

Renaissance News & Notes

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RUNNING "FICINO"

BY Germaine Warkentin

The convivium...rebuilds limbs, revives humours, restores spirit, delights senses, fosters and awakens reason. The convivium is rest from labours, release from cares and nourishment of genius; it is the demonstration of love and splendour, the food of good will, the seasoning of friendship, the leavening of grace and the solace of life.

—Letter 48 to Bernardo Bembo, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1979), 2:51f.

The above words are from the "welcome message" which greets new subscribers to FICINO, the electronic-mail list which serves scholars in all fields of Renaissance and Reformation studies.

FICINO was established in September 1990—several centuries ago, electronically speaking—under the aegis of the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at Victoria University, University of Toronto. Since its inception, FICINO has served as an increasingly useful venue for the rapid circulation of news about conferences, calls for papers, and queries about scholarly problems. The list of members grows longer every week; there are now over 260, from ten different countries, including participants from the Folger Shakespeare Library, Warburg Institute, Private Libraries in Renaissance England project, and Records of Early English Drama. A notice posted of a meeting in Philadelphia,

Canterbury, Melbourne or Geneva will always reach the right audience, not only locally but among those of us who are wandering scholars, ha-

IN MEMORIAM: PHYLLIS GORDAN (1913-1994)

Phyllis Walter Goodhart Gordan died on Monday, January 24, 1994, at her home in Manhattan. She was eighty years old. A well-loved member of the RSA Board of Directors, Mrs. Gordan was the author of *Two Renaissance Book Hunters: The Letters of Poggius Bracciolini to Nicolaus de Niccolis* (Columbia University Press, 1974) and a trustee and benefactor of the New York Public Library. She was a long-term and generous supporter of the Renaissance Society, and sponsored the multi-volumed edition of the letters of Lorenzo de' Medici. The Renaissance Society mourns her passing. A full obituary will appear in the next issue of *Renaissance Quarterly*.

bitually in transit from one library to another. Participants are senior scholars, active younger academics, and graduate students at the beginning of their training.

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TEACHING THE RENAISSANCE: A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

BY Jackie Bennett, Abraham Lincoln High School, Brooklyn, NY

I come from the worm's-eye school of teaching, but in high schools things are done differently. I know; I teach at one, Abraham Lincoln High School, in Brooklyn. High schools function on the assumption that it is the birds who understand the world; after all, they see so much of it. Firm in that belief, they cover a vast curriculum, cramming information down the throats of hungry students who spit it back digested, or half-digested, or in most cases, raw. I don't especially blame the high schools. However, data retrieval (even if students manage it successfully) is not the same as thinking. Worse still, the bird's-eye view, by its very nature, turns every lovely patch of speckled earth to monochrome.

Take the Renaissance. Not much time is left to it when history courses try to cover everything that ever happened. In my own school, which is typical at least of schools across New York State, the Renaissance is allotted only one of 144 weeks of study. Thus curtailed, it becomes a before-and-after advertisement for secularism and individualism with

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UPDATE ON NEH- AND RSA-SPONSORED SUMMER INSTITUTES

BY Albert Rabil, Jr.

The RSA's 1992 summer institute for secondary school teachers (described in RNN V:3) continued in two follow-up rounds, a two-day session in December 1992 (attended by all 32 participants) and a four-day session in Summer 1993 (attended by 21 participants). The extra sessions enabled us to touch on music and literature, not included in the original institute, and renew professional contacts. Based on that experience we have applied for and received an NEH grant for another summer institute in 1994 that includes the new expanded agenda. This national institute (the 1992 institute was for teachers in New York State only)—entitled "The Worlds of the Renaissance"—(continued on page 3)

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Mike Sappol: *Editor*
John Tedeschi: *Calendar of
Conferences*

NEXT DEADLINES:
1 JUNE AND 1 OCTOBER

FICINO, *continued from p. 1*

What is it like to sit at the center of the web? My colleague Bill Bowen (Humanities/Music, Scarborough College, University of Toronto) and I are the "list-owners" of FICINO. This means that we are responsible for receiving applications to join, priming the pump by circulating fresh news, dealing with members who disappear without canceling their subscriptions and, increasingly, fraternizing with related lists on which interesting information appears which might be cross-posted to our own. Though not yet four years old, FICINO began when e-mail lists in the humanities were relatively new. At first it was modelled on HUMANIST, the archetype of humanities lists—indeed the founding editor of HUMANIST, William McCarty, was the person in charge. The moderator received all messages, sorted them into neat daily postings, and handled replies. Within a year or so it became evident that growth in e-mail activity had led to a situation in which information was being exchanged very rapidly—sometimes within hours of posting a query. In 1991 FICINO became an "automatic" list, and we took over as editors. Postings now go directly to a list-server which distributes them impartially to all members. At the same time, FICINO is not entirely "open"; new subscribers aren't enrolled until they have submitted a brief biography. Mildly applied, this rule has discouraged (continued on page 4)

TEACHING, *cont'd from p. 1*

Michelangelo's *David* standing in as the model, and Machiavelli writing the testimonials. It's a ridiculous distortion, and most teachers recognize this, but it cannot be helped. At least the students will know something, they reason, and anyway Louis XIV and Napoleon call them on.

The sad thing here is not the loss of the Renaissance (though I mourn that loss), but the loss of the opportunity to use the Renaissance as a tool to think with, a place to learn about complexity. Students who see history as a simple thing cannot be expected to view current events with much sophistication. Then we all live with the consequences.

With this in mind, I volunteered to teach a course devoted entirely to Renaissance studies. I chose this topic because I already had a strong background in it, and because I had attended an NEH/RSA Institute whose aim was to encourage participants to take their increased understanding of the Renaissance back to the high schools and teach it confidently. But when I found myself standing before 28 honor students, I was worried. After all, in spite of all the pedagogical theories and approaches I had been taught, how could I succeed if my students had no interest in the topic?

For once, however, pedagogical theory won the day. My students became so interested in the Renaissance that one time a heated debate erupted in (continued on page 3)

FICINO, *continued from p. 2* few prospective members, reduces casual exploitation of the list, and helps us, as editors, get to know FICINO's audience. The biographies are sent out to all subscribers every month or so, which in turn provides a way for members of the list to get to know each other—and they do!

FICINO is not the only Renaissance list; *Renaiss-L* (*Renaiss-L@ULKYVM.LOUISVILLE.EDU*) serves Renaissance historians, and *EMH-L* (currently without a home list-server and thus dormant) is intended for historians of the early modern period. But FICINO is the only list which by design crosses disciplinary boundaries and encourages dialogue between disciplines. Our editorial policy furthers this goal by posting messages from lists with allied concerns: besides *Renaiss-L* we frequently cross-post messages from *HUMANIST* (general humanities), *LATIN-L* (Neo-Latin), *C18-L* (the long 18th century), *ExLibris* (Rare Books and Special Collections), *SHARP-L* (Society for the History of Authorship, Readership, and Publication), *SHAKSPER* (self-explanatory), and *REED* (Records of Early British

Drama). And courtesy of a chain of fellow editors, we receive cross-postings to FICINO from lists in history, philosophy, classics, and the European languages.

Does this lead to an impossible glut of information on your screens (and ours)? Not really, for two reasons. First, people who have been using e-mail for several years (a long time in e-mail history) learn to watch

rences posted and queries passed from scholar to scholar, it's still not a list where people "chat" incessantly as they do on some others.

However, life on FICINO is anything but uneventful. *LATIN-L* got its start as a result of a lively discussion which took place concurrently on FICINO and *C18-L*. When the New York Historical Society (with its fine library of early books) was

threatened with closure, FICINO joined other lists to circulate an appeal for support. The state legislature of New York must have been surprised to receive a petition with over 600 names collected internationally from several e-mail lists in a single weekend. FICINO has helped Luciano ~~Fiori~~ take the opinion of the scholarly community on the proposed CD-ROM edition of Kristeller's *Iter*

Italicum, put a scholar in Rome in contact with a book historian in Virginia, and circulated up-to-date information on the progress of the on-line *STC*. As I write, FICINO members are trying to track down information about the usability of preservation microfilms of English manuscripts made during World War II and on deposit at the (*continued on page 5*)

RENAISSANCE SOCIETY OF AMERICA REPRINT TEXT SERIES (RSARTS)

Christopher B. Coleman, ed. and tr., *The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine*

Kurt Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action: The Protestant Ethic, the Rise of Capitalism, and the Abuses of Scholarship*, tr. E. Geoffrey French, intro. D.C. Coleman

Werner Gundersheimer, *The Italian Renaissance*

To order, contact the Renaissance Society office.

the titles on incoming messages for "threads" they want to follow, and delete, ruthlessly, the ones they don't. Second, the activity on FICINO reflects the fact that Renaissance scholars have been slower to adapt to e-mail than those in the classics or history of the book. Building FICINO has taken time and patience, and despite the many confe-

DESTRUCTION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

The destruction of the sixteenth-century bridge at Mostar and other important architectural monuments and urban sites in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia has prompted the Society of Architectural Historians to distribute a "statement of alarm and solidarity." The statement reads in part: "As architectural historians we are outraged to see that architectural and cultural sites have become the focus of military attacks. While people and their needs come first, we as architectural historians especially deplore the systematic destruction of...markers of cultural heritage. Museums, archives, libraries, churches, synagogues, mosques, agricultural structures and housing have all been targeted, as have those urban places where people gather—cafés, piazzas, community centers, markets, bazaars.... We offer the support of the Society and urge our academic colleagues in other fields to join us in bringing these tragic losses to national and international attention." ■

TEACHING, *continued from p. 3* never been so catching in the past. And, yes, the Renaissance is a fascinating moment in world history, but then, what moment isn't, once we look closely into it?

And therein lies the secret. My students were given time to inch

their way through that patch of speckled earth, and they were inspired. They dug in deep and found themselves thinking creatively, and critically, and abstractly, and feeling awfully good about it. In high school—any school—that is quite an achievement.

I do not know how much my stu-

RSA ANNUAL MEETINGS

The National Office of the Renaissance Society of America will host the 1995 annual conference on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, March 30–March 31–April 1, in New York City. The Josephine Waters Bennett lecturer will be John O'Malley (Weston School of Theology). The 1996 annual conference will be in Bloomington, Indiana on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, April 11–12–13. Hope to see you there!

dents will remember about the Renaissance. I doubt it will be much. These kids go home to a very different world, and in time our class will be remembered, if at all, like a vacation taken long ago, where the names of towns all blend together and just a few snapshots remain. But that's

okay. For now, they have had their first real taste of knowing just for knowing's sake, and I suspect many of them will find their own ways to cultivate that. In the meantime, it seems fitting that it should have been the Renaissance thinkers, with their quest to know, who set my students on the rocky course to being fully human. ■ *Teaching the Renaissance* is a new feature of *RNN*. Readers are invited to submit short personal accounts (1000-1200 words) of innovative approaches to teaching and experiences teaching in universities, colleges, adult education, high schools, and other settings, in America and around the world.

FICINO, *continued from p. 4* Library of Congress and University of Michigan.

Running FICINO for the past two years has been a great pleasure; as Ficino wrote, "the convivium is rest from labours, release from cares." On its present and prospective members rests the equally pleasant task of making it "the nourishment of genius." To join FICINO, e-mail your request to <Editor@epas.utoronto.ca>—and

welcome to the convivium. ■ *This article is the first of a series about e-mail and other new technologies facilitating dialogue between Renaissance scholars. RNN invites readers to submit short personal accounts (1000-1200 words) of their experiences with e-mail and e-mail lists.* •