

Professor Anne Schuurman  
Winter 2017  
Wednesdays 9:30-12:30  
Somerville House 2348

**English 9146B:**  
**Saints and Heretics: Mysticism, Gender, and the Legitimacy of the Middle Ages**

In their 2010 book *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages*, Andrew Cole and Vance Smith argue “not only that [...] medieval modes are sustained within modernity, but also that no theory of modernity can be complete or legitimate without a constant reckoning with ‘the medieval.’” This course explores medieval mysticism as a key mode that is sustained within modernity. In particular, we will consider the role of affective, visionary, and ecstatic forms of mysticism in the development of modern feminist and materialist thought, exploring the debts of such thinkers as Georges Bataille and Luce Irigaray to the radical philosophies, mystical theologies, and visionary literature produced by medieval women. Why have certain streams of Christian affective piety, especially those associated with women and women's bodily experiences, proven so useful in the formation of avowedly secular, post-Christian philosophies? Can we espouse mysticism without metaphysics? What happens when we forget the historical contexts in which medieval women wrote about their visions and experiences? Readings will include texts by Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Teresa of Ávila, Simone Weil, Georges Bataille, Luce Irigaray, and Graham Harman, among others.

**Texts:**

In addition to readings scanned and copied for students, the following books are required and available in the university book store:

Porete, Marguerite. *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Ed. Colledge, Grant, and Marler. U of Notre Dame Press, 1999.

*The Writings of Julian of Norwich*. Ed. Watson and Jenkins. Penn State University Press, 2005.

*The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself*. Trans. Cohen. Penguin Classics, 1957.

Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. Trans. Crawford and von der Ruhr. Routledge, 1947, 2002.

## **Work:**

All written work must be submitted both in hard copy in class **and** in electronic format (Word or RTF). I may use plagiarism-checking software.

- Weekly response papers (5 over the term x 4% = 20% of course grade)

You must submit **five** short response papers (750 words max) in which you discuss and analyze a key idea or passage in the reading assigned for the week; do not summarize or generalize. Your papers must be submitted electronically (in Word or RTF by email attachment) to me by Tuesday at 12:00 pm of each week. Do not submit a response paper in the week that you are giving your presentation.

- Oral presentation (20%)

You are required to give a 20-minute presentation on one of the assigned readings. You must analyze the text under consideration, not summarize it, and present a thesis about its meaning and significance. The aim of your lecture is to open up class discussion. You will be evaluated on the content of your ideas, the clarity of your presentation, and your efficacy in leading discussion. You must also submit a 5-6 page write-up of your presentation on the day you give your lecture.

- Oral participation and designated response to one presentation (15%)

You will be expected to participate actively in every seminar by coming to class having read the assigned texts, by asking thoughtful questions and contributing to the class discussion. You will also be assigned the role of designated respondent for another student's oral presentation. As respondent, you may ask for clarification, formulate questions for discussion, or present counterpoints to the presenter's thesis.

- Research Essay (45%)

Your research essay must be between 15 and 20 pages in length. You may choose any topic or approach relevant to the course material. Use MLA or Chicago style for formatting and documentation.

## **Course Policies**

No laptops or electronic devices in class. Be sure to bring print copies of the assigned readings.

Absences are inexcusable except in extenuating circumstances.

On plagiarism:

The Senate of the University of Western Ontario writes:

“Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. **Plagiarism is a major academic offense.**”

See the Scholastic Offence Policy in Western Academic Calendar:

[http://uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

On mental health:

Students who are in emotional or mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

## **Class Schedule**

### **Jan 11: Introductions**

#### **Jan 18: Basic concepts.**

Plato, “Speech of Diotima” (from *Symposium*, 201D-212A); from *Phaedrus* (Socrates’ second speech, 243E-257B); “Allegory of the Cave” (from *Republic*, book 7, 514A-518B).

Bernard McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, pp. 108-182.

#### **Jan 25: Basic concepts.**

*The Wooing of Our Lord.*

Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love*, chapters 1-43.

Luce Irigaray, “La Mystérique” (from *Speculum of the Other Woman*).

#### **Feb 1: Love and belief.**

Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation*, chapters 44-86.

Luce Irigaray, “Divine Women” (from *Sexes and Genealogies*).

#### **Feb 8: Love and belief.**

Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself*.

Luce Irigaray, “Belief Itself” (from *Sexes and Genealogies*).

#### **Feb 15: Ontology and Annihilation.**

Marguerite Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*.

(Reading Week)

#### **Mar 1: Ontology and Annihilation.**

Meister Eckhart, *Commentary on Genesis*.

Levi R. Bryant, from *The Democracy of Objects*.

**Mar 8: Sacred and Profane.**

Margery Kempe, from *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

Georges Bataille, from *Guilty*.

**Mar 15: Sacred and Profane.**

Angela of Foligno, from *The Book of the Blessed Angela of Foligno*.

Georges Bataille, from *Inner Experience*.

**Mar 22: Affliction and Ethics**

Simone Weil, *Grace and Gravity*.

**Mar 29: Affliction and Ethics.**

Simone Weil, from *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*.

**Apr 5: Course Conclusion.**