**ENGLISH 120: MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WOMEN’S WRITING**
Tuesday–Thursday 5:00-6:15 PM
Walsh 490

**Instructor:** Dr. Kavita Mudan  
**Office Hours:** New North 413, Tuesday/Thursday 2:30-4:00 PM  
**Contact Info:** The best way to reach me is via e-mail at km589@georgetown.edu.

The Latin word *auctoritas* can signify a number of different things, including authority (political, literary, cultural, etc) and authorship, both of which were generally denied to women during the medieval and early modern periods. This class will focus on how female writers of those periods could and did claim *auctoritas* in textual form, whether literary, political, or religious—and frequently more than one at once. Writers to be studied will include Sei Shōnagon (c. 966-1017), Marie de France (late 12th-century), Saint Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1416) and other contemporary mystical writers, Christine de Pizan (1363-c.1430), Anne Askew (c.1520-1546), Queen Elizabeth I (1536-1603), Veronica Franco (1546-1591), Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645), and Elizabeth Cary (c.1585-1639). Assignments will include three short papers, one major research paper, and two presentations.

All required texts are available at the university bookshop, on Amazon, and at Barnes and Noble.

**Required Texts**

All other assigned texts will be uploaded to BlackBoard.

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**General Course Policies**

**Attendance and Assignments**
We are covering a lot of material in this course so it is extremely important that all students attend all classes. If you have a *legitimate reason* for missing class, get in touch with me *at least 24 hours in advance* and I will try my best to accommodate you. That being said, sometimes life happens, and as such, you are permitted two unexcused absences and three excused. For every additional absence, 5% will be deducted from your final grade.
This class has a heavy reading load and you are expected to complete all of the reading by the assigned date, so plan accordingly. Don’t worry if you do not understand everything; that’s what class discussion is for. What is important is that you come to class with theories and ideas about that day’s reading.

All students are expected to bring all assigned texts to class (including printouts and BlackBoard downloads) and are expected to participate in discussion. As a matter of general policy, cell phones must be switched off during class.

You are expected to submit all assignments on time. If you require an extension, you must request it at least 2 days in advance and provide a very good reason and a concrete date by which you will submit the work. In all other cases, 10% will be deducted from your grade on that assignment for every day late.

**Note for online submissions:** If you are submitting assignments online, please include your name in the filename.

You are expected to use secondary sources that are not Wikipedia. Improperly researched or cited papers will not be tolerated. The MLA citation system is available for no charge on the MLA website, so you have no excuse not to use it.

**Communication**

Please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns with me during office hours or via e-mail. That being said, you should plan for a twenty-four (24) hour turnover time for e-mails. In case of an emergency, I will get back to you as soon as possible, but keep in mind that a lack of preparedness on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine. Please indicate your question in the subject line.

My office hours, as listed above, are in New North 413 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 PM to 4:00 PM. This is an ideal time to bring me ideas for papers or reading responses or to ask questions that you might not have felt like asking during class. If you would like me to look over a draft, please send it to me at least 24 hours beforehand and we can discuss it over e-mail or in office hours. As a final note, office hours end at 4:00 PM on the dot. Do not show up at 3:55 PM and expect an extended conversation.

In order for me to get to know you better, I have set aside time during office hours in the first two weeks of class to hold individual meetings of 15-20 minutes each. There will be a signup sheet going round on the first day of class. If you absolutely cannot make it because of other classes, let me know and I will do my best to accommodate you at some other time.

**Plagiarism**

Georgetown University has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. It is not that hard to find out if you’ve been doing it, and if you are caught, you will fail the class. Bottom line: Cite your sources and don’t plagiarize.
Grading Rubric

There is no curve in this class, and if the work merits it, I would be thrilled to give each and every one of you an A. That being said, they are reserved for exceptional work and class participation, and that is what you will need in order to earn one.

A-level work is exceptional. An A paper does everything a B paper does, below, but also goes above and beyond. The distinguishing qualities of such a paper are the originality, clarity, and complexity of the argument; the depth and subtlety of the analysis; and the elegance of the prose. Most A papers take some real intellectual risks --for example, by advocating an interpretation that may be new, surprising, or controversial to readers. However, they also keep their analysis firmly grounded in the text and show how the author’s word choice and use of literary devices supports the student’s interpretation.

B-level work is competent. It has a clear and arguable main idea, and the author maintains focus on this point. It addresses some of the complexities of the text -- for example, by exploring and responding to alternative interpretations. It uses appropriate supporting evidence, including quotations and original analysis, and any evidence from outside sources is cited and attributed correctly. The writing is free or nearly free of surface errors and infelicities of style (e.g., unnecessarily convoluted sentences). The author has a good sense of audience; the tone and level of detail are appropriate for academic writing.

C-level work is promising but uneven. It is on topic, and the writer has some sort of argument and has made an attempt to muster appropriate supporting evidence. Information from outside sources is cited. However, the paper may be too general and lack specificity; it may substitute plot summary for analysis or fail to cite appropriate textual evidence (e.g., quotations). There may also be pervasive mechanical errors or stylistic problems that distract the reader from the author’s message. But by far the most common problem is that the author fails to make a real argument -- he or she plays it safe and makes claims that no reasonable person would disagree with, and hence readers are left wondering why the essay was written in the first place.

D-level work is seriously flawed. Perhaps the essay does not meet minimal standards of college-level writing -- it lacks a clear point, evidence, and / or an organizing principle. Or, more often, it simply fails to engage in analysis: it consists of plot summary and / or biographical or historical information, with the occasional quotation, but no real interpretation on the author’s part.

Failing work does not meet the guidelines for the assignment or is plagiarized.

Participation: Generally, a student with strong (A-level) participation does all of the following:

- Attends class regularly.
- Turns in writing responses that show engagement with the text.
- Contributes substantively to class discussions, usually speaking up during every
class period. Questions and comments show that the student has read the text closely and carefully.

- Listens attentively and responds to other students’ comments.
- Seeks help when appropriate, for example, by coming to office hours.

Students who do most of these things will earn a B. Students who do some of them—for example, students who attend every class and are not disruptive, but rarely ask questions or contribute to class discussion—will earn a C. Students who attend the minimum number of classes and are frequently unprepared or disengaged will earn a D or F.

Course Requirements

Grading Breakdown
35% Research Paper
5% Paper Proposal
30% Short Response Papers (3 at 10% each)
10% Presentation
15% Class Participation (inc. in-class activities)
5% Female Mystics Group Project

Response Papers
All students will be required to write three (3) 600-800 word (2-3 page) response papers, due on three designated days over the course of the semester. These may be on a topic of your choice, although optional prompts will also be provided as a guideline.

I do not expect you to have a thorough interpretation, but your response paper should offer some kind of evaluation or analysis. In other words, it should be more than simply random, unconnected thoughts. This assignment is designed to stimulate class discussion, and to help you remember the texts and generate paper ideas. These do not need to be polished essays, but please watch for spelling and grammar, and do not forget to cite your sources, even if they are among the suggested secondary readings.

Response papers may be submitted electronically, but they must be in my inbox before class starts on the designated day. These dates are as follows:

Tuesday February 14
Tuesday March 20
Thursday April 26

Research Paper
Students are required to write one major research paper for this class, of approximately 2500-3000 words (8-10 pages). Papers must include at least four (4) pieces of primary contextual material and secondary criticism (in any combination) in addition to the main text or texts under discussion (for example, if you were comparing Veronica Franco to
Isabella Whitney, you would need at least six sources). Secondary criticism may be in the form of either books or articles, and may include material used in class.

All papers must be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point font, and submitted in hard copy, with attached bibliography. I will not accept electronic copies of research papers.

**Paper Proposal**
You must submit a one-page proposal for your final paper and list of at least two pieces of additional source material (primary or secondary) on Thursday April 12. This may be submitted electronically. You are strongly encouraged to discuss your proposed topics with me before this date, either in office hours or by e-mail.

Ideally, your paper proposal should tell me what your main argument is, how you plan to support it, and what larger significance it might have. I say “might,” because a good paper is an evolving paper; as you read more secondary criticism or primary contextual material, you may find that your argument is changing, and that is perfectly fine. If you feel you are straying considerably far from your proposal, please discuss it with me.

**Presentations**
At the beginning of term, students will pick a topic and accompanying date on which they will pair up and give a short (8-10 minute) presentation, pose one or two questions to the class, and lead the ensuing discussion. For further information, please consult the accompanying detailed description of this assignment.

You are advised to divide the labor in advance so no one person is left doing all the work. If you feel as though the work has been divided unevenly, do get in touch with me and we will work together to resolve the issue.

**Female Mystics Group Project**
As part of the unit on spiritual authority in women’s writing, you will be required to work in groups to produce a 5-7-minute presentation on one of five female mystics whose work we will be reading in excerpt form. You will choose your groups on the first day. As part of your presentation, you will come up with one or two discussion questions related to the assigned excerpt from your chosen writer.

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**Important Note:** Topics of discussion may vary as the term progresses. If there are any changes to the syllabus, I will announce them in class.

**Week 1**
Thursday January 12
For class:
In class: Introduction; choose presentation dates

**Unit I: Spiritual Authority**
Week 2 – Julian of Norwich
Tuesday January 17
For class: Read Grace M. Jantzen, “The Life of an Anchoress,” in Julian of Norwich, pp. 143-50; Julian of Norwich, pp. 3-21 (end of Revelation III)

Thursday January 19
For class: Julian, pp. 22-56 (end of Revelation XIII); Christine de Pizan, “The Hours of Contemplation on the Passion of Our Lord,” pp. 346-7

Week 3 – Julian of Norwich, cont’d
Tuesday January 24
For class: Julian, pp. 56-92 (end of Ch. 58); Margery Kempe in Julian, pp. 130-34
In class: Presentation on Margery Kempe

Thursday January 26
For class: Julian, pp. 92-end; Christine de Pizan, “A Letter Concerning the Prison of Human Life,” pp. 338-43

Week 4 – Medieval Mystics
Tuesday January 31
For class: Read selections from Marguerite, Elizabeth, and Bridget (BlackBoard)
In class: Presentations on Marguerite Porete, Elizabeth of Hungary, and Bridget of Sweden

Thursday February 2
For class: Read selections from Catherine and Mechtild (BlackBoard)
In class: Presentations on Catherine of Siena and Mechtild von Hackeborn

Week 5 – Post-Reformation Religious Writing
Tuesday February 7
For class: Selections from Anne Askew (BlackBoard)
In class: Presentation on Anne Askew

Thursday February 9
For class: Mary Sidney in Renaissance Women Poets, “To the Angel Spirit,” Psalms #54, 71, 84, 100, 111, 117, 127
In class: Presentation on Mary Sidney

Unit II: Political Authority

Week 6 – Marie de France
Tuesday February 14
For class: Read Marie de France, Prologue and Bisclavret (BlackBoard); Response Paper #1 due
Thursday February 16
For class: Read Marie de France, *Lanval* (BlackBoard)
In class: Presentation on Marie de France

**Week 7 – Christine de Pizan and the querelle des femmes**
Tuesday February 21
For class: Read de Pizan, pp. 171-228; excerpts from *Romance of the Rose* (BlackBoard)
In class: Presentation on Christine de Pizan

Thursday February 23
For class: Read de Pizan, pp. 269-91, 304-08, 348-52

**Week 8 – Queen Elizabeth I**
Tuesday February 28
For class: Read excerpts from early reign of Elizabeth I (BlackBoard)

Thursday March 1
For class: Read excerpts from Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots (BlackBoard)

**SPRING BREAK March 2 – 11**

**Week 9 – Women as Historians**
Tuesday March 13
For class: Read Anne Dowriche, excerpts from *The French History* (BlackBoard)

Thursday March 15
For class: Read Elizabeth Cary, *Tragical History of Edward II* (BlackBoard)
In class: Presentation on Elizabeth Cary

**Unit III: Intellectual Authority**

**Week 10 - Sei Shōnagon**
Tuesday March 20
For class: Read *Pillow Book*, pp. 23-71; Response Paper #2 due
In class: Presentation on Sei Shōnagon

Thursday March 22
For class: Read *Pillow Book*, pp. 71-end; *The Diary of Murasaki Shikibu* (BlackBoard)

**Week 11 – Women as Educators**
Tuesday March 27
For class: Read Marie de France, *Chaitevel* and *Chevrefeuil* (BlackBoard)

Thursday March 29
For class: Read de Pizan, “Christine’s Vision,” pp. 3-26; “Othea to Hector,” pp. 96-104
**Week 12 – Veronica Franco**
Tuesday April 3
For class: Read Veronica Franco, *Terza Rima*, Cap. 19, 20 (BlackBoard)
In class: Presentation on Veronica Franco

Thursday April 5
NO CLASS (Easter Break)

**Week 13 – Veronica Franco, cont’d**
Tuesday April 10
For class: Read Franco, *Terza Rima*, Cap. 16; *Lett. Fam.*, #17, 21, 22 (BlackBoard)
In class: Begin *Dangerous Beauty*

Thursday April 12
For class: Paper Proposals Due
In class: Finish *Dangerous Beauty*

**Week 14**
Tuesday April 17
For class: Read Isabella Whitney, *Sweet Nosgay*, in *Renaissance Women Poets*, pp. 3-28
In class: Presentation on Isabella Whitney

Thursday April 19
For class: Read excerpts from the poetry and oratory of Elizabeth I (BlackBoard)

**Week 15 – Aemilia Lanyer**
Tuesday April 24
For class: Read Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (dedications and ll. 1-328) in *Renaissance Women Poets*, pp. 207-36
In class: Presentation on Aemilia Lanyer

Thursday April 26
For class: Finish Lanyer, *Salve Deus* in *Renaissance Women Poets*, pp. 236-74; Response Paper #3 due

**FINAL**
Friday May 4
Final paper due in my mailbox (New North 306) before 12:00 noon.