**Transcendent Bodies in the Middle Ages (LT 19)**

This course will investigate popular ideas about the human body in the later Middle Ages and the ways in which they relate to those bodies that were considered in some way transcendent. The relationship between the ordinary human form and the physical forms of those marked out as in some way ‘holy’ results in fascinating dilemmas, inventions and possibilities for the authors of religious literature. The course examines the literary treatment of such matters as the perfection of the body before the Fall, and the degradations inflicted upon it in its post-lapsarian state; the conception of holy bodies, and their own sexuality and reproduction; the undead and resurrected holy bodies of Christ and Mary, along with Lazarus; and the questions of materiality and identity that emerge from the most fundamental questions of how body relates to soul.

1. **Perfection Lost: Adam and Eve (JT)**

This seminar considers medieval attitudes to the bodies of the first created pair, Adam and Eve, and the differences that the Middle Ages imagined there would be between bodies created in Eden, and those which existed after the Fall. The seminar will look at some of the apocryphal material surrounding Adam and Eve, and the accounts of the births of Cain and Abel. A key focus for the seminar will be some of the creation plays from the Mystery Cycles.

Genesis 1-5, (the Douay-Rheims Bible provides the closest English translation to the Vulgate. Both the Latin and English versions can be found at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).)


*Cursor Mundi* ed. Sarah M. Horrall (Ottawa, 1978), ll.600-700.

*The N-Town Play*, ed. S.Spector, EETS, s.s.11-12 (1991), The Creation of the World; The Fall of Man.


**Secondary Reading**


[The Apocryphal Adam and Even in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the Vita Adae et Evae](Oxford, 2009)
2. Embodiment, Gender, Rapture (PK)

Caroline Walker Bynum’s hugely influential *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* transformed the scholarship of later medieval spirituality by arguing in extraordinarily persuasive terms that late-medieval female religious experience staked its claims to legitimacy in the (female) body. This session takes Bynum’s book as a starting point for thinking about the religious force of embodiment, and how religious women use their bodies as sites of religious authority and transcendence, and how those same bodies might become sites of suspicion.

**Primary Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


See also:

3. **Creating Perfection: the Bodies of Christ and of Mary** (JT)

This seminar brings together medieval ideas about conception and about the formation of children in the womb, and considers the ways in which the Middle Ages applied these to Christ and to Mary. There was considerable interest in the formation of Christ in the Virgin’s womb and, in turn, in the conception of Mary herself. The seminar will consider representations of the Annunciation and Nativity, together with apocryphal material relating to the childhood of Mary.


*The N-Town Play*, ed. S.Spector, EETS, s.s.11-12 (1991), Joachim and Anna, The Salutation and Conception


*The Book of Margery Kempe* ed. Barry Windeatt


**Secondary Reading:**


4. Body, Soul, Resurrection (PK)

This seminar examines different kinds of texts that discuss the relationship between the soul and the body to explore how this central and difficult theological question affected attitudes to the body. The promise of the eventual resurrection of the body in Christian theology made this a particularly complex issue, and the many stories of resurrected bodies (above all Christ’s) raise troubling questions about the body and the afterlife, life at the end of time, and life in the daily world. Ranging across body and soul debates, apocryphal gospel narratives, and resurrection scenes in the York Plays, we will think about how questions of identity and materiality are played out across the literary and theological exploration of the soul’s relationship to the body.

Primary Reading:


The Middle-English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus, ed. William Henry Hulme, EETS e.s. 100 (London: Oxford University Press, 1907).

The York Plays, ed. R. Beadle, EETS, s.s. 23-4, (Oxford, 2009-12): Transfiguration; Woman Taken in Adultery and Raising of Lazarus; Resurrection, Incredulity of Thomas; Death, Funeral and Assumption of the Virgin.

Secondary Reading:


