

ENG 430: Shifting Identities: Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence (in English)

Credits: 3

Instructor: Stefano Baldassarri, Ph.D

Schedule: TBA

Prerequisite: None

(Taught in English)

Course description:

Ever since Jacob Burckhardt's seminal studies, the idea of individualism and, consequently, self-fashioning has been considered crucial to an understanding of the Renaissance. As the Swiss scholar wrote in his famous *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), "In the Middle Ages, man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation — only through some general category. In Italy this veil was first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such."

In recent years such views have been increasingly challenged by a host of scholars approaching the Renaissance from a number of different perspectives: economics, gender studies, political theory, reception theory, and art history — just to name a few. Yet, as William Connell puts it in a recent volume of collected essays devoted to this topic, "To say that the 'modern individual' was discovered during a given period and in a given place sounds like a very strong claim, but perhaps it is worth remembering that the idea did find some support in quite specific Renaissance changes in the way individuals were described and portrayed, and that most of them either involved Florentines or took place in Florence."

In light of this engaging scholarly debate and such an interdisciplinary background, the course will draw on a wide variety of primary sources to investigate the changes that have affected a number of socio-political figures (such as poets, statesmen, merchants, artists, scientists, and the clergy) in late Medieval and early Renaissance Florence. Emphasis will also be put on the shifting role of women (both in regards to their status and education) as well as on the attitude towards minorities — mostly Jews, unorthodox Christians and foreign residents — within the Florentine milieu from the outbreak of humanism (ca. 1350) to the making of the Medici grand duchy (1569).

The course will be taught in English. Likewise, primary sources will be read in English. Questions on the language and the stylistic peculiarities of the original texts, however, will be strongly encouraged.

Course descriptions may be subject to occasional, minor modifications at the discretion of the instructor.

Textbooks:

Readings include, but are not limited to, selections from the following:

Stefano U. Baldassarri and A. Saiber (eds. and trans), *Images of Quattrocento Florence. Selected Writings in Literature, History, and Art* (New Haven-London: Yale UP, 2000).

Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam (London: Penguin Classics, 1995).

Francesco Petrarca, *Selections from the Canzoniere and Other Works*, trans. M. Musa (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985).

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. G. Bull (London: Penguin Classics, 1999).

During orientation at the Institute, students will receive a list of textbooks they are required to purchase. Students should not purchase any texts before orientation.

