



## English 119, Literary Cities—Florence

### Prof. Christopher Looby

This course explores the city of Florence and its surroundings in relation to the fiction and works of art that American writers and artists produced there and set there in the nineteenth century. We allow these writers and artists—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Julia Ward Howe, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Hiram Powers, Edith Wharton and Constance Fenimore Woolson among others—to curate the city for us, as we follow in their (and their characters’) footsteps.

### Assignment: *Thick Mapping*

**First**, choose a *public space* in or near Florence (for example, a piazza, a cathedral, a park, or a market), one that has figured in our readings for this course. It may be a place we have visited together, or another place you have explored on your own. It can be a famous site or a lesser-known one. Ideally it will be a space that resonates for you personally in some fashion. You could select the Ponte Vecchio, say, where *Indian Summer* begins, or the vast interior of the Duomo, where Margaret Stowe and Trafford Morgan meet toward the end of “A Florentine Experiment,” or the Boboli Gardens, or the Franciscan Convent in Fiesole. This *space* will be your object of study, and you will prepare what in the field of Urban Humanities is called a “thick map” of it, capturing the *lived experience* of the space as vividly as possible.

**Second**, go to the space and investigate it as exhaustively as possible. Use all of your senses: look, listen, touch, taste, smell. Walk around it and experience the space proprioceptively. Depending on the space you choose, participate in its life in some fashion: sit at a café and observe your surroundings; walk around inside the cathedral as Margaret and Trafford did. How does it look? What are its material constituents? What people inhabit it, and how do they do

so? What are its uses? What are the sounds you hear? What odors do you smell? Return multiple times if possible until you feel intimately familiar with the space and with its activities.

Your apprehension of the space should pay close attention to at least these elements:

- ◆ Which of Kevin Lynch's elements does it represent, and why?
- ◆ What kinds of people and groups do you observe occupying and using the space?
- ◆ What kinds of activities are transpiring in the space?
- ◆ Is the space contested in any way(s)? Are any of the kinds of people or types of activities at odds with one another? Are there hierarchies and struggles present in the space?
- ◆ How does the space appear and function in our literary text, and does it appear and function in the same manner today?

**Third**, prepare a "thick map" that represents the space as robustly as possible. Imagine you are doing this for someone who has never been to this space, and to whom you want to convey as robust an impression of it as possible. Your "thick map" should contain a written description/narrative/essay—or even your own fictional story, if you like—but also one or more visual/aural components. You might draw a map of the space, or take photographs, or make a video, or draw sketches. If you like, make an audio recording of the characteristic sounds of the space.

**Deliverable:** You may combine all the elements into one document, if you prefer, or you can submit a dossier containing several parts (an essay, a set of photographs, a video, a PowerPoint presentation with embedded video and/or audio, any medium or combination of media you like).

Your **first draft** is due Monday, July 19, 2021. You will break down into small groups and present your drafts to one another for friendly and constructive critique. Then revise your draft with your classmates' feedback and advice in mind.

Your **final draft** is due a week later, Monday, July 26, 2021. As a class we will collaborate on locating your chosen spaces in relation to one another on a large map of Florence, collectively creating a "thick map" of the city as we have come to know it.