

REVIEWS

Stephen P. Thompson, ed. *The Renaissance*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 2000. Pp. 272. Paper, \$14.96; ISBN 0-7377-0218-4.

In *The Renaissance*, Stephen P. Thompson has compiled 21 articles divided into five chapters: The Origins of the Renaissance, Political and Social Contexts of the Renaissance, Renaissance Discoveries and Transformations, Achievements and Developments of the Later Renaissance, and The Significance of the Renaissance. This organization provides the reader with an essential overview of the full historical period that is the European Renaissance. Not only does Thompson provide the breadth of Italian, Northern European, and Western European Renaissance civilization, but he also touches upon the critical elements of Renaissance art, philosophy, the Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation periods.

However, the real value of Thompson's work lays in the historical topics not covered regularly in a survey readings text on the Renaissance. The text includes essays on witchcraft in Renaissance Europe, the darker side of the Renaissance, which discusses the power struggles of the Papal States, and the emergence of Cesar Borgia as an early leader of Italian unity. Topics of violence and lawlessness are presented to prevent the illusion that the Renaissance was a golden age without struggle and a certain degree of chaos. Other topical essays include influential women of the Renaissance, the "prince and the courtier," everyday life in Renaissance Europe, the economics of the Renaissance, and the European conquest of the Americas. The editor has provided a remarkable compilation of outstanding essays that explore and analyze the diversity of issues that compose the very complex nature of Renaissance European history.

The Renaissance concludes with three supplemental sections not usually found in a survey of readings text: Appendix of Documents, Chronology, and For Further Research. The supplements provide additional enrichment to the student of Renaissance history. Documents such as "Bruni's Promotion of Classical Studies," "Ficino Explains Platonic Love," and "To the Memory of ... William Shakespeare," are but three of the nineteen documents in the appendix. The Chronology (appendix) is a four-page historical overview of the major historical events and accomplishments of the Renaissance.

This is a well-written resource that promises to provide needed breadth and depth to the study of this unique historical period. Without a broader historical text on European history, it would have limited application in the teaching of post-medieval European civilization. Its greatest benefit is as a useful supplement to the teaching of modern European history.

I would recommend Thompson's *The Renaissance* for use in a college survey on modern European history or an undergraduate-level humanities course that focuses on Renaissance studies. The text is written with a reading level appropriate for most university freshman and sophomore students, who could be completing a history, social

science, or humanities requirement for general education. *The Renaissance* is written to apply easily to a variety of teaching situations and could be adopted as a supplement for advanced placement world history courses at the high school level.

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Clarice Swisher, ed. *Victorian England*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 2000. Pp. 263. Cloth, \$24.96; ISBN 0-7377-0221-4. Paper, \$15.96; ISBN 0-7377-0220-6.

In the last 500 years, England has been headed by 23 monarchs, six of whom were women. Two of these women, Elizabeth I and Victoria, not only reigned longer than anyone else, but both lent their names to characterize an age, thus adding to the significance of what they represented. The book under review, part of a "Turning Points in World History" series, consists of excerpts from previously published works "chosen for their accessibility" and introduced by an editor who provides "a general overview of the principal events and figures involved, placing the topic in its historical context." Each selection is introduced with a concise summary of its theme and an identification of the author. A modest collection of 22 document fragments brings up the rear—one-third, curiously, from the newspaper *Observer*. But this is the least of my concerns.

Victorian England as a turning point in world history is problematic at best, lacking analytical bite. Imperialism as a theme is not the subject of any of the essays, while those addressing the Industrial Revolution and some of the key ideas of the period (e.g., those espoused by Darwin) are focused parochially on Britain alone.

The selections are short and often enjoyable to read, but because so much of what they say has been superseded and expanded upon by recent scholarship, much of the book would have been out of date decades ago. Many of the authors are, or, more often, were prominent (e.g., G.M. Trevelyan and Charles Petrie), and some are known for their contributions to literature (e.g., Margaret Drabble and J.B. Priestly), but collectively the essays do not effectively represent contemporary Victorian studies. More than half were published before 1973, and several were extracted from textbooks, other general surveys, and non-scholarly writings. Even when a selection from someone of the caliber of Asia Briggs is included, it is from a book published in 1959.

The editor's nineteen-page introduction to Victorian England consists of familiar generalizations, simple statistics, unexciting facts, and a few useful primary source quotations, but the endnotes indicate that it is based heavily on secondary works published between 1949 and 1974, and it does nothing to draw attention to the selections themselves or to the appendix documents. There are also some errors (e.g., the six demands of the Chartists became "government passed acts" before 1848 that the