

## **Unit 6 Reading Guide: Transformations**

In this unit we will consider a few broad questions about the place of the Italian Renaissance in the larger narrative of European history. The first two meetings will address the question of secularization: that is, whether the Renaissance is part of a retreat from religion in modern European history, and whether Renaissance men and women were, at heart, pagans rather than Christians. In the last two meetings we will consider the culmination and, for many historians, end of the Italian Renaissance in the decades following the French invasion of Italy in 1494 and conclude by summing up the semester and drawing comparisons between the Renaissance and other cultural transformations in history.

### **Essential questions for this unit**

- How important were Christian beliefs, practices, and values for Renaissance Italians?
- Was it possible to be Christian and anticlerical?
- Is anticlericalism related to secularization? How?
- Did the Renaissance produce (or encourage) a separation between a religious sphere of activity and other spheres subject to different beliefs and values?
- Were there tensions between religious and worldly values, and if so, were they ever resolved?
- What is meant by the “end” of the Renaissance? What factors brought about this end?
- What can the Renaissance teach us about how cultural transformations are related to society and culture?

### **Paper topics for this unit**

The following paper topics are suggestions; if you would like to define a different paper topic, you are welcome to do so. See the paper guideline handout for more details.

1. Discuss the place of religion in the lives of Renaissance Italians, drawing on the primary sources we have read. Is there merit to the idea that life became more secular over the course of the period? What are the limitations of secularization as a concept for understanding religious change in the Renaissance?
2. Compare Machiavelli’s political thought with that of earlier Renaissance writers such as Petrarch and Bruni. Does he address the same questions that they did? How do his answers differ? How does his use of ancient examples compare with theirs?

### **Tues. 12/3: Religion, irreligion, and secularization**

Read: **Reader:** 79-99 (Boccaccio: selections from the *Decameron*); also review 14-20, 23, 33-34, 52-54 (Petrarch: “Ascent of Mount Ventoux,” *Canzoniere* no. 16, 81, 346, 353, 365); **Earthly Republic**, 81-114 (Salutati: Letter to Pellegrino Zambecari); also review 115-118, 139-40, 143, 175 (Salutati: Letter to Caterina di messer Vieri; Bruni: “Panegyric to the city of Florence,” selections); **Machiavelli**, 207-218 (*Discourses*, selection); review 453-461 (*The mandrake root*, 3.4-12); **Brucker**: review 75-78 (§35).

1. Read Boccaccio’s stories from the *Decameron*. They are clearly anti-clerical. Are they also irreligious? What does Boccaccio imply about the truth and value of Christianity?
2. Review Petrarch’s “Ascent of Mount Ventoux” and the poems from the *Canzoniere*. How is the life of religious contemplation related to the active life aimed at earthly love and literary fame? How does the imagery of Christian devotion compare with the imagery of love in Petrarch’s poetry?
3. Read Salutati’s letter to Pellegrino Zambecari. What charges did Carlo Malatesta allegedly make against poetry, and how does Salutati defend reading pagan poets?

4. What does Salutati think about the contemplative life that Zambecari proposes? How does his advice to Zambecari compare with the advice he gave to Caterina di messer Vieri?

5. Review the passages in Bruni's "Panegyric." What does Bruni say about Florence's churches? Does he distinguish them from secular buildings? Why does he end his oration by invoking God, Mary, and John the Baptist?

6. Read the passage from Machiavelli's *Discourses*. How did the Roman religion benefit the Roman state? Does it matter that the Romans worshipped false gods (according to Christians)? How has the Roman Church affected Italy, according to Machiavelli? Would someone like Petrarch have agreed with Machiavelli that a false religion can have good consequences and that the true religion can be harmful?

7. How does Machiavelli portray the priest Timoteo in *The Mandrake Root*? Why would his audience have found this character funny?

8. Based on the readings for today, did Renaissance society and culture become more secular between the mid-1300s and the early 1500s?

#### **Thurs. 12/5: Religious and secular virtues**

Read: **Machiavelli**, 126-154, 207-218 (*Prince*, ch. 15-21; *Discourses*, 1.11-15); **Reader**, 298-305 (Guicciardini, selections from the *Ricordi*).

1. Read *The Prince*, chapter 15. How does Machiavelli distinguish his book from earlier "Mirrors for Princes" (advice books for rulers)?

2. Machiavelli claims that it is impossible for a prince to be completely virtuous. Which virtues should a prince strive to embody, and which are less important? Why?

3. Read chapter 16. How does Machiavelli qualify the moral judgment that generosity is better than miserliness? Why should the prince not be too generous? How do Machiavelli's arguments compare with those of Poggio's characters in "On Avarice"?

4. Read chapter 17. Why does Machiavelli conclude that it is better to be feared than loved, and that a certain measure of cruelty is acceptable in a prince? How do his arguments compare with those of Petrarch in his letter to Francesco da Carrara (*Earthly Republic*, 42-45)?

5. Read chapters 18-19. What value does a prince's word have? What are the consequences of being known as a prince who breaks his word lightly? Are they moral? How does Machiavelli distinguish being feared from being hated, and why is the latter bad?

6. Read chapter 20. How should a prince ensure internal stability in his realm? How does Machiavelli's advice compare with Petrarch's advice that a prince should put away bodyguards (*Earthly Republic*, 48)? How do their reasons for their advice differ?

7. Read chapter 21. Do the precepts in this chapter contradict those in earlier chapters? How can a prince carry out great undertakings without taxing his subjects and earning their hatred? How can a prince be "a true friend and a true enemy" (151) if a prince shouldn't always keep his word? What does Machiavelli's portrait of the esteemed ruler tell us about the significance of cultural ideals of rulership in his hard-nosed political philosophy?

8. Do Machiavelli's and Guicciardini's political precepts represent a secularization of political thought? How? Do religious beliefs and values have a place in their thought? If not, can they still be considered Christian?

## **Tues. 12/10: The end of the Renaissance**

REMINDER: Your third 5-page paper is due no later than today! (Note: this is a change from the syllabus.)

Read: **Martines**, 277-337 (ch. 14-16).

1. Why did the French king Charles VIII invade Italy? What were the consequences?
2. What were the major powers that dominated Italian politics from 1494 to 1559? How did Italian alliances change as a consequence of northern European political struggles?
3. Why did the great Italian states prove incapable of offering resistance to the northern monarchies? How did the Italians' weakness affect their political consciousness?
4. According to Martines, how are both the High Renaissance style and the Mannerist style responses to the "calamity of Italy"?
5. Martines argues that, by the late fifteenth century, the Church hierarchy had become largely indistinguishable from the secular aristocracy. What were the consequences of this development for popular piety? For the Church's ability to respond to Luther's challenge?
6. How does Machiavelli's political thought represent a response to the conditions of Italy after 1494? Could Machiavelli have written such a work a century earlier (i.e., circa 1415)?
7. What is the "language question"? Does it represent a shift of frustrated political aspirations into the cultural realm? What were the consequences of the language question for humanism?
8. According to Martines, why did the Renaissance end? How does Martines's answer depend on his concept of the driving force behind the cultural Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries? In the end, what does power have to do with imagination?

## **Thurs. 12/12: Conclusions, review, make-up day**

Read: **Burke**, 235-256 (ch. 10-11).

1. What, according to Burke, is the relationship between epochal events (e.g. the fall of Constantinople or the French invasion of Italy) and developments in art and society? How does his approach compare with that of Martines?
2. What are commercialization and refeudalization? How does Burke employ them to discuss long-term changes in Renaissance Italy?
3. What does the comparison between Renaissance Italy, the Netherlands, and Tokugawa Japan reveal about the connections between social change and artistic development? Do the same forces have an effect on art today?
4. What is the most significant question about the Renaissance that remains unanswered for you? Come to class prepared to raise it and discuss it.

**The final examination for this course will be held TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, from 8 to 10 AM, in Bartlett 61.**

The exam will involve a few open-ended essay questions that will allow you to show what you have learned in this course. It is open-note but closed book; please leave your books at home or outside the examination room.

**Rewrites of the papers are due by 5 PM on Thursday, December 19.**

Bring them to my office (Herter 624) or, on Thursday, Dec. 19, from 4 to 5 PM, to Hasbrouck Lab 134. You must include the original paper along with your rewrite.