

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Descartes Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Schopenhauer Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Schiller Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schilling Kralik Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Raabe Gibbon Tschechow
Gerstäcker Klee Hölty Morgenstem Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Musil
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kierkegaard Kraus Moltke
Machiavelli Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Nietzsche Marx Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntatz
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving
Petalozzi Platon Pückler Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka
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Memoirs of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries

Albrecht Dürer

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

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BASIC BACKGROUND

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) was probably the greatest graphical artist of the Northern Renaissance. He is the first to have elevated the self-portrait to a high art form, and was known for his fascination with animals, which form the subjects of many of his graphical works. He reveled in portraying men of learning and/or high stature as well as peasants, believing that portraits of the latter could be as instructive as those of the former. His marriage to his wife Agnes was childless and banal, apparently because Dürer was too preoccupied with intellectual matters to be much interested in romantic pursuits.

In the letters below, this unusually modern thinker demonstrates his noble, righteous utilitarian personal philosophy, and meticulously records his personal and travel expenses, while journeying throughout Venice and various other European cities and divided German states. Numerous kings and laypeople sought to meet and host him, since he was renowned and loved as a painter while still alive. He comments on Martin Luther, Erasmus of Rotterdam and painting, and demonstrates his curious, inquiring nature. He also describes his visit to Zeeland to see a beached whale, which washed away before he got there; but during this visit, Dürer may have caught the disease from which he may have died several years later. Like Rembrandt, he enjoyed collecting things, and demonstrates this in his letters.

BRIEF EXCERPT FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO THE 1913 EDITION, WRITTEN BY ROGER FRY (1866-1934):

Whatever one's final estimate of his art, Dürer's personality is at once so imposing and so attractive, and has been so endeared to us by familiarity, that something of this personal attachment has been transferred to our aesthetic judgment. The letters from Venice and the Diary of his journey in the Netherlands, which form the contents of this volume, are indeed the singularly fortunate means for this pleasant intercourse with the man himself. They reveal Dürer as one of the distinctively modern men of the Renaissance: intensely, but not arrogantly, conscious of his own personality; accepting with a pleasant ease the universal admiration of his genius—a personal admiration, too, of an altogether modern kind; careful of his fame as one who foresaw its immortality. They show him as having, though in a far less degree, something of Leonardo da Vinci's scientific interest, certainly as possessing a quick, though naive curiosity about the world and a quite modern freedom from superstition. It is clear that his dominating and yet kindly personality, no less than his physical beauty and distinction, made him the center of interest wherever he went. His easy and humorous good-fellowship, of which the letters to Pirkheimer are eloquent, won for him the admiring friendship of the best men of his time.

To all these characteristics we must add a deep and sincere religious feeling, which led him to side with the leaders of the Reformation, a feeling which comes out in his passionate sense of loss when he thinks that Luther is about to be put to death, and causes him to write a stirring letter to Erasmus, urging him to continue the work of reform. For all that, there is no trace in him of either Protestantism or Puritanism. He was perhaps fortunate—certainly as an artist he was fortunate—to live at a time when the line of cleavage between the reformers and the Church was not yet so marked as to compel a decisive action.

CAST OF [SOME OF THE] CHARACTERS:

Agnes: Dürer's wife

Wilibald Pirkheimer: Dürer's best friend

Wolgemut: The master painter to whom Dürer began formal training as an apprentice. Later, Dürer painted a richly detailed self-portrait of him.

Giovanni Bellini: Famous Renaissance painter and contemporary of Dürer.

Jan van Eyk: Famous Renaissance painter.

Imhof: Hans Imhof, the elder, at Nuremberg; the younger Imhof was in Venice.

Schott: Kunz Schott, an enemy of the town of Nuremberg.

Weisweber: A Nuremberg general.

FORMS OF MONEY REFERRED TO IN THE LETTERS:

Marcelli: A Venetian coin worth 10 soldi.

Stiver: A Netherlandish coin worth about 80 pfennigs.

Philip's: A Netherlandish coin worth rather less than a Rhenish florin.

Crown: A Netherlandish coin worth 6.35 marks.

Noble: The Rosennobel = 8 marks, 20 pfennigs. The Flemish noble = 9 marks, 90 pfennigs.

Blanke: A silver coin = 2 stivers.

Angel: An English coin = 2 florins, 2 stivers Netherlandish.

PART 1: LETTERS FROM VENICE TO WILIBALD PIRKHEIMER

Venice, 6th January, 1506

To the Honourable and wise Wilibald Pirkheimer, in
Nuremberg.

My dear Master, To you and all yours, many happy good New Years. My willing service to you, dear Herr Pirkheimer. Know that I am in good health; may God send you better even than that. Now as to what you commissioned me, namely, to buy a few pearls and precious stones, you must know that I can find nothing good enough or worth the money: everything is snapped up by the Germans.

Those who go about on the Riva always expect four times the value for anything, for they are the falsest knaves that live there. No one expects to get an honest service of them. For that reason some good people warned me to be on my guard against them. They told me that they cheat both man and beast, and that you could buy better things for less money at Frankfort than at Venice.

As for the books which I was to order for you, Imhof has already seen to it, but if you are in need of anything else, let me know, and I shall do it for you with all zeal. And would to God that I could do you some real good service. I should gladly accomplish it, since I know how much you do for me.

And I beg of you be patient with my debt, for I think oftener of it than you do. As soon as God helps me to get home I will pay you honourably, with many thanks; for I have to paint a picture for the Germans, for which they are giving me 110 Rhenish gulden, which will not cost me as much as five. I shall have finished laying and scraping the ground-work in eight days, then I shall at once begin to paint, and if God will, it shall be in its place for the altar a month after Easter.

[Editor note: This refers to the [altarpiece called the] "Madonna of the Rose Garlands," painted for the chapel of S. Bartolommeo, the burial-place of the German colony. About the year 1600 it was

bought for a high price by the Emperor Rudolf II, who is said to have had it carried [over the Alps] by four men all the way to Prague to avoid the risk of damage in transport. [It suffered serious water damage during the Thirty Years' War of 1618-1648, and many parts of it had to be repainted to replace much of the original paint that was lost, but] it still remains one of the most important [and lavishly colored] of all Dürer's works.]

The money I hope, if God will, to put by; and from that I will pay you: for I think that I need not send my mother and wife any money at present; I left 10 florins with my mother when I came away; she has since got 9 or 10 florins by selling works of art. Dratzieher has paid her 12 florins, and I have sent her 9 florins by Sebastian Imhof, of which she has to pay Pfinzing and Gartner 7 florins for rent. I gave my wife 12 florins and she got 13 more at Frankfort, making all together 25 florins, so I don't think she will be in any need, and if she does want anything, her brother will have to help her, until I come home, when I will repay him honourably. Herewith let me commend myself to you.

Given at Venice on the day of the Holy Three Kings (Epiphany), the year 1506. Greet for me Stephen Paumgartner and my other good friends who ask after me.

— Albrecht Dürer

7th February, 1506

First my willing service to you, dear Master. If it is well with you, I am as whole-heartedly glad as I should be for myself. I wrote to you recently. I hope the letter reached you. In the meantime my mother has written to me, chiding me for not writing to you, and has given me to understand that you are displeased with me because I do not write to you; and that I must excuse myself to you fully. And she is much worried about it, as is her wont. Now I do not know what excuse to make, except that I am lazy about writing and that you have not been at home. But as soon as I knew that you were at home or were coming home, I wrote to you at once; I also specially charged Castel (Fugger) to convey my service to you.

Therefore I most humbly beg you to forgive me, for I have no other friend on earth but you; but I do not believe you are angry with me, for I hold you as no other than a father.

How I wish you were here at Venice, there are so many good fellows among the Italians who seek my company more and more every day—which is very gratifying to me—men of sense, and scholarly, good lute-players, and pipers, connoisseurs in painting, men of much noble sentiment and honest virtue, and they show me much honour and friendship. On the other hand, there are also amongst them the most faithless, lying, thievish rascals; such as I scarcely believed could exist on earth; and yet if one did not know them, one would think that they were the nicest men on earth. I cannot help laughing to myself when they talk to me: they know that their villainy is well known, but that does not bother them.

I have many good friends among the Italians who warn me not to eat and drink with their painters, for many of them are my enemies and copy my work in the churches and wherever they can find it; afterwards they criticize it and claim that it is not done in the antique style and say it is no good, but Giambellin (Giovanni Bellini) has praised me highly to many gentlemen. He would willingly have something of mine, and came himself to me and asked me to do something for him, and said that he would pay well for it, and everyone tells me what an upright man he is, so that I am really friendly with him. He is very old and yet he is the best painter of all.

[Editor's note: The character of Bellini agrees with all we know of him. Camerarius tells an amusing story of the two artists, to the effect that Bellini once asked Dürer for one of the brushes with which he painted hairs. Dürer produced several quite ordinary brushes and offered them to Bellini. Bellini replied that he did not mean those, but some brush with the hairs divided which would enable him to draw a number of fine parallel lines such as Dürer did. Dürer assured him that he used no special kind, and proceeded to draw a number of long wavy lines like tresses with such absolute regularity and parallelism that Bellini declared that nothing but seeing it done would have convinced him that such a feat of skill was possible.]

And the thing which pleased me so well eleven years ago pleases me no longer, and if I had not seen it myself, I would not have believed anyone who told me. And you must know too that there are many better painters here than Master Jacob (Jacopo de Barbari), though Antonio Kolb would take an oath that there was no better painter on earth than Jacob. Others sneer at him and say if he were any good, he would stay here. I have only today begun the sketch of my picture, for my hands are so scabby that I could not work, but I have cured them.

And now be lenient with me and do not get angry so quickly, but be gentile like me. You will not learn from me, I do not know why. My dear, I should like to know whether any of your loves is dead—that one close by the water, for instance, or the one like [drawing of a flower] or [drawing of a brush] or [drawing of a running dog]'s girl so that you might get another in her stead.

Given at Venice at the ninth hour of the night on Saturday after Candlemas in the year 1506. [Editor's note: Reckoning from sunset, at this season [this] would be about 2:30 a.m.] Give my service to Stephen Paumgartner and to Masters Hans Harsdorfer and Volkamer.

—Albrecht Dürer

28th February, 1506

First my willing service to you, dear Herr Pirkheimer. If things go well with you, then I am indeed glad. Know, too, that by the grace of God I am doing well and working fast. Still I do not expect to have finished before Whitsuntide. I have sold all my pictures except one. For two I got 24 ducats, and the other three I gave for these three rings, which were valued in the exchange as worth 24 ducats, but I have shown them to some good friends and they say they are only worth 22, and as you wrote to me to buy you some jewels, I thought that I would send you the rings by Franz Imhof. Show them to people who understand them, and if you like them, keep them for what they are worth. In case you do not want them, send them back by the next messenger, for here at Venice a man who

helped to make the exchange will give me 12 ducats for the emerald and 10 ducats for the ruby and diamond, so that I need not lose more than 2 ducats.

I wish you had occasion to come here, I know the time would pass quickly, for there are so many nice men here, real artists. And I have such a crowd of foreigners (Italians) about me that I am forced sometimes to shut myself up, and the gentlemen all wish me well, but few of the painters.

Dear Master, Andreas Kunhofer sends you his service and means to write to you by the next courier. Herewith let me be commended to you, and I also commend my mother to you. I am wondering greatly why she has not written to me for so long, and as for my wife, I begin to think that I have lost her, and I am surprised too that you do not write to me, but I have read the letter which you wrote to Sebastian Imhof about me. Please give the two enclosed letters to my mother, and have patience, I pray, till God brings me home, when I will honourably repay you. My greetings to Stephen Pirkheimer and other good friends, and let me know if any of your loves are dead. Read this according to the sense: I am hurried.

Given in Venice, the Sunday before Whitsunday, the year 1506.

– Albrecht Dürer

[p.s.] Tomorrow it is good to confess.

8th March, 1506

First my willing service to you, dear Herr Pirkheimer. I send you herewith a ring with a sapphire about which you wrote so urgently. I could not send it sooner, for the past two days I have been running around to all the German and Italian goldsmiths that are in all Venice with a good assistant whom I hired: and we made comparisons, but were unable to match this one at the price, and only after much entreaty could I get it for 18 ducats 4 marcelli from a man who was wearing it on his own hand and who let me have it as a favour, as I gave him to understand that I wanted it for myself. And as soon as I had bought it a German goldsmith wanted to give me 3 ducats

more for it than I paid, so I hope that you will like it. Everybody says that it is a good stone, and that in Germany it would be worth about 50 florins; however, you will know whether they tell truth or lies. I understand nothing about it. I had first of all bought an amethyst for 12 ducats from a man whom I thought was a good friend, but he deceived me, for it was not worth 7; but the matter was arranged between us by some good fellows: I will give him back the stone and make him a present of a dish of fish. I was glad to do so and took my money back quickly. As my good friend values the ring, the stone is not worth much more than 10 Rhenish florins, whilst the gold of the ring weighs about up to 5 florins, so that I have not gone beyond the limit set me, as you wrote "from 15 to 20 florins." But the other stone I have not yet been able to buy, for 10 one finds them rarely in pairs; but I will do all I can about it. They say here that such trumpery fool's work is to be had cheaper in Germany, especially now at the Frankfurt Fair. For the Italians take such stuff abroad, and they laugh at me, especially about the jacinth cross, when I speak of 2 ducats, so write quickly and tell me what I am to do. I have heard of a good diamond ornament in a certain place, but I do not yet know what it will cost. I shall buy it for you until you write again, for emeralds are as dear as anything I have seen in all my days. It is easy enough for anyone to get a small amethyst if he thinks it worth 20 or 25 ducats.

It really seems to me you must have taken a mistress; only beware you don't get a master. But you are wise enough about your own affairs.

Dear Pirkheimer, Andreas Kunhofer sends you his service. He intends in the meantime to write to you, and he prays you if necessary to explain for him to the Council why he does not stay at Padua; he says there is nothing there for him to learn. Don't be angry I pray you with me for not sending all the stones on this occasion, for I could not get them all ready. My friends tell me that you should have the stone set with a new foil and it will look twice as good again, for the ring is old, and the foil spoiled. And I beg you too to tell my mother to write me soon and have good care of herself. Herewith I commend myself to you.

Given at Venice on the second Sunday in Lent, 1506.

– Albrecht Dürer

[p.s.] Greetings to your loves.

2nd April, 1506

First my willing service to you, dear Sir.

I received a letter from you on the Thursday before Palm Sunday, together with the emerald ring, and went immediately to the man from whom I got the rings. He will give me back my money for it, although it is a thing that he does not like to do; however, he has given me his word and he must hold to that. Do you know that the jewelers buy emeralds abroad and sell them here at a profit? But my friends tell me that the other two rings are well worth 6 ducats apiece, for they say that they are fine and clear and contain no flaws. And they say that instead of taking them to the valuer you should enquire for such rings as they can show you and then compare them and see whether they are like them; and if when I got them by exchange I had been willing to lose 2 ducats on the three rings, Bernard Holzbeck, who was present at the transaction, would have bought them of me. I have since sent you a sapphire ring by Franz Imhof, I hope it has reached you. I think I made a good bargain at that place, for they offered to buy it of me at a profit on the spot. But I shall find out from you, for you know that I understand nothing about such things and am forced to trust those who advise me.

The painters here you must know are very unfriendly to me. They have summoned me three times before the magistrates, and I have had to pay 4 florins to their School. You must know too that I might have gained much money if I had not undertaken to make the painting for the Germans, for there is a great deal of work in it and I cannot well finish it before Whitsuntide; yet they only pay me 85 ducats for it. [Editor's note: Bellini at this time received 100 ducats for a large picture]. That, you know, will go in living expenses, and then I have bought some things, and have sent some money away, so that I have not much in hand now; but I have made up my mind not to leave here until God enables me to repay you with thanks and to

have too florins over besides. I should easily earn this if I had not got to do the German picture, for, except the painters, everyone wishes me well.

Please tell my mother to speak to Wolgemut about my brother, and to ask him whether he can give him work until I get back, or whether he can find employment with others. [Editor's note: Dürer's brother was Hans Dürer, who was fifteen at this date. He became a painter of second-rate ability, and afterwards helped Albrecht in the decoration of the Emperor Maximilian's prayer book]. I should like to have brought him with me to Venice, which would have been useful both to me and to him and he would have learned the language, but she was afraid that the sky would fall on him. I pray you keep an eye on him: women are no use for that. Tell the boy, as you can so well, to be studious and independent till I come, and not to rely on his mother, for I cannot do everything although I shall do my best. If it were only for myself, I should not starve; but to provide for so many is too hard for me, and nobody is throwing money away.

Now I commend myself to you, and tell my mother to be ready to sell at the Crown Fair. I am expecting my wife to come home, and have written to her too about everything. I shall not purchase the diamond ornament until you write. I do not think I shall be able to return home before next Autumn. What I earn for the picture which was to have been ready by Whitsuntide will all be gone in living expenses and payments. But what I gain afterwards I hope to save. If you think it right, say nothing of this and I shall keep putting it off from day to day and writing as though I was just coming. Indeed I am quite irresolute; I do not know myself what I shall do.

Write to me again soon.

Given on Thursday before Palm Sunday in the year 1506.

– Albrecht Dürer

[p.s.] Your servant

23rd April, 1506

First my willing service to you, dear Sir. I wonder why you do not write to me to say how you like the sapphire ring which Hans Imhof has sent you by the messenger Schon from Augsburg. I do not know whether it has reached you or not. I have been to Hans Imhof and enquired, and he says that he knows no reason why it should not have reached you, and there is a letter with it which I wrote to you, and the stone is done up in a sealed packet and has the same size as is drawn here, for I drew it in my note-book. I managed to get it only after hard bargaining. The stone is clear and fine, and my friends say it is very good for the money I gave for it. It weighs about 3 florins Rhenish, and I gave for it 18 ducats and 4 marzelle, and if it should be lost I should be half mad, for it has been valued at quite twice what I gave for it. There were people who would have given me more for it the moment I had bought it. So, dear Herr Pirkheimer, tell Hans Imhof to enquire of the messenger what he has done with the letter and packet. The messenger was sent off by Hans Imhof the younger on the 11th March.

Now may God keep you, and let me commend my mother to you. Tell her to take my brother to Wolgemut that he may work and not be idle.

Ever your servant.

Read by the sense. I am in a hurry, for I have seven letters to write, part written. I am sorry for Herr Lorenz. Greet him and Stephen Paumgartner.

Given at Venice in the year 1506, on St. Mark's Day.

Write me an answer soon, for I shall have no rest till I hear. Andreas Kunhofer is deadly ill as I have just heard.

— Albrecht Dürer

28th August, 1506

To the first greatest man in the world; your servant and slave, Albrecht Dürer, sends salutation to his magnificent Master Wilibaldo Pirkamer. By my faith, I hear gladly and with great pleasure of your health and great honour, and I marvel how it is possible for a man

like you to stand against so many, tyrants, bullies, and soldiers. Not otherwise than by the grace of God. When I read your letter about this strange abuse it gave me great fright; I thought it was a serious matter. But I warrant you frighten even Schott's men, for you look wild enough, especially on holy days with your skipping gait! But it is very improper for such a soldier to smear himself with civet. You want to be a regular silk tail, and you think that if only you manage to please the girls, it is all right. If you were only as taking a fellow as I am, I should not be so provoked. You have so many loves that it would take you a month and more to visit each.

However, let me thank you for having arranged my affairs so satisfactorily with my wife. I know there is no lack of wisdom in you. If only you were as gentle as I am, you would have all the virtues. Thank you, too, for everything you are doing for me, if only you would not bother me about the rings. If they do not please you, break off their heads and throw them in the privy, as Peter Weisweber says.

What do you mean by setting me to such dirty work, I have become a gentiluomo at Venice. I have heard that you can make lovely rhymes; you would be a find for our fiddlers here. They play so beautifully that they weep over their own music. Would God that our Rechenmeister girl could hear them, she would cry too. At your command I will again lay aside my anger and behave even better than usual.

But I cannot get away from here in two months, for I have not enough money yet to start myself off, as I have written to you before; and so I pray you if my mother comes to you for a loan, let her have 10 florins till God helps me out. Then I will scrupulously repay you the whole.

With this I am sending you the glass things by the messenger. And as for the two carpets, Anthon Kolb will help me to buy the most beautiful, the broadest, and the cheapest. As soon as I have them I'll give them to Imhof the younger to pack off to you. I shall also look after the crane's feathers. I have not been able to find any as yet. But of swan's feathers for writing with there are plenty. How would it do if you stuck them on your hats in the meantime?