Cultures and Contexts: Renaissance Italy

Core UA 500
Spring 2018

Course Description: The culture and politics of Renaissance Italy. We begin with the demographic catastrophe of the Black Death in 1348 and end with the decline of the Italian states in the sixteenth century, focusing on the political and family structures of the city-states, the culture of the princely courts, the ambitions of the Roman popes, the social and intellectual basis for artistic creativity, and the new forms of political, religious, and scientific thought that we associate with the Renaissance. Primary sources include literary works, diaries, traveler's accounts, visual art, and political and scientific writings.

Course Requirements:

Reading: All required readings must be done in their entirety before your recitation section meets each week.

Writing: Midterm exam, final exam, and four short papers of 4-5 pages (1,200-1,500 words) each. The short papers are due on NYU Classes and under no circumstances will extensions be granted or papers accepted by other means. Paper topics will be posted on NYU Classes at least a week in advance of the due date.

Participation: Attendance and participation in all recitation section assignments are required. N.B. Your performance in recitation section counts more than any single assignment; therefore it is in your interests to prepare and participate.

Statistics: Grades break down as follows:
Exams 25% (12.5% each), Short Papers 50% (12.5% each), Recitation 25%.

Electronic Devices Policy: I discourage the use of electronic devices of any kind in the classroom. Students who wish to use a laptop must sit in the back row. If all the back row seats are taken when you arrive, you may not use your laptop that day. Hearing impaired students who wish to use a recording device may do so in the front row.

Plagiarism Policy: Plagiarism of any kind will result in an F on the assignment in question. Two-time offenders will fail the course. N.B. Post facto discoveries of plagiarism will count as your second offense. For more see the Core Curriculum’s statement on plagiarism on the last page of this syllabus.

Readings: All books available at the University Bookstore and on reserve at Bobst Library. You may, of course, purchase the books from different vendors. However,
Please purchase the same edition as the bookstore is stocking. Other readings are available on the Wordpress site.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron, W. Rebhorn trans.
Fonte, Moderata, The Worth of Women, V. Cox, ed., trans.
Kohl and Witt eds. The Earthly Republic
Machiavelli, Niccolò. The Essential Writings of Machiavelli, P. Constantine trans.

Lecture and Reading Schedule:

**Week One**
Jan 23rd – Introduction: What was the Renaissance?
Jan 25th – The Social and Economic Structure of the Italian Communes  
The Life of Cola di Rienzo, Books I and IV excerpts (Course Site)

**Week Two**
Jan 30th – The Black Death and Other Disasters
Feb 1st – Religious Culture in the Early Renaissance  
Giovanni Villani, Chronicle of Florence (Course Site)
Boccaccio, The Decameron, Boccaccio’s preface and introduction
The Pistoia Ordinances, (Course Site)

**Week Three**
Feb 6th – Everyday Life in the Early Renaissance
Feb 8th – Social Class and Social Conflict  
The Decameron, day 1, story 1 (1.1), 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.5, 2.7, 3.1, 3.10, 4.prologue, 4.2, 4.5, 5.4, 5.9, 6.5, 6.10. 7.2, 7.10, 8.3, 9.2, 9.10, 10.10

**Week Four (Short Paper Due)**
Feb 13th – Humanism: Antiquity vs. Modernity
Feb 15th – Humanism and the Role of Learning for Society  
Lorenzo Valla, The Donation of Constantine (entire)
Francesco Petrarca, On His Own Ignorance and that of Many Others (Course Site)
Coluccio Slautati, Letter to Peregrino Zambeccari, in The Earthly Republic
Coluccio Salutati, A Letter in Defense of Liberal Studies (Course Site)

**Week Five**
Feb 20th – Humanism, Gender, and Class in Renaissance Society
Feb 22nd – Gender and Politics in the High Renaissance  
Laura Cereta, Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist
Alessandra Strozzi, Selected Letters (Course Site)
Francesco Barbaro, On Wifely Duties in The Earthly Republic
**Week Six (Short Paper Due)**
Feb 27th – Renaissance Economic Cultures
Mar 1st – Wealth and Public Display in the High Renaissance
    Leonardo Bruni, *Panegyric to the City of Florence*, in *The Earthly Republic*
    Cennino Cennini, *The Craftsman’s Handbook*
    Poggio Bracciolini, *On Avarice*, in *The Earthly Republic*
    Leon Battista Alberti, *The Perfect Country House* (Course Site)

**Week Seven**
Mar 6th – The Problem with Golden Ages
Mar 8th – MIDTERM EXAM

**Spring Break**

**Week Eight**
Mar 20th – Fortune, Virtue, and Politics in Renaissance Italy
Mar 22nd – Electoral Politics in Renaissance Republics
    Leon Battista Alberti, *On Virtù and Fortune* (Course Site)
    Marsilio Ficino, *Letter to Paul of Middelburg* (Course Site)
    Benedetto Dei, “Letter to a Venetian” (Course Site)
    Guicciardini, “Florentine Admiration for Venice’s System of Government” (Course Site)
    Venetian Documents about the Doge (Course Site)

**Week Nine (Short Paper Due)**
Mar 27th – Cultures of Political Violence in the Renaissance
Mar 29th – Savonarola and the Crisis of Renaissance Republicanism
    Angelo Polizziano, “The Pazzi Conspiracy,” in *The Earthly Republic*
    Francesco Guicciardini, *A Portrait of Lorenzo de’ Medici* (Course Site)
    Girolamo Savonarola, *Treatise on the Government of Florence* (Course Site)
    Francesco Guicciardini, *History of Italy* excerpt (Course Site)

**Week Ten**
Apr 3rd – Machiavelli: Humanism Transformed
Apr 5th – Machiavelli: The Lessons of History
    Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Florentine Histories* in *The Essential Writings*
    Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses* in *The Essential Writings*

**Week Eleven**
Apr 10th – Machiavelli: The People’s Prince
Apr 12th – Guicciardini: The Aristocrat’s Republic
    Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* in *The Essential Writings*
    Francesco Guicciardini, *Dialogue on the Government of Florence* (Course Site)
**Week Twelve (Short Paper Due)**
Apr 17<sup>th</sup> – Taming the Aristocracy
Apr 19<sup>th</sup> – The Invention of Manners
   Moderata Fonte, *The Worth of Women*
   Baldessario Castiglione, *The Courtier* (Course Site)

**Week Thirteen**
Apr 24<sup>th</sup> – Worlds Without
Apr 26<sup>th</sup> – Worlds Within
   Nicolaus Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus* (Course Site)
   Andreas Vesalius, *De Fabrica Corporis Humani* (Course Site)

**Week Fourteen (Short Paper Due)**
May 1<sup>st</sup> – Renaissance Amusements
May 3<sup>rd</sup> – Conclusion: What was the Renaissance?
   Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Mandrake Root in The Essential Writings*
   Matteo Bandello, *Gonnella Tricks Marquis Niccoló D’Este* (Course Site)