

Cultures and Contexts: Renaissance Italy

Core UA 9557

Summer 2019

Office Hours – TTh 2-3 or by appointment

Location: Villa Ulivi, Lucca

Course Description: The culture and politics of Italy, from the demographic catastrophe of the Black Death in 1348 to the decline of the Italian states in the first half of the sixteenth century. During this period the Italian cities were the Mediterranean crossroads for economic, political, and cultural exchange. They were also subject to repeated mass mortality events caused by epidemic disease and foreign invasions. The combination of crisis and cultural exchange led writers, artists, and a surprising number of common people search for answers to new questions about their place in the world and their relationship to each other and to God. We call that search the Renaissance. The course will focus on the Italian city-states. We will examine the new forms of political, artistic, 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. And because we are in Florence, there will be field trips.

Course Requirements:

Reading: All required readings must be done in their entirety before the class for which they are assigned.

Writing: Six short in-class writing assignments, two papers on a primary source 4-5 pages (1,200-1,500 words) each, and one creative assignment on a site of your choice in Florence. The short papers are due in class on the due date.

Participation: Attendance and participation in all class meetings. There is a participation grade.

Statistics: Grades break down as follows:

Six in-class writing assignments 30% (5% each), Short Papers papers on a primary source 40% (20% each), Creative Assignment 15%, Participation 15%.

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: The La Pietra Library has enough copies of the Boccaccio and Machiavelli texts for everyone in the class. The Cereta is available as an ebook through Bobst. All other readings are available on the Wordpress site.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron, W. Rehorn trans.
Cereta, Laura. Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist, D. Robin ed., trans.
Machiavelli, Niccolò. The Portable Machiavelli, Bondanella trans.

Lecture and Reading Schedule:

Week One

May 28th – Introduction: What was the Renaissance?
The Social and Economic Structure of the Communes

May 30th – The Black Death and Other Disasters **Site Visit: Ospedale degli innocenti. Meet in Piazza Santissima Annunziata at 9AM.**
Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, Boccaccio's preface and introduction;
Day 6, Story 10.
Plague Descriptions from Siena and Padua (wordpress site)
Gregorio Dati, Ricordanze, excerpt (wordpress site)
The Pistoia Ordinances (wordpress site)

Week Two

Jun 4th – Everyday Life in the Renaissance
The Decameron, Day 1, Story 1 (1.1), 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.5, 2.7, 3.1, 4.prologue, 4.5, 5.4, 5.9, 7.2.

Jun 6th – Humanism and the Role of Learning
Francesco Petrarca, On His Own Ignorance and that of Many Others PART II ONLY (wordpress site)
Coluccio Salutati, A Letter in Defense of Liberal Studies (excerpt, wordpress site)
The Decameron, 6.6

Week Three (First Short Paper Due Friday at 6PM)

Jun 11th – Gender, Class, and Education in Renaissance Society
Laura Cereta, Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist Letters I-XX (pp. 20-86); Letter XLVII (pp. 160-4).
A Dowry Contract (wordpress site)
Francesco Barbaro, On Wifely Duties (wordpress site)
The Decameron, 9.2

Jun 13th – Wealth and Public Display **Site Visit: Walking Tour (Meet at the Duomo at the Colonna di San Zanobi at 9AM)**
Leonardo Bruni, Panegyric to the City of Florence (wordpress site)

Laura Cereta, Letter XLVIII
The Decameron, 6.5, 8.3

Week Four

Jun 18th – Fortune and Virtue in Renaissance Politics

Leon Battista Alberti, On Virtù and Fortune (wordpress site)

Laura Cereta, Letter XLV

Benedetto Dei, “Letter to a Venetian” (wordpress site)

Venetian Documents: “Electing the Doge” (wordpress site)

Jun 20th – Florence and the Medici **Site Visit: Palazzo Vecchio**

Angelo Poliziano, The Pazzi Conspiracy (wordpress site)

Francesco Guicciardini, History of Italy (excerpt wordpress site)

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Florentine Histories BOOK ONE AND BOOK THREE excerpts ONLY. (wordpress site)

Week Five

Jun 25th – Savonarola and the Crisis of Florentine Republicanism.

Girolamo Savonarola, Treatise on the Government of Florence (wordpress site)

Francesco Guicciardini, History of Italy (excerpt, wordpress site)

Niccolò Machiavelli, Letter to Riccardo Becchi (wordpress site)

Jun 27th –Machiavelli: Humanism Transformed **Site Visit: Machiavelli's House**

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince in The Portable Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli, Letters to Francesco Vettori in The Portable Machiavelli

Week Six (Short Paper Due Monday 6PM Creative Assignment Due by Email by July 7th)

Jul 2nd – Other Worlds **Site Visit: Museo Galileo**

Nicolaus Copernicus, De Revolutionibus (wordpress site)

Galileo Galilei, Sidereus Nuncius (wordpress site)

Jul 6th – What was the Renaissance anyway?

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Mandrake Root in The Portable Machiavelli

Matteo Bandello, Gonnella Tricks Marquis Niccoló D’Este (wordpress site)