

LS 810
The City of Florence: Myths, Meanings, and Magic

Fall 2023
Thursdays, 6:30 - 9:20 p.m., online via Zoom
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Course Description

Cradle of the Renaissance, bastion of liberty, paradise of exiles, and a highway to hell. Over the last seven centuries, the city of Florence has been defined, described, and mythologized in myriad and often conflicting ways. What explains Florence's lasting hold on our collective imagination? How have Florentines represented their city and themselves in art, architecture, literature, and film? Why, for generations, was Florence home to a veritable who's who of foreign novelists, poets, and art critics? How did this intellectual community respond to the city, and what meanings did they ascribe to it? These questions will guide us as we explore representations of Florence across time and in texts both verbal and visual. Our tour is ambitious: it begins in the 14th century with Dante's epic *Inferno* and concludes with the recent Broadway musical "Light in the Piazza." Along the way, we will linger at critical junctures in the city's history, including the crippling crisis of the Black Death; the intellectual and artistic revolution of "the Renaissance"; the reign of the Medici family; the dawn of the Grand Tour; the Nazi bombing of World War II; and the catastrophic flood of 1966. The authors, artists, and film directors we encounter will often be familiar, at least in name: they include Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Lord Byron, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Mark Twain, E. M. Forster, and Roberto Rossellini. But we will also meet others less familiar, among them, the celebrated Florentines Giovanni Boccaccio, Giuseppe Poggi, and Vasco Pratolini.

This course will be taught remotely Thursday evenings (6:30 - 9:20 p.m.) on Zoom. Each class meeting will be dedicated to discussing assigned readings, analyzing one or more works of art/architecture, and considering the interplay between our visual and textual sources. As the course progresses, we will also explore how our authors and artists are in conversation with one another across time. Brief background lectures will occasionally preface class discussions or be recorded and posted to Canvas.

Assignments

Seminar participation	20%
Analytical reflections (2)	25%
Argument-based paper	25%
Final Project	30%

Required Readings

Our readings for LS 810 consist of the books listed below and a series of shorter texts (e.g., poems, essays, images of artworks). I will supply you with electronic copies of these shorter readings once the semester begins. You will be able to stream the two assigned films (*A Room with a View* and the subtitled *Cronache di Poveri Amanti*) through Canvas.

Book List

Please purchase these books online or at your favourite local bookstore. Pulp Fiction has been a favourite of GLS students in recent years. Here's their website:

<http://pulpfictionbooksvancover.com/>

Unless otherwise noted, please purchase the editions listed below:

Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum (Bantam Classics, 1982/2004 reissue).

ISBN-13: 978-0553213393

Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*. Trans. G. H. Williams (Penguin Classics; 2nd revised edition, 2003).

ISBN-13: 978-0140449303

E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (Penguin, 2012), or any another edition.

ISBN-13: 978-0141199825

Craig Lucas and Adam Guettel, *The Light in the Piazza* (Theatre Communication Group, 2005).

ISBN-13: 978-1559362672

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Mandragola*. Trans. Mera J. Flaumenhaft (Waveland Press, 1981).

ISBN-13: 978-0917974571

Tentative: Vasco Pratolini, *A Tale of Poor Lovers* (Monthly Review Press, 1988).

ISBN-13: 978-0853457237 [Note: this book is out of print and difficult to get. I am exploring options with SFU's copyright office at SFU and will provide an update when I have one.]

Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*. Trans. Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford World's Classics, 2008 reissue).

ISBN-13: 978-0199537198

Tentative Class Schedule

Note: This is a tentative and partial class schedule: I will continue to tinker with the current selection of shorter, electronic readings over the course of the summer. The class reading schedule will be completed and finalized in August, and at that point, I will also indicate the particular works of art and architecture that we will discuss each week. Note that electronic readings will be available on Canvas in the first week of the fall semester.

Week 1 - September 7th

Introduction

Week 2 - September 14th

Faith, Factions, and Florins: Dante's Infernal Florence

Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*

Week 3 - September 21st

A Plague on Your City: Florence and the Black Death

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, introduction and selected stories

Week 4 - September 28th

Rome Reborn: Florence in the Early Renaissance

Coluccio Salutati, *A Defense of the Roman Origins of Florence*

Leonardo Bruni, *Panegyric to the City of Florence; History of the Florentine People*, selections

Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, preface

Week 5 - October 5th

The Florence of the Medici

Angelo Poliziano, *The Pazzi Conspiracy*

Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Tale of Nastagio degli Onesti* (from *The Decameron*)

Week 6 - October 12th

The Florence(s) of Savonarola and Machiavelli

Girolamo Savonarola, selected sermons.

Niccolò Machiavelli, *La Mandragola* (*The Mandrake Root*); "Belfagor the Devil"

Week 7 - October 19th

Crafting the "Cradle of the Renaissance": Giorgio Vasari's Florence

Florence of "the Forgotten Centuries" (1527-1800)

Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Renaissance Artists*, selections

Michelangelo, selected poetry on sculpture

Tullia D'Aragona and Laura Battiferri, selected writings

Week 8 - October 26th

Under the Art Critics' Lens: Pater and Ruskin's Florence

[Re]constructing the City: Florence as Italy's First Capital and the Birthplace of Modernity (?)

Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, selections on Florence

John Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence*, selections

Walter Pater, "Luca Della Robbia"; "Botticelli"

Bernard Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*, selections

Week 9 - November 2nd

Visitors' Voices and Views, I: Florence in the 19th Century

Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, selections

Henry James, "Autumn in Florence"; "Florentine Notes"

E. B. Browning, "Casa Guidi Windows" (1848-51), selections

Robert Browning, "Old Pictures of Florence"

Mark Twain, *Innocents' Abroad* (1869), selections on Florence

Week 10 - November 9th

Visitors' Voices and Views, II: E.M. Forster's Florence

E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*

James Ivory, dir., *A Room with a View*

Week 11 - November 16th

Florence and Florentines Under Fascism

Vasco Pratolini, *A Tale of Poor Lovers*

Roberto Rossellini, *Paisàn*, episode on Florence

Week 12 - November 23rd

Tourists and Water: The Floods of Post-War Florence

Carlo Lizzani, dir., *Cronache dei Poveri Amanti* (film of Pratolini novel, Week 11)

Mary McCarthy, *Stones of Florence*, selections

Katherine Kressman Taylor, *Diary of Florence in Flood*, selections

Week 13 - November 30th

21st-Century Florence: *Dolce Vita* or the *Inferno* Reborn?

Craig Lucas and Adam Guettel, *The Light in the Piazza*