Writing women in Early Modern Italy

Second year module (20 Credits)
Teaching: 30 hours; over Autumn and Spring terms
Weekly lectures: Tuesday 9am (Rm 73)
Fortnightly seminars (even weeks): Friday 9 am (Rm 57)
Convener: Dr Lisa Sampson

This module will explore a broad range of representations of women, both as objects and active subjects, in various works from the early modern period. Major works by male writers (Boccaccio, Castiglione, Tasso) will be examined in conjunction with others by female authors (including Catherine of Siena, Vittoria Colonna, Isabella Andreini) in order to evaluate how these writings were affected by the social and literary context of their production, and general perceptions of and attitudes towards women.

Module requirements for students:
• Students will be expected to contribute to the seminars and to structured discussion in certain lectures by preparing the relevant material provided during the course of the module.
• Two essays of 2,000-3,000 words, to be submitted at the end of the Autumn and the Spring terms counting for 50% of the overall mark.
• Examination: one two-hour paper, counting for 50% of the overall assessment.

Lecture Plan

**Autumn Term 2003**

Week 1  General Introduction
Week 2* Historical and Cultural Background
Week 3  Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus
Week 4* Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus
Week 5  St Catherine of Siena: Introduction
Week 6* St Catherine of Siena: questions of genre and agency
Week 7  The Debate on Women
Week 8* Castiglione's Cortegiano (Book 3)
Week 9  Women, lyric poetry, and Petrarchism
Week 10* Vittoria Colonna's Rime

**Spring Term 2004**

Week 1  Culture and literary society in Venice
Week 2* Veronica Franco and courtesan culture
Week 3  Veronica Franco Rime and Lettere (discussion)
Week 4* Pastoral drama and the conventions of genre
Week 5  Isabella Andreini and Torquato Tasso: literary contexts
Week 6* Isabella Andreini's Mirtilla: themes
Week 7  Moderata Fonte: Introduction
Week 8* Fonte, Il merito delle Donne: themes and concepts
Week 9  Il merito delle Donne: themes and concepts (discussion)
Week 10* Conclusion: women and the literary canon

* Denotes a week with seminar discussion
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Set texts

Autumn term

  Extracts: Dedication and Preface, chs 1-2, 31, 37-39, 40, 42, 45, 48, 50, 55, 57, 60, 91, (94), 97, 100-101, Conclusion
  See also the translation by Guido Guarini (Concerning Famous Women) (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963)

- Catherine of Siena, Epistolario (Letters), see extracts
  See also Lettere mistiche, ed. with intro. by Massimo Baldini (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1998) [242-CAT]; and the edition by P. Giuseppe Di Ciaccia (Bologna, 1999) 242-CAT

- Baldassare Castiglione, Il Cortegiano (The Book of the Courtier), Book III (any edition)
  [854.33]

- Vittoria Colonna, Rime [1538], ed. by Alan Bullock (Rome, 1982) [851.39-COL];
  See also her Sonetti, ed. by Tobia R. Toscano (Milan, 1998) [FOLIO--851.39-COL]

Spring term

- Veronica Franco, Rime [1575] (a selection), ed. Stefano Bianchi (Milan: Mursia, 1995) and her Lettere, ed. Stefano Bianchi (Rome: Salerno, 1998) [851.49-FRA];
  Translated by Ann R. Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal as Poems and Selected Letters (Chicago: Chicago University press, 1998) [851.49-FRA]

- Torquato Tasso, Aminta, favola boschereccia (Aminta, a pastoral play), see the annotated edition by C. E. J. Griffiths (Manchester, 1972), or the one by Marziano Guglielminetti (Garzanti) [851.46]
  For a translation, see Elizabeth Story Donno, Three Renaissance Pastorals: Tasso, Guarini, Daniel (Binghamton, N. Y., 1993), 808.-82--THR

- Isabella Andreini, Mirtilla, favola pastorale [1588], ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1995)
  Translated by Julie Campbell (Tempe Arizona: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2003)

- Moderata Fonte (Modesta Pozza), Il merito delle donne... [1600], ed. Adriana Chernello (Venice: Eidos, 1988) [396.0945-FON]
  (See also The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men, ed. and transl. by Virginia Cox (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997) [396.0945-FON]

Further suggested reading

- Giovanni Boccaccio, Il Corbaccio (any edition, see complete works)

Secondary sources

General Introductions


Maclean, Ian, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge University Press, 1980) [396.9–MAC] – the intellectual background to attitudes towards women


Rose, Mary Beth, ed., *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Literary and Historical Perspectives* (Syracuse, 1986) [396.09401–WOM]


Wiesner, Merry E., *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge UP, 1993); esp. chs 4 and 5 [396.094–WIE]


Author/subject specific criticism

Boccaccio


**Catherine of Siena**


Bell, Rudolph M., *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) [248–BEL], ch. 2 gives a psychoanalytical reading of Catherine's life; to be treated with caution

Norman, Diana, *Siena and the Virgin*. Art and politics in a late medieval city state (New Haven CT, 1999) [FOLIO – 7-09.45 – NOR]


Tinagli, Paola, 'The cult of female saints', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: gender, representation, identity* (Manchester, 1997) [757.4 – TIN]


**La Querelle des Femmes**


Kaufman, Gloria, 'Juan Luis Vives on the Education of Women', *Signs* 3 (Summer 1978), 891-97 [Periodical 396.05]


**Humanism**


King, Margaret and Rabil, Albert (eds), Her Immaculate Hand. Selected Works by and about the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy (Binghamton, NY, 1983; rev. ed. 1992), 77-86 [945.05–HER]


Castiglione and Women at Court


Benson, Pamela J., The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: the Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England (University Park, PA, 1992), ch. 3 – discussion on the role of women in Book 3 [820.903.BEN]

King, Margaret L., Women of the Renaissance (Chicago, 1991); a useful general introduction to attitudes towards women in the Renaissance, see especially ch. 3 [396.0942-KIN]

Kelso, Ruth, ‘The lady at Court’, in Doctrine for the lady of the Renaissance (Urbana, 1956) [396.094021-KEL]

Zancan, Marina, ‘La donna e il cerchio nel Cortegiano di B. Castiglione: le funzioni del femminile nell’immagine di corte’, in Nel cerchio della luna, cit. (Venice, 1983) [850.903-NEL]


Vittoria Colonna and Petrarchism


Dionisotti, Carlo, Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana (Turin, 1967) – see especially the essay: ‘La letteratura italiana nell’età del concilio di Trento’, pp. 183-204 – see me

Gaspara Stampa


Veronica Franco, Venice, and Courtesan culture


Tasso and pastoral drama


Isabella Andreini: Women and the theatre


Henke, Robert, Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’arte (Cambridge, 2002), esp. ch. 6 on actresses [792.2–HEN]


Rudlin, John, Commedia dell’arte: an actor’s handbook (London, 1994) [792.028–RUD]

Moderata Fonte


Women writers and the Canon

Cannon, JoAnn, ‘Women Writers and the Canon in Contemporary Italy’, in Maria Ornella Marotti, ed., Italian women writers from the Renaissance to the present. Revising the canon (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 13-23 (see also Introduction to the volume)


Costa-Zalessow, Natalia, Scrittrici italiane dal XIII al XX secolo (Ravenna, 1982)
Essay Questions

Autumn Term

1. How far can Boccaccio be described as presenting a positive vision of women in the De Claris Mulieribus?

2. ‘The structure of late-medieval society may have restricted the access of women to property and office, but it could not silence […] them’ (D. Herlihy). Discuss this quotation with reference to St Catherine of Siena.

3. To what extent should St Catherine of Siena be considered as a writer who reflects gender related issues? Discuss with specific reference to at least three of her letters.

4. Explore the ways in which Castiglione dramatises the contemporary debate on women in his Cortegiano in terms of characterization, setting, and the exposition of the main arguments.

5. How far can Vittoria Colonna be regarded as the creator of an ‘original’ female voice in her Rime, which contrasts with dominant poetic practices?

Spring Term

6. ‘The writings of Veronica Franco can only be understood properly by taking into account her social context: as a courtesan, and a Venetian.’ Explore this statement, making reference to Franco’s verse AND/OR letters.

7. ‘In writing her Mirtilla, Isabella Andreini was seeking more to raise her social profile as an actress than to explore the potential of pastoral drama for voicing feminine concerns’. Discuss this statement, referring also to Tasso’s Aminta.

8. Discuss the contribution of Moderata Fonte to the debate on women.

9. ‘Writing women in early modern Italy challenged both conventional ideas of “femininity” and certain forms of literary activity’. Discuss this statement with reference to one or more writers or works.

Essay deadlines

Students are required to write one essay per term, and may not reuse the same material in both essays. Essays on Autumn Term work are due by 4 pm on Tuesday 13 January 2004. Essays on Spring Term work are due by 4 pm on Tuesday 27 April 2004. Please see the Department’s Final Year Handbook for the University’s rules on late submission of work.

Essays must be submitted to Mrs Whyte’s office (Room 70). They must be on paper and in duplicate: word-processing is strongly recommended, but we cannot accept essays in electronic form. When handing in essays, students must also sign a submission form for this piece of work, declaring that this is all their own work (please see the Final Year Handbook for the University’s rules on plagiarism). Copies of this form are available in Room 70. Students should obtain a receipt for their essays.