COURSE DESCRIPTION

Central European University / Departments of History and Medieval Studies

THE RENAISSANCE:
Culture, Institutions, Representations
MA course in Medieval and Historical Studies
(Tuesdays, 11:00–12:40)
György E. Szönyi
Office hours after the class + appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Renaissance Studies form a connecting link between medieval studies and modern history, just as the Renaissance is often referred to as the "early modern" period between the Middle Ages and modernity. The familiar labels attached to the Renaissance since its first historical construction by Jacob Burckhardt, such as "the birth of the individual," "the rise of rationalism and the scientific revolution," "the human-centered universe," etc. all indicate that the Renaissance was not only one of the historical periods but a specific epoch which bears direct importance for the self-definition of our present age, too. It is not by chance that some important post-structuralist trends of cultural theory (New Historicism, e.g.) evolved from a theoretical-methodological revolution in Renaissance Studies in the 1980s and have become paradigmatic modes of critical discourse.

After having looked at the medieval antecedents (the Carolingian Renaissance, the rise of medieval Italy and the important role of medieval urbanization), this survey course introduces the Renaissance as an important transitory period of great epistemological (from an organic to a mechanistic world view), ideological (individualism, "man-centeredness"), social-psychological (the Reformation) and artistic (from emblematic to a representational style with perspective) paradigm shifts. Special attention is given to new or radically reformed socio-cultural institutions (courts, universities, academies, art collections, patronage, etc.).

The goal of the course is to make students aware of the continuity of European cultural and institutional trends from the time of the Renaissance through the Enlightenment up to the 19th and 20th centuries, even our own present. While looking at Europe in a wide geographical context, it will also be emphasized that the Renaissance and early modern Europe was forged through vital extra- and intra-European encounters, such as the colonization of the Americas, the interactions with the Ottomans, the Reformation and the role of the Jews.

The learning outcome should consist of 1/ an accumulation of historical knowledge about the connections of political and social history and premodern/early modern ideology, education, and art in Europe; 2/ A better understanding of the complexity of Europe in the given period; 3/ A better understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of culture, representations and institutions in general. 4/ Based on the readings and assignments, students should develop their ability of processing scholarly ideas and argumentation and expressing themselves in an argumentative and scholarly way.
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

1. [SEP10 – Zero Week lecture] 
The Renaissance – Introduction. 
Reference: Loys le Roy, "The Excellence of this Age" (Ross 91-109, Reader); Giorgio Vasari, "Barbarism, Antiquity, Rebirth" (Hay 11-13, Reader); Burke, The European Renaissance; Voegelin, Renaissance and Reformation.

2. [SEP17] 
Text: Giorgio Vasari, "Barbarism, Antiquity, Rebirth" (Hay 11-13, Reader); Loys le Roy, "The Excellence of this Age" (Ross 91-109, Reader). 
Reference: Burke, The European Renaissance; Voegelin, Renaissance and Reformation.

3. [SEP24] 
The Renaissance – Medieval or Modern? Discussion: From the historiography of the Renaissance. 
Text: Burckhardt, "Italy in the Renaissance: A Synthesis" (Hay 35-57, Reader); Szönyi, "The World of the Italian Renaissance" (Reader). 
Reference: Dannenfeldt, Basic Interpretations.

4. [OCT01] 
From the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Expansion of the Medieval Cities in Italy. Discussion: Life, economy and politics in the Italian Renaissance cities. 
Text: Benedetto Dei, "The prosperity of Florence" (Ross 165-67, Reader); Arnold von Harff, "Venice, Mistress of the Seas" (Ross 168-74, Reader). 
Reference: Braudel, Capitalism; Braudel, Civilization; Burckhardt, The Civilization..., Martines, Power and Imagination.

5. [OCT08] 
The Renaissance Outside Italy. Discussion: City versus court. 
Text: "The Habsburgs and the Fuggers" (Ross 175-80, Reader); Maximilian I, Weiskunig (Reader); Marino Cavalli, "Charles V and Philip, His Son" (Ross 294-305, Reader). 
Reference: Busse, Berg und Scholss; Vogelin, Renaissance and Reformation.

6. [OCT15] 
Discoveries – Antiquity And the New World. Discussion: Humanism – Profession or a world view? 
Text: Marsilio Ficino, "The Golden Age in Florence" (Ross 79-80, Reader); Erasmus of Rotterdam, "An Age of Gold" (Ross 80-84, Reader); Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Classical Antiquity and Renaissance Humanism" (Hay 98-111, Reader). 
Reference: Hans Baron, Crisis...: Civic Humanism; Kristeller, Renaissance Thought; Black, "Humanism".

7. [OCT22] 
Literature – Latin and Vernacular. Discussion: Sonnets and the Petrarchan paradox of love.
Text: Petrarch, *Rime 140* as translated by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (Reader); Castiglione, "A Theatrical Performance" (Reader).


8. [OCT29]
**A New Perspective On the World – Revival of the Arts.** *Discussion:* The Italian and the Northern Artistic Renaissance: Leonardo and Dürer.


9. [NOV05]
**A New Perspective On the World – the Geographical Expansion.** *Discussion:* From Discovery to Colonialism.

Text: Christopher Colombus, *Diary* (Reader); Bartolomew de las Casas, *A Brief Account Of The Destruction Of The Indies* (Reader); Michel de Montaigne, "The Old World and the New" (Ross 157-61, Reader).


10. [NOV12]
**A New Perspective On the World – Scientific Paradigm Shifts.** *Discussion:* Cosmology and medicine, the cases of Copernicus, Vesalius and Paracelsus.

Text: "The Revolution of the Celestial Spheres" (Ross 589-93, Reader); "The Art of Paracelsus" (Ross 552-58, Reader); Vesalius, "Anatomy and the Art of Medicine" (Ross 563-72, Reader).


11. [NOV19]
**The Kingdom of God – Renaissance and Reformation.** *Discussion:* Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Savonarola, Luther, Calvin.

Text: Francesco Guicciardini, "Savonarola, A Portrait" (Ross 647-52, Reader); Reginald Pole, "An Appeal to the Council of Trent" (Ross 665-72, Reader); Luther, "The Faith of a Christian" (Ross 721-27, Reader); Calvin, "Good Christian Discipline" (Ross 738-42, Reader).


12. [NOV26]
**The Sociology of the Renaissance.** *Discussion:* Women in the Renaissance.

Text: A mini anthology of women writings (Louis Labé, Queen Elizabeth I, etc., Reader).

13. [DEC03]
Renaissance Institutions – Court, Church, City, State. Round-up discussion.

Text: Machiavelli, "The Circle of Governments" (Ross 263-67, Reader); Aldus Manutius, "The Life of a Scholar-Printer" (Ross 396-401, Reader).

ASSIGNMENTS
– Participation in classes and in discussions. (25%)
– Journal. Choose 7 out of the twelve topics of the seminar and write 3 double spaced pages about those topics in the following way: summarize the contents of that class, recall the train of thought followed there, add to this some reflections about the readings for the accompanying seminar and indicate also your personal opinion (if you liked that topic/those texts, in what way that theme would relate to your research topic at CEU, etc.). (75%)

REFERENCES

Primary Texts

Secondary Sources


