

Kaela Brandi
HI 102B
Primary Source Paper, Unit 2
September 22nd, 2016

Society's Rules

The Renaissance was a time of change. There were new inventions that evolved from this era, such as the printing press, the telescope, and many more. Along with inventions, came about a new type of writing. For the longest time, only Church officials could read and write, along with a few exceptions. The Renaissance changed all that. The common people started to learn to read and write, as well. Upon these new type of writings was an essay called "Oration of the Dignity of Man" by Pico Della Mirandola and a letter to Homer that's from Francesco Petrarch. Oration on the Dignity of Man is written about society's men. It talks about how humans are below Gods and above creatures. The letter to Homer talks about how Homer is the person that changes the Renaissance. Both writings showed how people need to get rid of the bad in their soul. They needed to do this so they could be accepted into the Church and Heaven.

"Oration on the Dignity of the Man" was an insight to Mirandola's thoughts about society and what he thought of Heaven and the Gods. He talked about one of the many gods but didn't discuss the impact they had on society or what their role was for the people. Humans, according to Mirandola, "... are familiar with Gods above him, and is the lord of the beings beneath him."¹ Mirandola thinks humans are mediators between creatures and Gods. Mirandola thought that humans didn't possess free will. He wrote in the statement "The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which we have laid down ; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you,

¹ Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man", SHU Blackboard, p 1, September 19th, 2016.

trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature.²” Mirandola is saying the Gods put laws and restrictions on humans, so they can’t do anything freely. There’s always a law, they must follow. Mirandola had this concept that in order to be accepted into the Church or Heaven, a person must purify their soul. The process was removing the bad in their souls, then teaching the ways of being good, and then the final step is being molded into perfection. “... first purified, then illuminated, and finally made perfect.”³ People were restrained from becoming a perfect person so it fits society’s or the church’s idea of a person. They were practically brainwashed into a new lifestyle. “... thus washing away, so to speak, the filth of ignorance. The passions may never run rampant, nor reason, lacking restraint, ... then may we suffuse our purified souls with the light perfection by the knowledge of divine things.”⁴ As concluded, Mirandola was full-on ideas of how society should and shouldn’t work.

Letter to Homer by Francesco Petrarch is similar to Mirandola’s essay. It’s similar in that they both think souls should be purified to be accepted. Petrarch says in a statement “so put away your indignation and your grief, and to be good hope, for to have gained the disfavor of the evil and the ignorant is to have given the sure sign of virtue and genius.”⁵ Petrarch thought in order for Renaissance people to gain higher virtue, they had to gain a dislike of evil and ignorance.

Letter to Homer is different compared to “Oration on the Dignity of a Man”. “No one could deal comprehensively with so great a genius. Then you mourn because your name, which was held in great honor by the lawyers and physicians of old, is despised by their successors of today. But you forget that

² Pico della Mirandola, “Oration on the Dignity of Man”, SHU Blackboard, p 1, September 19th, 2016.

³ Pico della Mirandola, “Oration on the Dignity of Man”, SHU Blackboard, p 4, September 19th, 2016.

⁴ Pico della Mirandola, “Oration on the Dignity of Man”, SHU Blackboard, p 4, September 19th, 2016.

⁵ Francesco Petrarch, *Letter to Homer*, SHU Blackboard, p. 259, September 19th, 2016.

these professions are filled now by men of a very different stamp from those who followed them in former times.⁶” Petrarch says in this statement that Renaissance people don’t understand Homer is because people never heard such ideas before. Petrarch felt they didn’t appreciate Homer as much as they should because Homer was a genius in Petrarch’s mind. Petrarch mentioned that a fellow named Flaccus says how Homer is above all philosophers and poets at the close end of his letter. Not only did Petrarch say he worshiped Homer because of his teachings, but he also worships the God of Intellect. “I pray -- not your Apollo, but the true God of Intellect whom I worship, to crown the effects of all who may deem it worth their while to follow after me and to grant that they may find it an easy thing to come up with me, and outstrip me too.”⁷ Petrarch mentioned briefly that people craved knowledge during this era. The Church did everything in its power not to give that information to them because they didn’t want people thinking differently of the Catholic church.

When it comes to the Renaissance, writings can relate so much to what the writer feels and thinks. Both writings talked about how Renaissance people don’t understand what’s going on in this era. They also talk about the ludicrous way of being accepted into the Church and Heaven. Some may not agree with Mirandola and Petrarch because of the way they talk about how people need to be cleansed to be accepted into the church. In my opinion, if you believe in God and you do the right things in life then you’re already accepted.

⁶ Francesco Petrarch, *Letter to Homer*, SHU Blackboard, p. 259, September 19th, 2016.

⁷ Francesco Petrarch, *Letter to Homer*, SHU Blackboard, p. 256, September 19th, 2016.

Bibliography :

- Mandola, Pico Della. Oration on the Dignity of Man, 1486. SHU Blackboard, Sept. 19, 2016.
- Petrarch, Francesco, The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letter, SHU Blackboard, Sept 19, 2016.