

**Professor Jessica A. Boon**  
**Body and Suffering in Christian Mysticism**  
**RELI 665**  
**3 credit hours**

The category of somatic spirituality, in which the devotee's body resonates with the bodily experiences of the suffering Christ, was critical in the formation of Christian mystical praxis in the Middle Ages. Modern scholars, however, do not always consider the medieval construction of body, much less the suffering body, within its historical parameters. The first unit of this course pairs modern critical theory concerning bodies with medieval scientific, theological, and artistic inquiries into cognition, gender, and pain. These dual lenses will aid our readings of influential medieval treatises about Passion-centered devotions (both textual and artistic) and of major texts recording embodied mystical experience.

Primary source readings may include Hildegard of Bingen, Pseudo-Bonaventure, Julian of Norwich, Angela of Foligno, Heinrich Suso, Meister Eckhart, and Teresa de Cartagena. Critical theory and secondary sources by medievalists may include Elaine Scarry, Georges Bataille, Caroline Walker Bynum, Karma Lochrie, Amy Hollywood, Joan Cadden, and Mary Carruthers.

**Required texts:**

Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford 1987, ISBN 0195049969

Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, SUNY Press, 1988, ISBN 0887066356

Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, Paulist Press, 1977, ISBN 0809120917

Karma Lochrie, *Marjorie Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, University of Pennsylvania, 1994, ISBN 0812215575

Valentin Groebner, *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*, Zone, 2009, ISBN 1890951382

Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, University of Chicago, 2002, ISBN 0226349527

**Recommended texts:**

Angela of Foligno : *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance. Paulist Press, 1993, ISBN 0809133660

Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, University of California Press, 1988, ISBN 0520063295

Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture*, University of Chicago, 2010, ISBN 0226112675

Rachel Fulton. *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary*, 800-1200. Columbia University Press, 2005, ISBN 0231125518

*Henry Suso: The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, trans. Frank Tobin. Paulist Press, 1989. ISBN 0809129868.

**Course Requirements:**

*Undergraduate (14-16 pages of writing, final exam):*

- 3 two-page papers applying critical theory, medieval science, medieval suffering to a primary textual source or art object (10% each, 30% total)
- 1 eight-10 page essay analyzing either a Passion meditation text or a mystical treatise (40%)
- Final exam, analysis of a new primary source (20%)
- Class participation (10%)

*Graduate*

- 3 two-page papers applying critical theory, medieval science, medieval suffering to a primary textual source or art object (10% each, 30% total)
- 15-20 page research project, either researching further based on the class reading or applying the methods in the class to a devotional text in another era or religion (60%)
- Class participation (10%)

## SYLLABUS

Jan 11: Intro: Theories of Christian Mysticism

Rec: McGinn overview, *Foundations of Mysticism*

Jan 18: Critical Theory and Bodies

Selections from Scarry's *Body in Pain*

Bataille, *Inner Experience*

Jan 25: Case study: Margery Kempe

Short selections from Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Lochrie, *Marjorie Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*

Feb 1: Medieval Science and Bodies **Brief Paper #1 Due**

Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, ch 2

Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, pp. 11-39, 70-88

Selections from Hildegard of Bingen, *Physica, Causae et Curae, Scivias*

*Recommended:* Holsinger, "The Musical Somatics of Hildegard of Bingen"

Selections from Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*

Reed, "Dispersing Faith" (Mary, Margaret, pregnancy, trotula, pain)

Feb 8: Medieval Natural Theology and Cognitive Bodies

Selections from Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*,

Selections from Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*

Selections from Hildegard of Bingen, *Physica*

*Recommended:* Holsinger, "The Musical Somatics of Hildegard of Bingen"

Feb 15: Pain in Medieval Theology **Brief Paper #2 Due**

Selections from Mowbray, *Pain and Suffering in Medieval Theology*

Selections from Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*

Selections from Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

Feb 22: Bodies in Pain in Medieval Culture and Devotion

Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages"

Groebner, *Defaced*

Feb 29: Passion Meditation

**Brief Paper #3 Due**

Selections from Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*

Parshall, "The Art of Memory and the Passion"

Selections from Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*

*Spring break*

Mar 14 Gender in Passion Meditation

Selections from Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*

Pseudo-Bernard, *Quis dabit (Mary's Lament)*

Neff, "The Pain of *Compassio*: Mary's Labor at the Foot of the Cross"  
Angela of Foligno, *Memoriale*

Mar 21 Body and Medieval Mysticism

Selections from Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*

Hadewijch, selected letters, poems, visions

Newman, "La mystique courtoise"

Hollywood, "Queering the Beguines"

Mar 28 Porete vs Eckhart

Boesel and Keller, Introduction to *Apophatic Bodies*

Selections from Eckhart, sermons, "On Detachment"

Selections from Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*

Apr 4 Julian of Norwich

Julian, *Showings*

Apr 11 Heinrich Suso

Suso, *Exemplar*

Apr 18 Teresa de Cartagena; Modern Appropriations of Medieval Mystics

Cartagena, *The Grove of the Infirm*

Rivera-Cordova, "Spatializing Illness"

Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy* part 1

Apr 25 Summing Up

Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy* parts 2-3

April 27 **Long Paper due**

**Final Exam for undergraduates**