

# *Daughters of Eve or Sisters of Mary?: Women in the Middle Ages*

## **Course Information:**

History 310-01 (CRN 80158), Fall 2009  
Time: TR 9:30-10:45  
Room: Curry 241

## **Instructor Information:**

Dr. Richard Barton  
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**Office hours:** TR 11-12 and by appointment

## **Course Description:**

This course offers an introduction to the experience of women in the Middle Ages through close examination of writings by and about women. In so doing we will be less concerned with the more traditional elements of medieval history and more interested in how such elements came to shape women's lives and opportunities. One of the central themes will be the importance of gender as a category of cultural difference; with this in mind we will spend a fair amount of time considering the ways in which medieval society defined femininity, appropriate female behavior, and the female body, as well as the ways in which those definitions and understandings changed over time. Among the two paradigms to be considered will be the two most common and paradoxical medieval understandings of women: as "daughters of Eve" women were inherently sinful and inferior, but as "sisters of Mary" women shared in the virtues and special status of the Virgin. A second organizing principle will involve power and agency; we will be concerned to ask whether and how women could exercise power (or act as 'agents' as opposed to 'subjects'). To do so we will need to think about how we conceive of power, and how power can be located in some untraditional forms and places. Third, since in the Middle Ages, as now, women and femininity were understood and culturally defined only in relation to men and masculinity, we will also spend some time comparing female experience with the experience of men. Fourth, we will examine the changing role of Christianity in shaping both women's lives and spirituality. In our exploration of these themes we will depend upon analysis of significant primary sources about women and femininity written both by men and by women.

## **REQUIRED BOOKS** (available for sale at the UNCG bookstore):

Conor McCarthy, ed., *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook* (NY: Routledge, 2003). ISBN: 978-0415307468

Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (Routledge, 2005). ISBN: 97804152891634

Chretien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, trans. Dorothy Gilbert (Berkeley, 1992). ISBN: 9780520073463

Elizabeth Spearing, ed., *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (Penguin, 2002). ISBN: 978-0140439250

Christine of Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl J. Richards (Persea Books, 1998). ISBN: 978-0892552306

Online Texts: the URL of such texts will be clearly indicated in the syllabus.

E-reserves: some readings will appear in a folder marked e-reserves on Blackboard.

Blackboard: other readings will appear on Blackboard in a folder marked "Course Readings"

### Teaching Strategies

The course will combine lecture and discussion. Students will read original sources and modern commentaries and discuss them as a class. Written work will include analysis and interpretation of these texts.

On Thursdays, class will commence with a brief quiz. On Tuesdays, and after the Thursday quiz, we will then proceed to some discussion of the assigned readings. After discussion of the texts, I will provide more formal context for the readings in a lecture/dialogue format.

### Student Learning Goals:

A student who successfully completes this class ought to be able to:

1. interpret primary sources from the period under study and, using both written and oral skills, analyze them
2. evaluate modern scholarship of a variety of genres and methodological orientations
3. employ a variety of forms of writing to communicate analytical conclusions
4. apply theoretical frameworks of analysis - including gender, agency, and power - to interpretations of the past
5. use on-line and library resources to construct a working research bibliography
6. Demonstrate knowledge of the variety of social roles played by women in Medieval Europe from 500-1500
7. Analyze how and why women's roles varied across socio-economic and religious boundaries, as well as across time

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Participation	10%
Average of 10 best weekly quizzes:	30%
Research Project	
Annotated Bibliography	5%
Article Review	15%
Final Paper	25%
Gender Essay	15%

### Explanation of Course Requirements:

#### 1. Participation [Goals 1,2,3, 6, and 7] (10% of your grade)

This course emphasizes the reading and discussion of written texts. To get the most out of the course, you should attend regularly and come to class prepared to discuss the readings that were assigned for that class meeting. You are strongly encouraged to take written notes on the readings. With primary sources, this might involve significant comments or events (with the appropriate page number so you can find them again if necessary). With secondary sources, you should try to jot down the main interpretive points of the reading. It is essential that you know the argument of any assigned secondary source. In terms of grading discussion, I have found that if you rarely or never open your mouth in class, your discussion grade will probably be in the low C range. To get in the A range, you

should be making regular comments and/or asking questions each day. The notes you take on the readings is a good jumping-off point for discussion.

## 2. Quizzes [Goals 1,3, 6 and 7] (average of 10 best quiz grades = 30% of total grade)

Each Thursday (except August 27 and November 5) there will be a short (10 minute) quiz on the readings assigned for that week (including the material assigned for the day of the quiz). Of the 12 quizzes, I will count the ten best towards your quiz grade. Quizzes will involve short answers, and will be based directly on the primary source readings. I will not try to trip you up with trivial-pursuit style questions, but rather will aim towards larger, interpretive questions. Some weeks I will offer quizzes with 4-5 short answers, and some weeks I will ask a single interpretive question.

## 3. Research Project [Goals: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7]

Each student will conduct a short research project on a specific medieval woman. You will locate and read at least three (3) article/chapter-length (i.e., 20-25 page) works on that woman written by modern historians and, if possible, at least 25 pages of primary sources either written by or about that woman. You will then formulate some sort of analytical question (why? how? Significant because ....? etc) about that woman and write a 8-12 page essay which answers that question using the sources you have located.

So that you don't try to start and finish this project the night before it is due, I will require you to turn in several preliminary assignments:

### a. Choice of a topic

Due: 29 October in class

Turn in the name of your person, along with 1-3 sources for her (or him).

### b. Bibliography [Goals: 2, 5] (5% of your total grade) Due: Tuesday, 17 November, in class

The bibliography should include 5-10 items, of which 1-3 should be primary sources. For this assignment, you must list the sources in proper bibliographic format **and** you must provide a 2-3 sentence evaluation of its value for your project. Note: try to acquire the most up-to-date and scholarly works on your subject. This means, for instance, that *Uppity Women of the Middle Ages* (as fun as it is .... and I should know, since I own it!) is not an appropriate source for your research. And, if there are two biographies of your person, written in 1900 and 2000 respectively, the more recent one (if it is academic) will almost always be superior. If you're having difficulties evaluating the quality of a source, come talk to me. Another note: you must produce 5-10 items for this bibliography, even though I only require that you employ 3-4 of them in your final paper. Why? It is useful to gather a wide range of sources and then determine which are most useful for your project. Still another note: since I require 1-2 sentences of evaluation of each source, you must actually look at each of them (even if you don't read the entire thing). Simply listing them without the 2-3 sentence evaluation will result in no credit for the assignment. Last points: Your bibliography should be divided into two sections: primary sources and secondary sources. Within each section, you should alphabetize your sources by author's last name. Use the Turabian or Chicago Manual of Style format for bibliographic entries. On blackboard you will find a document which lists several online resources which may be helpful in locating sources.

### c. Article Review [Goals: 2, 3, 4] (15% of total grade)

Due: Tuesday, 24 November, in class

Everyone must locate one article of at least 20 pages in length written about the subject of your research and published either in a recognized journal or as a book chapter (i.e., no web sites! No book reviews!). Once you've found it and read it, you will write a 3-4 page review which evaluates it in two ways: 1. the success (or not) of its argument; and 2. its utility to the research project you are working on. The purpose of this assignment is twofold: 1. To force you to get started on your research; and 2. To teach you how to analyze and critique a work of secondary scholarship.

### d. Final Paper [Goals: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7] (25% of total grade).

Due: Friday, 11 December, 5 PM

The final paper for this class will be a 8-12 page essay which addresses an analytical question concerning the woman you chose to research. Note: analytical essays are not biographies! Analytical essays must argue a specific analytical point about that woman and/or her work/thought/environment. The essay should be written in a formal academic style, complete with foot- or endnotes in the Turabian or Chicago Manual of Style format.

4. Gender Essay [Goals: 1, 3, and 4] (15%).

Due: September 22, in class

For this essay I will ask you to explain the concept of gender and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses as a tool of historical analysis by considering one of the topics covered in class to this point. The essay should be at least three (3) full pages in length.

### Grading Scale

A	93	C	73
A-	90	C-	70
B+	87	D+	67
B	83	D	63
B-	80	D-	60
C+	77	F	59

### Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed to miss 3 classes without explanation; for every subsequent absence, I will deduct 1 point from your final cumulative course grade. A missed quiz may be made up by writing a 1-2 page response to the reading; no more than 2 quizzes may be made up in this way.

### Academic Honor Code

Each student is required to sign the Academic Integrity Policy on all major work submitted for the course. Refer to this address on the UNCG website for more details:

<http://studentconduct.uncg.edu/policy/academicintegrity/complete/>.

### Additional Requirements and Advice

1. In case later consultation should prove necessary, students are asked to keep copies of all graded assignments until at least the end of the semester.
2. All course requirements must be completed to receive a grade for the class.
3. **Late work** will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade (ie., A to A-) per day it is late unless previous arrangements have been made with the instructor.
4. **Plagiarism** is a serious academic offense that occurs when someone - whether knowingly or not - uses the words or ideas of someone else without giving that person credit for those words or ideas with a formal citation. I therefore expect that all written (and oral) work will be your own. Should I find evidence to the contrary, I will consider any and/or all of the punitive sanctions made available to me by the university. When in doubt, cite your source. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me in private - I'm happy to discuss it.

## SEQUENCE OF CLASSES:

Notes on Readings:

You are expected to do the Primary Source Readings and Secondary Source Readings in full before the class for which they are assigned.

I recognize full well that medieval texts can sometimes seem dense and unforgiving. Don't despair! Our collective mission is to force them, through discussion and analysis, to reveal their secrets. I don't expect you to be masters of a topic after doing the reading, especially if it is hard. I do expect, however, you to think carefully both about the surface meaning of the medieval author's text (what he or she said) and about the significance or value that each text may hold for modern readers. In the case of works by modern authors, you should attempt to understand the author's main argument (that is, of what is the author trying to convince you? What does s/he want you to believe? Why?) and to spend some time evaluating it (does the author succeed? Why or why not? Do you buy it? Why or why not? Does the author present enough - and convincing enough - evidence to persuade you?).

August 25: Introduction to the Course: Women, Gender, Agency, Power

August 27: Images of Women from the Ancient World

Primary Source Readings:

Blackboard: Roman Laws on Marriage and Sexuality

Online text: the Rape of Lucretia (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/livy-rape.html>)

Online text: Aristotle and Galen on the Nature, Biology and Social Position of Women  
(<http://www.uncg.edu/~rebarton/ancient-women.htm>)

Secondary Sources:

Karras, 1-27

September 1: Christian Models of Women

Primary Source Readings:

Blackboard: selected biblical texts on women

Online text: the Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity

(<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html>)

September 3: Church Fathers on Marriage, Sex and Women

Primary Sources:

McCarthy, 1-23, 27-43

Blackboard: Church fathers, supplemental readings

September 8: Germanic Ideas about Women and Sex

Primary Sources

Blackboard: Amt, 36-49 (Germanic law codes)

McCarthy, 44-52

Online texts: Frankish Queens

<http://www.uncg.edu/~rebarton/frankish-queens.htm>

September 10: Germanic Female Spirituality

Primary Source Reading:

Blackboard: Two Lives of St Radegund

September 15: the Push for Monogamy: Lothar v. Theutberga

Primary Source Reading:

Blackboard: The Case of Emperor Lothar and Empress Theutberga

Secondary Source Reading:

On-line (J-Stor): Stuart Airlie, "Private Bodies and the Body Public: the Divorce Case of Lothar II," *Past and Present* 161 (1998), 3-38.

September 17: High Medieval Women : nobles and power

Primary Source Reading

Online texts: Norman Noblewomen of the Eleventh Century

(<http://www.uncg.edu/~rebarton/normanwomen.htm>)

Secondary Source Reading

Blackboard: Kimberly LoPrete, "Women, Gender and Lordship in France, c. 1050-1250," *History Compass* 5/6 (2007), 1921-1941.

September 22: High Medieval Women: queens

**DUE: Gender Essay (in class)**

Primary Source Readings:

Blackboard: letters to and from Eleanor of Aquitaine

Secondary Source Reading:

Reserve Room: Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: the Woman and Her Seasons," in Bonnie Wheeler and John C. Parsons, eds., *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady* (Palgrave, 2003), 1-54 (pp 29-54 are endnotes)

September 24: The Virgin Mary

Primary Sources:

Online text: the Cult of the Virgin Mary

(<http://www.uncg.edu/~rebarton/cultofvirgin.htm>)

Secondary Sources:

Karras, 28-58

October 29: Theology and Canon Law

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 61-92 (gratian, aquinas, actual canon law cases)

Secondary Sources

Karras, 59-75

October 1: Secular Law in England

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 95-96 (intro), 108-128 (Norman laws)

Secondary Sources:

Karras, 75-86

October 6: Two 12<sup>th</sup> Century Women on Marriage and Spirituality: Heloise and Christina of Markyate

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 134-137 (marriage part), 146-149

Spearing 27-45 (spirituality)

Secondary Sources:

Karras, 87-104

October 8: Dominance and Power: Prostitution

Primary Sources

Blackboard: Amt, 210-213

Secondary Sources

Karras, 104-119

October 13: Sodomy and Attitudes towards Same-Sex practices

Primary Sources

Online text: Peter Damian, on sodomy

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/homo-damian1.html>

Online text: St Thomas Aquinas on lust

<http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/aquinas154.htm>

Online text: the controversy over Richard I and Philip Augustus

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/hoveden1.html>

Online text: the interrogation of John Rykener

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1395rykener.html>

Secondary Sources

Karras, 120-159

October 15: the Trumpet of God: Hildegard of Bingen

Primary Sources

Spearing, vii-xiii, 3-26

October 20: FALL BREAK

October 22: Women and Health: Trotula and Others

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 257-265

Secondary Sources:

On-line (J-Stor): Monica Green, "Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe," *Signs* 14 (1989): 434-473 (Reprinted in Bennett, et al., eds., *Sisters and Workers*, 39-78)

October 27: Women Mystics: Christina the Astonishing and Marie d'Oignies

Primary Sources

Spearing, 75-106

Secondary Sources:

Online (J-Stor): Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast and Flesh: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations* 11 (1985), 1-25.

October 29: Women Mystics: Marguerite Porete

**DUE: Choice of Research topic**

Primary Sources

Spearing, 120-144

Online text: The Trial of Marguerite Porete

<http://www.uncg.edu/~rebarton/margporete.htm>

November 3: Women Mystics: Julian of Norwich

Primary Sources

Spearing, 175-206

November 5: NO CLASS

November 10: Women Mystics: Margery Kempe

Primary Sources

Spearing, 226-254

November 12: Love?

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 165-6, 175-182 (Andreas and others), 266-273

Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, first third

November 17: Courts and Courtly Love: Context and Marie de France

**DUE: Annotated bibliography, in class**

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 183-191 (Yonec)

Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*,

Secondary Source Readings:

Handout: June Hall McCash, "The Image of Women in the 'Lais' of Marie de France," *Medieval Perspectives* 11 (1996): 96-112

November 19: Chretien de Troyes and Erec and Enide

Primary Sources

Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*,

Secondary Sources:

Online (journal finder): Lynn Ramey, "Representations of Women in Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*:  
Courtly Literature or Misogyny?" *Romanic Review* 84 (1993): 377-386.

November 24: Chaucer and The Wife of Bath

**Due: Article Review**, in class

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 220-241

McCarthy, 245-249 (Ballad of Tyrannical Husband)

November 26: THANKSGIVING

December 1: Christine de Pizan: Book of the City of Ladies

Primary Sources

McCarthy, 191-195, 203-206

Christine de Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies*

December 3: Joan of Arc: Gender, Politics and Sanctity

Primary Sources:

On-line: The Life and Trial of Joan of Arc (<http://www.uncg.edu/~rebarton/joanofarc.htm>)

**FINAL PAPERS DUE:** Friday, December 11, by 5:00 in my office