Reading Love and Death in the Italian Renaissance: An Introduction to the Literature and Art of the Italian Renaissance

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Course Description:
In this course we will examine the way in which the literature and visual arts of the Italian Renaissance confront the perennial pairing of love and death. Our aim will be to understand what love and death meant for this particular community in an effort to determine why these two themes were constantly intertwined in its literature, as well as in the visual arts. We will begin with an introduction of the poetry of the early stilnovists (the group of poets that wrote in “the sweet new style”), primarily Guinizzelli and Cavalcanti, and continue with their legacy as witnessed in the works of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Piero della Francesca, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Raphael, Titian.

Our project will be to read the material and to look at the art critically, not descriptively. We will assess the importance of these two themes, love and death, in the works under consideration in order to determine why they necessarily appeared together over and over again. Ultimately, our focus will be to decide whether earthly love was considered possible in this cultural milieu without the notion of the inevitability of death looming on the horizon.

Most of the reading will be available to you in both English and Italian or Latin, although no prior knowledge of Italian or Latin is required. All texts are available either in a course e-packet or on the Internet. We will look at art in museums in and around Urbino, and conclude the course with a trip to Rome that will include visits to St. Peter’s, the Vatican Museums, the Galleria Borghese and the Church of St. Peter in Chains.

Course Outline:

- **Week One: “The Sweet New Style” and its Legacy // Dante**
  - Cavalcanti, Ballata 5, *Light do I see within my Lady’s eyes*
  - Cavalcanti, *A lady asks me*
  - Guinizzelli, *Love seeks its dwelling always in a gentle heart*
  - Dante, *Vita nuova*
  - Dante, *Inferno*, V (Francesca and Paolo)

- **Week Two: Petrarch**
  - Petrarch’s *Ascent of Mont Ventoux*

- **Week Three: Boccaccio’s Decameron**
  - Selected novelle
  - Visit to the Palazzo Ducale (The National Art Gallery of Urbino)
• Week Four: Rome Excursion
  o St. Peter’s and Vatican Museums
  o Galleria Borghese
  o Church of St. Peter in Chains

Students will submit short response papers at the end of each week which will serve as pre-writing for a 5-page final essay. Class participation will figure significantly into the final grade.