

**HOS 903**  
**Early Modern Scientific Genres**  
 Fall 2008  
 5:30-7:30 W  
 7130 Social Science

instructor: Florence Hsia  
 office: 7137 Social Science  
 office hours: 12:30-2:30pm Wednesday & by appt.  
 phone: 262-3971  
 email: [fhsia@wisc.edu](mailto:fhsia@wisc.edu)

*course summary*

Textual evidence of scientific practice and thought comes in many different forms. This seminar will look at a wide variety of scientific writing in the early modern period in order to explore the continuity of medieval scientific genres as well as the rise of new scientific genres as part of the historical movement we call the Scientific Revolution. Readings will include primary sources, some genre theory, and recent secondary literature.

*course requirements*

(a) You'll be asked to take turns leading discussion of assigned readings (the number of these will depend on the number of seminar participants). A typed summary/critique/reaction (1 page in length) should accompany your discussion.

(b) You'll present your independent work-in-progress to the seminar in the latter part of the course: **Nov. 5, Nov. 19, Dec. 3, Dec. 10**. This may take the form of a set of readings that you select for group discussion, or a draft of your seminar paper. Be sure to distribute your readings or draft to seminar participants at least a week in advance of your presentation.

(c) You should complete 15-20 pages of prose writing in connection with this course – ideally a research paper which relates to the themes of this course, analyses two or more primary sources, and makes use of some conceptual and/or methodological insight gained through the readings. Such a paper may involve comparison of early modern materials with materials from your own period of interest. Other possibilities include a critical discussion of some historiographical issue in the secondary literature; two or more book reviews (situating the book with respect to existing scholarship and critiquing the author's use of source material); or a bibliographic survey in preparation for a prelim field. Please see me as early as you can in the semester to discuss how you propose to fulfill the writing requirement.

Grading will be based on class participation (25%), in-class presentation (~25%), and your written work (~50%). A prospectus and preliminary bibliography for your written work is due **Nov. 19**. All of your written work is due on **Wednesday, Dec. 17**.

Sept. 3    **introduction**

Sept. 10    **sylva or commonplace book?**

Francis Bacon, *Sylva sylvarum* (London, 1627), selections

Ralph Austen, *Observations upon some part of Sr Francis Bacon's Naturall history* (Oxford, 1658)

Graham Rees, "An unpublished manuscript by Francis Bacon: *Sylva Sylvarum* drafts

- and other working notes," *Annals of Science* 38, no. 4 (1981): 377-412
- Frans De Bruyn, "The classical silva and the generic development of scientific writing in seventeenth-century England," *New literary history* 32, no. 2 (2001): 347-73
- Ann Blair, "Humanist methods in natural philosophy: the commonplace book," *Journal of the history of ideas* 53, no. 4 (1992): 541-51

Sept. 17 **'heads' and 'queries'**

- Robert Boyle, *Robert Boyle's "heads" and "inquiries"*, ed. by Michael Hunter (London, 2005)
- Robert Plot, *Quær's to be propounded to the most ingenious of each county in my travels through England* [Oxford], 1674
- Robert Plot, *The natural history of Oxford-shire, being an essay toward the natural history of England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 1705), selections
- Michael Hunter, "Robert Boyle and the early Royal Society: a reciprocal exchange in the making of Baconian science," *British journal for the history of science* 40 (2007): 1-23
- Harriet Knight and Michael Hunter, "Robert Boyle's Memoirs for the natural history of human blood (1684): print, manuscript and the impact of Baconianism in seventeenth-century medical science," *Medical history* 51, no. 2 (2007): 145-64
- Vladimir Jankovic, "The place of nature and the nature of place: the chorographic challenge to the history of British provincial science," *History of science* 38 (2000): 79-113

Sept. 24 **the experimental essay**

- Robert Boyle, "Advertisement to the reader" [1661] and "A proemial essay," in *Certain physiological essays and other tracts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1669)
- Scott Black, "Boyle's essay: genre and the making of early modern knowledge," in *Making knowledge in early modern Europe*, ed. by Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt (Chicago, 2007), 178-95, 320-25
- Maurizio Gotti, "The experimental essay in early modern English," *European journal of English studies* 5, no. 2 (2001): 221-39

Oct. 1 **the scientific article**

- Philosophical transactions*, preface, vol. 1 (1665-1666) and March 1665 number
- Alan G. Gross, Joseph Harmon, and Michael Reidy, *Communicating science: the scientific article from the 17th century to the present* (Oxford, 2002), 1-67
- Frederic L. Holmes, "Argument and narrative in scientific writing," in *The literary structure of scientific argument*, ed. by Peter Dear (Philadelphia, 1991), 164-81

Oct. 8 **the scientific journal**

- Philosophical transactions* 26 (1708-1709), selections
- Useful transactions in philosophy, and other sorts of learning* (March-April 1709)
- Adrian Johns, "Miscellaneous methods: authors, societies and journals in early modern England," *British journal for the history of science* 33 (2000): 159-86
- T. Christopher Bond, "Keeping up with the latest transactions: the literary critique of

scientific writing in the Hans Sloane years," *Eighteenth-century life* 22, no. 2 (1998): 1-17

Oct. 15 **the dialogue**

Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Conversations on the plurality of worlds*, trans. by H.A. Hargreaves (Berkeley, 1990), selections

Aphra Behn, "The translator's preface," *A discovery of new worlds* (London, 1688)

Mary Terrall, "Gendered spaces, gendered audiences: inside and outside the Paris Academy of Sciences," *Configurations* 3 (1995): 207-32

J. B. Shank, "Neither natural philosophy, nor science, nor literature - gender, writing, and the pursuit of nature in Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes habités*," in *Men, women, and the birthing of modern science*, ed. by Judith P. Zinsser (DeKalb, 2005), 86-110

Lisa Anscomb, "'As far as a woman's reasoning can go': scientific dialogue and exploitation," *History of European ideas* 31, no. 2 (2005): 193-208

Oct. 22 **the scientific voyage**

Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, *The figure of the earth, determined from observations made by order of the French King, at the polar circle* (London, 1738), selections.

Mary Terrall, "Heroic narratives of quest and discovery," *Configurations* 6, no. 2 (1998): 223-42

Neil Safier, "Unveiling the Amazon to European science and society: the reading and reception of La Condamine's *Relation abrégée d'un voyage fait dans l'intérieur de l'Amérique méridionale* (1745)," *Terrae incognitae* 33 (2001): 33-47.

Oct. 29 **voyage or utopia?**

Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis: a work unfinished* (London, 1627)

Margaret Cavendish, *The description of a new world, called the blazing-world* (London, 1666), selections

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's travels into several remote nations of the world* (London, 1726), selections

Nov. 5 **presentations**

Nov. 12 no class meeting – paper prospectus and preliminary bibliography due Nov. 19

Nov. 19 **presentations**

Nov. 26 THANKSGIVING (no class meeting)

Dec. 3 **presentations**

Dec. 10 **presentations**

Dec. 17 written work due