www.TLHjournal.com Literary Herald ISSN: 2454-3365
An International Refereed/Peer-reviewed English e-Journal
Impact Factor: 3.019(IIJIF)

Shakespeare's Renaissance: Ushering into the Modern Era

Oumeima Mouelhi
Assistant Professor (PhD)
The High Institute of Human Sciences of Tunisia
Tunisia

The Renaissance has, for centuries, been affiliated with the greatest achievements of outstanding figures like: Michelangelo, Donatello, and Leonardo da Vinci. There is, however, more to the Renaissance than enchanting pictures and flamboyant individuals. In European historiography the term, "Renaissance', appears as one of the most value-laden yet contested one. First, coined by the French historian Jules Michelet and later elaborated by the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt in his book *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, the Renaissance is understood as a departure from the Middle Ages where European culture shifted into a "new" one.

According to Burckhardt, there are two important factors that contributed to this shift: the regeneration of the classical learning (hence the 'rebirth' or 'renaissance' of the classical world) and the beginning of the "Modern Age". In restoring the classical learning, the Italians of the Renaissance created the premise of modern culture.[1] From the French *Renaitre* (to be born again) and the Italian *Rinascimento* (rebirth), the term "Renaissance" is applied to the great revival of arts which began in Italy in the fourteenth century and went on to the following two centuries spreading its wings to all parts of Europe. The Renaissance, the rebirth of classical art, architecture, literature, and learning marked the transition from medieval to modern times by restoring the philosophical and artistic ideals of classical

[1] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. SCG. Middlemore (London: Penguin, 1990), P. 19.

antiquity. Freed from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance sought its revival in Antiquity. The Renaissance marked the onset of modern times, where artists were glorified and celebrated again beyond all boundaries. In Italy where the Renaissance first blossomed, "Rinascimento", was the name of a great intellectual and cultural movement. The incorporation of Greek and Latin cultures that took place in the Eastern Mediterranean after the crusades is at the origin of the Renaissance.[2] Burckhardt offers a more effective view of the Renaissance in Italy observing that:

> […] the literary bequests of antiquity, Greek as well as Latin were of far more important than the architectural and indeed than all the artistic remains which it had left. They were held in the most absolute sense to be the springs of all knowledge…Great as was the influence of the old writers on the Italian mind in the fourteenth century and before. Yet, that influence was due rather to the wide diffusion of much that was new. The most popular Latin poets, historians, orators, and letter-writers, together with a number of Latin translations of single works of Aristotle, Plutarch, and a few other Greek authors, constituted the treasure from which a few favoured individuals in the time of Petrarch and Boccaccio drew their inspiration […] a complete Latin translation of the *Iliad & Odyssey*, though a very bad one, was made at Petrarch's suggestion and with Boccaccio's help, by a calabrian Greek, Leonzio Pilato […]. [3]

From this point of view, the Renaissance is held to mark the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the "Modern" western world. Though an accurate date for the very beginning of the renaissance remains a field of much contest, among historians, the twelfth century is commonly held to announce a revival, therefore, a renaissance of European learning, while the eighteenth century is perceived as a direct continuum of the Renaissance's

[2] Craig Harbison, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in Its Historical Context* (New York: Harry and Abrams Inc, Publishers, 1995), p. 12.
[3] Quoted in Hans Baron, *The Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), P. 52.

intellectual tendencies.[4] The Renaissance is seen as a process extending from Petrarch and Boccaccio in Italy to Jonson and Milton in England including the work of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare. It is defined by a proliferation of lyric poetry and a regeneration of classical forms as epic and pastoral literature. The term, "Renaissance", also expands to specific times and places like the American Renaissance or the Harlem Renaissance.[5] The Renaissance was first used in the sixteenth century by Giorgio Vasari who saw a "rinascita delle arti", or the birth of arts in his own time. Two centuries later, Voltaire saw in this age, "a renaissance des letters et des beaux arts" in Medicean Florence.[6] The notion of an age stamped by "the discovery of the world of man" was profoundly tackled by Burckhardt who saw in this epoch an inauguration of the modern era. In shaping the contours of modern culture, Burckhardt contends that modern culture is situated somewhere between the decline of the classical world and the Renaissance.[7]

Modernity has been shaped for a long time. Daniel Milo, like Jacques Le Goff, believes that the Middles Ages, and subsequently the Renaissance could be the beginning of modern institutions.[8] As a matter of fact, modernity remains a slippery notion as every age could be understood as new in its time, setting a parallel the recent (modern) and the ancient (antique). For the New Historicists, the term "Renaissance" is a substitute for the "Early Modern", a historical period that englobes all of European history from the Italian Renaissance to the Enlightenment. Like Burckhardt, too, New Historicists assess this period

[4] Jill Kraye, *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 246.
[5] Stanley Stewart, *Renaissance Talk* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997), p. 17.
[6] Cited in Claire Farrago, *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 95.
[7] Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, P. 19.
[8] Janet L.Nelson, "The work of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History by Jacques Le Goff," *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 114 (Feb1999): 154-155.

in relation to what follows, which is modernity.[9] The continuum, nevertheless, with the medieval world is so consistent that separating the Italian Renaissance/Early Modernity from the medieval world seems out of the question. The outset of the modern world is as fully rooted in the medieval world as it is in the Italian Renaissance. In early modern Europe, along with the growth of new knowledge was the emergence of a new view of history and the past. The latter set such high standards and criteria of achievement and judgement that it became the "classic" one by which subsequent ages and cultures are measured. "The defining criteria for value were inescapably governed by past models, not by present experience or by future ideal states of existence."[10]. In short, there arose a sharp sense of history, the awareness that the significance of the present was affected, defined, and governed by past contexts. The Renaissance promoted the value of "Man" as the centre of the universe. The Renaissance, vehemently, believed in the potential of the individual and the human mind, and ultimately, paved the way to modern humanism. It celebrated Man's achievements, worth, and enlightening thinking. "Man is the measure of all things", as Leon Battista Alberti, a typical early Renaissance thinker expressed it: "A man can do all things if he will."[11] It was during the Renaissance that the word *Humanist* was coined. Yet, it was from the Renaissance that modern secular humanism grew with the development of an important split between reason and religion. Leonardo da Vinci was the first to begin the age of secularism when he dared speak freely of the love of money and the flesh.[12]

[9] Jean Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," *ELR* 16.1 (1986): 13.
[10] Robert Eric Frykenberg, *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Minch: William B. Eerdmans Publishing co, 1996), pp. 149-150.
[11] Quoted in Mark Jarzanbek, "The structural problematic of Leon Battista Alberti's De Pictura," *Renaissance Quarterly* (spring 1990): 273.
[12] Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, eds and trans. Robert N. Lindscott and Edward Mac Curdy (New York: Random Horse, 1957), p. 32.

One of the salient features of modernity was the progress in sciences and arts. Scientific and technological revolutions have been no less influential than political revolutions in changing the face of the modern world. The scientific revolution, beginning with the discoveries of Kepler and Galileo and culminating in Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* changed the way in which educated people looked at the natural world. Indeed, the scientific revolution changed man's thinking process. It was an intellectual revolution, a revolution in human knowledge. Scientists such as Copernicus, Galilee, and Newton tried to understand Man and his surroundings. Thinkers such as the Polish astronomer Copernicus, the French philosopher René Descartes, and the British mathematician Isaac Newton called into question, both, the authority of the Middle Ages and the classical world. The scientific revolution could almost have been called the Copernican Revolution. Being an exceptional Renaissance man, Copernicus determined that the sun was at the centre of the cosmos and that the earth moved challenging the geocentrism of Ptolemy. In his book, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*, Copernicus declares that:

> We hesitate to grant (the earth) the motion which accords naturally with its form, rather than attribute a movement to the entire universe whose limit we do not and cannot know? And why should we not admit, with regard to the daily rotation, that the appearance belongs to the heavens, but the reality is in the earth? [13]

The Renaissance stood at a point midway between two spheres: medieval supernaturalism and the modern scientism. Medievalists see humanism as the terminal product of the Middle Ages. Modern historians are perhaps more able to view humanism as the ensuing period of modernism.[14] Most probably, we can assume that the Man of the Renaissance lived, as it were, between two worlds: the world of medieval Christianity and

[13] Nicolas Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*, trans. Edward Rosen (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 3.
[14] Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 152.

that of reason. As medieval dependence on faith and God began to weaken, secular and human interests became more prominent. The lived world became an end in itself instead of simply a preparation for a world to come. Ultimately the boundaries between the profane world and the heavenly one were dissolved. Aesthetics were thought to afford some glimpse of a transcendental existence. This explains the humanist adoration of beauty and makes it clear plain that humanism was, above everything else, fundamentally an aesthetic movement. The intellectuals of antiquity like Sir Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus were uninterested in the metaphysical world and redemption. Instead, they were keen on a joyful, convenient, and dynamic life in the city of Man. Humanism enlivened the pagan virtues. "Whatever is pious and conduces to good manners ought not to be called profane", Erasmus wrote:

> To confess freely among friends, I can't read Cicero on Old Age on Friendship […] without kissing the book, without veneration towards the divine soul. And on the contrary, when I read some of our modern authors, treating of politics, economics, and ethics, good God! How could they are in comparison with these! Nay, how do they seem to be insensible of what they write themselves! So that I had rather lose Scotus and
> twenty more such as he, than one Cicero or Plutarch.[15]

The distinctive intellectual trait of the time was the retrieval, to a certain degree, of the secular and humane philosophy of Greece and Rome. Another humanist movement which cannot be overlooked was the rebirth of individualism developed by Greece and Rome and suppressed by the church in the Middle Ages. The church asserted that the prevailing individualism was identical with arrogance, rebellion, and sin. Furthermore, it ignored man and nature. In other ways, medieval civilisation suppressed the ego. Yet, the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century worked in favour of the general emancipation of the

[15] Quoted in Erika Rummel, *The Erasmus Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990), p. 24.

individual. Burckhardt's *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* marks the modern selfhood and gives the highest development to individuality. The early signs of the "Modern European Spirit" were, according to him, best expressed in Renaissance modern subjectivity as:

> In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness, that which was turned within as that which was turned without, lay dreaming or half-awake beneath a common veil […]. In Italy, this veil first melted into air, an objective treatment and consideration of the state and all things of this world became possible. The subjective side at some time asserted with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such.[16]

Stephen Greenblatt owes the full development of the concept of "the self" to the Renaissance period. In some general sense it was during the Renaissance that the self went through different stages and was reshaped up to the long modern period.[17] Scholars, over the last few decades, have tackled the issue of the emergence of the modern self from different perspectives. The most poignant and authentic treatment of the Renaissance self is retrieved in the work of Stephen Greenblatt and most notably in his classic study, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning.* Self-fashioning has become a central theme in the exploration of Renaissance and early modern culture generally.[18] As a descriptive category, self-fashioning seems to capture much of what is popularly believed about Renaissance life. As Greenblatt notes:

> The simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. Such self–consciousness had been widespread among the elite in the classical world, but Christianity brought a growing suspicion of man's power to shape identity. As a term for the action or process of making for particular features of appearance, for a distinct style or pattern, the word had been long in use, but it is in the sixteenth century, that FASHION seems to come into wide currency

[16] Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 200.
[17] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 15.
[18] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 14.

> […] But, more significantly for our purposes, fashioning may suggest the achievement of a less tangible shape; a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving […].[19]

In his book, *Passage to Modernity*, Louis Dupré discusses the roots, development and impact of modern thought, tracing the fundamental principles of modernity to the late fourteenth-century Renaissance affirming that modernity is still an influential force in contemporary culture.[20] Early Renaissance humanism emphasized human creativity: the self came out as the only source of meaning while nature lessened to the degree of an object. Dupré rightly retorts: "Indeed, but the more valuable heritage of the past consists in the vital promises it holds for the future."[21] He proceeds to conclude his insightful treatment of modernity as follows:

> Modernity is an event that has transformed the relation between the cosmos, its transcendent sources, and its human interpreter. To explain this as the outcome of historical precedents is to ignore its most significant quality-namely-, its success in rendering all rival views of the real obsolete. Its innovative power made of modernity, which began as a local Western phenomenon, a universal project capable of forcing its theoretical and practical principles on all but the most isolated civilizations.[22]

Despite post-modern criticism and its rejection of a modernity that came to be seen as 'obsolete' since the world has entered its post-modern phase, the principles of early modernity continue to dominate the climate of our time. Modernity is not so much a critique as a search for the philosophical meaning of the epochal change that changed the face of Western Europe in the subsequent years. Many scholars go on maintaining the idea that the Renaissance is at the origin of a dynamic, liberating, and post-religious, post-medieval humanistic spirit centred on the ideal of human autonomy. Thus, Charles Trinkaus, one of the most influential Renaissance historians writes that the Renaissance is:

[19] Ibid., p. 332.
[20] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 201.
[21] Ibid., p. 248.
[22] Ibid., p. 249.

> the vision of a man commanding his environment with the resources of science, creating his own rules of personal behaviour, free from the restrictions imposed by theologians, and governing his relationships with his fellows in an open, physically informed and mutually tolerant discourse.[23]

The Renaissance announced the death of religion which was superseded by rational thought. Christianity which, for centuries, bonded people together under the name of God was left out of the picture. Its role weakened and it started losing its aura and effectiveness paving the way for a vibrant new secularism compared to long Middle Ages' old belief. The era that followed that period, in the eighteenth century, was described by historians as the age of Enlightenment. The latter, opened the doors to modernity. Though the Enlightenment is seen as a whole individualistic age in itself, its affinity with the Renaissance cannot be overlooked as the Middle Ages could not be seen but through the eyes of the Renaissance. If the Renaissance humanists proclaimed a new world, it was because they knew that the old world was irretrievable. In this respect, as Peter Osborne suggests, modernity situates itself as a temporal determinant of a "very specific kind." [24] Unlike contemporary postmodernists, modernists celebrated the historical development of modernity that climaxed in the triumph of the individual on rational principles. As Leo Spitzer put it, "The Humanist believes in the power bestowed on the human mind of investigating the human mind."[25] For the Man of the Enlightenment, the joy of the new world was a result of the triumph of the Renaissance scientific revolution. The intellectual and scientific revolution of the Renaissance gave birth to masterpieces. But the chief influence lay not with the popular writers and dramatists such as Jonathan Swift and Oliver Goldsmith, but with the *philosophes*, the articulate, sociable secular

[23] Paul Oscar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 31.
[24] Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verson, 1995), p. 76.
[25] Leo Spitzer, *Language and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 52.

men of letters who were the heart and soul of the Enlightenment. In the eighteenth century, Kant defined the era as the period of man's emergence from his self-imposed minority. He offered as its motto, *Sapere Aude!* (dare to know!).[26] This resulted in the ultimate split between reason and revelation, light and darkness, reason and superstition, philosopher and priest, and man of realism and believers in myth. Philosophers sang the virtues of criticism and promoted this new spirit. They underlined the worth of reason. It was, only, thanks to reason that they called into question everything around them. For men like David Hume, "religion has lost all specificity and authority; it is no more than a dim, meaningless and unwelcome shadow on the face of reason." [27]

Renaissance Humanism supported scientific empiricism and scepticism rejecting unsupported beliefs and further diminishing the value of faith in everyday life. Besides, humanists assert that the knowledge of oneself and the universe rely on the understanding of one's individual rather than emanating from a transcendental truth. This was a fundamental stage towards the achievement of greater aspirations. Man was not only the measure of the world he knew, but the measure of the world of which he dreamt. Undoubtedly, Renaissance ideals for the individual have profoundly influenced modern thought and thinkers like Nietzsche. It contributed to the liberal and philosophical approaches that enhance much of modern life in Europe and America today. Indeed, the Renaissance hymn for Man, foregrounded Nietzsche's modern theory of *Ubermensch*, or "superman" idea. Nietzsche constantly sang the virtues of cultural strength of ancient Greece and Italian Renaissance. These ideals, Nietzsche believed, were concentrated in strong individuals like Julius Caesar or Coriolanus (Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, as a model of Renaissance Humanism, will be referred

[26] Quoted in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: Alfred A. knopf, Inc., 1966), p. 75.
[27] Gay, *The Enlightenment*, p. 44.

to for further analysis in this part later) and the "great men" of the Renaissance.[28] The critical theory of the Frankfurt School which, vehemently, rejected the degrading conditions to human dignity and spirit had been partly influenced by the philosopher Nietzsche who was, himself, influenced by the Renaissance ideals.

The Nazi concept of a European, *Herrenmenschen*, or "Master Race", in the twentieth century believed in the potential of the human will in the world. Nietzsche had written, "once you said 'God' when you gazed upon distant seas: but now I have taught you today Ubermensch, […] you could transform yourselves into forefathers and ancestors of the Ubermensch […]."[29] Nietzsche's notion of the Ubermensch or, the *Overman* who builds an eminent form of human being, can be regarded as a typically 'modern' idea, an image of the modern human aspiration to progress, advance, growth, and innovation. Zarathrustra's overman is Nietzsche's emblem for the triumph of the individual and the cultural militant. *Zarathrustra* can be read as a reverberation of ancient Renaissance ideals. "I teach you the overman," Nietzsche writes:

> Man is something that shall be overcome […] All beings so far have created something beyond themselves. Behold I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth […] man is a rope tied between the beast and overman- a rope over an abyss […] What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end. What can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a going under […].[30]

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, modernity was well-established as a departure from the backward age of medievalism. Man's achievements were towered. "We

[28] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Janet Bate, eds. Rolf Peter Horstmann and Judith Normann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 52.
[29] ----------, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian del Caro, ed. Robert pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 12.
[30] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 3.

see the future of Man as one of his own making," said H.J. Muller.[31] Starting from the seventeenth century, the escape from conventional authorities in Europe brought about the split between the religion and social virtues. The fundamental medieval precept that morality and religion stem from the same root was called into question:

> Religion of some sort is probably necessary […] Instead of worshipping supernatural rulers; it will sanctify the higher manifestations of human nature in art and love, in intellectual comprehension and aspiring adoration.[32]

During the Enlightenment and the proliferation of science, it was widely believed that nature was progressing forward into life. In 1929, Freud remarked in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*: "Man has, as it were become as prosthetic God […] Future ages […] will increase man's likeness to God still more."[33] Scientific inspections and social practices began to distance themselves from their earlier religious doctrines. A new autonomous ethic based on *reason* and *rationality* came into existence. Ethics replaced theology; religious practices were replaced by moral and civil codes. Moral confidence was founded on the merits of Reason and Nature. For instance, Bayle declared the divorce between religion and morality declaring that, "Morals and religion, far from being inseparable, are completely independent of each other." [34] Spinoza professed the worth of morality, based on his "rational" observation of the world:

> He that will carefully pursue the history of mankind, and look abroad into the several tribes of men, and with indifference survey their actions, will be able to satisfy himself that there is scarce that principle of morality to be named, or rule of virtue to be thought on which is not, somewhere or other, slighted and condemned by the general

[31] Quoted in Thomas M. Kitwood, *What Is Human?* (Downers Grove III: Intervarsity, 1979), p. 49.
[32] Julien Huxley, *The Humanist Frame* (London: George Aelen and Unwin Ltd, 1961), p. 44.
[33] Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, trans. James Stranchey (London: The Hogar Press Ltd, 1961), pp. 91-92.
[34] Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Albany: University of New York Press, 2000), p.148.

> fashion of whole societies of man, governed by practical opinions and rules of living quite opposite to others.[35]

The leading ideological principle of European modernity brought by the Renaissance was that of learning and knowing. Descartes and what came to be known as the 'Cartesian method', a method based on the potential of the mind and radical scepticism became a foundation for modern philosophy. The main purpose of this foundation was to bring to light a structure of human knowledge resting on the precept of certitude. Descartes challenged preconceived ideas relying on Christian belief and replaced it by Cartesian ethic relying on empiricism. Ultimately, the fundamental knowledge of the world and certain facts of existence were reached through one's understanding of the self, or through inner speculation. The long-standing belief that all truth was associated with the Almighty disappeared over time. Religious zeal weakened and instead, there was a wider appeal to individual conscience and thinking, seen as the only bases of all knowledge. René Descartes, the pioneering thinker of the European Enlightenment, went about rejecting all previous forms of knowledge and certainty and replaced them with a single, echoing truth: *cogito, ergo sum*, or "I think, therefore I am"[36]. Descartes's new doctrine paved the way to a new kind of rational thinking in European culture, one based on the method of scepticism which would be applied to all levels of life and inquiries. In his book, *Discourse and Method*, Descartes developed the notion of scepticism and his method of scrutinizing the truth. What is particularly important about the cogito is that it privileges the individual over tradition and privileges the

[35] Paul Hazard, *The European Mind: The Critical Years* 1680-1715, trans. J. Lewis May (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 286.
[36] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method: Meditations* and *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. John Veitch (London: Every Man's Library, 1995), P. 17.

individual's perception of the truth over some commonly shared truth. In other words, the individual subjective experience is the foundation of truth.[37]

Only through Reason, can the individual break with the past, Descartes thought. Descartes, vehemently, believed that the individual should be autonomous and free from all the shackles binding him to tradition and the culturally transmitted heritage. 'Liberal rationalism', as it came to be called, saw the light and it provided the ground for liberal political philosophers of the next three centuries as Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, and Mill were to follow. Descartes set up diverse models for *Modern* Europe to retrace: he established the idea that thinking was the most significant of all in one's life. By subjecting everything to doubt, Descartes hoped to discover the self, the universe and reach certainty. Undoubtedly, part of the original drive that gave rise to modern science was the desire to find knowledge that would prove to be useful and practical. It was hoped that through Science, the individual would become a master of nature.

In this perspective Enlightenment, a continuum of Renaissance humanism, was a "way out" to Modernity, ensured through reason that allowed for the possibility of new development.[38] It seems obvious that the Renaissance set the path towards early modern life and consequently towards modernity by beginning with a desire to overthrow all previous traditions and renovating the world in all its forms. As such, it was seen as a time of rebirth after a dark intermediate period of the middle Ages. The Renaissance established the parameters of a new system through which the contemporary world is still living. This is done in myriad fields (science, politics, economy, arts, etc). There is the usual tendency among philosophers and theologians to assume that since they deal with ideas, concepts, themes, and

[37] Ibid, p. 52.
[38] Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 158.

language, it follows that earlier ideas, concepts, and themes wrote the screen script for the present. As an illustration Allan Bloom has written:

> What was acted out in the American and French Revolution had been thought out beforehand in the writings of Locke and Rousseau, the scenarists for the drama of modern politics […] Locke was the great practical success; the new English and American regimes founded themselves according to his instructions.[39]

In order to see modernity as a whole, a cultural epoch, it is also necessary to have a clearer and fuller perspective on the past. As we must see modernity as a whole, a cultural epoch to grasp its meaning, so too must we examine Modernity as Adorno reminds us as, "a *qualitative,* not a chronological category."[40] Most importantly, the Renaissance gave credit to the potential of Man and to his ability to transcend a former age seen as 'dark'. In *The History of Political Ideas*, Eric Voegelin provides a cultural and philosophical history of the transition to modernity. He states that:

> The common factor is the growing awareness that man is the origin of meaning in the universe, and at the point of convergence arises an image of the universe that owes its meaning to the fact that it has been evoked by the mind of man. This new awareness, which we shall designate by the term modern, constitutes a radical break with the medieval image of the closed universe in its dimensions of nature and history. The medieval idea of the closed cosmos gives way to the idea of an open, infinitely extending universe evoked as a projection of the human mind and of its infinity into space.[41]

[39] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p.162.
[40] Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: verso, 1978), p. 218.
[41] Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas: Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, ed. James L. Wise (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 136.

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