



Spring 2021

---

Arts and Cultures Towards the Crossroads

---

ACC – UF 9102 F02

Tues./Thurs. 5:00 – 6:15 pm Central  
European(Italian) Time

---

Instruction Mode: Blended

Aula Giardino

---

### Spring 2021

We know that you may be taking courses at multiple locations this semester. If you are enrolled in this course 100% remotely and are not a Go Local/Study Away student for this course site, please make sure that you've completed the online academic orientation via NYU Classes so you are aware of site specific support, policies and procedures.

Please contact [florence.academicssupport@nyu.edu](mailto:florence.academicssupport@nyu.edu) if you have trouble accessing the NYU Classes site.

If you are attending in person, you will be instructed to choose your seat on the first day and are expected to use that seat for the entire semester due to NYU COVID-19 safety protocol.

#### Instructor Details:

Name: Eric Nicholson

NYU Global Home Email Address: [en27@nyu.edu](mailto:en27@nyu.edu)

Office Hours: Tues. 12:00-1:30 pm Italian time

Appointments available via Zoom, or in person on request

Villa Ulivi Phone Number: +39 055 5007 300

[Zoom Personal Meeting Room](#)

## **Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging and Equity**

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “...not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU Florence, we are committed to creating a learning environment that:

- fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and
- promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavours.

NYU Florence embraces diversity and recognizes our responsibility to foster an open, welcoming environment where students, faculty and staff of all backgrounds can collaboratively learn, work and communicate. We will continually strive to work together to nurture a culture of inclusivity, compassion and mutual respect.

There are both on-campus and NYU Global resources available to students and staff wishing to share their experiences with us or offer suggestions for improvement. On-campus, students, faculty and staff can contact any one of our three local [IDBE Liaisons](#), [Mary Barbera](#), [Lisa Cesarani](#) and [Angelica Pesarini](#). Students can also contact the [Office of Academic Support](#) or the [Office of Student Life](#) to talk to a member of staff. Students are invited to join the NYU Florence IDBE Student Committee and take on an active role in planning encouraging dialogues on issues around diversity and inclusion.

The Global NYU community can access the [Office of Global Inclusion, Diversity and Strategic Innovation](#) who works closely with students, faculty, administrators, and staff, regardless of where you may be located, to help make every aspect of NYU more equitable. You can contact them at [globalinclusion@nyu.edu](mailto:globalinclusion@nyu.edu) for more information and resources.

## **Bias Response Line**

NYU's [Bias Response Line \(BRL\)](#) provides an open forum to members of our community

and helps to ensure that our community is equitable and inclusive. It is a centralized way to share or report experiences and concerns regarding bias, discrimination, or harassing behavior that may occur within our local or global NYU community. To contact the BRL, please email or call: 212-998-2277.

### **Class Description:**

**Prerequisites:** ACA, an open mind, and a readiness to study, speak, listen, and learn with others.

Through close reading, discussion, viewing (and some performance), we will explore major literary, visual, and architectural works produced in Asia, Europe, and Africa from ca. 500-1700 CE. As the second part of the Liberal Studies first year sequence, this course will focus on **TRANSITIONS**: first, from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages, then through the "12<sup>th</sup> century renaissance" in Europe and the "Classic" cultures of China and Japan to a time of crisis and change in the fourteenth century. In turn, we will study the emergence of the modern world, during the period often called "The Renaissance," ca. 1400-1600 CE, followed by 17<sup>th</sup> century upheavals, including the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade and the African diaspora, which preceded the major Revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although we will chart predominant trends, we will also consider exceptions and challenges to "the rules": these will include secular and vernacular expressions counterpoised to Christian and Latin culture; the advocacy of women's voices, their poetic writings, and cultural agency in a patriarchal society; and even apparent celebrations of adultery, questionings of authority, and social role reversals. We will also aim to compare representations of both the natural world and of civilization, as produced in important centers ranging from Cordoba to Kyoto and yes, Florence.

The course will also extend last semester's inquiry into artistic representations of basic social and individual issues. In this regard, we will consider how Greco-Roman culture persisted or was deliberately revived and transformed in the medieval and Renaissance periods. Again, we will assess how the texts and art works portray and interrogate subjects such as the individual's relation with the community; personal identity and mortality; love, gender, and sexuality, etc. In the context of the changes noted above, we will discuss new topics, including the rise of the individual artistic "master" or even "genius"; humanism, skepticism, and the notion of the world as theatre; mercantile and international economics, early

industrial technologies, experimental science, and their impact on artistic and literary expression.

Again, a special concern will be to make informed comparisons and contrasts between the Asiatic and European traditions, and through this study, to focus and deepen our understanding of a richly creative process of transcultural exchange, often enabled by the famous "Silk Road" across central Asia. A MAJOR OBJECTIVE will be to make informed, precise connections between the **ECOLOGICAL** concerns and anxieties of these medieval and early modern cultures--from western Africa to pandemic-plagued Europe to Surinam and South America-- and today's global preoccupations with a fragile environment, in a time of climate change, embattled resources, and endangered species. We also will confirm how **IMMIGRATION** and open borders have tended to promote innovative cultural production.

In practical terms, **the course aims to develop your critical, analytical, and interpretive skills through attentive reading of texts and viewing of art works, combined with open, engaged, and interactive discussion.** One specific goal of this approach is the following: if the works we are studying are now defined as "classics" and "masterpieces," what exact qualities might earn them these distinctions? This particular section of Arts and Cultures Towards the Crossroads also offers students the chance to learn and interpret assigned texts through in-class reading and *performance* of poems, dramatic scenes, and monologues (in particular, Shakespeare's Othello, and The Winter's Tale); there will also be some study of medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music.

By its conclusion, the course will ideally provide you with a strong foundation for future studies in the Humanities, not only through familiarization--and perhaps re-orientation—with fundamental works of medieval and early modern art and literature, but also through direct learning and application of specific methods of inquiry, assimilation, and analysis.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

- On completion of this course, students should:
- Have improved their ability to think critically, engage in complex reasoning and express their thoughts clearly through their written work
  - Have improved their understanding of the methodologies of literary, art historical, and cultural studies

- Have mastered a basic understanding of how to research questions in literary, art historical, and cultural studies
- Recognize works by the principal protagonists of the medieval and early modern European and Asiatic worlds, and understand why they are significant for literary, artistic, and cultural history in a global context

### **Assessment Components**

- Attendance and Participation: 20%
- Written Assignments: 25%
- Midterm Exam: 20%
- Oral Presentation: 10%
- Final Exam: 25%
- Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class, while submitting your work in a complete and timely fashion will significantly enhance your positive experience of the class.

**\*\*NB: Commitment:** A student's commitment will be evaluated based on active participation, involvement and contribution in the course either remote or in-person.

This may include, but is not limited to, presence at synchronous class sessions, timely submission of predetermined course assignments to the instructor, collaboration with peers in group course work both during class time or independently outside of class time, individual oral or written contributions to synchronous course time through the chat function, in person discussion, or in individual office hours with the instructor. In an asynchronous format this academic engagement may take the form of written contributions to course forums, adding comments to posted work on VoiceThread or Google Drive shared docs.

### **PARTICIPATION and ATTENDANCE:**

Since in-class discussion, and on occasion, performance, will comprise our main approach to the course material, it is CRUCIAL that you do your best to participate in discussions as often as possible. Remember that our live, synchronous class meetings are on **Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00-6:15 p.m. Italian (Central**

European) time. Participation counts toward your overall grade, as does attendance. **ALWAYS BRING THE REQUIRED READING TO OUR MEETINGS!**

- \* **REQUIRED in-class presentation, preferably with the use of a PowerPoint slide show:** individually or in collaboration with fellow students, you are required to give at least ONE in-class presentation, preferably on a Canto from Dante's Inferno (other, later readings, such as Boccaccio's Decameron, are also options)

## **WRITTEN REQUIREMENTS:**

There are **TWO GRADED PAPERS** in my Cultural Foundations II course, one related to the readings and one to your viewing of a work of medieval or early modern art. Paper topics will be given out well before the due dates indicated on the syllabus. Papers must be typed and double-spaced. Submit the original and keep a xeroxed copy. These papers will each receive a letter grade (**A = excellent; B = very good; C = average; D = below average; F = unacceptable; more details below**). Papers are to be submitted to me in class on or before the due date; unjustifiably late papers will receive one grade lower for each calendar day late. I encourage you to meet and/or correspond with me about your paper before you submit it, and I require you to meet with me if you decide to devise your own topic.

On occasion, ungraded but required quizzes may be given in class: these are mainly designed to keep you on pace with the required readings, and to spark discussion.

**THE JOURNAL!** At various points through the semester, you will be given 1-2 page take-home "journal" assignments related to the required readings. While these will not be given letter grades, they must be completed in order for you to pass the course. You may use your journal responses as a possible basis for one of the longer take-home essays.

- **EXAMS:** There will be TWO exams this semester: the midterm exam will cover material studied up to the midterm date; the final exam, divided into two parts, will cover material studied since the midterm. The format of each exam will be explained during the week prior to the exam date; for the final exam, part two, there will also be a review session (indicated on the course calendar).

## Assessment Expectations:

- **Grade A:** The student's work demonstrates an understanding of the subject that goes beyond assigned course readings. The student writes essays/exam questions that are an original synthesis of source materials, demonstrating the ability to evaluate source material critically. Written arguments are clear, well-organized and well-presented; oral presentations are concise, incisive and supplemented by appropriate visual materials. The student has distinguished her/his/their self throughout the course of the semester for her/his/their contributions to class discussion.
- **Grade B:** The student's work shows a clear understanding of assigned readings and materials covered in class. The student writes clear, well-organized and well-presented essays/exam questions; oral presentations are concise, incisive and supplemented by appropriate visual materials. The student is prepared in class and asks relevant questions.
- **Grade C:** The student's work shows a basic understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. However, written and/or oral work is deficient in one or more of the following areas: clarity, organization or content. The student's work is generally in need of improvement
- **Grade D:** The student's work shows occasional understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. Written and/or oral work is deficient in one of more of the following areas: clarity, organization or content. The student does not participate in class discussion and has not frequented the instructor's office hours.
- **Grade F:** The student's work does not demonstrate understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. Written and/or oral work are either insufficient or are not submitted. The student appears unprepared in class and has not frequented the instructor's office hours.

## Grading Guidelines

A = 94-100

A minus = 90-93

B plus = 87-89

B = 84-86

B minus = 80-83

C plus = 77-79

C = 74-76

C minus = 70-73

D plus = 67-69

D = 65-66

F = below 65

**Grading Policy:**

Please refer to Assessment Expectations and the policy on late submission of work

**Academic Accommodations:**

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see the [Moses Center](#) for further information.

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see [Study Away and Disability](#).

**Attendance Policy:**

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. In blended course format, students, based on need and circumstance may attend class sessions in-person or remote synchronously online. Both are acceptable and would be considered present in class. Since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the Global Sites is expected. Unexcused absences will affect students' semester participation grade. Faculty will take attendance at the beginning of every class. For Go Local Students studying in Florence, If you have scheduled a remote course immediately preceding/following an in-person class, you may want to discuss where at the Academic Center the remote course can be taken. Both in-person and remote students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated unexcused absences in a course may result in failure. Please be in contact with your professor via email to meet during office hours to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

## **Excused Absences:**

In case of absence, regardless of the reason, the student is responsible for completing missed assignments, getting notes and making up missed work in a timely manner based upon a schedule that is mutually agreed upon between the faculty member and the student. Absences should be reported to the [Office of Academic Support](#) via email and to your faculty member BEFORE your class meets for lesson.

## **Categories of Excused Absences**

### *Absence Due to Illness*

- If you are a Go Local student present in Florence and feel sick, please contact the [Office of Student Life](#) for assistance.
- COVID-19 related family emergencies will be considered as an excused absence
- The Office of Student Life, when assisting you in cases of severe or extended illness, will coordinate with the Office of Academic Support to properly record your absences

### *Due to Religious Observance*

- Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday
- Please note that no excused absences for reasons other than illness can be applied retroactively.

Students with questions or needing clarification about this policy are instructed to contact a member of the Office of Academic Support located in Villa Ulivi or to email [florence.academicssupport@nyu.edu](mailto:florence.academicssupport@nyu.edu)

## **Late Submission of Work**

- All course work must be submitted on time, in class on the date specified on the syllabus.
- To request an extension on a deadline for an assignment, students must speak to the professor one week prior to the due date
- To receive an incomplete for a course at the end of the semester, two weeks before final exams, both the student and the faculty member must meet with the Assistant Director of Academic Affairs to

review the request and if granted, they must both sign an Incomplete Contract detailing the terms for completing missing coursework.

## **Plagiarism Policy**

PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY FORM:

The presentation of another person's words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

In the event of suspected or confirmed cases of plagiarism, the faculty member will consult first with the Assistant Director for Academic Affairs as definitions and procedures vary from school to school.

## **Writing Center:**

The NYU Florence Writing Center offers you feedback on any type of writing, at any stage in planning or drafting; very rough drafts are welcome. Sign up for an online consultation at the [Writing Center's website](#) and submit your working draft or ideas at least six hours in advance to [NYU Florence Writing Center](#). Please also note that the Writing Center does not correct or "fix" your writing but prompts you to think and work. The aim is to create stronger writers in the long term, not necessarily perfect papers in the short term.

## **Required Text(s):**

Course readings are posted online in the Resources folder of the NYU Classes site. In the [Villa Ulivi Library](#) hard copies of some textbooks are available to loan out for the semester. For more information on the resources and services of the library, please email [florence.library@nyu.edu](mailto:florence.library@nyu.edu)

## **Supplemental Texts(s):**

Texts that students are not required to purchase are in NYU-FL Library or available online

## **Internet Research Guidelines:**

The careful use of internet resources is encouraged and a list of recommended websites will be given. Failure to cite internet and other non-traditional media sources in your written work constitutes plagiarism.

## **Additional Required Equipment: N/A**

## **Class Assignments and Topics (Course Calendar):**

**Session 1 – Thurs. 28 Jan.:**

Introduction: what is a "Renaissance"? The Early "Middle Ages": Byzantine Art; Art, Architecture, and Gregorian Chants from the Christian monastic world (with PowerPoint presentation, and in-class listening)

**Session 2 -- Tues. 2 Feb.:**

Poetry of the Tang Dynasty era in China (selections by Li Bai, Du Fu, and Bai Ju Yi), Buddhism and Art in China (readings available on the course "NYU Classes" site), with images from the Global Image Gallery

**Session 3 -- Thurs. 4 Feb.:**

The First, and One of the Greatest Novels of All Time: The Tale of Genji, by Lady Murasaki Shikibu (Japan, 11<sup>th</sup> cent. CE; available on the course "NYU Classes" site, pages 1-29, 53-80)

**Session 4 -- Tues. 9 Feb.:**

More highlights from The Tale of Genji (pages 81-109, 255-277, 331-344), plus a 15<sup>th</sup> cent. Japanese Theatrical & Philosophical Interlude: selected No Dramas of Japan (available on the course "NYU Classes" site)

**First journal assignment due**

**Session 5 -- Thurs. 11 Feb.:**

Classic Japanese Art and Architecture, then back to Christian Europe, with Carolingian and Ottonian Art, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, "Early Medieval Europe"

**Session 6 -- Tues. 16 Feb.:**

Another brilliant female medieval author: Marie de France (French, late 12<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.), Lais: "Prologue », and "Bisclavret," "Laustic," "Les Deus Amanz" (available on the course "NYU Classes" site)

**Second journal assignment due**

**Session 7 - Tues. 23 Feb.:**

Medieval versions of love, nature, and spirituality: Islamic culture, art and architecture, especially in Spain; Selected songs by Troubadour poets/composers;

Romanesque, and early Gothic Art and Architecture: *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, "Romanesque Europe," and first part of "Gothic Europe"

**Session 8 -- Thurs. 25 Feb.:**

Classical Epic Transformed into Christian Autobiography: Dante, Inferno, Cantos I-V; Selected poems by Guido Cavalcanti

\* **4-5 PAGE ESSAY DUE**

**Session 9 -- Tues. 2 March:**

Dante, Inferno, Cantos VI-XI

**Session 10 --- Thurs. 4 March:**

Dante, Inferno, Cantos XII-XVII

**Session 11 -- Tues. 9 March:**

Dante, Inferno, Cantos XVIII-XXIII

**Session 12 --- Thurs. 11 March:**

Dante, Inferno, Cantos XXIV-XXVIII

**Session 13 -- Tues. 16 March:**

Dante, Inferno, Cantos XXIX-XXXIV

**Session 14 --- Thurs. 18 March:**

*Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, "Gothic Europe" (part two)

**Session 15 -- Tues. 23 March:**

*Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, "Africa before 1800," especially the art of Ife-Ife

**Session 16 -- Thurs. 25 through Fri. 26 March**

**MIDTERM EXAM**

**Session 17 -- Tues. 30 March**

A 14<sup>th</sup> Century Pandemic, A Brilliant "Human Comedy," and the Start of the Modern World: Boccaccio, Decameron (ca. 1353): Prologue, First Day (Intro., and First, Second, and Third Stories); Second Day (First and Fifth Stories)

**Session 18 -- Thurs. 1 April:**

Boccaccio, Decameron: Third Day (First and Tenth Stories); Fourth Day (Intro., First and Second Stories), Fifth Day (Fourth Story)

**Session 19 --- Tues. 6 April:**

Boccaccio, Decameron: Sixth Day (Seventh Story), Seventh Day (Seventh Story), Eight Day (Third Story) and Tenth Day (Tenth Story, and Conclusion)

**Third journal assignment due**

**Session 20 -- Thurs. 8 April:**

The Renaissance in Quattrocento Italy: Required reading on Early Renaissance Art (*Gardner's Art*, Chapter 21, first half)

Highly Recommended reading, on the NYU Classes site: The ideas and stories of Italian Renaissance art (excerpts from Alberti, On Painting, and Vasari, Lives of the Artists)

**IN-CLASS SITE VISIT/LIVE STREAM, to the CHURCH of SANTA MARIA NOVELLA, Florence**

**Session 21 -- Tues. 13 April:**

Art and Architecture of Quattrocento-Cinquecento Italy, Part One (*Gardner's Art*, Chapter 21, second half, plus excerpts from Chapter 20, and Chapter 22, "Renaissance and Mannerism in Cinquecento Italy," first half)

**Session 22 -- Thurs. 15 April:**

Art and Architecture of Cinquecento Italy, Part Two (*Gardner's Art*, Chapter 21, second half)

**Session 23 -- Tues. 20 April:**

Comparing Italian "Renaissance" art with the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries CE art of the Benin Kingdom, West Africa (*Gardner's Art*, "Africa before 1800," plus supplemental readings on Benin art and culture)

Session 24-- Thurs. 22 April through Fri. 23 April:

**FINAL EXAM, Part I (on art historical material)**

Session 25 -- Tues. 27 April:

Late Renaissance Venice and the Commedia dell'Arte, Shakespearean Style: Othello, Acts One and Two

**Fourth Journal Assignment due, with in-class group staging exercise**

Session 26 -- Thurs. 29 April:

Shakespeare, Othello, Acts Three and Four; in-class viewing and discussion of scenes from theatrical productions and film adaptations of the play

Session 27 -- Tues. 4 May:

Shakespeare, Othello, Act Five; Baroque Art and Architecture in Italy and Spain (*Gardner's Art*, Chapter 24, excerpts); plus another Shakespearean play of Female Innocence and Male Paranoia: excerpts from *The Winter's Tale*

**2-3 Page graded "Ekphrasis" assignment DUE!**

Session 28 -- Thurs. 6 May:

Challenging notions of white European supremacy, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: Aphra Behn, *Oronooko, or The Royal Slave* (1688), plus short related readings, especially on the early modern slave trade and racism

Session 29 -- Tues. 11 May:

Review for the Final Exam, Part Two

Session 30 -- Thurs. 13 May through Fri. 14 May:

**\*\* FINAL EXAM, Part II (on "The Commedia dell'Arte," *Othello*, and *Oronooko*)\*\***

## **Class Time Expectations**

**In light of the unique circumstances of blended instruction, we ask students to consider the following class time expectations to ensure a productive class:**

- Prepare your workspace for class, limit non-class activities during synchronous class time.
- If you are not using your cell phone to follow the lesson, cell phones should be turned off or in silent mode during class time.
- If deemed necessary by the study away site (i.e. a COVID related need), synchronous class sessions may be recorded and archived for other students to view. This will be announced at the beginning of class time.
- Students should be respectful and courteous at all times to all participants in class. Consider using the chat function or “raise hand” function in order to add your voice to class discussions.
- Please be mindful of your microphone and video display during synchronous class meetings. Ambient noise and some visual images may disrupt class time for you and your peers.

### **Final Exams**

Final exams must be taken at their designated times. Should there be a conflict between final exams, please bring it to the attention of the Office of Academic Support [florence.academicsupport@nyu.edu](mailto:florence.academicsupport@nyu.edu) as soon as this is known to facilitate alternate arrangements. Final exams may not be taken early, and students should not plan to leave the site before the end of the finals period.

### **Required Co-curricular Activities**

Circumstances permitting, there will be an in-class site visit on Thursday, April 8, to the Church of Santa Maria Novella, which will be live streamed to students studying remotely (details to follow). Other co-curricular activities may occur through simultaneous use of the internet, for the viewing of a film or performance, for example.

## Suggested Co-curricular Activities

Suggested optional co-curricular activities will be announced in class and/or via email by the professor throughout the semester.

## Your Instructor

**Eric Nicholson** (Ph.D., Yale University, 1991) teaches literature and theatre courses at NYU Florence, and Syracuse University Florence. An active member of the international research collaborative Theater Without Borders, with Robert Henke he has co-edited *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (2008), and *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater* (2014). He has recently contributed the chapter on “Commedia dell'Arte in early modern English drama” to *The Routledge Research Companion to Anglo-Italian Renaissance Literature and Culture* (2019). For the NYU and Syracuse Florence programs, he has directed plays by Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Leonora Bernardi, Molière, Goldoni, and others, and in 2018 he co-directed and played Theseus/The Fool in a bilingual theatre workshop, with a final public performance, on *Oedipus at Colonus/King Lear* in Verona, Italy. Eric is very much looking forward to teaching Arts and Cultures Towards the Crossroads this spring semester.