ECSTASY:
MYSTICAL, VISIONARY, AND HOLY WOMEN AND THEIR WRITINGS
IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE, CA. 1000-1400

Mr. Laurence J. Bond
Department of History | Johns Hopkins University
Fall 2022 | Tuesday and Thursday, 9:00-10:15 am
Office Hours: Thursday, 10:30 am-12:00 pm – or by appointment
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Syllabus

Course Overview

In this course, we will use the writings of medieval women to explore their social and religious worlds. The course orients visionary writing within the broader narrative of religious movements from the twelfth through the fourteenth century. The religious history of the Middle Ages is often told from the perspective of canon law, politics, and high theology—realms that necessarily excluded women. This course will center the writings of visionary women in the historical narrative. We will read our texts to identify how medieval women expressed their spiritual and devotional distinctiveness in their writings. How did they assert and subvert authority? And, how do these texts challenge the historical narrative of medieval religious change? This course will consider the place of gender and power in a medieval religious and institutional context—reading these women against the “canonical” authorities of the Middle Ages. We will read a variety of sources, texts left to us by our visionary women themselves: “visions”, narratives, letters, and other “literary” works. We will also read texts written about these women: hagiographies, inquisitorial records. In these selections we will encounter the unfamiliar and—to the modern reader—perhaps the bizarre. Yet, these sources are a window into the lives and devotions of those who are often absent from the historical narrative. We will divide our meetings between a secondary source/historiographical overview followed by an in-class primary source analysis where we will apply and test the reading against our texts. The course will culminate in a 10-12 pp. research paper.
Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, a student will have the tools to:
❖ Critically analyze a generically diverse body of primary texts.
❖ Summarize and evaluate scholarly arguments.
❖ Develop the written and verbal skills necessary to formulate clear and persuasive arguments.
❖ Formulate an original research question and produce an essay-length research paper according to the conventions of historical scholarship.

Required Texts

The following texts are available via the JHU Libraries, Borrow Direct, and Interlibrary Loan. They are also available for purchase:


I will make available all other texts online via Canvas, E-reserves, or online sourcebooks.

Useful references


Evaluation

40% Participation (including discussion leadership)
10% Research question meeting, Oct 4 & 6
15% Research proposal and annotated bibliography, submission due Oct 23
5% Paper draft presentation, submission due Dec 4
30% Final research paper, due Dec 22

Assignments

Weekly Participation

Class discussion is the heart of this course. Completion of weekly readings, therefore, is the key to successful participation. You are expected to have completed all weekly readings prior to class, to bring questions, comments, and to respond to your classmates’ contributions. Each week I ask that you post a brief (ca. 250 words) response to the readings focusing your thoughts on themes, keywords, and connections to other weeks’ readings. On our first day, each student will sign up as discussion leader for a specific week’s readings. As discussion leader you are responsible for introducing the week’s readings, engaging your classmates’ Canvas responses, and for preparing 2-3 discussion questions to begin our conversation.

Research proposal and annotated bibliography

The research paper will begin officially in the sixth week when we will meet as a class and individually to discuss your idea. I do, however, encourage you to begin thinking about this early. The research proposal and annotated bibliography are the first step toward your final research paper. Beginning work early is the best way execute a coherent, well thought out, paper. The research topic is of your choosing but should be linked to the themes of the course. Once you have some idea for a topic you will make a preliminary research in the library to what secondary sources are available on your subject. Most importantly, you will use these sources to determine if there is a primary text which you can use as the basis of your paper. You will write a 2-3 pp proposal outlining your topic and orient it historiographically. You will also include an annotated bibliography (with no less than 10 secondary sources) with your proposal. We will then
review your proposal together and I will offer advice on revisions as necessary. One week will be devoted to these meetings.

**Paper draft presentation**
One week of classes will be devoted to a presentation of your work to the class. We will engage critically with your work, offering feedback and constructive questions.

**Research paper**
Your research will culminate in a 10-12 pp. paper. This paper will demonstrate a familiarity with the conventions of academic historical writing. A strong paper will engage with the scholarship of your topic (literature review) and will offer a clearly articulated argument.

**Attendance**
Our course is based on reading challenging texts and the discussion thereof. Regular attendance is therefore of the utmost importance. Excused absences (including serious illness, religious observance, athletic team event, or family emergency) will be granted but you must notify me in advance. More than two absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.

**Academic Integrity**
Undergraduate students enrolled in the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences or the Whiting School of Engineering at the Johns Hopkins University assume a duty to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the University’s mission as an institution of higher learning. Students are obliged to refrain from acts which they know, or under circumstances have reason to know, violate the academic integrity of the University. Violations of academic ethics include, but are not limited to: cheating; plagiarism of another student’s or another scholar’s work; submitting the same or substantially similar work to satisfy the requirements of more than one course without permission; failure to cite sources adequately. See the guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” and the Ethics Board Web site for more information: [http://catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB](http://catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB).

**Accommodations**
Johns Hopkins University values diversity and inclusion. We are committed to providing welcoming, equitable, and accessible educational experiences for all students. Students with disabilities (including those with psychological conditions, medical conditions and temporary disabilities) can request accommodations for this course by providing an Accommodation Letter issued by Student Disability Services (SDS). Please request accommodations for this course as early as possible to provide time for effective communication and arrangements. For further information or to start the process of requesting accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services at Homewood Campus, Shaffer Hall #101, call: 410-516-4720 and email: studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu or visit the website [https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities/](https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities/).

**Communication**
E-mail is my preferred—and the most expedient—way for you to contact me. It is important that you communicate with me regarding any question or issue that you may have. Many of the concepts and materials we will be discussing will be new and unfamiliar to you. Therefore, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am happy to meet with you during my office hours or to schedule another convenient time.

**Content Warning**
It is important to note that in this course we will confront difficult ideas, images, and words. Our work will involve delicate and challenging discussions about topics such as sexism, violence, sexual violence, and criticism of religious groups/beliefs. At times it will also involve viewing, reading, or hearing graphic descriptions of sex and violence, and reading texts that express offensive words and views. We will study and talk about these topics and views in order to understand their historical context and consequences—never to endorse them. I will speak about them and facilitate our study with great sensitivity towards their potentially harmful impact, and to give all students room to develop and express their own ideas in a respectful manner. I expect that you all will embrace those same commitments in our work together. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with material we’re studying or are having difficulty adhering to these commitments, please speak to me individually.
Additionally, it is the expectation that students will not only be sensitive to the religion and beliefs of people in the past but will also understand that modern belief systems and medieval belief systems are not the same. In order to understand the religious history of the Middle Ages, it is imperative that we examine medieval religion(s) on its (their) own terms and abandon modern religious views (especially Christianity) as categories of analysis.

Weekly Schedule of Readings and Assignments

| O=online access through JHU libraries | C=Canvas | E=E-reserves |

**Week 1: Introduction and Background to the Middle Ages and Medieval Mysticism (I)**

**30 Aug**

Introduction to the course, the syllabus, and to each other.

Podcast and reading discussion:


The London Review of Books Podcast, *Encounters with Medieval Women: Repentant Sinner*

[https://open.spotify.com/episode/54iPMcVnW0m7ird7nkCp?si=2a6ae4a1735c4d68](https://open.spotify.com/episode/54iPMcVnW0m7ird7nkCp?si=2a6ae4a1735c4d68)
or

[https://www.lrb.co.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts/close-readings/encounters-with-medieval-women-repentant-sinner](https://www.lrb.co.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts/close-readings/encounters-with-medieval-women-repentant-sinner)

**1 Sept**


Walter Simons, “New Forms of Religious Life in Medieval Western Europe,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian*

**Primary source practicum: Analysis, text and context:**
Carolingian and twelfth-century images
http://expositions.bnf.fr/carloingiens/grand/018_3.htm
Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome,
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/468218?when=A.D.+1000-1400&amp;where=Europe&amp;r=crucifixion&amp;offset=40&amp;rpp=40&amp;pos=68
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471904?when=A.D.+1000-1400&amp;where=Europe&amp;r=crucifixion&amp;offset=0&amp;rpp=40&amp;pos=2

Texts

Week 2: Introduction and Background to the Middle Ages and Medieval Mysticism (II)

**Sept 6**

**Primary:**

**Sept 8**

Writing Practicum? How to make an argument.
TBD

Week 3: Monastic Virginity and the Bride, the Twelfth Century

**Sept 13**

**Primary:**
Song of Solomon, ESV. Selections.

**Sept 15**


**Primary:**


**Week 4: Clerical Collaboration and Reform, the Twelfth Century**

**Sept 20**


**Primary:**


**Sept 22**


**Writing practicum:**

**Week 5: Lateran IV, New Orders, the Thirteenth Century**

**Sept 27**


**Optional:**


**Primary:**


**Agnes of Harcourt TBD**

**Sept 29**


**Primary:**

**Week 6: Preliminary Research Meeting**

Come prepared with an idea for your research paper. Meet with me individually to discuss.

**Oct 4**

**Oct 6**

**Week 7: Lateran IV, the Eucharist, the Thirteenth Century**

**Oct 11**


**Primary:**


Revisit relevant sections.


**Oct 13**


**Primary source practicum: Analysis, text and context:**


**Week 8: Institutionalization, the Thirteenth Century**

**Oct 18**


**Primary:**


**Oct 20**


**Primary:**


**Week 9: Research Proposals and Annotated Bibliographies**
Please add yourself to the schedule to meet with me this week.

**Oct 25**

**Oct 27**

**Week 10: Sanctity and Inquisition, the Fourteenth Century**

**Nov 1**

**Primary:**
Catherine of Siena

**Nov 3**

**Primary:**

**Week 11: Inquisition and Heresy, the Fourteenth Century (I)**

**Nov 8**

**Primary:**
Inquisition activity

https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/heresy2.asp

**Nov 10**

**Primary:**

**Week 12: Inquisition and Heresy, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century (II)**

**Nov 15**
Julian secondary sources? Minnis? Watson?

*Primary:*

**Nov 17**


Margery secondary Minnis?

*Primary:*


**Week 13: Fall recess. Enjoy!**

**Week 12: Medieval Art Practicum and Walters Museum Visit**

**Nov 29**
Art

**Dec 1**
Walters Museum visit. Meet on St. Paul Street outside Barnes & Noble at the Hopkins shuttle stop.

**Week 14: Presentations**

*Presentations. Please sign up for a day to present.*

**Dec 6**

**Dec 8**

**Week 15: Medieval Afterlives and Class Reflections**

**Dec 13**
*Women of the Book: Catherine of Siena and Theresa of Avila*


We will discuss what we have learned and conclude with our reflections on medieval historiography and the place of visionary women in that narrative.

Dec 15
Visit the “Women of the Book” collection with Dr. Earle Havens. Meet outside the Peabody Library.

**Final Papers due December 22 by midnight**