

**History 2159B**  
**Midwives, Madonna, Witches, & Whores: Women in Early Modern Europe**  
**Winter 2027**

Instructor: **Dr. Sara Morrison**

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Office: **Department of History, Stevenson Hall 2124**

Office Hours: **Monday 1:00-2:00; Tuesday 11:00-12:00**

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

**Course Description**

This course provides critical perspectives on the lives of European women 1500 to 1700. Students analyze early modern perceptions, life cycle, individuals, and various roles of women: wife, mother, nun, martyr, midwife, citizen, soldier, worker, property owner, and artist, plus female rulers and regents.

Although Europe did not yet exist in 1500, the world of “Christendom” extended over present-day western and central Europe. During the early modern period, the witch-hunting craze and the reformation is often considered a time of setbacks for women as they lost economic and political power, along with the prestige they had enjoyed during the Middle Ages. The age also produced female rulers: Mary Queen of Scots, Mary Tudor, Elizabeth I in England, Queen Isabella in Castile and Christina of Sweden. Several Queen Mothers stood in as regents for their underage sons in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Catherine de Medici, Marie de Medici and Anne of Austria.

The course explores some of the questions engaging early modern historians studying women in Europe: Did women have a renaissance? Were women inferior or more sinful than men? What was the everyday life for women in different occupations and social groups? How did life cycle influence status? Was life influenced by the reformation and the dissolution of monastic houses in Protestant countries like England? What role did Angela Merici play in the Catholic reformation in sixteenth century Italy? What impact, if any, did a significant cluster of women rulers and regents have in early modern Europe? These are just some of the questions to be addressed in a thematic analysis of the recent historical literature concerned with early modern women, which explores contemporary perceptions and the reality of their everyday lives.

**Anti-requisite(s):** History 2459F/G

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## Course Syllabus

Through class lectures, readings, films, oral or written discussions, students will consider the role of women in early modern Europe. Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Think historically about women, understanding contemporary perceptions and the reality of their everyday lives in early modern Europe.
2. Learn basic content, themes and important events 1500-1700 (the renaissance, reformation, scientific revolution and the enlightenment) and the role women played in these events in the social, economic, religious, cultural, political and military history of Europe.
3. Critically read, summarize, and analyze secondary sources.
4. Understand that historians have biases or perspectives — a product of their life experiences and the times in which they lived and wrote.
5. Understand how things change over time and recognize that the past may be interpreted from different perspectives.

Students are encouraged to attend lectures so they can ask questions and engage more fully with the world inhabited by early modern women. Compared with today, the rules of behaviour, and standards were very different for women 1500-1700. Europe also looked very different; some countries we recognize today were not yet formed. To provide a mental map of Europe c. 1500, students will write a short map quiz. Students will also write a midterm & final exam based on lectures, readings, discussions, and in-class activities.

### Methods of Evaluation

Students must complete two exams to pass this course:

Map Quiz	10%	26 Jan 2027	In-Class
Attendance & Participation	10%	Ongoing	Class Discussions
Mid-term exam	40%	9 Feb 2027	In-Class
Final exam	40%	Date & Locations:	TBA - Final Exam Period

Students take **two exams**: one two-hour in-class mid-term during class time on Tuesday 9 February 2027, and a three-hour final exam, to be scheduled during the Final Exam Period by the Registrar's Office. Both exams will feature a selection of short written answer questions and a choice of essay questions (one essay for the midterm and two essays for the final).

Please note that the midterm examination is a **designated assessment**, meaning that supporting documentation will be required for any academic consideration.

### Accommodation for Missed Exams:

Students seeking **academic accommodation or consideration** regarding the **mid-term or final exam** must contact their **home Academic Advisory office** and provide formal supporting

documentation. The History Department will set the re-sit date and times for missed exams, only if academic accommodation is granted.

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Advising. Please see [https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

**Absences** There is a small attendance/participation mark in this course to encourage student engagement. Repeated absences will adversely impact your grade. You must attend at least **eight** out of twelve meetings in order to pass this course, regardless of grades received for other assignments. Please contact me if you are experiencing difficulty attending class.

*Course-specific conditions required to pass course:*

- You must complete all course assignments in order to pass this course.
- Electronic devices of any kind (e.g., phones) are not permitted to be carried, or near to the student during exams. No video or audio recording permitted in class.

### **Course Preparation Advice**

*In preparation for students to do well in this course: before attending class lectures, read over the assigned text (a paper copy in the library and available for purchase) and other readings (freely available on Weldon's Course Readings site for History 2158B); use the opportunity to take part in class discussions and in-class exercises; also think about questions raised during the lectures within the wider context. Attendance and participation are important to success, and provide opportunities to ask questions. Students attending weekly lectures and discussions are better prepared for the evaluations; note students are responsible for signing the weekly class sheet, which helps me to learn your names. If you miss a class, you are responsible for accessing any notes related to missed classes; if you require further clarification, I am happy to answer questions after class and during office hours.*

### **Course Materials**

Merry Wiesner Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. **Paper copy in Weldon library.** [About 45.00]  
N.Z. Davis, *Women on the Margins. Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (1997) **Free online copy** in Weldon Library.

**All additional materials consisting of book chapters, articles, and illustrations will be available on the course website or through the Western Libraries Course Readings for History 2159B.** Weekly Reading List will be found on the final version of the syllabus on the OWL Brightspace course website, prior to the beginning of classes

Second hand copies of textbook are widely available; if you wish to purchase copies from Western bookstore: students will also be able to see this information on their Personal Textbook list [Dellelce Family Bookstore - Western University | Dellelce Family Bookstore - Western University](#)

### Course Schedule and Readings

5 Jan	<b>Introduction to Women and Gender 1500-1700; Europe in 1500</b> Wiesner Hanks (WH) Introduction; Map of Europe c. 1453)
12 Jan	<b>Ideas about Women</b> (WH Ch. 1)
19 Jan	<b>The Body: The Female Life Cycle</b> (WH Ch. 2)
26 Jan	<b>Working Women: Rural &amp; Urban Economy:</b> (WH Ch 3) <b>Map Quiz 10%</b>
2 Feb	<b>The Early Modern Midwife</b> In class discussion (Weldon Readings)
9 Feb	<b>Mid-term (40%)</b>
16 Feb	<b>Reading Week</b>
23 Feb	<b>Students &amp; Scholars</b> (WH Ch 4) <i>On the Margins</i> : Marie of the Incarnation
2 March	<b>Exceptional Women: Artists, Scientists and Writers</b> (WH Ch 5) <i>On the Margins</i> : Maria Sibylla Merian.
9 March	<b>Women &amp; Popular Religion in Christendom</b> Catholicism (medieval & reformed); Protestantism (mainstream to radical) (WH Ch 6: 201-243) <i>On the Margins</i> : Marie of the Incarnation
16 March	<b>The Other”’: Heretics, Jews, Muslims &amp; Witches</b> Jewish & Muslim Women’s Life, (WH Ch 6: 243-251) Witchcraft (WH Ch 7) <i>On the Margins</i> : Gluckl of Hameln
23 March	<b>Queenship &amp; Power: Female Rulers in Europe 1450-1700</b>
30 March	<b>Women on the Margins</b>
6 April	<b>Summary and Review</b>
	<b>Final Exam period (40%)</b>

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**Additional Statements**

**Communication policies:** The best way to contact me is by email, after class or during office hours. Please write using your UWO email account as it is less likely to end up in spam. If my office hours do not fit your schedule, I am happy to talk after class or try to arrange an alternative time to meet. Office hours are useful to clarify any issues concerning the course but are also an opportunity for further discussion.

**Classroom behavior:** Please turn off your phone and use laptops for notetaking only.

**Use of electronic devices:** Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions. No electronic devices are permitted during tests and examinations.

**Copyright and Intellectual Property:** PowerPoint lecture slides and notes are typically the intellectual property of the instructor. Unauthorized reproduction through audio-recording, video-recording, photographing, sharing on social media, or posting on course-sharing websites is an infringement of copyright, and is prohibited.

**Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI):**

You may **not** make any use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course. Any use of such tools for assignments in this course may be considered a form of academic misconduct.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: [https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.