

# Women in Medieval and Renaissance Europe

COLT 324 Professor Margaret Rosenthal

Spring 2025, Monday and Wednesday, 12:00-1:50

[mrosenth@usc.edu](mailto:mrosenth@usc.edu)

my office: THH 155D



**Queens, lovers, wives, mothers, courtesan poets, nuns, virgins, princesses, prostitutes:** this course focuses on male and female representations of women, conceptions of the “woman question” in European literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the literary works produced by women. We will consider how a gendered identity was formed in the novellas (short stories), plays, poems, fashion, letters and essays of male and female authors, creating what we may call a social politics of gender. We will also examine how male and female bodies were represented in the visual arts. We will read gender-bending fourteenth-century Italian stories in Giovanni Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* together with enigmatic narrative romance poems by twelfth-century French woman writer, Marie de France. We will compare love poems of Francesco Petrarca and Michelangelo with those by Venetian courtesan, Veronica Franco. Notions of female power and authorship in the speeches and poems of Queen Elizabeth I of England and Anne Bradstreet, a Puritan poet, will be informed by cultural debates surrounding women’s alleged inferiority, education, marriage, authorship, and rule. How women authors in their works responded to changes in the roles of women and the social outlets available to them will be central to our analyses. We will also consider how governments and the Church attempted to regulate forms of sexual and social transgression.