

**Religion 150 04: Freshman Seminar  
Women's Spiritual Autobiography**

Prof. Alison I. Beach  
The College of William and Mary  
Spring Semester 2003

Class Meeting: Tuesday & Thursday, 2:00 – 3:20, Wren 204  
Office: Wren 306  
Office Hours: Wednesday 9:30 – 11:00 and 2:00 –3:00, and by appointment  
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**A. Course Organization and Requirements**

Course Description:

Spiritual autobiography can provide both a window on the inner life of a person and a reflection of the world in which that person lives. This course includes women's diaries & journals, memoirs, letters, a short story, and two films. We will pay particular attention to changing understandings of what it means to be an individual – and an individual woman – within a number of religious and secular contexts.

Class Meetings:

The class will meet Tuesday and Thursday from 2:00 to 3:20. We will spend most of our time in class discussing the assigned readings. I will also provide background information in class for each new religious/historical context. The reading assignments are listed by week in section D of the syllabus. I may update this schedule as the semester progresses.

*Remember:* The success of this course depends on your doing **all** of the reading. We can't discuss what you haven't read!

Course Requirements:

- ❖ Autobiographical Journal and Essay (20%): 7 to 10 pages, due on the last day of class. You will write this during the course of the semester, and you will have several opportunities to share parts of what you are writing with both me and the class.
- ❖ 8 Response Papers (10%): 1-page written reactions to the course material, due on the day we begin discussing the text about which you are writing.
- ❖ 2 Exams (40%)
  - (a) Take-home Midterm Exam (15%)
  - (b) Take-home Final Exam (25%)

❖ Class Participation (30%)

Class participation in a seminar includes active engagement in discussions and activities. I am interested, not just in the quantity, but also in the quality of your contributions to the class. Be ready to show that you have both read and thought about the assigned material. Please take this component of your grade seriously: ***you won't get an A for participation simply by attending class.***

**B. Course Books and Reader**

Margery Kempe	<i>The Book of Margery Kempe</i>
Radice, Betty ed.	<i>The Letters of Abelard and Heloise</i>
Teresa of Avila	<i>The Life of Teresa of Avila by Herself</i>
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins	<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>
Ann Frank	<i>Diary of Ann Frank</i>
Nimmo, Beth and Scott, Darrell	<i>The Spiritual Journey of Columbine Martyr Rachel Scott</i>
Articles on the Genre of Autobiography; Augustine, Perpetua, Elizabeth Ashbridge, Jarena Lee	Course Reader Available for purchase at Staples on Richmond Road

**C. Grading Policy**

My interpretation of letter grades for written work is as follows:

**A and A-:** Excellent

Papers and exams that are correctly written in a technical sense, develop a logical, coherent argument, and contain a sequence of related paragraphs that lead to clear conclusions. An A-range paper demonstrates a firm grasp of the assigned material and offers original and insightful analysis.

**B+, B, B-:** Good

Papers that have only minor technical flaws, develop an argument, but one that may be less subtle or well-reasoned than an A-range paper. B-range papers demonstrate a more than adequate grasp of the text(s), and make thoughtful use of the text(s) without necessarily adding something new.

**C+, C, C-:** Adequate

Papers that have numerous technical errors, treat the assigned material only superficially, and/or fail to answer the assigned question adequately.

**D+, D, D-:** Poor

Papers with numerous serious technical errors and/or fail to address the assigned question in any effective way.

My interpretation of letter grades for class participation is:

**A and A-:** Excellent

The student is always prepared to discuss the **specifics** of the assigned readings, asks interesting and focused questions, brings appropriate previous knowledge into the discussion, and listens and reacts respectfully to the comments of others in the class. The student has not missed more than one class meeting (without a valid excuse).

**B+, B, B-:** Good

The student is usually, but not always, prepared to discuss the specifics of the assigned readings. The student is usually a good questioner and listener. The student has not missed more than two class meetings (without a valid excuse).

**C+, C, C-:** Adequate

The student is often not prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Questions and contributions reflect spotty preparation for class. The student is sometimes not a respectful listener. The student has not missed more than three class meetings (without a valid excuse).

**D+, D, D-:** Poor

The student is generally not prepared for class and demonstrates little engagement with the readings or the class discussion. Student is inappropriately argumentative or offensive to fellow students. The student has not missed more than four class meetings (without a medical excuse).

**F:** Unacceptable

The student has missed more than five class meetings (without a valid medical excuse).

## **D. Schedule of Classes & Readings**

### **January 16**

#### Course Introduction

### **January 21**

#### Biography, Autobiography & Spiritual Autobiography

##### *Read:*

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Life Narrative: Definitions and Distinctions," and "A Tool Kit: Twenty Strategies for Reading Life Narratives," in *Reading Autobiography* (Course Reader #1)

Jill Ker Conway, "Memory's Plots," in *When Memory Speaks: Exploring the Art of Autobiography* (Course Reader #2)

Augustine, *Confessions* (Course Reader #3)

### **January 23 & 28**

#### Perpetua: Early Christian Mother & Martyr

##### *Read:*

The Passion of Saints Perpetua & Felicity in *Mystics, Visionaries, and Prophets: a Historical Anthology of Women's Spiritual Writings* (Course Reader #4)

### **January 30, February 4 & 11**

#### Heloise (& Abelard): Letter-Writing Medieval Lovers

##### *Read:*

*The Letters of Abelard & Heloise*

### **February 13 & 18**

#### Margery Kempe: Annoying Medieval Pilgrim

##### *Read:*

Margery of Kempe, *The Book of Margery of Kempe*

### **February 20 & 25**

#### Teresa of Avila: Mystic of the Catholic Reformation

##### *Read:*

Teresa of Avila, *Life*

### **Spring Break: No Class March 4 & 6**

### **February 27, March 11 & 13**

#### Elizabeth Ashbridge: Quaker Rebel

##### *Read:*

Cristine Levenduski, *Peculiar Power: A Quaker Woman Preacher in Eighteenth-Century America* (Course Reader #5)

Elizabeth Ashbridge, *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge, who died in Truth's service at the house of Robert Lecky at Kilnock in the County of Carlow*

*Ireland; the 16th of 5th mo. 1755. Written by her own Hand many years ago* (Course Reader #6)

**March 18**

Film: *A Midwife's Tale*

**March 20, 25 & 27**

Jarena Lee: African-American Preacher

*Read:*

Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* in *My Soul Has Grown Deep: Classics of Early African-American Literature* (Course Reader #7)

**March April 1 & 3**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Exploring Insanity in the Nineteenth Century?

*Read:*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"

**April 8 & 10**

Anne Frank: A Young Woman of the Holocaust

*Read:*

Anne Frank, *Diary*

**April 15 & 17**

Movie: *The Color Purple* (April 15 class to be rescheduled for the evening)

**April 22 & 24**

Rachel Scott: A Modern Martyr?

*Read:*

Beth Nimmo and Darrell Scott, *The Spiritual Journey of Columbine Martyr Rachel Scott*