

An Essay on The "Renaissance" Chronology

Kôji NISHIMOTO

A very particular—not to say "unique"—period in the history of the European civilization, the "Renaissance" has long been and still is fostering among historians of every field of specialization, a great deal of controversy which, far from being settled, appears even to widen conflicting interpretations. That classical dichotomy put forward by Jacob Burckhardt, in his famous "*Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*" (1860), opposing the "Renaissance", bright, humane and enlightened, against the dark, barbarous Middle Ages, has since been counterbalanced by Johan Huizinga's "*The Waning of the Middle Ages*" (1919). Huizinga proves quite conclusively both that the Dark Ages were neither as dark nor as unenlightened as the Swiss historian describes them, and that there was a great deal in the "Renaissance" which had once been believed proper to the Middle Ages, such that the "Renaissance" may be more correctly understood as a continuation of the Middle Ages, to the extent that there is no sharp contrast, no deep rupture between the two.

In the decade following Huizinga's work, Charles H. Huskins, in his "*Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*" (1927), writes yet of another and earlier Renaissance; and Vittore Branca, in his monumental "*Boccaccio Medievale*" (1956), also stresses the continuity between the Renaissance and Middle Ages (medievalistic approach). Wallace K. Ferguson, in "*The Renaissance in historical Thought*" (1948), takes another turn and argues for the suspension of such controversy; he stresses rather the necessity of concentrating on the study of primary sources, such as manuscripts, legal statutes, business correspondence, accounting books kept by commercial houses, and other similar documents. As for the "Middle Ages vs. Renaissance" controversy, Ferguson writes that:

. . . The Renaissance, it seems to me, was, in a peculiar way, an *age of transition* . . . And the Renaissance owes much of its peculiar character, I think, to the *uneasy coexistence* within it of medieval and modern elements, of decaying or obsolescent institutions and ideas still *imperfectly formed* . . . (*Toward the Modern State*, pp. 3-4, italic by the present author)

But as the general title of Ferguson's work clearly indicates, his is evidently a standpoint which implies a modernistic approach to the problem. In returning to the question in a subsequent essay entitled "*The Reinterpretation of the Renaissance*" (1956), Professor Ferguson states in fact that:

. . . Looking over the long evolution of the idea of the Renaissance and its more recent vicissitudes, I am impressed by the fact that *the relation of the Renaissance to the Middle Ages is the crucial point. Its relation to modern civilization is a subsidiary problem*, dependent on the historian's notion of the extent to which

Renaissance culture differed from that of the Middle Ages and the directions in which the deviation occurred . . . (p.2, italic by the present author)

The basic premise of Professor Ferguson is that the Renaissance *naturally* merges into the modern European civilization, while there is, whether it be earlier or later, a difference which essentially divides the Renaissance from the Middle Ages.

Whether it be according to the medievalist or the modernist approach, the Renaissance has always been and still is considered in terms of what preceded or followed it, never as a period in its own right. This view of the Renaissance has always seemed more than a little strange to me. To liken the Renaissance to the waxing spring,—should I be permitted to make a bold comparison, and one which is not, I think, altogether out of place, since Huizinga has already written of the “Waning Middle Ages”—is it to deny that spring, then, is not a season in and of itself? It is true that spring is neither winter cold and inhibitive, nor summer hot and glaring. Rather, more changeable and capable of assuming diverse aspects, spring is surely less uniform in its character than summer or winter; yet the very diversity and indefiniteness of its nature establish springtime as an independent season, full of possibility and grace, full also of alluring yet treacherous changes. In a like manner, the Renaissance, less definable though it may be than both the preceding Middle Ages and the Modern Ages which follow, or rather precisely because of its extravagant abundance which defies definition whatsoever, it is our contention here that the Renaissance stands as period *in se per se*; the Renaissance simply refuses to be identified as a mere “period of transition”, as an “uneasy coexistence” of elements medieval and modern, of institutions and ideas still “imperfectly formed,” running thereby the risk of being decomposed into elements belonging to the other periods and none of its own.

Traditionally the Renaissance has been considered as a transitory period, largely because the period is seen from the perspective to the subsequent development of European civilization with its political, social and cultural centre of gravity transferred to the countries north of the Alps. In those countries, in fact, short-lived as it was—roughly speaking six decades in France, a little more than a century in England and in Spain, hardly two scores in Germany—, the Renaissance played a role which may be termed, with at least some plausibility, as an “interlude” between the Middle and Modern Ages. However, upon tracing the development of the Renaissance back to the country of its origin, to Italy where it realized itself most fully, the Renaissance clearly appears as a full and independent entity with various phases of development and distinctive characteristics that refuse, even transplanted into the countries to the north of the Alps, to be identified as mere aftermath or premature manifestation of those elements belonging to the preceding or succeeding epochs.

The purpose of the present article is, then, to give a very brief and rough outline of a larger and more detailed work under preparation which attempts to demonstrate:

- (1) that the frequent view of the “Renaissance” as extending from the mid-fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth century omits, not only for Italy, but for the history of the Renaissance itself, the first half of a very complex movement of Europe-

wide importance. This view adds also a superfluous half century to a movement that, in Italy, was already dead, while at the same time it artificially antedates, for countries north of the Alps, the birth of the movement that began, at the earliest, in the closing years of the fifteenth century; and

- (2) that contrary to what is generally argued, the Renaissance is not a kind of "prelude" to the Modern Ages. Quite simply, the Renaissance does not run smoothly into modern Europe, far from it. The sharp distinction that separates the Renaissance from the Modern Ages, mirrors also the deep chasm that divides the period from the Middle Ages.

Any socio-cultural movement of importance cannot properly be considered without reference to its "*Träger*". In the case of the Renaissance, the "*Träger*" was the burgher class. The Renaissance was essentially an urban, and therefore socially "wide", multi-phased movement. For example, "*burgher*" does not mean "*bourgeois*" or "*citizen*" in the modern sense of these terms. In the middle of the thirteenth century Europe, scattered all over the continent, the few cities then in existence could count a history of hardly more than a century. Still half buried in the medieval social system and tradition, these cities were not "cities" in the modern sense, but rather they were "*polis*", city-states, each constituting independent political entity. Their inhabitants, *burghers*, had flocked to these newly sprung-up centres from neighbouring rural areas (*contado*) with strongly *secular*—that is, "*realistic*" in both practical and intellectual sense—outlook. They were determined to free themselves from the rigours of serfdom and to enjoy what was still the modest—but then quasi non-existent elsewhere—excitement of the city. "*Secular*" in this context, however, does not necessarily mean "*irreligious*". At the very bottom of the souls of these practical burghers, there hovered a deep religious—sometimes superstitious or even fanatic—sentiment which rose quickly to the surface of their consciousness whenever crisis, whether individual or social, whether political, economic or intellectual occurred. There were, of course, already rich and poor, but not the class division of plutocrat and proletariat. Still imbued with aristocratic notions of honour and feudalistic value system, the new city dwellers behaved nonetheless quite "burgher-like" in putting their ideals into effect. Discarding the feudalistic principle of blood distinction—for so few could boast of it—the burgher stood as a result on an eminently egalitarian footing; he competed or "fought" fiercely for power and wealth, as these were the only means through which one could achieve distinction. What factional strife there was, was fostered by the Investiture Struggle for universal leadership between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Roman Pontiff.

Thus it was in Italy, and in Italy alone, that a new set of mental attitudes, a new subjectivity and world view emerged, which in their turn gave birth to the Renaissance. This change in attitude occurred against the larger background of a wide variety of particularly propitious conditions which included among others, geographic (peninsular dividing the Mediterranean into eastern and western halves, linking at the same time Europe with North Africa—trade routes), religious (the Vatican and the Pope,

head of the universal church, at Rome), military (starting ports for the crusades repeatedly undertaken from the end of the 11th through 13th centuries), historical (seat of the old Roman Empire, with still extant ties with the Byzantine world).

Assigning a precise starting date to a movement of such “*envergure*” and complexity as the Renaissance is at best an awkward enterprise. But if we were absolutely to choose among the most conspicuous events which symbolized the decisive step from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, 1266 (Dante was but a year old!), the year of the battle of Benevento, would not be altogether so out of place.

The battle of Benevento sealed the doom of the House of Hohenstaufen at the hand of Charles of Anjou, younger brother of King Saint Louis (Louis IX) of France. Then and there, the imperial cause was irretrievably lost in the Italian peninsula. Together with other dates and events, 1266 inaugurates the first phase—ascending phase—of the Renaissance in Italy, which extends toward the last quarter of the fourteenth century (e.g. 1375, death of Boccaccio). In a general sense, the defeat of the *Ghibellini* (imperialists) brought about a political situation favourable to the *Comuni* (city-states) which found themselves locked in traditional opposition to the secular domination of the empire. The happy *denouement* to Benevento was the cessation of warfare which had been so fatal to the fruitful development of trade and exchange of a wider scope. The sixty odd years following 1266 were characterized by an extraordinary prosperity, largely as a result of the expansion in international trade and banking, the emergence of albeit still primitive manufacturing industry (cloth-weaving, silver smithery, etc.), both of which provoked, in their turn, great demographic expansion.

Yet, once the binding force, common enmity against Emperor, had disappeared, the *Guelf* (papal) party, instead of uniting under church’s banner, soon split between the *Bianchi* (Whites, anti-pope faction within the papal party!) and the *Neri* (Blacks, pro-pope faction within the same). And the Whites, as did once Dante himself, didn’t scruple to join hands with the imperialists to fight the Blacks. The truth was, the burghers who had become by this time real “*Träger*” of the Renaissance, cared little about the ideological side of the struggle between the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church, which were deeming themselves universal institutions and behaving as such. Unlike the Middle or the Modern Ages, the Renaissance was essentially a “*local*” movement. It was stamped with strongly distinctive, local flavour, whether Florentine, Milanese or Napolitan, and such was also to be the character of the later French, English and the Spanish Renaissances. It is this extraordinary diversity which is one of the aspects of the Renaissance that captivated and captivates still our interest and imagination.

Faithfully reflecting this state of things, in the field of political thought, the fundamental book “*Li Livres dou Trésor*” (1260–1265) by Brunetto Latini, Florentine notary, ambassador and chancellor, describes how a city-state torn by a civil strife must be governed by “*podestà*”, a city magistrate appointed from outside the city! In 1324 Marsilio da Padova, political advisor serving Emperor Ludwig von Bayern, codifies, in his “*Difensor Pacis*” the theory of secular government completely inde-

pendent of the theocratic pretensions of the church, uplifting thus the idea of the separation of church and state.

In the field of literature, the *stilnovist* poetic school—of which Guido Cavalcanti, Guido Guinizelli, Cino da Pistoia were among the most famous exponents—domesticates that fatal, irrational and unsocial force of Love (most typically exemplified in the story of "*Tristan et Yseult*") adapting it to the burgar and christian ideal of an unattainable lady who elevates and purifies the soul of her lover. This "*donna mia*" is best impersonated in Beatrice of Dante's "*Vita nuova*" and still better in the "*Divina Commedia*". In parallel also flourished a realistic, sensual, *terre-à-terre* poetic vein discovered by the "*giocosi*" school which found its best expression in the poems of Cecco Angiolieri of Siena and Rustico di Filippo of Firenze.

The greatest literary achievement of this period, however, and indeed of the whole of the Italian literature, was marked by the appearance of three masterpieces: "*Divina Commedia*" (1301–1321) by Dante Alighieri, the "*Canzoniere*" (1326–1374) by Francesco Petrarca, and the "*Decameron*" (1348–1353) by Giovanni Boccaccio. The three works attained, each in its own genre of epic, lyrical poetry and novel, the height that has never been surpassed since.

Just as the Italian Renaissance was thus attaining full bloom, calamitous economic conditions developed, triggered by the declaration of insolvability of Edward III of England in 1339, which provoked a series of bankruptcies of the first generation of international bankers, such as the Bardi, Peruzzi, Frescobaldi and the Acciaiuoli. This precipitous economic decline was closely followed in 1348 by the plague of black death that decimated the population throughout the entire country. The description of this disaster and of the tremendous process of disintegration of the city community as the direct consequence of it, is justly famous for its vividness in the introductory part of Boccaccio's "*Decameron*".

By the middle 1370s, the ascending and democratic phase of the Italian Renaissance had come to a close. Burghers had become sharply divided into rich and poor. With an evermore conservative outlook, the former organized themselves into a plutocracy which came to take the form either of oligarchic government (Firenze, Venezia) or of straightforward principality (Milano, Romagna cities). Although Rome with the seat of Roman Pontiff elected by the conclave, and Naples as the capital of the hereditary Southern Kingdom had somewhat different political constitutions, those cities differed very little from an economic, social and artistic perspective from leading centres of central and northern Italy.

During the second phase of the Italian Renaissance which extends from the last quarter of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth centuries, this politically, economically and socially conservative strain strengthened still further. The whole peninsula was in the gradual process of being organized into five regional states: Lombardy (Milano), Venezia (Venezia and hinterland), Central (Firenze and Tuscan cities), the State of the Church (Roma and its romagnol domain), and the Southern Kingdom (Napoli and Sicilia). They competed ruthlessly for the domination of the

entire peninsula, although none was ever successful.

The main characteristic of this second phase is the emergence of a new trend called "humanism", founded on the resurgence of Latin language and the rediscovery of the classical Greek cultural heritage. A period of political and economic stagnation introduced a reflective turn of mind and, instead of launching into new adventurous commercial enterprises or risky political undertakings, intellectuals dug out manuscripts (Poggio, Niccoli, Barbaro, etc.), or studied the ruins of ancient Rome (Brunelleschi, Donatello, Masaccio, etc.).

The political situation in the Eastern Roman Empire also favoured this trend. The menace of Turkish invasion forced the Eastern Empire to seek the alliance of the West, and seemingly endless negotiations were repeated. Like the earlier crusades, these meetings produced politically no positive result, and in the end Constantinople fell into the hands of the Ottoman besiegers in 1453. But the fall of Constantinople, together with the preceding parleys, brought to the West, Greek scholars of the very first order (Chrysolorus, Argyropoulos, Carcondillas, Lascaris, Plethon, Bessarion, etc.), as well as priceless Greek manuscripts which gave tremendous impetus and stimulus to the study of Greek classical thought (Platon, Aristoteles not through Arabic translation but in original Greek, Stoics and Epicurians), and literature (Homer, Aeschylus and other tragic writers, lyrical poets like Sappho and Anacreon, etc.). In turn Italy produced her humanists such as C. Salutati, L. Bruni, P. Bracciolini, Fr. Barbaro, Pope Nicolas V, G. da Verona, V. da Feltro, and L. Valla.

This first generation of Italian humanists was not, however, merely contemplative as were those who were to follow. They belong to the first stage of the humanistic movement and played an active role in the government of their own city, or else they fought strongly against the enemy of the ideals they were upholding. Their ideals were essentially republican, and we may call them "civic humanists". The aforementioned five regional states were still in the process of making, each rivalling with the other. Chancellor of the Florentine Republic, Coluccio Salutati wrote pamphlets of tremendous impact against the imperialistic policy of the Milanese tyrant Giangaleazzo Visconti; Lorenzo Valla, serving King Alfonso of Naples, refuted the authenticity of "*Donatio Costantini*", thereby undermining the papal pretension to secular domination. The same Valla applied later philological text-criticism even to the Holy Scriptures and opened the way to the Reformation.

From a literary perspective, however, this enthusiasm for ancient civilization left little creative energy for genuine production. Humanists prized themselves in blindly imitating ciceronian Latin, indeed some even wrote in Greek. But those two languages, however rich and refined they may be, were after all foreign languages to the Italian humanists of the fifteenth century. An enormous quantity of treaties, disputations, epistles, orations and poems were written in both classical languages, of which very few retain really spontaneous character. On the other hand, only a few writers, such as Leonardo Bruni, Leonardo Giustinian and Vespasiano da Bisticci, tried to write in their own "*vulgar*" language.

In the field of plastic art, on the contrary, the introduction and penetration of the

Greek classical style, which was to stamp so strongly the generations to come not only in Italy, but also throughout Europe, went with irresistible force. The work of Donatello and Ghiberti in sculpture, Gentile da Fabriano, Masolino, Masaccio and Fra Angelico in painting, as well as Brunelleschi and Michelozzo in architecture, to cite almost at random only those names that suggest themselves to our mind, evoke eloquently how smoothly the assimilation and "naturalization" of classical elements were gaining ground.

Coinciding with this second stage of the humanistic movement, the third phase of the Italian Renaissance was characterized by the balance of power established among the five regional states in the peninsula. Though fragile, this balance naturally brought forth a relative political stability. The house of Medici, now *de facto* tyrant of Florence since the advent of Cosimo de' Medici to the power in 1434, played the pivotal role in the Italian politics. The grandson of Cosimo, Lorenzo *il Magnifico* (died 1492) conferred an unparalleled lustre upon his city, patronizing Boticelli as well as young Michelangelo and Raffaello, poets like Luigi Pulci and Angelo Poliziano, philosophers such as Christoforo Landino, Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino. Ficino went so far as to celebrate the reign of Lorenzo, likening it to the ancient Golden Age. Cultural and artistic effervescence was not limited, of course, to Florence. Naples could boast of Pontano, Panormita (Antonio Beccadelli) and, best of all, Sannazzaro, author of the famous "*Arcadia*" which gave rise to the Europe-wide vogue for pastoral romances (Sir Philip Sidney, Nicolas Poussin, Honore d'Urfé, Jorge de Montemayor, and others), while Milano, under *Ludovico il Moro*, adorned itself with works of Bramante as well as of Leonardo da Vinci.

As alluded to above, the humanists of this second stage became courtiers serving the regional princes or even lesser tyrants like Gonzagas of Mantova, Estes of Ferrara, Montefeltros of Urbino. In doing so, they were less of the free-minded, independent thinkers than their predecessors had been. Rather, being cut off from the hard political, social or ideological commitment to the "*polis*"—local reality—, they became less "*engagés*", but wider in cultural perspective. They were successful in recasting classical Greek and Latin models into regional, or even national mould. As the best examples of this assimilation of classical model, we can cite "*Le Stanze*" and "*Orfeo*" by Poliziano, as well as "*Arcadia*" by Sannazzaro. The neo-platonic movement promoted by Marsilio Ficino may also be interpreted in this same light.

The fourth and final—declining—phase of the Italian Renaissance started in the last decade of the fifteenth century. The year 1492 saw, in fact, a series of ominous events: Granada, the last stronghold of Islamic domination in Iberic peninsula, fell to the joint forces of the Queen Isabella of Castillia and the King Ferdinando *El Catolico* of Aragon; Lorenzo de' Medici, *il Magnifico*, died; and the Genovese navigator at the service of the Spanish Majesties, Cristoforo Colombo, discovered America.

The conquest of Granada marked the end of the Moslem power in Western Europe, as it fully carried out the centuries long "*Reconquista*" under the united leadership of

Castilla and Aragon, and thereby symbolized the birth of a Spanish national monarchy. National monarchies were also coming into existence in France and in England approximately at the same time. The death of Lorenzo *il Magnifico* indicated the end of an ever so delicately maintained balance of power and ushered in the political anarchy which was to be so disastrous for the whole Italian peninsula in the following decades. The discovery of the New World announced the transfer of the centre of gravity in world politics from the Mediterranean shores to countries north of the Alps; Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, Germany and England.

While Italy remained divided into small or middle-sized states, each jealously pulling the other down, so that none could achieve the position of eminence and command to the others, in the rest of Europe the reorganization of political structure was making significant advance, particularly in Spain, France and in England. In each of these countries, internal struggle—the *Reconquista* (998–1492) in Spain, the Hundred Years' War with England which was followed by the struggle between two houses of Valois and Bourgogne (death of Charles *le Téméraire* in 1482) in France, and the War of Roses (1455–1485) in England had until then frustrated attempts at the national unification. But once unification was achieved, these states became giants capable of raising armed forces far superior in number, strategy and in discipline than an army of condottieri which any Italian regional state could ever muster.

On the other hand, whatever the vicissitudes of her political situation, Italy continued still to far outshine all other European countries in brilliance, elegance and refinement. So that it became the object of covetous and greedy attention on the part of the sovereigns of those newly formed northern national states. First among them, King Charles VIII of France descended into Italy in 1494 only two years after the death of Lorenzo *il Magnifico*. This invasion took place at the request of the tyrant of Milano, the unscrupulous and inconsiderate Ludovico *il Moro*, who has calculated erroneously as it turned out, to make use of the forces of French monarch who was dangerously stronger than himself, in order to strengthen his own position in the duchy of Milano. But as Charles VIII crossed the Alps at the head of a formidable army of 50,000 men, all the Italian states were seized with panic and surrendered without ever trying to offer any substantial resistance. Charles VIII led his triumphant troops as far south as Naples where he was to proclaim valid the pretension of the French crown to the heritage of the princely house of Anjou.

But as Charles nonchalantly savoured his easy Italian conquest, an anti-French coalition was rapidly formed to include the very Ludovico *il Moro* who had inadvertently invited Charles to Italy, Ferdinando *El Cattolico* of Spain, Pope, Venezia and the Emperor Maximilian von Hapsburg. Suddenly sensing the imminent danger, the French monarch abandoned the kingdom of Naples in a hasty attempt to regain France. Although others tried to bar his retreat and the battle of Fornovo (1495) resulted in military victory of the coalition army, Charles safely scrambled home with the rich spoils of his expedition intact. This course of events had given such a gusto for the Italian enterprise to the later French monarchs, that they emulated Charles descending repeatedly into Italy during the reigns of Louis XII and François I. It was only the

signing of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis (1559) between Henri II of France and Felipe II of Spain, that put a stop to the French invasion of Italy. The political vacuum left by France, however, was soon to be filled by Spain, and from the mid-sixteenth century onward, for two hundred years, Spain remained sole master of the Italian peninsula. But this is long after the demise of the Renaissance in Italy.

Coming back to 1494, Charles VIII's Italian campaign revealed to everybody the endemic weakness of the make-believe defenses of the Italian states. Spain followed quickly the lead of France and in its turn began to depredate the peninsula. Another notable consequence of the French invasion was the collapse of the Medici government in Florence. Piero, son of *il Magnifico*, behaved with as much imprudence as political "naïveté" in going out without due consultation with his counsellors to meet Charles VIII at the very moment when the French army was drawing near. The move roused the suspicion of the city's mercurial anti-Medici faction, afraid as they were that the *de facto* tyrant was attempting to receive official title as Duke of Florence conferred upon him by the French monarch in exchange for delivering their city to the French. In face of the prospect of imminent seige accompanied with the unconfirmed rumour of Piero's pending treason, the Florentine population broke into revolt, forcing the Medici to flee from the city on the Arno.

After the Medici came the short-lived theocratic government of Savonarola, which was followed, in 1498, by a new republican government headed by Piero Soderini with young Machiavelli at his side. This savonarolian religious revival is often considered as a step back to medieval fanaticism, but nothing could be further from the truth. Popular religious fever which recurred time and again throughout the Renaissance was the direct result of the franciscan and dominican movements, as they aimed with boundless zeal at the propagation of the teaching of Christ among people of every walk of life. It was the "popularization", in the best sense of the term, of the Christian faith. Later, such efforts were to take form of the Reformation in the countries to the north of the Alps.

In the first quarter of the 16th Century, after successfully invading Italy, Spain gained the upper hand in her competition with France. In the course of her struggle for supremacy in the peninsula, Spain first proceeded to restore the Medicean party in Firenze, headed by Giovanni de' Medici—future Pope Leo X—in 1513. But the regime was short-lived, for already in 1527, there broke out that infamous "sack of Rome" which laid waste the Eternal City and forced the Pope Clemente VII—another Medici—to take refuge in Castel Sant'Angelo and to beg peace of the Emperor Charles V. Taking advantage of this weakened Medici position, Florentines overthrew Medicean government and re-established the republic for the third time. By this time, however, the Renaissance was practically at its end in Italy, despite the outward show of its artistic and cultural brilliance enhanced by such high-sounding names as Rafaello, Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Castiglione, Guicciardini, Boiardo and Ariosto. This was no more than the swan's song. The collapse of the Third Florentine Republic in 1530, after a heroic defense conducted by the popular militia founded by Machiavelli, against the Spanish army as it marched to restore the Medici for

the second time, symbolized the demise of the civic spirit of local independence that was so vital to the Italian Renaissance.

But just about at this time, that is, at the very beginning of the 16th century, as the Italian Renaissance was drawing near to its end, the movement was re-born, but this time taking on a "national",—instead of "local"—form and in the countries to the north of the Alps. In the limited space allotted to us, it is absolutely impossible to deal comprehensively with the various Renaissances in France, Spain, England and elsewhere. It would suffice here, then, to enlist some of the general characteristics of the northern Renaissances, as they contrast to the original Italian movement.

To begin with, it is important to note that the initial impetus for these northern Renaissances took the form of the courtly humanism corresponding to the second stage of Italian humanism, the first having been "civic" or republican humanism. Furthermore the movement was inspired from above, in that it was imported from Italy under the patronage of the monarchs of newly established nation-states who commissioned the work of leading Italian intellectuals and artists. Thus the northern humanism at the outset presents a sharp contrast to the Italian humanism which, in its first stage at least, took the form of a spontaneous, civic movement grown up from among the citizens of the city-republic, jealous of their local independence and determined to enhance the republican virtues of Cato and Cicero, as they fully approved the tyrannicide as exemplified by Lucrezia and Brutus. These first generation Italian humanists were deeply committed to the politics and welfare of their own *polis*. Later, however, with the advent of middle sized regional principalities or oligarchic states, the Italian humanists gradually found themselves cut off from real political concerns. The less involved in the reality, the more contemplative have they become, but what was lost in direct involvement, they gained in wider perspective and in higher level of speculation. And it is this type of humanism more apt to be accepted by the courts of new national monarchs, that was so enthusiastically hailed by Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, Reuchlin, Juan de Valdès, Guillaume Budé, and many other scholars in the north.

And yet in each of these countries, by this time, there had gradually come to gain in importance a class—precisely "burghers"—that was able first to respond to the new intellectual turn of mind coming from the south of Alps, then to assimilate it, producing a form of expression artistic, literary, technological, which was unmistakably "national", and at the same time distinctively "Renaissance" in its exuberance, vigor and refinement. In the 16th century to the north of the Alps, Shakespeare and Marlowe in England, Rabelais, Ronsard and du Bellay in France, Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca in Spain, were thus the very counterparts of Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio in Italy in the 14th century. There was however one key difference: for the northern Renaissances, the process was exactly the reverse of that which had characterized the Italian experience as discussed above. To the north of the Alps, the movement was inaugurated from the top, led by a contemplative, intellectual humanism, under the royal patronage, and produced, in the end, both strongly *national* and *universal* geniuses. Also, the time span of the Northern Renaissances was less than a

half that of Italian experience, for in the North, the movement could profit from the experiments and models set by the earlier Italian Renaissance.

The Renaissances in the North came to an end at the earliest in the second quarter of the 16th century (in Germany, due to the Reformation and Peasants' War begun in 1524), and at the latest in the first quarter of the 17th (in England and Spain, Shakespeare and Cervantes died in the same year 1616). Although the causes vary from country to country, the end of these Northern Renaissances, as in Italy, was marked by the disappearance of the sense of abundance, variety and harmony. At the same time, however, in France and England, "burghers" steadily continued to gain importance in the management of the new national monarchy. In alliance with the emerging national monarchs, the "burgher" class worked to demolish the feudalistic and decentralizing power of the nobility, in a struggle which was to take the form of religious war. This cooperation led to the enthronement of absolute monarchs with divine right to rule but, in a later period, resulted in these monarchs' being forced to accept constitutionality and, eventually, led to their dethronement. In the process of this historic development, the "burghers" were transformed into a modern "bourgeois" class, more national-conscious than the burghers of Italian city-states. The new class emerged profoundly marked by the internal religious struggle, in that they became morally and intellectually more sober, austere and uniform.

In Spain, on the other hand, a nation-state was formed too. But after a short period of unprecedented prosperity and affluence due to the discovery of the New World, due in particular to the gold, silver and other precious metals from Mexico and Peru, due also to the spices from Southeast Asia, the newly formed nation-state began to stumble despite a series of flamboyant military success. The fabulous riches of South America and the Orient, instead of being used to consolidate Spanish "burghers" as a class productive of the "wealth of the nation", passed directly through the hands of the monarchs and grandees in order to finance what were in the end ruinous foreign expeditions. Not only that, those riches triggered in the country a very steep inflation which had a disastrous effect on the "burghers" who may well have otherwise developed into a modern, national "bourgeoisie". Together with economic and political stagnation, a rigid moral and religious conformism also developed as a result of the long practice of inquisition, such that the "Siglo de Oro" (Golden Century, the 16th c.) came to an abrupt ending by the 1620s.

In the case of the 16th century Germany, the situation was quite similar to what was then prevailing in Italy, albeit minus Italy's brilliant antecedents. The German Renaissance, as elsewhere in the North, initially took the form of an intellectual, humanistic movement. But German burghers who had to cope with a strongly feudalistic and still powerful landed gentry, remained rather conservative and timid. Nor did strong nation-state or clear monarchical leadership emerge in Germany. There broke out also the "Peasants' War". The peasants' uprising was inspired by the Reformation leaders whose preaching had the same tenets radical franciscan friars had held four hundred years earlier. But in the 16th century, German burghers, unlike their counterparts in the 13th century Italy, refused in general to make common cause with

popular movements. Indeed quite the contrary occurred, as burghers, in forming alliances with local princes, participated in the ruthless suppression of popular causes. For these variegated but inter-related reasons, the German Renaissance was very short-lived and never achieved a nation wide form. From a moral perspective, the balance of forces in Germany resulted in a tightened discipline in every aspect of social life, which had the effect of smothering the very liberty of being diverse and colourful that was so essential to the Renaissance.

By the first quarter of the 17th century, everywhere in Europe and in very facet of human endeavour, whether it be cultural, religious or economic, political, literary or artistic, another period—the Modern Age—had begun. This new age was characterized by a political structure which was at once wider and narrower than that of the Renaissance. The new political structure was based essentially on the nation-state and, accordingly, its behaviour was *national* and *inter-national*, whereas Renaissance structure had been local but universal in expression and ambition. The art and literature of the Modern Age were internationally uniform (think of baroque or rococo style) throughout Europe, tormented (inhibitively agitated), lacking that serene, static harmony, or unbridled, healthy, dynamic exuberance of the Renaissance. The “Träger” of civilization also changed. City burghers, although still remaining the main force driving forward to the Modern Age, had been transformed into a modern “bourgeois” class, more pragmatic and intensely economical—partly for the reasons analyzed by Max Weber in his justly famous “*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*”. The Modern World, finally, was more sober, religiously more rigid, more rational or at least concretely logical than the Renaissance had ever been. As a result the Modern Age left little room for fantasy, imagination and speculation. Indeed, the very criteria —“reason”—according to which one tests the truth of a statement, hypothesis or phenomenon had changed, which is perhaps the clearest indication that a radical difference in mental attitude had occurred.

Contrary to the generally accepted historical interpretation which holds that the “Renaissance” was a period confined mainly to the 16th century, we have put forward here a very commonplace notion that a wide-spread, multi-phase movement like “Renaissance” must chronologically differ in its occurrence from one place to another. In Italy the relevant period runs from 1266 to 1530, and in the course of these two centuries and a half a complete cycle of socio-cultural evolution which had originated simultaneously in several peninsular city-states, was fully enacted. On the other hand, in the countries to the north of the Alps, at the outset the Renaissance was experienced not as a spontaneous local movement, but as something introduced from above in the form of courtly humanism, as a part of cultural policy of national unification occurring under the direction of newly formed national monarchies. Nonetheless in the end it gave rise to genuine, local Renaissance, characterized by distinctive features in each country, and endowed at the same time with the unmistakable characteristics of the period: vigor, abundance, high-flown inspiration, harmony and grace. By the beginning of the 16th century, as internal strife particular

to each country came to an end in Northern Europe, the Renaissance began north of the Alps, concomitantly with the emergence of the nation-state which was being built through the cooperation of the monarch-to-be and the burghers who, taking advantage of the royal policy of centralization of power, worked to curtail the feudalistic rights of the aristocracy. At the beginning of this process, the still weak and uncertain royal power could not do without the support of the burghers (*le Tiers Etat*), but to gain that support, a certain amount of freedom and initiative had to be conceded them. Thus burghers of the north found themselves in a position somewhat analogous to that in which their Italian counterparts had been toward the close of the Investiture Struggle between the Hohenstaufens and Roman Pontiffs. Analogous though the situation may be, what followed was, of course, different. In the case of 13th century Italy, it was the independent city-states, their ruthless rivalry and inability of any one of them to subdue others, that allowed everyone to be fiercely individualistic, unscrupulously self-asserting. To the north of the Alps, however, by the beginning of the 17th century, the Renaissance movements were soon to be overshadowed by centralized royal power. In this process of centralization, in which the burghers played key-role, they also found themselves being transformed into a modern "bourgeois" class, and it was precisely at this point, that began the Modern Age, a period *fundamentally different* in spiritual and worldly outlook from the Renaissance. And elsewhere in Europe where a process of this nature did not occur, what reigned was but stifling stagnation. The "Renaissance" was over: "*Vive la Renaissance!*"

Short Bibliography

- Jacob Burckhardt: *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Harper Torchbooks, 2 vols Introduction by Benjamin Nelson & Charles Trinkaus, New York, 1958
- Johan Huizinga: *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Pelican Book, pp. 368, London, 1955
- Charles H. Haskins: *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Harvard Univ. Press, Harvard Paperbacks, pp. 437, Boston, 1971
- Hans Baron: *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Princeton Univ. Press, Newberry Library, pp. 584, Princeton, 1966
- Christian Bec: *Le Siècle des Médecins*, Coll. Que sais-je?, Presses Univ. de France, pp. 128, Paris, 1977
- Albert Autin: *L'Echec de la Réforme en France au XVI^e Siècle*, Armand Colin, pp. 286, Paris, 1918
- Vittore Branca: *Boccaccio Medievale*, Sansoni, 5^e ed., pp. 442, Firenze, 1981
- Alfredo Sabetti: *Marsilio da Padova e la Filosofia Politica del Secolo XIV*, pp. 127, Napoli, 1964
- Brunetto Latini: *Li Livres dou Trésor*, éd. critique par F. Carmody, Slatkin Reprints, pp. 458, Genève, 1975
- Wallace K. Ferguson: *The Renaissance*, Harper Torchbooks, pp. 184, New York, 1962
- Wallace K. Ferguson: *Facets of the Renaissance*, Harper Torchbooks, pp. 130, New York, 1963
- Ferdinand Schevill: *Medieval and Renaissance Florence*, Harper Torchbooks, 2 vols, New York, 1963
- R. Trevor Davies: *The Golden Century of Spain*, Harper Torchbooks, pp. 325, New York, 1954
- Max Weber: *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. by Talcott Parsons, Scribner, pp. 292, New York, 1950
- R. H. Tawney: *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Pelican Books, pp. 334, London, 1948

The University of Tokyo