

HI 208: Renaissance Europe
Dr. Phillip Haberkern (phaberke@bu.edu)
M/W/F, 9.05-9.55, CAS Rm. 225
Office: Rm. 509, 226 Bay State Rd.
Office Hours: Mon. 10-12 and Fri. 10-12 or by appointment

Course Description

This course covers the political, intellectual, social, and artistic culture of the Renaissance, a period stretching from roughly 1350 until 1600 that witnessed a remarkable burst of human creativity and achievement. Traditionally, the Renaissance has been understood as the death knell of a benighted medieval order and the gateway to modernity, marked by forays into republican political thought; the celebration of the individual; and the embrace of rationality. To put it mildly, such a presentation ignores or obscures the actual historical context in which the Renaissance developed. As such, this class will seek to engage with both primary sources and contemporary scholarship in order to understand how civic traditions and politics; international, imperial ambitions; an expanding economy; and a resurgent Church all worked to foster and harness the energies of the Renaissance *virtuosi*.

Throughout the course of this semester, we will primarily seek to contextualize the Renaissance through an examination of **power**: how it was gained, how its exercise was understood, and how those who held it broadcast it to their peers and subordinates. What we will find is that much power in the Renaissance was “soft,” in the sense that it was gained through family connections and economic pressure, understood as an exercise in benevolent patronage, and promoted by art and wealth. Still, underlying the rhetoric of Renaissance magnificence was the reality of war. Throughout this class, we will repeatedly explore the tensions and disjunctions between the ideal and actual world of Renaissance politics, broadly conceived.

Most of our attention this semester will be focused on the urban republics and growing courts of the Italian peninsula that were the cradles of the Renaissance. We will also widen our focus, however, to account for the ramifications of the Italian Renaissance for Europe as a whole. We will also try to move beyond a narrow gaze on the individual geniuses who capture our imagination, such as Michelangelo, Lorenzo “the Magnificent” de Medici, and Machiavelli. By paying equal attention to the women who raised and married them, the merchants who bought their art, and the secretaries who wrote their wills, we will try to see the Renaissance as an intellectual and cultural moment that encompassed and enlivened an entire society, rather than just the learned and wealthy elite who presided over it and sought (in vain) to control it.

Structure and Requirements

This course is structured as a hybrid lecture and discussion; class meetings will feature lectures that, along with the course’s secondary readings, frame the essential issues. The course will also require student participation, as we will spend considerable time discussing primary sources and images. In some weeks we will have discussions during all of our class meetings; in others, we

will spend one day in lecture and the others in discussions or working in small groups. As such, students will need to be prepared to discuss the materials listed for each specific week! This course is reading intensive – reading will average about 100 pages per week, and will require more reading on certain weeks; for class meetings, however, we will typically focus on the primary sources – please be sure to have access to them in class for the purpose of our discussions.

Because of the structure of this course, attendance is essential for your success. If you know you will miss a class, please inform me ASAP to find out about missed assignments. Class participation is graded, so be aware that absences and a lack of active participation will affect your final grade. Beyond class participation, students will be evaluated based on 3 short papers (3-4 pp. each) and a take-home final exam due December 19th at noon; the questions for this exam will be distributed on the last day of class.

Assignments are Weighted as Follows:

Paper #1: 20%	(Due Oct. 10 th)
Paper #2: 20%	(Due Nov. 14 th)
Paper #3: 20%	(Due Dec. 12 th)
Final Exam: 25%	(Due Dec. 19 th)
Class Participation: 15%	

Required Texts:

Students are required to purchase **four** texts for this class; they are available at the BU Barnes & Noble Bookstore, and are also available on Amazon.com and other online book retailers:

Lisa Kaborycha, *A Short History of Renaissance Italy* (Prentice Hall, 2010), ISBN-13: 978-0136054849.

Kenneth Gouwens, ed., *The Italian Renaissance: The Essential Sources* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), ISBN-13: 978-0631231653.

Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Renaissance Italy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford UP, 1988), ISBN-13: 978-0192821447.

Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, L. Jardine, ed. (Cambridge UP, 1997), ISBN-13: 978-0521588119.

Academic Conduct and Etiquette

Students are expected to comply with the spirit and letter of the CAS Academic Conduct Code (available at: <http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/undergrad-resources/code>). Any findings of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of “F” for the semester. While I do not expect any cases of academic misconduct to occur, dishonesty or plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism during the course of the semester, please ask! It is always better to be safe than sorry.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note: all readings marked as [BB] in the course schedule are available on the course website under the “Course Documents” tab. Otherwise, readings are available in the required texts for the course. Texts marked as [Gouwens] are included in his book, *The Italian Renaissance: The Essential Sources*.

Week 1 (9/5-9/7) – Introduction: How do We Define Renaissance? In our first meeting, we will discuss what we mean by the term “Renaissance.” We will also start to unpack our assumptions about this period in order to figure out what sorts of baggage (mostly positive, and positivistic) this term carries with it. Finally, we’ll talk about the two P’s of the Renaissance – power and patronage – as a means of setting up the course of the semester.

Reading: Niccolo Machiavelli, Letter to Francesco Vettori [BB]. (Also, please read the first two chapters of Kaborycha, *A Short History*, for necessary background knowledge)

Week 2 (9/10-9/14) – Humanism and the Presence of the Past: In our first full week of class, we will explore the origins of the Renaissance in a set of reading and writing techniques known as humanism. These practices demanded a new engagement with classical antiquity, and we will examine this new historical interest through the work of the acknowledged father of humanism, Francesco Petrarch.

Readings: Kaborycha, *A Short History*, ch. 3; Paula Findlen, “Understanding the Italian Renaissance” [BB]; Francesco Petrarch, “The Ascent of Mont Ventoux,” “Letters to Cicero,” and Leonardo Bruni, “The Life of Petrarch” [Gouwens].

Week 3 (9/17-9/21) – The Civic Cradle of Humanism: During this week’s meetings, we will focus our attention on Florence, the great, landlocked republic that was the cradle of the early Renaissance. We will look in particular at how humanist learning was turned to political ends in the city, and at how new perceptions of the past shaped the political present of 14th- and 15th-century urban regimes.

Readings: Review Kaborycha, *A Short History*, chs. 1 and 3; Gene Brucker, “Civic Traditions in Premodern Italy” [BB]; John Najemy, “Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics,” [BB]; and Leonardo Bruni, *Panegyric to the City of Florence* [BB].

Week 4 (9/24-9/28) – Venice: Ritual, Myth, and Republican *Realpolitik*: For this week, we will look at the other “republican” bastion of the Renaissance, Venice. In particular, we will focus on the soft forms of power that civic elites in La Serenissima used in order to enforce their authority and enlist the citizens of Venice in its defense.

Readings: Kaborycha, *A Short History*, ch. 8; Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* [BB]; Gasparo Contarini, Excerpts from *The Government and Commonwealth of Venice* [BB]; Enrico Dandolo, *Promissione* for becoming Doge [BB].

Week 5 (10/1-10/5) – The Renaissance Papacy and Rome Reborn: Rome was both an Italian power and the center of the universal church in the fifteenth century. For this week, we will explore how the papacy reconstituted itself after the disasters of the fourteenth century and enlisted Renaissance tools of statecraft and cultural production in order to establish the “papal prince” as the head of the church.

Readings: Kaborycha, *A Short History*, ch. 4; Jill Blondin, “Power Made Visible: Pope Sixtus IV as Urbis Restaurator in Quattrocento Rome,” *Catholic Historical Review* 91 (2005) [BB]; Selections from *Pope Alexander VI and His Court* [BB]; Pope Pius II, *Commentaries* [Gouwens]; and Lorenzo Valla, *On the Donation of Constantine* [Gouwens].

Week 6 (10/10-10/12: WE WILL NOT MEET TU., 10/9) – The Collector’s (and Collective’s) Pride: Art in the Italian City: We often associate the Renaissance with the production of innovative art; for this week’s meetings we will consider the social and business relationships that made that art possible, and also consider the political implications of architecture and art within Renaissance cities.

Reading: Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, chs. 1-2.

PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS ON 10/10

Week 7 (10/15-10/19) – Princely Politics and the Development of Court Culture: Over the course of the fifteenth century, many of the Italian communes came to be ruled by princely dynasties. How did these new regimes justify the extent of their power and maintain their rule? We will analyze the various manipulations of republican rhetoric and ritual that made it possible during our class meetings this week.

Readings: Kaborycha, *A Short History*, chs. 6 and 9; Anthony Molho, “Cosimo de Medici: Pater Patriae or Padrino?” [BB]; Vespasiano da Bisticci, “Life of Cosimo de Medici” [BB]; Baltasare Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier* [Gouwens].

Week 8 (10/22-10/24: WE WILL NOT MEET FRI., 10/26) – Women and Power[lessness?] in the Renaissance: During these meetings, we will analyze how women were shut out of the world of the learned elite during the Renaissance and examine how a rhetoric of feminine duty sought to circumscribe their roles. We will also see, however, how certain women turned the tools of humanist learning to their advantage in order to join the Renaissance boys’ club.

Readings: Kaborycha, *A Short History*, ch. 5; Joan Kelly Gadol, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” [BB]; Francesco Barbaro, *On Wifely Duties*, and Laura Cereta, “Familiar Letters” [Gouwens].

Week 9 (10/29-11/2) – Portraying Power: This week, we will dive into the relationships between princely patrons and the artists who worked for them. We will, in short, look at art as the product of a political relationship, rather than as a product of individual genius or a purely aesthetic milieu. In order to do this, we will look particularly at how the rulers of Mantua used art to communicate their legitimacy and power.

Readings: Kaborycha, *A Short History*, ch. 11; Alison Cole, *Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts* [BB]; and Isabella d'Este, "Selected Letters" [Gouwens].

Week 10 (11/5-11/9) – The Aesthetics of Art and Experience of Objects: This week is a bit unusual, as you will be required to visit the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (on your own or in a group, schedules depending) to approach Renaissance art as a contemporary would have. We will use Baxandall to create our own vocabulary of early modern art criticism, with an eye towards understanding how value and virtuosity could be conditioned by social experience.

Readings: Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, ch. 3; additional reading TBA.

Week 11ish (11/12-11/14) The Religion of the Renaissance? On Man's Place in the Cosmos: Among the many intellectual projects of the Renaissance, one of the most significant involved the discovery and revival of Greek philosophy. This week, we will see how the philosophy of Plato was synthesized with Christian belief in order to produce an exalted view of man. We will also explore how this new anthropology proliferated in the courts and learned societies of Renaissance Italy.

Readings: Review Kaborycha, *A Short History*, ch. 9; Paul O. Kristeller, "The Philosophy of Man in the Italian Renaissance" [BB]; and Pico de Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* [BB].

PAPER #2 DUE IN PROFESSOR'S BOX ON 11/14

Weeks 12ish (11/16-11/19: NO CLASS ON 11/21 AND 11/23) – Political Realism and the "Crisis" of the Renaissance: At the close of the fifteenth century, Italy was rocked by invasion. In the wake of this event, both princely regimes and republics were forced to examine their assumptions about how politics worked. We will therefore explore the work of Machiavelli as one strand of response to this military and existential crisis.

Readings: Kaborycha, *A Short History*, ch. 10; John McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* [BB]; Niccolo Machiavelli, excerpts from *The Prince* [Gouwens] and "Reforming the State of Florence" [BB].

Week 13 (11/26-11/30) – Renaissance Ramifications, pt. 1: Erasmus: In our final three weeks, we will explore how the ideas and practices of the Renaissance were transferred to, and transformed in, northern Europe. For our reading this week, we will focus on the "prince of humanists," Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, and the impact of his religiously-inflected brand of humanism on the genre of the "mirror for princes."

Readings: Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*.

Week 14 (12/3-12/7) – Renaissance Ramifications, pt. 2: Thomas More: For this week we will compare Erasmus’s mirror to the utopian vision of St. Thomas More, and see how this English political thinker’s actual experience affected his philosophical outlook on human society. We will also focus this week on the mutual influence between More and Erasmus in order to trace the contours of the so-called “republic of letters” that bound together the northern Renaissance.

Readings: Thomas More, *Utopia*, bk. 1 [BB]; Hanan Yoran, “More’s Utopia and Erasmus’s No-Place” [BB].

Week 15 (12/10-12/12) – Renaissance Ramifications, pt. 3: Michel de Montaigne: In our final meetings, we will use the French humanist Montaigne’s reflections on his life and learning as a coda to the semester. Did the Renaissance change fundamental ideals about humanity and how people could and should live together? Montaigne provides an excellent entry point into this most essential question.

Readings: Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, selections TBA [BB].

PAPER #3 DUE IN CLASS ON 12/12

***FINAL EXAM DUE IN THE INSTRUCTOR’S BOX IN THE HISTORY DEPT. OFFICE
(ROOM 308, 226 BAY STATE RD.) AT NOON ON 12/19***