

HUI216

Italian Civilization

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11.1 Giovanni Boccaccio's account of his life

- He maintained that he was born in Paris, from the secret affair his father allegedly had with the King's daughter
- Then, as his father moved back to Florence, he was brought along
- When he was still very young he went to live in Naples, where he studied and practiced accounting
- In Naples, he met Fiammetta, illegitimate daughter of the King of Naples
- Boccaccio claims that he became a poet and a storyteller because of her

11.1 Boccaccio's life as we know it

- He was born in Florence, from a widow who had an affair with Boccaccio's father
- Fiammetta was the daughter of a Neapolitan noblewoman, wife of a rich merchant
- Boccaccio's family lived in the small town of Certaldo (near Florence)
- His father was Boccaccio da Chellino
 - Boccaccio's father moved to Florence
 - From 1310 to 1342 he worked for the Bardi Financial Company

11.1 Boccaccio (1313-1374)

- Boccaccio's father was in Paris a few times, including the year of Giovanni's birth (1313)
- However his son was born in Florence (or perhaps in Certaldo)
- Boccaccio went to Naples around 1325
 - There he worked for the Bardis, getting the training needed to become a merchant
- He left Naples in 1340, when the Bardi were forced to close many of their offices

11.1 Boccaccio and the Black Death

- In 1348 in Florence he witnessed the Black Death
 - An epidemic of plague that killed more at least 40% of the population of the city
 - The epidemic is described in the Introduction to the *Decameron* (written 1348-51)
- Later he also worked as a diplomat, traveling to different places in Italy

11.1 Boccaccio: the last years

- He retired to Certaldo with little money
 - Here many scholars and poet visited him, as he was already famous
 - Following Petrarch's lead, he wrote many scholarly books
 - Among them, a Life of Dante and a series of lectures on the Inferno, and the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, a dictionary of mythology, in Latin
 - He became a deacon, for various reasons, personal as well as economic
- Died in 1374

11.2 *The Decameron* (1348-51)

- Follows the tradition of the *specula Principum* (mirrors for Princes)
 - short stories with moral principles to teach, while also entertaining the reader
 - e.g., *Il libro dei sette savi* (The book of the 7 wise men)
- Reflects the political struggles of the merchants in Florence
 - The plague is also an allegory of social change (the demise of the old world)
- The title reminds of St. Ambrose *Hexameron*, a commentary of the six days of creation
- The frame story (*cornice*) allows the author to add another level to the narration
 - The characters telling each other stories also offer different commentaries and different reactions

11.2 The structure of the *Decameron*: topics of the various sections

- Day 1: narrators are free to pick any topic
- Day 2: fighting against fortune
- Day 3: overcoming adverse fortune with one's virtue
- Day 4: tragic love stories
- Day 5: love stories with a happy ending
- Day 6: wit and intelligence
- Day 7: wives tricking their husbands
- Day 8: man and women tricking each other
- Day 9: no fixed topic (mostly vices and pranks)
- Day 10: the greatest virtues

11.3 Multiple points of view in Ciappelletto's novella (*Dec. 1.1*)

- One of Boccaccio's stylistic innovations is the introduction of multiple points of view inside the story, a common approach in modern literature, seldom used before by medieval writers
- The narrator present the novella as a theological dilemma, concerning good saints and bad saints
- The characters have differing views/opinions of the main character, Ciappelletto
- For example, Musciatto's choice, to send him to deal with the crafty Burgundians, reflects his practical values and social identity
 - As a businessman, the wicked notary is simply the right man for the job, exactly because of his wickedness

11.3 Multiple points of view in Ciappelletto's novella

- The priest's opinion (and the Burgundians' opinion)
 - They judge him based on their limited contacts and experience
- The 2 Florentine brother's judgment
 - They have no idea that Ciappelletto's confession is his legacy, his masterpiece: based on very limited knowledge of this character's past life, they justifiably think he is a terrible man, as he is able to play such a prank on his deathbed, to save them, absolute strangers
- The audience (the *brigata*) laughs and appreciates the story (remarking that it is just a story)
- The author's point? Inside the changing culture of Humanism, it is as important to know about man and human nature as it is to know about the holiest of things

11.3 The narrator introduces *Dec. 1.1*

- ...dear Ladies... a man ought to begin whatever he does, in the great and glorious name of Him, who was the Creator of all things. ...seeing that I am the man appointed to begin this story-telling: I intend to begin also with one of God's wonders. To the end, that this being heard, our hope may remain on Him...
- Now... as temporal things are mortal and transitory, so are they both in and out of themselves, full of sorrow, pain, and anguish, and subjected to infinite dangers: so... we... cannot continue or defend ourselves, if God by His special grace and favor, give us not strength and good understanding.

11.3 The main message of the novella?

- To... [the Saints] (as to advocates and procurators, informed by the experience of our frailty) we offer our prayers, not daring to confront so great a Judge with our petitions.
- ...we may be misled in opinion, by electing such and such as our intercessors... who perhaps are far off from Him, or driven into perpetual exile...
- ...He... more regards the sincerity of him that prays, than ignorant devotion, committed to the trust of an improper intercessor...
- As manifestly will appear, by the Novella which I intend to relate...

11.3 Musciatto the merchant/knight

- There was a man named Musciatto Franzesi, who from being a most rich and great merchant in France, had become a Knight, and was preparing to go into Tuscany...
- ...the merchant found his affairs greatly intricate here and there... and that very hardly he could unentangle them, without referring the charge of them to a number of people.

11.3 The right man for the job

- And he managed to do so in every case save one; he remained doubtful, whom he might sufficiently leave, to recover his debts among many Burgundians.
- His doubt arose from reports that the Burgundians were people of bad nature, litigious, and inclined to mischief: so that he could not be think himself of any man (no matter how wicked) in whom he might repose trust to meet with their slyness.
- ...at last he remembered one Master Cepperello from Prato...

11.3 Evil?

- ...being a Notary, he held it in high disdain, that any of his Contracts (although he made but few) should be found without falsehood.
- He would never refuse a request for a fraudulent certificate, and he'd sooner hand one of these out for nothing, than issue a genuine one against a hefty payment.
- He took the only pleasure of the world, to bear false witness, if he were thereto entreated, and (oftentimes) when he was not requested at all.

11.3 A backward saint?

- ...He delighted (beyond measure) and addicted his best studies, to cause enmities and scandals between relatives and friends...
- If he were called to kill anyone, or to do any other villainous deed, he never would make denial, but go to it very willingly...
- He was a great glutton and a drunkard, even he was not able to take any more...
- ...suffice to say, that never was there a worse man born...

11.3 Playing with viewpoints

- This Ciappelletto, being thus remembered by Musciatto (who very well knew his life and behavior) he perfectly persuaded himself, that this was a man apt in all respects to meet with the treachery of the Burgundians...
- Ciappelletto, seeing himself idle, and greedy after worldly goods, considering that Musciatto... was now to depart from there, without any dreaming on the matter, and constrained... by necessity, set down his resolution, and answered, that he would gladly do it.

11.3 The many faces of Ciappelletto

- Ciappelletto went to Dijon, where he was unknown of any. ...there... he began benignly and graciously, in recovering the debts due; which course he took the rather, because they should have a further feeling of him in the end.
- Being lodged in the house of two Florentine brothers who were practicing usury; and (for Musciatto's sake) using him with honor and respect: it happened that he fell sick, and the two brothers sent for doctors...

11.3 What shall we do... with this man?

- ...for to send him away (sick as he is) we shall be greatly blamed thereby... On the other side we are to consider also that he has been so bad a man, as he will not now make any confession..., and dying so without confession, there is no Church that will accept his body... And yet if he would confess himself, his sins are so many and monstrous, as the like case also may happen, because there is not any Priest or Religious person, that can or will absolve him. And being not absolved, he must be cast into some ditch or pit, and then the people of the Town..., in furious madness will they come upon us, and our house....

11.3 Ciappelletto's plan

- "...Procure therefore... that the most holy and religious man that is to be found... may come unto me, and refer the case then to me, for I will deal in such sort for you and myself, that all shall be well, and you no way discontented."
- The two brothers, although they had no great hope in his speeches, went... to a Monastery of Friars, and requested that a holy and wise man might come to hear the confession of a Lombard... And one was granted unto them, being an aged religious Friar, well versed in the sacred Scriptures, a very venerable person, who being of good and sanctified life, all the Citizens held him in great respect and esteem...

11.3 The sin of gluttony: playing the context against the sin

- "...over and beside the Fasts of our Lent season... I brought myself to such a customary use, that I could fast three days in every Week, with Bread and Water. But indeed (holy Father) I confess, that I have drunk water with such a pleasing appetite and delight (especially in praying, or walking on pilgrimages) even as greedy drunkards do, in drinking good Wine. And many times I have desired such Salads of small herbs, as Women do gather out in the open fields, and feeding only upon them, without coveting after any other kind of sustenance, has seemed much more pleasing to me, than I thought to agree with the nature of Fasting..."

11.3 Switching the roles...

- "Son, Son" replied the Confessor "these sins are natural, and very light... It happens to every man (how holy he may be) that after he has fasted too long, feeding will be welcome to him, and drinking too."
- "Sir" said Ciappelletto "never tell me this to comfort me, for well you know, and I am not ignorant of this, that such things as are done for the service of God, ought all to be performed purely, and without any blemish of the mind..."

11.3 Reframing the sin of anger

- "Oh Sir" said Ciappelletto "therein I assure you, I have often transgressed. And what man is able to bear it: looking at the daily actions of men to be so dishonest? No care of keeping God's Commandments, nor any fear of his dreadful judgments. Many times in a day, I have rather wished myself dead then living, seeing youth pursuing idle vanities, to swear and forswear themselves, drinking in Taverns, and never attending Churches..."

11.3 The switch...

- "But" said the Confessor "have you done nothing else?"
- "Yes" said he "... once I spat in God's Church."
- The Friar smiling, said: "Alas Son, that is a matter of no moment; for we that are Religious persons, do use to spit there every day."
- "The more is your shame" answered Ciappelletto, "for no place ought to be kept more pure and clean than the sacred Temple, wherein our daily sacrifices are offered up to God."

11.3 The two brothers...

- The two brothers... heard... the passage of all, between him and the Friar, being many times scarcely able to refrain from laughter... And often they said...: "What manner of man is this, whom neither age, sickness, nor terror of death so near approaching..., nor that which is much more, God, before whose judgment he knows not how soon he shall appear, or else be sent to a more fearful place; none of these can alter his wicked disposition, or make him think twice about dying as he has lived?" Notwithstanding, seeing he had so ordered the matter, that he had burial freely allowed him, they cared for no more...

11.4 Pierpaolo Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971)

- Pasolini's intention was to comment on contemporary Italian society
- Pasolini chooses to ignore the frame story entirely
- Pasolini alters Ciappelletto's novella to support a Marxist view of social relationships
 - Ciappelletto, from the point of view of the lower class, appears to be a victim of the wealthy merchants
 - Ciappelletto is "sacrificed" and manipulated by the bourgeoisie
 - Thanks to his sacrifice, while he loses his soul the usurers can continue with their capitalist pursuits
 - The Church can appropriate his "good" reputation and gain power
 - North vs. South: in the movie the merchants are portrayed as Neapolitan immigrants, nostalgic of their land, and the setting is moved from France to Switzerland or Austria

11.5 Boccaccio's novella and its protagonist, Ciappelletto

- Ciappelletto is not your ordinary criminal, a petty thief or a paid killer
- What sets him apart from other evil characters is that he participates to criminal activities freely and willingly, with full pleasure, and with a sort of gusto
- He does not have a trivial motivation to account for his behavior, such as money or success or fame
- His life is that of a backward saint, somebody trying to make his life into a work of art, an extraordinary thing, by always being consistent, always setting up goals that are not easy to reach, and that require hard "evil" work to be achieved
- Ciappelletto is evil, nobody can deny that, and there is no apology for his behavior from the point of view of religious morality, or from any other point of view
- Yet it is clear that Ciappelletto is a talented fellow, that he is bright and that he has a strong will and a quick intellect

11.5 Boccaccio's novella and its protagonist, Ciappelletto (2)

- In the context of traditional medieval culture, for example from the point of view of a poet-theologian such as Dante, Ciappelletto deserves to be in Hell for two equally powerful reasons
 - first because he is evil and he has committed many crimes against religion, against God and against other men and women
 - and secondly because he had received so many talents from God, but he wasted them or misused them in a life of crime and debauchery
- Medieval culture was all about the unification or the reconciliation of different, paradoxical points of views
- Boccaccio's culture, as it appears from this novella, is an anticipation of our modern 'schizophrenic' culture, in which there is no effort to reconcile opposing views and contradictory judgments at all costs
- Therefore, for the reader of Boccaccio and for the more modern reader, Ciappelletto can still be admired for his talents, his intelligence, his wit, his wicked smarts, while at the same time he will have to be considered immoral from a different point of view

11.5 Boccaccio's novella and its protagonist, Ciappelletto (3)

- This is the same mechanism that drives you to empathize with and to like the protagonist of a story or a movie even when you recognize that he or she is evil, that technically he or she has violated social or moral laws
- Many a movie are based on this mechanism, on this separation of judgments
- What you as the reader or the viewer do, in front of such a character, is to adopt only one point of view at a time, to consider one set of values at a time
- Judging solely on a limited definition of success and intelligence, Ciappelletto therefore can be admired because he has outsmarted a wise old priest, who was well versed in the Scriptures, but clearly knew very little about the power of rhetoric and about human nature in general
- From the point of view of the businessman, the merchant, Ciappelletto is the right man for the job of recovering the money of the wealthy Italian who lived in Paris, because only he can outsmart the clever and not-so-honest Burgundians
- And, finally, from the point of view of religion, there is little doubt that Ciappelletto will end up in Hell, even though technically he could have repented sincerely at the very last moment, and God might have forgiven him for mysterious reasons

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (1)

- Regarding the style of this novella, the point of view is introduced here for the first time after the literatures of the Greeks and Romans, as a new literary device
- What I mean is that in this novella each character has a different point of view, a different opinion and a different knowledge of what is going on in the story
- For example the rich Italian merchant who lives in Paris and charges Ciappelletto with the mission of recovering his money from the French people of Burgundy knows Ciappelletto to be a crafty evil man, and therefore, from his angle, the right man for the job at hand
- The two Florentine merchants who accept Ciappelletto into their house do not know him as well as the merchant who sent him
- They do not believe that there can be a positive solution to the problem of the confession of this evil man, and they cannot understand why he would do something like that, that is a false confession, just to save them
- We, the readers, having read about Ciappelletto's frame of mind, his past history and his approach to anything that looks even remotely evil, do understand that the confession is the ultimate challenge, the best and last test for his natural talents

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (2)

- Previously, inside medieval literature, the narration was usually conducted from only one point of view, which is often similar to the point of view of a hypothetical eyewitness, who being present on each scene could then report what was told and what was done, with very little insight into the minds of the characters
- In the case of Boccaccio, the reader usually is able to understand what the character feels or thinks, and most importantly the reader is able to appreciate the distance that often separates the characters' thoughts and feelings and what he or she will say to other people
- In the case of the first novella, for example, Ciappelletto will first admit to himself that when Musciatto leaves Paris he will be without protection, and that therefore going to Burgundy is the only option he has at that point, if he wants to stay alive
- Yet he will "gladly" agree to the merchant's offer
- The two brothers do not believe that Ciappelletto will be able to make his confession in such a way that no harm will come to him or to them. Nonetheless, they accept his proposal to call for a wise holy man

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (3)

- Even the novella itself is presented from different angles
- The narrator, who belongs to the group of young men and women spending time in the Florentine villa during the Black Death epidemic, introduces the novella as a story about a theological dilemma, which is not entirely false, but certainly does not reflect the relevance of comedy in the structure of this story
 - (This novella also provides the reader with much needed relief after the grim description of the plague in Florence. And yet there is a similarity between the absolute social chaos in the city and the sum of all evils in Ciappelletto.)
- The confession is supposed to be (and still is, for many contemporary readers) a hilarious piece of comedy, built on the huge difference between the reality of Ciappelletto's life and the incredible lies of his fake confession
 - (Which helps explain why Ciappelletto needs to be an all-evil character, in the narration, since... the bigger the lie, the funnier the story.)

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (4)

- The audience, that is to say the other young men and women who listen to the narrator, react to the narration with smiles and they clearly like the story, which provides another point of view
- Then it is legitimate to ask ourselves what was Boccaccio's point of view, creating this narration and presenting it at the beginning of his collection of short stories
- In identifying Boccaccio's point of view, there are several points to consider
- First of all, since he is the author, the storyteller behind all the narrators, this story serves the purpose of arranging the organization and the structure of the entire collection of short stories around a clear criterion, imposed by the laws of the comical genre: the collection opens with the gloomy description of a terrible disease and its victims, followed by a story where the protagonist is an evil man who manages to overthrow all the laws of religion and piety, and it ends with a novella where the protagonist is Griselda, a woman from a low-class family of the countryside, who shows and uses successfully all the major virtues, humility and strength, dignity and courage, magnanimity and intelligence

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (5)

- But Boccaccio is also a writer, very much involved with the social and political issues of his times, an intellectual
- As such the "message" of the author must be connected to the many references to religion in the story, in particular the details of the not-so-flattering treatment of the character of the French priest who confesses the protagonist
- At the beginning of the 14th century the libraries of many Italian convents received a considerable amount of manuscripts dealing with the topic of confession, while at the same time instructions arrived regularly for the heads of the convents to be particularly careful in the choice of friars to be assigned to the sacrament of confession. It is clear from those instructions that the friars confessing the members of the community should be educated, well-read men (while not all friars were able to read or write at that time), and that confession was not to be considered an easy task, but rather one requiring culture and a large experience of the world.
- Boccaccio might have been aware of the ongoing debate inside sections of the Church about the peculiar skills required to be a good confessor

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (6)

- Boccaccio then also used the story to offer a comic allegory of the contrast between the new culture of Humanism, which was then coming out in Florence and in other areas of Italy, and the traditional culture where knowledge of the scriptures implied simply that one was competent in the ways God administers the universe and in the laws of religious morality
- At the core of the new humanistic culture instead, one finds the belief that all books, from the Bible to the works of the great Greeks and Romans, are worth reading only if the reader makes an effort to identify the 'historical' contents in them, that is to say those elements that pertain to human nature, human society and to nature in general
- The reason why still have a section in many universities called Humanities derives exactly from that attempt to reorganize culture around the belief that the students should read literary and historical texts to learn more about themselves

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (7)

- Finally, it is evident that the longest section of the novella, the confession itself, gives great emphasis to rhetoric, to some of the rhetorical devices that one can use to win over an argument, to convince the other party, or even to conclude a successful commercial transaction, since any merchant relies often on his communicative skills in his line of work, and merchants were the target audience of this book written by Boccaccio
- There are a few "tricks" that are used over and over by the main character to take advantage of the holy man's simple nature
- For example Ciappelletto will admit to a sin, exaggerating greatly the gravity of the act that he has committed against God, so that the holy man will have to convince him that it is really nothing, a minor infraction, a common albeit not entirely appropriate behavior (spitting in a church, eating with pleasure after fasting, etc.)
- Whenever the priest does that, Ciappelletto has the chance to take over and become himself the judge, scolding the friar for not showing enough respect for God's laws, as even the most minute rules are to be followed to the letter

11.5 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (8)

- Often a minor sin is also framed in the context of practices that show Ciappelletto to be the most pious man that ever lived
- While he is apparently giving attention only to the presumed gravity of a certain offense against God, in order to get to the actual sin he will 'have to' describe the kind of life that he leads, and that he (here is the clever twist) considers so totally inadequate and so unworthy of God's love
- The description of a fictional life where morality and moral considerations are central becomes effective and convincing exactly because rather than bragging about it, rather than looking for approval and praise, Ciappelletto shows that he is so disappointed with himself, so sure that he has not done enough to comply with the rules and the behaviors prescribed by Christian religion

11.6 Humanism

- A system of education and a mode of inquiry
 - Was developed in Northern Italy during the 14th century
 - Formed the basis for Renaissance culture
 - Encouraged the study and the rediscovery of classical culture
 - It is during this period of that philology and archeology were born, the first museums created
- The term derives from *studia humanitatis*
 - Traditional disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric, history, philosophy (ethics, politics) studied *juxta propria principia* (=according to their own principles), rather than with the guide of religious ideology
 - The Latin term *Humanitas*, which produced the English *Humanities*, indicates the development of human virtue(s)

11.7 Italy during the Renaissance

- The main Italian states during this time were
 - Piedmont, Genoa, Milan, Venice, Ferrara, Mantua, Florence, Siena, the State of the Church (the city-states of Romagna), the Kingdom of Naples
 - Political fragmentation and divisions characterized Italy during this time
- 1494: Charles VIII, king of France, invades Italy
 - The kingdom of Naples was his objective
- 1494-1559: France, Germany, Spain and the various Italian states fight constantly
 - Spain emerges victorious at the end: it controlled most of the South of Italy, parts of Tuscany, and Lombardy until the beginning of the 18th century

11.8 The life of Leonardo, from <http://www.mos.org/leonardo/bio.html>

- The illegitimate son of a notary, Ser Piero, and a peasant girl, Caterina, Leonardo was born on April 15, 1452, in Vinci, Italy, just outside Florence
- When he was about 15 his father apprenticed him to the workshop of Andrea del Verrochio in Florence
- Leonardo stayed in the Verrocchio workshop until 1477 when he set up shop for himself
- He entered the service of the Duke of Milan in 1482, abandoning a commission in Florence, "The Adoration of the Magi"

11.8 The life of Leonardo, from <http://www.mos.org/leonardo/bio.html> (2)

- He spent 17 years in Milan, leaving only after Duke Ludovico Sforza's fall from power in 1499
- The Duke kept Leonardo busy painting and sculpting and designing elaborate court festivals, but he also put Leonardo to work designing weapons, buildings and machinery
- Also during this period, Leonardo produced his first anatomical studies
- Between 1490 and 1495 he developed his habit of recording his studies in meticulously illustrated notebooks

11.8 The life of Leonardo, from <http://www.mos.org/leonardo/bio.html> (3)

- Over the next 16 years, Leonardo worked and traveled throughout Italy for a number of employers, including Cesare Borgia
- He traveled for a year with Borgia's army as a military engineer and even met Niccolo Machiavelli
 - received a commission to paint the "Battle of Anghiari"
- Around 1503, Leonardo reportedly began work on the "Mona Lisa"
- From 1513 to 1516, he worked in Rome
- Following the death of his patron Giuliano de' Medici in 1516, he was offered the title of Premier Painter and Engineer and Architect of the King by Francis I in France
- Leonardo died on May 2, 1519 in Cloux

11.9 Leonardo da Vinci: the myth

- The basis for the creation of the myth of Leonardo was the lack of details on him and his life
- Even about his physical appearance, not much was known, 30 years after his death
- It was easy to fabricate or to repeat fictional anecdotes, to exaggerate traits, and create an idealized portrait
- Fictional passages in Vasari: one cannot overlook the pathos and the allegorical implications of the last scene, with one of the most powerful kings of Europe paying homage to an artist

11.9 Leonardo da Vinci: Vasari's vested interest, Burckhardt's Romantic ideal

- Vasari the artist had a vested interest in the construction of this ideal portrait of Leonardo as the perfect model of an equally perfect culture, a new culture that Vasari promoted in his major work, giving it a name (Renaissance) and an image, and consolidating its reputation for centuries to come
- *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, by Swiss German scholar Jacob Burckhardt (1860), revamped the myth of Leonardo, as it matched the idea of the romantic hero, still fashionable at that time

11.9 Giorgio Vasari, "a highly unreliable witness"

- Vasari was credited as being the first or one of the first to use and make popular the word "rinascita" [rebirth] in reference to the culture of his age
- On Vasari, his accounts and opinions, consider what famous 20th-century art historian Gombrich had to say:
 - Vasari's book -- which first appeared in 1550 and in a second, much expanded edition in 1568 -- is perhaps the most famous, and even today the most read work of the older literature of art.
 - His portrayals of his characters and his art of pragmatically linking individual episodes are still influential.
 - It has not been difficult for critical documentary scholarship to demonstrate that Vasari is a highly unreliable witness, especially for the early Renaissance, that he often invents freely, and that, even when he writes on the basis of firsthand experience, he is subject to amazing confusions.

11.9 Giorgio Vasari and the progress of Italian art

- On Vasari, his accounts and opinions, consider what famous 20th-century art historian Gombrich had to say:
 - And yet praise and blame of the work are too often directed at specifics, overlooking the achievement of its construction of history, in which, of course, previous generations also had a part.
 - Vasari expressly protests (in the introduction to Part Two) against being judged as a mere chronicler. He was concerned with deriving instruction from history, with showing young painters how application and talent bring success, and above all with accounting for the flourishing of art after Cimabue.
 - He expressly places Michelangelo, as the only living figure, at the end and, simultaneously, at the summit of his first edition, for to him the history of art is a story of progress from modest beginnings, through the worthy but somewhat dry masters of the "second manner" (of the Quattrocento), to the triumph of the third and perfect artistic manner, introduced by Leonardo.

11.9 The myth of Leonardo

- It goes without saying that Leonardo was an exceptional individual, with qualities and talents that most people can only dream of
- Yet this mythical image of Leonardo that still exists in popular culture, and that many writers and journalists seem eager to embrace without reservations, is very much the result of a cultural operation, where early documents such as Vasari's *Lives* and later cultural trends (during the age of Romanticism) conspired to produce the impression that Leonardo was not simply extraordinary (but still a product of his own time and culture), but rather that he was really unique, a giant among pygmies, a phenomenon for all times, an intellectual freak of sorts

11.9 The myth of Leonardo, his defects and failures

- And yet, even inside Vasari's Life, one finds references to failures and defects, defects that did not go unnoticed by Leonardo's contemporaries
- I'm referring to his inclination to protract his works and defer completion endlessly, which generated the numerous references by Vasari to the unfinished works left by Leonardo (although in some instances Vasari's comments are somehow puzzling: is the Mona Lisa unfinished? Unless the painting that we now admire in Paris is not the one described by the Vasari, a possibility mentioned by many a scholar...)

11.9 The myth of Leonardo, his failures

- I am referring also to his failed experiments with new techniques, especially in the areas of oil painting and frescoes, which led to the early deterioration of famous works such as the Battle of Anghiari
- The Last Supper painted in Milan, for a long time considered the most beautiful fresco ever realized, became considerably darker just a few years after Leonardo finished it, and even today, after a recent painstaking restoration, many details cannot be seen clearly from a normal distance: they can only be appreciated at a very close range

11.9 The myth of Leonardo, recap

- The first element that facilitated the construction of the myth of Leonardo, other than his obvious talents, was, as I mentioned before, the very lack of precise information, details and anecdotes, at least compared to other artists such as Michelangelo
- When Vasari wrote the chapter on Leonardo, many things about him were still surrounded by secrecy or obscurity
- Even about his face and body, his physical appearance, not much was remembered, 30 years after his death

11.9 The myth of Leonardo, his portrait

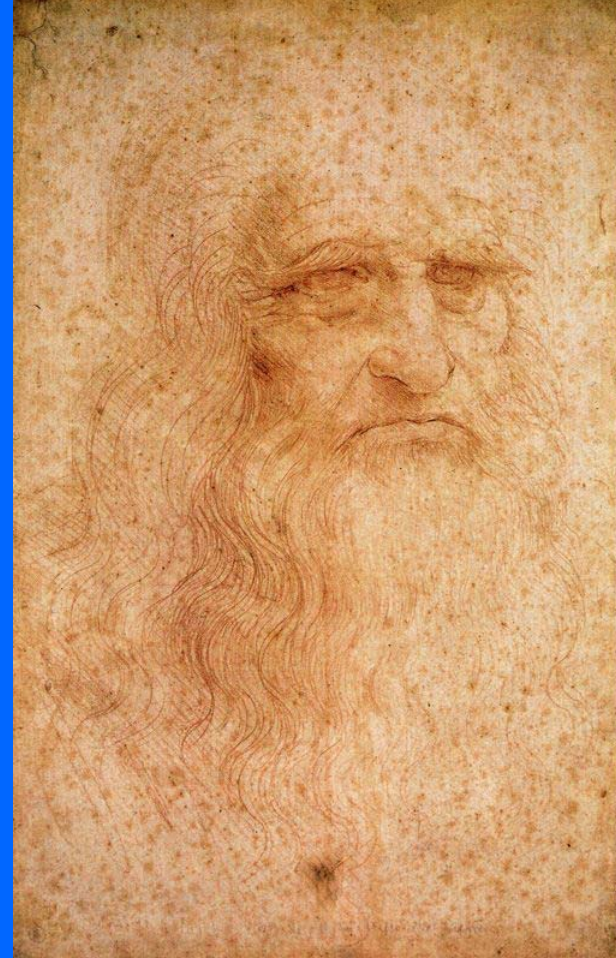
- There weren't any portraits where Leonardo could be identified without any doubts, nor were there any self-portraits that were known (scholars still argue whether or not the famous image of an old man drawn in red ink in a manuscript found in Turin, Italy, is Leonardo or not)
- Without accurate information available, it was easier in the case of this artist to fabricate or to repeat fictional anecdotes, to exaggerate the traits of an idealized portrait
- Therefore Leonardo becomes in the early biographies one of the most handsome men of his times, and not just the greatest mind

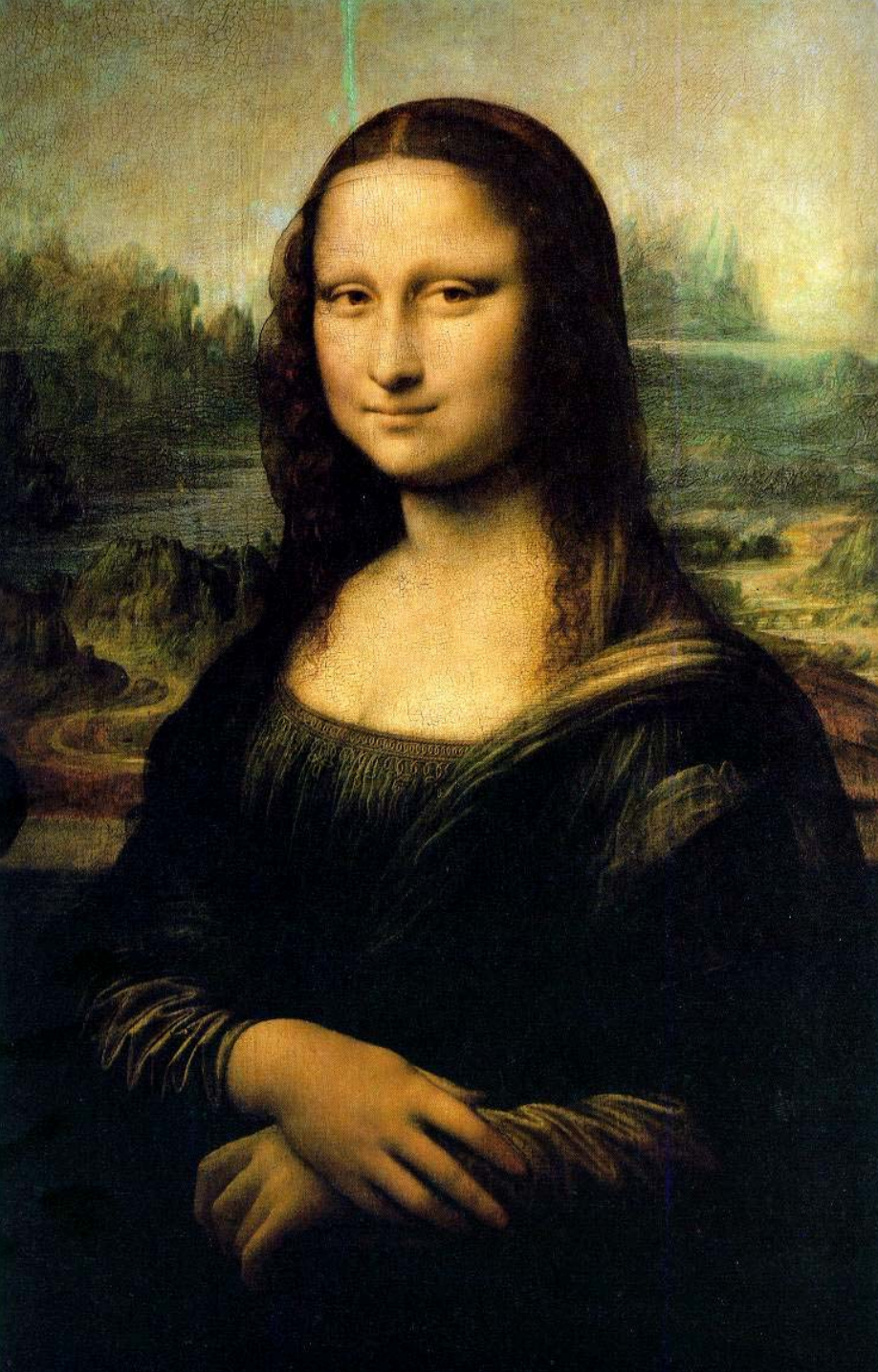
11.9 The myth of Leonardo, his portrait

- But this connection between mind and body, the correspondence between the grace of the physical characteristics (and of the movements) and the power of the intellectual talents was first and foremost a classical idea, which can also be seen in many literary characters of the Middle Ages, for example Dante's Cato (the ancient Roman placed by Dante at the beginning of Purgatory, as the Guardian and the gatekeeper)
- And talking about fiction in Vasari, one cannot overlook the pathos and the allegorical implications of the last scene, in which the artist dies in the arms of a powerful king, Francis I, having professed his greatest sin, a sin against Art itself: "he had offended God and man by not working at his art as he ought"

11.9 There is no evidence that this famous drawing is indeed a self-portrait of Leonardo

- Leonardo's tank could not have moved by an inch, considering the weight of cannons at that time, and the lack of any system of propulsion. The space inside is clearly insufficient for the number of men or animals required to move it forward. On the other hand it was probably supposed to be just something to show to his prospective employers, not the blueprint of a real machine





11.9 This portrait of a woman may or may not be the same that Vasari refers to

- "Leonardo undertook to paint for Francesco del Giocondo a portrait of Mona Lisa his wife, but having spent four years upon it, left it unfinished. This work now belongs to King Francis of France, and whoever wishes to see how art can imitate nature may learn from this head. Mona Lisa being most beautiful, he used, while he was painting her, to have men to sing and play to her and buffoons to amuse her...; and in this of Leonardo's there is a peaceful smile more divine than human" (Vasari).
- You can read Sigmund Freud's notes on the Gioconda here: <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~dj4r/freud.html>



11.10 The last supper

11.10 Giorgio Vasari (1511-74): *Lives of the Artists...*, Leonardo

- He also painted in Milan for the friars of San Domenico, at Santa Maria delle Grazie, a Last Supper, a thing most beautiful and marvelous...
- The work, finished after this sort, has always been held by the Milanese in the greatest veneration, and by strangers also, because Leonardo imagined, and has succeeded in expressing, the desire that has entered the minds of the apostles to know who is betraying their Master.

11.10 Vasari's portrayal of the artist as an intellectual genius, not just a souped-up artisan

- So in the face of each one may be seen love, fear, indignation, or grief at not being able to understand the meaning of Christ; and this excites no less astonishment than the obstinate hatred and treachery to be seen in Judas.
- Besides this, every lesser part of the work shows an incredible diligence; even in the tablecloth the weaver's work is imitated in a way that could not be better in the thing itself.

11.10 The Renaissance artist as a thinker and a great man, the equal of Dukes and Kings

- The prior of the place was very importunate in urging Leonardo to finish the work, it seeming strange to him to see Leonardo standing half a day lost in thought; and he would have liked him never to have put down his pencil, as if it were a work like digging the garden.
- And this not being enough, he complained to the duke... Leonardo, knowing the prince to be acute and intelligent, was ready to discuss the matter with him... He reasoned about art, and showed him that men of genius may be working when they seem to be doing the least, working out inventions in their minds, and forming those perfect ideas which afterwards they express with their hands.

11.10 Leonardo aims for perfection, aims too high

- ... he proposed to the duke that he should make a bronze equestrian statue of marvelous size to perpetuate the memory of the Duke [Francesco Sforza]. He began it, but made the model of such a size that it could never be completed. There are some who say that Leonardo began it so large because he did not mean to finish it, as with many of his other things. But in truth his mind, being so surpassingly great, was often brought to a stand because it was too adventuresome, and the cause of his leaving so many things imperfect was his search for excellence after excellence, and perfection after perfection.

11.10 Leonardo's death in Vasari (1568 version, normalized to fit into the culture of the Counter-Reform)

- having become old, he lay ill for many months, and seeing himself near death, he set himself to study the holy Christian religion, and though he could not stand, desired to leave his bed with the help of his friends and servants to receive the Holy Sacrament.
- Then the king... came in, and he, raising himself respectfully to sit up in bed, spoke of his sickness, and how he had offended God and man by not working at his art as he ought.
- Then there came a paroxysm... and the king raised him and lifted his head to help him and lessen the pain, whereupon his spirit, knowing it could have no greater honor, passed away in the king's arms...



11.11 The Virgin and St. Ann, 1510

11.12 Leonardo's inventions, from the halls of the museum in Vinci

- <http://www.leonet.it/comuni/vincimus/inptfram.html>
 - Flying machine
 - Helicopter
 - Steam cannon
 - Tank
 - Hygrometer
- <http://www.leonet.it/comuni/vincimus/inp1fram.html>
 - Spring driven car
 - Bicycle
 - Diver breathing apparatus
 - Parachute

11.12 Excerpts from an interview with Paolo Galluzzi, curator of the exhibition "Innovative Engineers of Renaissance" (2001)

- One of the most important developments in the art of the 15th century was the introduction of linear perspective: a system of representing three-dimensional space based on the principles of Euclidean geometry
- This major artistic achievement was born of scientific and mathematical research
- So you see, there was really only one impulse: the desire to gain control over space by ordering it mathematically
 - This impulse could express itself in different ways--through a painting that gives you the illusion of depth, or through a dam built on a river. But we should understand that the development of art and the development of technology are really two modes of a single great advance.

11.12 Excerpts from an interview with Paolo Galluzzi

<http://brunelleschi.imss.fi.it/ingrin/index.html>

- The situation of the technical worker before the 15th century can be defined as marginal.
 - Engineers were generally anonymous. Beautiful buildings were made during the Middle Ages, but you don't even know the names of the builders, which is a clear sign that their social role was considered marginal.
- Another way to gauge the status of technicians is through the classification of disciplines in the Middle Ages.
 - The basic school curriculum covered seven liberal arts.
 - Four of these, called the *quadrivium*, were considered to be higher, and three, called the *trivium*, were lower.
 - The intellectual disciplines of the quadrivium -- arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music -- were held to be superior.
 - The disciplines of the *trivium* -- grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric -- were inferior.

11.12 Excerpts from an interview with Paolo Galluzzi

- Still at a lower level were mechanical arts.
- This was both an intellectual and a social distinction.
 - Being trained only in mechanical arts meant you were someone who worked with your hands, someone who was fit only to be directed by someone else who was better educated.
 - We still have a trace of that distinction in our language, in the words "trivial" and "mechanical."

11.13 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- The most important point in Vasari's biography of Leonardo is the attempt to raise the status of the artist in culture and society, by convincing the reader, through anecdotes and other examples, that the artist is not simply a glorified artisan, someone who knows how to use his hands and his eyes
- Vasari does that very eloquently in the story about the painting of the fresco of the Last Supper in Milan
 - The head of the convent complains about the fact that Leonardo often interrupts his work, puts his brush down to think about his work
 - Leonardo refuses to argue with such an ignorant man (and as an improbable joke, Vasari will have Leonardo use the poor man's head for the face of Judas), but he is then more than willing to explain to the Duke of Milan that an artist works even when his hands are not moving, as the mind is really the primary tool of his art

11.13 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- Throughout the Middle Ages and the late Middle Ages even great artists such as Giotto were considered little more than artisans, and this is evident in the way their names and their salaries are listed in administrative documents, together with carpenters and all kinds of workers
- It is only during the Renaissance that the artist is regarded as a talented individual, and, by definition, a member of the middle-upper class (provided that he is successful)
- Famous artists in this age start spending more time promoting themselves, their art, and enhancing their reputation in order to ask for more money for their works
- Benvenuto Cellini during the late 1500's writes a famous autobiography which shows how he was right from his early childhood an extraordinary individual in any area and activity that he got involved in, from music to the crafting of jewels, from sculpture to duels

11.13 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- Leonardo himself, if you read his notebooks, participated in this revolution by emphasizing that you cannot simply observe nature to paint a realistic painting
- The method that he suggests and that he often practiced involves a careful (quasi-scientific) study of nature, because a painting cannot be simply a mirror of reality, rather it will always be an interpretation, as good as the mind (the intelligence) of the interpreter is
- A good example of Leonardo's reasoning would be his suggestion not to exaggerate with all the details of a painting, since in real life the eye of the viewer will not be able to see clearly the details of a house or an animal on top of a mountain, in the background of the main scene

11.13 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- In another passage, which might very well be an indirect criticism of Michelangelo's style, Leonardo has harsh words for all those artists who exaggerate the muscles of the body of the naked figures in a painting, pointing out that not all the muscles and tendons of the body will be visible and in a state of tension at the same time, suggesting that one has to study anatomy and biology, to understand how the body works and to be able to identify the muscles and tendons that will be used for any given movement, so that the figures in the painting will be anatomically correct and realistic

11.14 Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)

- 1498-1512: worked for the Florentine Republic
 - 1502-03: was in Romagna, at Cesare Borgia's court
 - was in Rome again in 1503
- When the Medici returned, Machiavelli was fired, then also arrested, tortured, and eventually confined to his villa in S. Andrea in Percussina
- 1513-14, 1515...: worked on *The Prince*
 - the book was rejected by the Medici
 - it was published only in 1530
 - later it was placed in the Index Librorum Prohibitorum

11.14 Machiavelli: other works

- *Discourses*
 - A commentary of Livy's *History of Rome*
- *Mandrake's Root*: if one of the most successful plays of the time
- 1518-19: he wrote *The life of Castruccio Castracani*
 - a more traditional biography: see the final speech, in which military/political leader Castruccio expresses remorse for his aggressive strategies
- 1520: starts working on the *Florentine history*
- 1527: in June, after the sack of Rome, dies
 - was rejected by the new Florentine government (once the Medicis were thrown out of the city again, before the siege of Florence 1529-30)

11.15 Letter to Francesco Vettori, Dec. 10, 1513

- Lunchtime comes, when my family and I eat that food which this poor farm and my meager patrimony permit.
- After eating, I return to the inn: there are I usually find the innkeeper, a butcher, a miller, and two bakers. With these men I waste my time playing cards all day and from these games a thousand disagreements and countless offensive words arise, and most of the time our arguments are over a few cents; nevertheless, we can be heard yelling from San Casciano.
- [*By doing this Machiavelli forgets about his bad Fortune, happy to be driven by her for now*]

11.15 Letter to Francesco Vettori, Dec. 10, 1513

- When evening comes, I return to my home, and I go into my study; and on the threshold, I take off my everyday clothes, which are covered with mud and mire, and I put on regal and curial robes; and dressed in a more appropriate manner I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men and am welcomed by them kindly, and there I taste the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born;

11.15 Letter to Francesco Vettori, Dec. 10, 1513

- and there I'm not ashamed to speak to them, to ask them the reasons for their actions; and they, in their humanity, answer me; and for four hours I feel no boredom, I dismiss every affliction, I no longer fear poverty nor do I tremble at the thought of death: I become completely part of them.

11.15 Letter to Francesco Vettori, Dec. 10, 1513: the first reference to *The Prince*

- And as Dante says that knowledge does not exist without the retention of it by memory, I have noted down what I have learned from their conversations, and I composed a little work, *De principatibus*, where I delve as deeply as I can into thoughts on this subject, discussing what a principality is, what kinds there are, how they are acquired, how they are maintained, why they are lost
- ...and to a Prince, and especially to a new Prince, it should be welcomed...

11.15 Letter to Francesco Vettori, Dec. 10, 1513

- I am urged to give it why the necessity that drives me: I'm wearing myself away, and I cannot remain in this state for long without being despised for my poverty, not to mention my desire that these Medici lords begin to make use of me, even if they start me off by rolling stones
- ... and in this work... they would see that I have been at the study of statecraft for 15 years and have not slept nor played about; and each one of them should be happy to obtain the services of one who is full of experience at another men's expense

11.15 Letter to Francesco Vettori, Dec. 10, 1513

- And they should not doubt my loyalty, for always having kept my word, I have not now learned to break it; and anyone who has been faithful and honest for 43 years, as I have been, cannot change his character; and my poverty is witness to my honesty and goodness.

11.16 *The prince*, dedication

- Wishing, therefore, to offer myself to your magnificence with some evidence of my devotion to you, I have not found among my belongings anything that I might value more or prize so much as the knowledge of the deeds of great men, which I learned from long experience in modern affairs and the continuous study of antiquity; having with great care and for a long time thought about and examined these deeds...

11.17 Traditional historiography and the truth

- Eyes → memory → intellect
- Seeing/experiencing → storing information/describing → selecting what is memorable and creating a convincing, coherent narration
- Autopsy
 - "The eyes are the most accurate witnesses" (Heraclitus, VI c. BCE)
 - Herodotus' ants (V c. BCE)
 - Medieval city states

11.17 Renaissance culture

- Leonardo da Vinci's idea of a realistic painting
 - The artist as an intellectual, not an artisan
 - A realistic painting is not simply a mirror
 - Eyes → memory/hand → artistic creation
 - Eyes → intellect → artistic creation
 - Vasari: Leonardo's dragon
 - A working model of reality

11.17 Vasari's Life of Leonardo

- And he suffered much in doing it, for the smell in the room of these dead animals was very bad, though Leonardo did not feel it from the love he bore to art. When the work was finished, Leonardo told his father that he could send for it when he liked.
- And Ser Piero going one morning to the room for it, when he knocked at the door, Leonardo opened it, and telling him to wait a little, turned back into the room, placed the picture in the light, and arranged the window so as to darken the room a little, and then brought him in to see it. Ser Piero at the first sight started back, not perceiving that the creature that he saw was painted, and was turning to go, when Leonardo stopped him saying, "The work answers the purpose for which it was made. Take it then, for that was the effect I wanted to produce."

11.18 Machiavelli's experience

- 1502-1503: at the court of Cesare Borgia
- Requests Plutarch's *Lives*
 - Hypothesis and verification
 - Plans and actions/predictions
- Multiple sources, multiple viewpoints
- Embracing different viewpoints
- Consistency vs. authority
 - Autopsy and gaps (Sanudo)
 - Consistency and trends/patterns, predictions (based on selective data)

11.19 Human nature

- The relevance of time
 - Aristotle's behaviorism
 - Psychological inertia
 - Pragmatism (Hell can wait / Hell is waiting)
 - Context
 - Rules are context-related, not universal
 - Limited in time
 - Well-defined in terms of space
- Nature and the individual's talents
 - The heroes vs. the sheep, the elite vs. the masses
- The centaur and the 'violence switch'
 - The fox and the lion
 - The power of one's image/reputation, as a means of control in alternative to violence (deterrence)

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- If, therefore, we consider all the steps taken by the Duke, we shall see that he laid sturdy foundations for his future power, and I do not judge it useless to discuss them, for I would not know of any better precepts to give to a new prince than the example of his deeds; and if he did not succeed in his plans, it was not his fault but was instead the result of an extraordinary and extreme instance of ill fortune.

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- Alexander VI, in his attempts to advance his son, the Duke, had many problems, both present and future.
- First, he saw no means of making him master of any state that did not already belong to the Church;
 - and if he attempted to seize anything belonging to the Church, he knew that the Venetians and the Duke of Milan would not agree to it because Faenza and Rimini were already under the protection of the Venetians.
- Moreover, he saw that the troops of Italy, and especially those he would have to use, were in the hands of those who had reason to fear the Pope's power;

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- Therefore, he had to disturb the order of things and cause turmoil among these states in order securely to make himself master of a part of them.
- This was easy for him to do, for he found that the Venetians, moved by other motives, had decided to bring the French back into Italy; not only did he not oppose this, but he rendered it easier by annulling King Louis' first marriage.
- The King, therefore, entered Italy with the aid of the Venetians and the consent of Alexander; and no sooner was he in Milan than the Pope procured troops from him for the Romagna campaign;

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- Having seized, then, Romagna and having beaten the Colonna, the Duke, wishing to maintain his gain and to advance further, was held back by two things:
 - first, his troops' lack of loyalty;
 - second, the will of France;
- ...As a consequence, the Duke decided to depend no longer upon the arms and fortune of others.

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- ...placing no trust either in France or other outside forces... he turned to deceptive methods.
- And he knew how to falsify his intentions so well that the Orsini themselves, through Lord Paulo, made peace with him; the Duke did not fail to use all kinds of gracious acts to reassure Paulo, giving him money, clothing, and horses, so that the stupidity of the Orsini brought them to Sinigaglia and into his hands.

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- Having removed these leaders and having changed their allies into his friends, the Duke had laid very good foundations for his power, having all of Romagna along with the Duchy of Urbino, and, more important, it appeared that he had befriended Romagna and had won the support of all of its populace once the people began to taste the beneficial results of his rule.

11.20 Chap. 7: Machiavelli simply adopts the point of view of the historical figure, the same way that Boccaccio did with his literary characters

- After the Duke had taken Romagna and had found it governed by powerless lords who had been more anxious to plunder their subjects than to govern them and had given them reason for disunity rather than unity, so that the entire province was full of thefts, fights, and of every other kind of insolence, he decided that if he wanted to make it peaceful and obedient to the ruler's law it would be necessary to give it good government.
- Therefore, he put Messer Remirro de Orco, a cruel and able man, in command there and gave him complete authority.

11.20 Chap. 7: even a prince with absolute power must worry about his public image (a modern strategy)

- This man, in little time, made the province peaceful and united, and in doing this he made for himself a great reputation.
- Afterward, the Duke decided that such excessive authority was no longer required, for he was afraid that it might become despised...
- And because he realized that the rigorous measures of the past had generated a certain amount of hatred, he wanted to show, in order to purge men's minds and to win them to his side completely, that if any form of cruelty had arisen, it did not originate from him but from the harsh nature of his minister.

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- And having come upon the opportunity to do this, one morning at Cesena he had Messer Remirro placed on the piazza in two pieces with a block of wood and a bloody sword beside him.
- The ferocity of such a spectacle left those people satisfied and amazed at the same time.

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- I say that the Duke, finding himself very powerful and partially secured from present dangers, having armed himself the way he wanted to, and having in large measure destroyed those nearby forces that might have harmed him, still had to take into account the King of France if he wished to continue his conquests, for he realized that the King, who had become aware of his error too late, would not support further conquest. And because of this, he began to seek out new allies and to temporize with France during the campaign the French undertook in the Kingdom of Naples...

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- ...as for future events, he had first to fear that a new successor in control of the Church might not be his friend and might try to take away from him what Alexander had given him.
- Against this possibility he thought to secure himself in four ways:
 - first, by putting to death all the relatives of those lords that he had dispossessed in order to prevent the Pope from employing that opportunity;

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- second, by gaining the friendship of all the noblemen of Rome... in order to hold the Pope in check by means of them;
- third, by making the College of Cardinals as much his own as he could;
- fourth, by acquiring such a large territory before the Pope died that he would be able to resist an initial attack without need of allies.

11.20 Chap. 7, New principalities acquired with help of others

- But Alexander died five years after he had drawn his sword. He left his son, gravely ill, with only the state of Romagna secured and with all the others up in the air, between two very powerful enemy armies.
- And there was in the Duke so much ferocity and so much ability, and so well did he understand how men can be won or lost, and so firm were the foundations that he had laid in such a short time, that if he had not had those armies upon him or if he had been healthy, he would have overcome every difficulty.

11.20 Chap. 7: the first conclusion, with a positive judgment of Borgia's actions

- And he himself said to me, on the day when Julius II was crowned Pope, that he had thought of what might happen on his father's death, and he had found a remedy for everything, except he never dreamed that at the time of his father's death he too would be at death's door.
- Now, having summarized all of the Duke's actions, I would not know how to censure him; on the contrary, I believe I am correct in proposing that he be imitated by all those who have risen to power through Fortune and with the arms of others.

11.20 Chap. 7: the first conclusion, with a positive judgment of Borgia's actions

- Because he, possessing great courage and noble intentions, could not have conducted himself in any other manner; and his plans were frustrated solely by the brevity of Alexander's life and by his own illness.
- Anyone, therefore, who determines it necessary in his newly acquired principality to protect himself from his enemies, to win friends, to conquer either by force or by fraud, to make himself loved and feared by the people, to be followed and respected by his soldiers, to put to death those who can or should do him harm, to replace ancient institutions with new ones, to be severe and gracious, magnanimous and generous, to do away with unfaithful soldiers and to select new ones, to maintain the friendship of kings and of princes in such a way that they must assist you gladly or offend you with caution—that person cannot find more recent examples than this man's deeds.

11.20 Chap. 7: the second and final set of statements, with a different assessment/judgment of Borgia's actions (multiple points of views, like in Boccaccio)

- One can only censure him for making Julius Pope; in this he made a bad choice, since, as I said before, not being able to elect a Pope of his own, he could have kept anyone he wished from the papacy; and he should have never agreed to raising to the papacy any cardinal he might have offended or who, upon becoming Pope, might have cause to fear him. For men do harm either out of fear or hatred.
- ...And anyone who believes that new benefits make men of high station forget old injuries is deceiving himself. The Duke, then, erred in this election, and it was the cause of his ultimate downfall.