

Jill Burke

## Teaching the Renaissance – University of Edinburgh

### Interdisciplinarity

Teaching the Renaissance at the University of Edinburgh has undergone several changes over the last five years. The most important, perhaps, has been the establishment of our interdisciplinary masters degree, the MSc Renaissance and Early Modern Studies (formerly called the MSc Renaissance to Enlightenment;

<http://www.medren.ed.ac.uk/postgraduate-studies/taught-degrees/msc-renaissance-to-enlightenment/>).

This is a programme that is co-taught across humanities disciplines, with major contributions from colleagues in History, English Literature and History of Art, and administered from History of Art. This, alongside the establishment of the Edinburgh Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in 2008 (<http://www.medren.ed.ac.uk>), has led to a great deal of interdisciplinary exchange, which is born out in our weekly seminar (the Edinburgh Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Seminar) and discussion programmes (the Renaissance and Early Modern Discussion group and the student-led *Quid Tum* discussion group). Students can also focus on subject-specific postgraduate degrees with a renaissance/early modern focus in History

(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/history-classics-archaeology/graduate-school/>),

English Literature

(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/postgraduate/research-masters-pathway/programmes>)

and History of Art

(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/edinburgh-college-art/history-art/postgraduate>).

### The Renaissance Now

The MSc Renaissance and Early Modern studies emphasises close attention to primary sources, and expects students to have first-hand engagement with this material. Our location in Edinburgh, with its wealth of renaissance and early modern collections, both within and outside the university, allows us to emphasise the current adaption and presentation of Renaissance material in various forms – for example recent productions or adaptations of renaissance plays, curatorship, cataloguing and editions of texts. This includes many opportunities for students to directly engage with objects and texts from the period and think about their relevance today.

This can be, for example, in the form of working with primary archival texts, such as in the course offered by Dr Suzanne Trill “Shakespeare’s Sister: Archival Research and the Politics of the Canon”, where students are given the opportunity to transcribe and edit early modern texts written by women; or conversely in considering the presentation of renaissance material today, as in Dermot Cavanagh’s option, *Shakespeare Adapted*, that considers how Shakespeare’s plays have been adapted and appropriated by a range of modern and postmodern writers and filmmakers. This is carried over into History of Art with our consideration of curatorship of renaissance paintings as part of our postgraduate “Cultures of Display” course.

Moreover, Edinburgh’s Renaissance and Early Modern Studies programme is unusual (if not unique) in offering our students the option of an internship in a local cultural institution as part

of their degree. This always includes a research element – so, for example, students could gain work experience on early printed architectural

treatises at the Edinburgh City Library; or re-searching the archives at one of Scotland's aristocratic country houses; or helping to prepare an exhibition at the University or National Galleries of Scotland.

The outward-looking nature of our teaching is influenced by our research activities, and the UK-wide emphasis on knowledge exchange between academia and public institutions in research (the "impact" of research is an important consideration of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (<http://www.ref.ac.uk>)).

Students are involved in various capacities with research projects that have a public face – these include:

- *Beyond Macbeth: Shakespeare in Scottish Collections* at the National Library of Scotland (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/research-activities/shakespeare-edinburgh>), jointly curated by James Loxley (English Literature) and Helen Vincent (National Library of Scotland).
- *Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court*, a project lead by Greg Walker (English Literature) with Professor Thomas Betteridge (Oxford Brookes University) and colleagues in Edinburgh, Southampton and Glasgow Universities, which, in collaboration with Historic Scotland and theatre professionals, will stage productions of Sir David Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* in Linlithgow Palace and Stirling Castle in June 2013.
- *From Apes to Angels: Animal and Human in the Early Modern World*, a project including an exhibition at the Talbot

Rice Gallery 2014-15, organised by Stephen Bowd (History), Jill Burke (History of Art), Sarah Cockram (History), and Andrew Wells (History). Students will be involved in a practice-based internship for the creating of this exhibition.

- *Beauty by Design: Refashioning the Renaissance* (<http://www.beautybydesign.org.uk>), a project that brings together fashion designers and renaissance scholars to consider notions of beauty and body image today and in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, culminating in an exhibition at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery 2014-15; project leaders are Jill Burke (History of Art), Mal Burkinshaw (Design) and Patricia Allerston (Scottish National Galleries). This includes co-teaching of fashion students with fourth-year undergraduates working on the Renaissance body, considering conventions of beauty over time.
- Rehangng the Italian Paintings at the Scottish National Gallery in 2014. Students will be asked to write alternative labels for the new display of Italian paintings (including Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*) in conjunction with Tricia Allerston, the head of education at the Scottish National Galleries.

### Italian Renaissance Studies

Italian renaissance studies has been a strength in Edinburgh for more than half a century – Denys Hay, Professor of Medieval History at Edinburgh after the Second World War, was the author of the popular *The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background* (1961) and it was on his retirement that the annual Denys Hay Lecture was established.

In 2008 the University of Edinburgh became a founder member of the Prato Consortium for Medieval and Renaissance studies, based at the Monash University Centre in Prato.

Since 2010 we have taught our masters students alongside 4<sup>th</sup>-year honours students from Monash university in an intensive week-long course in Florence and Prato (Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Texts, Objects and Practices). This academic year, 2012-13, this course will be taught in Venice for the first time. As well as getting first-hand knowledge of a major Italian city and its artefacts, we also take students to see a major archive during this course.

Recent appointments mean that we now have 8 permanent full-time staff members with research expertise in Renaissance/Early Modern Italy (Monica Azzolini and Stephen Bowd in History; Jill Burke, Carol Richardson and Genevieve Warwick in History of Art; Jim Lawson and Ian Campbell in History of Architecture; and Noel O'Regan in History of Music). PhD students working with us in this field have organised a conference in November 2012, "New Directions in Renaissance Italy", which highlights the work of early career scholars. This activity allows our undergraduate and postgraduate students to be exposed to new research as a matter of course.

### **Author**

The author teaches Art History at the University of Edinburgh.

### **Title**

Jill Burke, *Teaching the Renaissance – University of Edinburgh*, in: *Teaching the Renaissance II*, ed. by Angela Dreßen and Susanne Gramatzki, in: *kunsttexte.de*, Nr. 3, 2012 (3 pages), [www.kunsttexte.de](http://www.kunsttexte.de).