

ENGL 231:

Modernity and Early Modernity

Both intellectually and institutionally, our discipline relies on periodization when dealing with history, philosophy, and art, assuming that the historical period wields substantial interpretive or explanatory power. Taking the period as an object of study rather than an enabling fiction, however, “Modernity and Early Modernity” explores the most influential periodizing assumption in the history of Western thought: that “we” became “modern” somewhere between the 14th and 18th centuries. To explore this imagined historical breach, we will probe the “early modern,” an epoch marked by its fraught relationship to the primary intellectual categories through which Western histories are often imagined. Exploring the impossible relationship between the medieval and the modern that “early modernity” posits, we will work not only to identify the character of early modernity but also to identify the various ways that the category forecloses our understanding of the period under consideration. In doing so, we will regularly ask two key questions posed by Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Habitations of Modernity*: “Can the designation of something or some group as *non-* or *premodern* ever be anything but a gesture of the powerful?” What do we do when we characterize those people “whose life practices constantly challenge our ‘modern’ distinctions between the secular and the sacred, between the feudal and the capitalist, between the nonrational and the rational?”

As implied by Chakrabarty’s questions, the character of modernity is often identified in shifting terms that are imagined to map readily onto one another, as if secular, democratic politics, scientific rationalism, and capitalism are necessarily of a piece. Throughout the course, we will consider these terms individually, in relation to one another, and in terms of their presumed relationship to modernity. To facilitate this project, each week will be dedicated to a single key coordinate in the story told about modernity and the early modern. After the first week during which we will discuss the various histories enabled and foreclosed by stories of modernity, we will explore modern political economy at the dawn of capitalism in England, the various forms of political organization supported and challenged by modern forms of republicanism, and the three forms of social organization most often identified with modernity: the metropolis, the Westphalian nation state, and the “Globe of Nations.” After dealing with questions of political and economic organization, we will explore the implications of scientific and geographical exploration in discussions of modernity and early modernity. We will finish with *Hamlet*.

Week 1: Considering Periodization

Eric Hayot, "Against Periodization; or, On Institutional Time"

Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* ("Introduction")

Lee Patterson, "On The Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies"

Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary?"

Alain Badiou, "Search for a Method" from *The Century*

Philip Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300-1700"

Week 2: Capitalism

Anon., *Arden of Faversham*

Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 26 ("The Secret of Primitive Accumulation"), Chapter 27

("Expropriation of the Agricultural Population From the Land"), Chapter 28 ("Bloody Legislation Against the Expropriated"), Chapter 29 ("Genesis of the Capitalist Farmer.")

Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork* (selection)

Ellen Meiksins Wood, *On the Origins of Capitalism* (selection)

Week 3: Politics and Sovereignty

Shakespeare, *Richard II*

Jeff Doty, "Shakespeare's *Richard II*, 'Popularity,' and the Early Modern Public Sphere"

James Phillips, "The Practicalities of the Absolute: Justice and Kingship in Shakespeare's *Richard II*"

Week 4: Politics and Republicanism

Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*

Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (selection)

Kathleen Davis, "The Sense of an Epoch: Secularization, Sovereign Futures, and the 'Middle Ages.'" "

Week 5: Secular Nationalism

Milton, *Samson Agonistes*

Victoria Kahn, "Disappointed Nationalism: Milton in the Context of Seventeenth-Century Debates About the Nation State"

Linda Gregerson, "Milton and the Tragedy of Nations"

Feisal Mohamed, "Samson, The Peacemaker: Enlightened Slaughter in *Samson Agonistes*"

Week 6: Urbanization

Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, Part II*

Jean Howard, *The Theatre of a City* (selection)

Bronwen Wallace and Paul Yachnin, *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, and Forms of Knowledge* (selection)

Week 7: Exploration and the “New World”

Thomas More, *Utopia*

Walter Raleigh, *Discovery* (selection)

Peter Sloterdijk, “Return to Earth,” “Globe Time, World Picture Time,” and “Turn from the East, Entrance into Homogeneous Space” from *In the World Interior of Capital*

Eric Hayot, “Universalism as a Worldview” from *On Literary Worlds*

Ayesha Ramachadran, “Worldmaking and the Project of Modernity” from *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe*

Brent Dawson, “Making Sense of the World: Allegory, Globalization, and *The Faerie Queene*”

Pheng Cheah, “What is a World? On World-Literature as World-Making Activity”

Week 8: Exploration and Science

Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*

Sarah Hogan, “Of Islands and Bridges: Figures of Uneven Development in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*”

Julianne Werlin, “Francis Bacon and the Art of Misinterpretation”

Katherine Bootle Attie, “Selling Science: Bacon, Harvey, and the Commodification of Knowledge.”

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (pp. 1-5)

Week 9: *Hamlet* and Modernity

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Margreta De Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (selection)

Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human* (selection)

Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (selection)

Week 10: Workshopping Final Projects

Week 11: Final Project: Mini Conference