

The renaissance man vs the renaissance woman



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The Renaissance, meaning “ rebirth,” was a cultural movement in which emphasis was placed on learning and life in general. New ideas in the fields of literature, philosophy, art, politics, science, and religion became prevalent; as did the search for realistic views of human life through art. Beginning in Italy, this new attitude towards education and life slowly made its way around Europe. Another new idea was the focus on individualism rather than the group as a whole.

Artists began to sign their artwork to show they were proud of it, and people “ prized their own sense of uniqueness and individuality, hiring artists to paint or sculpt their portraits and writers to produce verbal likenesses,” the introduction states. The Renaissance is commonly seen as the separation between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, and the beginning of the Humanism point of view. All of the new and exciting ideas had in common one thing, learning, and as stated in the introduction “ humanists all agreed on the importance of education, not just for the individual but also for society as a whole.

The Renaissance was a brilliant time in history, bringing together all people for the benefit of a better life. However, not everyone was looked at equally during this time. Men were still seen as superior in society and had greater responsibilities than women. As time went on, it became increasingly clear who would prosper most with this new age of knowledge, the men. The ideal man during the time of the Renaissance was highly educated, accomplished, and willing to do his part in society. Source 4 by Peter Paul Vergerius is a Letter to Ubertinus of Padua which discusses the proper education for men.

He says that the best education for men is a kind in " which calls forth, trains, and develops those highest gifts of body and of mind," also that it must rank so highly that it is on the same level as dignity and virtue. This shows how important a good education was for a man during this time. According to Vergerius, men must study in three distinct areas, history, moral philosophy, and eloquence. " By philosophy we learn the essential truth of things, which by eloquence we so exhibit in orderly adornment as to bring conviction to differing minds.

And history provides the light of experience," he says. Everything a man is supposed to study will help him. He not only studies to learn the experiences of his people, but he also learns to accept different opinions and how the world works. A man during this time was supposed to be confident in himself and his actions. Source 6, *The Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione discusses how to be the perfect courtier. Being a courtier meant that you were expected to attend the courts of monarchs or other powerful people.

Castiglione writes " just as among women the name of purity, once stained, is never restored. " He talks about how if a man's profession is arms, and he is cowardly, he will always be seen this way so " the more our courtier excels in this art, the more will he merit praise. " He goes on to state how some men live in their shadows and do not praise themselves for the tremendous work they have accomplished. If a courtier should see that his work is being ignored he should be doing anything possible to show anyone, so he is not cheated out of the reward he deserves.

By the end of his studies Castiglione says that a courtier will become fluent, bold, and self-confident in speaking with everyone. There was so much expected of men during the Renaissance. This could explain why artwork of men looks the way it does. Source 1 is a self-portrait of the artist Albrecht Durer. It shows him sitting up straight, hand on his fur coat, looking straight forward. Men were supposed to make themselves known and be confident, a way in which Durer portrays himself. Source 3, a sculpture of General Bartolommeo Colleoni by Andrea del Verrocchio depicts Bartolommeo the same way.

He is standing tall and proud, looking out amongst his accomplishments. To be a man in this time period was a very prestigious honor. Women on the other hand, were not seen so highly. During the medieval times before the Renaissance, both men and women were educated to serve god. “

Renaissance men were educated to serve the city or the state, which no humanist felt was a proper role for women,” the introduction states. This meant that women were not getting the same prestigious education that the men were getting.

It was seen that since public activities to display talent were not proper for a woman that maybe they should not be educated at all. Some thought that maybe women should be educated under the older views of Christian modesty and humility rather than the new ideas of self-confidence and individualism, or just stay in the home with the family. Source 5 is a Letter to Lady Baptista Malatesta by Leonardo Bruni which discusses the proper education for women. “ Arithmetic and geometry are not worthy to absorb a cultivated mind, and the same must be said of astrology,” says Bruni.

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Instead women should study things such as religion, history, moral philosophy, theology, poetry and literature to produce gentle writings and ideas. Bruni states that " I have in view the cultivation most fitting to a woman," and that " Rhetoric in all its forms - public discussion, forensic argument, logical fence, and the like - lies absolutely outside the province of women. " People did not want women to become highly educated like men, but educated in ways in which they did not have to be known to the public. Source 7 is a second excerpt from the Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione which states how to be a proper court lady.

He says how men must show a sturdy manliness so " her ways, manners, words, gestures, and bearing, a woman ought to be very unlike a man...so it seemingly for a woman to have a soft and delicate tenderness, with an air of womanly sweetness in her every movement. " Castiglione says that women must be gracious with any man and engage in appropriate conversation. She be witty, yet discreet with her actions " I wish this lady to have knowledge of letters, of music, of painting, and know how to dance...adding a discreet modesty and giving the good impression of herself," he states.

While women were expected to be polite, gracious and acceptable to everyone, they were supposed to live somewhat in the shadows. Source 2 is a painting of Simonetta by Botticelli. Simonetta is seen from a side view, with long well done hair, and slightly slouched shoulders. She is not standing up tall and proud like the men in the paintings were. Women were not supposed to think highly of themselves which could explain why she is slouched. Since women were not supposed to make themselves known, only heard when

asked to, could explain why we are not seeing Simonetta from a front view but a side view.

Women during the time of the Renaissance were not seen as high class citizens like men. The views of women and men in this time period are very different. Women endured much prejudice and were seen as there to complete the tasks that were below the abilities of men. While men were out making something of themselves and proving their talent and education to the city, women were stuck at home for the purpose of childbearing and house work. Men were educated in highly intellectual areas like history, arithmetic, geography, while women were educated in the arts like poetry, music, and dance to provide entertainment.

Due to the different views of men and women, and the different education they were provided, there were stereotypes about each. Men were seen as very smart and highly capable of anything, while women were seen as useless and not capable of learning to the same degree as men. The Renaissance was a great time in history as it was an early beginning to what we know of as the Modern Era. It allowed learning and knowledge to take off in terms of importance. It gave us a new view into the importance of life and the realistic depiction of it through artwork.

It also gives us the start to the acceptance of new ideas. The Renaissance was a major turning point which allowed us to be where we are today. However, with the new ideas being introduced during this time, it is hard to understand why men and women were treated so unequally. Just as in older times, men were superior, and women were there to do their work. Since

women were meant to live in the shadows, men were the ones who allowed this brilliant time period to prosper. Who knows how much more could have been accomplished if women were allowed to participate in the shaping of these new ideas.