

Department: Modern and Classical Languages

Course No: ILCS 101

Credits: 3

Title: The Italian Renaissance

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Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Catalog Copy: Formerly offered as ITAL 101). First semester. Three credits. A knowledge of Italian is not required. Taught in English. A survey of Italian Renaissance civilization, with emphasis on literature and intellectual life.

Course Information: The Renaissance in Italy was a time of great ferment, especially in literature and the arts. But it was also a time of profound transformation in the economic, social, and political life. In this course students will encounter the most important personalities that characterize the spirit of the age -- Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Leonardo, Ariosto, and Michelangelo. Selection from their works will be analyzed and discussed, and several films will be shown. b. Midterm and final exams. The exams are in the form of objective short questions and essay questions based on lectures and class discussions of weekly reading assignments. The focus of lectures and class discussions is on the development of a critical approach in evaluating the work of the selected authors from a historical perspective, without losing sight of problems of ethics and aesthetics. c. The themes and issues covered are:

1. The new awareness and construct of the 'self' in Petrarch and the birth of Humanism and of "modernity": his unresolved inner conflict and fragmented self; his dialogue with the reader, and the rediscovery and imitation of classical authors.
2. Literature and history in Boccaccio's **Decameron**, and the representation of the new class of merchants and its ethos vs. the old, aristocratic, feudal class (and its ethos of 'might makes right').
3. Machiavelli's **The Prince**: its historical context; originality of Machiavelli's political thought. His concept of virtue and fortune and the question of the 'necessity' of using force. Machiavelli's 'civic' humanism vs. literary humanism. The prince/ruler-as artist and the creativity of make-believe and appearance.
4. The role of experience in Leonardo's thought and art. Science and art and Leonardo's 'anti-humanism'. Machiavelli's comedy, **Mandragola**: Lucrezia as a "tragic" figure (modeled on the ancient Lucrezia found in Livy); humor as a temporary disruption of the mechanism of the comic (cf. Pirandello, Bergson, and Freud on "humor"); echoes of **The Prince** in the **Mandragola**.
5. Ariosto's **Orlando Furioso**: Ariosto as humanist: his irony in the representation of the chivalric world; the theme of folly (cf. Erasmus' **In praise of folly** vs. insanity and fury; the "marvelous"/"fantastic" in **Orlando Furioso**; the "single vision" vs. the "multiplicity" of the world of becoming.

6. Notes on Michelangelo, artist and poet, as represented in a selection of his poems and in the film *The Hero as Artist."

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: Since this course focuses on early (Petrarch and Boccaccio) and high Italian Renaissance (Machiavelli, Leonardo, Ariosto, Michelangelo), it allows students to develop a deeper understanding of the problems and issues that characterize "modernity", as they are reflected first at the time of its inception in opposition to the medieval world view, and then in the fuller and more complex manifestations at the height of the Renaissance. An important aspect of this course is the discussion of what is meant by Humanism, from a historical perspective, and of the fact that, as in the case of Machiavelli and Leonardo--their work being based on experience more than on the imitation of the classics (from a strictly literary viewpoint)-- places them outside the current of Humanism. This course also provides the students with a critical vocabulary and the opportunity to develop interpretive skills as they are guided in the analysis of a variety of texts -- from letters to poems, from political theory to comedies, but also, through films, of representative works of architecture, sculpture, and painting. Moreover, students are encouraged to acquire a deeper sense of history and to deepen their moral sensitivity, as they encounter problems and issues, concerning the good and the beautiful, that resonate deeply within them today: from the relation of self to the life of the community to the function of art and poetry and its "logic" in the economy of social and political life.

CA1 Criteria: In this course students are given the opportunity to sharpen their analytical skills and to become conversant with the richness of the language of art and its symbolic force, mainly in the realm of literature but also in the visual arts, finding indeed correlations, analogies between all the arts. As they are invited to respond to a variety of texts (literary and otherwise), and thus to enter in a kind of dialogue with their authors, they are prompted to go beyond the ordinary or the usual way of looking at human experience and the world, and to become more articulate and more deeply aware of sharing such experiences with human beings across the ages. They are thus allowed to participate through the language of poetry and art in the collective memory of what has lasting value.

Role of Grad Students: The Teaching Assistant in this course is usually a graduate student, either in the MA or Ph.D. program in Italian Literary and Cultural Studies, chosen by the instructor for his/her proven ability in teaching and general preparation in the period covered in this course. The Teaching Assistant prepares and grades all the quizzes, grades 50% of midterm and final exams, under the supervision of the instructor, and is asked to present one or two lectures. The Teaching Assistant also, along with the instructor, holds regular office hours and offers, in addition to the review sessions held in class before each exam by the instructor, a review session, to help all students prepare for both exams.