Medieval Women Philosophers...

Fall, 2016
Duquesne University / Department of Philosophy
PHIL 624-01 / M 2:00-4:30 / College Hall 552
L. Michael Harrington

What is Medieval Philosophy?
Our first class will address the problem of defining medieval philosophy. Is it a synonym for Neoplatonism? Does it necessarily involve a concern for religious practice? Is it limited to the Western European philosophical tradition?

On Concepts and the Medieval
Having gotten our bearings in the field of medieval philosophy, we will look at women philosophers in the twelfth century renaissance, beginning with Heloise. Her letters to Abelard develop original conceptions of love and gender. We will also look at Abelard’s treatment of universals as it bears on the question of defining men and women.

Philosophy in Citation and Imagery
Still in the twelfth century, Herrad of Hohenbourg’s Hortus Deliciarum or Garden of Delights will provide us with a text unlike any other—a series of annotated images, accompanied by long quotations from famous philosophers, intended to be used by the women of her convent as teaching aids. This text will allow us to consider the significance of writing philosophy in the form of image and citation.

Gendered Mysticism
The Garden of Delights is famously the last non-mystical work of philosophy written by a woman during the Middle Ages. Hildegard of Bingen, however, turns thirteenth-century mysticism into a political and philosophical force in her Scivias, which we will read closely over the course of several weeks. She writes on the same topics as her contemporary Aquinas, but she addresses these topics in what is explicitly a work of female philosophy. We will accompany our reading of Hildegard with a primer on medieval medicine, so that we can better appreciate the biological focus of her work.

Philosophy Outside the Convent
We will conclude the term with a close reading of two texts written by thirteenth-century Beguines: Hadewijch of Antwerp and Marguerite Porete. Unlike the other women we have read this term, Hadewijch and Marguerite did not live in convents, but in secular female communities. Both of them engage in a lengthy and radical exploration of the relationship between reason and love.