CC 201, Fall 1998 Humanities III Core Curriculum
The Renaissance
Syllabus

Lectures: T, 12:30-2:00, SMG 105

Core Professors
Dennis Costa (Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures)
George Hoffmann (Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures)
James Johnson (History)
Stephanie Nelson (Core Curriculum)
William Vance (English)

Seminar Times: B1 MWF 11:00-12:00 pm, Professor Vance, STH B22
B2 TR 11:00-12:30 pm, Professor Nelson, PSY B51
B3 MWF 2:00-3:00 pm, Professor Vance, CAS 237
B6 TR 2:00-3:30 pm, Professor Hoffmann, CAS B20
B8 TR 3:30-5:00 pm, Professor Johnson, CAS 204B
B9 W 3:00-6:00 pm, Professor Costa, CAS 322

Books: The books you should purchase and read are available at the Boston University
Bookstore. The last page of this syllabus provides a list of these books and of the
handouts which will be provided.

Grading: Final grades will be determined by the student’s seminar instructor. The grade
will be based on a combination of written work, examinations, and participation, as
follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Papers</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term Exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Attendance at lectures and seminar discussions is an important part of the course. More
than two unexcused absences from seminar, or more than one unexcused absence from
lecture will be weighed seriously by your seminar leader, and will bring down your grade.

Exams will cover materials in the lectures, seminars, and the readings. Midterm exams
will be conducted in seminar and composed by seminar leaders. Final exam will include
passages for identification and short and long essay questions. Choices will be offered.
Course Description: The third semester of the Humanities Core continues our interdisciplinary survey with some of the most significant literary and philosophical works in Western culture—those of “the Renaissance,” an era in which the foundations of the modern world were laid. Our attention now shifts to the early fourteenth century in Europe; and the semester will carry us through the late seventeenth century.

Our themes include the rise of individualism; skepticism; the war between the ancients and the moderns; the struggle to distinguish appearance from reality and to bridge the gap between subject and object; the foundations of the modern scientific enterprise; the rise of secularism and the distancing of the divine; the sense of mankind as master rather than servant of nature; the invention of new artistic forms; and the new unfolding of what Socrates called "the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy."

This period also includes the first great flowering of English poetry. We will study some of the best of it—Chaucer’s General Prologue, Shakespeare’s Sonnets, the lyrics of John Donne, and Milton’s Paradise Lost. We will study these works in terms of their contribution to Western and world culture, but we will also want to know why reading poetry is different from reading prose, and how it is different: what special problems it poses and what particular rewards it offers to the careful reader--rewards suggested by Wallace Stevens in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven":

As if
In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,
The town, the weather, in a causal litter,
Together, said words of the world are the life of the world.

The semester concludes with John Milton, a somewhat Baroque example of a Renaissance man: a polemicist in a time of civil war and ideological struggle, a poet-prophet who saw himself in the shadow of Shakespeare and Spenser, in the tradition of Homer and Vergil, and as an inspired interpreter of the Bible; a man well aware of the skeptical and scientific currents of his time, taking up the Bible’s myth of origins and fall; a man who believed that a good education began with languages, proceeded through mathematics, agriculture, geography, philosophy, architecture, anatomy, medicine, ethics, economics, politics, law, and history, and culminated, at least for the chosen few, in poetic composition. Milton sought a language adequate to “justify the ways of God to men,” and believed that all his learning was at the service of divine inspiration; his poem came from God, and had to be written as it was. Within his soul the battle between humanism and Protestantism was waged—most dramatically with the figures of Milton's heroic Satan and Eve, mother of all mankind.

Beyond the themes and historical developments charted by the course lies something even more important: the greatness of each of the individual works we will be reading. What this greatness is, why these works instead of others still have the power to engage us in conversation with the creative intellects of the past (a past which therefore includes us!)—these questions will be of primary concern, just as they are central to all of the courses in the Core Curriculum.
CC 201 Core Humanities II Reading List
Fall 1998

Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, tr. Coghill

Francesco Petrarca, "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux"
Selections from the poetry
in Petrarck, Selections from the Canzoniere and Other Works, tr. Musa

John Calvin, selections from Institutes of the Christian Religion
(handout)

Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, tr. Mansfield

Michel de Montaigne, Selections from the Essays of Montaigne, tr. Donald Frame
"Of Cannibals"
(handout)

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quixote, tr. Cohen

William Shakespeare, King Lear

William Shakespeare, The Sonnets
(New York: Signet), ISBN: 0-451-51795-4

John Donne, Selected Poems, ed. Shaaber

Sir Francis Bacon, New Atlantis and The Great Instauration, ed. Weinberger

Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations, tr. Lafleur

Baruch Spinoza, Ethics, tr. Shirley

John Milton, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, ed. Ricks