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Speaker to Discuss Evolution of Sexual Norms and Same-Sex Desire

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Speaker to Discuss Evolution of Sexual Norms and Same-Sex Desire

Oct. 4, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Expert on the history of sexuality Valerie Traub will present a talk, “The Evolution of Sexual Norms: A Visual History, c. 1600,” on Oct. 26 at 4 p.m. in the Beckman Auditorium of The Ames Library.

A professor of English and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan, Traub’s research concerns gender and sexuality, particularly lesbianism in Early Modern England. The author of *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* and *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, Traub focuses on exposing women’s homoerotic desires that were often silenced and hidden during the Renaissance. She has been awarded a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship to study sexuality and same-sex desire during 16th and 17th century Europe.

Traub’s upcoming visit to campus has encouraged many professors to integrate her material into their coursework.

Students from three courses have been reading excerpts from Traub’s work in preparation for her visit: Professor of History Michael Young’s “Sex, Gender, and Power under King James;” Professor and Director of Greek and Roman Studies Nancy Sultan’s “Sex and Gender in Greece and Rome;” and Associate Professor of English Mary Ann Bushman’s “Shakespeare’s Shrews.” Students from all three courses will have a closed discussion with Traub preceding her public presentation.

Young said he is especially excited for Traub’s visit because her work on the history of Early Modern European sexuality is considered groundbreaking.

“It used to be routine for historians of what we today call ‘homosexuality’ to focus exclusively on men while lamenting that women regrettably just haven’t left behind any evidence,” said Young. “Traub’s book, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*, therefore revolutionized the field. Women can no longer be left out of the story.”

Young said Traub’s presentation will be particularly interesting because she will illustrate her findings with examples from the personal records, literature and poetry of the period, plus visual sources, including illustrations in medical tracts, sculptures, and paintings.

As part of the Gateway course, “What Is a University, and Why Are You Here?” taught by Associate Professor and Chair of English Joanne Diaz, Illinois Wesleyan’s first-year [Humanities Fellows](#) will also engage with Traub’s work. Humanities fellows – students who express a love for literature, philosophy, religion, art, musicology and languages – will read passages from *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* prior to Traub’s visit. Students will then discuss the readings as part of the Dialogues Across the Disciplines series on campus, an event designed to facilitate conversation between faculty members and students about scholarly works.

Diaz believes the discussions will help students understand that women’s homoerotic desires during the Renaissance are under-historicized.

“Men’s homoeroticism and homosocial interactions are very well documented. Not so much for women. Women’s desires were to some extent hidden,” said Diaz. “Traub is trying to historicize something that you cannot see.”

Students will interview Traub in an in-class Skype session, asking about her research interests, why she became interested in lesbianism and same-sex desire in the Renaissance, and how her research relates to queer theory and gender studies in the 21st century.

“When students actually speak with her, she will no longer be just a name on a page, but an actual human being,” said Diaz. “I want them to understand that in their Gateway they are engaging in conversations with scholars.”

Students will promote the event on social media, sharing interesting ideas and images they discovered from their in-class discussions and Dialogues Across the Disciplines meeting, with the hashtag #iwuhumanitiesfellows.

The event is a co-curricular activity complementing the University’s annual intellectual theme, [The Evolution of Revolution](#). The event is co-sponsored by the Robert W. Harrington Endowed Chair in History, the Byron Tucci Endowed Chair in Hispanic Studies, the Colwell Endowed Chair in English, the Women and Gender Studies Program, and the Renaissance, Early Modern, and Medieval Group.



**THE EVOLUTION OF SEXUAL NORMS:
A VISUAL HISTORY, C. 1600**

VALERIE TRAUB
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26 @ 4 PM
BECKMAN AUDITORIUM**

Sponsored by:
The Robert W. Harrington Endowed Chair in History,
the Byron Tucci Endowed Chair in Hispanic Studies,
the Colwell Endowed Chair in English,
the Women and Gender Studies Program,
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