The Fifteenth Century

Shakespeare's history plays have helped keep alive a picture of how, after deposing his cousin Richard II as king in 1399, Henry IV ruled under the shadow of possible and actual revolts. Henry died, his son **Henry V** came to the throne in 1413 and quickly invaded France. He lost huge numbers of English soldiers by disease, but at the battle of **Agincourt** (northern France) in October, 1415 he won an astonishing victory against all odds, killing or capturing most the French aristocracy without losing more than a handful of English soldiers. He was therefore remembered in England as a great national hero and in his last years he became a European statesman, negotiating a kind of peace and marrying the French king's daughter, Catherine. But in 1422 Henry V died, aged only thirty-six. His son, who duly became **Henry VI**, was only nine months old. After Henry V died, his widow took a young Welsh lord, Owen Tudor, as her lover, or husband, and they had four children; the son of one of these later became Henry VII, the first Tudor king.

Since Henry VI was only a baby, there was a council governing the kingdoms of France and England in his name. The French refused to recognize the English right to their land, and continued to fight, led for several years by an illiterate peasant girl called Jeanne Darc (**Joan of Arc**) who claimed to have had visions from God telling her to save France. In 1430 she was betrayed by her own people, condemned as a heretic, and burned by the English in 1431 in Rouen. A few years later she was declared innocent. In 1920 the Catholic Church made her a saint and there are many poems and plays about her life.

In 1445, Henry VI married a French princess, surrendering Normandy and Maine to France as the price for a peace that still did not come. At last, at Castillon in 1453, the English were overwhelmed by the French army's use of guns, and the only part of France remaining in English hands was the port of Calais, which France took back a hundred years later.

In 1453 there was another **Peasants' Revolt** in England, led by Jack Cade, with complaints about corruption, unfair taxation, low wages... but nothing was done. Henry VI, who had inherited a weak mind from his mother's family, was only interested in religion and good works; meanwhile, the great families were fighting for control, while money was being wasted in conspicuous consumption at court. The royal family, the Lancasters, with their supporters, were opposed by a coalition led by the heir-apparent Richard, the duke of York. In 1455 this became open warfare, largely inspired by the king's wife, Margaret.

These **Wars of the Roses** were mostly fought in and near Wales, and in 1460 Henry VI was taken prisoner, while the son of Richard of York became king as Edward IV. The fighting stopped for a time and the nation became more prosperous. In later battles, Henry VI's supporters tried to restore him, but finally he was murdered in 1471, soon after his only son had been killed at the battle of Tewkesbury.

It was during Edward's reign and with his support that **William Caxton** set up his printing-press in Westminster in 1476; Edward encouraged the rising merchant classes to expand their business and trading activities. But in 1483 he died and the throne was seized by the ambitious Richard of Gloucester, his younger brother, who directly or indirectly murdered a number of rivals, including his brother, his wife, and some children in order to become king **Richard III**. Shakespeare's play has immortalized an almost certainly untrue portrait of him as a warped monster. Two years later Henry Tudor, the earl of Richmond, returned from exile and defeated Richard, who was killed, at the battle of Bosworth in 1485. He became **Henry VII**, the first of the **Tudors**.

Poetry after Chaucer

When Chaucer died in 1400, he left a clearly defined body of works and a reputation as a poet that was unequalled, for there had not been a writer with such a clearly defined character in England before him. Although many poets who wrote after Chaucer paid tribute to him, and perhaps thought they were imitating him, it is curious that most of his truly characteristic features did not continue.

The indeterminacy of the voice of so many of his narrators and speaking *personae* is uniquely his; the concern shown in *Troilus and Criseyde* and in "The Knight's Tale" to recreate a pre-Christian, pagan world with people thinking about the meaning of what happens in life in a metaphysical framework is never repeated. Above all, his deep struggle to come to terms with the seemingly arbitrary cruelty of Providence that made Boethius his main philosophical guide was not shared by later writers.

Thomas Hoccleve

Two poets were beginning their writing careers as Chaucer was completing his: Thomas Hoccleve (?1366-1426) and John Lydgate (?1370-1449). In 1387 Hoccleve became a clerk (scribe) in the Privy Seal Office, part of the royal administration, and it may be that he came to know Chaucer there. In 1405-6 his salary was not paid, so he wrote *La Male Regle* (Misrule) as a begging poem. In 1411-2 he wrote his most ambitious work, *The Regiment of Princes*, for Prince Henry, only a year or so before he became Henry V. It is a guide to the virtues required of a prince, and exists in some 40 manuscripts. He became a respected political poet, his next important poem being an attack against the Wycliffite religious movement called Lollardy. In 1416 he seems to have suffered a severe mental breakdown, from which he only slowly recovered. He only wrote poems again in 1421-2, when he wrote the *Complaint*, which includes references to his sickness.

Hoccleve wrote no narrative poems, his poems are lyrics, often first-person monologues similar to Chaucer's "Complaint to His Purse" or the "Wife of Bath's Prologue." It is because it seems possible to sense something of the individual person in his poems that they have become popular today; they are often very frank, in a confessional mode, even while begging for money as "La Male Regle" does:

I dare not tell how that the fresh repair
Of Venus' female lusty children dear
That so goodly, so shapely were and fair
And so pleasant of port and of manneere
And feede cowden all a world with cheere,
And of atire passingly well byseye,
At Paul's Head me maden oft appear
To talk of mirth and to disport and pleye...

Of love's art yet touched I no deel;
I cowde nat, and eek it was no neede,
Had I a kiss I was content full weel,
Better than I would han be with the deede.
Thereon can I but small, it is no dreede.

When that men speak of it in my presence
For shame I wax as red as is the gleede.   (*coal*)
Now will I turn again to my sentence.

      Hoccleve is not merely imitating Chaucer, he has read French poets as well as English, but like Chaucer he is well aware of the best ways to speak in a convincing first person voice; but such a voice is a major part of medieval poetic convention, and it would be wrong to look for too strong an individuality here. It is Hoccleve, though, who first writes in an autobiographical voice, partly because he is writing for a very small audience of people who knew him well. Hoccleve offers the first critical appreciation of Chaucer and Gower as poets, linking them, and he first calls Chaucer "Father," in his "Regiment of Princes" (lines 1961ff):

O master dear and father reverent,
My master Chaucer, flower of eloquence,
Mirror of fructuous entendement,
O universal father in science
Allas, that thou thine excellent prudence
In thy bed mortal mightest not bequeath.
What ailed death? Alas, why would he slay thee?

O death, thou didest not harm singular
In slaughtery of him, but all this land it smarteth.
But natheless yet hastou no power
His name slay. His high virtue asterteth
Unslain from thee, which ay us lifely herteth
With bookes of his ornat enditing
That is to all this land enlumining.

Hastou not eek my master Gower slain,
Whose virtue I am insufficient
For to describe?...

      Modern readers, with their interest in psychology, are particularly struck by the "Complaint" in which he describes the way people reacted to him, after he had his breakdown:

Men seiden I looked as a wilde steer   120
And so my looks about I gan to throwe.
Mine head to hie, another side, I bare;
'Full buckish is his brain, well may I trowe.'
And said the third -- 'and apt is in the rowe
To sit of them that a reasonless rede
Can give -- no sadness is in his head.'   (*firmness*)

Changed had I my pace, some seiden eke,
For here and there forth start I as a roe.
None abode, none arest, but all brainseke.   (*brainsick*)
Another spake and of me said also,
My feet weren ay waving to and fro

When that I stonde should and with men talke,
And that mine eyen soughten every halke.   (*corner*)
(...)

Sithen I recovered was, have I full ofte
Cause had of anger and impatience,
Where I born have it easily and softe,
Suffering wronge to be done to me and offence,
And not answered again but kept silence,   180
Leste that men of me deem would and sein,
'See howe this man is fallen in again.'

John Lydgate (?1370-1449)

Nothing can make Hoccleve more than a minor poet, which is not a negative term.
Lydgate, though, used in the sixteenth century to be set alongside Chaucer and Gower, as one
of the founding fathers of English poetry. His fall in critical esteem has been catastrophic; the
recent editor of Hoccleve (M.C. Seymour) calls Lydgate "prolix and artificial. His self-
complacent conservatism breaks no new ground... content with his world, conventionally
religious, uncritically sententious, and essentially unmoved, he has nothing to say" (p.xxxi).
Lydgate became a monk in the abbey of Bury St Edmunds in 1385, and began his
poetic career as an imitator of Chaucer. In the ten years after Chaucer's death he wrote
several poems imitating Chaucer's early works. Then between 1412 and 1420 he wrote the
Troy Book, a long verse translation of Guido delle Colonne. His *Siege of Thebes* (1420-2) is
written as if it were part of the *Canterbury Tales*; Lydgate joins the pilgrims as they are about
to leave Canterbury and tells his tale as the first on the return journey. It is related to
Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* by its theme, ending where the Tale begins, and by many verbal
echoes. It is significant that there is no Chaucer among the pilgrims that Lydgate meets. He
seems to consider himself to be the new Chaucer!
Finally, Lydgate made a translation of *The Pilgrimage of Man* (from the French by
Deguileville) in 24,000 lines, and another in the 1430s of Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum
Illustrium*, *The Fall of Princes*, 36,000 lines about the misfortunes of famous persons
translated from a French version. At the beginning of the "Fall," Lydgate also claims Chaucer
as his teacher (master):

My master Chaucer, with his fresh comedies,
Is dead, alas, chief poet of Breteyne,
That whilom made full pitous tragedies;
The fall of princes he did also complain,
As he that was of making sovereign,   250
Whom all this land should of right preferre
Sith of our language he was the lodesterre...

And semblably as I have told toforn,
My master Chaucer did his businesse,
And in his daies hath so well him born,
Out of our tongue t'avoiden all rudenesse,
And to reform it with colours of sweetnesse;
Wherefore let us give him laud and glory

And put his name with poetis in memory.

Robert Henryson

The man whom many consider the finest poet of the century, Robert Henryson, lived not in England but in Scotland. Little is known of his life. He may have been born around 1424, and died before 1505; he seems to have been a schoolmaster. He wrote a series of splendid beast-fables, *The Testament of Cresseid*, and *Orpheus and Eurydice*. He was influenced by Chaucer, and the "Testament" was printed as the sixth book of *Troilus and Criseyde* in early editions.

The Testament of Cresseid is the work for which he is most famed, telling how Cresseid ended her life in misery. In a prologue he describes how he is sitting in his room by the fire in winter after seeing Venus in the evening sky. He gives himself a drink "my spirits to comfort" and begins to read Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Then he says he took up another book (his own poem?) in which he found the story of the death of Cresseid (not told by Chaucer, of course):

Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?
Nor I wait nocht gif this narratioun
Be authoreist, or fengeit of the new
Be sum poeit, throw his inventioun
Maid to report the lamentatioun
And wofull end of this lustie Crisseid,
And quhat distres scho thollit, and quhat deid.

(Who knows if all that Chaucer wrote was true? And I don't know if this story is authentic, or newly composed by some poet, designed by his own imagination to tell of the lamentations and sorrowful end of lively Crisseid, of the distress she suffered, and all that she did.)

Henryson tells how Crisseid is abandoned by Diomede, and becomes a whore among the Greeks, then goes to her father Calchas who is in charge of Venus's temple. There she regrets her service of Cupid (Love) and renounces him. She has a vision of the gods, who decide to punish her with loss of beauty and love. On waking, she finds she has become a leper. She slips out of the house and goes to live in the hospital outside the town. Here she laments her loss in a "Complaint." One day the soldiers of Troy come riding home after fighting the Greeks, Troilus among them. The lepers call out for alms: (*spelling modernized*)

Then to their cry noble Troilus took heed,   495
Having pity, near by the place gan pass
Where Crisseid sat, not knowing what she was.

Then upon him she cast up both her eyne,
And with one blink it came into his thought
That he sometime her face before had seen,   500
But she was in such plight he knew her not;
Yet then her look into his mind it brought
The sweet visage and amorous blenking   (*looks*)
Of fair Crisseid, sometime his awin darling.   (*own*)

They do not recognize one another, though Troilus finds himself trembling with love! He throws a purse full of gold and jewels into her lap in memory of Crisseid and rides on. She asks the other lepers who it was, and one tells her it was Troilus. She collapses, lamenting "O false Crisseid and true knight Troilus!" She writes her testament (will) leaving everything to the lepers, except for a ring that Troilus once gave her that she sends back to him, then she dies. Hearing of what has happened, Troilus has a brief comment: "I can no more; She was untrue and woe is me therefore." The poem concludes that "some say" he made a tomb for her; the poet ends by exhorting ladies not to mix love with false deception.

The pathos of this revision has always been admired. Almost all of Henryson's works are dark, overshadowed with death and doom. In most of them all that is possible is for people to consent to their fate and die with dignity. In particular, the beasts in the fables are a sign that human beings have chosen to live in ways that are no longer human. The tone of these poems is worthy of Chaucer, although different from his because more sombre. The spelling, and some of the vocabulary, makes them a little difficult to read, which is a pity.

William Dunbar

Usually linked with Henryson is the other "Scottish Chaucerian" William Dunbar (?1456-?1513) who was a priest and a poet at the Scottish court. Dunbar's poems show a lively spirit, most famously in his alliterating "Tretis of the Two Married Women and the Widow" which seems to have links with Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Prologue" in its blunt portrayal of female sexual skills. The poet reports how he overheard three women talking together about their relationships with men, one Midsummer's Night: *(the spelling is modernized)*

(The last to speak is the widow:)
Now am I a widow, I wise and well am at ease;
I weep as I were woeful, but well is me for ever;
I busk as I were baleful, but blithe is my heart;
My mouth it makes mourning, and my mind laughs;
My cloaks they are careful in colour of sable,
But courtly and right curious my corse is there under:
I droop with a dead look in my dull habit,
As with man's deal I had done for days of my life.
When that I go to the church, clad in cair weid,   (*sad clothes*)
As fox in a lamb's fleece fain I my cheer;
Then lay I forth my bright book abroad on my knee,
With many lusty letter illumined with gold,
And draw my cloak forwards over my face quite,
That I may spy, unspied, a space me beside.
Full oft I blink by my book, and blynis of devotion,
To see what barn is best brawned or broadest in shoulders,
Or forged is most forcfully to furnish a banquet
In Venus' chamber, valiantly, without vain ruse:
And as the new moon all pale, oppressed with change,
Kythis quhilis her clear face through clouds of sable,   (*peeps*)
So geek I through my cloaks, and cast kind looks
To knights and to clerks and courtly persons.
When friends of my husband beholds me afar

I have a water-sponge for wa, within my wide cloaks,
Then wring I it full whilily and wet my cheeks,
With that waters mine eyes and welters down tears.
Then say they all that sit about, 'See ye not, alas,
Yon listless lady so loyally she loved her husband:
Yon is a pity to imprint in a prince's heart,
That such a pearl of pleasance should yon pain dre!'   (*endure*)
(...)
But with my fair calling I comfort them all.
For he that sits me next, I nip on his finger;
I serve him on the other side on the same fashion;
And he that behind me sits, I hard on him lean;
And him before, with my foot fast on his I stamp;
And to the barns far but sweet blinks I cast.
To every man in special speak I some words
So wisely and so womanly, which warm their hearts.
There is no living lad so low of degree
That shall me love unloved, I am so loik hearted;   (*warm*)
And if his lust so be lent into my lyre quite
That he be lost or with me lie, his life shall not danger.
I am so merciful in mind...

   The poem ends with the narrator's question to his (male) audience: "Which of these wanton women that I have described would you choose for your wife, if you had to marry one of them?"
   Dunbar is also reputed for a more serious poem, written when he was sick, the "Lament for the Makaris" (in Scotland the poet is known as a "maker," a translation of the Greek word *poet*):

I that in health was and gladness
Am troubled now with great sickness
And feebled with infirmity;
  Timor mortis conturbat me.

Our pleasance here is all vain glory
This false world is but transitory
The flesh is brittle, the Feind is sly;
  Timor mortis conturbat me.

The state of man does change and vary
Now sound, now sick, now blithe, now sorry,
Now dansand merry, now like to die;
  Timor mortis conturbat me.

No state in earth here standes sicker   (*certain*)
As with the wind waves they wicker
Waves this world's vanity;
  Timor mortis conturbat me.

On to the death go all Estates

Princes, Prelates, and Potestates   (*powers*)
Both rich and poor of all degree;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

He takes the knights in to field
Enarmed under helm and shield
Victor he is at all melee;   (*combat*)
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

That strange unmerciful tyrant
Takes on the mother's breast suckand
The babe full of benignity;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

He takes the champion in the stour   (*army*)
The captain closed in the tower
The lady in bower full of beauty;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

He spares no lord for his puissance   (*strength*)
No clerk for his intelligence
His awful stroke may no man flee;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

Art-magicians and astrologes,
Rhetors, logicians, and theologes,
Them helpes no conclusions sly;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

In medicine the most practicions,
Leeches, surgeons, and physicians
Themselves from death may not supply;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

I see that makers among the live
Play here their pageant then go to grave
Spared is not their faculty;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

He has done pitously devour
The noble Chaucer, of makers flower,
The monk of Bury, and Gower, all three;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.
(*there follow 10 stanzas naming many forgotten poets*)

In Dumfermline he has done roune   (*whispered*)
With Master Robert Henryson
Sir John the Ross embraced has he;
     Timor mortis conturbat me.

(...)

Since he has all my brethren ta'en
He will not long me leave alone
On force I must his next pray be;
        Timor mortis conturbat me.

Since for the dead remede is none
Best is that we for death dispone
After our death that live may we;
        Timor mortis conturbat me.

Charles d'Orléans

In England, the first long sequence of formal love poems to be composed in English was written in the 1430s by the French prince Charles d'Orléans, who was a prisoner held hostage by the English from 1415 until 1440. Charles d'Orléans is the most noted French lyric poet of the century, but his English poems are only preserved in a single manuscript and were probably not known to more than a few people. The sequence is tragic, the Lady Beauty (who may have been his wife) dies:

Ballade

Alas, Death, who made thee so hardy
To take away the most nobil princess
Which comfort was of my life and body,
My weal, my joy, my pleasure and richess?
But syn thou hast biraft me my mistress,
Take me, poor wretch, her silly servitur;   (*servant*)
For lever had I hastily forto die
Than languish in this careful tragedy
In pain, sorrow, and woeful adventure.

Alas, n'had she of each good thing plenty,
Flowering in youth and in her lustiness,
I beseech God a-cursed mote thou be,
O false death, so full of great rudeness.
Haddest thou her taken yet in unweldyness   (*ill-health*)
As had thou not y-done so great rigour,
But thou, alack, has taken her hastily
And welaway has left me pitously
In pain, sorrow, and woeful adventure.

Alas, alone am I without company.
Farewell, my lady, farewell my gladness;
Now is the love parted twixt you and me.
Yet what for then I make you here promise
That with prayers I shall of great largess
Here serve you dead, while my life may endure,

Without forgetting sloth or sluggardy,
Bewailing oft your death with weeping eye,
In pain, sorrow, and woeful adventure.

O God, that lordest every creature,
Grant of thy grace thy right forto measure
On all the offenses she hath done wilfully
So that the good soul of her now not lie
In pain, sorrow, and woeful adventure.

Later in the same manuscript, we find him wooing another lady in a second sequence, but without success!

All through the fifteenth century, lyric poetry also continued to be written in the older styles, although there are some anonymous poems of the later 15th century that seem to point forward to the wittier works of the Elizabethans:

When nettles in winter bear roses red,
And thornes bear figges naturally,
And broomes bear apples in every mead,
And laurels bear cherries in the croppes (*treetops*) so high,
And oakes bear dates so plentously,
And leeks give honey in their superfluence,
    Then put in a woman your trust and confidence.

When whitings walk in forests, harts for to chase,
And herrings in parks horns boldly blow,
And flounders moor-hens in fens embrace,
And gurnards shoot rolions out of a cross-bow,   (*fish*)
And greegeese ride in hunting the wolf to overthrow,
And sperlings run with spears in harness to defence,   (*smelts*)
    Then put in a woman your trust and confidence.

When sparrows build churches and steeples high,
And wrens carry sackes to the mill,
And curlews carry clothes, horses for to dry,
And sea-mews bring butter to the market to sell,
And wood-doves wear wood-knives, thieves to kill,
And griffins to goslings do obedience,
    Then put in a woman your trust and confidence.

When crabs take woodcocks in forests and parks,
And hares been taken with sweetness of snails,
And camels with their hair take swallows and perches,
And mice mow corn with waving of their tails,
When ducks of the dunghill seek the Blood of Hailes,
When shrewd wives to their husbands do no offence,
    Then put in a woman your trust and confidence.

In some poems we even seem to find the influence of Petrarch, with the oxymorons (union of opposites) that Shakespeare's Romeo later enjoyed using:

I shall say what inordinate love is:
The furiosity and woodness of mind,
An instinguible burning, faulting bliss,   (*inextinguishable*)
A great hunger insatiate to find,
A dulcet ill, an evil sweetness blind,
A right wonderful sugared sweet error,
Without labour rest, contrary to kind,
Or without quiet to have huge labour.

Sir Thomas Malory

It seems that readers continued to enjoy the older popular romances, since many of the manuscripts preserved date from the 15th century even when the works were written earlier. New romances also continued to be written, at least in the early years of the 15th century. While in France prose had become the normal medium for romances in the 13th century, it is only in the 15th century that English writers begin to dare to use prose to tell stories. The only major prose narrative of this period is that usually known after its last section as *Le Morte D'Arthur*, a huge (700 printed pages) adaptation of all the main Arthurian romances completed in 1470. The sources are mostly French prose romances, but Malory also consulted English verse romances, such as a stanzaic *Mort Artu* written around 1400.

Who Sir Thomas Malory was is not at all certain. The text of the book tells us that it was written in prison and there is a knight of that name who was charged with violence, theft, and rape some time after 1450. He died in 1471.

The title is inaccurate, since the book unifies the tales told in eight major French romances: 1) Arthur and Lucius; 2) Merlin; 3) Lancelot; 4) Sir Gareth; 5) Tristan; 6) The Grail; 7) Lancelot and Guinevere; 8) The Death of Arthur.

There is one surviving manuscript, that long remained unknown. Caxton published a printed version in 1485 by which the work became well-known, the only large-scale Arthurian narrative in English. In the 19th century, Tennyson based his *Idylls of the King* on parts of it. The style is influenced by that of the English verse romances, and has been much praised, although it is not sure that it had much influence on the later development of English prose. The last pages are the most often read:

(*The great battle is over, Sir Mordred is dead, Arthur gravely wounded, Sir Bedivere seems to be the only other survivor. Arthur speaks to Bedivere*):

'Take thou here Excalibur my good sword and go with it to yonder water's side; and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water and come again and tell me what thou sawest there.'

'My lord,' said Sir Bedivere, 'your commandment shall be done, and I will lightly bring you word again.'

So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all precious stones. And then he said to himself, 'If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss.' And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree and so as soon as he might he came again unto the King and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword into the water.

'What saw thou there?' said the King.

'Sir,' he said, 'I saw nothing but waves and winds.'

'That is untruly said of thee,' said the King. 'And therefore go thou lightly again and do my commandment; as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in.'

Then Sir Bedivere returned again and took the sword in his hand. And yet him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword. And so eft he hid the sword and returned again and told the King that he had been at the water and done his commandment.

'What sawest thou there?' said the King.

'Sir,' he said, 'I saw nothing but waters wap and waves wan.'

'Ah, traitor unto me and untrue,' said King Arthur, 'now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that hast been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of this sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee I shall slay thee mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead.'

Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and so he went to the water's side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts and threw the sword as far into the water as he might. There came an arm and a hand above the water and took it and clutched it, shook it thrice and brandished; then vanished away the hand with the sword into the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the King and told him what he saw.

'Alas,' said the King, 'help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried overlong.'

Then Sir Bedivere took the King upon his back and so went with him to that water's side. When they were at the water's side, even fast by the bank hoved a little barge with many fair ladies in it; among them all was a queen; and they all had black hoods and they all wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur.

'Now put me into that barge,' said the King; and so he did softly. There received him three ladies with great mourning, and so they set them down. In one of their laps King Arthur laid his head, then the queen said, 'Ah, my dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas this wound on your head hath caught overmuch cold.' And anon they rowed fromward the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go froward him.

Then Sir Bedivere cried and said, 'Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?'

'Comfort thyself,' said the King, 'and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in. For I must into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear nevermore of me, pray for my soul.'

But ever the queen and ladies wept and shrieked that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge he wept and wailed and so took the forest, and went all that night.

(...)

Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place. And men say that he shall come again and he shall win the Holy Cross. Yet I will not say that it shall be so, but rather I will say, Here in this world he changed his life. And many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: *Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rexque futurus* (Here lies Arthur, the once and future king).

Renaissance Humanism

While the 15th century in England appears as a time of decline in creative energy in literature, of confusion and conflict in society, the same years were witnessing in Italy,

particularly, tremendous intellectual ferment and intense confrontation. Out of the work of the 15th century arose reflexions that opened the way to the modern world. It is only possible here to indicate a few of the names and philosophical points involved; without these, though, no understanding of the evolution of modern Western thought would be possible.

The most notable names are those of Nicolas of Cusa (Cusanus, 1401-1464), Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). What must be remembered is that the word 'philosophy' at this time covered almost everything that could be studied. A history of Renaissance Philosophy must discuss Logic, Language, Natural Science, Moral Philosophy, Political theory, Psychology (the soul), Metaphysics (the divine), as well as theories of knowledge, of poetry, and of history. The process begun by these men in the 15th century continues on into the 17th, it is still with us today.

One starting-point for the centrality of Man (in the generic sense of the individual human person) in Renaissance thought is to be found in **Petrarch**'s realization, expressed in his *De vita solitaria* (1346), that the time had come "to reveal man to himself once more." The supreme nobility of being human could only be found in man's nature as God's creation, the "image of God." That divine origin united all, and was the origin of the moral obligation to be each at the service of the common good. At the same time, Petrarch found the finest portrayal of active human dignity in the wisdom (*sapientia*) contained in the ancient writers of classical Rome.

Saint Anselm

Other starting-points also exist; Augustine and the mainly Platonic ideas derived from his writings is certainly one. St Anselm (1033-1109) was for forty years a monk in Normandy, then became Archbishop of Canterbury; one of his works, *Proslogion* (1077-8), contains the famous phrase, *Fides quaerens intellectum* (Faith in search of understanding). The Augustinianism of Anselm led him to see that God can only be God, by definition -- *id quod nihil maius cogitari potest* (that than which no greater can be conceived), a perfection of Being that is not open to proof or disproof by human reason. Instead, coming to knowledge of this perfection in Faith, man is invited to achieve likeness with the Perfect by following the path of human perfection. A vital part of human perfection is the use of the mind God has given, and the highest work the human mind can perform is to find "necessary reasons" for faith, arguments by which the human mind becomes aware of itself knowing a truth that it cannot contain.

In response to the contemporary challenges of doubt and disbelief, Anselm wrote his *Cur Deus homo* (Why God became man) (1095-8), in the same perspectives; that God became man is the incomprehensible heart of Christian faith, yet it is the task of humans to strive to comprehend that faith so that others in turn can believe what at first seems incredible. Anselm's method is that termed "natural theology," in which the human mind works according to its own rules, without being initially bound by any other authority. In this way old formulations are freely challenged in a radical way.

Scholasticism

In the 13th century, though, the triumph of Aristotle in the universities was such that for a time it seemed that his writings, or some of them, were identical with the Christian faith, and offered a structure of terms with which it was possible to codify all human knowledge as

well. At the heart of the Scholastics' reading of Aristotle was the conviction that knowledge of God's nature lay beyond human understanding. "We can know that God is, but not what he is," said **Aquinas**. Faith is faith, transmitted by authority, man can only assent, not know. Metaphysics is not a science of God, but of being in general, God figuring only as the First Cause.

Raimon Lull

Yet there were other currents. Raimon Lull (1232-1316) was born in the Mediterranean island of Majorca, which like Spain and Sicily was mainly Christian but still partly Arab-Islamic, while many Jews also lived there. Because of this background, he became concerned to find a way of presenting the Christian Gospel to the Moslems and the Jews, to all men, and instead of studying Scholasticism in Paris he learned Arabic, until he had become more skilled in Arabic than in Latin.

At the heart of the 280 works Lull wrote on every kind of topic is his search for *Ars inveniendi veritatem* (The way to find the truth). This became the centre of his life's quest, he kept revising it, and changed the name into *Ars generalis*. He hoped to lay the foundations of a general science (knowledge) which would be acceptable to and be capable of including every particular science. At the centre of his work is the human mind thinking God in a superlative act, beyond sense-knowledge and reason-knowledge. A legend says he died after being stoned by a Moslem mob while preaching in North Africa when past eighty. His teaching seemed to have been died with him; certainly the scholastics condemned it. But in the early 15th century his ideas touched some thinkers at the university of Padua, part of the region governed by Venice.

Venice, like Majorca, was in touch with the Arab world, it had a large Jewish population, and it was the Western port at the end of the Silk Road with contacts reaching beyond Byzantium as far as the Mongols. It was open to the East, and familiar with cultures quite unlike its own. Here in the early 15th century people began to be interested in exploring the full dimensions of the dignity of Man. Petrarch had lived there, and after 1400 Venice and Padua were centres for the study of Greek science and poetry. Scholasticism had a pessimistic view of Man, based on the doctrine of the Fall; here scholars returned to a classical view of human integrity, sensibility, creativity. In this milieu, Lull's ideas were spread by Catalan scholars from the later 14th century on.

Nicolas of Cusa

In 1417 the young Nicolas Krebs, born in the village of Cues in Germany and therefore called in Latin *Cusanus* (of Cusa), came to study Church law in Padua. He stayed there until 1423, and became a noted thinker. He was made a cardinal in 1448 and a bishop in 1450. In some ways his writings anticipate those of Kant. His most famed, perhaps, is *De docta ignorancia* (about learned ignorance): "the better a man knows his own ignorance, the greater his learning will be." Here he explores the great paradox: all human thinking about God is symbolic, metaphorical, yet God is in Himself infinite and therefore infinitely beyond any metaphor. "There is no end to symbolisms, since no symbolism is so close that there cannot always be a closer one." Yet the infinite is always utterly beyond our mind's grasp, only vaguely suggested in the better images, which are found in paradoxical enigmas that Nicolas calls *coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of contraries). So why not give up, say that there can be no knowledge? Because of a hunger of the mind that he calls "wonder" that

gives rise to "wanting-to-know." In other words, the human mind can never stop seeking God, always straining at its real limits in order to become more truly itself. God has created Man to know him, and wants to be known, the result is that Man at his most truly human cannot stop pursuing knowledge of God, knowledge of Truth, striving for the infinite.

The first step Nicolas suggests is to know that we cannot know, to know that we are not God. But then he invites us to try to put ourselves in God's place, through our faculties of wonder. Beyond all the contradictions and conflicts, Nicolas sensed that there must be a final unity. It is astonishing to find him preaching, in 1430, that all the different names for God used by Greeks, Latins, Germans, Turks, Slavs, Saracens, and Ethiopians are basically reconciled in one Name. Later, in a similar way, he came to realize that Christ is the bond of reconciliation between the infinite God and his infinite Creation (in the *De Docta Ignorantia*). Christ shows us what God is and what Man is, and they are one and the same! This way of thinking is, again, that of natural theology (Anselm was vital for him) and essentially guided by Plato. It was and remains of tremendous importance.

Nicolas stands at the threshold of what is now called the Renaissance. Before Marsilio Ficino made human aspiration to God's infinitude the centre of Renaissance thought, several disasters had to happen. In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks, the Greek Empire of Byzantium ended. The political situation in Italy became violent, hope of Italian unity dimmed. In 1464 Cosimo de' Medici died. The humanists turned from direct political involvement to contemplation of pure ideas, studying and teaching, in the hope that powerful princes might like to hear their thoughts from time to time.

Marsilio Ficino

Ficino, one of the first modern thinkers marked by that melancholy that Milton's *Il Penseroso* suggests is necessary for deep thought, chose Platonism as the key to meaning. In a villa outside of Florence that he called the Florentine Academy, he translated into Latin all the works of Plato, publishing them in 1484, almost all of them in Latin for the first time. He wrote commentaries on them, too. Yet before this he translated the Orphic Hymns, and works thought to have been written by an Egyptian sage, Hermes Trismegistus. For Ficino believed that Plato was the inheritor of an "ancient theology" found in these works, in Pythagoras and Zoroaster. This totally unhistorical mixture of occultisms spurred the Renaissance's interest in magic and supernatural marvels.

For Ficino, though, this allowed him to see in ancient philosophy another preparation for Christianity, equal to the Old Testament. In order to complete his syncretistic scheme, he translated the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the great Alexandrian Neo-Platonist of the 3rd century, which he published in 1492. Ficino's vision was "a Christian reading of a Plotinian reading of Plato" and he expressed it in his own major philosophical work, the *Theologia platonica* (*Platonic Theology*, 1474).

Ficino's favorite direction is upward, ascent is always the main image for the human soul's movement towards God in this kind of Platonic mysticism. Ascent towards the One ends in unity with the One; only do I still exist as an individual identity at that moment? Is there an immortal human soul/identity? For Ficino, there must be, since Man in the Renaissance sense is a projection of *ego* and *ego* knows no limits in its aspiring:

> We have also said that man strives to rule over himself and all other creatures, men as well as animals; and that he is unable to bear any kind of slavery. Even if he is forced to serve, he hates his lord, since he serves against his nature. In everything he strives with all his strength to overcome others; and he is ashamed to be defeated even in

small matters and the most trifling games, as if this were against the natural dignity of man.

As for our desire for victory, we can easily recognize the immeasurable splendor of our soul from the fact that even dominion over this world will not satisfy it, if after having subdued this world, it learns that there is still another which it has not yet subdued. Thus when Alexander heard... that there are innumerable worlds, he exclaimed: How miserable am I who have not yet subdued even one world. Thus man wants neither superior, nor equal, and he does not suffer that anything be excluded from his rule. This condition belongs to God only. Hence man desires the condition of God.

Pico della Mirandola

Ficino's pupil and friend, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94) added the mysteries of the Jewish *cabala* (occult mysticism) to the "ancient theology" of Ficino and had the same goal of reconciling all doctrines. When he was only twenty-three, in 1486, Pico proposed to defend 900 ideas or theses in Rome during public hearings. The Pope forbade it, but the text Pico prepared as his introductory lecture survived, it is known as the *Oratio de dignitate hominis* (Oration on the Dignity of Man) and is a key text in Renaissance thought.

For Pico, the search for truth in philosophy is a form of "emulation." This word implies strong competition and rivalry in the upward quest for the highest possible form of vision, it allows us to indulge in unlimited intellectual ambition. Pico retells the story of Genesis in order to justify his vision of Man. God, he says, finished making the universe without Man in it, each thing in its proper place with an unvarying nature. Trees are content to be trees and cannot be anything else, likewise stones, clouds, and angels. Then, looking at it all, God "longed for there to be someone to think about the reason for such a vast work, to love its beauty, to wonder at its greatness." The creation was complete in itself, with no empty position in the **Chain of Being** for another creature. So God makes Man "of indeterminate form." Man alone has no pre-determined nature fixing his actions and thoughts; Pico's God tells Adam, "You are the moulder and maker of yourself; you may sculpt yourself into whatever shape you prefer."

Pico's Man, like Ficino's, aspires to be like God because he is like God in his radical freedom. Minds created to admire the Creator's work can never be satisfied with less than full possession of it; "let us compete with the angels in dignity and glory... until we come to rest in the bosom of the Father, who is at the top of the ladder." Here is Faust without the failure, and it is significant that Pico's Oration is only a fragment, not a finished work. The life and ideas of Pico were quickly known in England, thanks to Thomas More's translation of a *Life of Pico*. By Pico, the Renaissance learned that the human individual can enjoy unbounded empire, be it political, intellectual, poetic, or whatever. Marlowe's Tamburlaine says that his goal is "That perfect bliss and sole felicity, The sweet fruition of an earthly crown."

Yet the future did not confirm the optimistic vision, it denied it; ironically, Pico himself was the first to do so. Under the influence of the great Florentine Dominican **Savonarola**, he turned away from all these ideas, and returned to Aristotelian Thomism. In his *De ente et uno* (on being and the One) he affirms that the being of God is not knowable to us. He rejects the dynamics of intellectual knowledge, and the active conception of reality that marks Renaissance Platonism. Prospero seems to do very much the same thing at the end of *The Tempest*.

European political theory developed mainly in Italy, because of its unique independent city-states. Charlemagne had been crowned in Rome in 800 as the first of a new line of Emperors, and although the Emperors had their throne in Germany, at Aix-la-Chapelle/Aachen, they claimed to rule over Italy as well. In the 12th century, Bologna and the other universities were studying the *Codex* of Roman laws brought together by **Justinian**, in which the Emperor was described as "lord of the whole world."

Yet in the same period, most of Italy's major cities were establishing themselves as independent communes, electing one man to control the administration of the town for a limited time, with a fixed salary. These cities were republican, while the kings of northern Europe each saw themselves in the Christian imperial mould: "a kind of image on earth of the divine Majesty" (John of Salisbury, 1159). Thinkers referred to St Augustine and said that hereditary princes were needed to "repress the wicked, to reward the good," and to uphold God's laws. Monarchical government was seen more as a punishment for sin than as an ideal source of human community.

In 1260, Aristotle's *Politics* was first translated into Latin and at once **Thomas Aquinas** began to write a commentary on it, in a quite new tone: "to live a social and political life together is altogether natural to mankind... living in a city is living in a perfect community, one that is capable of supplying all the necessities of life." Aquinas pinpoints "peace" as the most important value of social life; when there is peace, each citizen can live well, in a truly human way.

Aristotle was writing in Greece, where city-states were common, but in discussing the best form of government he mentions monarchy, aristocracy, and *politia* (where the body of citizens act for the common good), suggesting that the very best will perhaps be a combination of the three. Aquinas, as an Italian, knew and respected the structure of the autonomous city-state, unknown in northern Europe. He still considered that a virtuous monarchy was best, not for any religious reason, but because he saw greater peace and prosperity in kingdoms. The princes Aquinas has in mind, though, are elected mayors, who have to rule surrounded by aristocratic and popular checks and balances: a system "in which all the citizens are involved in public affairs, not merely as electors of their rulers but as potential members of the government themselves."

By 1300 writers were referring to the form of government practiced in **Venice** as a model of its kind, and this reference to Venice continued throughout the Renaissance, since it alone never came under the control of dictatorial *signori* but remained a republic, with the name *Serenissima* indicating the great peace thought to reign there. In Venice a Duke (*Doge*) was elected, there were 400 nobles and gentry who debated in public, and forty leading citizens formed a council.

Out of this evolves the vital idea that the law-maker and holder of sovereignty is not the monarch (who then remains above the law) but the people taken as a whole (*universitas*) who retain even the power to remove the ruler at any time. In 1324 **Marsilius of Padua**'s *Defensor Pacis* explores all of these themes, rejecting at the same time the absolute powers claimed by the Pope. The Church, he says, must be under the control of the local citizens, like every city.

The underlying constitutional question emerged in the Church itself, first in 1378, with the Great Schism when two rival popes were elected by rival groups of cardinals, and then in 1409, when three popes claimed authority over the Church. The question was urgent: could the bishops gathered in a General Council depose a Pope? In 1414 the **Council of Constance** declared that it could, that the Christian people as a whole were a *universitas* charged with making the laws, and choosing its leaders. Nicolas of Cusa supported the same

idea at the Council of Basel in 1433, as did the French thinker of Paris, Jean Gerson. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the rise of royal absolutism in Europe saw a rejection of all such ideas, whether applied to the Pope or to a temporal monarch.

If peace was desirable, the late 13th century in Italy found that civic peace could only be kept by having in each city a family that provided a hereditary ruler. Otherwise the powerful clans were in endless conflict. Almost all the Italian cities were under the power of such *signori* before 1300, the only great exceptions being Venice and Florence, but Florence did not survive long. Dante describes Italy as being "full of tyrants." In a reaction against this fragmentation Italy experienced the quarrel between the **Guelphs** (the Pope's party) and the **Ghibellines** (the Emperor's party), in an attempt to find a unifying focus. Mostly, though, Italians were grateful that the *signori* had brought peace to the faction-torn cities.

There was a withdrawal from democratic ideals; and the influence of Petrarch, together with some ideas of St Augustine, led to a humanist view that with strong princes, it was now possible for intellectuals to enjoy *otium* (leisure) in writing, thinking, and praying. The active life lost ground to the contemplative life. The humanists concentrated on the great writers of imperial Rome: the poems of Horace and Virgil, the histories of Livy and Sallust, the moral works of Juvenal, Seneca and Cicero (their favorite). The great civic ideals they found in Rome were honour, glory and fame, the human and worldly pride that the Church had always denounced, Thomas Aquinas wrote, "The desire for human glory destroys any magnanimity of character."

Cicero offered the idea of *virtus* (not fully translated by the English word virtue) as the source of all human glory by saying "glory necessarily follows from a love of *virtus*." **Petrarch** and the other humanists, following the writings of Cicero, see the highest sign of *virtus* in the justice of a Prince's reign and explain that justice means rendering to each his due, ruling in good faith (*fides*), with clemency and generosity. This they argue, following Cicero, will ensure the Prince his people's love and that is the only guarantee of national security and lasting personal glory and fame. By contrast, the humanists had nothing to say about when the use of military force might be justified, whereas the Scholastics had much to say on the "just war" in an attempt to prevent unjust uses of violence. The humanists also failed completely to see the need for a proper constitutional balance of power between Prince and people.

During the 15th century, Venice the *Serenissima* became the focus of much attention; its peace was explained by its unique system of free government. Similar praise was given to the republican independence of Florence. This latter was defended by great military power, against outside enemies, and the spread of power within the community, to prevent internal subversion. By the early 1400s, **Leonardo Bruni** and other humanists were attacking Petrarch for his ideal of *otium*, arguing that "*virtus* is always to be seen in action." Philosophy is to be lived in the heart of political life, shunning solitude, concerned with the good of the community as a whole. Bruni also tries to define more strictly the moral and Christian qualities needed by any Prince, specifying prudence, courage, and temperance.

Out of this, the 15th century saw a rise of literature about the nature of true nobility in the leading citizens, concluding that it is a matter of *virtus* alone. The Scholastics, though, had argued that true nobility in public servants was only possible if they were members of a rich family; they were following Aristotle who saw that public service took up a lot of time, so that it was only possible for rich people of inherited fortune. This the humanists rejected.

The main difficulty was that all the other cities of Italy were more and more totally under the rule of absolutist hereditary *signori*. Many humanists began to write manuals designed to give advice to their rulers on how to rule well. Such books also began to offer advice to the "courtiers" who had now replaced the democratic councils in the decision-making processes; this culminated in the famous *Il libro del cortegiano* by **Baldassare**

Castiglione, written early in the 16th century and published in 1528. In all these works the main tone is idealistic. The prince is advised to cultivate majesty and *virtus*, personal christian virtues and the rule of justice. Again, they specify the *fides* Cicero demanded, insisting that a Prince must keep his word and be perfectly honest, even when dealing with enemies. The people's love will ensure peace; force and fear are excluded as means of governing.

In Florence, **Cosimo de'Medici** died in 1464; the citizens hoped that now they might return to more republican ways after years of autocracy, but in 1469 **Lorenzo de'Medici** gained control of the city and in 1480 set up a Council composed entirely of his own men. Faced with this, certain realists among the humanists began to give up republican ideals and write in praise of monarchy. Once again the scholar's *otium* so esteemed in Platonism was in favour, and Pico's *Oratio* of 1486 spoke with scorn of those who devote themselves to public affairs. For the idealist platonicians, the pursuit of Truth required detachment from civic and political concerns. Finally, Plato's image of the philosopher-king of the *Republic* could be applied to Lorenzo, the man who took all the burdens of active life on himself. With such a perspective, the prince could even be set above all laws, the last step towards absolutism.

Niccolo Machiavelli

Lorenzo de'Medici died in 1492, the French invaded Italy, the Medici family was exiled, the great Dominican Savonarola led the restoration of republican Florence until he was burned as a heretic in 1498. Then in 1512 the Medicis regained certain powers, without a firm basis of popular or institutional support. By the end of 1513 **Niccolo Machiavelli** (1469-1527) had finished his *Il principe* (The Prince), the most famous work of Renaissance political thought.

This book gives itself the usual advice-book goal of helping the prince *mantenere lo stato* (maintain the state) by establishing "such a form of government as will bring honour to himself and benefit to the whole body of his subjects." Machiavelli dedicated it to the Medicis, yet he had for a long time been an active republican, and when he wrote he was enjoying the forced *otium* of retirement in his home in the country near Florence. He certainly hoped to get a job, yet he did not write in self-interest and while he was writing *The Prince* he was composing his *Discourses* on the Roman historian Livy, in which he expresses strong republican opinions. The *Prince* is not the written to justify absolute monarchy but to explore the limits of personal power in the State.

The ruler, he begins, must be *prudente e virtuoso*; the words virtuous and virtuoso in English do not mean the same thing, and the second is closer to what Machiavelli advocates. The *vertu* that his ruler needs is skill, not morality. Machiavelli first contradicts the humanists by insisting that the prince must have a strong army, and not fear the use of force. Then he denies that a good ruler must be virtuous in his private life, unless the vice endangers his rule. In chapters 16-18 he examines the traditional ideals of justice, generosity, clemency, and faith, before denying their effectiveness: "there is such a great distance between how people live and how they ought to live, anyone who gives up doing what people in general do, in favour of doing what they ought to do, will find that he ruins rather than preserves himself." In discussing the old idea that a prince should be loved (chapter 17), he declares: "it is much safer for a prince to be feared than loved." In chapter 18, finally, he discusses the demand for *fides* and notes: "we see from experience in our own times that those princes who have done great things have been those who have set little store by the keeping of faith." The skillful ruler, then, "never departs from the ways of good as long as he can follow them, but knows how to embark on evil when necessary."

The most debated chapter in *The Prince* is chapter 18, here translated by George Bull:

How princes should honour their word

Everyone realizes how praiseworthy it is for a prince to honour his word and to be straightforward rather than crafty in his dealings; nonetheless contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who in the end have overcome those abiding by honest principles.

You must understand, therefore, that there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second. So a prince must understand how to make a nice use of the beast and the man...

So, as a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, he must learn from the fox and the lion; because the lion is defenseless against traps and a fox is defenseless against wolves. Therefore one must be a fox in order to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves. Those who simply act like lions are stupid. So it follows that a prudent ruler cannot, and must not, honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist. If all men were good, this precept would not be good; but because men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them. And no prince ever lacked good excuses to colour his bad faith... But one must know how to colour one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived.

There is one fresh example I do not want to omit. Pope Alexander VI never did anything, or thought of anything, other than deceiving men; and he always found victims for his deceptions. There never was a man capable of such convincing asservations, or so ready to swear to the truth of something, who would honour his word less. Nonetheless his deceptions always had the result he intended, because he was a past master in the art.

A prince, therefore, need not necessarily *have* all the good qualities I mentioned above, but he should certainly *appear* to have them. I would even go so far as to say that if he has these qualities and always behaves accordingly he will find them harmful; if he only appears to have them they will render him service. He should appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, kind, guileless, and devout. And indeed he *should* be so. But his disposition should be such that, if he needs to be the opposite, he knows how. You must realize this: that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which give men a reputation for virtue, because in order to maintain his state he is often forced to act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, of religion. So he should have a flexible disposition, varying as fortune and circumstances dictate. As I said above, he should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible, but he should know how to do evil, if that is necessary.

A prince, then, must be very careful not to say a word which does not seem inspired by the five qualities I mentioned earlier. To those seeing and hearing him, he should appear a man of compassion, of good faith, of integrity, kind and religious. And there is nothing so important as to seem to have this last quality. Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands; because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close touch with you. Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are....

The expression "the end justifies the means" may not be a full summary of Machiavelli's main idea in the *Prince*, but his insistence on realism and pragmatism is clear. Yet in the end he remains a democrat! For in the 17th chapter, where he discusses whether it is better for a prince to be loved or feared, his main theme is that a prince must do all he can to avoid being hated. That is to say, the ruler must always be conscious of how fragile his hold on power is, and how utterly dependant he is on the consent of his subjects. He may earn, or compel, that consent, but he can never despise it or rule without it.

Like many realists, Machiavelli was deeply pessimistic about human nature, and the best summary of his view of man comes in the *Discourses*: "all men are evil, and will always act out the wickedness in their hearts whenever they are given free scope." The terrible reputation as an advocate of immorality in government that Machiavelli gained in the years following his death is not deserved by what he actually wrote, his works were attacked without being read. In Elizabethan drama his name is synonymous with "diabolical," although in England the devil was called "Old Nick" before him. Yet the first English translation of *The Prince* was only published in 1640, and the book has never been as influential as its reputation would suggest.

Machiavelli had one major concern: to stimulate the rulers and people of Italy to wake up to the terrible dangers their land was facing, before it was too late. In this he very largely failed but he was prophetic in his understanding that the state has its own rules, and that "reasons of state" would in the end be widely recognized as a determining factor in government policy.

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