

McGill University Faculty of Arts
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures - Italian Studies
LIBA 402: Seminar in Liberal Arts
Love and Sex in Renaissance Italy

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Office hours: by appointment
Communication plan: e-mail preferred

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Dante's love for Beatrice. Petrarch's devotion to Laura, both in death and in life. Boccaccio's celebration of love, tragic, happy, or bawdy. All three have been studied extensively. But just how far did the founding fathers' reach extend on discussions surrounding love and sex? How great was their influence – and the influence of their own sources of knowledge – on modern Italian literature of the sixteenth century?

This course seeks to examine the evolution of theories of love and sex in Renaissance Italy. Through the study of treatises, handbooks, dialogues, lessons, poems, and plays, it aims to provide a general picture of the elaboration of themes of love and sex in works by both men and women of that period – courtiers and courtesans -- to trace the cultural heritage left by the three crowns of Italian literature and identify new currents of thought to be inherited by further generations.

COURSE MATERIALS

Primary sources via MyCourses:

Pietro Bembo, *Gli Asolani* (selections)
Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (selections)
Benedetto Varchi, *Lessons* (selections)
Sperone Speroni, *Dialogue on Love*
Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*
Laura Battiferra, poems (selections)
Gaspara Stampa, poems (selections)
Veronica Franco, poems and letters (selections)
Pietro Aretino, *I ragionamenti* (selections)
Antonfrancesco Grazzini, *La spiritata* (play); Prologue to *La strega* (play), *Le cene* (selections)

Via MyCourses:

Weekly secondary sources (academic essays or studies) selected by the instructor

Additional recommended sources (may be used for research projects):

- Carlson, Raymond. "‘Eccellentissimo Poeta Et Amatore Divinissimo’: Benedetto Varchi and Michelangelo’s Poetry at the Accademia Fiorentina." *Italian Studies* 69, no. 2 (2014): 169–88.
- Celenza, Christopher S. *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance: Language, Philosophy, and the Search for Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Cox, Virginia. *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
- Degl’Innocenti, Luca, Brian Richardson, and Chiara Sbordoni, eds. *Interactions between Orality and Writing in Early Modern Italian Culture*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016.
- Feng, Aileen. *Writing Beloveds: Humanist Petrarchism and the Politics of Gender*. of *Toronto Italian Studies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.
- Giovannozzi, Delfina. "Leone Ebreo in Tullia D’aragona’s Dialogo. between Varchi’s Legacy and Philosophical Autonomy." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (2019): 702–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2018.1563765>.
- Levy, Allison M. *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy : Practice, Performance, Perversion, Punishment. of Visual Culture in Early Modernity*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010.
- Mac Carthy, Ita. *The Grace of the Italian Renaissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. <https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1515/9780691189796>
- McLaughlin, Martin L., "The Dispute between Giovan Francesco Pico and Bembo', *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo*, Oxford Modern Languages and Literature Monographs (Oxford, 1996; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct. 2011), <https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198158998.003.0012>
- Ray, Meredith K. *Writing Gender in Women’s Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017.
- Scott, Izora, Pietro Bembo, Gianfrancesco Pico, and Desiderius Erasmus. *Controversies Over the Imitation of Cicero in the Renaissance: With Translations of Letters between Pietro Bembo and Gianfrancesco Pico, on Imitatio: And a Translation of Desiderius Erasmus, the Ciceronian (ciceronianus)*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 1991.
- Sgarbi, Marco. "4. Benedetto Varchi and the Idea of a Vernacular Logic (1540)." In *The Italian Mind*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014. doi: https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/9789004264298_005

METHODOLOGY

This class will be conducted in person as an undergraduate seminar. It will rely heavily on synchronous participation in classroom discussion and group activities. Teaching methods include lectures, class debates, oral presentations, audio-visual presentations, class discussions, and group work. Reading must be completed *before* each class.

ASSESSMENTS

Evaluation Plan

Comprehension exercises:	25%
Midterm:	20%
Final project:	30%
Participation and in-class activities:	10%
Oral presentations:	15%

Unit *comprehension or interpretation exercises* will evaluate students' understanding of the selected readings, both primary and secondary. They will be administered via the Quizzes function on MyCourses. They will be timed at 120 minutes.

In their 6-8- page *midterm papers*, students will be asked to conduct research that connects at least one author seen in the course at that point to a literary source of Antiquity or the Middle Ages and to analyse and qualify the influence of the earlier source on the latter.

In their 10-12-page *final project*, students will reflect upon themes examined in the course, readings, and class discussions in an analytical research paper or creative project.

Students will be assigned two *oral presentations* over the course of the semester: *primary presentation* and *response*. In their 5-7-minute primary presentation, students will present to the class a pre-selected topic, author, literary movement, or text. In their 3–5-minute response, students will react to the primary presentation and add one to two original contributions. Students will be asked to post written records of their research and preparation for their presentations on the MyCourses discussion forum for the benefit of their classmates.

In-class *participation* will be calculated using an impartial points system. Students who attend class, contribute vocally to in-class discussion at least once and/or work actively in small-group settings will earn 2 points for that lesson. Students who attend class and do not contribute to in-class discussion or small group work but show other signs of engaged learning (e.g., note-taking, active listening) will earn 1 point for that lesson. Students who fail to attend class will earn no points for that lesson. Participation points will be tallied at the end of the semester. Each student will have access to one “unjustified” absence; all others must be accounted for through a dated and signed doctor’s note. Occasionally, students will be invited to respond to a reflection question on the MyCourses discussion forum. Doing so will provide them with an additional opportunity to participate in a classroom discussion they may have missed or foregone for

personal or academic reasons. Participation in these discussions is recommended, but not mandatory.

TENTATIVE CLASS CALENDAR

NB: This class calendar may vary depending on the pace of class discussions and availability of texts in translation. Any changes made will be communicated at least one week in advance. Please see MyCourses for dates of each lesson.

Lesson 1

Introduction to the course: the main characteristics of the Italian Renaissance

Lesson 2

Pre-Unit: Introduction to the founding fathers of Italian literature (Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio) and their literary sources of inspiration; Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*

UNIT 1: EARLY RESPONSES TO NEOPLATONISM

Lesson 3

Primary source: Pietro Bembo, *Gli Asolani* (selections)

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Marsilio Ficino's Commentaries on Plato

Oral presentation: Bembo's correspondence with Vittoria Colonna

Lesson 4

Primary source: Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortigiano* (selections)

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Unit quiz due February 2nd at midnight (open from January 29th to February 2nd)

UNIT 2: LOVE IN ACADEMIC DIALOGUE

Lesson 5

Primary source: Benedetto Varchi, *Lezioni* (selections)

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Benedetto Varchi's funeral oration for Michelangelo Buonarroti

Oral presentation: Michelangelo Buonarroti: love sonnets

Lesson 6

Primary source: Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo d'amore*

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Bernardo Tasso

Lesson 7

Primary source: Tullia D'Aragona, *Dialogo dell'infinità d'amore*

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Tullia D'Aragona's correspondence with Benedetto Varchi

Unit quiz due February 23rd at midnight (open from February 19th to 23rd)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE FEBRUARY 26th AT MIDNIGHT

UNIT 3: POETESSES OF THE RENAISSANCE AND FEMALE REFLECTIONS ON LOVE

Lesson 8

Primary source: Laura Battiferra, poetry (selections)

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Moderata Fonte

Lesson 9

Primary source: Gaspara Stampa, poesie (selections)

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Lucrezia Marinelli

Lesson 10

Primary source: Veronica Franco, poesie e lettere (selections)

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Isabella Andreini

Unit quiz due March 15th at midnight (open from March 1st to March 15th)

UNIT 4: LEWD TALES FROM THE STREETS AND TOWN SQUARES

Lesson 11

Primary source: Pietro Aretino, *I ragionamenti* (selections)

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Lesson 12

Primary source: Antonfrancesco Grazzini, *La spiritata*; prologue to *La strega*

Secondary sources: see MyCourses

Oral presentation: Niccolò Machiavelli, *The mandrake root*

Oral presentation: Erudite comedy of the 15th century and Commedia dell'arte of the 16th century

Lesson 13

Primary source: Antonfrancesco Grazzini, selections from *Le cene*

Oral presentation: Franco Sacchetti and the novellieri of the 14th to 16th centuries

Course wrap-up

Unit quiz due April 5th at midnight (open from March 27th to April 5th)

FINAL PAPER DUE APRIL 12TH AT MIDNIGHT

COURSE POLICIES

- Asynchronous activities:
 - At the end of each unit, the instructor will post reading comprehension or literary interpretation exercises on MyCourses (quizzes). These will be available for the entire week but will need to be completed by the week's end (Friday at midnight) to be graded. They will be timed at 120 minutes. This time limit will not be strictly enforced by MyCourses, but the instructor reserves the right to penalize students who submit their work with a significant delay or disregard for the time limit.
- Written work:
 - Students are asked to submit all written work in .docx or pdf format via MyCourses. Should their final project include a visual component, alternative arrangements should be discussed individually with the instructor. Submissions made by e-mail will be discarded.
- Late policy:
 - Barring documented extenuating circumstances supported by a doctor's note, submissions made more than 48 hours late will be discarded. Late submissions will receive a penalty of 3% per day late. Extensions should be requested at least one week in advance.
- Make-up work:
 - No make-up quizzes, tests, or assignments will be given in this course. No work for extra credit will be offered.
- Instructor communication and availability:
 - In addition to her office hours, the instructor may be reached by e-mail. The instructor will be checking and responding to e-mail messages between the hours of 9am and 6pm from Monday to Friday. Students may expect a response to their sent messages within 24 hours, excluding weekends.
- Flipped classroom model and in-class participation:
 - Students will be expected to complete, on average, three to four hours of reading and asynchronous work per week. The seminar style of this course can only work if this reading is completed ahead of class meetings, and if students come to class prepared to share their reflections. To that end, each lesson will begin with a plenary discussion of students' first impressions of or reactions to the texts presented, and observations, questions, or concerns about them. Occasionally, in class, students may be given additional primary texts to analyse or put into conversation with those already supplied on MyCourses. Completing the required readings ahead of time will be crucial to the success of these exegetical exercises.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences

under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see [McGill’s guide to academic honesty](#) for more information). (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

« L’université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l’on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l’étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l’honnêteté académique de McGill](#)).

- Note that to support academic integrity, your assignments may be submitted to text-matching or other appropriate software (e.g., formula-, equation-, and graph-matching).”

“© Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, comprehension questions, grammar exercises, reflection questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.”

LANGUAGE POLICY

“The main language of instruction at McGill is English. You have the right to write essays, examinations, and theses in English or in French except in courses where knowledge of a language is one of the objectives of the course.”

INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Student Accessibility and Achievement Center](#), 514-398-6009.

END OF COURSE EVALUATION

End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.