SEEING AND HEARING THINGS: MEDIEVAL MYSTICISM
FRSEM-UA 626
Fall 2016
Tuesday 2:00-4:30
Bobst LL141

Professor: Melissa Vise
Email: mv80@nyu.edu
Office: Casa Italiana, 502
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00-12:00 or by appointment

Course Description

In August 1308, the visionary nun Chiara of Montefalco died. Her fellow nuns dissected her body, split open her heart, and found the imprint of the Cross. A few years earlier, Chiara had had a vision wherein Christ had staked his cross upon her heart. The truth of Chiara’s vision was now proven by the nuns’ own eyes. Chiara’s story and that of many others is provocative for modern readers. What was mystical experience, what could it do? And how should moderns with no religious affiliation tell the history of those who experienced the divine entering into human events? This seminar will examine mystics and mysticism in medieval Europe, addressing central issues in the interpretation of these perplexing figures. Key topics to be addressed include: gender, the self, union with God as a sexual trope, suspect religious ecstasy and heresy, self-harm and embodiment, medicine, notions of “proof” and authority, the political weight of mystical experience, ideas of the holy and canonization, prophecy, the dolce stil novo, and speaking with the dead. We will move from studying major mystics to an examination of literature in which writers use various devices to mimic “seeing and hearing things”: from Dante’s dark wood to Petrarch’s conversations with dead men.

Required Texts

A copy of the Christian Bible, with Apocrypha. The New Oxford Annotated Bible is a great option, but there are many, many more. If you are unsure whether your copy is unsuitable, consult with instructor.

The Romance of the Rose OR The Divine Comedy (please purchase after your group assignment has been made)
*Selected primary sources and articles uploaded to the course website on NYUClasses or listed as hyperlinks. Please use your generous NYU print quota to print these out and bring them with you to class. These are always marked by an asterisk (*) in the daily readings.

**Course Reserves**
The books assigned for this course are being held in Course Reserves at Bobst Library. In addition—and in order to avoid a vicious recall war—I will be adding books that may be helpful for you as you approach the final paper. This collection will not be exhaustive, but it will be a basic starting point.

I have also made an effort to keep the book costs down for this course. Where NYU eBooks are available, students are welcome to use them.

**Course Objectives**
By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Analyze and interpret primary sources (e.g. Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*), and
2. Marshal and critique relevant secondary sources (e.g. Bynum), so that they may
3. Construct an argument about a central issue in the study of mysticism (e.g. “rather than simply reading mysticism and ascetic practices as self-punishing, historians must acknowledge that they also afforded women an empowering and authoritative religious voice in an otherwise repressive atmosphere” or “contrary to how it is often described, mystical devotion in medieval Italy was not an especially ‘female’ practice but rather one avenue of religious practice pursued by many men and women”) which they can
4. Orally present in a compelling and engaging fashion and about which they can
5. Write an elegant, balanced, and persuasive case for their interpretation.

Of course, I trust that you will enjoy your work immensely for its sheer intrinsic value. Nevertheless, the ability to make a convincing argument about history and culture will serve you well far beyond the bounds of our classroom.

**Attendance and Participation Policy**
Your attendance is expected at every class meeting. In classes on a once-weekly schedule such as ours, this is particularly important. That being said, occasionally life throws you the odd stomach flu or transportation problem. For this reason, you may take two unexcused absences without penalty, but please email me if you foresee yourself needing to take this option. Each further absence will result in a 10% reduction of your participation grade. Excused absences include service to the university, truly extenuating personal or family circumstances, or illness worthy of hospitalization (doctor’s note required). Egregious lateness will be counted as an absence and chronic lateness will negatively influence your participation grade.

Please come to class having carefully done the reading for that day. Active reading involves taking notes, preferably by engaging your pencil to the margins of the text. As wonderful as technology is,
there is little else that compares to the gritty, physical process of active reading. For this reason, I ask you to print out all of our readings that are not in the books assigned for the course. You should expect to spend at least 6 hours per week preparing for class. If reading and participation begin to lag, I reserve the right to administer pop reading quizzes.

As you can see, participation is a major component of your grade. It is crucial for your learning that you enter into our class discussions. For the shy, this can be a hurdle. If you find your voice dying in your throat or that you are speaking only once per meeting, please come see me in office hours and we will strategize a solution.

**Technology**
Unless in the case of an accessibility issue or at the professor’s invitation, laptops are not to be brought to class. They are entirely unsuitable for a seminar-style class such as ours. Computer use in class is distracting for you, your colleagues, and your instructor. You can afford to invest a technology-free 2.5 hours per week in this class. That also means no cell phones. Tablet use in class is permitted for accessing online readings, but printed hard copies are STRONGLY PREFERRED. This policy does not mean you must invest in parchment, a quill pen, and knife; paper and ballpoint pens are entirely acceptable.

**Academic Honesty**
I give no sanction to academic dishonesty and neither should you. Cheating and plagiarism undermine your learning and your character in addition to violating university policy. They will not be tolerated in this course. Instances of academic dishonesty can result in a grade penalty, or, if of a serious enough nature, disciplinary processes before the Dean that may end up in probation, suspension or dismissal from the university. Please consult the document “Avoiding Plagiarism” on Classes where I explain in detail how to use proper citation: ignorance of procedure is not a valid excuse. You will need to be especially careful of inadvertent plagiarism. If you are in doubt about a citation, ask me first. For the university’s position on academic integrity, see: [http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity](http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity).

**Assignments and Grade Break-down**
Participation: 35%
One Oral Presentation: 15%
One Primary Source Wiki page: 20%
Final Paper Project: 30%

Participation: As discussed above, you will be participating regularly in class discussions. In addition to your thoughtful contributions to discussion, you will each also submit a 100-word summary of the reading along with 2 well-considered discussion questions for three pre-selected class meetings of your choosing. These are due by email by 10 p.m. the night before. Please schedule your time accordingly. I have posted examples of good discussion questions as well as a guide for crafting them on Classes. As a service to you and your colleagues, I will publish all contributions as a class resource on Classes.
Each of you will also give a 10-15 minute oral presentation of class readings at one point during the semester. We will sign up for these at our first meeting.

Occasionally I may assign additional writing assignments (1 page or, more likely, markedly less). These are either already noted on the syllabus or will be announced at least one week in advance. Any pop reading quizzes that occur will also factor into your participation grade. Please also note that you have a scheduled map quiz on September 13.

Finally, in order to ensure that all students feel encouraged to interact, we will be playing a semester-long game entitled Mapquest. Starting in the second week of class, each Friday by noon, each student will identify something of interest from the week’s readings. S/he will place a corresponding marker on the online map and include a description of the location that demonstrates its relevance to the class. Each Monday, I will review the map at the start of class to assign bonus points for creativity and emerging titles of expertise. If ever you wished to be Chancellor of the University of Paris, your chance has arrived (virtually). More details to follow.

Wiki Page: In this assignment, you will create a wiki page on our class space on Confluence in which you will enter a primary source (previously agreed upon with the Professor). You will then “gloss” this text much in the manner of the medieval biblical commentators we have discussed in class with a minimum of 20 glosses. You will then create in the comments section, a three paragraph critical analysis in which you take an interpretive stance on the text. You will be working in concert with each other and must link to the work of a minimum of two of your colleagues in your own page. More instruction to follow.

Final Paper: Your final paper will be a 10-page research paper utilizing materials read in class along with relevant outside research. The topic is of your choosing but I also offer a list of potential topics. Each of you will meet with me at least once to discuss the appropriateness of your topic as well as to obtain pointers for further research. Please notice that there is a timeline for submitting various stages of the project. These are designed to help you be as successful as possible. They will be graded and will factor into your final paper grade. Proposals (200-word) are due Oct. 25 and should detail what line of research you intend to follow as well as one primary and one secondary source you intend to use. Annotated Bibliographies are due Nov. 4 and will list all your primary and secondary sources with a 2-3 sentence explanation of how you intend to use each source. Intro Paragraphs w/Outline are due Nov. 15 and we will workshop these in class in pairs. A 2-Page Primary Source Analysis on a primary source that you intend to use is due Nov. 24. Finally, on the last days of class, all students will give a 7-9 minute oral presentation of their paper detailing their thesis and use of evidence. The Final Draft is then due to my inbox by noon on Dec. 17. Your advanced notice of this deadline should preclude any lateness issues, including technological errors; please plan accordingly.

Paper Formatting
All papers must be submitted in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and page numbers. Your reader can always tell if you attempt to format otherwise. This may mean that you need to alter your word processor’s default settings. Please follow the Chicago
Manual of Style for footnote citations and consult the writing guides posted on Classes. You must append a bibliography. Do not forget to proof-read. 

I do not accept late papers except in truly extraordinary circumstances.

While I am always happy to meet about writing goals, students may also wish to obtain help from NYU’s Writing Center for help in developing the argumentation and elegance of their papers. Please consult: http://ewp.cas.nyu.edu/page/writing.center.

Grading Scale

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Please consult the documents on Classes for grading rubrics.

Rewrite Option
Writing is a process. If you find that you are unhappy with the grade you earned on one of the short assignments, you have the option of rewriting it for up to a two-thirds of a letter grade increase (i.e. B- becomes a B+). You should attach a cover letter addressed to me in which you explain what you have changed and why. Rewritten papers must demonstrate ample re-engagement with the original written work and with my comments. This is applicable to only one of the papers.

Resources for Non-native Speakers of English
Since this class is heavily based on conversation and writing in English, I encourage all non-native speakers of English to reach out to the NYU resources offered them for practice in English fluency. CAS offers conversation circles and Writing Review at the University Learning Center. In addition, Prof. Vise would be happy to meet with you at any time.

Schedule

**WEEK I, SEPT. 6: INTRODUCTION(S)**
*Bernard McGinn. The Foundations of Mysticism xiii-x, 189-216
Revelation Chs. 1, 4-8, 12-13, 17-22


**WEEK II, SEPT. 13: MONASTIC MYSTICS**
Song of Songs, entire text (In your Bible)
*Caroline Walker Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing” in Jesus as Mother, pp. 110-169
*Bernard Sermons on the Song of Songs and On Loving God, excerpts

Assignments:
1. Map Quiz!
2. Create a list (with cited examples) of at least 4 different kinds of meaning which Bernard finds in the biblical text.
3. In one paragraph, describe who or what counts as an “authority” for Bernard: what sorts of things can be trusted, how can humans find truth?

**WEEK III, SEPT. 20: HILDEGARD OF BINGEN ***Please Bring Laptops today**
*Hildegard of Bingen. Scivias. Declaration, I.1,3,4; III.12

View: “Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen,” (2009) on reserve at the Avery Fisher Center. There will be a class viewing on Sunday, Sept. 18th at 5 PM at the Avery Fisher Center (Second Floor of Bobst). Students who cannot make it to this viewing must arrange to see the film on their own before class.

Assignments:
1. 1 page response to film due in class. See handout.
2. Meet with Prof. Vise this week regarding final paper topic.

**WEEK IV, SEPT. 27: FRANCISCAN MYSTICS, ORIGINS, AND THE QUESTION OF HOLINESS: FRANCIS AND ANGELA**
*Bernard McGinn. The Flowering of Mysticism. pp. 41-69
*Thomas of Celano The First and Second Lives of St. Francis of Assisi

Assignments:
1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
Assignment:
Select a short passage from either Angela of Foligno or Thomas of Celano that either (a) in some way evidences some of the many ways that sanctity was scripted in Medieval Italy or (b) might suggest that not everyone appreciated this new spirituality as true holiness. Write a 1-page analysis of the passage, due in class.

WEEK V, OCT. 4: FRANCISCAN MYSTICS, DEVELOPMENT AND DIVISION
*Bernard McGinn, The Flowering of Mysticism, pp. 70-75
Bonaventure. The Journey of the Mind into God, entire text incl. Introduction
*Angelo Clareno, Chronicle or History of the Seven Tribulations of the Order of Brothers Minor. Editor's Introduction and Angelo's Prologue (i-xxx, 1-29)

Presenter 1:________________________________________
Presenter 2:________________________________________

Assignment:
1. Create a diagram that can explain Bonaventure’s suggested journey.

Wiki Assignments Due Friday Oct. 7

WEEK VI, OCT. 11: EXTREME BEHAVIORS
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
*Bynum, Caroline Walker. Holy Feast, Holy Fast, pp. 1-9, 189-218
*Rudolph Bell. Holy Anorexia, pp. 1-21
*Jacques de Vitry. The Life of Marie D'Oignes. I.11A-38; II.103-109

Presenter 1:________________________________________
Presenter 2:________________________________________

Assignment:
1. Live-tweet your readings of the lives of Maria and Christina chapter by chapter onto the Confluence website via comments.

WEEK VII, OCT. 18: PROOF OF THE BODY: DISCERNING SPIRITS
*Nancy Caciola “Breath, Heart, Bowels” in Discerning Spirits, pp.176-222
*Katherine Park “Holy Anatomies” in Secrets of Women, pp. 39-76

Assignment:
1. Assume the role of a time-traveling journalist and conduct an interview with a denizen of medieval Montefalco or medieval Paris whose persona is up to your historical creativity. The topic of your interview is “What does the human body mean?” 1 pg. minimum

**WEEK VIII, OCT. 25: SECULAR POETRY TURNED GODLY: COURTLY LOVE MYSTICISM AND THE BEGUINES**

**Paper Proposals Due In Class**

Assignment: Group screenplay exercise. On Confluence, choose either the transcript of Hadewijch or of Mechthild. Each has been hauled before a suspicious board of clerics who worry about the validity, truthfulness, and holiness of her experience. Enter one suspicious clerical question and one beguine answer into the transcript in a way that flows from the one that came before yours.

**WEEK IX, NOV. 1: POLITICS: CATHERINE OF SIENA**
* F. Thomas Luongo, The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena, Introduction and Ch. 3, pp. 1-22 and 90-122
* Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, Translator’s Introduction, Ch. 1-2, 26-30, 45, 61, 79, 84-86
* Catherine of Siena, The Letters of Catherine of Siena, ed. Suzanne Noffke, #273
* Raymond of Capua The Life of Catherine of Siena, Prologues, Pt 1. Ch. 12; Pt. 2 Chs. 5-6 (pp. xci-20; 106-109; 158-207)

Presenter 1:_________________________
Assignment:
1. Create a two column list with the headings “Raymond” and “Catherine” and as you read both your primary and secondary sources, enter differences and similarities in how each recounts Catherine’s life. Be sure to include textual references as we will be working with your lists in class.

**Annotated Bibliographies Due Friday Nov. 4 by E-mail**

WEEK X, NOV. 8: SUSPICION IN PARIS: MARGUERITE PORETTE AND ANNIHILATION
Philippians 2:1-13
*Sean Field. The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor pp. 1-10 18-25, 217-218, 222-231
Marguerite Porette, The Mirror of Simple Souls Preferred: read the whole text. Acceptable:

Assignment:
1. In bullet points, write down the stages of progress that Marguerite describes for the soul.
2. Find the most puzzling passage in Marguerite’s text that you can. In a maximum of one page, describe it, why it is confusing, and offer an explanation.

WEEK XI, NOV. 15: VERNACULAR THEOLOGY

Assignment: In two paragraphs or less take a position and defend it: Is there something different about Julian?

WEEK XII, NOV. 22: DREAM VISIONS: ROMAN DE LA ROSE AND THE DIVINE COMEDY
Group I: Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris, Roman de la Rose
See group handout for secondary materials

Group II: Dante Alighieri, Divine Comedy
See group handout for secondary materials
Assignment:
1. Fill out your presentation preparation sheets individually
2. Meet before class as a group to organize your group presentations

WEEK XIII, NOV. 29: THE POETS’ FURTA SACRA: DOLCE STIL NOVO AND PETRARCHAN EPISTLES
Dante Alighieri, Vita Nuova
*Francesco Petrarca, from My Secret pp. 2-29 and 53-63; and The Familiar Letters to Cicero and Seneca

Presenter 1:_________________________

2-Page Primary Source Analysis Due In Class

Assignment: Pick a single poem or letter and answer: For the writer, what does it mean to “see” or to “hear”?

WEEK XIV, DEC. 6: FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Final Paper due: Saturday Dec. 17 at 5 PM by e-mail