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Humanities 402: the Renaissance
Spring 2012
Other materials on Blackboard as assigned.

Course Description: Jules Michelet’s term Renaissance described 15th century Florence specifically, but it has come to mean the general flowering of Western culture in the two centuries after the Middle Ages, based in part on rediscovering the ideals and accomplishments of the Greco-Roman world that produced the last great Western civilization 1000 years earlier. Thus our focus here will be the masterpieces produced in Europe in this phase of the second millennium CE, the beginning of what we might consider the modern world. Historical trends and technological change propelled the development of this rich civilization that would produce the world-shaping European Empires. While vibrant cultures existed elsewhere across the centuries and the reaches of our planet, Western Europe at the time of the Renaissance, with its lucky confluence of political evolution, technological invention, exploratory curiosity, and imperial ambition, built a cultural legacy worthy of close and careful study, which will be our goal in this class.

Fittingly, then, after a preliminary review of the late Gothic world, we’ll travel across three geographic areas over as many centuries: the Renaissance as it began in Italy, the High Renaissance across Europe, and the Renaissance in England in the Tudor Age. We’ll cover five areas of interest: art (painting and sculpture), architecture, literature (poetry, prose, drama, and philosophy), music, and science & technology. As such we’ll consider the painting of the early great masters like Bottecelli and Da Vinci; the painting and sculpture of Michelangelo; the architecture of Brunelleschi; the drama of Shakespeare and Marlowe; the philosophy of the humanists Erasmus and Machiavelli; the Christian thinkers Luther and More; and the establishment of Protestantism known as the Reformation. We’ll also view some episodes of the documentary series *Art of the Western World*, as well as select films that dramatize the age, with a possible theater field trip, if available.

E-mail / Internet: I make regular use of e-mail and the Internet in this class. Announcements, program changes, and class materials are distributed via e-mail or are placed on Blackboard for you to download. Therefore, it is necessary -- as necessary as your buying the textbook -- that you have a current e-mail address and check it at least once a week. I’ll go over materials in class as well, of course, but you may well miss them or receive them late if you’re not routinely on-line. It’s not a bad idea to check for last-minute announcements before coming to class, either. Finally, don’t be concerned if you don’t always receive a reply to any e-mail that you may send to me; I simply might deem it worth a collective response rather than an individual one, as the issue you’ve raised might concern the whole class.

Workload: Three exams; one reflection paper (of your choosing); several pop quizzes, given randomly and usually at the very start of class (to encourage prompt attendance). Typically, exams are multiple-choice, with some lecture slides to identify. One make-up session
for a missed exam is offered the last week of term, with different content and method, so think carefully if you decide to pass on a regularly scheduled exam. If you feel unable to watch a film that I’m presenting to the class, let me know and, providing you have a valid case, I’ll arrange an alternate assignment for you, though this may require some legwork on your part.

**Grades:** 25% of term grade for each exam, 25% total for the reflection paper and the quizzes, based on the total point value earned. Extra credit: students may write one additional reflection paper on any other film/documentary screened in the classroom (following my guidelines); this earns you a further grade step (+/-) on a letter-graded assignment at the end of term.

**Office hours:** You’re encouraged to meet me in my office during the semester. This may be to follow upon a poor exam result or just to discuss humanities, politics, or whatever else is on your mind – so drop by.

**Attendance & class participation:** I take attendance regularly, if not always at every class session. Perfect attendance earns you an extra grade step on a letter-graded assignment at the end of term (like doing another EX CR). One unexcused absence is the official limit; after that you may lose one full letter grade per missed day (A to B, B to C, etc.), at my discretion. I also use attendance and general class comportment to help me determine where to place someone who’s on the cusp of two grades. Only doctor-certified illness or documented legal concerns constitute excused absences, though if you have a serious problem (i.e., a work conflict), let me know and I’ll try to accommodate you. You can only do better by attending regularly and taking good notes. Much of my lecture material corresponds to the textbook, but I do introduce other ideas as well, so be aware that anything touched upon in my lectures or in the reading is fair game for an exam question. Before each exam, I’ll briefly go over essential material. For all those reasons, you’re encouraged to exchange e-mails and phone numbers with a few peers; you’ll have a way to catch up if you miss class, and -- who knows? -- you may make a few new friends.

**Study guides:** These are luxuries that no instructor is obliged to provide. If you want to do well on exams, you need to pay attention, take good notes, read the material, and review diligently all that accumulated knowledge. Right before a test I provide a brief list of points that you should know – but that is a gift to you and is delivered when convenient for me. It is certainly not an entitlement, nor is reviewing it a substitute for the kind of hard work expected of college students. I do not post my lecture notes on Blackboard.

**Class conduct:** While in class, you’re expected to conduct yourselves as professionals. Informed questions and polite attention make for good participation; eating lunch, talking to your neighbor, checking e-mail, or chatting on the phone distracts both your colleagues and myself and will not be tolerated. **Mobiles off! No laptops, texting, or phone use once class is in session; doing so will result in your being obliged to leave and take an absence for that day.** Late arrivals or those who have to leave early, please sit at the back and enter or exit quietly. Drinks and snacks are fine, but no full-scale meals -- and if you spill anything, clean it up!
Student health, etc. Please let me know as early as possible if you need special accommodation for exams (Disabled Student Services, etc.) or have any other private concerns.

Advice on the readings: To help ground yourself in the various eras covered, you should read the timeline and the summary at the beginning and end of any chapter. Read all material within the assigned pages. Also, the page numbers refer to blocks of information that may fall slightly outside them, so if the discussion appears to start or stop in medias res, look back or forward to find where the paragraph actually begins or ends. Don’t be put off by seemingly lengthy readings; often they include several pages of plates interspersed with text. Last of all, “plates” = “pictures” -- simple enough.

Please read the following statements, which explain standard university policies on classes such as ours.

Courses that fulfill the 9-unit requirement for Explorations in General Education take the goals and skills of GE Foundations courses to a more advanced level. Your three upper division courses in Explorations will provide greater interdisciplinary, more complex and in-depth theory, deeper investigation of local problems, and wider awareness of global challenges. More extensive reading, written analysis involving complex comparisons, well-developed arguments, considerable bibliography, and use of technology are appropriate in many Explorations courses.

This is an Explorations course in the Humanities and Fine Arts. The Humanities and Fine Arts encompass works of the imagination, such as art, literature, film, drama, dance, and music, and related scholarship. Students better understand human problems, responsibilities, and possibilities in changing historical contexts and diverse cultures, and in relation to the natural environment. Students acquire new languages and familiarize themselves with related cultures. They gain the ability to recognize and assess various aesthetic principles, belief systems, and constructions of identity. Students acquire capacities for reflection, critique, communication, cultural understanding, creativity, and problem solving in an increasingly globalized world.

Completing this course will help you to do the following in greater depth:

1) analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments;

2) describe various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures;

3) identify issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance;

4) demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities
Course plan: All assignments and activities subject to change (modification / addition / deletion) if we get behind or find new topics to consider. Readings are due on the day assigned.

I: (1-18) Course outline and policies. Thinking about art: Christ Pantocrater.


VI: (2-22) Exam #1. Bring pen; review exam guidelines beforehand.

VII: (2-29) Film: The Agony & The Ecstasy (dir. Carol Reed, 1965).


XI (3-26/30) Spring Break

XII: (4-4) Film: Luther (dir. Eric Till, 2003).


XIV: (4-18) Exam #2. Bring pen; review exam guidelines beforehand. Luther papers due.


XVIII (5-16) FINAL EXAM, 4pm. Bring pen; review exam guidelines beforehand.