madmen out of hospitals," says Merejkowski in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci (page 519). Sabatini states that "Boccaccio and Sacchette (were) the horn-books of all jesters," in his novel The Shame of Motley (page 17).



Intellectual pursuits were popular during the Renaissance. Talking, for instance, was a favorite pastime of the learned Renaissance men and women. The popularity of Platonic discussion has already been mentioned. Marjorie Bowen in The Carnival of Florence says that they also liked to talk informally upon such subjects as love, learning art, and beauty (page 273). Italians of the Renaissance liked to read works such as Plato and Aristotle, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, and the romances of Luigi Pulci, adds Bowen (page 273). They also specialized in wit and humor. Maugham emphasizes the fact that Machiavelli was noted for his humor. One of his favorite stories, according to Maugham was that he had borrowed money from a husband to seduce the man's wife (pages 103-104).

Neither were physical diversions slighted during the Renaissance. Shellabarger mentions the hunting of bear, ox, boar, wolf, elk, and deer. (page 128). There is also the story of Cesare Borgia's bull fighting in The Borgia Testament by Balchin (pages 207-212). All courtiers and well educated men were expected to possess a certain degree of physical prowess.

In contrast to the vast amount of material given about the life of the wealthy, there is very little material about the peasant life of the Italian Renaissance in either the criticisms of the period or in historical novels dealing with the subject. Samuel Shellabarger does attempt to describe peasant life. He says that the peasants went barefooted and wore smocks; their diet consisted largely of bread, cheese, sausage, and wine; their furniture was rough and hand-hewn; they made their living mostly by raising poultry and livestock (pages 45-51). Maurice Samuel points out that the vast majority of the Renaissance peasants could neither read nor write (page 4). According to Symonds the morality of the peasants was generally higher than that of the

upper stratus of society.<sup>6</sup> The peasants enlivened their dull existence by working together, making a sort of festival out the harvesting of grain, for instance. They also resorted to low taverns with their ribald laughter, drinking, and immorality, according to Sabatini in The Shame of Motley (page 118) and Gallizier in The Red Confessor (page 118). However, this was an age of opportunism, and the peasant, like the nobleman, could rise in his position, states Edward Bulwer-Lytton in Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes (page 15).

The Italian Renaissance was a period of widespread superstition. Although its influence was by no means limited to the peasant or lower class of society, it was so deeprooted in this group that it is possible to consider superstition at this point. An inordinately large number of examples will come from the upper class because historical novelists of the Renaissance consistently use mostly the nobility as characters in their novels. This is a subject scarcely mentioned by Renaissance historians, yet very frequently treated by the novelists under consideration.

The Italians of this period believed in a vast number of omens. Pier Luigi Farnese, for instance, in The Strolling Saint by Sabatini "was a grossly superstitious fellow who studied omens and dabbled in horoscopes, divinations, and the like" (page 348). Cesare Borgia also was superstitious, states Gallizier in his novel The Court of Lucifer, for he believed in the signs of the moon and stars (page 77). Maurice Samuel also emphasizes the belief in stars in The Web of Lucifer (page 33). There seemed to be an ill omen connected with bastardry, too. Leonardo da Vinci, who was a bastard, had a great deal of superstition associated with him. Merejkowski points out that he was, in addition, left-handed, wrote back-hand, and had an "evil eye" - all of which were evil omens. Maurice Samuel also mentions the spell of the "evil eye."



Lucrezia Borgia's infant son, he says, wore an emerald "against the evil eye" (page 193). Birds were considered ill omens, according to Merejkowski. Alexander VI saw a bird fly against a window and fall stunned. Merejkowski says that he whispered, "An ill-omen! An ill-omen!" (page 447). Sabatini states in The Strolling Saint that the owl was considered an "evil omen," a "harbinger of death" (page 156). In the same novel, Sabatini points out the fact that the people attached a superstitious significance to names (page 3).

Good omens were also observed during the Renaissance. They believed, for example, that "fools are proverbially lucky folk," according to The Shame of Motley by Sabatini (page 73). Don Tarquinio stated in Rolfe's novel Don Tarquinio that "as he went, I touched his hump for luck; for it seemed I needed all the aids which fortune had in store, my stars being most malignant" (page 144). It was even believed that a tuft of hair on the face was a good omen, says Bergengruen in A Matter of Conscience (page 30).

Superstitious rituals were also common during the Italian Renaissance. Maurice Samuel in The Web of Lucifer cites the ritual through which a peasant went in sowing the grain: "Old Leone took off his hose, went down on his hands and knees, and, presenting his bare buttocks to the sun, chanted loudly: 'You may burn my arse and blacken my skin, But I'll work in the fields till the harvest is in'" (page 13). Samuel also describes the "incantation, prayer, abjuration" and special preparation used to drive away the dreaded milk snake (pages 34-37). Even Ludovico Sforza observed such superstitious ritual. Merejkowski says that Ludovico had made the notation, "fifth of August, at eight minutes after ten - pray most earnestly, on bended knees, with hands folded and eyes raised" (page 83).

The Italian Renaissance as painted by twentieth century historical novelists contained a great deal of evidence of the practice of the "black arts". Ludovico Sforza, states Merejkowski, made Messer Galeoto his court alchemist (pages 95-96). The Carnival of Florence by Bowen cites the instance of Pico della Mirandola implicitly believing the oracle's prediction that he would die in the time of the lillies (page 261). The belief in sorcery seems to have been frequent during this period. Donna Fiamma, according to The Court of Lucifer by Gallizier pursued her studies of the black arts in a sepulchral chamber. It was said that she could raise the devil (page 88). Monna Bonda, a sorceress in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Merejkowski, used a marble hand to cure toothache, fever, belly-ache, falling sickness, and cows in torment (pages 3-5). Montgomery tells in his novel The Cardinal's Pawn of a Cassandra, a sorceress who could make people disappear or make them appear at more than one place at a time (page 120). The Renaissance belief in the black arts included a belief in witchcraft. Cassandra revealed that she was a witch, according to Merejkowski (pages 92-94). Whiting in her novel The Plough of Shame cites Zarico as one of the greatest wizards of the time, (page 23). Whiting also points out that people accused of witchcraft were often burned to death without inquiry. Merejkowski gives a weird witch scene, the Witches' Sabbath. Cassandra and Aunt Sidonia flew to the moon. The ancient gods came to life, and Dionysius shed the form of a goat to become a youth and claim Cassandra (pages 102-110). When modern novelists carry the belief in superstition to this extent, it is obvious why their ideas are not backed by historians.

Twentieth century novelists of the Renaissance often go entirely too far in giving the Renaissance a mystical atmosphere. Gallizier is the most notable of these, especially in The Red Confessor, in which he describes in detail the



Infernal Chapel with red fiends in an infernal choir chanting a credo to Lucifer, Beelzebub, and a Black Pope (pages 416-422). Occasionally other novelists go to the extreme in this, such as the Witches' Sabbath scene of Merejkowski, but it is unusual.

Tradition has made the Italian Renaissance a blood-thirsty age. The extent of murders and poisonings is questioned by historians. Corvo and Roeder claim that this influence was less than Burkhardt and Symonds would show it to be. Most of the modern novelists note murders frequently, and it would seem that they follow the Burkhardt-Symonds pattern of the Renaissance.

Benvenuto Cellini exemplifies the theoretical indifference felt toward murders when he says, "Murder? A venial error," in The Red Confessor by Nathan Gallizier (page 38). The people of the period, says Whiting, did not see any conflict between their murders and their religion. Castellani, in this novel, said, "I am myself very religious, as you know; I have never set out to kill anyone without first consecrating my enterprise at the altar, nor have I ever taken plunder without bestowing a tithe in almsgiving. What more does the Holy Father do himself?" (page 60). There were two types of murder, states Gallizier in The Court of Lucifer: "The lesser vendetta is the death of the body only....We watch our man come out of church, or take him in an innocent hour, and so deal with him. In the greater vendetta we watch him and catch him hot from some unrepented sin, and so slay his soul as well as his body" (page 15). Murders were so frequent that no one thought much about them. Maurice Samuel says in his novel The Web of Lucifer, "And what did a murder amount to in those days? Sforza and Bentivoglio and Malatestas and Baglione murdered each other singly and in groups, secretly and openly" (pages 19-20). Gallizier

speaks of "corpses floating nightly down the river, bravi springing from old buildings," in The Red Confessor (page 42). It was said that Cellini "enjoyed carving live men into bits quite as much as casting statues in bronze" (page 41).

Mary Whiting tells of the bellavendetta in her novel The Plough of Shame:

"To put an enemy out of the way by the exercise of brute force did not commend itself to the Italian imagination of the sixteenth century; to work upon a man's fears, to entangle him in a snare that he had laid himself, to humiliate him by the exposure of his own guileless folly - these were the arts that irradiated crime and glorified it; and judged from this standpoint, Veronica's vengeance was a bellavendetta indeed" (page 62).

Professional murderers were not uncommon during the Renaissance. Symonds states that Pope Sixtus IV hired professional cutthroats to attempt to kill Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici.<sup>7</sup> Shellabarger says in The Prince of Foxes that Simone Furia belonged to the "swank elite of his trade" because he worked for the Borgia and he had such an admirable record (page 269).

Problems in love often resolved themselves in murders. Lucrezia Borgia's husbands and lovers fared none too well. Maugham in Then and Now states that "it was dangerous to be either the husband or lover of Cesare Borgia's sister" (pages 189-190). This idea is backed up by Yeats in The Honour of Savelli when he suggests that "the attentions of the Lady Lucrezia are a trifle dangerous" (page 197). It was reported that Pier Luigi Farnese strangled Giuliana, his mistress, according to The Strolling Saint by Sabatini (pages 392-393). Angela Borgia impulsively tried to kill Andrea Orsini in The Prince of Foxes by Shellabarger when she discovered that he did not love her (pages 259-260). Another hot-tempered Renaissance lady, Julia Farnese, had her real husband Ursinus Orsini brutally murdered, states Gallizier in The Court of Lucifer (pages 229-230).



The most celebrated murder in the novels dealing with the Renaissance is the mysterious death of the Duke of Gandia, son of Pope Alexander VI and brother of Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia. This is mentioned with varying emphasis in The Gorgeous Borgia by McCarthy (pages 35-38), The Shame of Motley by Sabatini (page 101), The Carnival of Florence by Bowen (page 310), The Borgia Testament by Balchin (pages 106 and 123), and The Honour of Savelli by Yeats (pages 145-146).

Poisoning was also commonplace during the Renaissance, according to Burkhardt and Symonds, although Corvo and Young try to minimize it in their studies of the Borgia and the Medici.<sup>8</sup> Twentieth century novelists writing of the Renaissance place much less emphasis upon poisonings than other murders. Sabatini mentions poisoned daggers in The Strolling Saint (page 384), and Balchin states that whenever anyone died Alexander VI was accused of poisoning him (pages 92-93). In The Prince of Foxes Angela Borgia tried to have Camilla Baglione Varona murdered to avenge her jealousy (page 273). McCarthy suggests that Cesare Borgia and Alexander VI were poisoned (pages 254-262). Ramiro del' Orca gave Madonna Paola Santafior a poison that made her appear dead, intending to rob the coffin later, in The Shame of Motley by Sabatini (pages 172-189).

Modern novelists also emphasize the ruthlessness of the period. Yeats mentions the gruesome hangings at Tor di Nona (page 160). Whiting states in The Plough of Shame that "treachery is a sure weapon" (page 133). Cesare Borgia resorted to severe punishment, says Maurice Samuel (page 137). He punished Ozzi for his treachery in proving traitor to his native Picina by burying him alive. He punished Andrea Orsini by depriving him of food and water, beating him, and putting his eyes out in front of the lady he loved, says Shellabarger (pages 368-379). Maurice Samuel gives the most gruesome story of all when he describes the hanging of two youthful swineherds and the

serving of their livers to their parents (pages 13-15). Needless to say, things of this sort are not backed up by Renaissance historians.

Lawlessness was typical of this period of Italian history, according to historical novelists. Bergengruen describes the bad conditions in Cassano in his novel A Matter of Conscience: "Here are temptation, suspicion and treachery. Lies are exchanged and perjury practiced between brothers and between man and wife. Deeds of violence are done, bodies perish and souls perish" (page 274). Gallizier points out in The Red Confessor that Cellini was fighting three ruffians in the street. (pages 36-37). Yeats states that "the country was full of banditti. In fact, for a half-pistole one might have had a priest's throat" (page 34). The height of lawlessness and disorder, says Balchin, was reached during the papal election. There was an average of fifteen murders a day (pages 38-39).

In conclusion, it seems that novelists emphasize the violence of the Renaissance, a point not denied by historians, but not treated as extensively by them as by the writers of fiction.

Little emphasis is placed on the industrial, commercial, and scientific development of the Italian Renaissance by either historians or historical novelists. However, some mention is occasionally made of these factors. Maurice Samuel states that Florence had about two hundred houses of wool manufacturers (pages 80-81). Forli, says Merejkowski, had only eight or nine wool manufacturing houses (page 1). Merejkowski also points out that Oriental spices were imported by Italy during this period (page 2). This is obviously a very incomplete picture of the industry and commerce of Italy from 1250 to 1600. Yet, it is all that can be concluded from the novels under consideration.



This was also a period of exploration and development for Italy. Burkhart explains that "freed from the countless bonds which elsewhere in Europe checked progress, having reached a high degree of individual development and been schooled by the teachings of antiquity, the Italian mind now turned to the discovery of the outward universe, and to the representation of it in speech and in form."<sup>9</sup> Corvo also mentions Columbus' explorations.<sup>10</sup> Merejkowski (pages 249-251) and Bowen (page 337) among the novelists mention that Columbus had discovered a New World. It would be hard for a novelist to work in exploration in the New World along with an Italian setting, however. Yeats states in The Honour of Savelli that Savelli planned to finish up his business with D'Entragues and then try to find in the New World "a future of peace and rest which fears no disturbing of this world" (page 52).

The scientific development of the Renaissance is treated only in part by historians and novelists. There seems to have been a scant amount of medical knowledge contrasted with a great deal of superstition. Merejkowski quotes Leonardo da Vinci's advice to a sick man: "I advise thee to think not of how to cure thyself, but of how thou mayest keep thy health, which last thou shalt the better attain the more thou art on thy guard against doctors whose medicines are akin to the absurd compounds of the alchemists" (page 149). Mario Belli in The Prince of Foxes by Shellabarger would not trust the best physicians to care for Andrea Orsini (pages 260-265). Many of the compounds used for medicine do sound fantastic. Maurice Samuel in The Web of Lucifer says that one of the chief medicines was a live spider wrapped in its own web (page 72). The "French disease" was treated with the application of dissolved silver and gold. There were, nevertheless, some indications of progress. Balchin mentions a type of blood transfusion in The Borgia Testament (page 29). The study of anatomy was also being developed, according to Sabatini in The Shame of Motley (page 198).

Burkhardt points out that in the field of natural sciences the Italians incomparably surpassed all of the other European nations. Their interest included mathematics, geography, astronomy, the pseudo-sciences, botany, and zoology.<sup>11</sup> Young states that Catherine de' Medici was interested in all of the sciences, especially astrology, mathematics, and mechanics.<sup>12</sup> As far as the twentieth century novelists are concerned, Leonardo da Vinci is the supreme and almost sole example of this field of interest. Merejkowski points out in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci that Leonardo was interested in mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, and even alchemy (pages 8, 75, 539, 38, 205, 82, and 341).

Women were important factors in Renaissance life. There is some question as to their position in society. It has already been said that women were well-educated and that they enjoyed considerable freedom. The question is whether a woman should be a dutiful, submissive wife as Maugham describes Aurelia, Bartolomeo's wife, (page 63), or whether moral infidelity should be permissible. Castiglione in the Courtier says that a Court Lady should love one man whom she can marry. Corvo states that Lucrezia Borgia was known for her perfect wifehood and motherhood.<sup>12</sup> In the novel Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Rienzo says to his wife Nina, "It was not only to glad me with thy beauty, but to cheer me with thy counsel, to support me with thy valor, that Heaven gave me Thee as a helpmate" (page 190).

On the other hand, it is sometimes pointed out that secret infidelity was all right. Symonds, for instance, states that "the onestà of a married woman is compatible with secret infidelity, provided she does not expose herself to ridicule and censure by letting her amour be known."<sup>13</sup> According to Bergengruen in A Matter of Conscience "Vittoria considered herself free of any hostile feelings towards her husband. If she deceived him, it was in a society



that took a tolerant view of such matters. And Pandolfe, with his equal calm, had never attempted to possess her innermost being" (page 95). Immorality during the carnival of Florence was high, as described by Bowen (page 58). The loose standards of love are exemplified by Machiavelli of whom Maugham says: "A man who likes women as much as Niccolò will never be content with one, and if she is his wife less than ever" (page 3).

A radically different attitude from perfect wifedom is the attitude expressed by Agapito in The Gorgeous Borgia by Justin McCarthy. He said that women "were exquisite amusements, necessary relaxation for soldiers and statesmen" (page 180). Shellabarger points out that Lucrezia Borgia was used as an instrument for her father Pope Alexander VI and her brother Cesare Borgia through her numerous marriages (page 143). Alexander VI advised Cesare Borgia, in The Borgia Testament by Balchin, to confide in women, if he wished to confide in anyone, because "they will repeat what you say, but nobody takes much notice of women" (page 52). Leonardo da Vinci, states Merejkowski, noted that men treated women as animals (page 160).

The position of women in Renaissance society was not a fixed thing. It depended upon the individual woman, and her peculiar personality and situation. The trend, according to historians and novelists, was toward freedom.

Religion and morality suffered a peculiar separation during the Renaissance. It was characterized by a dulling of the conscience accompanied by the outward retention of religion. This disregard for the tenets of religion "descended from the upper stratum of society downwards."<sup>14</sup> Symonds also states that during the Renaissance there was "an impure and worldly clergy; an irreligious, though superstitious, laity; a self-indulgent and materialistic middle class; an idle aristocracy, excluded from politics and unused to arms; a public given

up to pleasure and money-getting; a multitude of scholars, devoted to trifles and vitiated by studies which clashed with the ideals of Christianity.... Religion expired in laughter, irony, and license."<sup>15</sup>

Novelists generally note a pagan indifference to religion. Whiting says in The Plough of Shame that a "pagan indifference to past and future" was typical of the Renaissance (page 28). The Italians felt an indifference to murder because they could be absolved of it, states Shellabarger in The Prince of Foxes (pages 143-145). Shellabarger says, in addition, that with Cesare Borgia "religion was a matter of convention or of expediency, which had no more effect on his personal outlook than the cut of his clothes" (page 374). Machiavelli noted this indifference in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci by Merejkowski when he stated, "We are neither Christian nor pagan. We have shoved off one shore but not beached on the other" (page 454). Florence should not be allowed to indulge in too much repentance, says Maughan in Then and Now because "excess of virtue can be as harmful to the state as excess of vice" (page 115). Varano represented the opposite attitude, in The Prince of Foxes by Shellabarger when he proposed the idea that "if Italy is ever to become a nation...believe me it will not be by force of arms alone, or clever schemes. Reverence for God and honest dealing must play the bigger part" (pages 169-170).

The Renaissance papacy was characterized by "undisguised sensuality; fraud cynical and unabashed; policy marching to its end by murders, treasons, interdicts, and imprisonments; the open sale of spiritual privileges; commercial traffic in ecclesiastical emoluments; hypocrisy and cruelty studied as fine arts; theft and perjury reduced to system."<sup>16</sup> Balchin says in The Borgia Testament that Pope "Sixtus didn't believe in the Christ legend" (page 9).



Balchin also points out that Innocent VIII was "the first Pope openly to acknowledge his children - all seven of them" (pages 13-14).

The Renaissance Popes were a worldly group. Youngs suggests that Leo~~X~~ was more concerned with having fun than with papal duties.<sup>17</sup> Symonds says that Paul II's call to the ministry consisted of feeling that he could advance quicker there than in secular life.<sup>18</sup> Balchin would also add that Paul II was merely a drunkard and glutton (page 8). McCarthy points out in The Gorgeous Borgia that Popes frequently used bribes to help them gain election (pages 272-273). Innocent VIII, states Symonds, established "a bank at Rome for the sale of pardons."<sup>19</sup> Not all of the Popes of the Renaissance were as base as those already mentioned. Gallizier proposes, in The Red Confessor, that Paul III, for example, was relatively innocent of the common incriminations against Renaissance Popes (pages 68-69).

Both historians and novelists believe that the moral weakening of the papacy was accompanied by a weakening of its power. Burkhardt states that "new and strange perils and trials came upon it (the papacy) in the course of the fifteenth century, as the political spirit of the nation began to lay hold upon it on various sides, and to draw it within the sphere of its action. The least of these dangers came from the populace or from abroad; the most serious had their ground in the characters of the Popes themselves."<sup>20</sup> Balchin is the only one of these twentieth century novelists who emphasizes the decay of the papacy. In The Borgia Testament he has Cesare Borgia address his father Pope Alexander VI, thus: "Do you really think the Papacy can go on like this? I'm not interested in your Christ legend. It may even be true, for all I know. But how long is the world going on accepting men like you as the representatives of Christ on earth? You may have a successor - perhaps

even two. But after that, can't you see that the world is going to get tired of paying for your mumbo-jumbo?" (page 281). Balchin also states that Sixtus IV made no pretence of believing in "the Christ legend" (pages 8-9).

Alexander VI, according to historical novelists, was the supreme example of the Renaissance Pope. Burkhardt states that "the great, permanent, and increasing danger for the Papacy lay in Alexander himself, and above all, in his son Cesare Borgia. In the nature of the father, ambition, avarice, and sensuality were combined with strong and brilliant qualities." Balchin cites the example of the shrewdness of Alexander's diplomacy and bribery in his election (pages 31-36). Yeats points out in his novel The Honour of Savelli that Alexander forgot himself so much "as to appear in public robed as a heathen, and gallop through the streets of Rome like a drunken madman" (page 148). Alexander VI's notorious immorality is accepted by both historians and novelists. Among the historians who refer to this are Burkhardt, Symonds, and Corvo. Gallizier and Balchin among the novelists treat this aspect especially.

Renaissance paganism permeated all parts of the Church, not just the head of the Church, the Pope. Cesare Borgia contrasted the simplicity of Christ with the pompous ceremonies of the Church in The Borgia Testament by Balchin (page 49). Gallizier noted in his novel The Court of Lucifer that masses would be sung and sacred rites offered up at the Carnival of San Giovanni, but that the night before it seemed that all of Rome had turned pagan. (page 3).

Cardinals tended to be an immoral lot during the Italian Renaissance. Balchin states that "nobody worried if a cardinal had his mistress quietly and without fuss" (page 7). Sabatini in The Strolling Saint adds that the



Sacred College was "a gathering of ambitious worldlings, who had become so brazen in their greed of temporal power that they did not even trouble to cloak the sin and evil in which they lived" (page 110). They often resorted to the lowest means to win the election into the Sacred College. Alessandro Farnese, the "Petticoat Cardinal," was elected as a result of the shame of his sister Giulia, according to The Red Confessor by Gallizier (page 68). The cardinals, like the Popes of the Renaissance dispensed with conscience, using virtue and vice alike as instruments. In The Cardinal's Pawn by Montgomery, it is stated that "possibly at the village in the mountains an obsolete reverence was still paid to truth and honour, matters from which the better-disciplined conscience of an ecclesiastic could dispense" (page 13).

Immorality and paganism often extended to the clergy of the Italian Renaissance. Symonds traces the internal rottenness of Italy back to ecclesiastic tyranny.<sup>21</sup> Maugham explains in Then and Now that priests were untrustworthy when he says that "Fra Timoteo is a good and saintly man, but with priests you have to be on your guard; you can never be quite sure that they haven't some ulterior motive in their advice" (page 231). Priestly morality had degenerated to such an extent, states Maurice Samuel in The Web of Lucifer that Pope Pius II had to issue a bull forbidding priests to maintain gambling establishments and whorehouses (page 64). Even after Fra Timoteo's corruption was widely known, Maugham states that "he delivered the Lenten sermons in our own church this very year and the whole city thronged to hear him. When he described the tortures of the damned, strong men burst into tears, women swooned" (page 110). Such gross inconsistency is shocking. Novelists do not completely overlook the sincere and good clergy, however. Maurice Samuel describes Fra Matteo as a good pastor - kind, loving, and understanding. He was always sensitive to the needs of his people and ready to guide them. He seldom preached, but was always ready to perform weddings, funerals, and baptisms (pages 3-28).

There seems to have been a gradation in Renaissance immorality from the papacy to the clergy. This is generally recognized by both critics and historical novelists. Nigel Balchin in his novel The Borgia Testament deals with the moral and religious corruption much more extensively than any other twentieth century novelist writing about the Italian Renaissance.

Naturally the corruption so prevalent in the Church was also found in the laity. Burkhardt observes that the Italians did not rise above the corruption of the Church in their religion.<sup>22</sup> There were periods in which individuals and occasionally masses turned in sincerity to God, although this is contrary to the general trend noted by historians and novelists. Gallizier says in The Red Confessor that in the time of trouble over Paul III's demanding control of Fiorano, Lady Beatrice and her ladies prayed earnestly and sincerely for God's help (page 10). Gallizier records a more general concept, however, when he states in his novel The Court of Lucifer that "there was a time when mankind walked to hell - now they run" (page 372). Inconsistency in morality and religion was frequent. Carnation, an old Venetian courtesan in The Cardinal's Pawn by Montgomery commented that "the master Benvenuto Cellini was better company to sit to, though I lacked the wit to see how so ardent a fingerer of his beads could be so glib with his dagger" (page 85).. Bowen also notes insincerity in The Carnival of Florence when he observes that "Aprilis, kneeling so motionless, so devout, looked like one of Messer Perugino's saints, but Andrea knew that she was a true child of Florence, and was filled with none but worldly thoughts" (page 4). Fianna Bonaventuri, states Montgomery, carried a dagger carefully concealed in a cross (pages 46-47).

Renaissance Italians were conscious of the moral and religious conditions of their land to a certain extent. Symonds states that both Machiavelli



and Savonarola realized the need of reform. Machiavelli was only theoretically interested because he did many of the things he condemned, but Savonarola was sincere in his desire to reform.<sup>23</sup>

Savonarola had tremendous popular appeal, a fact admitted by novelists and historians alike. Both Merejkowski (page 33) and Bowen (page 9) speak of Savonarola's sermon as "a delirium," accompanied by highly emotional repentance. Bowen observes that "the expression that animated this face with terrible, almost unearthly power, was principally pride - the passionate, boundless pride of one who considers himself the chosen instrument of heaven and combined with this was a look of hate - hate and contempt for the things that opposed him, wrath for the sins of the world" (page 34). Bowen points out in her novel The Carnival of Florence that Savonarola used as the basis of his prophecy the dreams of San Silvestro, who went out of his head frequently due to severe illness (page 236). Corvo<sup>24</sup> and Balchin (page 129) declare that Savonarola's position was so strong in Florence that he was virtually a dictator. Yet Savonarola, like Humpty Dumpty, had a great fall. Bowen states that "the once-acclaimed prophet who had swayed the whole city was, in the eyes of all Florence, now nothing but a fallen and broken idol" (page 345). Fra Bruno comments, however, in The Court of Lucifer by Nathan Gallizier that "Savonarola deserted Heaven, - not Heaven Savonarola" (page 136). It is often believed that he became insane. Corvo states that "the poignant struggle overthrew the mental balance of the saint."<sup>25</sup> Don Tarquinio refers to Savonarola as "the maniac Fra Girolamo" in Rolfe's novel Don Tarquinio (page 119). Bowen also notes that "Savonarola gazed at him with eyes that held the superhuman fire and steadiness of insanity" (page 169).

Savonarola led his attack against all types of worldliness. Corvo states that "he burned every pretty worldly thing."<sup>26</sup> Merejkowski notes in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci that Savonarola said in his last sermon: "The wisdom of this age is madness before the Lord. Full well we know these learned men: they shall all come to the dwelling-place of Satan" (page 8). Marjorie Bowen says, in addition, that Savonarola believed "that all beauty, all magnificence, all science, all learning, but block the way to God" (page 14). Savonarola led a mob in burning priceless treasures in the way of books and paintings, states Merejkowski (pages 199-202). Savonarola also led his reform against the political set-up of Italy, entangling the Borgia name, according to Corvo.<sup>27</sup> Bowen adds to Savonarola's attack on the Borgia by describing his visions of "the scarlet woman on the scarlet beast, smiling with the childishly fair face of Lucrezia Borgia and surrounded by young men, 'princes riding on horses,' looking at her with lover's eyes and yet her brothers; and one was scarlet too, Cesare, in the robes of a Cardinal" (page 282). So Savonarola led the Inquisition. Bowen describes the scene of Savonarola being followed by "the troop of children he had formed from the idle youth of the city and established as a kind of moral inquisition over the citizens" (page 280).

In spite of his brilliant career, popularity, and power over Florence, Savonarola was doomed to failure. Young says that his attack upon the Church under Alexander VI resulted in his unfair trial and death.<sup>28</sup> Merejkowski describes his cruel death very simply: Alexander VI had him hanged and burned (page 306). The final results of Savonarola's reforms were negligible. Symonds points out <sup>that</sup> the Inquisition led to hypocrisy, not faith. Maugham brushes it aside in his novel Then and Now as he says that "the Florentines dearly love to be called to repentance at the proper season; it enables them to cheat their neighbor for the rest of the year with a good conscience" (page 110).



The immorality (fo) the Italian Renaissance is emphasized in criticisms of the period and in twentieth century historical novels. Symonds says that "to over-estimate the moral corruption of Rome at the beginning of the sixteenth century is almost impossible."<sup>29</sup> Burkhardt estimates that there were 6800 prostitutes in Rome in 1490.<sup>30</sup> Novelists also fully recognize the widespread effects of immorality. Maurice Samuel states that "the principal secular profession in Rome was that of the courtesans. There were thousands of them, and only a small fraction registered. They, too, had their national groups, and the poorer kind had their national sections within the districts set aside for them"(page 196). Merejkowski points out in The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci that there was a "Catalogue of All Harlots in Bordellos with their prices, issued for the convenience of travelers" (page 191).

The immorality of many outstanding figures of the Renaissance has been noted by modern novelists. In his introduction of Machiavelli in Then and Now, Somerset Maugham says that "it was notorious that Machiavelli was a gay fellow and a dissolute. He was, moreover, not in the least ashamed of it and would tell improper stories about his adventures with women of the town and with maidservants at wayside inns"(page 2). Gallizier pointed out in The Red Confessor that Pope Paul III had a natural son Pier Luigi Farnese (page 8). The Borgia family was probably the most immoral according to reputation during the entire Italian Renaissance. Merejkowski tells of the incestuous, lustful love of Alexander VI, Don Cesare, and Don Giovanni for Lucrezia Borgia (page 175). Cesare Borgia says in The Gorgeous Borgia by McCarthy, "It wrings my heart to think that there is a woman living in the world who can say that she escaped chaste from Caesar's arms and left Caesar unsatisfied" (page 112). Giuffre Borgia's wife Sancia had as her main ambition "to go to bed as often as possible with the maximum number of handsome men," states

Nigel Balchin in The Borgia Testament (page 101). Merejkowski says that after an enormous dinner Pope Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia entertained themselves and their guests by having fifty nude "noble whores" scramble on the floor for chestnuts among the candelabra (page 445). Gallizier points out in The Court of Lucifer that Cesare Borgia, to avoid scandal, appointed his seraglio to wait on his wife (page 42).

There were all sorts of courtesans during the Renaissance. Maurice Samuel says that "they, too, had their national sections within the districts set aside for them" (page 196). Frequently they were women of great culture. Burkhardt says that "the famous Roman courtesan Imperia was a woman of intelligence and culture, had learned from a certain Domenico Campana the art of making sonnets, and was not without musical accomplishments."<sup>31</sup> Burkhardt also states that another courtesan Caterina di San Celso "played and sang and recited superbly."<sup>32</sup> Sabatini pictures Giuliana, a courtesan in The Strolling Saint, as "witty and cultured" (pages 393-394). However, courtesans ranged from the cultured Renaissance lady to little ragamuffins. Bergengruen describes one of the latter in A Matter of Conscience. He says that the Guinea-Chick was "a creature of still childish appearance, the tip of her tongue still flickering along her moist gleaming red lips in a not ungraceful embarrassment. Monna Mafalda surveyed the kerchief on her head, her shoes, her girdle, her dress, on the sleeves of which was embroidered the emblem of her calling" (page 195). Montgomery makes Carnation, an old Venetian courtesan, a very human character in The Cardinal's Pawn when she explains about love to Fiamma Bonaventuri: "Ay, it hurts, sweet, as a woman's breasts hurt in the growing! But a worse hurt comes when the breasts are



full, and little fumbling lips are stiff and dead; and the worst hurt of all is when the heart is full of love no one needs! I have known all three, and the third anguish had gnawed for many a year" (page 192).

Bastardry is a topic frequently mentioned by modern historical novelists of the Italian Renaissance and recognized by historians of the period. This was a natural result of the low moral standards of the Renaissance. Bastards were considered rather diabolic figures, and a considerable amount of superstition was built up about them. Yet in the opportunistic atmosphere of the Renaissance, they were able to advance to as great heights as legitimate offspring. Bastardry, as previously stated, often served as a powerful towards opportunism.

From the many examples of bastards listed by the novelists under consideration, it seems that there were bastards in all levels of society during the Renaissance. Merejkowski cites Giovanni Beltraffio as a low-born bastard. He says that "Giovanni, an orphan, the illegitimate son of Oswald's brother, Reynold, a stonemason, received his name of Beltraffio from his mother, a native of Lombardy, who...was a loose woman and had brought Giovanni's father to ruin" (pages 15-16). Leonardo da Vinci, states Merejkowski, was also a bastard (pages 513-514). The nobility often had bastards too. Maugham, in his novel Then and Now, mentions "the Chevalier Orsini, a bastard of that noble and powerful house, who was in the Duke's service" (page 87). In The Borgia Testament by Balchin, it is stated that in 1498 Lucrezia Borgia, a lady generally counted among the Renaissance nobility, had an illegitimate son. He was legitimized first as Cesare Borgia's son and later as Pope Alexander VI's son. He was later made the Duke of Nepi (pages 126-128). Even ecclesiastics frequently had bastards. Maurice Samuel says in The Web of Lucifer that it was

common for the clergy to have sons called "nephews" (page 42). Two of the main figures in historical novels of the Renaissance were bastards of Popes: Cesare Borgia, bastard son of Pope Alexander VI, and Pier Luigi Farnese, Pope Paul III's bastard. Such was the significance of bastardry during the Renaissance as conceived by writers of modern historical fiction.

A conclusive look at paganism would show that the corruption of the Church, and separation of religion and morality so noticeable during the Italian Renaissance resulted in a loose society with low moral standards.

It may be concluded in this study that modern novelists take the traditional historical attitude towards the Renaissance as a cultural period and treat, for the most part, aspects which are generally thought to distinguish the period: individualism, paganism, humanism, and statism.

Modern novelists, in general, follow the interpretation of the Renaissance found in traditional histories. They seldom deviate from the standard set by Jacob Burckhardt's concise essay on The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy and John Addington Symonds' more voluminous study Renaissance in Italy. The influence of Symonds, for instance, can be noted especially in the manner in which novelists treat Renaissance pageantry. The novel The Carnival of Florence by Marjories Bowen and The Golden Book of Venice by Mrs. Lawrence Turnbull deal fully with the brilliant opulence of the period. Burckhardt, moreover, emphasizes the opportunism of the Renaissance, and characters portrayed by modern novelists also frequently exemplify this notable aspect of the period. Opportunism is the main theme in Cardillac by Robert Barr and the key to the character of Radish-Head in A Matter of Conscience by Bergengruen. It is also notably exemplified in the character of a woman, Fiamma Bonaventuri, in The Cardinal's



Pawn. Among the historians, G. F. Young treats the flowering of arts and culture extensively in his work on The Medici. A similar emphasis on the cultural background of the Renaissance is found in Merejkowski's The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci and A. J. Anderson's The Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi.

Modern writers of historical fiction frequently exploit the characteristics of the Renaissance evident in the works of contemporary Renaissance thinkers, such as Castiglione's Courtier and Machiavelli's Prince. Most of the novels studied contain striking examples of the ideal courtier as developed by Castiglione. Cristofano degli Albizzi in The Carnival of Florence is one of the most representative courtier types. Machiavelli himself is the central character in Then and Now by Somerset Maugham; and, of course, a great many of the principles of statism held by Machiavelli are treated in this work. One might, in fact, reconstruct the theory of statism developed in The Prince from materials found in historical novels.

Although modern novelists are of one accord in following traditional concepts of the Renaissance as a cultural period, they differ widely in their manner of emphasis and employment of this material. A typical technique is to emphasize the sensational quality of Renaissance life and activity. Many novelists employ forms of sensationalism with some skill, as does Maurice Samuel in The Web of Lucifer. Occasionally, however, sensationalism is so overdone as to be absurd, as in Gallizier's The Red Confessor. Here a sinister atmosphere is attempted through the obvious and grotesque use of dark colors and ornate furnishings, and love scenes are exaggerated to the point of impropriety. Cruelty, too, is the point of emphasis in a number of novels. The Gorgeous Borgia by Justin McCarthy is outstanding in this respect. Murders and poisonings abound in Yeats' The Honour of Savelli, Sabatini's The Strolling Saint, and Mary B. Whiting's

The Plough of Shame. Then, too, pagan thought and activity are prominent features of Renaissance novels, as in Gallizier's The Court of Lucifer. Novelists also seem to feel that superstition and sorcery were typical manifestations of the Italian Renaissance. Peasant superstitions are a part of the activity of The Web of Lucifer, and black magic is a major criterion in The Court of Lucifer.

The characters in historical novels of the Renaissance are striking for their vitality and versatility. Fiamma Bonaventuri in The Cardinal's Pawn by Montgomery is the center of intrigue and adventure. Characters, in general, tend to conform to the uomo universale type of the period. Lazzaro Biancomonte exemplifies this development in The Shame of Motley by Sabatini. Sometimes novelists invent fictitious characters to fulfill the requirements of versatility and energy. Andrea Orsini in Shellabarger's The Prince of Foxes is a notable example of a universal man.

Renaissance figures as portrayed by historical novelists are highly individualistic. Bastards are generally opportunists, doing anything to push their way to whatever form of success they desire. Radish-Head in A Matter of Conscience and Angelo in Rienzi are outstanding examples of bastard opportunists. Renaissance characters are so conditioned by their environment that they often seem to have no sense of moral values. They feel, as Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici expressed it in The Carnival of Florence, that they had risen above the religion of the Cross and the simple standards set there. They thus resort easily to pagan licence, as is illustrated in Then and Now and The Red Confessor.

The chief characters of Renaissance novels are usually supermen. Cesare Borgia dominates Balchin's The Borgia Testament and Gallizier's The Gorgeous Borgia, and his figure is the motivating force behind the action of Shellabarger's