Cultures and Contexts: Renaissance Italy

Core UA 500            Karl Appuhn
Spring 2018             Office – 19UP 204
Time TTh 2:30-3:15       Office Hours – M 2-3 or by appointment
Location Silver 520            Email – appuhn@nyu.edu

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.

The culture of the Italian Renaissance emerged during a period of severe social, political, and demographic crisis. These crises prompted writers, artists, and a surprising number of common people to reflect on their place in the world and their relationship to each other and to God.

the ways cultures have interacted, for example, through trade, colonization, immigration, religious dispersion, and media representation; how such groups define themselves against internal and external difference; and how the dominant perspective of Western modernity affects comprehension of the ways in which people outside that position understand, experience, and imagine their lives.

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 Petrarcha, *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 Poliziano, “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 17th – Taming the Aristocracy
Apr 19th – The Invention of Manners
  Moderata Fonte, The Worth of Women
  Baldessario Castiglione, The Courtier (Course Site)

**Week Thirteen**

Apr 24th – Worlds Without
Apr 26th – Worlds Within
  Nicolaus Copernicus, De Revolutionibus (Course Site)
  Andreas Vesalius, De Fabrica Corporis Humani (Course Site)

**Week Fourteen (Short Paper Due)**

May 1st – Renaissance Amusements
May 3rd – Conclusion: What was the Renaissance?
  Niccolò Machiavelli, The Mandrake Root in The Essential Writings
  Matteo Bandello, Gonnella Tricks Marquis Niccolò D’Este (Course Site)