Individualism in the Early Italian Renaissance: Burden and Blessing

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Individualism in the Early Italian Renaissance: Burden and Blessing*

By way of prologue, I should like to underscore the impressionistic character of my historiographical and literary evidence. This inquiry is a perspective upon other scholarly perspectives, a view of other views, and as such treats a few chronicles, some prose and poetry, and some celebrated art of late medieval and renaissance Italy. The particular works mentioned have been selected because they were in themselves crucial to leading scholarly interpretative.

* This paper was presented at the Anglo-American Historical Conference in London in July 1970.

The present discussion does not consider the experiences of South Italy and Sicily. The exceptional nature of the culture of the South has been underscored by generations of scholars. In my particular case the materials consulted were chiefly prose, poetry, and chronicles; southern exemplars of these genres display notable differences from those of North and Central Italy. For instance, historical writing in Sicily lacks that high sensibility for 'social facts' that characterized so many of the North Italian chronicles. Cf. Gina Fasoli's Cronache medievali di Sicilia (Catania, 1950). Moreover, chroniclers focused upon the behavior of eminent personages from clergy and nobility, while il popolo played but a minor role. The emergence of the commoners serves to differentiate between the chronicles from South Italy and Sicily on the one hand, and Lombardy and Tuscany on the other. Of all the southern chroniclers only Michele da Piazza has an appreciation for social facts. Neither the histories of Saba Malaspina, the pseudo-Jamsilla, Bartolomeo di Neocastro, Nicola Speciale, nor Simone Lentini possess this sensibility. By the same token, literary developments displayed what one scholar has termed a 'desolante agnosticismo politico'. Cf. V. De Bartholomaeis' Primordi detta tirica d'arte in Itatia (Turin, 1943), p. 148. Another literary scholar, Folena, dwells upon the 'anti-storico' bias of the aristocratic lay culture of Sicily. The vernacular poetry of the South was of prime importance for the development of North Italian culture. What this verse lacked, however, was a sense of lyrical development and a 'true spiritual history'. When compared with Tuscan or Bolognese poets (Guido d'Arezzo and Guinizelli), the works of the Southerners seldom disclose a spiritual dialectic or have the intellectual movement of an internal history. Cf. Gianfranco Folena's chapter, 'Cultura e poesia dei Siciliani', in Storia della Letteratura Italiana, ed. E. Cecchi and N. Sapegno (Milan, 1965), pp. 273–316. Exceptions there are, of course: the canzone 'Ben m'e venuto prima cordoglienza' by Iacopo da Lentini is the most notable. For additional bibliography on the theme of medieval Italian historiography, see O. Capitani, 'Motivi e momenti di storiografia medioevale italiana', in Nuove questioni di storia medioevale (Milan, 1964), pp. 729–800.
Individuation of the culture of North and Central Italy during this time. Historical personages were chosen because their lives were also judged essential by scholars for an effective survey of this civilization.

A problem for any interpreter of late medieval or early renaissance Italy is the current imbalance in historical scholarship with its passion for economic and social history. Over the past years only modest interest has been displayed for the systematic increase of the small stock of psychological insights into the emotional characteristics of this period. For the most part, scholars have been satisfied to borrow psychological observations from a few historical classics when compelled to discuss emotional qualities of this age. This practice runs the serious risk of trivializing our understanding of the field. Hollow and mechanistic history is in prospect unless we are willing to advance new hypotheses and criticize the older sets of psychological generalizations.

My rather unventuresome assumption is that interpreters of the past must employ a psychology—no matter how informal or loosely held—when seeking for an appropriate context in which to place data. Few significant historical problems can be properly delineated without a full appreciation for the role of human emotion. A historian failing to register the contours of these emotions is liable to project past episodes onto a sterile screen where they will be as lifeless as a non-event in a Godard film or a Robbe Grillet novel. Specialized studies of Italy are legion, but few are devoted to psychological problems. Burckhardt and Huizinga do yeoman service, and yet more ample options should be available to the scholar.

When confronting Burckhardt’s view of the Renaissance, his concept

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2 Certainly a case can be made for dedicating historical studies to a variety of ends. One of these might well be the multiplication of alternate explanations, especially in the areas of human behavior where they are in short supply. In this type of endeavor we of course must recognize that the historian is concerned with the increase of possible explanations for past behavior and that his energies are devoted not ‘to narrating what really happened’, but rather to multiplying the store of possible explanations. The historian’s critical intelligence can be self-consciously directed toward rejection or acceptance of alternate explanations, the assumption being that the proper exercise of this faculty will bring him closer to that generalization capable of subsuming the largest quantity of data. If one, therefore, raises the question, can we ever know the thirteenth century? the answer would be, of course not, but we can know the reasons why we reject one explanation and accept another. In the area of psychological history the critical choice is too limited.

of individualism immediately engages our attention. Without entering the scholarly debate over this perilously protean notion, we can observe the extent to which the Swiss historian was influenced by nineteenth-century conceptions of human volition and the strength of man’s ego. Too influential were Schopenhauer’s doctrines concerning primacy of the will and the capacity of an individual to impose form, however fleeting, on the swirl of life. Burckhardt referred to Schopenhauer, not Aristotle, as ‘master of those who know’, viewing the assertion of brutal egoism as the hallmark of a renaissance civilization in which man’s will had dispelled illusion and forestalled chaos.

Certainly, one need not read extensively into modern psychology to recognize that nineteenth-century confidence in the self-assertive and sustaining force of the ego is not altogether defensible. Even if we grant Burckhardt his impulse and assume the existence of a historical moment when late medieval culture declined and man stood free from the womb of illusion, still we must reserve judgment as to the extent to which the individual suffered from loss of supportive life-styles and fantasies. What was the cost to the North Italian of the thirteenth century of the erosion of vital facets of his ceremonial identity? What was the price for the weakening of ritual-social ties in society or the slackening of sacramental bonds in politics? What public disorder and public grief ensued when the political landscape fell into disarray and the twin engines of salvation—empire and papacy—were seen to be in disrepair? Disappointment of messianic expectancies of course provoked frustration, while widespread diffusion of heterodox opinion threatened pious minds sustained by religious rite and hierarchy. If we agree with Burckhardt that a magic system did indeed begin to falter during the thirteenth century, then we must entertain the possibility that at that time certain traditional ego defenses proved less effective. Surely, our study of other cultures suggests that such changes can only produce anxiety. A world of deteriorating magic can be a most appropriate psychic setting for the beginnings of collective alienation. When Burckhardt’s insights into the

4 Bibliography on this theme is extensive, but see especially W. K. Ferguson, The Renaissance in Historical Thought (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), pp. 179–194; and W. Kaegi, Jacob Burckhardt (Basle, 1956), Vol. 3.

5 Writings on this subject are legion but a few are of particular interest: cf. R. Morghen, Medioevo Cristiano (Bari, 1953), pp. 212–286; R. Manselli, L’eresia del male (Naples, 1963), and his and other contributions in the volume Povertà e ricchezza nella spiritualità dei secoli XI e XII (Todi, 1969).
dissipation of illusion are placed in the context of twentieth-century psychology, we must confront the fact of psychic loss as well as of gain.

To illustrate we could construct a psychic balance sheet with two sets of entries: on the one side we would note the decline of the extended medieval clan with its consorteria, whereas on the other we could enter the emergence of the nuclear family of the Renaissance with its deepening affection for children and cherished domesticity. Chivalric worship of women recedes before the celebration of conjugal love. The communal ethos that conferred corporate identity on the citizen diminished before the rise of impartial territorial states. This erosion of a more intimate medieval community was accompanied by a more secure public identity and the legitimization of the quest for citizen fame. Family partnerships, the guild, and the tower society were no longer so sustaining; against this, however, we find the renaissance impulse to elevate to

6 From a methodological point of view the admonition of Federico Chabod is crucial: We must not confuse practical life with the life of the mind, or the day-to-day activities of man with his rational consciousness of these activities. Such a clear statement disposes of the naive disclaimer of the historian, who argues in the name of common sense that medieval practices differed not at all on the conscious level from those of the Renaissance. Our concern here is not with certain instinctual and fundamental passions but rather with their elevation to the status of a consciously articulated program of life. It is the programmatic that finds expression in the chronicle, the Tuscan lyric or fresco. To quote Chabod: 'Ever since the world began men in their everyday life have always obeyed certain instinctive and fundamental passions; and love and ambition, sensuality and the need for amusement, the desire for riches and the yearning for political power are peculiar to men of all ages and countries. Hence, if we had to reconstruct history in the light of such considerations we should be obliged to regard as equal and alike in their significance all the things that have happened from the times of the Egyptians and the Babylonians down to the present day, and history would become a grey blur in which we could no longer distinguish one epoch from another. But this is not so; for when we speak of historical "periods", of the classical world and the mediaeval world, of the Renaissance, of the Age of Enlightenment, of Romanticism, to what are we referring if not to political, moral and cultural ideas and the institutions in which those ideas have found expression—ideas and institutions which characterize individual epochs?' Cf. Chabod's *Machiavelli and the Renaissance* (New York, 1965), pp. 162–164. A telling correlation between Tuscan painting and literature is found in the sacralization of familial love and domesticity. Cf. E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 22–23; Francesco da Barberino, *Il trionfo d'amore*, ed. A. Zenatti (Catania, 1901), p. 36. Barberino is among the first of the European poets to lend spiritual validation to conjugal love. His forerunner in the area of prose may have been another North Italian, Albertano da Brescia, who also celebrated the sacred bond of familial love. Writing in the early thirteenth century he suggested the image employed by Barberino a century later when husband and wife were depicted as a single figure with two heads. See Albertano da Brescia, *Dei trattati morali* (Bologna, 1873), p. 266. For an effective treatment of the theme of chivalric love, see the recent work of René Nelli, *L'erotique des troubadours* (Toulouse, 1963), pp. 46, 175, 178, 250, 256, 264, 314.
a religious ritual the daily round of bourgeois activities. Psychic debits and credits can be paired: communal living against greater privacy; clan loyalty against dedication to the state; a rational theology against fideism; metaphysical certainty as opposed to historical knowledge; and, finally, the intimacy of a medieval town compared to the grandeur of a renaissance city.

In discussing the theme of individualism it is tempting to sentimentalize the medieval experience while monumentalizing its renaissance counterpart. Despite apparent psychic benefits gained by the individual from participation in a more personal communal society, he was less secure politically than the citizen of the renaissance state. Renaissance bureaucracy afforded greater legal protection to the individual; civil war with its mass exiling was not chronic. But the price exacted for this stability was high: renaissance territorial states intruded alarmingly into private realms of feeling. Vigorous criticism of public policy so evident in the Middle Ages was converted into veneration for the state. The promptings of Christian morality were dulled as claims of the state were advanced against those of conscience.

Another feature of altered sensibility to be entered on the psychic balance sheet concerned changes in the conception of history. The familiar thesis advanced by T. E. Mommsen and E. Panofsky contends that fourteenth-century Italy was the locus for a shift in historical consciousness culminating in a new awareness of self and place in the temporal continuum. Literati and early humanists were distanced from their immediate past by a radical feeling of discontinuity. Neither contemporary institutions nor princes and prelates were fit topics for dignified historical study—all they merited was satire. Personalities of the contemporary world lacked gravitas, and medieval accomplishments in metaphysics, logic, and science were ridiculed. Petrarch saw the thousand years since Rome’s decline as a dark interval separating him from the world of pristine Christianity and classical Rome. The church and

7 For a general discussion of these topics, see Richard Goldthwaite’s valuable study, Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence (Princeton, 1968).


9 T. E. Mommsen, ‘Petrarch’s Concept of the Dark Ages’, Speculum, xvii (1942), 226–242; E. Panofsky, ‘Renaissance or Renascences?’ Kenyon Review, vi (1944), 225, and his Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art (Stockholm, 1963), 1, 108–113. For a discussion of distancing from the present, see Petrarch’s introduction to his De viris illustribus, where he announces that contemporary princes furnish materials not (for) ‘historie sed satyre’.
empire of his day were equally removed and the corrupt Latin language of his century poisoned discourse and literature.

A feeling of disjunction became a datum for the history of consciousness. Since literati felt themselves cut off from the recent past at a moment when conviction was mounting that a new age had begun, conceptions of culture and self were in process of redefinition. This new awareness played between perception and reality so that the world might be experienced with novel subjectivity thus heightening the burden of self-consciousness. An instance of this was the poetry of Petrarch, so soon the vogue, describing the emotions nature evoked in the soul of a poet. This was a nature distanced from the poet, so that he could not depict it directly but only his reactions to it. So, too, renaissance history was narrated with an appreciation for the separation between the present and the immediate past; oratory and rhetoric also instructed men in the various forms for distancing themselves from audience and subject matter. In the arts confidence diminished in the possibility that sacral time and space could be replicated; in its stead emerged single point, man-made perspective. The very doctrine of *imitatio* suggests an awareness of separation. Over the next century forms evolved describing this condition, while the content of painting, literature, and philosophy served to make it tolerable. If one takes the message of early humanism to heart, one sees that the new forms adopted by figures such as Petrarch and Salutati housed a philosophy of consolation. These were but the

For a discussion of this text, see N. S. Struenver, *The Language of History in the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1970), pp. 79–81. Important revisions have been made by Carlo Calcaterra and Guido Martellotti based upon the chronology of De *viris illustribus*. We can now appreciate the fragility of Petrarch’s commitment to the ‘new concept of history’. The profound effects of his spiritual crisis of 1342 dispelled the even tenor of his dedication to the ideals of a republican Rome. Subsequent versions of the *De viris illustribus* disclose his mounting concern with the consequences of the stain of Adam’s fall on history. Petrarch’s spiritual travail adds another dimension to the problem of alienation and history in fourteenth-century intellectual circles. Cf. Hans Baron’s incisive discussion of the scholarship on this vital issue in *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 23–27.

10 For bibliography on this and other matters, see N. Sapegno’s chapter ‘Francesco Petrarcha’ in *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, ed. E. Cecchi and N. Sapegno (Milan, 1965), II, 187–313, but especially pp. 305–313.

11 Petrarch and Salutati are but two of the more talented exemplars of a trend toward the laicization of the priestly role. A recent assessment of Petrarch’s intellectual commitment maintains that ‘the most persistent pattern in [his] long career as a writer is his urge towards the cure of souls through exhortation’. Petrarch’s interest is ‘in the “cure of souls,”’ not their analysis: in the remedies for their ills, not their spiritual topography’. Cf. C. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness* (Chicago, 1970), i, p. 11. Francesco Tateo, in his
first of the literary lay confessors who would minister to the beleaguered souls of North Italian townsmen. In the cities of this region problems of identity and the burden of individuality could not be subordinated so readily to traditional patterns of chivalry and courtly life or ascetic restraint and mystic flight. But Petrarch and the humanists came after several centuries of transition; the psychic ground had been prepared so that loss of sustaining ritual, ceremony, and hierarchy could be endured.

I

Chabod’s influential discussion of realism and individualism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance conceals a special difficulty crucial for interpretation. Taking as exemplary of the medieval stance the chronicle of Acerbo Morena of Lodi, Chabod emphasizes only his tendency toward stock description of leading historical personages. Schematized and peopled by ideal types, this form of historical writing was realistic only in its particulars but never conceptually. Adherence to sensible reality remained emotional rather than intellectual, instinctual rather than premeditated: ‘The sensibility’, says Chabod, ‘is human and mundane; but the spirit is nourished by an inner life whose centre lies outside the earthly city and carnal humanity’. And yet it was exactly Acerbo’s awareness at mid-twelfth century of the need for increasing the dramatis personae of his chronicle that proves revealing. That Chabod ignores the fact that Acerbo was conscious of the need to go beyond the narrow bounds of medieval political typology in order to describe adequately the historical moment is telling. The chronicler was well aware that the traditional cast of historical characters was too limited for an effective narration of complex political life in the age of the Italian commune.

Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica nel ‘Secretum’ del Petrarca (Florence, 1965), discloses that among the clerical precedents for his writings were Gregory the Great’s Regula pastoralis and the De gradibus humiliatis of Bernard of Clairvaux. A reading of Salutati’s letters indicates the vitality of his role as spiritual counselor and lay confessor. Two centuries before, such a function would have surely been performed by a cleric. The rise of lay culture in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Italy was marked especially by the enhancement of lay spiritual roles, and the theme of consolation was a persistent one. Indeed, the first serious Latin poem in late medieval Italy to gain a European audience was Enrico da Settimello’s De diversitate fortunae et philosophiae. Cf. S. Battaglia, La coscienza letteraria del medioevo (Naples, 1965), pp. 585-607.

12 F. Chabod, Machiavelli and the Renaissance, p. 170.

13 De rebus Laudensisibus in Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Scriptores), ed. P. Jaffe, xviii (Hanover, 1863), 640–641. (I wish to thank my student Louis La Favia for directing my attention to many of the relevant passages in the Lombard and Genoese chronicles.)
Earlier historical writings concerning the urban experience tended to be imagistic and iconic, with the individual readily subsumed under the rubric of an ideal type. Social and economic life was portrayed in a mosaic affirming exact subordination to hierarchy and ritual. Historical notation was paradigmatic with individual experience comfortably catalogued through a series of rhetorical *topoi*. Seldom were metaphors and similes taken from everyday experience; instead, chronicler and epic poet sought for an idiom allowing them to illuminate the twin polar surfaces of life—the celestial and the satanic. Although identity could be derived from an urban milieu, it lacked durable social dimension. Fusing abstraction about Roman patriotism with the symbolism of Christian hagiography, models of virtue were presented as senatorial apostles reproachless in their sanctity. Municipal pride prevented the easy diffusion of universalist historiography into North and Central Italy.¹⁴ Nurtured by *amor patriae* the author of the urban panegyric was able to relinquish his individuality by embracing a world in which the polar alternatives were martyrdom and salvation or betrayal and hellfire. Seldom was the existential or problematic character of urban life dramatized. The setting was achieved through employing a series of archaizing notations calculated to revitalize the sacred time and space of a paleo-Christian world.¹⁵

But by the eleventh and twelfth centuries these literary tactics were less effective. *Amor patriae* proved more costly for chronicler and citizen and neither was able to realize that sublime moment of fusion of self with the perfect community. The investiture controversy presented harsh alternatives to clergy and laity, while the imperial-papal contest shattered the iconic surface of municipal life. Traditional ethical cate-

¹⁴ During the two centuries after the death of Charlemagne we observe a flowering of local history characterized by an intense municipal pride. Regional resistance to Carolingian reforms was tied to an abiding sense of urban identity. Even the Benedictine school at Monte Cassino remained extraneous from universalistic historical narrative (*ab origine mundi*). Cf. N. Cilento, ‘Le struttura del racconto nelle cronache benedettino-Cassinesi della Longobardia meridionale nei secoli IX e X’, *Bullettino del Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, lxxxi (1962), 85–112. The development of universalist historical conceptualization came quite late to medieval Italy. Romualdo di Salerno’s history, written late in the twelfth century, was the first narrative in this genre. Also, historical philosophizing was not so fashionable in Italy as across the Alps.

gories were less useful when recording the ambiguous role of prelates, nobles, and il popolo. Religious reformers and involved citizens challenged hierarchy and ritual in the name of lay piety. Municipal sacral prerogatives were affirmed against the Roman See; the Gregorian reforms were countered by increased devotion to local religious rites. For the chronicler a secure perspective was not easy; occasionally, events compelled him to switch allegiance in the middle of his work.

Italian urban chronicles do testify to the durability of amor patriae. Not since antiquity do we have evidence for so energetic a literary attempt to create ample civic space for the play of convulsive urban movements. The first of these historical commentators was the noble cleric Arnolfo who began his Gesta episcoporum mediolanensium in the conventional mode. Intended as a diocesan chronicle, the traditional form broke when the author reached his own times. This cracking of the historical mold was a commonplace in the urban chronicle after the eleventh century. The pattern of court history, the monastic annal, and the universal chronicle could not easily contain the experience of urban life. Contemporary events in the towns were not readily subsumed within literary genres thriving elsewhere in medieval Europe. Arnolfo’s descriptions pulsed with the vitality of ‘a populace always avid for novelty and displaying excessive zeal against clergy’. These spontaneous civic movements, coupled with the energies of misguided Gregorian reformers, altered the secure moral landscape of an older municipal world. The chronicler was prey to increasing tension as the navigation of treacherous urban tides became more difficult. Confronted with harsh personal choices, the chronicler’s sense of political identity required a more problematic articulation. Arnolfo defended the ancient liberties of Milan and the right of the people to elect their bishop. He stood for the time-honored customs of the clergy of Lombardy and the Ambrosian liturgy. He desired to dismiss the obstreperous patarini from his historical narrative, but no familiar rhetorical tactic sufficed; the usual etymological analysis of the term ‘patarini’ was insufficient to dispose of this hardy clique of reformers. He also sought to disvalue the historical significance of the laity but was unable to displace these ‘idiotae’ and their ‘base-born’ leaders. Inadvertently, the diocesan chronicle was being converted into an urban record. The present stood in marked contrast to a time of lost innocence, but this idyllic past was

recent and possessed political dimension; no lost Eden, this, but the historical duchy of Lombard rulers.

Devotion to *patria* induced him to assert the rights of Milan over papacy, empire, and neighbor. Opposed to papal reformers, he allied with the concubinary clergy, simoniacs, and civic and religious idealists. Proud of a united Milan of rustics and knights doing battle confidently behind the city’s standard, he was yet vulnerable to other exacting claims. His hostility to Rome was economic and political, but now citizen disparagement of ecclesiastical hierarchy called the redemptive power of the church into question. It was difficult to invoke traditional religious formulas to assuage anxiety; vexing political choices placed his soul in jeopardy. At first he searched for a social explanation for the onset of corruption, but his release from tension came with a rush when he experienced a conversion very like that of St. Paul and St. Augustine. Although he went over to the papal party, he did not renounce his municipal allegiance.

The components of individuality were exposed in Arnolfo as he consciously experienced conflicting sources of his own identity. Moreover, he was unable to subordinate his personality to class affiliation or clerical status, or lose it in any extratemporal vision. The two Landolfi, continuators of this Milanese narrative, experienced the civic struggle with even greater immediacy. More secure in their civic identity, they were more personal in their appeal to history. The older Landolfo viewed the clergy as highly dependent upon the polis, preferring death to the safety of exile. The chronicler was not immune to the love of glory and was fired by caritas for his *patria*. Candidly, he acknowledged the claims of community and lent them an appropriate religious dimension. To this familiar stance novel elements were added: first, the prerogative of the faithful to utilize all means for advancing the coming of the Kingdom of God; and second, justification of the political role of *il popolo*. For the first time in any Italian chronicle *il popolo* joined prelates and lords in advancing Milan’s cause. Involvement of *il popolo* in civic life had a spiritual dimension, and both Landolfi affirmed the imperatives of lay piety.

The response of these chroniclers testified to the democratization of historical writing. New orders in medieval society were surfacing, and their political as well as their religious aspirations were not scorned. The

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younger Landolfo regularly quoted the everyday speech of *milites* and *populares*. He experienced the urban world deeply and without theological reserve; unlike his predecessors he never quoted Scripture. The chronicler could not easily distance himself from tensions he was describing by resorting to ordinary theological formulas. Narrators found themselves becoming implicated in history through their own partisanship.

The earliest of the medieval chronicles to be composed by a layman was Caffaro’s *Genoese Annals*. Here, for the first time, was disclosed a communal sensibility linking the honor and fortune of a mercantile order with civic well-being. Appreciating the economic and social bonds of society, the chronicler portrayed his Genoese burgher contemporaries of the twelfth century in the act of shaping their own history. Men sought to satisfy natural human desires, and power and glory were rewards for success. Caffaro described the expansion of territory and increase of governmental authority as the overwhelming pre-occupation of the ruling cadre. He had often served with the consuls and tells us that at first they worked ‘for the honor of the city of Genoa’. Later in the chronicle they are seen as striving ‘for the increase of the domains of the Genoese republic’.

Caffaro desired to validate the juridical personality of the collectivity so that grants from popes and emperors as well as privileges gained through conquest and crusade were amply recorded. Still, he traversed a world where allegiance to pope and emperor might provoke ruinous conflict, while treaties with feudatories seldom permitted a firm purchase on the future. Sharp commercial rivalries and citizen factionalism were rarely assuaged by bland proclamations of civic ideals.

Like other later chroniclers, Caffaro’s effort to validate the commune in a world of hierarchy and conflicting allegiances caused him to rely upon legal formulas. He and his collaborator were the first to employ the notarial style in composing historical narrative. Continuators of this chronicle recorded investment of burgher time and patrimony in a civil milieu so that merchants became increasingly dependent upon the dura-

bility of communal institutions. Caffaro himself closed his narrative with melancholy hints of civic disruption. The continuators lived with the chronic threat of civil war and loss of patrimony and status.

The greater the psychic involvement and patrimonial investment the more the fear of loss. Poets and chroniclers consecrated the history of the commune by cataloguing innumerable triumphs and newly won privileges. Indeed, the sole contribution of Italy to Latin literature of the twelfth century was the communal epic that did so much to aggrandize the communal ego.\(^{20}\) The struggles of Bergamo, Brescia, Como, Milan, and Pisa were seen as transcending municipal limits. By associating local contests with the investiture controversy, the Crusades, and the imperial papal struggle, poets could equate communal imperatives with divine mandate. *Il popolo* were portrayed as performing the work of God, with *pedites et milites* drawing inspiration from both the poetry of Vergil and the words of Christ. Classical and Christian Rome lent assurance that to defeat enemies of the commune was to win glory and achieve immortality. But citizens did suffer and the pathos of the poet was real; carnage and death made the chronicler melancholy even during moments of triumph.

Dramatic celebration of the *Gesta* of the community in a world under threat of alien domination was dependent upon the persistence of the ideal of social stratification. Only when the community was durable and the individual could be readily accommodated within the hierarchy could this epic genre flourish. If hierarchy were menaced, then the poet could neither be confident about the durability of community nor fix the destiny of the individual to the collectivity with certainty. In so notable a communal epic as the *Liber Maiolichinus*, describing the splendid victories of Pisa over the Saracens (1114–1115), we observe an exact accommodation between individual and hierarchy.\(^{21}\) Also, we see a perfect blend of Christian zeal and civic patriotism. Pisan citizenry and clerics were cited with a frequency directly proportional to their position in the social structure. The poet was not required to increase the

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\(^{20}\) A. Monteverdi observes that Latin literature in Italy from 1000 to 1200 was not of superior quality. But for some rhymes and odes of Alfano da Salerno we have a tiresome abundance of prose and poetry treating contemporary events; historical and legal writing dominates the literary scene. Cf. Monteverdi's *Studi e saggi sulla letteratura italiana dei primi secoli* (Milan–Naples, 1954), pp. 3–14.

number of personality types; traditional models served quite well, since all the characters were playing familiar parts. Status was sufficiently secure to allow for the use of customary epithets to delineate ideal types. Again, the historical surface was abstract and iconic; the community lacked that amount of social ambiguity required to produce more individualized forms of historical notation.

By the late twelfth century, however, the literary impulse to link the destiny of the individual with the collectivity was dissipated. Giuseppe Chiari, modern literary historian, argues persuasively that all the finest examples of the communal epic antedate the 1180s. Simultaneously, the urban panegyric was losing its effectiveness. Here, too, Italy had led the way; from the eighth century until the late twelfth, her contributions to this genre were abundant. This form of civic poetry proclaiming the durability of the public world was Italian in origin. As we have observed, it was infused with the energies of il popolo in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when its stately hexameters were opened to civic passion and the politics of a merchant patriciate.

To turn to the Florentine Giovanni Villani or the Paduan Giovanni da Nono, is to confront marked change in literary perception of experience. Writing in the early fourteenth century, Da Nono attempted to compose an urban panegyric obeying the precepts of civic hagiography. Unlike his twelfth-century forebears, he was unable to balance the equations between ancestry and power or wealth and status. His urban genealogy was in startling disarray as he inadvertently revealed the gross proportions of the body politic. Villani’s proud description of Florentine wealth was followed by a disconsolate account of the republic’s corrupt politics and ‘insane expenditures’. The last books of his chronicle revealed the failure of each of the Florentine orders: neither nobles nor haute bourgeoisie nor newcomers had the talents to give society an ethical direction. At this juncture we might follow an easy

22 La poesia epico-storica latina dell'Italia medioevale (Modena, 1939). Cf. also his L'epica medioevale latina e la Chanson de Roland (Genoa, 1936).


24 For a translation of Villani's Laudatio urbis, see R. Lopez and I. Raymond, Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World (New York, 1954), pp. 71-74. Cf. also Villani’s Cronica, ed. F. Dragomanni (Florence, 1844-1845), vi, 69; xi, 88; xi, 94.
line of explanation and contend that this dramatic alteration in social perspective was largely a consequence of the discrepancy between traditional conceptions of hierarchy and changing realities of socioeconomic life. Certainly, the increased amplitude of consciousness of civic space can be attributed in part to this separation. Chroniclers and poets stretched their social and political sensibilities by attempting to conserve traditional conceptions of stratification and legitimacy while at the same time acknowledging the social variations from these norms. This explanation, however, does not treat the question of why these authors were so attracted to the ambiguous details of everyday life. Could they not have dismissed them as petty matters and taken refuge in a bitter dualism that would underscore the perennial contest between the forces of good and evil? After all, this had been a popular Augustinian solution throughout the Middle Ages.

Before the twelfth century, urban literature had expressed trust in firm bonds between past and present. An unconscious archaism was postulated upon the spiritual vitality of Christian martyrs and Roman patriots whose lineal descendants thrived in the late medieval world. This comforting belief in historical continuity was little disturbed by a sense of anachronism; instead, the sensibility that sacred time and space could be readily replicated was strong. Such celebrated documents as the *Honorantiae Civitatis Papiae* contained full descriptions of economic and social activity, but were informed by a spirit of retrospective fantasy. Over the next centuries such narratives were to contain increased detail on the life of the city. In the twelfth century writers tended to respond with greater intimacy to the physical city and, for the first time, we have descriptions that are personal and do not conform so exactly to rhetorical doctrine. In the next century we observe an intensification of involvement between the urban panegyrist and the ‘social city’. From Moses of Bergamo to Bonvicino of Milan we note a heightening of consciousness concerning life-style. Materials are provided on occupation, attire, the consumption of food and wine, the size of dowries, numbers of teachers, flour mills, and even the cost of maintaining the communal lion.


26 Giuseppe Martini in his recent article, ‘Lo spirito cittadino’, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–12, speaks persuasively about Moses of Bergamo, who composed his civic verse (*Liber Pergaminus*)
This enumeration of society and the public world disclosed startling discrepancies; poet and chronicler initiated this enterprise with a sense of urban pride, but soon unhappy social perceptions intruded. By comparing the life-styles of the past with those of the present the writer became painfully aware that he was living in a new and dissolute age.\(^{27}\) Whereas his forebears had prospered under a modest regimen, and glory was the preserve of an ancient nobility, now it was evident that simple customs were being subverted. The city was being corrupted by the practice of usury and avarice. Social climbing and luxury poisoned the wellsprings of citizen morality. Here we can observe a telling paradox: on the one hand the author would extol the wealth and grandeur of his city, while on the other he must despise the very mechanisms promoting it.

From Riccobaldo of Ferrara to Rolandino and Mussato of Padua, and, finally, Dante and Giovanni Villani, the idea that wealth ineluctably caused decadence heightened a sense of alienation from the recent past.\(^{28}\) Few chroniclers failed to praise past achievements and lament present decadence. This was no simple posing of a contemporary world grown vice-ridden against a lost Arcadia; the virtue of the past and the evil of the present had durable social qualities. The reasons for the decline were political and economic; analysis of change was secularized, and although explanations might prove historically satisfying, they re-

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mained morally disconcerting. The locus of failure was at first internalized with the individual incurring blame: avaricious and luxury loving, citizens were judged derelict in performing civic duties and were responsible for municipal decline and the rise of tyranny. Soon the blame was generalized and writers raged puritanically against corruption induced by those breaking the hierarchical bonds of society. In the Quattrocento, one of the major attractions of classical history was its capacity to offer a view of the past both less punishing and more consoling. Wealth, expansion, and even class antagonisms could be justified by renaissance historians on grounds that they all redounded to the advantage of the polis.29

By the late thirteenth century, poets consciously employed an archaic language to distinguish a virtuous ancestry from its vile progeny. A feeling for differences between generations and even taste in art and style became pronounced.30 Artists were increasingly aware of this separation from the past; they sought to imitate a sacred pictorial vocabulary. In North Italy a chivalric literary culture, enclosed entirely in the anonymous play of courtly love, did not thrive. Such indifference before reality presupposed the aristocratic security of a moral conservative. This stance was repudiated in literature as poetry and prose were infused with political fervor and civic concern. The aristocratic isolation of the tragic style broke when moral abstraction lost its appeal to a popular audience. Where traditional ritual and ceremony were celebrated the sentiments were frequently undermined by a satirical style. Delight in chivalry became an exaltation of decorations and trappings until feudal ceremony was converted into burgher spectacle. Consciousness of loss heightened awareness of historical anachronism; the very doctrine of imitatio popularized by Petrarch depended upon realization of this separation from the past.

Italian historiography of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries elevated the themes of political mutability and social change to the level of methodological principle. Chroniclers appropriated bits of Aristotelian

philosophy and medieval science to confirm this methodology.\(^{31}\) Correlation was sought between the prevalence of social vice and the origins of municipal decline; periodization was couched in moral terms with violation of communal liberty by despots boldly connected with the corruption of citizen character through usury and avarice.\(^{32}\) The social dimension of sin was acknowledged and the individual became increasingly vulnerable to the passage of time and the verdict of history. Meanwhile, rigorous application of the communal ethic condemned acts of political individualism as grievous crimes against a just God.

Although the civic role of the individual was affirmed and his social identity established, yet he was expected to comport himself in the commune with a humility befitting a monk. Chroniclers enriched the language of narrative in order to highlight the unique and idiosyncratic; new historical types exercised a fatal fascination upon literati but no easy ethical warrant was in prospect for these characters. We can appreciate something of the burden placed upon the citizen ego when we consider the strong commitment by literati to the corporate ethic. The slightest deviation from communal norms merited strict historical censure.\(^{33}\) The minutes of the Florentine signory of the late thirteenth century disclose that hostility toward the promptings of political individualism was not confined to a few literati. The process of governmental policy-making was itself corporate rather than individualistic. Only a century later did this system of guild politics recede before the direct and sustained participation of single prominent citizens. A neglected aspect of Quattrocento humanist historiography was the successful effort of Bruni and others to furnish moral justification for the new style of political leadership.\(^{34}\) But in the thirteenth and early fourteenth cen-

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\(^{31}\) N. Rubinstein, "Some Ideas on Municipal Progress and Decline in the Italy of the Commune", in Fritz Saxl 1890–1948 (London, 1957), pp. 165–181; B. Nardi, Saggi sull'Aristotelismo padovano dal secolo XIV–XVI (Florence, 1958), pp. 1–74. It is notable that the first group of medieval chroniclers to be committed to certain methodological premises derived from Aristotelianism were Paduans whose city was the center for such philosophical activity.


\(^{34}\) Bruni's Historiarum Florentini populi libri XII deserves to be studied not only for its treatment of constitutionalism and libertas, but also because of its sponsorship of Florentine imperialism. The themes of territorial expansion and defense of the polis usher in a sensibility that more dynamic styles of civic leadership will be required.
turies documentary evidence reveals that the communal ethic was quite effective in stifling individualistic political opinion. Chroniclers scorning Giano della Bella for his failure to obey communal norms were simultaneously intrigued by his commanding personality. Beneath their deprecation of his egoistic political style they recognized his capacity for leadership. Again we are at an emotional crossroad: How to affirm the corporate ethic while at the same time acknowledging the commune’s desperate need for civic leadership? How could those virtues required for leadership be nurtured when chroniclers, poets, and artists were so zealous in exposing the base motives of false heroes? How could individuals capable of assuming civil command prosper when art, literature, and theology proclaimed the menace of the sin of pride? While the force of ego was recognized, still it was denied ethical endorsement.

Similar ambiguities were suggested in the poetry and prose championing the nobility of deed over lineage. Opting for an open society and democratization, literati yet continued to disvalue social ambition and economic enterprise. Advocates of the popularization of knowledge and education for social mobility, these literati sought to preserve hierarchy. Sponsors of a popular culture without elitist warrant, they still despised the very parvenus and rudes they were attempting to civilize (digrossare). Fervent spokesmen for lay piety, they remained anxious to conserve ecclesiastical structure and ritual. Critical of St. Augustine’s doctrine of the sinful origin of the state, they stressed instead its positive beginnings and moral ends. Against this optimistic prognosis, however, they posited the certain onset of ethical decay and communal decline. Agreeing that reason, not force, was at the base of Roman expansion, they severely condemned the population growth and imperialism of their native towns. Sympathetic to the noble impulses of the citizenry of antiquity, whose quest for glory promoted the public good, they were reluctant to transfer this attitude to their own contemporaries.

Whereas a citizen’s identity became increasingly public, it remained without firm moral sanction. Even the allegedly durable merchant ego was easy prey to sudden qualms and paralyzing guilt; such psychic

35 Cf. n. 33 and D. Compagni, Cronica, ed. I. del Lungo (Florence, 1889), i, 12–14.
36 M. Becker, Florence in Transition (Baltimore, 1967), i, 39–43. Significant in this context is the recognition accorded social determinants in interpretations of the past. In describing the civic heroism of Cicero, literati such as Dante, Latini, and Villani commented upon this Roman’s parvenu status. His triumphs were all the more remarkable, since he was a ‘cittadino di Roma, nuovo e di grande altezza’. Cf. C. T. Davis, ‘Brunetto Latini and Dante’, Studi medievali, ser. 3, vili (1967), 424.
devastation was the stuff of the urban novel and notarial cartulary.\textsuperscript{37} The very conception of the ‘common good’ implied a challenge to citizen identity anchored in allegiance to clan or social order. This lofty expression of the communal ethic would substitute dedication to a more abstract community for the tangible and immediate benefits of kinship. Primary loyalty to consorteria, guild, or parte was countered by a vigorous propaganda, the most aesthetic expression of which was to be found in the frescoes and poetic inscriptions adorning the walls of Tuscan council halls. Previously, conceptions of citizen identity had been less exacting so that easier accommodation was possible between conflicting claims. But by the late thirteenth century, contests between affection for commune, dynasty, papacy, and empire induced a deep political foreboding into the public world. Now, citizen literature suggested the difficulties of navigating through a polis whose civic dimensions were exquisitely moral. Economic and political actions had spiritual consequences for the soul of both merchant and noble. The former found it increasingly hard to justify his acquisitiveness, while the latter, no longer so secure within the frame of ritual and ceremony, was denied the satisfaction of blood feud and vendetta. Preachers provoked the merchant to self-doubt and introspection, while poets and chroniclers insisted that the milites find an ethical mandate for their behavior. Communal legislation kept pace by regulating business excesses and the many forms of honorific violence.

If strong tensions existed between the demands of the corporate ethic and citizen ego, supports were also in prospect. Juridical ties firmed the identification of citizen with polis. Legal studies, rhetoric, and a deepened interest in contemporary history were hallmarks of this public culture. How different it was from the civilizations of other leading intellectual centers in Europe!\textsuperscript{38} Here, in North Italy, metaphysics, theology, and the study of pure science were of less consequence, and scholasticism was to bloom only much later. The practical and immedi-

\textsuperscript{37} We observe that in urban chronicles of the early thirteenth century wealth and power are seen as expressions of God’s love for man. In the latter half of the century an interesting reversal occurs with obsessive concern being expressed by chroniclers for the sin of usury. This deepening of moral conscience coincides with the diffusion of lay piety and the onset of large-scale restitution of usury. Cf. G. Arnaldi, \textit{Studi sui cronisti}, pp. 44ff.; J. K. Hyde, \textit{Padua in the Age of Dante}, pp. 113–117, 177–234; E. Fiumi, \textit{Storia economica e sociale di San Gimignano} (Florence, 1961), pp. 86–87.

ate were treasured, with artists and literati ministering to the anxieties of secular pilgrims traversing a menacing terrain. Knowledge of the perilous odyssey of merchant pilgrims carried with it remedies for consolation. The destiny of the viator was secularized and his character revealed by literati at the moment when he confronted the extremes of fortuna or amore. The measure of the man was in his ability to survive the buffets of fortune and win the trophies of love.39

But understanding and sage counsel could do little to relieve the individual of burdens of selfhood or order the cluttered landscape of community. Dante had sought to project his private sufferings onto a screen of universal history; in this way personal tragedy could assume general meaning. Yet he and other literati were unable to subsume their own immediate history under any ideal schema. A feeling of selfhood was ineradicable, and the finest prose and painting of the period were characterized by a belief that man’s earthly character was the outward expression of his spiritual destiny. While iconic depiction of personality persisted, new techniques were being developed in poetry and painting to generate the artistic illusion of individuality. In the Cimabue Crucifix we note the portrayal of intense conflict between the iconic and historical Christ; perhaps in this single painting soon to be imitated throughout North Italy we possess a most revealing emblem of this time of transition.40 The artist’s technique allowed him to disclose the human Christ at the very moment when He struggled to be free from the icon: image was receding before the onslaught of personality.

The history of the individual was no longer so readily structured by hierarchy and consorteria; his public world was not given lasting meaning by crusading enthusiasms, visions of an age of ultimate justice, or decisive victories by angelic popes or messianic emperors. The cherished principles of Guelfism and Ghibellinism were now fit topics for bizarre

39 See V. Branca’s persuasive remarks in his Boccaccio medievale (Florence, 1957), pp. 68-73: Carnal passion obtains its highest consecration and tragedy in those spiritual moments of love and death. Thus, in the lyrical and subjective we discern a solemn and heroic tension. In this interior climate we have the echoes of this tension, always solemn and heroic, standing as the highest exemplars of tragic passion.

In his De viris illustribus Petrarch argues that the historian must deal with the truly illustrious deed rather than the merely fortuitous. Earned nobility cannot be discerned in the chance event or lucky action. Cf. N. S. Struver, The Language of History, p. 78.

40 For much of the discussion that follows, I am much indebted to my colleague, Professor Bruce Cole of the Department of Fine Arts, University of Rochester.
etymologies. As millenarian and eschatological impulses proved less vital, a sense of selfhood became more probable. Moreover, ideals of collective renovatio declined in favor of more personal notions of salvation. Confidence in the rejuvenation of a faltering world through the activities of newly founded religious orders was absent in contemporary urban literature. Church and empire no longer served in the familiar dual role of worldly institution and intermediary between human and divine history. The polis was no longer exempt from decay because it had contracted sacred alliances with either church or empire.

Profound economic change in process during the first part of the fourteenth century increased the isolation of the individual. Again we shall observe that literature and art ministered to the beleaguered citizen ego. Legislation in Tuscany began to reflect the multiplication of procedures among clans for alienating patrimony and disposing of shares. Property could be held more readily by individuals so that the possibilities of private investment were greater. Written agreements for the purpose of holding patrimony in common were rare in Florence; guild regulations permitting new types of non-familial relationships between partners were a response to the decline of traditional forms of clan enterprise. Meanwhile, merchant courts tended to recognize the distinct personalities of business firms. These new forms of merchant enterprise increased the risks of the citizen entrepreneur.

As the strong bonds of extended association were weakened in the world of business, so, too, they were attenuated by the rude intrusion of the state into clan life. If I suggest that principal developments in early renaissance culture were intimately connected with these social, economic, and political changes, which in turn increased the sense of personal isolation, then the concept of Burckhardtian individualism takes on its burdensome and negative dimension. At a considerable psychic price the citizen was released from a world of ritual, ceremony, and the supportive associative impulse. At this moment the arts came to his side. We note the emergence of a positive valuation of burgher life, conse-

41 To cite only one of many examples, see the eccentric definition presented by that Florentine arch-Guelf Lapo da Castiglionchio in R. Davidsohn, 'Tre orazioni di Lapo da Castiglionchio', Archivio Storico Italiano, xx (1897), 225–246.


43 I wish to thank Professor Richard Goldthwaite of Johns Hopkins University for allowing me to read his unpublished manuscript: 'The Patrician Palace of Renaissance Florence as Domestic Architecture'.
crating new ideals of domesticity that were to give meaning and struc-
ture to a world become more solitary.

If we compare the panels of two nativity scenes done by Nicola and
his son Giovanni Pisano, we observe the beginnings of this transition in
Tuscan sculpture. In the Baptistry of Pisa, on a pulpit completed in
1260, Nicola portrayed the Virgin Mother as austere, monumental, and
detached. A Roman goddess, she paid no attention to her child but re-
clined like a queen, accepting her destiny while receiving the formal
embassy of the shepherd. In the pulpit completed in 1301 at St. Andrea
in Pisa, Giovanni’s Mary Annunciate retreats in fear and awe as she
learns the dread message from an overwrought angel. Altogether, the
scene is intimate and filled with human concern and tenderness. A strik-
ing difference between the two portrayals involves the bathing of the
Christ Child. For Nicola the washing was a ritual, whereas for Giovanni
it was a warm domestic act.\textsuperscript{44} Now, for the first time in the history of
European painting, iconographic motifs representing intensely emo-
tional domesticity appeared in early Trecento Tuscany. Sacred events
were viewed in their most tender and intimate moments, with Christ’s
apostles comporting themselves like virtuous citizens. Sanctity was not
so much a consequence of celestial grace as a matter of effort and honest
social conduct. In the twenty-eight scenes of the Life of St. Francis in the
church of San Francesco at Assisi, the sacred subject was ‘set boldly in
the context of ordinary existence and lively human feeling’.\textsuperscript{45}

Florentine depictions of the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Christ
Child, the Man of the Sorrows, the Meeting of Joachim and Anna, and
scenes of the Virgin’s childhood all stressed possibilities for effective
spiritual contact between husband and wife, mother and child, and
father and son.\textsuperscript{46} The incarnate Christ became ‘nostro fratello’ and the
Madonna was portrayed only slightly enlarged, so that the difference
between the mother of God and the viewer rested solely in her virtuous
mien. Art explored the deepening contours of familial bonds, with
affection being lavished on women and children, and paternity finding
favor in the sight of God. But all was not smooth in the burgher odys-
seey: narratives of human isolation, while not rivaling this extensive
affirmation of spiritual ties in burgher life, remained as pictorial testi-
mony to man’s capacity for suffering. The Expulsion from the Temple,
the *Lamentation of Christ*, and the *Story of Job* were popular reminders.\(^{47}\)

We can observe the difference between the art of the age of Giotto and the earlier Italo-Byzantine school in the convergence of the sacred and profane. This vision was committed to the notion that sacred events could be treated as historical episodes possessing a temporal dimension that would render them objectively real, i.e., having their locus in time and space as humanly conceived. Such a view was in itself destructive of eschatological speculation and the millenarian tradition of schematization. Cimabue’s conviction that *virtus* coincided with *mediocritas* weakened allegory and symbolism, substituting in their stead a prosaic concreteness. The ecstatic was being displaced by the prudential and in the process literary and artistic conventions were formulated to depict laic personalities. The religious space of Tuscan art was opened to burgher emotion. The viewer became a spectator, even a participant, in a sacred moment whose location was in a space and time not very different from that which he traversed.

Prudential burgher culture had numerous spokesmen for *mediocritas*; virtues were in process of being secularized as the doctrine of the mean challenged the ecstatic and the overwrought.\(^{48}\) North and Central Italy were the first to confront the decline of medieval culture and its millenarianism because individuals possessed a public world. The price, however, for this civic identity was high. Detached from a world of traditional ritual they were burdened with the knowledge of ceaseless change.

The psychological setting for leading elements of renaissance culture was well in prospect by the early Trecento. The urge to validate and enhance burgher emotions appeared to stem from the need to assuage anxiety and overcome feelings of isolation. In the novella exemplars of commercial virtue were enscorched beside heroes of chivalry.\(^{49}\) The literary *topoi* of early humanism focused upon the legitimacy of the acquisitive impulse, the desire for secular glory, and dignity of the contemporary world. Defense of the status of women, approval of matrimony, dedication to the education of children, as well as an abiding concern for the virtues of household management, were paramount.

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literary pre-occupations. That humanists continued to disagree over the possibilities of combining high spirituality with worldly elegance or true piety with service to the state indicates that literature gravitated around these perennial problems, although no unequivocal solutions were forthcoming. The greater portion of these questions concerned the role of the citizen in the public world: human individuality was detached from the cosmic order only to be hostage to fortuna, dependent upon virtù and ingenio or at the mercy of history.

Huizinga, though not central to this discussion, does of course merit notice. Surely he was quite correct to observe that North and Central Italy were not sealed off from the decaying world of medieval chivalry or to the emotions of an over-elaborated Gothic. Even in such advanced centers as Quattrocento Florence, Gentile da Fabriano and Lorenzo Monaco were the popular painters, while the Flemish masters would soon find a ready audience. The iconic was not displaced by the illusionistic: Pietro di Miniato, Mariotto di Nardo, and Bicci di Lorenzo rivaled Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Masaccio in burgher taste. Attachment to the international style ran deep and the triumph of the classical impulse was much more evident in civic monuments than in private art. Indeed, this might suggest that such a separation between private and public emotion was a commanding cultural trait of the period. Yet, even here there is a distinction to be made: although attachment to the courtly, the iconic, the allegorical, and the international mode was powerful, the perspective toward them all was being modified. In fact, it was quite as possible to achieve historical distance from the world of the courtly as from antiquity. Painters and literary men moving in the chivalric tradition could be as alienated from this world as humanists were from theirs. It was a self-consciousness that informed the paintings of the Life of St. Martin at Assisi: a nostalgic reminiscence for a lost way of life suffused this work of Simone Martini. A century later, Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello continued to pay dreamy homage to these lost ideals.

We could observe comparable distancing of the artist from the political icon in Martini’s St. Louis of Toulouse Crowning Robert of Anjou (1317) or from the religious image in Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s solemn

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50 This is not to suggest that courtly style was without lively and progressive qualities. Classical influences and advanced techniques were readily accommodated within this genre from the time of Pisanello through to Veronese. Cf. E. Sindona’s Pisanello, trans. J. Ross (New York, 1961).
and enigmatic Madonna in the church of Vico l'Abate near Florence (1319). Full separation of the artist, orator, and chronicler from a sacral universe enabled him to view a world of magic in retrospect. This was an essential condition for the onset of the Renaissance. Only when we observe the detachment of Martini, and see that he still displayed a fascination for the picturesque, can we take pleasure in this fact of loss (Investiture of St. Martin as a Knight). By the early Quattrocento, Pisanello was placing medieval personalities, sublimely indifferent, in a nightmarish world on the eve of the Apocalypse. A sense of melancholy was the response to the recession of aristocratic ideals of harmony. Mantegna painted with a nostalgia for the lost world of heroes; such a self-consciousness concerning ideals and artistic conventions of past civilizations was a hallmark of renaissance culture. If a feeling of alienation contributed to this sense of historical detachment, then countervailing responses served to describe the restorative possibilities open to the individual. The young Donatello presented model figures combining piety and civic dedication, while Ghiberti’s sculptures blended worldly elegance and high spirituality. But perhaps those renditions closest to the burgher world of Quattrocento Florence were done by the aged Donatello and the youthful Masaccio. How demanding were the secular odysseys of Mary Magdalen and St. John! How used up and exhausted they were! How little comfort the world seemed to offer the moral pioneers in Masaccio’s Brancacci Chapel frescoes! But although there was no surcease, these rugged figures would endure.

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