

Catherine Kovesi

Teaching the Renaissance in Australia:

The View from the University of Melbourne

Perhaps surprisingly for readers sitting in Europe, the Renaissance has a strong history of interest, teaching, and research in the Australian tertiary sector. Partly this is due to the tenacity of the idea of the Renaissance as a potent concept in the western imagination – however poorly grounded that concept may be in fact. It is also assisted in part by the large numbers of second and third generation Italians who live in Melbourne and Australia. Year after year students enrol in our courses here at Melbourne determined to find a world of past beauty, and are often surprised at the more complex world that unfolds. Recent conferences and exhibitions organised by, or involving staff from, the University of Melbourne have also attracted wide audiences and are testament to this enduring interest in the Renaissance:

‘Renaissance: 15th and 16th Century Painting from the Accademia Carrara Bergamo’, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (9 December 2011 – 9 April 2012): <http://www.visitcanberra.com.au/renaissance/>

‘The Italian Renaissance in Australia: A Tribute to Villa I Tatti’ (19-20 July 2012): <http://articulation.arts.unimelb.edu.au/?p=1850>

‘Four Horsemen: Apocalypse, Death and Disaster’, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (31 August 2012 – 28 January 2013):

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/exhibitions/the-four-horsemen>

‘Pleasure, Desire and Greed in the Renaissance’:

<http://events.unimelb.edu.au/events/2678-pleasure-desire-and-greed-in-the-renaissance>

The teaching of Renaissance History itself has a long history at the University of Melbourne. Ian Robertson trained a whole generation of Italian Renaissance scholars who have made their mark nationally and internationally: Bill Kent, Dale Kent, Lorenzo Polizzotto, Jaynie Anderson, and Pat Simons being some of the most prominent of these. Another generation (including Lyn-dal Roper, and Alex Walsham) has been trained by Charles Zika, whose work on witchcraft and the northern Renaissance is internationally renowned. When Ian Robertson retired, Catherine Kovesi took over his position, and has been teaching Renaissance History subjects at the University of Melbourne since 2000. Colleagues in the School of Languages and Linguistics (Andrea Rizzi, Véronique Duché-Gavet, Vicente Perez de Leon and, until recently, Stephen Kolsky), as well as the School of Culture and Communication, where the Art History programme is based (Jaynie Anderson), teach both independently and collaboratively. The retirement of Charles Zika from the History programme meant that Renaissance subjects, which had been

evenly divided between northern and southern Europe, and with a highly successful overseas intensive subject on Renaissance Nuremberg and Prague, became centred instead solely on Italy. It is hoped that this might be rectified with other staff appointments in the near future. The recent appointments of a French and a Spanish early modernist in the School of Languages also brings the promise of a broader geographical spread of subjects in the early modern period.

In 2008 the University of Melbourne introduced sweeping curriculum reforms, known as 'The Melbourne Model'. An adaptation of the Bologna Model for the Australian educational sector, this shifted teaching into a broader based undergraduate degree with vocational subjects moved into the postgraduate level. This meant the establishment of much broader subjects at the undergraduate level with staff encouraged to develop more subjects at the Masters by Coursework level. The Renaissance in Italy, offered as a third year undergraduate History subject, which has been taught at Melbourne since 2000, survived into the Melbourne Model, and attracts in excess of 120 students each year:

<https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/view/2013/HIST30006>.

The Art History subject, 'Renaissance Art in Florence and Venice', offered at the second year level and coordinated by Jaynie Anderson, is another perennially popular subject:

<https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/view/2013/AHIS20011>.

The Melbourne Model also encouraged staff to collaborate across the disciplinary divide and to foster a range of internationalising learning experiences for students. In line with these developments, Andrea Rizzi (Languages) and Catherine Kovesi (History) developed an overseas intensive subject for students based in Venice for a month in late November to December. This intensive has a structure unique in the University. It consists of two subjects in two different Schools (School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, and the School of Languages

and Linguistics), each of which is a co-requisite of the other. Each subject's lectures are intimately and collaboratively related and site visits are shared in common around the day's themes:

<https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/view/2013/HIST20052>

<https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/view/2013/ITAL30012>.

During their month's stay in Venice, students are exposed to cultural, historical and linguistic diversity, and have a unique and rewarding experience resulting in a deep, layered knowledge of the city. A Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Melbourne and Ca' Foscari in Venice means that students from the University of Melbourne can take subjects offered by Ca' Foscari as part of their home degree. From 2013 a new relationship with the Institute at the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence will allow students to take an overseas intensive subject 'Museology in Florence' in that city also, as well as to take advantage of the other subjects on offer in the Institute.

Amongst the Masters by Coursework programmes available to students under the Melbourne Model is a Masters of Art Curatorship, in which Jaynie Anderson's 'The Virtual Print Room', makes available to students, in a searchable online format, the outstanding collection of Renaissance and Baroque prints in the Baillieu Library:

<https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/view/2012/ACUR90002>.

Similarly, Charles Zika, Catherine Kovesi and Jenny Spinks collaborated with the Baillieu Library to produce 'The Melbourne Prints' website. Students enrolled in a seminar 'Medieval Manuscripts and Early Print', as part of the Executive Masters of Arts were able to contribute to the entries on this website, and the Centre for Materials Conservation were also involved in restoration and conservation of some of the prints:

<http://melbourneprints.wordpress.com>.

Several of these prints feature in the current exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, 'Four Horsemen: Apocalypse, Death and Disaster.'

These two subjects, as well as the exhibition, highlight some of the surprising Renaissance riches contained in the libraries and galleries of Melbourne of which students at the doctoral level are also available to take advantage.

There have been more recent and exciting developments and opportunities at Melbourne with the establishment of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of the Emotions in 2011 (\$24.15 million over seven years). One of the nodes of the Centre is at the University of Melbourne, with Charles Zika (History) and Stephanie Trigg (English), as the two Melbourne Chief Investigators:

<http://history.unimelb.edu.au/history-of-emotions/>

and also

<http://www.historyofemotions.org.au/>.

This funding has meant that postdoctoral research fellowships (Sarah Randles, Stephanie Downes and Giovanni Tarentino) and a senior research fellowship (Grace Moore) have also been awarded. A new PhD coursework seminar on 'The History of Emotions' was developed by staff from the Centre, and taught for the first time in 2012. In addition, an Honours seminar 'Feeling the Past: A History of Emotion', helps students with the theoretical frameworks of this new and engaging area of research:

<https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/view/2012/HIST40034>.

Postgraduate research remains strong at Melbourne with students in History, Art History, and Italian researching topics including 'Perceptions and Uses of Colour in Renaissance Venetian Clothing' (Tracey Griffiths); 'How to Be A Good Wife in the Renaissance: A Man's Perspective' (Shari Blanck); 'Il Gottoso: Piero di Cosimo de' Medici and his Gout' (Felicity Griffin Clark); 'Margherita Costa Romana: Court Virtuosa and Author' (Julie Robarts); 'John Florio and Parallel Text Language Manuals' (David Chidgey); 'Lucrezia Marinella' (Amy Sinclair).

There is a lively research culture at Melbourne with a variety of research and discussion

groups meeting regularly, most pertinent for this context being the Early Modern Circle:

<http://www.amems.unimelb.edu.au/seminars/earlymodern-circle.html>.

Italian studies in general have also been greatly assisted, not just in Melbourne, but Australia-wide, by the generous donations over many years from the Treviso-based Cassamarca Foundation. Not only does this foundation part-fund the lectureship of Andrea Rizzi, but it also enabled the establishment of the Australasian Centre for Italian Studies (ACIS). ACIS hosts a bi-annual conference, the last of which was held at the University of Melbourne in 2011, and helps to foster and engage with research in Italian studies (broadly conceived) conducted in the Australasian region: <http://acis.org.au/>.

In sum, Renaissance studies, and in particular Renaissance Italian studies, remain a core area of study, research and engagement at the University of Melbourne, and it is hoped that the geographical spread of Renaissance studies, in the light of recent appointments, will continue to expand.

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