

RLST 370 Medieval Women Mystics Fall 2016

Paul Dietrich

Class information and Contact information:

- Office: LA 150 MWF 2:00-2:50
- Phone: 243-2805
- Social Science 344
- Hours: MWF 3-4 & by appointment
- 3 credits

A survey of significant women writers from late antiquity to the renaissance with a close reading of major works by several of the most important of the medieval women mystics. Topics to be considered include:

- methodological issues in the study of mysticism;
- medieval Frauenmystik (mystical women) and attitudes toward asceticism, gender roles, power and authority, doctrine and ritual;
- the role of intentional communities in the formation, education and literacy of medieval women;
- the epistemological status of visionary and ecstatic experience;
- perceptions of the body, desire, eroticism, pain, suffering, and illness;
- genres of mystical literature, e.g., vision accounts, sermons, letters, treatises, autohagiography, poetry;
- the politics of dissent, persecution, and heresy;
- Passion mysticism, affectivity, apophaticism and the via negativa;
- material culture – architecture, music, liturgy, the structure of the cloister.

“This is the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly.” Luce Irigaray

Required Reading:

- Petroff, Elizabeth A., ed., Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature (Oxford)
- Gertrude the Great of Helfta, Spiritual Exercises, (Cistercian)
- Mechthild of Magdeburg, The Flowing Light of the Godhead (Paulist)
- Marguerite Porete, The Mirror of Simple Souls (Paulist)
- Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love (Penguin)
- Selected handouts and Moodle readings

Course Syllabus:

8/29,31,9/2 Introduction. Medieval Women, the Visionary Tradition and the Discourse of Mysticism (Petroff, Introduction)

9/5 Labor Day – no class

9/7,9 From Early Christian Martyrs to the *Mulieres Sanctae* (Holy Women) of the Dark Ages – St. Perpetua to Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (Petroff, cc.1,2)

9/12,14,16 Visionaries, Healers, and Recluses in the Twelfth Century - Christina of Markyate, St. Elisabeth of Schonau, and Hildegard of Bingen (Petroff, c.3)

9/19,21,23 Spiritual Exercises and the (Mystical) Pilgrimage of Monastic Life – St. Gertrude the Great of Helfta (*Spiritual Exercises*)

9/26,28,30 Eros, Transgression and Desire – Beginning the Beguines - Marie d'Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, Hadewijch, Beatrijs of Nazareth (Petroff, c.4)

10/3,5,7,10,12, The Hunt for Love, Lady Pain, and the *Jubilus* in Mechthild of Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (Petroff, c.5; MM)

10/14 Midterm exam

10/17,19 Troubadours and Reformers in Medieval Italy - St. Clare, St. Agnes of Assisi, St. Umilta, Angela of Foligno, St. Catherine of Siena (Petroff, c.6)

10/21,24 Heresy and Holiness in Early Fourteenth Century France - Na Prous Boneta, Marguerite d'Oingt, Marguerite Porete (Petroff, c.7; MP)

10/26,28,31 Apophasis, Annihilation, and Living Without a Why in Marguerite's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*

11/2,4,7 Vision, Exegesis and Theology in the Later Middle Ages - Julian of Norwich (Petroff, c.8)

11/11 Veterans Day – no class

11/14,16,18,21 Passion Mysticism and the Motherhood of God in Julian's *Revelation of Divine Love*

11/23-25 Thanksgiving travel day and break

11/28,39,12/2 Pilgrims and Autohagiography in the Later Middle Ages - Authority, Pilgrimage and “Hysterical Compassion” in Margery Kempe (Petroff, c.8)

12/5,7,9 Memoir, Devotional Verse and Debate in Dona Leonor de Cordoba and Christine de Pisan (Petroff, c.8)

12/12 Conclusion and final exam review

12/15 Final exam (Thursday, 1-3)

Course Requirements

1. Timely completion of assigned reading, class attendance and participation in class discussion (30%). Attendance and participation are crucial. Three absences or persistent tardiness will lower your grade one letter. Six unexcused absences will result in failure of the course. You will be asked to bring discussion questions to class.
2. Midterm exam (10/14) and final exam (Thurs.,1-3,12/15). (35% each toward final grade).
3. Optional research paper (12-15 pages) on approved topic in lieu of final exam. Proposal should be submitted by Friday, 10/21.

No extensions on written assignments. Evidence of plagiarism will result in failure of the course.