Course Description
In the history of western culture, the late medieval and early Renaissance period has traditionally been interpreted as the beginning of a new civilisation. In Italy the growth of the city-states from the second half of the thirteenth century was accompanied by the rise of a mercantile class which, in a republic such as Florence, created the conditions for great achievements in politics, culture, philosophy and art. The most important social institution on which the rise of urban élites was based was the family.

But what was the structure of the family? What was the position of women inside it? And did women have a role outside of it? Drawing on a rich range of written and visual material, this course aims to explore the role of women and family in medieval and early Renaissance society. After an overview of political, institutional, economic and cultural aspects of Italian society in this period, the course will look at the structures of family life. It will then explore contemporary expectations of women's social roles, and investigate whether the available evidence suggests that women in fact remained within those roles or transcended them. By looking at secondary sources and at extracts from primary sources such as marriage contracts, letters or treatises (many of them relating to Florence in particular), the course will examine the crucial moment at which a newly married woman entered the household of her husband; her role in the house; women's education; women's position in the world of work; the position of widows, religious women and nuns; women’s relationship to the world of Renaissance art and culture; and 'marginalized' women such as witches and prostitutes.

Course Objectives
The objective of this course is to investigate the social constructions at the heart of the Renaissance world, above all the patriarchal family and gender roles.

By the end of the course students should have acquired:

a) a broad understanding of the nature of the family and of the dynamics of gender interaction in Italian Renaissance society;
b) the ability to trace back to their late medieval and Renaissance origins those social formations which are still recognizable in the western world today;
c) the ability to analyse and interpret primary sources, both visual and written;
d) the ability to elaborate through personal research an independent and critical vision on some of the specific topics dealt with during the course.

Course Structure
The course will consist of lectures, seminars, the viewing of a movie and site visits. Each lecture will be followed by a seminar discussion on weekly topics and by the analysis of documents in translation.

Assessment
Students will be evaluated on the basis of the following: participation in seminars (15%); two written assignments up to five pages in length each (25%); a mid-term exam consisting of a take-home essay of up to eight pages (25%); a final exam consisting of an oral presentation and a written essay of up to ten pages on a piece of individual research (35%).
 Attendance Policy
Students are expected to attend all classes. Absences will affect the final grade. All students are expected to be on time for class and to switch off their cell phones, laptops and blackberry systems before joining the class.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the short text book *Giovanni and Lusanna* should be read by the fourth class. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 should be completed by the seventh class.

Some Guidelines for Writing Essays
1. Plan your essay carefully: before beginning to write it, draw up a one-page plan of its structure and argument.
2. Structure your essay rationally: include a short introduction in which you identify the main issues to be discussed, a central part in which you develop those issues, a conclusion, and a complete bibliography.
3. Privilege an interpretative analysis over a merely descriptive one.
4. Take care to follow a clear and logical line of argument.
5. Make use of quotations from primary and secondary sources to emphasize your points, but do not exaggerate the use of those from secondary sources: it is always important to have the argument of the essay in your own words.
6. Whenever you quote from a primary or secondary source, be sure to give the correct citation: author, title, page numbers etc.
7. Deepen your understanding of the topic and your ability to bring an original perspective to it by wide reading. Exploring the ‘recommended readings’, or other readings in the Library relevant to your topic, will enhance the quality of your essay and is essential for your exam papers.
8. Do not use more than three sources from the internet, and if you decide to use them, do so with extreme care as not all material on the web is of high quality!
9. Give yourself enough time to research, plan, write and print your essay.
10. Submit it by the deadline in typewritten form!

Bibliography

Course Books
available at Feltrinelli International, Via Cavour 12-20r:

Prescribed Readings

a) available as electronic version via Bobst Library (e.v.):

G. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, “The story of Jancofiore and Salabaetto”, eighth day, tenth story; “The story of Griselda”, tenth day, tenth story;

b) available in Villa Ulivi Library Collection (VUL coll.):

P. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, Baltimore and London, 1985, pp. 87-102;
Schedule of Classes and Readings

NOTE: In the following schedule ‘prescribed readings’ (both primary and secondary sources) refer to material that students are required to read before each session for class discussion. ‘Recommended readings’ (all of which are available in the Villa Ulivi Library) refer to other material which students are advised to read for further study. The questions listed under each class are intended to help students to reflect on issues which will be discussed in the relevant meetings. Students will also select one of them to write their first two written assignments (first assignment: one of the questions listed under Class 3; second assignment: one of the questions listed under Class 4).

Make sure you always bring in class the primary sources prescribed for the day.

Class 1 - September 7

Recommended readings:
- Feminism and Renaissance Studies, ed. L. Hutson, Oxford, 1999;
Class 2 - September 14

Walking Tour in Town Center: A visual discovery of the Renaissance city.
Meeting Point: 9.00am, main door of the Baptistry, in front of the Cathedral.

Class 3 - September 21

Fathers, Family and Society: Male Strategies for Building Honor

Questions:
In what ways were honour and gender mutually related in Renaissance society?
How was the Renaissance family different from today’s family?
How can we describe the roles that the family had in Renaissance society?
What different kinds of sources can be used to understand Renaissance society and what are the problems of interpreting these sources?

Prescribed Readings:
- Gender and Society, pp. 19-38 (course book);

Primary sources:

Recommended Readings:
- Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence, ed. G. Ciappelli and P. Rubin, Cambridge, 2000;

FIRST WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE - September 24 (Friday!)
Drop your essay in my mailbox in Villa Ulivi by 1 pm!

Class 4 - September 28

Marriage, Dowry and Ideal Wives:
Visit of the Exposition “Virtù d’Amore”, at the Galleria dell’Accademia
Meeting Point: 9.00am, main door of the Galleria dell’Accademia, Via Ricasoli

Questions:
How was women’s status shaped by the law?
Why did Alberti address his advice on ideal wives to men?
How and why did the Florentine government intervene in the dowry mechanism and in the marriage market?
What was the significance of the public rituals which marked a woman’s progress to married life?
Why did wealthy Florentine aristocrats prefer to be married by a notary rather than by a priest?

Prescribed Readings:
- Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna*, chapters 1 and 2 (course book);
- *Gender and Society*, pp. 87-106 (course book);

Primary sources:
- G. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, “The story of Griselda”, tenth day, tenth story (e.v.);

Recommended Readings:

FIELD TRIP – October 1st (Friday!)
Women and Men at the Spa: The Breaking of the Taboo.
Visit to Bagno Vignoni and Pienza.
Meeting Point: 8.00am, Santa Maria Novella Central Train Station, main entrance to the Pharmacy.

Prescribed Readings:
- G. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, “The story of Jancofiore and Salabaetto”, eighth day, tenth story (e.v.);
- D. S. Chambers, ‘Spas in the Italian Renaissance’in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, ed. M. Di Cesare, Binghamton, NY, 1992, pp. 3-27 (VUL r.r.);

Primary sources:
Recommended Reading:

**Class 5 - October 5 - SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE**

*Visit to the Fondazione Horne Museum*

Meeting Point: 9.00am, Piazza Signoria, main entrance to Palazzo Vecchio, next to the David.
See [http://www.museohorne.it](http://www.museohorne.it)

**Prescribed Readings:**

Recommended Reading:
• *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. M. Ajmar-Wollheim, F. Dennis, London
• R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600*, Baltimore and London, 1993;

**Class 6 - October 12**

**Crossing the Boundary: Women Intellectuals**

Questions:
What was the point of an education for women in the Renaissance?
How do you think women felt about the possibility of choosing a life of study?
How would you account for the relationship between female learning and (real or imagined) sexual transgression?
Which of the ideas fostered by intellectual women of the Renaissance were most innovative compared with the common cultural assumptions of the time?

**Prescribed Readings:**

**Primary sources:**

Recommended Readings:
• *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works by and about Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy*, ed. L. King and A. Rabil, Ashville, 1992;
• Moderata Fonte (Modesta dal Pozzo), *The Worth of Women: wherein is clearly revealed their Nobility and their Superiority to Men*, ed. V. Cox, Chicago, 1997;

Class 7 - October 19 – MID TERM EXAM DUE
**Difficult Choices: The Cases of Lusanna and Veronica**

**Questions:**
What were the social and economic obstacles that Lusanna facing, first in her relationship with, and then in her lawsuit against Giovanni?
Why Lusanna got the support of Archbishop Antoninus?

**Prescribed Readings:**
• Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna*, chapters 3, 4 and 5 (*course book*).

Recommended Readings:

**FALL BREAK**

Class 8 – November 2
**Power and Creativity: Widows and Nuns**
*A listening session of Renaissance music will be integral part of this class*

**Questions:**
What level of autonomy was allowed to a Florentine widow?
What was the relevant importance of status, wealth and age in determining the future of a widow?
Why did women have more opportunities to exercise power in principalities than in republics?
Could a life as a nun offer more opportunities than the life as a wife?
In what way the “historically conditioned status of things as ‘works of art’” has determined our understanding of Renaissance women’s creativity?

**Prescribed Readings:**
  
  *Gender and Society*, pp. 213-33 (course book);
- Suor Plautilla Nelli (1523-1588), The First Woman Painter of Florence, ed. J. Nelson, Fiesole, 2000, pp. 57-65 (VUL r.r.);
- N. Tomas, ‘Alfonsina Orsini de’Medici and the “Problem” of a Female Ruler in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence’, *Renaissance Studies*, XIV, 2000, pp. 70-90 (e.v.);

**Primary sources:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Class 9 – November 9**
*Visit to the ex-Nunnery of S. Apollonia and to the Monastery of S. Marco*

**Meeting Point:** 9.00am, Via 27 Aprile no. 1. Bring your Museum card!

**Class 10 – November 16**
*The Hidden Economy: Women and Work*

**Questions:**
Can we interpret women’s work in the Renaissance as an indication of their growing emancipation?
Why was slavery perceived as acceptable in Renaissance society?
How important was women’s work to the Florentine economy and what kinds of obstacles do we encounter in trying to evaluate its real extent?

Prescribed Readings:

Primary sources:

Recommended Readings:
- S. Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity and Human Bondage in Italy*, Ithaca and New York, 2001;
- *Rewriting the Renaissance*, pp. 191-205.

Class 11 – November 23

Visit to the Magi Chapel and to Fondazione Lisio – Arte della Seta
Meeting Point: 9.00am, Via Cavour no. 3.
See http://www.palazzo-medici.it
and
http://www.fondazionelisio.org/

Class 12 – November 30

Witches and Prostitutes

Questions:
Why was homosexuality regarded as less socially desirable than prostitution?
How could witchcraft beliefs coexist with the new emphasis on rationality of the Renaissance age?
Were women or men more vulnerable to prosecution for witchcraft and why?
Why in Florence were only a few women prosecuted for witchcraft?

Prescribed Readings:
- *Gender and Society*, pp. 129-149, 150-170 (*course book*);

Primary sources:
- Brucker, *The Society of Renaissance Florence*, document nos 88, 89, 90, 95, 96 (course book);
- D. Mammoli, *The Record of the Trial and Condemnation of a Witch, Matteuccia di Francesco, at Todi, 20 March 1428*, Roma, 1972, pp. 3-52 (VUL r.r.);

Recommended Readings:
- *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. S. Clark, Houndmills, 2001;

Class 13 – December 7

**Summing up**

**Question:**
Having read Joan Kelly-Gadol’s article and having completed this course, do you think women had a Renaissance?

**Prescribed Reading:**
- J. Kelly-Gadol, ‘Did Women have a Renaissance?’ *Becoming Visible. Women in European History*, ed. R. Bridenthal, C. Koonz and S. Stuard, Boston, etc., 1987, pp. 175-199 (VUL coll.);

Recommended Readings:

December 14

**PRESENTATIONS – FINAL ESSAY DUE**