

Conflict and Absolutism in Europe 1550-1715

THE STORY MATTERS...

In seventeenth-century Europe, absolutism was a reaction to instability. In England, the desire of King James II to practice his Catholic faith openly was opposed by Parliament, ending in the creation of a constitutional monarchy under the joint rule of William III and Mary II. Mary's life mirrors the conflicts of her time. Raised as a Protestant, she reluctantly overthrew her own Catholic father, James II.

Lesson 18-4

European Culture After the Renaissance

READING HELPDISK

Academic Vocabulary

decline creative drama

Content Vocabulary

Mannerism baroque

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

• How does the exercise of absolute power affect a country?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The religious and political conflicts of seventeenth-century Europe were reflected in the art, music, and literature of the time. Art produced during the Mannerist and baroque movements aroused the emotions, and the literature spoke of the human condition.

Art After the Renaissance

GUIDING QUESTION *How did art movements change in Europe after the Renaissance?*

The artistic movements of Mannerism and the baroque began in Italy and spread through Europe. The art produced during these movements reflected the tension of religious upheaval and the spirituality of religious revival.

Mannerism

The artistic Renaissance came to an end when a new movement, called **Mannerism**, emerged in Italy in the 1520s and 1530s. The Reformation's revival of religious values brought much political turmoil. Especially in Italy, the worldly enthusiasm of the Renaissance declined as people grew more anxious and uncertain and wished for spiritual experience. Mannerism in art reflected this new environment by deliberately breaking down the High Renaissance principles of balance, harmony, and moderation. The rules of proportion were deliberately ignored as elongated figures were used to show suffering, heightened emotions, and religious ecstasy. Mannerism spread from Italy to other parts of Europe and perhaps reached its high point in the work of El Greco, "the Greek." El Greco studied the elements of Renaissance painting in Venice. He also wrote many works on painting. From Venice, El Greco moved to Rome. His career as a painter stalled there possibly because he had

criticized Michelangelo's artistic abilities. When he moved to Spain, El Greco met with success.

In El Greco's paintings, the figures are elongated or contorted and he sometimes used unusual shades of yellow and green against an eerie background of stormy grays. The mood of his works reflects well the tensions created by the religious upheavals of the Reformation.

Baroque Art

Mannerism eventually was replaced by a new movement – the **baroque**. This movement began in Italy at the end of the sixteenth century and eventually spread to the rest of Europe and Latin America. It was eagerly adopted by the Catholic reform movement as shown in the richly detailed buildings at Catholic courts, especially those of the Hapsburgs in Madrid, Prague, Vienna, and Brussels.

Baroque artists tried to bring together the classical ideals of Renaissance art and the spiritual feelings of the sixteenth-century religious revival. In large part, though, baroque art and architecture reflected a search for power. Baroque churches and palaces were magnificent and richly detailed. Kings and princes wanted others to be in awe of their power.

Perhaps the greatest figure of the baroque period was the Italian architect and sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who completed Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, Rome. Saint Peter's Basilica is the church of the popes and a major pilgrimage site.

Action, exuberance, and dramatic effects mark the work of Bernini in the interior of Saint Peter's. For instance, his Throne of Saint Peter is a highly decorated cover for the pope's medieval wooden throne. It is considered by many to be Bernini's crowning achievement in Saint Peter's Basilica. The throne seems to hover in midair, held by the hands of the four great theologians of the early Catholic Church. Above the chair, rays of heavenly light drive a mass of clouds and angels toward the spectator.

The baroque painting style was known for its use of dramatic effects to arouse the emotions as shown in the work of another important Italian artist of the baroque period, Caravaggio. Similar to other baroque painters, Caravaggio used dramatic lighting to heighten emotions, to focus details, and to isolate the figures in his paintings. His work placed an

emphasis on everyday experience. He shocked some of his patrons by depicting religious figures as common people in everyday settings, rather than in a traditional, idealized style.

Artemisia Gentileschi is less well-known than the male artists who dominated the seventeenth-century art world in Italy but is prominent in her own right. Born in Rome, she studied painting with her father. In 1616 she moved to Florence and began a successful career as a painter. At the age of 23, she became the first woman to be elected to the Florentine Academy of Design. She was known internationally in her day as a portrait painter, but her fame now rests on a series of pictures of Hebrew Bible heroines.

The baroque style of art did not just flourish in Italy. Peter Paul Rubens embodied the baroque movement in Flanders (the Spanish Netherlands), where he worked most of his life. A scholar and a diplomat as well as an artist, Rubens used his classical education and connections with noble patrons in Italy, Spain, England, France, and Flanders to paint a variety of genres. He is best known for his depictions of the human form in action. These images are lavish and extravagant, much like the court life he experienced during the baroque period.

Baroque Music

In the first half of the eighteenth century, two composers – Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel – perfected the baroque musical style and composed some of the world’s most enduring music.

Bach, a renowned organist as well as a composer, spent his entire life in Germany. While he was music director at the Church of Saint Thomas in Leipzig, he composed his *Mass in B Minor* and other works that gave him the reputation of being one of the greatest composers of all time.

Handel was a German who spent much of his career in England. Handel wrote much secular music, but he is probably best known for his religious music. Handel’s *Messiah* has been called a rare work that appeals immediately to everyone and yet is a masterpiece of the highest order.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Cause and Effect How did the Mannerist and baroque styles in art reflect the religious conflicts and revivals of their time?

Golden Age of Literature

GUIDING QUESTION *What characterized the Golden Age of literature in England and Spain?*

In both England and Spain, writing for the theater reached new heights between 1580 and 1640. Other forms of literature flourished as well.

England’s Shakespeare

A cultural flowering took place in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The period is often called the Elizabethan era, because so much of it fell within the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Of all the forms of Elizabethan literature, none expressed the energy of the era better than drama. Of all the English dramatists, none is more famous than William Shakespeare.

When Shakespeare appeared in London in 1592, Elizabethans already enjoyed the stage. The theater was a very successful business. London theaters ranged from the Globe, a circular, unroofed structure holding 3,000 people, to the Blackfriars, a roofed structure that held only 500.

The Globe Theatre’s admission charge of one or two pennies enabled even the lower classes of London to attend performances. The higher prices of the Blackfriars filled the audience with more well-to-do patrons. Because Elizabethan audiences for a single performance varied greatly, playwrights wrote works that were meant to please nobles, lawyers, merchants, and vagabonds alike.

William Shakespeare was a “complete man of the theater.” Although best known for writing plays, he was also an actor and shareholder in the chief theater company of the time, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, which performed at the Globe.

Shakespeare has long been viewed as a universal genius. A master of the English language, he brought many new words into common usage. Shakespeare also wrote over 150 sonnets, a type of poetry popular during the Elizabethan era. He had a keen insight into human psychology. In his tragedies, comedies, and histories, Shakespeare showed a remarkable understanding of the human condition.

Spain’s Cervantes and Vega

One of the crowning achievements of the golden age of Spanish literature was the work of Miguel de Cervantes (suh • VAN • teez). His novel *Don Quixote* has been hailed as one of the greatest literary works of all time.

In the two main characters of this famous work, Cervantes presented the dual nature of the Spanish character. The knight, Don Quixote from La Mancha, is the visionary so involved in his lofty ideals that he does not see the hard realities around him. To him, for example, windmills appear to be four-armed giants. In contrast, the knight’s fat and earthy squire, Sancho Panza, is a realist.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

Don Quixote on the Windmills

“[F]or you can see over there, good friend Sancho Panza, a place where stand thirty or more monstrous giants with whom I intend to fight a battle and whose lives I intend to take; and with the booty we shall begin to prosper. For this is a just war, and it is a great service to God to wipe such a wicked breed from the face of the earth.”

– Miguel de Cervantes, from *Don Quixote*

CONTRASTING

How do Don Quixote’s motives for attacking the windmills show a contrast?

Each of these characters finally comes to see the value of the other’s perspective. The readers of *Don Quixote* are left with the conviction that both visionary dreams and the hard work of reality are necessary to the human condition.

The theater was also one of the most creative forms of expression during Spain’s golden period of literature. The first professional theaters were created in Seville and Madrid

Soon, every large town had a public playhouse, including Mexico City in the Americas. Touring companies brought the latest Spanish plays to all parts of the Spanish Empire.

Beginning in the 1580s, the standard for playwrights was set by Lope de Vega. He wrote an extraordinary number of plays, perhaps 1,500 in all. Almost 500 of them survive to this day. Vega's plays are thought to be witty, charming, action-packed, and realistic. Lope de Vega made no apologies for the

fact that he wrote his plays to please his audiences and to satisfy public demand. He remarked once that if anyone thought he had written his plays for the sake of fame, "undeceive him and tell him that I wrote them for money."

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining Why was the theater so popular in England, Spain, and the Spanish Empire between 1580 and 1640?

REVIEWING VOCABULARY

- Mannerism** an artistic movement that emerged in Italy in the 1520s and 1530s; it marked the end of the Renaissance by breaking down the principles of balance, harmony, and moderation
- Baroque** an artistic style of the seventeenth century characterized by complex forms, bold ornamentation, and contrasting elements