



EVERYDAY RENAISSANCES

The Quest for Cultural Legitimacy in Venice

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CONTENTS

Introduction · 1

PART I

1. *Venice's Reading Public* · 27

2. *Testamentary Humanism* · 52

PART II

3. *Nicolò Massa, a Self-Made Man of Letters* · 79

4. *Francesco Longo's Philosophical Testaments* · 111

5. *Cultural Life in the Journals of Alberto Rini* · 139

Conclusion · 167

Abbreviations · 177

Notes · 179

Acknowledgments · 227

Index · 229

INTRODUCTION

“The Renaissance was a time of great change and innovation, marked by a renewed interest in classical learning and art, a shift away from medieval ways of thinking, and a focus on individualism and personal achievement. It was a period of great cultural, political, and social change, and its influence can still be seen today in many aspects of our world.”

his book is about the Renaissance, but not the era's literary or artistic celebrities. Our subjects are Venetian men and women living outside the circles of power and the Renaissances they experienced and represented. We will be examining a world of aspiration inhabited by people who valued learning and literature but whose families lacked formal political authority and whose intellectual lives were not coterminous with their gainful employment. Patronage networks were not ready-made for them, and cachet did not form part of their patrimony. For the subjects of this book, moreover, education was often a gift, not a given. Learning provided our protagonists with the tools to interpret and improve their lives, to make the world around them; their different forms of contact with books and learning elevated, transformed, or anchored them, depending on their points of origin, where they aimed to go, and what hopes they cherished for kin, colleagues, and friends in future generations.

Scholars and broader audiences alike now tend to level charges of elitism at “the Renaissance” as a cultural phenomenon, and with some justice. Patrons of culture had uncommon wealth. And even if most producers of culture had relatively humble origins, they enjoyed uncommon talent. Yet *Everyday Renaissances* claims that ordinary people also participated energetically in culture, and that attending to them offers a sharper picture of the era’s intellectual and literary ferment. I do not, however, aim to revive Jacob Burckhardt’s conception of egalitarianism in Renaissance Italy.¹ Our protagonists seldom reveal a utopia of cultural accessibility; more often they tell us of their effort to possess books, education, and literary esteem.

Even their successes—and there were successes—reveal the social tensions they confronted.

Looking at the cultural and intellectual lives of predominantly unheralded artisanal, mercantile, and professional people with little discretionary income or leisure, we confront an essential question: What did culture do for people? The scholarship of the last half century has taught us that literary, intellectual, or artistic work and its sponsorship always had practical dimensions. If it requires little argument that Leonardo da Vinci needed to eat, we have had to think carefully about the complex ways in which literary and artistic patronage supported the careers of scholars and artists while at the same time enhancing the reputations and serving the objectives of their patrons.² When we move into society's middle ranks, questions of culture's value and its practical applications become both more pressing and more difficult to answer. Could the allocation of resources to literary or artistic studies repay the effort in the cases of people for whom prominent roles in the republic of letters, the academies, or even the civil professions would be unlikely?³ This study answers that question in the affirmative, although focusing on books and education far more than visual art. The Renaissance mattered to everyday people, because even provisional contact with intellectual and literary endeavors built reputations, initiated or continued processes of social mobility, and promised an honorable posterity.

Resting on an evidentiary base of more than four thousand archival documents, especially wills, household inventories, and account books, this study showcases diverse fragments of cultural experience. Making sense of those fragments and their owners, however, requires a new theoretical framework. I would like to begin, then, by highlighting a representative artifact and drawing out the framework in which it can be situated before surveying this book's sources, protagonists, and specific interventions.

ONE RETAILER, TWO GREEK MANUSCRIPTS, AND A THEORY OF CULTURAL LEGITIMACY

On June 18, 1556, a Venetian secondhand goods dealer named Francesco entrusted his shop boy, Zuanne, with an interesting errand. Zuanne was to procure two Greek manuscripts from His Magnificence, Andrea di Franceschi, a secretary of the ducal chancery whose duties included granting permission to borrow items from the collection of books and manuscripts that would, centuries later, still form the core of Venice's famous library, the Biblioteca Nazionale di San Marco. The ledgers that Franceschi kept most often reveal the usual suspects of libraries: career scholars, orators,

secretaries, writers, and lawyers. But a few physicians also appeared and even, on this occasion, a minor player in the world of commerce. His Magnificence may have been taken aback to find a retail merchant attempting to make use of the lending potential of this collection, but in any event he took the basin that Zuanne had brought as surety and made this note: "18 June 1556, Mr. Francesco (son of Paul), who runs a second-hand shop near the clock tower in the Piazza San Marco, has borrowed a Greek book on parchment called *Proclus on Platonic Theology* and also *The Commentary of Hierocles on the Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, which his servant, Zuanne of Venice, will take to him with my permission. And I have had from him as a collateral an engraved silver basin."⁴ The desire of a secondhand goods dealer to borrow two Greek manuscripts treating philosophy encapsulates the point of this study: literary culture mattered, for a host of reasons, to everyday people in Renaissance Europe. More specifically, I am arguing that literature mattered to Venetian men and women who, like this retailer, did not belong to the political or even cultural elite. Some left discursive evidence of how the humanities enriched their minds and souls; however, they more often reveal how contact with the literary helped them earn respect (including self-respect), cover social blemishes, and, in some cases, improve their social positions. Cultural legitimacy as a concept makes room for both inherent value and its potential instrumental applications.⁵

Why, more particularly, might a secondhand goods dealer such as messer Francesco have wanted to consult Greek manuscripts? Like many of the sources at the heart of this book, these lending records are laconic, making the task of divining motives even more problematic than usual. But any purely practical motive we might give him would lead us to unlikelihood. If he had come into possession of similar manuscripts and wanted to verify their authenticity or completeness as part of assessing their value, it would have been more efficient to enlist the services of a humanist or grammarian. Might messer Francesco himself have possessed sufficient knowledge of Greek and philosophy? A secondhand goods dealer could have been the well-educated son of a patrician or citizen family that suffered economic decline. By the middle of the sixteenth century, many families in Venice responded to financial constriction by practicing extreme estate planning, effectively disinheriting most children to transmit the estate intact to the most capable heir. Such a strategy required monachating many daughters and sons, as well as pushing other boys either into commercial apprenticeships, or else providing the minimal support for university studies that might prepare the young men for a learned profession.⁶ Francesco might have had such a story, and in that case perhaps the requisite skills to read and comprehend the manuscripts unaided. But we would

still have to ask why he did not interact with this material in printed form. Proclus, for instance, was widely available, and in 1516 had even appeared in a scholarly Aldine edition. Why go to the trouble of sending an employee to fetch these manuscripts, which required making collateral of a precious object, as well as time and inconvenience? Attempting to give this man a practical aim leads us to rationales such as an aversion to print media or a second career as a humanist that would be highly improbable (though admittedly not impossible) for a man described as a retailer.

We thus have an instance of bibliophilia that requires a different category of analysis than the ones intellectual historians tend to use. While we cannot be certain of Francesco's specific motive, it fell between the quasi-professional exigencies animating people deeply embedded in and identified with the world of literature and the vagaries of aspiration, curiosity, practical need, and pleasure pushing amateurs toward literary material. We need a framework for understanding cases such as this that fall between our usual interpretive categories, but one that does not establish a mutual exclusivity between the typologies at either end. "Cultural legitimacy" allows for appreciating degrees of difference—comparatively grand or comparatively modest educational or expressive ambition, a monumental or a modest collection of books, a tight or a tenuous connection to an intellectual community—while still keeping an overarching set of shared values in view. We can appreciate the differences between a celebrated humanist such as Pietro Bembo and a goldsmith's wife who harbored an Italian rendering of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, yet still see how both historical actors occupied a field of endeavor that their era charged with social no less than literary meanings.

Returning to those manuscripts at San Marco, one thing is clear: Everyone who appeared in these lending records, whether literary celebrities or retailers, had easier access to the same material by other routes. These volumes, the most famous texts of pagan antiquity and medieval theology, had printed editions easily accessible in Venice. This city, still the print capital of Europe, housed hundreds of printers who collectively produced between fifteen thousand and thirty thousand volumes annually.⁷ Elite borrowers with general interests and anyone connected to them, moreover, also would already have enjoyed access to manuscript versions through friendship networks. The only major category of borrowers, then, who could have needed these manuscripts were humanists, who might require a particular redaction for their research. Borrowers who were not humanists by definition, and perhaps even those who were, must then have derived as much benefit from participating in the community that formed around this collection as they did from the volumes themselves. Even the

most recondite exchanges of literati were, as Christopher Celenza observes, “as much social and involved with the search for distinction” as they were scholarly.⁸ In the case of the Marciana collection, by borrowing a manuscript the individual formed or strengthened an ennobling connection to the literary life of their city. Francesco the secondhand goods dealer might have had a fascinating background and myriad pursuits, but he was described as a secondhand goods dealer. Yet in the act of borrowing these two Greek manuscripts he inscribed himself in a small way as part of the same Renaissance culture inhabited by luminaries like Giovanni Battista Ramusio, a heavy borrower in these years.⁹ In other words, messer Francesco obtained a measure of honor connected to educational and literary attainment that had the power to reshape his self-perception, reputation, and potentially even his or his children’s social position. That type of honor is what I am calling *cultural legitimacy*.

But cultural legitimacy needs a more precise definition. It will be best to begin with what this concept is not—or, more accurately, what it is not quite or not only. Cultural legitimacy relates to but is not quite meritocracy. Like meritocracy, cultural legitimacy indicates the prioritization of earned distinctions and skills over inherited status or material assets. But meritocracy, in its literal definition if not in common usage, denotes the conferral specifically of political power on the basis of proven abilities, rather than birth or wealth. Meritocracy’s loose and depoliticized modern connotation would be close to what I mean by cultural legitimacy, but its denotation goes wide of the mark. Indeed, the term *legitimacy* itself often connects to legally constituted governmental authority (or claims thereto), but with the modifier *cultural* I mean to indicate a fundamental distinction between this political usage and my own meaning. This book treats matters of the mind, not the mechanisms or representations of governance.

Closer to my interests is the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital,” which I will indeed apply in certain instances.¹⁰ Yet as much as I share Bourdieu’s conviction that abstract merits have tangible value, his concept privileges too much the ultimate conversion of intellectual, literary, and artistic possessions and commitments into literal social and economic rewards.¹¹ Cultural legitimacy embraces the potential of that socioeconomic conversion; indeed, we will see several individuals leveraging their intellectual honor to dignify their professions, broker prestigious marriages for their children, and initiate (or continue) processes of generational social mobility within their families. But cultural legitimacy, at least in the early-modern Venetian context, was not only about practical gain and social positioning. Intellectual and literary values had a power that was not always measurable, let alone monetary. If meritocracy had too

much of the political, cultural capital has too much of the economic to be fully satisfactory here.¹²

If these are the interpretive structures whose limitations urge analytical renovation, the work of art historians and scholars of material culture, above all Renata Ago, have inspired the major design features of the category I am proposing. Ago in particular draws from household inventories of seventeenth-century Rome a fascinating survey of the art, luxury goods, musical instruments, and books collected by an impressive swath of society, from artisans to patricians.¹³ Beyond finding ordinary collectors worlds away from an Isabella d'Este, she expresses eloquently the social meanings ascribed to the interactions between object and owner. Lorna Weatherill has used this line of reasoning to compelling effect in her analysis of English consumption of books, art, and other "luxury" goods at the end of the early-modern period.¹⁴ But Ago has gone the furthest in theorizing the meanings of those interactions, which, she claims, signaled individuals' "quasi-noble lifestyle," or an ostensibly impractical "taste" that marked them as cultivated.¹⁵ Even book owners with only a few volumes beyond devotional material, she suggests, proved that they were "intellectuals of a modest sort."¹⁶

Ago makes space for forms of social motion impossible in Bourdieu's model. Within what he called the "aristocracy of culture" intellectuals of a modest sort suffered exclusion. While he envisioned provisional possibilities for individuals to move in and out of the cultural aristocracy, he understood social boundaries as vigilantly policed and sites of a "permanent struggle."¹⁷ One might join this aristocracy, but only by internalizing and reproducing its *habitus*—styles of education, comportment, possession, and display, but above all modes of thought and perception—to the point that it became owned, automatic, habitual.¹⁸ Those lacking complete knowledge or impeccable credentials, such as autodidacts (whether partial or complete) or anyone without a university degree, he insisted, suffer either relegation to the margins or exclusion from "the legitimate culture."¹⁹ The rigidity of Bourdieu's formulation even encompasses the claim that working-class men and women actively participate in their exclusion by putting moral boundaries between their hardworking virtue and the perceived corruption of elites. Those falling between the ranks of cultural aristocrats and the working classes, in his system, can be positive members only of the petit bourgeoisie itself, and in reality only certain sectors even within that already restricted group. Minute shadings of status connected to family, education and income define sub-ranks. In Bourdieu's model, then, the person of modest intellectual or other cultural attainments necessarily faces the hostility of the culturally rich and culturally poor alike.

By contrast, Ago emphasizes the interstices of early-modern social hierarchies, where she locates an “elite of taste, defined by the possession of cultural goods whose value had to do with their beauty, ingenuity or innovativeness more than the cost of their materials. Lacking any other sort of visible distinction or testimonial, whether direct or indirect, their cultural material vouched for them.”²⁰ Less tethered than Bourdieu to hermeneutics of class conflict and market economics, but still attentive to the problem of social boundaries and culture’s role in reproducing them, Ago’s “elite of taste” captures better the dynamics of premodern Europe.

But who formed Ago’s more flexible elite? “Amid the middle ranks of the population,” she explains, lay “a group that wanted to be appreciated as ‘cultivated,’ ‘trendy,’ ‘refined,’ and who invested their respectability in those traits,” rather than wealth, station, or office as such.²¹ Ago and I study the same types of people, and I find evocative the range of terms she has devised for expressing their hopes—and even more so the ways those terms interact. She speaks variously of taste, cultivation, trendiness, and refinement. Yet it is never quite clear to whom this elite of taste displayed their cultural credentials. That audience could not be the socioeconomic elite, as some members of that group (lawyers, for instance, or minor patricians) also belonged to the elite of taste. Nor, beyond a general desire for respectability, does Ago suggest the goals that motivated her protagonists or tell us whether or not those goals were fulfilled. Admittedly, the fluidity of Ago’s model is part of what makes it so attractive. But a scholar who is at least in part a social historian wants more stable rubrics. Cultivation and trendiness can interact but are manifestly not the same thing. And even cultivation and refinement need not be coterminous. Combined and juxtaposed, then, these different qualities ably describe Ago’s subjects; however, she offers no unified theory for them, nor can any of these terms stand on its own as a heuristic tool. Cultivation comes close, but we must ask cultivated in what particular sense, to what specific end(s), and in dialogue with whom? Ago offers provocative case studies of individuals, but how did they interact with each other, if not literally, at least in their values and practices?

The category of legitimacy I am offering brings us back to the relational, but it allows for a positive inclusiveness of the sort Ago imagined and Bourdieu denied. Access to the literary created possibilities for joining a cultural lineage, but one not restricted by bloodlines or formal networks.²² At the same time, cultural legitimacy examined within the particular realm of literary priorities refines Ago’s more general notion of the quest for “respectability,” positing a specific realm of endeavor in which self-defined “people of taste” interacted and the norms that helped define their interactions. The norms I have in mind include the veneration of antiquity or

of the modern authors who revered and imitated antiquity, a confidence in the polyvalent value of education, and an emphasis on academic or literary credentials in the process of constructing individual, professional, or family honor. These priorities set general parameters for making claims to cultural legitimacy but did not constitute a rigid *habitus*.

This emphasis on relationship also keeps us more attuned to early-modern modes of thought. As economic and social historians alike have taught us, the early-modern world ran on systems of credit, in all senses of the word, which were defined not by mathematical formulae, let alone sociological models. Instead, early-modern men and women earned credit from the reputations they forged in sometimes rapidly changing socio-political environments and within unpredictable networks of human relationship.²³ In thinking about legitimacy, we also get a useful stimulus to ponder different levels and forms of belonging. Indeed, belonging gives the term *legitimacy* its greatest analytical power. Cultural legitimacy meant belonging to a lineage defined by commitment to intellectual, literary, or artistic matters. Commitment, not expertise or even necessarily competency, served as the minimum requirement for affiliation.

The value of belonging, however tenuously, to this lineage derived from the entrenchment of humanistic values. While humanists continued doing the precise philological, editorial, and authorial work that defined their particular neoclassical enterprise, the broader ideals that had inspired and justified that enterprise since its inception continued to take root in their social worlds. Those broader ideals included optimism about the ennobling power of education and a conception of the literary as an essential route to and proof of “virtue.” By our period, humanists had spent two centuries propounding these more abstract notions as they packaged their program of study for diverse audiences. Society listened to those ideals, even while it did most of its reading in the vernacular—if at all.

Cultural legitimacy, then, indicates a continuum of relational humanistic values. By displaying an education if not always a deeply classical one, a literary inclination if not always a literary gift (let alone a publication record), the ownership of literature if not always a well-stocked library, the Renaissance subject showed that he or she belonged to one degree or another in the ranks of the cultured, the diverse “elite of taste” as Ago calls them, or people “of the right sort,” as my Venetian protagonists usually express it. The degree of belonging might be close and tight, such as Ramusio’s, or distant and loose, such as that, apparently, of Francesco the secondhand goods dealer. Cultural legitimacy can accommodate even tremendous differences of degree that were not ultimately differences of kind.

SOURCES AND PROTAGONISTS

Our protagonists are Venetian men and women living in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They are artisans, merchants, priests, lawyers, physicians, and their kin whom I have located in 3,005 Venetian testaments and 1,227 household inventories. These notarial records enable both wide-angle views of the city's cultural topography and detailed analysis of the literary lives of individuals who often left us nothing in libraries but sometimes a great deal in the archives. I also draw on manuscript *ricordanze*, as well as printed literature to explore different forms of access to, hopes for, and uses of cultural legitimacy. Out of these thousands of Venetians from the middle ranks of society, 147 men and women receive attention as book owners (101 souls) or practitioners of what I am terming *testamentary humanism* (46 souls). Within that group, approximately twenty individuals emerge with some detail, and three become central case studies: Nicolò Massa, Francesco Longo, and Alberto Rini.

These three core protagonists were all physicians, as were many of the others whose wills and household inventories reveal ardent devotion to the literary and eagerness for others to know about it. Physicians might not seem at first glance to be ideal guides to the literary lives of middling-sort Venetians. While historians generally conceive of physicians as enfranchised, in socioprofessional if not necessarily political or economic terms, a closer look at their circumstances as a group urges rethinking that conception.

Physicians became an unexpected focus of research and writing. This study grew out of a chance encounter with the uncharacteristically wordy, semiautobiographical testaments of Francesco Longo and questions about why a physician would seem so hungry for recognition as a man of wide experience and learning. Why did he not feel that as a physician he had sufficient honor or, in the terms I am suggesting, cultural legitimacy? Longo was even the son of an apothecary, but his university credentials (the requisite bachelor's degree the liberal arts and doctorate in medicine) brought considerable prestige. And his children might have continued his own story of social mobility; Longo's professional status paved the way for greater honor. Why, then, did he feel compelled to dictate two wills that drew not only on tropes of Christian piety but also on lessons in magnanimity derived from Plutarch—a fascinating case of humanistic special pleading?²⁴

In the course of trying to understand this particular physician and his milieu, I formed larger questions about intellectual honor that his wills raised. Looking for others who exhibited similar preoccupations, I found many Venetians making ethical bequests in wills, possessing literary even

if numerically small collections of books, and expressing concern for the intellectual formation of their children. Still, physicians consistently demonstrated themselves both most inclined to exploit the discursive potential of the testament and to harbor book collections that outpaced those of patricians by orders of magnitude, and even those of their near relatives on the professional family tree—priests, lawyers, secretaries—by significant margins.

Nancy Siraisi's pathbreaking work on the cross-pollination of historical and medical writing has taught us not to be surprised to find trained medical doctors doing literary work ostensibly unrelated to their primary careers.²⁵ But I also detected defensiveness, if not an anxiety, on that point. If Siraisi has demonstrated that physicians did a great deal of historical and antiquarian writing, it is worth questioning why—especially why practicing physicians seemed so desperate to draw attention to their broader literary pursuits, more than even their contributions to medical humanism as such.

The scholarship on humanism and the professions now generally posits that the long tradition of literary attacks on physicians as manual laborers with delusions of grandeur had subsided by the sixteenth century, when medicine had achieved a reasonably stable place, alongside the law, as a civil profession.²⁶ Yet on closer inspection, physicians protested, if not too much at least a good deal, about their humanistic learning and the need for society to give their profession more credit as a liberal art. These protests suggest medical doctors' fear that contemporaries still viewed their work as baser than that of the other learned professions, in part thanks to its unavoidable contact with human bodies. Medical doctors' repeated emphasis on these concerns indicates that medicine was still fighting for recognition as *scientia* not just *ars*. Contemporary dialogues, plays, and other forms of reception underscore the notion that the medicine remained suspect and, more than the other professions, relegated to a lesser order of endeavor than "pure" literary activity.

Both archival and print trails portray physicians and their families less as comfortable members of the urban elite and more as a group still in search of credibility. Put another way, when we examine the sources they did not intend for publication (and even some of those they did) physicians look less like privileged *cittadini* and more like harried occupants of the last rungs on the ladder of upward mobility. Indeed, in many cases physicians, like Longo, had artisanal or mercantile parentage. If the higher clergy, lawyers, ambassadors, and secretaries had put a safe distance between themselves and the taint of artisanal labor, physicians had not; they inhabited a tense space between those assumed to belong to the cultural elite and those who were assumed to be unlettered, or at least unliterary. Medical doctors labored under the peculiar tension of being "so close and yet so far" from the

most secure forms of belonging on the spectrum of cultural legitimacy. Accordingly, I am arguing that while physicians' peculiar status made them more vocal than others about the cultural assets they hoped and trusted would distinguish them, they remained representative of the artisanal and mercantile worlds in that hope and trust. Patricians seldom worried about their intellectual or literary credentials; they had less to prove. Trying too hard, as Bourdieu pointed out long ago, is a sure sign of exclusion.²⁷

In the positive sense, however, physicians' anxious rhetoric articulated a conviction in the ennobling and enriching potential of letters that those in the social ranks behind them also held but revealed in more laconic statements or gestured toward in their testamentary bequests of books or provisions for education. Physicians also reveal the various ways in which the idea of "enrichment" or "ennoblement" at the heart of cultural legitimacy might be conceived and used. Longo seems to have viewed that enrichment in a more personal sense; he worried less about his family's social mobility and more about crafting an image of himself as a learned man and bequeathing his essential philosophical precepts to his heirs. Many of his colleagues voiced their hopes of converting cultural legitimacy into social mobility. Some took pride in their family members' gradual integration with patricians—if not yet at the level of forming direct family ties, at least in terms of moving in patrician circles and enjoying greater latitude for dispensing patronage in their own right. A few physicians also became explicit defenders of the literary value of the medical profession.

Physicians thus lead us to particularly rich veins of evidence for anatomiizing cultural legitimacy, but that evidence is by no means unique. Other categories of people within Venice's broad reading public shared physicians' central concerns. We will consider diverse stories of encounters with and hopes for books, education, and the next generation. If physicians could use the humanities as an astringent to sanitize a profession whose more distasteful responsibilities included smelling urine, other types of people found the humanities an effective cosmetic for covering their social blemishes, such as illegitimacy, or parents who were servants or artisans.

SCHOLARLY CONVERSATIONS

Beyond the analytical category it proposes and the variety of historical actors it recovers, *Everyday Renaissances* contributes methodologically to the growing rapprochement between intellectual and social history. Few of this book's protagonists have earned any notice from modern scholars, in part because they awaited recovery from the archival record. But people like this are also less apt to draw scholarly inquiry because they fall between

two major sets of concerns. Intellectual historians still tend to focus on authors, or writers who left behind compositions intended for readers beyond themselves. Social historians, by contrast, remain most focused on unearthing from unpublished sources the voices and lives of the disenfranchised, traditionally construed as lacking secure or any access to formal education or “high culture.”²⁸ While research in recent decades has challenged the assumption that, for instance, a cobbler would not have heard of Tacitus let alone owned the *Annals*, the ghost of such an assumption still lurks in history’s interpretive machinery.

Studies within what has come to be called the “social history of ideas,” following Peter Gay’s coinage in the 1960s, tend to align with one or another of three primary lines of inquiry.²⁹ At the most theoretical level, scholars such as Roger Chartier and Peter Burke have given us sociologies of knowledge that reveal the ways in which different social worlds constitute, if not determine, the meanings of languages, educational traditions and institutions, information storage and retrieval systems, the production and distribution of books, the practices of reading, the collection and display of cultural artifacts, and the dynamics of knowledge communities.³⁰ Other social historians of ideas aim to embed specific authors within their everyday worlds, as Gay attempted to do with Enlightenment philosophes, and as many others, especially but not exclusively within the history of science, have done with increasing sophistication in recent years. Mario Biagioli, for instance, famously reframed Galileo as a Medici courtier.³¹ Stephen Shapin showed us Robert Boyle and his colleagues contorting to accommodate contemporary expectations for “epistemological decorum” and the character of the independent and thus trustworthy gentleman.³² Paula Findlen uncovered the prehistory of museums in large domestic collections of early-modern Italy, paradigmatically that of Ulisse Aldrovandi, which became surprisingly inclusive forums for intellectual exchange.³³ All three scholars have taught us that early-modern science as a pursuit, and the particular careers of early-modern natural philosophers, had as much to do with skillful networking as it did with content knowledge. Historians of science are not alone in this approach. Scholars of humanism such as Lauro Martines, Diana Robin, Christopher Celenza, Brian Maxson, and others have revealed the networks connecting the Renaissance republic of letters.³⁴ Those of us working on intellectual women, moreover, have of necessity wrestled with the ways in which relational forces shaped women’s literary possibilities.³⁵

The social historians of ideas who adopt a third approach recover broader patterns of book ownership and the reading practices (especially but not exclusively) of nonelites from collections of popular literature and

the widest possible selection of archival materials. This third approach most often provides insight into the literary lives of the peasantry, artisans, and the middling sort. An approach favored by *Annalistes*, Albert Labarre's classic study of book ownership in sixteenth-century Amiens exemplifies the empirical riches it can yield.³⁶

Each of these modalities has its strengths and to a degree relies on the others, but there have been and continue to be methodological tensions. Not long after Gay coined the phrase "social history of ideas," Robert Darnton issued a stirring manifesto for a methodology that might help reconcile these related but divergent projects.³⁷ The chasm he saw between the "library" people, exemplified by Gay, and the "archive" people, represented by the *annalistes*, has narrowed in the ensuing decades. The increasing integration of intellectual and social questions owes much, in fact, to Darnton's own work. Whether finding deep meaning in the ritual execution of cats or reminding us that books may indeed cause revolutions—even if those books were more likely to have been pulp fiction than political philosophy—he models ways to divine what people read, how they read, and sometimes why, toggling back and forth between the individual document and evidence drawn from print culture.³⁸

My own study owes the greatest debt to Darnton's anatomy of the mid-eighteenth-century republic of letters through the trove of case files left by a literary-minded police inspector for the book trade, Joseph d'Hémery.³⁹ Darnton excavates the raw data furnished by d'Hémery's files from a prosopography of the republic's citizens, while also considering the larger problems this citizenry raises: the emergence of the writer as a figure, the conceptual category of "Enlightenment," and the tensions surrounding the act of authorship, especially the constraints and even the violence of patronage systems. Darnton's inspector led him to the thought worlds of many people beyond Voltaire. We meet 501 individuals whom d'Hémery genially stalked, hundreds of men and women who had written at least a line or two for a periodical. If fathers' occupations are taken into account, 19 percent of these writers belonged to the *petites gens*.⁴⁰ Fully 70 percent of them belonged to the third estate.⁴¹ Statistically speaking, then, literary work meant more to the middling sort than it did to the nobility in Enlightenment France. Mapping another corner of this world, Darnton has also unearthed impassioned letters written by a bourgeois book collector and fanatical reader of Rousseau to his favorite printer-publisher.⁴² In these materials, Darnton reveals that everyday people cared very much about books and authors, even if the lack of peasants reminds us that the ranks of the literate remained comparatively circumscribed throughout the early-modern period.

We certainly have models, then, for giving intellectual and social issues close to equal weight, but instabilities in conceptualization remain. Darnton, for instance, harbored a prejudice against tabulations of book inventories and the generalizations drawn from them. “Cultural objects are not manufactured by the historian but by the people he studies,” Darnton chastised. “They give off meaning. They need to be read, not counted.”⁴³ On the one hand, few of us would challenge the notion that statistics can reveal much without careful connection to other sources. On the other hand, Darnton’s locution invites historians’ continued reliance on evidence susceptible to the literary analysis that Darnton wants—in other words, texts. That reliance, in turn, risks keeping the spotlight on those who left substantial documentary trails, which often means the privileged. Numbers have the distinct advantage of urging us to consider the full range of participants in the history of ideas.

As we continue to amass data, however, we should be aware that the interpretive rubrics within which we work tend still to reproduce older assumptions about the effects of social stratification. One important synthetic study exemplifying this tendency is Roger Chartier’s primer to the sociology of knowledge, *The Order of Books*. Chartier states at the outset that “communities of readers” must be understood as dynamic, active, and plural. He speaks eloquently against understanding literary and cultural commitments as “necessarily organized according to pre-existent social divisions,” and terms any binary conception of high versus low culture “a mutilated conception of the social.”⁴⁴ Chartier goes on to insist, “The same texts were appropriated by ‘popular’ readers and other readers more than has been thought.”⁴⁵ Yet this promising argument for multiplicity soon retrogrades toward binaries. “Readers of more humble social condition,” he continues, “were put in possession of books [*aient été mis en possession des livres*] that were not specifically designed for them.” He further notes that “inventive and canny bookseller-printers made available to a very large clientele texts that formerly had circulated only in the narrow world of wealth and letters.” The passive construction conjures the image of an inert mass on which shrewd pressmen foisted reading material—an image Chartier cannot have intended, as it contravenes his own argument about the active nature of individual reading. Yet he goes on to characterize these men and women as “readers of humble social condition” (*lecteurs d’humble condition*) inhabiting a social space outside “the narrow world of wealth and letters” (*le monde étroit des lettrés fortunés*), which we might also translate “the restricted territory of wealthy, well-read people.”⁴⁶ We thus return to a socioeconomic opposition: people of “humble condition” versus a world of financial privilege coextensive if not coterminous with the world of intel-

lectual privilege. That binary, in turn, inflects Chartier's characterization of reading practices. We must, he concludes, "understand how the same texts can be differently apprehended, manipulated, and comprehended" by readers who lived outside the gated community of the *lettres fortunées*.⁴⁷ Chartier's participles leave little room for informed, even if divergent and alternative reading, suggesting instead misreading.⁴⁸ Despite the disavowals, then, Chartier remains within the ambit of a "high culture" versus "low culture" model.⁴⁹ Once his exposition moves from readers to authors and conceptions of the library, moreover, everyday people recede and the erudite return to their usual place of prominence.

Peter Burke's recent contributions to the sociology and anthropology of knowledge also continue to sort complex sets of evidence and otherwise nuanced readings under strangely static conceptual rubrics such as "insider" versus "outsider" communities, and "popular" versus "elite" reading modalities. Such rubrics are even stranger to find here, given that Burke himself changed the field with his two-way model for the movement of cultural forms, including ideas, between more and less socioeconomically privileged groups.⁵⁰ Here again, conceptual binaries filter through in unfortunate ways, for instance, in the opposition Burke posits between "practical literacy," useful for getting things done in business, family, church, and government, and the (implicitly impractical) skills necessary for appreciating *bonae litterae*.⁵¹ Armando Petrucci has gone a long way toward pluralizing even this conception literacy, positing an intricate spectrum of reading and writing abilities and an equally diverse range of their potential uses.⁵² And scholars have also raised important questions about our definitions of practicality. Lorna Weatherill, for one, argues that our historical subjects might see literary texts no less than games or art as "deeply valued, and thus, in some sense, necessary."⁵³

If Burke's conception of practical versus ornamental literacies at least hints at the possibility for more complex shadings of skills and objectives, he nonetheless tethers texts to context-specific assumed values. "What individuals believe to be truth or knowledge is influenced, if not determined, by their social milieu," Burke observes.⁵⁴ The argument for influence is unimpeachable, for determinism much less so. Unfortunately the exposition tends toward determinism, in the end a polarity of "academic" knowledge and "alternative knowledges" of the type possessed, for instance, by itinerant healers, Moriscos, and women.⁵⁵ Burke then sorts these knowledges further, according to social group: "Intellectuals are masters of some kinds of knowledge, but other fields of expertise or 'know how' are cultivated by such groups as bureaucrats, artisans, peasants, midwives and popular healers," possessors of what he then terms "implicit knowledge."⁵⁶

With “alternative” or “implicit” knowledge versus “dominant” or “academic” knowledge we return to the conceptual binary. Thereafter Burke, like Chartier, moves on to his paradigmatic Renaissance readers. In Burke’s case, those readers are Montaigne and Montesquieu.⁵⁷

As pioneers, Darnton, Chartier, and Burke show the road forward while also revealing some of its obstacles. In their different ways, each makes the crucial claim that premodern literary cultures were pluralistic, but each also reveals how difficult it is to capture differences without invoking binaries. Conceptions of “high” and “low” culture keep returning to our research and writing, just when we thought we had modified or even deleted them.

These persistent disjunctions also affect work on the history of consumption, which might be one means of continuing to keep everyday readers in view. Books as goods, however, tend to occupy the margins in this line of inquiry. Vast libraries appear as part of the voracious collecting on the part of a Medici or a d’Este, for instance, in recent studies by Lisa Jardine and Evelyn Welch.⁵⁸ Yet books at large do not receive consideration as consumer objects. To learn about books in conjunction with other uses of discretionary income among different social groups, we must turn to rare targeted studies such as that of Lorna Weatherill.⁵⁹ Scholars of literary culture and scholars of consumer culture, then, while certainly in conversation, still tend to pursue different questions.

Here again, however, historians of science have made strides in bringing disparate lines of inquiry together. Pamela Smith and Pamela Long form part of a vanguard emphasizing the active roles played by artisans in the rise of the new science, the collaboration of artisans with theoreticians, and the frequency with which individuals had both manual skills and book learning.⁶⁰ Intellectual and literary historians should attend more to this work. We know that Galileo both knew Latin and modified a spyglass. Yet we have not actively sought out and analyzed the literary lives of artisans who lived primarily by craftwork, because we still tend to assume that these men and women would not have known Latin, or even been able to read in the vernacular, let alone have felt any desire to purchase translations of Ovid and Josephus—or at least not in numbers sufficient to save us from accusations of studying exceptions.

Scholarship on book culture offers a promising avenue to bring the insights of the history of science concerning artisan-intellectuals into literary domains. Scholars in this field continue to show us the importance of the “print revolution” while directing our attention to the unpredictable relationships between producers, texts, and readers.⁶¹ Especially illuminating for thinking about early-modern literary consumption, Ann Blair has shown us an extensive community of scholars who devised new search,

storage, and retrieval methods to capitalize on the early-modern “information explosion.”⁶² Turning to an even more diverse group of people, William Sherman brings into sharp relief the specific passages that drew English readers’ attention, even if his reliance on marginalia limits somewhat the range of texts he could use.⁶³

Again, however, synthetic assessments have not caught up with empirical studies. Recent comprehensive treatments of early-modern book history do situate literary culture as a marketplace and emphasize its diversity. Yet they still rehearse older models of readerly segregation by arguing that, excepting the broad readership of a few best sellers such as the *Decameron*, *Don Quixote*, or *Amadis de Gaulle*, the erudite and wealthy read scholarship and literature, whereas nonelites consumed devotional material and tales of “marvels.”⁶⁴ It is perhaps small wonder that our historical shorthand seems so impervious to change, given that scholars who have developed highly nuanced conceptions of literacy, among them Armando Petrucci, still let conceptions of the broadest patterns of book ownership stand unqualified; even here, we are told that the bulk of reading material in circulation pertained to religion, with school texts and vernacular translations of the classics coming in a distant second, and other genres filtering in with increasingly meager showings down to the rarest specialist Latin works on medicine, rhetoric, and law.⁶⁵ While print runs have significance, they should not set the parameters for discussions of early-modern encounters with texts as much as they still do.

Archives furnish contrary evidence for any generalization we want to make, including old claims about readers’ tastes. We have learned a great deal from scholars working in the Italian archives about the literary range of most social groups, if not about the particular benefits they derived from the purchases their household inventories reveal. Christian Bec has offered us a magisterial account of book ownership in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence, finding the most voracious consumers among the mercantile and citizen orders.⁶⁶ More recently, as noted earlier, art historian Renata Ago has drawn on household inventories in seventeenth-century Rome to illuminate not only the art, luxury goods, musical instruments, and books collected by an impressive swath of society, which again shows the middling sort to be the most consistently engaged in cultural collecting if not (owing to their more limited means) the owners of the largest collections.⁶⁷ Isabella Cecchini takes a similar approach in a multidimensional study of Venetian inventories 1511–1633, though her primary concern remains art.⁶⁸ We also have the meticulous research of Susan Connell and Marino Zorzi, who used inventories to unearth patterns of book circulation in Venice during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—patterns that

once again reveal literary passions centering in the mercantile and citizen ranks.⁶⁹

This is an exciting moment, then, to join conversations at the crossroads of social and intellectual history that now span eras and geopolitical contexts while continuing to question access to and interest in literary material. “Great books had plebeian readers,” insists Jonathan Rose as he introduces his magisterial analysis of book ownership and readership in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England.⁷⁰ Some of the sources that bolster Rose’s claim, for instance, the records of mutual improvement societies and libraries’ extensive borrowing records, do not exist for the Renaissance era. Yet there are plenty of evidentiary trails early modernists and Italianists can follow and have followed to rethink our persistent assumptions about early-modern readers and listeners. Indeed, pioneering works of micro-history got us started long ago. Carlo Ginzburg found in the Inquisitional records a sixteenth-century Friulan miller who was also a keen reader and formulated a bizarre, idiosyncratic cosmology on this basis of his reading.⁷¹ Duccio Balestracci showed us the “Renaissance in the fields” of fifteenth-century Tuscan peasants who, inspired by the record-keeping mania of the era, paid notaries to chronicle their family histories alongside their business transactions.⁷² More recently and speaking, like Rose, as an intellectual historian, Christopher Celenza has urged scholars of Renaissance humanism to learn from micro-historians how to embed ideas more deeply in their social and cultural contexts, as well as to reconsider the traditional boundaries drawn between “high” and “low” culture.⁷³

While retaining the traditional emphasis on textual material, David Ruderman and Nancy Siraisi have innovatively pointed to the different cultural positions that even educated men occupied when they moved outside their areas of specialization. Ruderman and Siraisi show us rabbis and physicians, respectively, inhabiting literary middle zones. When they dealt outside their areas of mastery to discuss (in the case of rabbis) scientific matters or (in the case of physicians) popular history, news, and divination, these ostensible members of “high” culture inhabited far less exalted readerly and writerly spaces.⁷⁴ But even here the problematic terminology remains, as well as the emphasis on career intellectuals, rather than amateur reading or collecting. Neither scholar delves into their protagonists’ family backgrounds or connects these particular cases to broader sociocultural trends.

Everyday Renaissances dispenses altogether with conceptions of “high” and “low” culture, as well as integrating these two disciplines’ methodologies and their characteristic sets of evidence. This is a history of ideas drawn principally from sources dear to social historians: wills, household inventories, and account books. Our ensemble of protagonists allows us to

think about intellectual life outside the realm of notable minds, on the one hand, and broad statistics on the other. Drawing at once on discursive documents (testaments, diary entries, and of course some printed works) and inventories that yield numerical data, this book finds traces of learning everywhere—traces susceptible at once to social, intellectual, and material analysis. While my treatment of inventories does lie open to Darnton's charge of counting more than revealing reading practices, by connecting these numbers to the literary priorities evident in more discursive sources, I do ultimately arrive at books' social and literary significance.

In toggling between objects, texts, and meanings, *Everyday Renaissances* engages several topical literatures beyond the social history of ideas. Given the emphasis on books and learning, I interact with recent work on the vernacularization of humanism. As so many of my protagonists are physicians, the history of medicine remains another crucial frame of reference. And analyzing intellectual honor and related claims to cultural legitimacy brings me to interact with scholarship on the family, in particular with recent studies of social mobility. While the vast majority of previous research along my lines of inquiry has been done by Anglophone scholars, I hope that this study's attention to work by Italian and, to a lesser degree, French historians may help spark new conversations at the interstices of social, intellectual, and cultural history in larger European academic circles.

The subjects of this study cannot be termed humanists by any definition currently available. My protagonists were not Kristellerian philologists who had full command of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy; nor did they follow closely “in the footsteps of the ancients” by appropriating classical Latin style and usage in the specific ways that Ronald Witt has shown humanists doing.⁷⁵ Many of my protagonists would not even fit within the more pliable definition of humanism as a principal commitment to the classical tradition, ornately rhetorical self-presentation, and privileging of original sources employed by Anthony Grafton, Craig Kallendorf, Jill Kraye, Adam Shear, and others.⁷⁶ A few of the more voracious book collectors and some of the physicians in this study might pass these more general criteria, but only just. My conception of the significance of the literary, however, and the value attached to it does engage work on humanism in a general way. The Venetian men and women we will meet became members of humanism's audience, belonging to the lineage of the literary by extension. Even those who had Latin, as we will see, never felt entirely confident of their membership in the humanist community. What scholars of humanism as such stand to gain from the present study, however, is a better sense of the scope and impact of humanist rhetoric in convincing contemporaries to value the literary.

In turning to humanism's audiences, I follow recent work on the vernacularization of literary culture. James Hankins examined one paradigmatic fifteenth-century humanist, Leonardo Bruni, working in Italian no less than in Latin—a clear indication, as Hankins demonstrated, that Bruni aimed to bring classical moral philosophy to those who could only read Italian and in so doing tap the considerable vernacular market.⁷⁷ I also benefit from Brian Maxson's decentering of elite producers in his analysis of the degrees of humanism exhibited by those who did not publish.⁷⁸ While retaining as a defining feature the commitment to the classical tradition, Maxson posits an important distinction between what he terms "literary humanists," producers of complex works in humanist genres as well as the most ardent consumers of humanists' publications, and "social humanists," by which he indicates men and women who engaged the new learning tangentially, often through contact with more ardent devotees instead of independent intellectual endeavor. Some social humanists had demonstrable contact with writers, scholars, and philologists through correspondence; others put their Latin competency in the service of the Florentine diplomatic corps as orators. Maxson abjures binaries, noting that many individuals displayed characteristics of both types. Yet "social humanism" still does not quite work for my protagonists, many of whom did not have connections to career humanists. At a more fundamental level, moreover, I resist retaining classicism as the benchmark of participation in literary culture, as it excludes too many people who participated by means of "modern" literature. And while Maxson makes a compelling case that humanists changed conceptions of merit in political culture to emphasize intellectual and literary capabilities, his focus on governmental politics, as he concedes, necessarily keeps the spotlight on men, patricians, and the wealthy.⁷⁹

How can we assess Renaissance literary life more fully? Lynn Enterline has shown us a new world of literary consumption and humanistic priorities by examining grammar-school graduates in Elizabethan England.⁸⁰ Interweaving schoolbooks and pedagogical treatises with Shakespeare's plays and poetry, as well as the works of his contemporaries, Enterline demonstrates that humanist pronouncements about the value of the liberal arts for creating "gentlemen" went in different directions when appropriated by students, many of whom (including Shakespeare) had artisanal and mercantile social backgrounds. Following these lines of inquiry, I focus on the issues of humanistic demand and consumption, from the extensive literary ruminations of physicians to a pharmacist's wife who stipulated in her will that her husband must spend no fewer than five years teaching their son to read well.

Given the prominence of physicians in this study, the history of medicine holds a central place in the analysis. In approaching medical culture, I build on work in the social history of medicine, particularly the studies of Venetian physicians by Richard Palmer and the wider assessment of physicians' roles in Renaissance Italy by Gianna Pomata and Katherine Park.⁸¹ I also draw on a comparatively recent line of inquiry: early-modern cultures of healing, which spanned different social and occupational groups, among which studies by David Gentilcore and Mary Lindemann have been most helpful.⁸² In emphasizing physicians' literary ambitions, my principal model is Nancy Siraisi's *History, Medicine and the Traditions of Renaissance Learning*.⁸³ Siraisi has redirected our attention to physicians' literary passions, above all in the field of history, beyond their particular contributions to medical knowledge or practice. *Everyday Renaissances*, taking a cue from Siraisi's work on humanistic physicians as well as the research that she, Douglas Biow, and George McClure have done on humanist conceptions of the professions, moves further into the archives to highlight the social and professional stakes of physicians' interdisciplinary endeavors.⁸⁴

In considering the connections between learning and socioprofessional mobility, I aim to modify our understanding of family strategies as primarily concerned with economic and marital issues. Studies of social mobility and family history in Venice continue to follow models such as James Davis's *A Venetian Family and Its Fortune* that focus on the accumulation and conservation of wealth, as well as marriage strategies.⁸⁵ In making education and literary cachet a part of the calculations, I draw inspiration first from Maxson, who also posits that intellectual and literary endeavors catalyzed socioeconomic mobility. Most of his humanistic correspondents and unheralded orators constitute new figures for us to consider, men who did not begin life primed for election to government service, even if they belonged to the patriciate or enjoyed considerable wealth.⁸⁶ Maxson's argument for educational social mobility in a more dramatic sense, however, rests primarily on the example of Bartolomeo Scala.⁸⁷ To be sure, Scala proves the point. But as we work to change paradigms in social history, we will need evidence beyond a few well-known individuals, who can always be dismissed (even if misguidedly) as exceptional cases.

While rooted in the eighteenth-century Ottoman world, Dana Sajdi's analysis of the historical and biographical writing of an eighteenth-century Damascene barber offers another source of encouragement for considering the connection between education, writing, and social mobility.⁸⁸ Sajdi's concept of "nouveau literacy" encapsulates the entrance of nonelites into academic activity across the Ottoman world and the social mobility they often enjoyed thereafter. Explicating the cultural legitimacy of everyday

Venetian testators and the city's bibliophilia, an honorable pathology that physicians had in a particularly acute form, I find, like Sajdi, literary endeavors and social advancement to be mutually sustaining across a wide spectrum of people. Meritocracy was not just an ideal in the republic of letters; it formed an important part of some families' strategies.

EVERYDAY RENAISSANCES IN VENICE

This study has an itinerary with two major destinations. Part I maps the worlds of literary consumption and aspiration through two chapters that explore the different paths to books and learning, honor, and status revealed by my wider sets of archival evidence. Part II turns from the macroscopic to the microscopic, considering individual approaches to cultural legitimacy through three narrative case studies.

Who owned reading material or spoke of educational goals? What types of books did middling-sort Venetians have in their houses? How did families understand and attempt to transmit their cultural legitimacy? These are the fundamental questions addressed in Part I. Chapter 1 analyzes patterns of Venetian book ownership. As we will see, physicians were the most voracious, one might also say the most anxious, literary collectors. But medical doctors were not alone in their passion for texts. Nor do the genres collectors emphasize mesh with models of socioeconomic divisions or professional libraries. Venetian literary consumers of all social stations collected a variety of reading material. Inventories tell an important story about cultural priorities, but in a necessarily laconic way. Fortunately, we have other avenues to explore for seeking out the literary lives of Venice's reading public. In concluding this first chapter, I consider classical and literary naming practices as one possibility. Chapter 2 continues the thought, turning to Venetians' explicit statements about their ethical, bibliographic, and pedagogical commitments in their final wills and testaments, expressions that I am terming "testamentary humanism." By this I do not mean that everyday Venetians imitated some entrenched humanist practice of writing the testament; there was no such practice. Indeed, many card-carrying humanists did not pen or dictate wills that reveal their literary inclinations. Instead, "testamentary humanism" describes the practice of everyday Venetians, often those who did not have a humanist's access to other forms of written expression, who took advantage of the discursive potential of the testament to articulate their literary, bibliographical, pedagogical, or philosophical commitments. In making these bibliographic, educational, and ethical bequests, our Venetians reveal a concern about securing an honorable reputational afterlife that may

also have inspired a few notable humanists to bequeath their vast literary collections for “public” use.⁸⁹ This book’s protagonists did not as a rule have the resources for this sort of elaborate cultural patronage, but they could form libraries that extended beyond devotional and occupational volumes; some also wrote or dictated wills that made literary departures.

Physicians dominate the ranks both of book owners and those who exploited the literary potential of the testament. In seeking answers to why that should have been the case, Part II anatomizes medical doctors’ quest for cultural legitimacy through a triptych of case studies. Chapter 3 explores the quest for literary cachet through close examination of the life and career of Nicolò Massa (1485–1569) and the networks emanating from the sodalities to which he belonged, especially Venice’s College of Physicians. Massa and his colleagues reveal a common aim of securing humanistic recognition for the profession. Massa’s print campaigns, his library, and his ornately rhetorical wills (especially his forty-page draft will) all represented him as a self-made man of letters. In this, his priorities meshed with those of his colleagues and college, whose orations and print publications defended medicine as a liberal art from the disparagement of literary humanists.

But the value of books and education was not always so instrumental. If Massa and some of his colleagues used their learning pragmatically as cultural capital, Francesco Longo (1506–1576) redirects our attention to cultural legitimacy’s more idealistic dimensions. Chapter 4 offers a close reading of Longo’s two ethical testaments, drawing out their social, intellectual, and literary meanings and recovering what can be known of the life circumstances shaping them from Longo’s matriculation records at the University of Padua, as well as other private family documents and the records of the convent of Corpus Domini, where his daughter Virginia took her vows. Longo enjoyed some recognition in the medical community in his lifetime, but he held a place several rungs below Massa on that professional ladder. He published nothing, so far as we know, nor did he hold any civic offices, and his resources were just sufficient for his family’s needs. In his two loquacious and philosophical final testaments, Longo made repeated and extensive references to the ancient Persian king Artaxerxes, carefully divided his “Latin, Greek and vernacular books” among his children, and dispensed crash courses in moral philosophy as ethical bequests. In these small textual monuments, he immortalized himself not as a physician but as a man who belonged to the world of letters and possessed a philosophical mind. Longo’s self-conception as a moral philosopher, irrespective of his particular job description, and his deference to general Stoic precepts and modes of reasoning situate this physician within a cultural paradigm that Pierre Hadot finds exemplified by Marcus Aurelius.⁹⁰

But if one of the distinctive practices of Hadot's Marcus Aurelius was the emperor's turn to writing as a spiritual exercise, then another Venetian physician, while less overtly philosophical in his expressions than Longo, exhibits even more kinship with this ancient model. Alberto Rini (d. 1599) articulated in his own way how much the literary Renaissance mattered to someone outside the elite of the republic of letters. Chapter 5 offers a close reading of two manuscript treasures, Rini's *giornali*, which record both his daily life and the life of his mind. Once again, we see a physician who, like Longo, left no traces on the print record but was anything but intellectually dormant. Rini's *giornali* detail not only his routine expenditures but also his bouts of note taking at sermons, his recipe collections, his mania for copying chronicles, his appreciation and purchases of art, and his pride in making new additions to the family's growing library of (nonmedical) books. Like Longo, Rini had a passion for culture and education. And Rini created a monument of himself in much the same manner as Longo did. While others, for instance, his colleague Tommaso Rangone, chose commemoration in bronze and in their professional guise, Rini and Longo preferred fragile paper and the personae of *letterati* and philosophers. In choosing what Matthew Lundin has eloquently termed "paper memory" for his posterity, Rini, like Longo, reveals a literary excitement and optimism, even in moments of despair.⁹¹ Even for uncelebrated Venetians, confidence, satisfaction, and even social honor might have to do with the mind less than the wealth or occupational prestige.

In the aggregate, our 147 book collectors and humanistic testators, with our three insistently rhetorical physicians, help us think afresh about the literary Renaissance. We have long befriended behemoths of erudition who enjoyed unrestricted access to Parnassus. We are getting better acquainted with professionals who formed at least discipline-specific libraries, adding perhaps some art or antiquities to ornament their *studioli*. And our familiarity with vernacular readers reaching for prayer books, romances, and news has also deepened. But as we think of these general categories of people and the patterns of their interaction with the written word, let us also think about interstitial cases, letting their sometimes surprising degrees of access to materials, their wide-ranging interests, and their complex aspirations challenge our interpretive models. I hope this book will encourage us to keep on the lookout for provisional literati like those whom we meet here: wives of goldsmiths harboring copies of Lucan and Josephus, professionals desperate to be (or be seen as) literary, and even the occasional retailer borrowing works of Greek philosophy. These men and women can be useful guides to the early-modern republic of letters in their own right; at the least, they sharpen our image of that imaginary republic's very real audiences, and its aspiring citizens.