

HIST 233: Renaissance, Reformations, (Revolutions), and Explorations

Grinnell College, Spring 2023

TTh 1:00-2:20 p.m., HSSC N1118

Syllabus subject to change

Assistant Professor Catherine Chobud (ucath@grinnell.edu)

Office Hours: TTh 2:30-3:30 p.m. and by appointment [Sign up here](#)

Course Description

Why is it worth studying the history of early modern Europe in our globalized and multicultural present? It used to be that a course covering this geographic and chronological era would take for granted that several well-defined events had ushered in a rational, secular modernity, first for 'the West' and then for 'the rest' –the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and the beginnings of overseas empire.

As historians began experimenting with new methodologies, the stakes for examining the history of early modern Europe shifted as well. Recasting events of world significance as contingent and contested processes both diminished their distinctiveness and recuperated the agency of a greater variety of participants. These historiographical shifts also had the effect of revealing that Europe's status as the origin point of modernity is less incontrovertible fact than a story developed by both early modern men and women, and contemporary scholars, looking to make sense of a rapidly expanding and more interconnected world. To study early modern Europe in the twenty-first century is to understand why history built around the idea of inevitable progress, led by the West, was so appealing and durable, and why it has been difficult and perhaps undesirable to construct a single cohesive narrative in its place.

This course will be split into four major units (Renaissance, Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the 'Age of Discovery'), each pairing a narrative of progress and definitive breaking from the past with narratives of gradual, contested, and multifaceted change.

Required Books and Readings [available for rental or purchase in both ebook and](#)

hardcopy format

Course Packet

Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Participation 15%

3 x 1200-word response papers (including drafting): 45%

Outline one due 02/2;

Readings and Topics

Week One

Tuesday January 24 – Introduction

Thursday, January 26 – Renaissance Men

1. Jacob Burckhardt, 'The Development of the Individual' and 'The Revival of Antiquity' ('The Humanists'), in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Phaidon Press)

Week Two

Tuesday, January 31 – Renaissance Men

1. Petrarch, 'The Ascent of Mont Ventoux', April 26, 1366, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 36-46

Thursday, February 2 – Humanism and the New Learning

1. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* (selections from the *Divine Comedy* c. 1320, eds. Jean and Robert Hollander (Anchor Books, 2002)

Week Three

Tuesday, February 7 – Humanism and the New Learning

1. Giovanni Boccaccio, selections from *The Decameron* c. 1353, trans. Wayne A Rebhorn (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013)

Thursday, February 9 – Renaissance Women?

1. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Part 1, Chapters 1-11 (New York: Penguin, 1999)

Sunday, February 12 – Outline for Paper #1 due

Week Four

Tuesday, February 14 – Renaissance Women?

1. Merry Wiesner Hanks, 'Do Women Need the Renaissance?' in *Gender and History*, no. 3 (November 2008), p. 539-557

Thursday, February 16 – The Cataclysmic Reformation Lutheranism

1. Andrew Pettegree, "The Changing Face of Reformation History" and Carl Truman, "Luther and the Reformation in Germany", in *Reformation World* (Routledge, 2000)

Week Five

Monday, February 20 – Final draft of Paper #1 due

Tuesday, February 21 – The Cataclysmic Reformation Lutheranism

1.

Week Eight

Tuesday, March 14th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Andreas Vesalius, selections, *On The Fabric of the Human Body* (1543), trans. D.H. Garrison and M.H. Hast (Basel, Switzerland: Karger, 2016)

Thursday, March 16th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Robert Boyle, selections, *New Experiments Physico-Mathematicae* (1660)

Spring Break

Week Nine

Tuesday, April 4th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Margaret Cavendish, selections, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1651), ed. Eileen O'Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Thursday, April 6th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985)

Week Ten

Tuesday, April 11th – A Social History of Early Modern Science

1. Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Chapter 1 'The Great Civility: Trust, Truth, and Moral Order', 4.13

Wednesday, April 12th – Outline for Paper #2 due

Salon Evening TBD in lieu of regular class

Week Eleven

Tuesday, April 18th – The 'Age of Discovery'

Week Twelve

Tuesday, April 25 – Thursday, April 27 – The ‘Age of Discovery’

1. Jose de Acosta, Natural and Moral History of the Indies Jane E. Magan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1590

Thursday, April 27 – The Impact of the ‘New World’ in Europe

1. Anthony Grafton, Introduction and Chapter ‘A New World of Learning’, in New Worlds, Ancient Texts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992)

Friday, April 28 – Scaffolding Assignment #1 for Final Project due

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, May 2 – Special Collections research time

Thursday, May 4 – Special Collections research time

Friday, May 5 – Scaffolding Assignment 2 for Final Project due