



## Medieval Women Writers

### An Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

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#### INTRODUCTION

In her *Prologue*, the Wife of Bath, one of *The Canterbury Tales*' most enduring characters, asks the audience a question that has dogged astute readers for centuries, if not millennia:

Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?  
By God, if wommen hadden written stories,  
As clerkes han within hire oratories  
They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse  
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.<sup>1</sup>

Having just cited the anti-feminist arguments of authorities like Aristotle, Galen, St. Jerome, and other dogmatically misogynistic interpretations of Scripture, the Wife claims that literature represents women so negatively because the only people writing about women are embittered clerks, who have little experience with real women. Whether Chaucer, speaking through the outraged Wife of Bath, actually believes that women have not contributed to the literary canon or merely wishes to portray women writers as absent in order to bolster his own authorial claims,<sup>2</sup> it is an unfortunate but all-too-common misconception that women in the Middle Ages were completely oppressed, confined solely to the domestic sphere, and forbidden from attaining any sort of education. As we can see from the passage above, this is not just a modern misconception made possibly by our historical and cultural distance from the Middle Ages. Yet, if students learning about medieval literature and society are to get anything close to an accurate conception of the era, it is crucial that they also learn about that half of the population typically underrepresented in history textbooks and literature anthologies.

The buried history of medieval women's writing also has broad-reaching, modern-day implications. The Wife's question alludes to Aesop's fable, "The Man and the Lion," in which a man and a lion debate the natural hierarchy of humans and animals: when the man points to a sculpture of a man slaying a lion in order to support his claim of human supremacy, the lion points out that the sculpture was made by a man and that the situation it depicts would be reversed if a lion had made it. This short fable brings to light issues of authorial bias and historical subjectivity — the age old problem of history being written by the victors. "Who painted the lion?" can be rephrased as "Who painted the cultural master narrative?" or "Who painted the [insert marginalized population here]?" Thus, underlying the wife's innocent-sounding rhetorical question is the implication that art and literature are not harmless things existing in a vacuum: they have real social consequences that can be matters of life and death. In her book, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, the late Joanna Russ presents (in satirical handbook

form) ways by which society prevents women from writing and having their writing taken seriously, including explicit “prohibitions” that deny women access to means of writing, societal “bad faith” that systematically devalues or ignores women’s writing, a “denial of agency” that obviates a woman author’s role in producing her work, and falsely “categorizing” women as just the wives, sisters, or lovers of more important men.<sup>3</sup> So, that is the “death” part of the fable. The “life” part comes in the narratives of resistance, when the lion takes up the brush to tell his (or her) own version of events.

The Middle Ages abounds with such narratives of resistance. While earlier periods surely recognized that an objective narrative is hard to come by — as Aesop’s sixth-century BCE fable reveals — the Middle Ages is really the first time we start to see these alternative narratives being written by members of marginalized populations *and* being preserved for future generations in their original forms. By drawing attention to women’s narratives, we start to chip away at the myth that misogynistic propaganda successfully prevented women from entering the male-dominated social, political, and literary realms. The reality is that numerous women (and men!) challenged such ideas. For example, the seventh-century French queen, abbess, and saint Radegund made education the cornerstone of religious life at her all-female convent; the twelfth-century German nun Hildegard of Bingen contributed several works to the growing scientific field, educated the women at her abbey, and herself provided valuable counsel to political and religious rulers across Europe; the many mystics of the High Middle Ages became spiritual authorities in their local communities; and the fifteenth-century French author Christine de Pizan started a real, public dialogue about misogynistic literature and argued compellingly for women’s intellectual equality. By acknowledging these women’s accomplishments, we mitigate the effects of posthumous methods of literary suppression, such as isolating only a few women’s works as worthy of canonical status and/or presenting a writer as an anomaly of her era rather than as emerging out of a continuous tradition of women writers.<sup>4</sup>

These are difficult philosophical and ethical concepts for students to grasp, but they are raised in a very poignant and relatable way through “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” Aesop’s fable, and the actual writings of medieval women. Moreover, discussions about historical women’s writing, which is a relatively low-stakes topic — that is, it is unlikely that someone in today’s Western world would seriously object to women’s right to education and free speech — can pave the way for discussions of more emotionally-charged subjects, such as slavery, class conflict, civil rights movements, and more.

## BACKGROUND

### Critical Resources

The following books are just a small sampling of those published on medieval women’s writing. Due to their density, most are suitable only for teachers and the most advanced students.

Delany, Sheila. *Writing Woman: Women Writers and Women in Literature, Medieval to Modern*. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

While not focused solely on medieval literature (or even on writing by women), Delany studies women’s representation and participation in Western literature from the Middle Ages to the Modern era. Deliberately argumentative, Delany’s book might serve as a useful discussion-starter among more advanced students. Relevant chapters include:

(2) “*Flore et Jehane*: the Bourgeois Woman in Medieval Life and Letters,”

- (3) “Womanliness in *The Man of Law’s Tale*,”
- (4) “Slaying Python: Marriage and Misogyny in a Chaucerian Text,”
- (5) “Sexual Economics, Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” and
- (10) “A City, a Room: The Scene of Writing in Christine de Pisan and Virginia Woolf.”

Gies, Frances, and Joseph Gies. *Women in the Middle Ages: The Lives of Real Women in a Vibrant Age of Transition*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978.

Though slightly outdated, Gies and Gies offer a highly accessible overview of women’s lives in the Middle Ages. The book is most useful for its breadth. Part One gives background information that covers actual historical circumstances of women in both early- and late-medieval feudal society, as well as how cultural images of Eve and Mary influenced real women’s lives. Part Two contains portraits of individual women, but the studies are so wide-ranging and contextualized that, taken together, they provide a fairly accurate conception of what life for “real women” in the Middle Ages was like: there are royal women (Queen Blanche of Castile, Eleanor de Montfort), middle-class women (two merchants’ wives, Agnes li Patiniere of Douai and Margarita Datini), an upper-class woman (Margaret Paston), a religious woman (Hildegarde of Bingen), and a literary character (Kit, the protagonist’s wife in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*).

Krug, Rebecca. *Reading Families: Women’s Literate Practices in Late Medieval England*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2002.

Krug here offers an excellently argued counter-narrative to traditional feminist approaches to medieval women’s literature. Instead of taking up the pen to challenge pervasive misogynistic representations of themselves, Krug claims, women first sought literacy to fulfill traditionally female duties, such as managing a household, because writing was increasingly becoming a prerequisite to engagement with social institutions of all kinds. *Reading Families* is historical in nature, looking at women’s actual engagement with literary practices, not fictional representations of their engagement (i.e. Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Prologue”) or even the semi-fictional works of major medieval English women authors (e.g. Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich). Her focus is thus on two late-medieval English writers, Margaret Beaufort and Margaret Paston, alongside two growing, contemporaneous, gender-inclusive literary communities, the Lollards at Norwich and the Bridgettine nuns at Syon. While Krug’s book is likely too densely historical for classroom use, teachers may find its conclusions useful for an introductory contextualizing lecture to any medieval English woman writer (in which case, the short Introduction, “From Law to Practice: Women, Resistance, and Writing,” will suffice).

Watt, Diane. *Medieval Women’s Writing: Works by and for Women in England, 1100-1500*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007.

Watt’s book is one of the most useful studies of medieval women’s writing for teachers and students with some background knowledge of medieval literature, as it provides both historical breadth and literary depth. Each chapter (excluding the one on hagiography) examines a specific woman writer -- Christina of Markyate, Marie de France, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and the Paston women — but the focus is always on how her writings fit into the historical/literary context in which they were produced. Chapters are broken down by themes, and each sub-section includes a close reading combined with comparisons to other works.

(Overviews of chapter contents will be given with the list of resources for their respective authors.)

## ANTHOLOGIES

Instructors — especially those unfamiliar with the Middle Ages—should consult any one of several excellent anthologies of medieval women’s writing, as these make a distinct effort to contextualize each writer and contain easily accessible, edited excerpts of authors’ major works. These anthologies are also useful because they contain wide-ranging selections of women’s writings, usually encompassing the entire thousand-year length of the Middle Ages and drawing on every country with substantial literary output. [An asterisk (\*) following a name indicates that the author appears in the Individual Authors section of this bibliography.]

Larrington, Carolyne, ed. *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Larrington breaks down her selections and explanatory essays according to the social structures that defined medieval women’s lives — namely

- (1) marriage,
- (2) love, sex, and friendship,
- (3) motherhood and work,
- (4) women and Christianity,
- (5) women and power,
- (6) education and knowledge, and
- (7) women and the arts.

Each section contains an array of texts, most but not all written by women. Especially helpful are her lengthy general introductions for each section. Of those listed here, Larrington’s anthology is probably the most accessible to students because she does not assume in-depth knowledge of the Middle Ages. It is also remarkably diverse, including excerpts from each of the twelve authors examined in this bibliography alongside those from many other, lesser-known figures.

Thiébaux, Marcelle, ed. and trans. *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology*. 2nd ed. New York: Garland, 1994.

Thiébaux provides short explanatory essays on the themes of each author’s life and works, and he helpfully groups authors according to their historical context and theme. Authors included: Perpetua of Carthage, Egeria of Spain, Eudocia of Constantinople, Amalasantha of Italy, Radegund of Poitiers, Caesaria of Arles, Baudonivia of Poitiers, Eucharica of Marseilles, anonymous speakers of the Old English *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, Loeba of England and Germany, Dhuoda of Uzès, Hrotswitha of Gandersheim\*, Anna Comnena\*, several Trobairitz poets\*, Marie de France\*, Queen Matilda, Hildegard of Bingen\*, Elisabeth of Schonau, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Beatrijs of Nazareth, Christine de Pizan\*, Julian of

Norwich\*, Margery Kempe\*, Julians Barnes (also spelled Juliana Berners), Queen Margaret of Anjou, and Margery Brews Paston\*.

Wilson, Katharina M., ed. *Medieval Women Writers*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1984.

Each chapter in Wilson's volume is devoted to a single author, contains a short essay and excerpted passages, and includes a bibliography of primary sources and related readings. Authors included: Dhuoda of Uzès, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim\*, Marie de France\*, Heloise d'Argenteuil\*, Hildegard of Bingen\*, Castelloza, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch, Marguerite Porete\*, Saint Bridget of Sweden, Saint Catherine of Siena\*, Julian of Norwich\*, Margery Kempe\*, Florencia Pinar, and Christine de Pizan\*.

## RESOURCES FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

It can be difficult to teach younger students about the Middle Ages because medieval peoples' lives were so different from our own. While most books listed below are intended for students in the fourth grade or higher, these same books could be used with students in lower grades if they have solid reading skills and/or extra guidance from instructors. Some of the fictional works below (especially those by Barrett and Cushman) could be integrated into history lessons on the European Middle Ages to provide a relatable image of the Middle Ages that is not the cliché of knights in shining armor, kings and queens, and damsels in distress.

### Non-Fiction

León, Vicky. *Outrageous Women of the Middle Ages*. New York: Wiley, 1998. [Ages 10+, Grades 5-8]

*Outrageous Women of the Middle Ages* includes chapters on Eleanor of Aquitaine, Trota of Salerno, Hildegard of Bingen, and Saint Clare of Assisi. Written in colloquial prose, the biographies are engaging enough to get students interested in these women's lives, and León gives additional academic merit to the book through informative sidebars on medieval culture.

This book would be suitable for lessons on any of the abovementioned authors, although it does not contain any of their writings. It would also be good for a general exploration of historical women, especially because it contains chapters on non-Western figures from China, Japan, Africa, and the Middle East.

### Fiction

Barnhouse, Rebecca. *The Book of the Maidservant*. New York: Random House, 2009. [Ages 8-12, Grades 3-7]

*The Book of the Maidservant* is a novel loosely based on *The Book of Margery Kempe* but told from the perspective of Margery's maidservant, Johanna. Johanna first endures arduous household tasks and Margery's religious eccentricities, but then she is forced to accompany Margery on a pilgrimage to Rome. The adventure begins when Margery abandons the other pilgrims, and Johanna must continue the journey alone. *The Book of the Maidservant* could be used to engage younger students with the Middle Ages and a notable medieval woman writer, as students will certainly identify more easily with its snarky, down-to-earth protagonist than with the fervently religious Margery. Additionally, the novel could be coupled with excerpts from *The Book of Margery Kempe*—though it should be noted that Barnhouse's Margery is

something of a caricature, her religious fervor being depicted as exaggerated at best, fraudulent at worst.

Barrett, Tracy. *Anna of Byzantium*. New York: Random House Children's Books, 1999. [Ages 12+, Grades 4-7]

*Anna of Byzantium* tells the story of the young Anna Comnena, daughter of Byzantine emperor Alexius I, who would grow up to become a renowned scholar, physician, and author of the *Alexiad*, an historical account about her father's reign during the First Crusade. While none of her later accomplishments appear in the novel, Barrett nevertheless presents Anna as a sharp-witted young woman with an acute understanding of politics and gender inequalities. As an enormous fifteen-book history, the *Alexiad* is not well-suited for young students, but *Anna of Byzantium* could certainly be used to introduce to women in medieval society because its protagonist is so relatable and Barrett includes some excerpts from the *Alexiad* in her retelling.

Cushman, Karen. *Catherine, Called Birdy*. New York: Clarion Books, 1994. [Ages 9-12, Grades 4-7]

Cushman's novel consists of journal entries written by Catherine, a fictional medieval fourteen-year-old young woman, who writes engagingly about all the daily happenings on her family's small manor in rural England, such as her daily chores, friendships, and thoughts on her precarious position at the cusp of adulthood. These meditations frequently digress into adventures she imagines she would have if only she could escape her real life, most notably her imminent betrothal to an oafish man whom she hates but who will enhance her father's wealth. While there is no equivalent diary of a real woman like Catherine, Cushman's character is a believable recreation that does not romanticize the Middle Ages.

Cushman is also the author of two other medieval-women-themed books, *Matilda Bone* and *The Midwife's Apprentice*. Although *Catherine, Called Birdy* is the only one to depict a medieval woman writer, all three would make good entrances into medieval women's lives because they show smart, capable women in relatively common positions like daughters and apprentices.

Schreck, Heidi. *Creature*. New York: Samuel French, 2011. [Cast of eight required]

*Creature* is a play based on the life of Margery Kempe. Although it touches on some issues that might be difficult for younger students to grasp, such as vivid visions of devils and apparently masochistic anchoritic spiritual practices, the majority of the play focuses on Margery's daily life with her husband in their upper-middle-class household and her conversations with the local priest. The language is simple, the scenes short, and the dialogue interlaced with comedy. It would probably be suitable for students in middle school and beyond, and it could easily accompany *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

## FILM/TELEVISION

*Anchoress*. Dir. Chris Newby. British Film Institute, 1993. [108 min., Not Rated, English, B&W]

*Anchoress* tells the story of a young, fourteenth-century English woman whose holy visions motivate her to become an anchoress, walling herself up inside a small room attached to a local church. However, when her mother is tried as a witch, she makes the daring decision to leave

her anchorage, an act forbidden by the church and punishable by death. This film provides students with an excellent introduction to the stranger aspects of medieval spirituality.

Although it is not about a woman writer, this film could easily enhance lessons on any mystical woman writer, especially Julian of Norwich, who wrote from a similar time, place, and situation.

*Stealing Heaven*. Dir. Clive Donner. Amy International, 1988. [108 min., Rated R, English, Color]

*Stealing Heaven* depicts the (in)famous love affair between the brilliant twelfth-century French nun, Héloïse d'Argenteuil, and her philosopher-theologian tutor, Peter Abélard, documented for history in the letters they exchanged after their forced separation. A somewhat loose interpretation of historical events, the film emphasizes the romantic elements of their relationship (hence its R rating), ignoring things like Abélard's arguably inappropriate pursuit of Héloïse (he was twice her age), and the vast majority of their written correspondences.

Teachers could have students watch segments of this film in conjunction with a lesson on *The Letters of Abélard and Héloïse*, although the film's content may limit its use to all but the most mature students.

*Vision - From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen* [*Aus dem Leben der Hildegard von Bingen*]. Dir. Margarethe von Trotta. Zeitgeist Films, 2009. [110 min., Not Rated, German, Color]

*Vision* is an excellent film about the life of twelfth-century German mystic and polymath, Hildegard of Bingen. Unlike *Stealing Heaven*, *Vision* does not downplay its protagonist's intellectual abilities: Hildegard is frequently seen reading and composing texts, instructing powerful men, navigating ecclesiastical hierarchies, and adroitly managing her abbey. Yet it also shows Hildegard's human aspects — her genuine love and concern for her sisters, her uncertainty about her visions — and brings this medieval genius to life for modern viewers.

Teachers would benefit from including this film in lessons on Hildegard of Bingen or women in the medieval church more generally.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

*Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Ed. Joan M. Ferrante. Columbia University. Web. 2014. <<http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/home>>.

*Epistolae* is a still-expanding database of letters written in Latin by medieval women, all of which are provided in both the original language and modern English translation. Texts are organized primarily by author, but the website also allows readers to search by other criteria, such as the authors' date of birth or death, the sender or receiver, and date of composition -- all of which makes it easy to find letters from a specific time period or social class, and it allows for easy mapping of correspondences between authors. In general, most of the women are not well-known as writers, but the letters may be of interest to students seeking to understand everyday life for medieval women.

*Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index*. University of Iowa. Web. 2014. <<https://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/feminae/default.aspx>>.

*Feminae*'s index of journal articles, book reviews, works of art, and essays in books is an indispensable resource for both students and scholars of gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages. Although its records do exclude single-author books, it strategically indexes and

catalogues the majority of resources published or made available from 1990 to the present, providing a variety of search options (as broad or specific as one wants), as well as abstracts of and links to every article (if that information is available). *Feminae*'s main advantage as an index/database is its inclusivity: it catalogues not only about medieval women but also about gender relations, masculinity, and male homosexuality; it considers relevant the histories of Byzantium and Russia, two areas not normally included under the purview of standard medieval studies; and it catalogues articles written not only in English but also in Spanish, French, German, and Italian.

*Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. Fordham University. Web. 2011.  
<<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.asp>>.

Most useful for teachers of medieval women writers is the sub-page "Selected Sources: Sex & Gender," which is an annotated bibliography of (mostly) online sources related to women writers, including links to some full texts, and a variety of primary and secondary sources about women's status in medieval society. There are also French and Spanish editions of the *Sourcebook*, which ESOL teachers may find useful if they incorporate medieval literature into their curriculum.

*Luminarium: Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. Anniina Jokinen. Web. 2007.  
<<http://www.luminarium.org/>>.

*Luminarium* contains online versions of major authors' works produced in English from the Middle Ages through the Restoration, as well as a variety of resources (biographies, essays, online "study resources," images, and bibliographies) for each author and time period. With regards to medieval women writers, *Luminarium* is unfortunately limited to Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. However, it is still a useful resource for teachers of early English literature because of its accessibility to students across a wide range of economic situations, age groups, and skill sets: its scholarly articles and other resources are available to students who may not have access to a quality physical library; the essays are a mixture of dissertations, master's theses, undergraduate theses, and student essays; and its online format permits hyperlinks to encyclopedic entries for medieval persons and events. Teachers could use it to assign individual research projects because all of the resources are more or less scholarly, and students can self-regulate the level of secondary materials. [*Luminarium* and its external links contain some advertisements, so younger students' access should perhaps be mediated by a teacher.]

*Monastic Matrix: A Scholarly Resource for the Study of Women's Religious Communities from 400 to 1600 CE*. Ohio State University. Web. 2014. <<http://monasticmatrix.osu.edu/>>.

*Monastic Matrix* is a collection of information and resources on medieval and Renaissance women's religious communities. It provides profiles of a range of religious communities (under the heading *Monasticon*); bibliographic entries on men and women connected with women's religious communities (*Vitae*); a large collection of primary source documents (*Cartularium*); an archive of scholarly articles (*Commentaria*); a visual library (*Figurae*); published and unpublished bibliographies (*Bibliographia*); and a glossary of key terms (*Vocabularium*). All content is produced by scholars of medieval history and religion from around the world, so it is a good source for teachers and for students conducting independent research on religious medieval women.

*ORB: The Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies*. Ed. Kathryn Talarico. CUNY Staten Island.



Web. 2002. <<http://www.the-orb.net/>>.

Although somewhat outdated and home to many dead links, *ORB* is still a very useful, highly reliable website both for both students and teachers. The *ORB Encyclopedia* is divided chronologically, geographically, and thematically, and each entry (written by a prominent scholar) is a combination of narrative information and annotated bibliography. There is a lengthy list of resources for the non-specialist, including scholarly and non-scholarly resources in various media. Though geared towards college professors, the “Resources for Teachers” page includes a number of resources that elementary and secondary teachers may find useful.

## INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS

In this portion of the bibliography, I have provided condensed bibliographies of twelve medieval women writers (or distinct groups of women writers):

- Anna Comnena,
- Saint Catherine of Siena,
- Christine de Pizan,
- Héloïse d’Argentreuil,
- Hildegard of Bingen,
- Hrotsvit of Gandersheim,
- Julian of Norwich,
- Marguerite Porete,
- Margery Kempe,
- Marie de France,
- the women of the Paston family, and
- the women Troubadour and Trouvère poets.

This selection is in no way comprehensive, as these twelve women do not even represent one-third of all medieval women writers whose works survive to this day.<sup>5</sup> It consequently runs the risk of making these writers appear anomalous. Yet, while this selection is unfortunately but inevitably exclusive, I tried to strike a balance between breadth and depth by focusing on the women writers most suitable for classroom use, based on factors such as: the significance of each woman and her works, the sheer volume of works she produced, the extent to which she and her works are representative of medieval women’s sociocultural and authorial circumstances, and the accessibility of her works to modern audiences.

For example, Catherine of Siena was chosen over any number of mystical women writers because her work is representative of the themes and imagery that appear in their works, but her status as a Doctor of the Church sets her apart as especially important. Similarly, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe were chosen primarily for their importance to the English literary canon, since their works are otherwise fairly typical of medieval “feminine spirituality.” In contrast, Héloïse d’Argentreuil and Marguerite Porete were chosen to demonstrate the variety of medieval women’s writings, since their approaches to philosophical and theological subjects are more similar to those of their male

contemporaries. Additionally, some writers were chosen for their singular importance to a given genre or historical period — Anna Comnena as a female historian, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim as the first playwright in post-Roman Europe, and Marie de France as a driving force behind the explosion of medieval romance. Finally, others like Christine de Pizan and Hildegard of Bingen, were chosen solely on their merits as writers regardless of gender, as both were more prolific than the majority of their male contemporaries.

### Genre

- Autobiography: St. Catherine of Siena, Christine de Pizan, Margery Kempe
- Drama: Hildegard of Bingen, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim
- Letters: St. Catherine of Siena, Christine de Pizan, Héloïse d'Argentreuil, the Pastons
- Poetry: Christine de Pizan, Marie de France, the Troubadour and Trouvère poets
- Prose, religious: St. Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Marguerite Porete
- Prose, secular: Christine de Pizan, Hildegard of Bingen

### Nationality

- Byzantium: Anna Comnena
- England: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Marie de France, the Pastons
- France: Christine de Pizan, Héloïse d'Argentreuil, Marie de France, Marguerite Porete, the Troubadour and Trouvère poets
- Germany: Hildegard of Bingen, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim
- Italy: St. Catherine of Siena

### Social Class

- Middle-Class: Margery Kempe
- Upper-Class: Christine de Pizan, Marie de France, the Pastons, the Troubadour and Trouvère poets
- Royalty: Anna Comnena
- Religious Orders: St. Catherine of Siena, Héloïse d'Argentreuil, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Marguerite Porete

### Time Period

- Early Middle Ages (c. late-5<sup>th</sup> to early-11<sup>th</sup> centuries): Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim
- High Middle Ages (c. late-11<sup>th</sup> to early-14<sup>th</sup> centuries): Hildegard of Bingen, Héloïse d'Argentreuil, Marie de France, Marguerite Porete, the Troubadour poets
- Late Middle Ages (c. late-14<sup>th</sup> to early-16<sup>th</sup> centuries): Julian of Norwich, St. Catherine of Siena, Christine de Pizan, Margery Kempe, the Pastons

### **Anna Komnene**

Anna Comnena (or Komnene) (1083-1153?) was the eldest daughter of Byzantine emperor Alexius I (r. 1081-1118). She received a top-rate education in a variety of subjects – including sciences like astronomy and medicine, and humanities like history, rhetoric, and philosophy – and she later went on to manage one of the largest hospitals in Constantinople. As the eldest child of the emperor, Anna believed that the throne should rightfully pass to her, but because she was a woman, her younger brother John was the chosen heir. When it became clear that their father was dying and she would not become empress, Anna plotted to kill John. The conspiracy was exposed before she could act, and Anna was exiled to a convent outside Constantinople, where she composed her famous literary-historical work, the *Alexiad*. This lengthy work chronicles her father’s reign during the First Crusade (1096-1099), but it also discusses the imperial family, including Anna’s relationship with her father and brother. However, because Anna is trying to redeem her reputation and show her brother to be unfit to rule, she tends to represent John as a heartless son who abandoned his father on his deathbed, while she appears to have always been the paragon of filial piety. The *Alexiad* is notable because Anna Comnena is the only female Greek historiographer of the early/high Middle Ages, and because it provides us with our only non-Western eyewitness account of the First Crusade.

Anna’s rivalry with John over inheritance of the Byzantine throne is the subject of Tracy Barrett’s historical novel, *Anna of Byzantium* (above), though Barrett’s focus on Anna’s youth conveniently allows her to sidestep Anna’s later murder plot.

*The Alexiad*, full text. Ed. and trans. E.R.A. Sewter. London: Penguin Books, 2003 (1969).

An earlier translation by Elizabeth Dawes (1928) is available online at Fordham’s *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (<http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/basis/AnnaComnena-Alexiad.asp>). While Dawes’ version is considered more faithful to the original Greek text, Sewter’s translation is more accessible to modern readers. At a length of fifteen books, however, few students could cope with the entire text, making the excerpts in Thiébaux’s anthology the best choice.

*The Alexiad*, selections. “A Byzantine Historian of the First Crusade.” In Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, pp. 225-239.

In “Anna Dalassena” (232-34), Anna praises her grandmother’s ability to rule with great skill and piety in Alexius’s absence during the First Crusade. She uses this description at the beginning of the *Alexiad* to show that women can be capable rulers—possibly better than men because of their compassion—and to give precedent for her own imperial ambitions. “The Siege of Durazzo” (234-36) describes the siege tactics Alexius used to defeat the forces of Bohemund, the Norman commander fighting for Pope Urban II. The military knowledge she demonstrates here lends credence to the rest of her history and her own ability to rule an empire. In “Bohemund” (236-37), Anna conveys the commander’s imposing physical and mental qualities, which she seems to have found quite pleasing.

### **Saint Catherine of Siena**

Due to her unrelenting orthodox piety, Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) was the first woman to be declared Doctor of the Church, a title that effectively establishes her equality with such well-known philosopher-theologians as Saints Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Bernard de Clairvaux. Although this title was bestowed posthumously in the mid-twentieth century, Catherine’s life and writings show that she deserved recognition much earlier. Her early life was relatively unremarkable, but her teenage years were defined by her fierce opposition to marrying any worldly husband because she saw herself as a “bride of Christ,” a common concept in medieval spirituality. To

ensure her celibacy, Catherine undertook extreme practices, such as prolonged fasting and cutting off her hair, to make herself physically unattractive. She gained many followers during her travels around northern Italy, and her sphere of influence eventually encompassed religious and political authorities across Europe. Her followers were attracted to her intense asceticism and mystical intimacy with God, as revealed in her many visions and supposed miracles. She was also a prominent political figure as she became more vocal in her efforts to bring peace to the warring Italian states and to reunite the papacies at Rome and Avignon. She died of a stroke at just thirty-three years of age, her lifelong poor health exacerbated by years of fasting.

Catherine of Siena's metaphorical marriage to Christ, visionary experiences, and self-injurious devotional displays make her a prime example of late-medieval mystical piety. In this regard, Catherine could easily be taught in conjunction with other mystical women writers like Margery Kempe, who became a "bride of Christ" after demanding chastity from her husband; Marguerite Porete, who uses romantic and sometimes-sexual language to describe the nature of divine love; and Julian of Norwich, who prays for physical suffering and uses the related metaphor of "Christ as mother" to describe her mystical relationship with the divine. Additionally, Catherine's writings could start a discussion about what it means to be an author, as she dictated most of her letters to her confessor, Raymond of Capua. Evidence suggests that, like most upper-class women, she could read Italian and that she had learned to write by 1377, so she would certainly have exercised great control over her *Dialogue* and letters even if she did not write them by hand. Dictating one's thoughts was common practice in the Middle Ages, especially for women (cf. Margery Kempe), but because this method of composition does not fit our modern notion of authorship, it tends to raise questions about what material is truly Catherine's and what is scribal addition or emendation. Finally, teachers could use Catherine's writings—or those of any other writer included here — to explore rhetorical maneuvers that medieval women used to bypass their lowly (and ideally silent) social positions in order to present themselves as authorities whose advice should be heeded.

#### Primary Sources:

*The Dialogue*. Ed. and trans. Suzanne Noffke. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue* is a complex work of "ecclesiastical mysticism" which combines intensely personal visionary experiences of divine love with more detached theological meditations on this love as it is described in the Bible. Thus, the *Dialogue* is essentially a treatise on medieval Catholic orthodoxy — a rehashing of everything she, lacking formal education, could have picked up from mass, confession, and reading the Bible. Yet, what it lacks in theological originality, it more than makes up for in its "fresh and vivid expression of the tradition" (10).

#### Letters:

Joseph Berrigan. "The Tuscan Visionary: Saint Catherine of Siena." Selected Letters. In Katharina M. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers*, pp. 252-68.

Of Catherine's roughly 350 letters, this chapter selects three addressed to religious and political authorities at the very beginning of the Western (Papal) Schism (1378-1418). In her letter to Pope Urban VI, Catherine urges Urban to exercise his papal authority in order to bring his "flock" of errant, immoral cardinals at Avignon back into the "fold" at Rome. In the same vein, her letter to the three Italian cardinals she considered most likely among the defectors at Avignon to hear her plea, to again "be united in faith and obedience to the pope, Urban VI" and abandon "the Antichrist," Clement VII. On an unrelated matter,

Catherine's letter to Giovanna of Anjou, Queen of Naples, urges her to help Pope Urban VI in his search for Italian men willing to undertake a new Crusade. While the letters' political context may be complicated, they are representative of Catherine's writing style and could be used to teach women's rhetorical maneuvers.

#### Secondary Sources:

*Guide for Anchoresses [Ancrene Wisse]*, Part 7. *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. Ed. and trans. Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. Pp. 110-29.

This section explains Christ's limitless love for the devoted soul through four of the most prevalent spiritual metaphors in the Middle Ages. Focus especially on the imagery from p. 113.33 through p.123.20. In this section, Christ is described as a knight or king rescuing the soul besieged by worldly temptations, and the ubiquitous "four loves of Christ" metaphor in which Christ's love is like (but superior to) that of one friend for another, a husband for his wife, a mother for her child, and a body for its soul (p. 117). This imagery appears in almost every medieval woman writer's works, and its seeming literalness for medieval women makes it easy for modern students to grasp.

### Christine de Pizan

Widely regarded as Europe's first professional woman writer, Christine de Pizan (1364-1430/1) published over forty individual works during her lifetime. Born in Venice, Italy, Christine moved to Paris when she was just four years old to join her father, the royal physician and astrologist to the French king Charles V. The daughter of a scholar, Christine grew up immersed in learning and developed a strong and ambitious passion for knowledge and writing, despite her mother's wishes that she not learn arts deemed so "unsuitable" for a lady. Her privileged early life took a dramatic turn in the late 1380s when her father and husband both died, leaving her essentially destitute with three children and a mother to support. Christine had few options available to her as a woman: she could remarry or join a convent, as most women would have done, or she could attempt to make her living by writing. Fortunately for us, she chose to write.

Her early works were collections of lyric poetry, which were popular at court and would have earned her a decent income. Knowing that poetry was less respected than prose, however, Christine published two prose texts, *The Letter of Othea to Hector* and *The God of Love's Letter*. The latter sparked the first public literary debate in European history, now known as the "Debate of the *Rose*" or more generally as "the woman question" (*querelle des femmes*, lit. "the argument about women"). The Debate focused on the morality of *The Romance of the Rose*, a thirteenth-century allegory in which a young man quests after a symbolic "rosebud" and finally, after encountering several proponents of misogynistic dogma, seizes it in a scene resembling a violent rape. After publishing some longer philosophical verse texts, Christine returned to prose in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, which remains her best-known work and, along with its sequel, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, has firmly established her position as a "defender of women." Before being forced by political upheaval in 1418 to retreat to a secluded abbey where she spent the remainder of her life, Christine published fifteen additional works that range from amorous ballade sequences to treatises on morality, politics, and military arts.

Instructors should probably introduce Christine through *The Book of the City of Ladies*, as it is the most

relatable to modern audiences with its first-person narration and still-relevant theme of overcoming internalized misogyny. The second choice would probably be *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (also known as *The Book of Three Virtues*), in which Christine instructs women on how to cope with an oppressive society. Teachers need not be limited to these works, though. Christine's numerous and varied writings provide ample opportunity for instructors to incorporate her into other units. For example, her *Letter of Othea* might be taught alongside other post-Roman reworkings of Classical mythology (medieval or modern), and its Prologue could be compared to that of Marie de France's *Lais* to see how each woman appeals to her royal audience. *The Book of Deeds and Good Conduct of the Wise King Charles V* and/or *The Book of the Body Politic* could inform a discussion on ideal kingship and governance in late-medieval France. *The Book of Fortune's Transformation* and *The Path of Long Study* could each serve as an introduction to medieval women's education, or education in the Middle Ages more generally. Her most overtly political writings — *The Lamentations on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, *The Book of Peace*, and *The Letter on the Prison of Human Life*—could be taught as part of a history unit on late-medieval France, as they address the increasing infighting among the nobility and the threat of all-out civil war (cf. Catherine of Siena), as well as France's precarious situation in the Hundred Years' War.

Christine de Pizan's works also lend themselves to multimodal teaching approaches because they survive in deluxe, beautifully illuminated manuscripts (see British Library MS Harley 4431); Christine was adamant that she be allowed to supervise the illuminations' production, and she may even have completed some herself. Additionally, students could themselves "illuminate" some of her fantastical, allegorical figures (especially in *Christine's Vision*) as part of a fun, interactive project to practice close-reading skills.

#### Primary Sources:

*The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*. Ed. and trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997.

This is the go-to book for instructors who plan on teaching more than one of Christine's works or assigning students independent research: it includes excerpts from all of her works, major and minor, introductions to each, and excerpts from criticism by the most notable Christine scholars. Few of her longer works, such as *The Mutations of Fortune* and *The Path of Long Study*, have been translated, so these excerpts are about as good as it gets for studying Christine's corpus. Additionally, the editors select critical resources that create natural dialogue with one another, such as Beatrice Gottlieb's "The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century"<sup>6</sup> and Sheila Delany's "'Mothers to Think Back Through,'"<sup>7</sup> which take up the question of whether or not Christine was a feminist, as well as Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's "Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition"<sup>8</sup> and Patricia Phillippy's "Establishing Authority,"<sup>9</sup> which explore the literary climate in which Christine worked.

*The Book of the City of Ladies*. Ed. and trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant. London: Penguin Books, 1999. [Earl Jeffrey Richards' translation (New York: Persea, 1998) is also excellent.]

*The Book of the City of Ladies* begins as a first-person account of Christine's encounter with misogynistic literature, her struggle to reconcile negative scholarly views of women with her first-hand knowledge of countless virtuous and intelligent women. The *Book* then relays her dream-vision in which three allegorical women (Reason, Rectitude, and Justice) explain all the reasons why misogynists are wrong. The *Book* is divided in three parts, each narrated by a different lady. In Part I, Lady Reason lays the "foundations" of the City of Ladies by enumerating the accomplishments of women (mythical and historical) throughout pagan antiquity. In Part II, Lady Rectitude constructs the City's "houses and buildings" out of the deeds of proto-Christian women like the Greco-Roman sibyls and Old Testament heroines. Finally, in Part III, Lady Justice puts the finishing touches on the city, adding "high turrets"

onto the towers in which the City's inhabitants, who are all Christian *exempla*, will dwell. Chapters I.1-11 (pp. 5-30) are probably the easiest for students to grasp, since they start as pseudo-autobiography and then transition into an allegorical dream-vision, a common medieval genre that has no real equivalent in modern literature; it also helps that the allegory is clearly laid out, as each Lady describes her function in the *Book*, and their dialogue is typical of medieval debate literature. An alternative approach would be to teach an individual tale along with its biblical, classical, and/or medieval counterparts to see how Christine rewrites her sources to produce an "authorized" female version of history. Her most direct source is Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* [*On Famous Women*], but she also uses (among others) Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Old Testament, and *The Romance of the Rose*. Students could read Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies* alongside any of these to discuss what it means "to write like a woman" — to write from the rather precarious perspective of one who has been injured personally and professionally by the Western literary tradition and yet must conform to its problematic expectations to advance her career.

*The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or The Book of the Three Virtues*. Ed. and trans. Sarah Lawson. London: Penguin Books, 2003 (1985).

The "sequel" to *The Book of the City of Ladies*, the *Treasure* deals with the practical matter of creating an ideal citizenry for her City. Consequently, the same three allegorical Ladies explain the proper behavior for medieval women of every secular social class, focusing on princesses (Part I), upper-class ladies (Part II), and working-class women (Part III). While her focus is undoubtedly on upper-class women, Christine does have substantive insight into the lives of ordinary women, and even includes a chapter on prostitutes. Teachers could integrate the *Treasure* into a lesson on medieval women's social situation, comparing the reality with Christine's ideal and getting students engaged with an atypical primary source.

*Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector*. Ed. and trans. Jane Chance. Newburyport, MA: Focus Information Group, 1990.

Framed as a letter written by the wise goddess Othea, Christine's own creation, to prince Hector of Troy, the *Letter of Othea to Hector* really conveys Christine's moral and political advice for French nobles through the common medieval "mirror for princes" genre. The *Letter* consists of a Prologue and 100 chapters, each of which recounts a mythological figure's story in a scholasticism-inspired, three-part structure: a *text* (the story itself), *gloss* (a fairly literal explanation of the story), and *allegory* (a Christian explanation of the story).<sup>10</sup> Like *The Book of the City of Ladies*, the *Letter* could be taught as a female rewriting of history by comparing Christine's stories to the Classical originals. Like Marie de France's *Lais*' Prologue, Christine's Prologue could be read as a rhetorically savvy navigation of submission to and subversion of patriarchal authority.

Selections. "A Woman of Letters at the French Court." In Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, pp. 413-40.

Thiébaux includes lyrics from *Les Cent Balades* [*One Hundred Ballades*], *Cent Balades d'Amant et de Dame* [*One Hundred Ballades of a Lover and Lady*], *Autres Balades* [*Other Ballades*], and *Rondeaux*. Prose is taken from the *Letter to the God of Love*, and two *vitae* from *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Justine (III.8) and Chlotilda (II.35).

Selections. In Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe*.

All of Larrington's excerpts come from *The Book* and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. From the *Treasure* are "Duties of the Bourgeois House Wife" (pp. 31-34) and "The Way of Life of the Wise Princess" (pp. 179-81). From the *Book* are "A Noble Lady Known to Christine de Pizan" (pp. 178-79) and "Christine and the Problem of Representation" (pp. 251-53).

#### Secondary Sources:

Willard, Charity Cannon. *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*. New York: Persea Books, 1984.

Comprehensive and very readable, Willard's biography is the go-to source for historical context on Christine de Pizan's life and works. While she does not dumb-down any of the content, Willard makes an obvious effort to explain the production and content of Christine's works in a coherent narrative.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1989 (1929).

There are remarkable parallels between Christine's encounter with Matheolus' *Lamentations* in *The Book of the City of Ladies* and Virginia Woolf's (quasi-fictional) experience at the British Library (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 116*n*1; Brown-Grant xvi). Both authors struggle to understand how so much could be written *about* women (most of it negative) while nothing, in contrast, has been written *by* women. One might also compare their respective experiences with social and educational systems, and the ways those systems have (or have not) changed over the centuries, first from Christine to Woolf's time, then from Woolf's time to our own.

British Library MS Harley 4431. "Christine de Pizan and the Book of the Queen." *Medieval Manuscripts Blog*. The British Library. 27 June 2013. Web.

<<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2013/06/christine-de-pizan-and-the-book-of-the-queen.html>>.

This blog entry showcases the most famous illuminations of Christine's works in Harley MS 4431 (c. 1410-5), also known as *The Book of the Queen* because the quasi-anthology was made for Isabel of Bavaria, queen consort of Charles VI of France. Among its contents are *The God of Love's Letter*, *The Letter from Othea* (nearly every chapter is illustrated!), *The Path of Long Study*, *The Tale of the Shepherdess*, and *The Book of the City of Ladies*. The post explains the conditions around the *Book's* production, gives captions and folio-pagination for each image, and links to the full digitized manuscript located at the British Library.

### **Héloïse d'Argenteuil**

Héloïse d'Argenteuil (1090-1100?-1164) was, by all accounts, one of the most intelligent and well-read women of her time -- a fact attested to by her thorough knowledge of history, theology, and philosophy, and her facility with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. She received the majority of her education from nuns at the Convent of Argenteuil (located just outside of Paris) and was already regarded as a renowned philosopher-theologian by the time she started studying under Peter Abélard (1079-1142). Thus began one of the most famous love affairs in Western history. Or, thus it continued—for by Abélard's own admission in Letter 1, he had fallen in love (or lust) with Héloïse before then and had convinced Fulbert, her uncle and guardian, that he should not only tutor her but also live with them, citing financial reasons at the time but later confessing his intent to seduce her. He tutored her in university subjects like formal logic and medicine. Their love, which seems to have been mutual, became the subject of shameful gossip, and eventually Fulbert learned the extent of their relationship when Héloïse got pregnant. They were secretly married at Fulbert's behest, though this did not assuage his outrage. Although Abélard sent Héloïse to the Convent of Argenteuil, located a few miles northwest of Paris, for her safety, he himself proved to be the target of the still-furious Fulbert's wrath when several men hired by Fulbert broke into Abélard's bedroom and castrated him. Enraged, humiliated, and banned from teaching in Paris proper, Abélard retreated to the Abbey of Saint Denis, located just north of Paris. Both he (willingly) and Héloïse (reluctantly) took holy orders, and their separation precipitated their long, eloquent, and sometimes sordid correspondence.

*The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*. (Rev. ed. M.T. Clanchy, 2003). Ed. and trans. Betty Radice. London: Penguin Books, 1974.

Students should probably read from the "Personal Letters" (Letters 2-5), in which Héloïse and Abélard discuss their current separation and past decisions. In Letter 2, for example, Héloïse reaffirms her love for Abélard even though she doubts his love for her, denounces their



marriage as a meaningless worldly constraint on their intellectual freedom, and condemns Abélard for abandoning her after she has sacrificed everything for him. In Letter 4, she reiterates these complaints and expresses the full extent of her despair. In his responses in Letters 3 and 5, Abélard sees his castration and monastic orders as punishment, tries to repent of his sins, and encourages Héloïse to do the same. The Letters are full of material for students to discuss, such as their disparate motivations for joining the Church, their sense of guilt and innocence (especially Héloïse's arguments about nominal sin and pure intent), and simply their feelings about their situation. The later "Letters of Direction" (6-8) are much longer and deal primarily with the legal history of monastic orders, making them less appropriate for high school students.

As mentioned above, the film *Stealing Heaven* is a loose adaptation of these events, and segments of it could be included along with readings from the Letters themselves.

### **Hildegard of Bingen**

Like Héloïse, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was one of the most intelligent and well-read women of her time, although unlike Héloïse, she was thoroughly devoted to religious life, spending all but the very first and very last years of her life confined to a Benedictine monastery in the German Rhineland. Hildegard was given as an offering or "tithing" to the Church by her parents when she was only seven or eight years old, and she was placed with Jutta of Spanheim, an older visionary nun whom she assisted and with whom she was eventually enclosed. She inherited Jutta's role as *magistra* (literally "female teacher," a position akin to Abbess or Prioress) of the abbey, although she eventually transferred her nuns to a new location where they could have greater independence. After asking for and receiving permission from the Church to write her visions, Hildegard's reputation expanded rapidly across the whole of Europe, and she became an adviser to political and religious authorities, as well as to other women seeking to establish themselves in the Church. She spent the last two decades of her life traveling around the Rhineland on a total of four separate preaching tours—proof of her high status within the Church, since Benedictine nuns normally were not allowed to leave their abbeys, and women were officially forbidden from preaching. Despite her unofficial sanctity in the Middle Ages and beyond, it was not until 2012 that the Vatican designated her an official saint, leading the way for her designation the same year as one of only four female Doctors of the Church (cf. Saint Catherine of Siena [above]) for her profound theological views and vast scholarship.

Indeed, it is Hildegard's theological and scholastic writings that distinguish her from other medieval women writers: she is second only to Christine de Pizan in the number of works published, and she is the only mystic to also have written secular scholarly texts. Her most significant work is *Scivias* (*Know the Ways*), a three-part book that contains her visions and related philosophies on God and creation, Christ and redemption, and the history of salvation. While *Scivias* could be taught as a text, I would recommend teaching her visions with Fox's *Illuminations*; the images come from the lost Rupertsberg Manuscript (c. 1165-1180) produced under Hildegard's supervision, the text comes from the *Scivias*, and Fox's commentary can provide valuable comparisons to other medieval texts and non-medieval spiritual traditions. Several years after finishing *Scivias*, Hildegard decided to expand it, making *Scivias* the first book of a trilogy, followed respectively by *Liber Vitae Meritorum* (*The Book of Life's Merits*), and *Liber Divinorum Operum* (*The Book of Divine Works*). She also composed two large-scale musical works, the *Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum* (*Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations*), which is full of beautiful plainchant hymns, and the *Ordo Virtutum* (*The Play of the Virtues*), which is a spiritual drama and arguably the first morality play of the Middle Ages (cf. fellow female dramatist Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim [below]). Additionally, Hildegard

studied and practiced herbal medicine, recording her findings in the *Causae et Curae* (*Causes and Cures*) and the *Physica* (*Physics*).

Hildegard and her works are easily incorporated into multimodal teaching approaches, since her extant works include not only texts but also numerous images and musical compositions. Teachers could have students produce their own “illuminations” based on close-readings of the text. For an even more interactive approach, students could put on a production of her *Play of the Virtues*. Students interested in music could listen to CDs of her *Symphonia*, and particularly advanced students could compare the compositions of the untrained Hildegard to other “learned” twelfth-century plainchant. Furthermore, teachers interested in exploring the history of scientific thought could use parts of her *Physica* to show how medieval science worked (if interested in medieval women in medicine/science, see also Trota of Salerno [not included here]).

#### Primary Sources:

*Selected Writings*. Ed. and trans. Mark Atherton. London: Penguin Books, 2001.

Atherton’s anthology is almost certainly the best choice for a general study of Hildegard’s writings. Atherton chooses excerpts from her major letters, works, and musical compositions, grouping them according to overarching themes, such as ways of knowing God, independence, political and spiritual counsel, justice and love, and the mysteries of the universe.

*Hildegard of Bingen: An Anthology*. Ed. Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies. Trans. Robert Carver. London: SPCK, 1990.

Bowie and Davies include many of the same selections and introductory material as Atherton, but they are organized by work rather than theme, making it more difficult to locate excerpts to suit a particular purpose. One major area of difference is in their selections from *Causae et Curae*, with Atherton choosing scientific passages (on the elements, weather, creation of the world, etc.) and Bowie and Davies choosing more theological passages (on Adam and Eve’s creation, and the nature of woman). Atherton also includes parts of the *Physica*, while Bowie and Davies omit it entirely.

*Scivias*. Trans. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop. Ed. Barbara J. Newman and Caroline Walker Bynum. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990.

This edition contains the full text of Hildegard’s *Scivias*. It is definitely oriented towards scholars of medieval religion, but it could be useful if teachers happen to need a vision not included in Fox, Atherton, or Bowie and Davies.

*Hildegard of Bingen: On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et Cure*. Ed. and Trans. Margret Berger. Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1999.

Berger translates a number of passages on the cosmos, human anatomy and physiology (especially women’s), diseases, and healthy behaviors. Because most medieval medical practitioners were affiliated with monastic institutions, the medical texts they produced were, by modern standards, as much works of theology as they were of science. Writing from a similar background, Hildegard’s *Causae et Curae* makes no clear distinction between the physical and the spiritual: indeed, the underlying premise of the work is that the physical ailments afflicting every human being are the microcosmic “symptoms” of humanity’s larger “infection” with Original Sin. Like all books in *The Library of Medieval Women* series, this book includes an interpretive essay which goes through each selection and discusses Hildegard’s sources and her influence on later medieval scientists.

*Symphonia: A Critical Edition of the Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationem*. Ed. and trans. Barbara Newman. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998.

Newman’s edition offers the only full-text print edition of the *Symphonia*. While these are two distinct works, they are both musical and tend to be combined in selections of Hildegard’s

music. There are many audio versions of both works, with CDs and mp3s readily available from websites like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iTunes, or AllMusic, although almost any individual song can be found on YouTube as well. *ORB* contains an excellent analysis of how the *Symphonia*'s content and structure are similar to and different from other medieval plainchant hymns, links to websites with audio and/or her compositions put into modern musical notation, and a few recommended CDs of her *Symphonia* and *Ordo Virtutum* (<http://the-orb.net/encyclop/culture/music/mather.htm>).

Selections. "A Benedictine Visionary in the Rhineland." In Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, pp. 315-348.

Thiébaux includes a range of texts from Hildegard's religious writings. From *Scivias* are the Prologue or "Protestificatio" and the first three visions, "The Iron-Colored Mountain and the Radiant One" (I.1), "The Fall of Lucifer, the Formation of Hell, and the Fall of Adam and Eve" (I.2), and "The Cosmic Egg" (I.3). From *The Book of Divine Works* are three additional visions, "The Three Trumpeted Winds of God" (I.1), "Worldly Love and Celestial Love" (I.1), and "The Celestial Joys of the Virgins" (VI.6). From *Symphonia* are hymns on the Virgin Mary, Saint Ursula, and "Christ as lover."

Selections. "Women's Physiology" and "Hildegard and Music." In Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe*, pp. 201-4 and 236-9.

Larrington includes two excerpts of Hildegard's expansive corpus. Under the category of "Women's Physiology" are passages from *Causae et Curae* that specifically address sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and women's humors. Under "Hildegard and Music" are most of the same hymns found in Thiébaux's anthology, but Larrington also includes a letter Hildegard wrote to the prelates of Mainz in response to their decision to place her convent under interdict and thereby forbid the nuns from celebrating Divine Offices, attending mass, and receiving the Eucharist. In the letter, Hildegard explains how music activates and elevates the human soul, and she implicitly equates music's salvific power to that of the Mass and the Eucharist when she recounts how Satan, hearing the fallen Adam once again singing divine praises, fears that this music might thwart "the machinations of his cunning" by reminding Adam of "the celestial harmony and the delights of paradise."

#### Secondary Sources:

Fox, Matthew. *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*. Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1985.

This book beautifully combines Hildegard's written descriptions of her visions and the illuminations of those visions that Hildegard herself supervised during the production of the Rupertsberg Manuscript/Codex, which was reproduced in the 1920s before the original was lost during World War II. Most of Fox's *Illuminations* is taken directly from Hildegard's own writings—mostly *Scivias* and *The Book of Divine Works*—but I include it under "Secondary Sources" because his commentary sometimes ventures into the realm of spiritual interpretation.

Schipperges, Heinrich. *The World of Hildegard of Bingen: Her Life, Times, and Visions*. Trans. John Cumming. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998.

This is an excellent resource for students, containing contextual information on life in the twelfth-century, the barriers and opportunities available to women at the time, as well as textual information on the ideologies and themes/motifs of Hildegard's works, especially on creation, the healing arts, and salvation. The prose is readable, and it highlights all of the key information without going into too much depth for those without much background in medieval literature. Each section includes excerpts from relevant primary texts, as well as images from the Rupertsberg Codex and related manuscripts.

Land der Hildegard [Land of Hildegard]. Stadtverwaltung Bingen am Rhein [City Council of Bingen-on-Rhine]. <<http://landderhildegard.de/>>.

This is a good, informative website. Most of its information is also in *The World of Hildegard*

*of Bingen*, but its online format offers interactive ways of exploring Hildegard's life and times.

There are individual pages for each of her major works, including a few downloadable mp3 files of songs in the *Symphonia* and *The Play of the Virtues*, a timeline of the twelfth-century, biographies of individuals closely tied to Hildegard's life and works, and an interactive map of the area around Bingen. Recommended for students conducting their own research, and for teachers looking for concise background information on just about anything related to Hildegard.

As mentioned above, the German film, *Vision*, accurately represents the events of Hildegard's early life with Jutta, including the kind of asceticism that Jutta might have undertaken, the daily rituals of a Benedictine nun, and her struggles to establish a new, more independent, all-female abbey. While it is impossible to know what Hildegard's visionary experiences were actually like, the film stays faithful to her own descriptions of them as waking, synaesthetic experiences that are later fulfilled through meditation and writing (see Atherton, Introduction xx-xxi).

### **Hrotsvit of Gandersheim**

Hrotsvit (Hrosvitha, Hrotswitha, Roswit, Roswitha, etc.) of Gandersheim (940?-973) was the first woman—arguably the first person, woman *or* man—to compose drama in the West since the Roman Empire's collapse. We know next to nothing about Hrotsvit's life except that she was a Benedictine canoness at Gandersheim Abbey, a cosmopolitan intellectual hub at the height of the tenth-century Ottonian Renaissance; we can conjecture that she came from the Saxon nobility, as only nobles could gain admittance there. Her writings demonstrate that she was not only remarkably well-read but also highly creative. Based on her knowledge of Latin authors, she seems to have been trained in the seven Classical liberal arts, a method of learning revived during the ninth-century Carolingian Renaissance comprised of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the *quadrivium* (mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and music), and there is evidence that she may have also known Greek. Despite her Classical training, her subject matter is thoroughly Christian, and this is the greatest testament to her creativity. Hrotsvit repurposes dramatic structures, themes, and motifs from Roman comedic playwrights, Plautus and Terence. Her extant corpus consists of eight legends, six plays, two epic poems, and a shorter poem.

Plays lend themselves to classroom productions, and Hrotsvit's are especially well-suited because they employ simple dialogue and few cast members. Probably the best play for students is *Dulcitus*, as it is the only one of her six comedies<sup>11</sup> to resemble modern notions of comedy as a generally light-hearted narrative with overtly humorous elements. All of her works could be used to teach gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages, especially ideas of femininity—through the “bride of Christ” metaphor and virgin martyrs in *Dulcitus* and *Calimachus*, as well as the virgin/whore dichotomy in *Abraham*—but also masculinity—through men's unmitigated sexual desires in *Dulcitus* and *Calimachus*, as well as those characters' chaste counterparts in *Abraham* and *Pelagius*, the latter of which also introduces the subject of Christian heteronormativity.

*Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: A Florilegium of Her Works*. Ed. and trans. Katharina Wilson. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998.

Wilson includes Hrotsvit's most popular works. Of the epics, Wilson chooses approximately 250 lines from the *Gesta Oddonis (The Deeds of Otto)*, in which Hrotsvit explains the divinely-ordained and typological lineage of the German king and Holy Roman Emperor, King Otto I (r. 936-973). Wilson chooses from Hrotsvit's second epic, the *Primordia*, a roughly 100-line

passage entitled “The Origins of the Gandersheim Abbey” from her second epic, the *Primordia*, which praises the pious generosity of the Ottonian dynasty’s ninth-century founders, Liudolf and Otto. Wilson includes the short poem *Saint John* in full. Of the legends, Wilson includes *Theophilus*, about a sixth-century Turkish clergyman who sells his soul to the devil to gain clerical promotions but is saved by the Virgin Mary’s mercy and a bishop’s intercession, and *Pelagius*, about a tenth-century Spanish martyr who rejected the homosexual advances of a Muslim government official and so was tortured and then dismembered. Of the dramas, Wilson provides Hrotsvit’s introductory letter to her patrons, as well as the following four plays: *Dulcitus*, about three virgin martyrs who refuse to marry because they are already “brides of Christ” and so are imprisoned by Dulcitus, whom God humorously prevents from defiling the virgins by making him lust after sooty kitchenware; *Calimachus*, about a lustful young man whose advances indirectly kill a chaste woman and bring about his own death when he attempts necrophilia, though he is resurrected and converted to Christianity; *Abraham*, about a harlot who becomes a chaste anchoress after her eremitic uncle comes posing as a customer; and *Sapientia*, about three virgin martyrs symbolically named Fides (Faith), Spes (Hope), and Karitas (Charity).

Selections. “Hagiographer, Playwright, Epic Historian.” In Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, pp. 171-223.

While Thiébaux’s range of selections is significantly more limited than Wilson’s, it still contains the works most likely to be used in a classroom: the legend of Pelagius, a passage of approximately 130 lines from *The Deeds of Otto*, in which Hrotsvit chronicles the tumultuous reign of Lombard queen Adelheid (r. 950-999), the short poem *John the Baptist*, the Prologue to her dramas, and the drama *Dulcitus*. Significantly, Thiébaux chooses to translate Hrotsvit’s Latin verse into prose, while Wilson preserves the verse structure, including rhyme and alliteration when possible. This makes Wilson’s text a better choice for teachers who want to discuss its literary elements, especially since Classical Latin verse never rhymed and almost never used alliteration; these are distinguishing features of medieval Latin poetry and reflect Hrotsvit’s sophisticated integration of spatiotemporally diverse literary traditions, as she was writing roughly 700 years after her Roman models, and rhymed verse was characteristic of Romance languages, alliterative verse of Germanic ones.

### **Julian of Norwich**

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) is considered the first English woman writer, her first-person visionary narrative known as *The Showings of Julian of Norwich* or *A Revelation of Divine Love* being composed sometime in the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century. We know very little about Julian except for what she tells us at the beginning of her *Showings*, most of this information is confined to the week-long period during which she experienced her visions. In 1373, the thirty-year-old Julian fell deathly ill. Joined in her bedchamber by her mother and a priest, she experienced fifteen visions or “showings,” as she called them, when the priest held a crucifix before her; the next day she experienced a sixteenth, which confirmed their divine (not demonic) origin and restored her to perfect health. At some point, she entered the anchor hold in Norwich, where she spent the remainder of her life praying and composing her *Showings*. Although she gained a strong local presence, earning the affectionate title “Mother Julian” and attracting pilgrims (including Margery Kempe [below]) from nearby English towns, her influence was nowhere near as great as Catherine of Siena’s or Hildegard of Bingen’s, both of whom initiated contact with leading theologians and even the Pope. Apart from these details,

however, we know next to nothing. Indeed, it is still a matter of debate what kind of illness afflicted Julian, whether she had been a religious woman before her visions or if she joined the church as an anchoress afterward, and even when she composed her *Showings*, whether she wrote them herself or dictated them to a priest/confessor, and why the Short Text (S) and Long Text (L) differ so remarkably in style and apparent purpose.

In general, S reads as though it were composed shortly after the initial visionary experience, leading scholars to presume that it was begun around 1373, while L's greater length, literary qualities, and theological insights give the impression that it was completed after many years of meditation, leading to a presumed date of composition after 1393. S is probably the best version for students to read because of its length and minimal theology. Both S and L give vivid descriptions of the crucifixion according to standard medieval motifs, as outlined in Part 7 of the *Ancrene Wisse* (see Catherine of Siena [above]), although Julian's *Showings* are distinguished from contemporaneous male-authored mystical texts by her consistent use of concrete images to ground complex, esoteric theological ideas (e.g. the hazelnut which contains "all that is made," S ch. 4, L ch. 5). Julian's *Showings* also differs from other female-authored mystical texts included in this bibliography: she focuses almost exclusively on Christ's nurturing, maternal nature, while Catherine of Siena, Margery Kempe, and Marguerite Porete focus on his potentially erotic, spousal nature. At times, Julian's theology becomes more Marian than Christocentric, especially when she identifies with Mary's pain at watching her son's crucifixion rather than identifying with Christ's own pain (S chs. 3-5, L chs. 4-8). While teachers do not need to go into detail about these theological issues, they should probably discuss the medieval idea of "compassion" and how it differs from our own—namely, that etymologically, compassion means "to feel with [someone]," and in religion meant to feel suffering alongside Christ during the Passion.

#### Primary Sources:

*Revelations of Divine Love*. Ed. A. C. Spearing. Trans. Elizabeth Spearing. London: Penguin Books, 1998.

This is a good choice for instructors who wish to present Julian's works in translation. Elizabeth Spearing creates a highly readable modern English version that still remains faithful to the Middle English text. Notably, this edition includes both S and L, as well as an excerpt from *The Book of Margery Kempe* in which another English religious visionary woman, Margery Kempe, describes her meeting with Julian.

*The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*. Ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994. [Full text available online at TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/crampton-shewings-of-julian-norwich>.]

This is an ideal text for instructors whose students can get through the Middle English version of the Long Text. Julian's Middle English is not too difficult to grasp with some effort, but spelling and false cognates could pose difficulties. Designed for students, TEAMS editions include frequent notes and glosses on the text, as well as wide margins for notes. The Introduction distinguishes the TEAMS edition from the Norton Critical edition, as Crampton provides enough historical and literary context for non-specialists to approach the *Shewings* knowledgeably without getting bogged down in the depth of Baker's Introduction, which includes more interpretive information to guide readers through the text's theology.

*The Showings of Julian of Norwich*. Ed. Denise N. Baker. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005.

For more advanced students, the Norton Critical Edition has a few advantages over the TEAMS edition — namely, its inclusion of excerpted medieval texts that contextualize Julian's work

(including *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*), and excerpts from major works of secondary criticism (notably B. A. Windeatt's and David Aers's commentaries on Julian's *Revelation* and Caroline Walker Bynum's groundbreaking literary-historical analysis, *Jesus as Mother*).

Long Text, selections. "An anchoress of England." In Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, pp. 441-465.

Thiébaux chooses representative passages to demonstrate the six primary themes she sees running throughout Julian's *Showings*: (1) her desire for physical illness as part of her contemplative spirituality, (2) the physicality of her visionary experiences, (3) her unwavering hope and faith in God's limitless love despite the prevalence of sin and worldly misfortunes, (4) her related belief that God's infinite goodness can permit sin because sin leads us to self-knowledge, (5) her prominent "Christ as mother" imagery, and (6) her concept of the soul as a city whose ruler is God himself.

Selections. In Carolyne Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe*, pp. 101-3.

Larrington includes passages from the Long Text of Julian's *Showings* in her "Motherhood and Work" section, a testament to the prevalence of maternal Christological imagery. Larrington's selection is not sufficient for teaching Julian as an author, although it could be useful for a focused lesson on medieval motherhood.

### Secondary Sources:

Watt, Diane. "Julian of Norwich (1342/3-after 1416)." *Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 91-115.

Looking at both S and L (which Watt calls *Vision* and *Revelation*, respectively), Watt's chapter explores Julian's self-representation of herself as visionary intermediary, arguing that the visions God showed to her personally actually have universal application and make Julian just a stand-in for any Christian man or woman. Watt then explores Julian's theology in *Revelation* by focusing on key imagery, such as the extended "Christ as mother" metaphor, the Parable of the Lord and the Servant, and the apocalypse, all of which seem to indicate that Julian believes in the possibility of universal salvation and/or the non-existence of Hell. Finally, Watt concludes that, based on manuscript evidence, Julian's writings were not known or in circulation outside Norwich and that a small community of followers was responsible for her texts' survival.

*The Shrine and Cell of the Lady Julian of Norwich, St Julian's Church*. 2014. Web.  
<[www.julianofnorwich.org](http://www.julianofnorwich.org)>.

Run by St. Julian's Church in Norwich, this website has a decidedly religious purpose and includes information like service schedules. However, it also includes images of the renovated cell in which Julian was enclosed (the church was nearly destroyed during World War II) and a video of church service at Julian's Shrine.

As mentioned above, the film *Anchoress* would provide a good introduction to anchoritic spirituality, especially as it relates to Julian's situation, as the film's semi-historical protagonist is an anchoress around the same time and place as Julian.

### **Margery Kempe**

Margery Kempe (1373-1438?) earned her place in the literary canon by composing the first autobiography in English, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which chronicles her daily life, her intensely

personal spiritual experiences, and her pilgrimages around England, Europe, and the Holy Land. Part of what makes the *Book* so remarkable, though, is just how unremarkable its author was. She was born in King's Lynn (now Bishop's Lynn) in Norfolk, England, into a high-status but solidly middle-class family, her father being a successful merchant, five-time town mayor, and member of Parliament. She married at age twenty, and she experienced her first vision of Christ shortly thereafter when giving birth to the first of fourteen children. As their business ventures floundered, her spiritual inclinations grew stronger and stronger, eventually leading her to demand a chastity vow from her husband and undertake numerous pilgrimages in England, the Continent, and even the Holy Land. Her abnormally emotional devotions to Christ eventually attracted the attention of English religious authorities; they tried her for heresy, but she proved her orthodoxy in every regard (chs. 46-54). Sometime around 1428, Kempe<sup>12</sup> began dictating her *Book* to her son-in-law, but the result was an almost unintelligible document. Some ten years later, she found someone who could decipher the previous text (Book I), translate it into real English, and then she dictated roughly ten additional chapters (Book II) about the last decade's events, leaving us the unified *Book* we have today.

*The Book of Margery Kempe* is, like most medieval mystical-visionary texts, concerned with its narrator-protagonist's spiritual pursuit of a life devoted to God. Like Catherine of Siena and Marguerite Porete, Kempe sees herself as a "bride of Christ" and strives to increase her intimacy with Him by denying all intimacy with her actual husband, much to his dismay. Like Julian of Norwich, her synaesthetic visions contain graphic, disturbing images of Christ's suffering on the cross. Unlike these other women, however, Kempe never officially devotes her life to God by joining the Church; she somehow finds time for daily prayer, confession, and penance while running a household, co-managing a business, and raising children. In this regard, her *Book* at times reads more like the Paston women's letters (below), which are concerned with secular, domestic affairs. A comparison of *The Book of Margery Kempe* to any of the abovementioned works could be a fruitful exercise for students.

Kempe's *Book* would also make an ideal text for comparing which subjects are of greatest importance to medieval and modern writers and readers of autobiographies and/or memoirs. For instance, Kempe shows almost no interest in the logistics of her travels, such as what she saw and did in faraway lands, and instead spends the most time describing her emotions, others' reactions to her emotions, and her rather mundane life back in England.

In addition to discussing the narrative content of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, students and teachers could also look at some of its extratextual qualities, especially her relationship to books, reading, and writing. For an illiterate laywoman, Kempe shows a remarkable knowledge of contemporaneous English and Continental books of popular theology, such as Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*, Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, pseudo-Bonaventura's *Stimulus Amoris*, and the *vitae* of mystics like Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, Marguerite Porete, and Mary of Oignies (see Windeatt's Introduction, pp. 15-22). It may also be worth discussing *why* Kempe might have felt compelled to write an account of her life, especially since there was no real precedent in English literature for an autobiography. For instance, what does it mean to write one's story? Based on what we know about Margery from her text, what might such a document have symbolized to an illiterate laywoman?

Questions like this become even more pertinent when one considers the apparent risk involved, as her exuberant behavior had already provoked accusations that she was a Lollard, a member of a heretical sect that emerged in the late-fourteenth century and encouraged individual spirituality, translation of the Bible into English, and even women preachers. Although Margery Kempe proved her orthodoxy, all writing produced after 1409, the year that Archbishop Arundel's infamous *Constitutions* created legal demand and recourse for censorship, fell under intense scrutiny. By the time Kempe began her *Book*, some people accused of Lollardy had already been killed (see Rex for more information on Lollards). In this regard, teachers could use *The Book of Margery Kempe* to start a conversation about the radical potential of literacy to challenge the status quo—a conversation that could be expanded to include Marguerite Porete (below), whose mystical *Mirror for Simple Souls* resulted in her execution a



century earlier in France, or even today's "Banned Books List," whose mere existence seems contrary to democratic free-speech ideals.

Primary Sources:

*The Book of Margery Kempe*. Ed. and trans. B. A. Windeatt. London: Penguin Books, 1985.

This is the only translation to date of the whole *Book*. Most students will probably have to rely on a translated text, although like Julian's *Showings*, the Middle English here is not terribly difficult. While Windeatt's translation is very good, his Introduction can be problematic in its value and aesthetic judgments, as when he devalues the "quality of [Kempe's] mystical experience," criticizes its "awkward" combination of hagiography and autobiography, and declares that ultimately "we must accept the *Book* as it is" and not lament that "the writing seems to have so much in it of the life it seeks to present," since this life belongs to an overly-emotional woman (pp. 23-24). Still, it could be productive to look at Windeatt's claims through Russ's schema in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, especially "bad faith," "pollution of agency," "double standard of content," and "anomalousness."

*The Book of Margery Kempe*. Ed. Lynn Staley. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996.

[Full text available online through TEAMS Middle English Texts Series,

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/staley-the-book-of-margery-kempe.>]

For students who can manage the Middle English, this is the best edition available, since TEAMS texts are geared specifically towards students. Staley's work on Margery Kempe's authorial status has been crucial to changing critical perspectives on the *Book*, which all used to look like Windeatt's. While Staley's Introduction provides nowhere near the same level of historical and literary contextualization, it is far superior to Windeatt's in its discussions of Margery Kempe as a writer whose work can resonate with modern audiences, especially when read from a feminist perspective.

Secondary Sources:

*Mapping Margery Kempe: A Guide to Late Medieval Material and Spiritual Life*. Ed. Sarah Stanbury and Virginia Raguin. College of the Holy Cross. 2009. Web.

<<http://college.holycross.edu/projects/kempe/>>.

An excellent resource for students and teachers alike, *Mapping Margery Kempe* provides textual resources like chapter outlines and excerpts from related medieval spiritual texts, as well as historical resources like explanations of religious practices, a virtual tour of a fifteenth-century parish church, information on guilds and city government, and maps of common pilgrimage routes. Resources geared specifically toward teachers include a list of suggested research topics for students on medieval subjects related to Margery Kempe (like saints, clothing, and religious themes), many of which could be expanded into lesson plans, and bibliographies on topics ranging from cathedral art to religious life to histories of King's Lynn. The site's plethora of images helps immensely to make medieval spirituality less foreign to modern audiences.

*The Kempe Project*. Ed. Joel W. Fredell. Southeastern Louisiana University. 2014. Web.

<<http://english.selu.edu/humanitiesonline/kempe/>>.

In addition to bibliographies of their own, *The Kempe Project* has two in-progress digital editions of *The Book of Margery Kempe* that teachers could use to show students what medieval manuscripts and early printed books looked like. The first is the only surviving manuscript of the *Book* (British Library Additional MS 61823) with a facing-page transcription. The second is Wynkyn de Worde's Pamphlet (Cambridge University Library, STC 14924 [London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1501]), the first printed edition of the *Book*, also with a facing-page transcription. It is worth noting that this short pamphlet excerpt was the *only* known version of the text until the MS was discovered in the 1930s.

Rex, Richard. *The Lollards*. London: Palgrave, 2002.

Rex provides a good overview of what religion was like in later-medieval England, the origins of Lollardy with John Wyclif, how it took hold in England, why it was feared by Church authorities, and its relationship with the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Chapter 1 is crucial for understanding the historical/religious context in which Margery Kempe lived.

Chapter 2 goes through Wyclif's beliefs and, point by point, delineates how they conflict with official Roman Catholic doctrine. Chapter 3 addresses the effects of Lollardy in English society, and these are most relevant to Margery Kempe (see especially "The Lollard Message" and "Lollardy and Lay Piety").

### **Marguerite Porete**

Marguerite Porete (or Margaret Porette) (?-1310) was a French mystic and author of the heretical guide to spiritual enlightenment, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, for which she was burned alive. What little we do know of Porete's life comes from the trial proceedings, for unlike the writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, Porete does not use a personal autobiographical frame narrative to guide readers along a spiritual journey like her own. In this way, the *Mirror* reads more like the treatises of male mystical authors, like Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, whose authority was not in question and who do not hesitate to instruct their audiences. Porete's confidence in her spiritual authority and her willingness to assume the role of spiritual teacher seem to have been her downfall: she was initially told to write her book in Latin and limit its recipients, but she defiantly chose to write in French. When she was later offered the chance to recant her views to spare her life, she refused. According to the thirteenth-century Church, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* promotes the "Heresy of the Free Spirit," which among other things argues that a soul working completely in concert with divine will is not subject to earthly laws, a belief which poses obvious problems for political and religious authorities. In order to make these abstract concepts more concrete, students could compare Porete's ideas of achieving divine unification to Julian's ideas of "oneing" (literally, "the process of becoming one with God"), noting especially how each achieves unification and what happens to the human soul during this process; they could likewise compare Porete's ideas of becoming above earthly laws to Héloïse's arguments in defiance of sexual mores in Letter 2.

While *The Mirror of Simple Souls* is most significant for its theological ideas, its most obvious sources are actually secular works, particularly the courtly lyrics of French twelfth- and thirteenth-century Troubadour and Trobairitz poets, the allegorical dialogues characteristic of *The Romance of the Rose*, and the anti-academic stance taken by the author in the Prologue to *The Romance of Alexander*. In fact, Porete's *Mirror* adopts almost no features of conventional "feminine spirituality," such as a focus on the Passion of Christ, on bodily suffering, or even on intense visionary experiences (see Colledge et al., Foreword xi). For this reason, it may be more fruitful for teachers to excerpt Porete's lyrics and have students compare them to Troubadour and Trouvère lyrics (below). The lyric by Bieiris de Romans (see Bogin, p. 132) would be a good choice, as some have interpreted its addressee, "Lady Maria," to be the Virgin Mary. One might also compare Porete's dialogue structure between three allegorical female figures (Reason, Love, and Soul) with Christine de Pizan's dialogues with Ladies Reason, Justice, and Rectitude in the *Book and Treasure of the City of Ladies* (above).

*The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Ed. and trans. Edmund Colledge, J. C. Marler, and Judith Grant. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1999.

This is probably the best edition of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* for students, as other editions are intended for scholars of theology rather than literature. Instead of focusing on its theological sources and explaining point by point why it was considered heresy, this edition's Foreword and introductory Interpretive Essay focus on its relationship to medieval literature and its content, both religious and secular. The text itself is also highly readable, with chapter headings that summarize their content and clear dialogue markers to indicate speakers.

## Marie de France

Marie de France (fl. 1160?-1215?) was a French poet who produced most of her writing during the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries while living at an English court, probably that of King Henry II. She has rightly been declared “perhaps the greatest woman author of the Middle Ages and the creator of the finest medieval short fiction before Boccaccio and Chaucer” (Hanning and Ferrante 1). Despite Marie’s repeated naming of herself in her works, we know nothing concrete about her identity except her English patronage and French nationality. We can speculate, however, that she was an unmarried woman from a noble family who lived at a monastery: our lack of historical record suggests that she had no property of her own and no husband, and her obvious education and access to manuscripts of both early Latin and contemporary French texts suggest that she had access to a fairly well-stocked library. Her native language was French, the language in which all of her texts are written, but she probably also knew Middle (or Old) English based on her professed sources for her works, and her command of Latin was clearly formidable, as her *Lais* have an obvious Ovidian influence, and her *Fables* and *The Legend of the Purgatory of Saint Patrick* (*L’Espurgatoire Saint Patriz*) both derive from Latin sources.

Marie is best known today for her *Lais* (c. 1170), a collection of twelve short (118-1184 lines) rhyming verse narratives that would originally have been recited (probably sung) at court before an audience.

As a genre, a *lai* is a short rhymed lyric that seems to have originated with Troubadour and Trouvère poets in the early-twelfth century. Marie’s *Lais*, however, are part of a related genre called “Breton lays,” which are basically mini-romances composed in the rhymed verse stanzas typical of other *lais*: their subject is usually “courtly love,” their characters knights and noble ladies, their plots developed through fairy-tale motifs and magical interventions.<sup>13</sup> As Marie explains in her Prologue, her *lais* are based on stories she heard—probably tales of oral Celtic origin transmitted by itinerant Breton court minstrels—which she then “undertook to assemble” and “compose and recount...in rhyme” for the king (lines 47-8).<sup>14</sup> She appears to be the first author to record these stories in writing; consequently, she may have precipitated the development of medieval romance, which really took off in the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries with Chrétien de Troyes’ much longer French Arthurian romances (c. 1190s). Like other romances, Marie de France’s *Lais* are wonderfully entertaining, plot-driven narratives, and their brevity makes them the perfect entryway into medieval literature for students at the middle school level and up. They can be taught individually, with the focus being on plot and character development, since each *lai* incorporates a remarkable amount of psychological depth. They can also be taught in groups according to a given theme, with the focus being on putting tales into conversation with one another, since no two tales express the same viewpoint, and the complicated (and fun!) part of reading Marie’s *Lais* comes in sussing out the differences.

Marie’s *Fables* provide still more distinct perspectives on issues raised in the *Lais*, such as gender and sexuality, love and marriage, quests for honor, feudal power dynamics, qualities of a good ruler, and appropriate executions of justice. For this reason, her *Fables* could be taught as a self-contained unit or selected as compliments to one or more of her *Lais*. In contrast to today’s preference for her *Lais*, medieval readers seemed to prefer her *Fables*, and manuscript evidence suggests that these circulated widely around England and Continental Europe. Consequently, Marie’s *Fables* could reasonably be taught alongside works by other medieval writers like Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (especially “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Merchant’s Tale,” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale”), poems of the contemporaneous Troubadours and Trouvères, Middle English Breton Lays like *Le Freine*, *Sir Launfal*, and *Sir Orfeo*, and even anonymous works like *The Romance of Reynard* and the *Romulus* version of Aesop’s *Fables* (Marie’s source for *Fables* 1-40). Although these authors take on similar issues, sometimes by telling versions of the same fables, Marie recounts them from a decidedly female perspective and thereby encourages readers (most likely male) to sympathize with female characters’ pain in childbirth and powerlessness in rape, even to commend their cleverness in manipulating their dull-witted husbands (see Spiegel’s Introduction, pp. 9-11). Their divergent perspectives raise

important questions about what it means to write *as a woman*, not just about women or even imitating a woman's voice.

Instructors outside literary fields could also use Marie de France's *Lais* in a unit on medieval music: the *lai* was a lyric poem sung at court, and the manuscript in which Marie's *Lais* and *Fables* are found (British Library MS Harley 978, *Lais* ff. 118r-160r, *Fables* ff. 40r-67v) contains several folios of musical notation, as well as the often-recorded Old/Middle English lyric "Sumer is icumen in." Likewise, history teachers could use one or two *lais* as part of a lesson on chivalry, as the short texts represent medieval chivalric ideals (but not realities).

Primary Sources:

*The Lais of Marie de France*. Ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby. London: Penguin Books, 1986.

This is a good edition with prose translations of each *lai*. Both editions given here have comparable Introductions, though Burgess and Busby focus more on historical context of Marie and her *Lais* while Hanning and Ferrante focus on the *Lais*' literary qualities.

*The Lais of Marie de France*. Ed. and trans. Robert W. Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Grand Rapids, MI: Labyrinth Books, 1978.

Hanning and Ferrante provide beautiful verse translations of all twelve *lais*. While the prose translations of Burgess and Busby are probably easier for students to read, I would strongly recommend using verse translations because they are a much closer approximation of the original text, and verse composition is an important part of the romance genre. Additionally, Hanning and Ferrante provide prose summaries at the start of every tale, so the focus is less on understanding what happens and more on figuring out what Marie is doing with the language itself.

*Marie de France: Fables*. Ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987.

Spiegel offers a facing-page, dual-language edition of Marie's *Fables*, a collection of 103 fables, composed in rhyming couplets, that Marie claims to have translated into French based on either a Latin version translated from Greek by Aesop himself (Prologue lines 17-20) or an Old English version first translated from Latin by King Alfred (Epilogue lines 16-19).<sup>15</sup> Based largely on source ambiguities, Spiegel argues persuasively that "Marie herself could have gathered and recorded these fables for the first time...compiling the earliest extant collection of fables in the vernacular of western Europe" (p. 7). There is thus even more reason to teach Marie's *Fables* as part of the larger medieval literary tradition.

Selections. "Marie is my Name: I am of France." In Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, pp. 277-292.

Thiébaux's selection includes full prose translations of *Laüstic* and *Chevrefoil*, and three fables from *Isopet*, Marie's translation/adaptation of Aesop's *Fables*, "The Widow and the Knight," "The Peasant Who Saw Another Man with His Wife," and "The Peasant Who Saw His Wife with Her Lover." Marie's fables present a more down-to-earth, sometimes cynical perspective on love, and the contrast between them and the *Lais* reveals the literary artifice of "courtly love." In "The Widow and the Knight," for instance, a knight promises his love to a newly-widowed noblewoman in exchange for her assistance in evading the law, and she readily defiles her husband's corpse in order to receive his favors, thereby demonstrating the corrupt, hedonistic ways of humankind. In the first "Peasant" fable, the unfaithful wife convinces her husband to trust her above his own senses; in the second, the unfaithful wife convinces her husband to drop his charges of adultery because the scene he witnessed was a premonition of her approaching death. Although these tales depict the kinds of "wicked wives" so common in medieval misogynistic tradition, Marie shifts readers' focus onto the husbands' uxorious stupidity and implies that perhaps the women should not bear all the blame. Consider teaching the two "Peasant" fables alongside the Wife of Bath's Prologue, as she claims to have behaved

in a similarly manipulative wifely manner.

Selections. "Marriage" and "Women and the Arts." In Carolyn Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe*, pp. 20-22 and 240-42.

Larrington selects *Laiistic* (trans. Burgess and Busby) as part of her discussion of medieval marriage because the *lai* features the literary figure known as *la malmariée*, a title that translates literally to "the unhappily married wife" and designates a popular genre usually featuring a beautiful young woman married to a jealous old man. Larrington also includes from Marie's *Fables* (trans. Spiegel) the tale of "The Wolf and the Sow" and the Epilogue.

#### Secondary Sources:

Brians, Paul. "The Lais of Marie de France Study Guide (12th Century)." Washington State University. 2001. <<http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/love-in-the-arts/marie.html>>.

Part of Brians' student resources for his course on "Love in the Arts," this study guide would be an excellent starting place for teachers because each tale is followed by a series of discussion questions/prompts that teachers could borrow as is and/or adapt into lesson plans more suitable for secondary students.

British Library MS Harley 978, c. 1261-1265. [The only MS to contain all twelve *Lais*, and the most accurate complete copy of the *Fables*.]

<<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8682>>.

For information on and access to additional manuscripts, see Robert D. Peckham, *Marie de France: Manuscript Sources*, University of Tennessee at Martin

<<http://www.utm.edu/staff/bobp/vlibrary/mdfrancemss.shtml>>.

Watt, Diane. "Marie de France (*fl.* 1180)." In *Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 39-62.

Watt divides her discussion of Marie de France into three sections according to her three known works, the *Lais*, the *Fables* (*Isopet*), and *The Legend of the Purgatory of Saint Patrick* (*L'Espurgatoire Saint Patriz*). Watt focuses throughout on Marie's presentation of herself as an author and translator, how she understood the act of translation, and what she wanted her relationship to readers to be. In Part I, which examines the *Lais* but provides the foundational argument for all of Marie's works, Watt makes important connections between the medieval association of translation (*translatio studii*, lit. "translation of learning/intent") with metamorphosis and also the broader "gender politics of medieval authorship": while she undoubtedly employs patriarchal techniques like *translatio studii*, she mitigates the transgressive power of this appropriation by translating from oral sources and into the French vernacular, both of which were considered thoroughly feminine (pp. 42-3). As a result of her hybrid (one might even say hermaphroditic or monstrous) authorial self-representation, Watt argues, Marie's works display a deep-seated anxiety that readers might perceive her as transgressing the accepted literary sex/gender system.

In the *Lais*, this anxiety, while never explicitly stated, may be seen in how frequently Marie combines themes of sexual scandal and tarnished courtly reputation with metamorphosis, transformation, and sometimes explicit monstrosity—a claim Watt supports with close-readings of *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, and *Eliduc*. In her *Fables*, discussed in Part II, Marie mitigates her appropriation of masculine *translatio* and *speculum principi* (lit. "mirror for princes") with a feminine claim not to understand all that she has translated: Marie's anxiety about her hybrid authorial role results in the continuous compromising of her authority as expositor, as she creates diverse, ambiguous, and contradictory morals for her fables, thereby placing the onus of interpretation on the reader. In the hagiographic *Purgatory*, discussed in Part III, Marie emphasizes her role as translator—one who merely puts into French the content of her Latin source without changing or embellishing it in any way—in part because there is so much more at stake for her as a woman to be writing a religious text intended to impart religious instruction, as the Church officially forbade women from teaching.<sup>16</sup> This does not stop Marie

from exerting authorial control over her text, however. Indeed, she makes significant changes and creates a text that, as Watt's careful analysis demonstrates, is far more secular and political than the Latin original.

### **Paston Women (Agnes, Anne, Elizabeth, Margaret, and Margery Paston)**

The Pastons were an upwardly mobile, middle-class English family living in fifteenth-century Norfolk, England. Their surviving letters and papers document three generations and more than fifty years (c. 1426-1484) of everyday family life, business and legal affairs, and even some national political events. Their rise to prominence began when Clement Paston, a meager yeoman, bought up land from his neighbors who had perished in the plague and eventually made enough money to give his son, William, a first-rate education in law, which eventually earned him a government position and an economically advantageous marriage to Agnes Berry. Their son, John I, also studied law and worked at court, although his wealth and prestige exceeded those of either William or Clement: he befriended a knight named John Falstolf, the model for Shakespeare's fat and feckless Falstaff, and after becoming Falstolf's lawyer shortly before his death, he ended up being the main recipient of the knight's wealth and lands. Suspecting deception (probably rightly), Falstolf's family disputed the inheritance, and the ensuing decades-long legal fights between the Pastons and Falstolf's kin became the central focus of the next Paston generation—primarily John II, John III, and Margaret Brews Paston, John III's wife—and precipitated the family's involvement in the War of the Roses. The fight to retain possession of Caister Castle in Norfolk, inherited from Falstolf and the family's main residence, which occasionally turned violent, is the subject of most of their surviving letters.

The Paston's letters are important to historians because there was no single, coherent chronicle kept during this tumultuous time: the family's exchanges not only offer the only documentary evidence we have for some events but also sometimes tell a different story than that recorded by government officials, who tended to produce factional and unreliable records during the War of the Roses (1455-1485). For students, the Paston Letters may be most beneficial as a glimpse into the lives of ordinary people in the later Middle Ages, and they have the advantage of being written in something close to Modern English. They are probably most relevant to history teachers who want students to engage with primary sources in addition to textbook materials. Literature teachers could also use the Letters in conjunction with *The Book of Margery Kempe*, since she spends a good part of her *Book* describing her life in Norfolk in the decades just before the Paston Letters begin; students could thus make a focused comparison between Kempe's more literary description and the Pastons' more objective ones.

#### Primary Sources:

*The Paston Women: Selected Letters*. Ed. Diane Watt. Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2004.

This is probably the best choice for teachers who want to focus on the Paston women as writers rather than looking at the entire family's letters as primary sources on English private life.

Watt's interpretive essay, "In the Absence of a Good Secretary': The Letters, Lives, and Loves of the Paston Women Reconsidered," discusses how medieval ideas of authorship differed from our modern ones. This is an important distinction to make when considering the case of Margaret Paston, who composed more letters than any other family member and yet was forced to dictate all of them to scribes because she could neither read nor write—a process which confounds our notion that letters are private correspondences between two people.

*Paston Letters*. Ed. Norman Davis. London: Oxford UP: 1958.

Despite being published over fifty years ago, Davis's text is still the definitive edition of the Paston Letters. Unlike Watt, Davis includes letters written by men and women.

#### Secondary Sources:

Keen, Maurice. "The First English Family Letters." *History Today* 9.5 (1959). [Available online, <http://www.historytoday.com/maurice-keen/first-english-family-letters>.]

Keen's relatively short, easily accessible article discusses the historical significance of the

Paston family's letters, providing readers with valuable historical context.

Watt, Diane. "The Paston Letters (1440-1489)." In *Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 136-56.

In this chapter, Watt demonstrates how we can read letters for more than just their explicit documentation of one family's experiences. Part I, "Absent Women," essentially performs forensic criticism as she searches for clues as to what two Paston women, Margery Paston Calle and Elizabeth Paston, thought and felt about their arranged marriages—no small task, as both women's voices were deliberately obscured in the epistolary records when their actions did not accord with the family's expectations. Part II, covers much of the same ground as Watt's interpretive essay in *The Paston Women* in its exploration of questions like what it means to be an author in the Middle Ages and how we should interpret these letters as historical documents with underlying literary qualities. Part III makes the case for studying women's writing alongside men's.

The critical work Watt performs in Part I is of utmost importance to students' critical reading skills, as it clearly shows how even what looks like an objective historical record—a series of letters exchanged between family members—must be treated as subjective, perhaps even deliberately biased, attempts to (re)write history the way one wants it to be remembered, not as it actually happened. In a sense, the Paston letters can help students develop media literacy by teaching them to read documentary evidence critically, keeping in mind an author's biases, noticing and interpreting an author's style, and looking for gaps or contradictions in the documents.

## **Troubadour and Trouvère Poets**

The poets who came to be known as Troubadours and Trouvères ushered in a period of poetic flourishing in twelfth-century France that would forever change the way people in western Europe thought about and wrote poetry. By definition, a *troubadour* was a male poet who originated in Occitania (southern France, sometimes generically called Provençal) and composed in *langue d'oc*, a language which is related to but distinct from Old French and which is now called Occitan; a *trouvère* refers to a male poet from northern France and composing in *langue d'oïl*, the group of dialects considered to be Old French, i.e. the predecessor to Modern French. A female troubadour is sometimes called a *trobairitz* because *troubadour* is grammatically masculine, but its application is inconsistent and no equivalent feminine title exists for the trouvères.

New literary modes are rarely (if ever) spontaneously generated, and the troubadours' poetry did have some precedent thematically in Ovidian conceptions of love and structurally in the freer-form Latin religious hymns of the early-eleventh century. Regardless, the troubadours' innovations far outweigh their derivations. First, the fact that they wrote in the vernacular, not Latin, set their poetry apart as something daring, innovative, and engaging. Second, the troubadours merged Classical discourse about love with medieval feudalism and Christian *caritas*, thereby inventing "courtly love" as we know it.<sup>17</sup> Although it varies in specifics from author to author, the basic idea is this: the lover feels an intensely passionate, often unrequited desire for the beloved, whom he obeys as a vassal obeys his *domna* ("lady," sometimes spelled *dompna*), and the very act of desiring her beauty and virtue leads to his moral improvement through a process known as *fin' amor* ("refining love"), regardless of whether or not she grants him *pretz* ("prestige" or "prize/reward," often with sexual implications). Additionally, the troubadours composed their lyrics as pieces to be performed before semi-intimate court audiences comprised of their social superiors, their peers, and potentially their respective beloveds. Finally, the troubadours were, on the whole, remarkably accepting of women writers, since we have surviving texts for twenty trobairitz, eight of whom are identified in historical records as poets, suggesting that their literary output was far greater than what manuscripts preserve (only two poets, the

Countess of Dia and the poet referred to in Bogin's anthology as "Anonymous III," have more than one extant lyric). There is no consensus among scholars as to *why* so many women emerged in a single geographic area within the span of a single century, but theories abound (see Bogin, Introduction pp. 13-19).

While poetry may be difficult for students, the trobairitz's lyrics have the advantage of being relatively straightforward responses to their lovers or narrative explanations of their situations, subjects that students can break down and discuss in small groups. Additionally, students can listen to performances of the poems to get a sense of what "high class" entertainment was like in the Middle Ages.

#### Primary Sources:

*The Women Troubadours: An Introduction to the Women Poets of 12<sup>th</sup>-Century Provence and a Collection of Their Poems*. Ed. and trans. Meg Bogin. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980.

This is probably the best choice for teaching trobairitz poetry. For students, Bogin provides facing-page translations of every poem, translations that are both eloquent and faithful to the original poems, and brief introductions to each poet. For teachers, Bogin's two very detailed introductions — the first a general introduction to twelfth-century Occitanian society and literature, the second a focused study of the women troubadours—provide all the information necessary to teach the poems themselves, the historical contexts that allowed for their composition in the first place.

*Songs of the Women Troubadours*. Ed. and trans. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, Laurie Shepard, and Sarah White. New York: Garland, 1995.

Also an excellent edition, Bruckner, Shepard, and White provide equally good translations as Bogin, but the introductory materials are nowhere near as comprehensive.

#### Secondary Sources:

*Music of the Troubadours*. Ensemble Unicorn, Oni Wytars, Michael Posch, Marco Ambrosini. Early Music [Alte Musik], 1999. CD.

*Music of the Troubadours* is a collection of medieval lyrics mostly written by male troubadours, with a couple of tracks composed by anonymous authors, as well as one purely instrumental arrangement.

*Trouvères & Troubadours: Minnesänger & Other Courtly Arts*. Century, Vol. 4. Harmonia Mundi, 2005. CD.

Useful for experiencing a wider variety of medieval music, this CD includes 1-3 songs by troubadour, trouvère, and minnesänger poets, some canonical hymns about the Virgin Mary, and 1-3 selections from *Carmina Burana*, a thirteenth-century text which was set to music in the twentieth-century.

Many modern musical renditions of trobairitz, troubadour, and trouvère lyrics can also be found on YouTube by searching for the first line of the original Occitan or Old French text.





1 “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” III(D).692-6, from *The Canterbury Tales* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

2 The former claim is unlikely, since his use of the word “painted” suggests that he is using Marie de France’s translation of Aesop’s *Fables* (Benson n692). The latter claim, that Chaucer deliberately represents women as excluded from the literary canon, is convincingly articulated in the chapter, “Following Corinne: Chaucer’s Classical Women Writers,” in Jennifer Summit’s book, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000). An excellent analysis, *Lost Property* is too theoretical for all but the most advanced students; however, teachers may be able to distill some of its points about women’s representations in literature to kick-start class discussion. See also Rebecca Krug’s Introduction to *Reading Families*.

3 Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1983). This bibliography and its methodology rely heavily on Russ’s analysis of the male-dominated literary sphere and its historical treatment of women’s writing, and I would highly recommend the book to anyone trying to integrate women’s writing into standard, canonical literary studies. However, because Russ’s work does not deal directly with *medieval* women’s writing, I have chosen not to include it in the main body of critical resources.

4 See Russ, “The Double Standard of Content,” “Anomalousness,” and “Lack of Models.”

5 For a comprehensive list, see Juliet Sloger, “Women Writers of the Middle Ages,” Robbins Library, University of Rochester <<http://www.library.rochester.edu/robbins/women-writers>>. Sloger provides an alphabetically organized list of medieval women writers, as well as a fairly comprehensive list of primary and secondary sources for each, though most of these are aimed at post-secondary students or specialists.

6 Beatrice Gottlieb, “The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century.” In *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy*. Ed. Julius Kirshner and Suzanne Wemple. Oxford: Blackwell, 1985, 337-64.

7 Sheila Delany, “Mothers to Think Back Through: Who Are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan.” In *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*. Eds. Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987, 177-97.

8 Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski. “Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition.” *Romantic Review* 81.3 (1990), 279-92.

9 Patricia Phillippy, “Establishing Authority: Boccaccio’s *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan’s *Le Livre de la Cite des Dames*.” *Romantic Review* 77.3 (1986), 167-94.

10 *The Letter of Othea*’s tripartite structure is a testament to Christine’s rhetorical brilliance: she first uses the *text* to rewrite Classical mythology to suit her own ends, and she then uses the *gloss* and *allegory* to authorize her rewritings—or to create the illusion that they are authorized, as these kinds of commentaries would traditionally have been added to biblical or patristic works by later clerics who deemed their contents (when correctly interpreted) critical to lay salvation. Christine thus negotiates the conflicting demands of joining the male-dominated literary sphere and remaining true to her opposition to clerical literary authorities.

11 For medieval authors, “comedy” simply referred to a narrative with a happy ending. This explains why Dante’s epic trilogy poem, which follows its narrator-author through Hell into Paradise, is called *The Divine Comedy* when there is nothing overtly funny about it.

12 Following Staley, I will use Kempe to refer to Margery Kempe, author of the *Book*, and Margery to refer to the narrative persona inside the *Book*. This is an important distinction to make, as it implies that Kempe had sufficient authorial awareness to make her *Book* not just a straightforward retelling of her life’s events—and a reading of her *Book* will show that it is not a straightforward anything—but also to imbue her text with clearly literary qualities whose meaning and effects she understood. Consequently, we should not always take women writers at their word when they say they lack learning or do not understand what their vision means — as many early (male) critics did when they wrote that these women were illiterate and uneducated. Indeed, we can see the necessity of women’s “denial of agency” in the cases of Margery Kempe, who was accused and acquitted of heresy, and Marguerite Porete, who was accused of and executed for heresy.

13 The term “courtly love” (*amour courtois*) was coined in 1883 by French scholar Gaston Paris, but it gained popularity as a conceptual framework for reading medieval literature when C. S. Lewis published *The Allegory of Love* (1936) and asserted, based on his wide-ranging study of medieval literature, that the Middle Ages possessed a codified doctrine of ideal heterosexual courtship. For Lewis, “courtly love” was defined by four interconnected ideas: (1) humility, (2) courtesy, (3) adultery, and (4) the “Religion of Love” (p. 2). The humility and courtesy shown by the lover to his lady are understood to

be transferences of the vassal's feudal obligation to his lord, as the woman, "by her social and feudal position, was already the arbitress of manners and the source of 'villainy' even before she is loved" (p. 13). Adultery was a necessary component of "courtly love" for at least three reasons: (1) true love could rarely flourish within the bounds of marriage because marriages were arranged for socioeconomic reasons, (2) true love manifested in feats of arms, as meditations on love enabled the lover to almost supernatural strength, but if the knight were already married, there would be no impetus to perform such deeds to win his lady's affections, and (3) the medieval Church's conflicting theological opinions on sex and sin made it, to some extent, preferable to sin outside of marriage. Finally, at the risk of oversimplifying Lewis's historical-theological analysis, the "Religion of Love" emerged out of the medieval (mis)appropriation and Christianization of Ovidian erotic/amatory tropes, and it resulted in the use of poetic language and imagery with simultaneously religious and sexual meanings (pp. 13-22).

While Lewis's four criteria do appear repeatedly in medieval literature, there almost certainly was no actual "code," and people probably never saw themselves as "courtly lovers" whose behavior should mirror that of the characters they read about. The closest thing in the Middle Ages to Lewis's codified "courtly love" was proffered by Andreas Capellanus in his twelfth-century *De Amore* (literally *On Love*, but sometimes translated as *The Art of Courtly Love*), which does seem to establish some of romance's salient features, including the need for secrecy and the belief that adulterous love was purer than married love. However, debate continues among academics as to whether Capellanus composed *De Amore* as satire, akin to Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* (*Cures for Love*) or as a serious work, though the arguments for satire are (to my mind) the more compelling.

14 She claims in *Chevrefoil* to have heard the story *and* to have found it written down:

I should like very much  
to tell you the truth  
about the *lai* men call *Chevrefoil*

... ..

Many have told and recited it to me  
and I have found it in writing... (lines 1-3, 6-7).

This is probably the only exception to her stories' oral origins, as *Chevrefoil* describes a moment in the very popular and frequently retold/rewritten story of Tristan and Iseult. However, it is equally possible that Marie also found written versions of other *lais* and obscures her sources by not referencing them in order to increase her authorial freedom to adapt the tales.

15 Marie's account of Aesop and his *Fables* is wildly inaccurate, though it is perfectly in keeping with what other medieval writers believed about him. In contrast to her claim that Aesop translated his *Fables* from Greek into Latin, the historical Aesop (assuming an historical author even existed) was probably an illiterate bard-like figure who lived around 600 BCE in Ancient Greece, several centuries before a Latin literary tradition emerged in Rome. For more information on the transmission of Aesop's *Fables* from Greek to Latin, as well as the earlier medieval Latin versions with which Marie may have been familiar, see Spiegel's Introduction, pp. 6-11.

16 The medieval Catholic Church cited biblical passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14, given respectively from the Douay-Rheims Version:

Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be subject, as also the law. But if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church.

Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man; but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed; then Eve. And Adam was not seduced; but the woman being seduced, was in the transgression.

The religious injunction against women's teaching significantly impacts the writing women produce in the Middle Ages. Most significantly, it meant that women writers took especial care to obscure their own authorial influence over a text, essentially appropriating the concept of "denial of agency" — typically used, according to Russ, by men against women writers — and using it to their own advantage. This plays out in a number of ways. For example, they may have insisted, like Marie de France, that they were mere translators or compilers of another male-authored, authoritative work. They may also, like Hildegard in her letter to prelates on music's salvific power, have communicated harsh admonitions indirectly through embedded allegories. Further, they may have claimed, as so many medieval women did, that their work was just a "translation" of divinely inspired visions — a claim which advantageously implied that God was the ultimate (and infallible) "author" for whatever they professed, that their words were inherently authoritative regardless of the woman's formal theological knowledge, and that they were not actually teaching since their visions were "merely" personal experiences without any direct implications for others.

While I do not mean to suggest that all medieval women's visionary experiences were fabricated for personal gain, I do think that women writers were aware of the genre's advantages and used "denial of agency" rhetorically to subvert doctrinal constraints. Consequently, we should not always take women writers at their word when they say they lack learning or do not understand what their vision means — as many early (male) critics did when they wrote that these women were illiterate and uneducated. Indeed, we can see the necessity of women's 'denial of agency' in the cases of Margery Kempe, who was accused and acquitted of heresy, and Marguerite Porete, who was accused of and executed for heresy. Indeed, we can see the necessity of women's "denial of agency" in the cases of Margery Kempe and Marguerite Porete. Kempe's *Book* went beyond providing a mere account of her visions, venturing into the realm of religious teaching, and she was tried and acquitted as a heretic; Porete makes no pretenses about not teaching, adopting the more authoritative genre of dream-vision, and she gets tried and convicted as a heretic. Their different contexts must, of course, be taken into account, but their situations nevertheless demonstrate the potential subversive power of women's voices when they are permitted to be heard.

17 As mentioned above (note ix), "courtly love" is really a modern concept based on common literary themes, not on actual gender relations in medieval society.

*The Once and Future Classroom*. XII.2 (Spring 2016)

<http://once-and-future-classroom.org/XII/2/12-2elb.pdf>

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