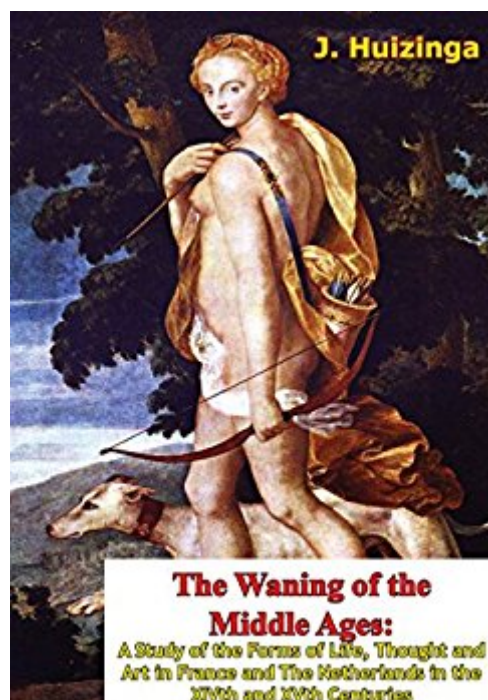


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The Waning Of The Middle Ages: A Study Of The Forms Of Life, Thought And Art In France And The Netherlands In The XIVth And XVth Centuries



Synopsis

“To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, Huizinga begins, “the outline of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us. Life seemed to consist in extremes—a fierce religious asceticism and an unrestrained licentiousness, ferocious judicial punishments and great popular waves of pity and mercy, the most horrible crimes and the most extravagant acts of saintliness—and everywhere a sea of tears, for men have never wept so unrestrainedly as in those centuries. First published in 1924, this brilliant portrait of the life, thought, and art in France and the Netherlands in the 14th and 15th centuries is our most trenchant study of that crucial moment in history when the Middle Ages gave way to the great energy of the Renaissance. From an analysis of the dominating ideas of the times—those that held the medieval world together, supported its religion and informed its art and literature—emerges the style of a whole culture at the extreme limit of its development.

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Customer Reviews

Just as interesting when I read it sixty years ago as now. A good reminder that sometimes original thought remains original over time.

Good service. Book was ponderous as expected.

This is a basic text written by one of the seminal historians of the 20th century. A great place to start in order to discern the Middle Ages.

This book was in a better condition than I expected. Thanks

I had been aware of this book for years but only recently finally read it. I found flashes of insight particularly about the symbolic bent of the medieval mind and its propensity for and limitation by allegory, solidifying into real categories by which reality is experienced. But it seemed the author had a point to prove before he started and pressed information from limited research into service of that idea- he goes back to the same few writers to illustrate his points. He uses contrast that almost amounts to contradictions multiple times to paint his picture. Worth reading but limited- I suspect it shows up so often in bibliographies due to being a very early example of the social as opposed to political history that came to dominate the field. Being surprised at the book's limitations after having known its high stature, I read a little about Huizinga and came to the conclusion that he thought he saw an idea expressed in the art of a particular painter and from the spark of that idea he tried to illuminate the entire era- thin premise and limited success. Also, he seems out of sympathy with any truly religious view which limits insight into the thought-world of the later middle ages. For a more penetrating view, try C. S. Lewis "Allegory of Love"

First of all, I would like to thank Bertrand Russell for inspiring me to read this book. He found Huizinga's reflections on the evolution of Western culture from the Medieval mindset to that of the Renaissance an aid in understanding his own experience of the rise of Modernism and the roots of its rejection in the horror of the Great War (World War I). I found it similarly interesting for my own experience of the transition from the Late Modernism of my childhood to the early Postmodernism of my youth, and the Second Era of Globalization of my maturity. For example, when reading the following quote I could not help but think about the reactionary forces inherent in the rise of Dominionism and the Tea Party: "The quattrocento with its serenity makes the impression of a renewed culture, which has shaken off the fetters of medieval thought, until Savonarola reminds us that below the surface the Middle Ages still subsist". This goes to the heart of the nature of our Postmodernity: Are we a rejection of Modernism and a return to the emotive or are we an evolution

in perspective that will retain and build on the logic and lessons of the Enlightenment and its aftermath? However, this book is also a great text on the cultural history of the Late Middle Ages and the Duchy of Burgundy. It analyzes the nature of both the plastic arts and the literary, religion and symbolism, chivalry and politics, and love and pessimism to the Medieval mind. For instance, when reflecting on the pessimism of its poets Huizinga states "Happy are the bachelors, for a man who has an evil wife has a bad time of it, and he who has a good one always fears to lose her. In other words, happiness is feared together with misfortune." A good read for anyone interested in the Middle Ages and the "curse" of "living in interesting times".

A classic. I read parts of it in college. Reading it again was like meeting up with an old friend.

This book stands out most as an example of what happens when history goes beyond a mere recounting of linear events, and takes the brave step of actually synthesizing information. The book serves to train readers to look at another epoch on its own terms and through the eyes of that epoch's people. Those who criticize the book for using "dated" scholarship miss the point. This work has earned the right to be exempt from the passing and pretentious fads of modern scholarship. Just read it and enjoy the insights.

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