

**Georgetown University**  
**Liberal Studies Graduate Program**  
*Spring, 2017*

**LSHV-475-01: *What Is the Italian Renaissance? The Confluence of History, Art, Literature and Music***

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The word “renaissance” means “rebirth” and thus the use of the term inevitably yields the question: rebirth of what? While it becomes clear, as one follows the period that has received that label, that much of classical, Greek and Roman, culture is re-achieving the center of the stage, this realization causes two further questions inevitably to present themselves: how is classical cultural redux similar to and how different from its original model? Does the re-engagement of the classics and their ideas, which are pagan, mean that the centuries’-long evolution of Christian culture and Christian ideas has dissipated? How so and how not? Further, what does the term “humanism” mean as it is used to refer to this era?

While addressing these fundamental questions from the beginning, this course will also necessarily explore other questions, as well, such as what “Italy” was and is and how and why it is associated with the beginning of the Renaissance; and how and exactly when the period that goes by that name began—and ended. We will consider the interface among the Italian city-states and between Italy and the larger world during those centuries. We will ask where not only mainstream Christians but those considered heretical together with non-Christians (specifically, Jews and Muslims) fit into this reshaped world. We will address the legacy of the Italian Renaissance toward our own era.

These questions, issues and ideas will be explored in a multi-valent manner, using historical events as a bone structure onto which we shall add very fleshy layers of the visual arts, literature (both prose and poetry) and music.

The main texts for the course, to simplify matters, are the paperbacks *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, by Jakob Burckhardt (Penguin Classics), (although for art I highly recommend the much more substantial work by Frederick Hartt on Italian Renaissance art), and Dante’s *Inferno* (the first of his three-volume poem, *The Divine Comedy*). I will provide written material on the history of Italy in photocopied form, and will also suggest books along the way as well as providing substantial numbers of handouts either on blackboard or through photocopies of the original materials that we will examine, from Boccaccio, Petrarch, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Michelangelo’s sonnets, Macchiavelli, and Castiglione—although you are encouraged to acquire full versions of any of these works..

Grades will be based primarily on midterm and final written take-home assignments, the precise content of which will be discussed as the semester moves forward.

**Syllabus** (precise dates of topics subject to some variation):

**Jan 17**

Introduction: What is the Renaissance? What is humanism? How do we arrive at it? From pagan Greek and Roman literature and art to the birth of Christianity. The triumphs and traumas of the medieval

church. Barbarians and the place of conquest and culture in the shaping of Italian city-states beyond the Roman period. Romanesque and Gothic art. When do we arrive at a new era?

**Jan 24**

The beginnings of the Renaissance in literature and art: Dante's *Divine Comedy* (with an emphasis on the *Inferno*) and early Siennese and Florentine art, from Duccio and the Lorenzetti to Giotto.

**Jan 31**

The fourteenth century unrolls: the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Papacy, The Black Plague, St Catherine of Siena, the rise toward dominance of Florence. Petrarch's philosophy and poetry, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (The "Human Comedy").

**Feb 7**

Into the fifteenth century. Jews as "Other" and Jewish poets. The Medici, banking, money-lending and art patronage. "Scientific" art, from Massaccio and Donatello to Alberti and Brunelleschi to Piero della Francesca to Verrocchio.

**Feb 14**

The later fifteenth century. The last "Crusade" and the founding of the *Accademia*. Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, philosophy and the positive interest in the "Other." Poetically inclined art from Fra Angelico and Boccaccio to Pinturicchio and Perugino.

**Feb 21**

The ongoing complications of religion: from Savonarola to the world of the ghetto, from Venice to Rome, to the Ottoman Turkish Muslim engagement.

**Feb 28**

Into the sixteenth century. Art and Poetry from Venice to Florence and Rome. From the Bellinis to Giorgione, the marriage of poetry and science in the work of Leonardo. Early Michelangelo.

**MIDTERM PAPERS DUE FEB 28**

**SPRING BREAK Mar 3-13**

**Mar 14**

Michelangelo and Raphael. Politics and politesse: Macchiavelli's *The Prince* and Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*.

**Mar 21**

The crisis of the Reformation and the Mannerist crisis. Parmigianino and his visual siblings; the late Michelangelo in painting and sculpture

**Mar 28**

The Counter-Reformation and the birth of the Baroque. Toward the final shaping of the Basilica of St Peter in Rome. The beginning of the age of Religious Wars.

**April 4**

The cultural culmination of Venice: From Titian to Tintoretto and Veronese. The shaping of the seventeenth century: continuing the Renaissance or marking its conclusion? The music of Claudio Monteverdi and Salomone Rossi. The New Science of Galileo.

**April 11**

The end and continuation of an era. Art from Caravaggio to Bernini and Borromini. The music of the Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti.

**April 18**

Epilogues and the Legacy of the Italian Renaissance: from the Age of Religious Wars to the *Risorgimento*; from El Greco and Ribeiro to Canova to Modigliani; from Verdi to Puccini; from Fermi to Ferrari

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*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

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