



A World Lit Only by Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance: Portrait of an Age

By William Manchester

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From tales of chivalrous knights to the barbarity of trial by ordeal, no era has been a greater source of awe, horror, and wonder than the Middle Ages. In handsomely crafted prose, and with the grace and authority of his extraordinary gift for narrative history, William Manchester leads us from a civilization tottering on the brink of collapse to the grandeur of its rebirth-the dense explosion of energy that spawned some of history's greatest poets, philosophers, painters, adventurers, and reformers, as well as some of its most spectacular villains- the Renaissance.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

It speaks to the failure of medieval Europe, writes popular historian William Manchester, that "in the year 1500, after a thousand years of neglect, the roads built by the Romans were still the best on the continent." European powers were so absorbed in destroying each other and in suppressing peasant revolts and religious reform that they never quite got around to realizing the possibilities of contemporary innovations in public health, civil engineering, and other peaceful pursuits. Instead, they waged war in faraway lands, created and lost fortunes, and squandered millions of lives. For all the wastefulness of medieval societies, however, Manchester notes, the era created the foundation for the extraordinary creative explosion of the Renaissance. Drawing on a cast of characters numbering in the hundreds, Manchester does a solid job of reconstructing the medieval world, although some scholars may disagree with his interpretations.

From Publishers Weekly

Manchester's marvelously vivid popular history humanizes the tumultuous span from the Dark Ages to the Renaissance. A one-week PW bestseller in cloth. Illustrations.

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From School Library Journal

YA-- An absorbing and readable history, beginning with the collapse of Rome and ending with the redawning of intellectual pursuits in the Renaissance. Manchester's vivid descriptions of the misery and ignorance of the Middle Ages are the background for the second and main section of his book, which he calls the "shattering,"--the collapse of essentially unified thought and the rebirth of the pursuit of knowledge. His last section focuses on Magellan and his historic voyage, described as a primary event in contributing to Western man's changing view of the world. The story of his efforts to obtain backing for his venture is engrossing; the difficulties of the voyage are made real enough to feel.

- Philip D. Winters, Thomas Jefferson Sci-Tech, Fairfax County, VA

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