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### RLST 370.01: Mysticism - Medieval Women Mystics

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#### Recommended Citation

Dietrich, Paul A. and Jones Lofink, Laura A., "RLST 370.01: Mysticism - Medieval Women Mystics" (2014).  
*Syllabi*. 878.

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## RLST 370 Medieval Women Mystics

Paul A. Dietrich  
Office: LA 150  
Phone: 243-2805  
Hours: MWF 11-12 & by appointment

Spring, 2014  
TTh 12:40-2:00  
Education 312  
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)  
Hildegard of Bingen, Selected Writings (Penguin)  
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)  
Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe (Norton)

### Course Syllabus

1/28 Introduction. Medieval Women, the Visionary Tradition and the Discourse of Mysticism (Petroff, Introduction)

1/30 From Early Christian Martyrs to the *Mulieres Sanctae* (Holy Women) of the Dark Ages – St. Perpetua to Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (Petroff, cc.1,2)

2/4,6 Visionaries, Healers, and Recluses in the Twelfth Century - Christina of Markyate, St. Elisabeth of Schonau, and Hildegard of Bingen (Petroff, c.3; Hildegard, *Selected Writings*)

2/11,13 Art, Allegory, Music, and Authority in Hildegard – “Sibyl of the Rhine” and “Teutonic Prophetess” (*Selected Writings*)

2/18,20 Spiritual Exercises and the (Mystical) Pilgrimage of Monastic Life – St. Gertrude the Great of Helfta (*Spiritual Exercises*)

2/25,27 Eros, Transgression and Desire – Beginning the Beguines - Marie d’Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, Hadewijch, Beatrijs of Nazareth (Petroff, c.4)

3/4,6,11,13 The Hunt for Love, Lady Pain, and the *Jubilus* in Mechthild of Magdeburg’s *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (Petroff, c.5; MM)

3/18 Midterm exam

3/20 Troubadours and Reformers in Medieval Italy - St. Clare, St. Agnes of Assisi, St. Umilta, Angela of Foligno, St. Catherine of Siena (Petroff, c.6)

3/25,27 Heresy and Holiness in Early Fourteenth Century France - Na Prous Boneta, Marguerite d’Oingt, Marguerite Porete (Petroff, c.7; MP)

3/31-4/4 Spring break

4/8, 10 Living Without a Why in Marguerite’s *The Mirror of Simple Souls*  
4/15,17

4/22,24 Visionaries, Pilgrims, and Poets in the Later Middle Ages - Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Dona Leonor L. de Cordoba, Christine de Pisan (Petroff, c.8; JN; MK)

4/29,5/1 Passion Mysticism and the Motherhood of God in Julian’s *Revelation of Divine Love*

5/6,8 Authority, Pilgrimage and “Hysterical Compassion” in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

5/13 Final exam (Tuesday, 8-10)

### 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 (3/20) and final exam (Tues. 8-10, 5/13). (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 Thursday, 3/27.

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