

## **HIST 4310.001: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE**

Fall 2006, TR 2:00-3:50, WH216, Prof. Morris, WH265, 565-4216, mmorris@unt.edu  
Office hours TR 3:30-4:30 & by appointment.

NOTE: this course can be taken for credit toward a minor in The Study of Sexualities—  
For more information see: [www.hist.unt.edu/sos](http://www.hist.unt.edu/sos)

### CONDITIONS:

By enrolling in this course you agree to the following conditions. You will read and follow the directions set down in the syllabus. The syllabus, however, is not a contract; I reserve the right to revise it as the need arises. You are responsible for keeping yourself informed of these changes and any further instructions given in class. You will have the assigned reading done and be ready to discuss the study questions in class each week. We will strive for a free flow of ideas while observing the rules of civility. Academic dishonesty and other behaviors that undermine the learning process will not be tolerated. Plagiarism (handing in as your own work material lifted wholesale from any book, the Internet, or another student) will result in a failing grade and disciplinary action. Excessive absences and discourteous behavior in class—such as conducting personal conversations, reading material unrelated to the class, text messaging, or habitually wandering in late or leaving early—will adversely affect your grade. If you're not interested in the course content, please do everyone a favor and drop. If you have a medical condition or childcare situation that forces you to leave class, inform me and make sure you sit near the door so you can leave and return unobtrusively. If you miss class it is your responsibility to obtain notes from a classmate. I will entertain the possibility of an Incomplete only if you have completed at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the coursework, have attended class regularly, and you or an immediate family member suddenly requires hospitalization. If you are having any trouble with the course, make an appointment to see me immediately. Most problems can be resolved if presented early, honestly, and directly. I have NO obligation to accommodate your work or vacation schedules with respect to class attendance, exams, or assignments. **I do not want to hear or see any #\*!&@! cell phones while class is in session. Laptops are permitted in class ONLY if they do not create a distraction, i.e. are used for taking notes only.**

### OBJECTIVES:

This course will address theories regarding the change in sexual mores that took place at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Public fears over a perceived increase in sodomy brought a backlash against the variety of sexual activities associated with aristocratic libertinism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a renewed valorization of procreative sex. Students will deal with the question of how one can talk about sexuality before the notion of sexual orientation existed—the words homosexual and heterosexual did not appear in print until 1869 and 1870. Why did sexual object choice become the main basis of sexual categorization? What impact did sexual behavior have upon the construction of individual identities during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an era that featured the birth of “the subject”: the modern sense of self and individuality?

Concurrently, the political influence of queens, queen consorts, and royal mistresses continued to be a provocative issue after John Knox, the Scottish Calvinist, issued *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558)

in an attempt to incite rebellion against Catholic queens. The wider-ranging *querelle des femmes*, or the “women question” of the late 14<sup>th</sup> to late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which debated what constituted proper male and female attributes and behavior, exposes the tensions and contradictions within the so-called absolute monarchies of this era as well as Enlightenment philosophy. This controversy also offers insights into the impact that anatomical discoveries and the popularization of medical knowledge had upon social attitudes. Students will assess the accuracy of the traditional model that shows female influence and resistance to patriarchy during the early modern period subsumed by the ideologies of domesticity and separate spheres by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### REQUIRED TEXTS:

Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. CUP.  
 Ian McCormick, ed., *Secret Sexualities: A Sourcebook of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Writing*. Routledge.

Isabelle de Charrière [*née* Belle de Zuylen], *Letters of Mistress Henley Published by Her Friend*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vache. MLA.

*Boswell in Holland, 1763-1764, including his Correspondence with Belle de Zuylen*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle. Orig. pub. Yale. Paperback: McGraw Hill.

#### APPROACH:

I have selected a textbook that covers all of Europe in the early modern period, whereas my current research specialization is 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain and my secondary fields of interest are 17<sup>th</sup>-century England and 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century France. Between the women’s history approach in Wiesner’s text and the methodologies of gender studies and the history of sexuality that I employ in my own work, I hope to present students with a broad view of topics and analytical strategies. Students will read the textbook to gain a general overview of the major gender issues of the period, which we will discuss in class, and in lectures I will focus on the changes that took place from the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and present detailed illustrative examples from England and France. The rest of the assigned readings will be primary-source material—actual writings from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries—which we will analyze in class together. **Be warned: when you read the writings excerpted in the McCormick sourcebook, look for opinions and attitudes, not for facts!** Much of this work is satirical and allegorical; it reveals the anxieties and prejudices of the time. Read McCormick’s introductory sections as needed.

#### SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION REQUEST PROCEDURE:

Any person with special circumstances covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act should register with the Office of Disability Accommodation, Suite 318A, University Union Building, & also inform the instructor. Reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the special needs of students with disabilities where such adjustments are necessary to provide equality of educational access. Prof. Eaton is the history department’s ODA liaison.

#### GRADING:

2 exams @ 15% each, final exam = 25%, 3 analytical essays @10% each, attendance and participation in class discussion =15%.

ASSIGNED READINGS AND CLASS SCHEDULE:

**Have the reading done before class and be prepared to discuss the set questions and to pose questions of your own. Bring books to class on days you read primary sources because we will be discussing interpretations of specific passages.**

I. 8/29: Introduction to course. Discussion of theoretical models.

8/31: Read Wiesner, Introduction.

As the field of women's history evolved, what were some sources of disagreement in its practice? What sorts of questions does the field of gender studies address? How do the methodologies employed in the study of gender and sexuality challenge traditional historical categories and approaches?

II. 9/5: Wiesner, chapter 1.

As you read about the different traditions that support the idea of female subordination, try to determine the larger political, social, and economic purposes furthered by this arrangement. Did these ideas serve men's interest in the long term? How did traditional notions of sex difference shape scientific inquiries and discoveries? In what ways do you think laws governing marriage were both beneficial and detrimental to the lives of men and women?

9/7: McCormick, pp. 237-9, 13-34, 126-31.

How can language reveal the dominant attitudes of a particular historical period? What are the perceptual consequences of considering the male body as normative? Did possession of a penis automatically entitle one to manhood? How did descriptions of eunuchs and bachelors help reinforce traditional notions of masculinity?

III. 9/12: Wiesner, chapter 2.

How did ideas about women's bodies affect attitudes toward and regulation of sexuality? Was it possible for women to achieve sexual autonomy? How did economics affect sexual behavior?

9/14: McCormick, pp. 34-48, 135-43, 147-50, 181-2, 198-202, 207-10, 215-16.

What various connections did this literature draw between women and effeminate men? How did representations of male and female same-sex sexuality differ? Do men and women inhabit their bodies in the same way; i.e. is the relation between mind and body the same for both sexes?

IV. 9/19: Wiesner, chapter 3.

On what principles was the gendered division of labor based? Does the relation between the household and the workplace change over the course of the early modern period? What effects did economic conditions have over beliefs and practices? Why has prostitution been tolerated through the ages and sometimes been legal? How did social class affect an individual's opportunities and autonomy?

**\*\*\*Analytical Essay #1\*\*\*** due 9/21 before 5pm. Drawing upon the McCormick readings assigned from 9/7 to 9/21, write a one-page, single-spaced, typed essay addressing an issue raised in the discussion questions. Your first paragraph should set

out your thesis statement, your main argument, and state briefly how you propose to prove it. Subsequent paragraphs should support your thesis point by point. Back up your points with specific evidence from the primary sources excerpted in McCormick's reader. Do not use lengthy quotations. Paraphrase passages and provide page numbers to the material to which you refer parenthetically. Example: "A novel of 1749 represented a young man's sexual weakness originating in the womb when his mother developed what she thought to be an unnatural and impossible desire for another woman's genitals (216)." **Papers that are late or are longer than one page will not be accepted.**

9/21: Read excerpts from Cleland's work in the following order: McCormick, pp. 216-20, 158-60. On p. 160 McCormick omits a paragraph from the first edition:

All this, so criminal a scene, I had the patience to see to the an end, purely that I might gather more facts and certainty against them in my design to do their deserts instant justice; accordingly, when they had re-adjusted themselves and were preparing to go out, burning as I was with rage and indignation, I jump'd down from the chair, in order to raise the house upon them, but with such an unlucky impetuosity, that some nail or ruggedness in the floor caught my foot, and flung me on my face with such violence, that I fell senseless on the ground, and must have lain there some time e're any one came to my relief: so that they, alarmed, I suppose, by the noise of my fall, had more than the necessary time to make a safe retreat. This they effected, as I learnt, with a precipitation nobody could account for, till, when come to myself, and compos'd enough to speak, I acquainted those of the house with the whole transaction I had been evidence to.

Does Fanny seem entirely truthful in her account of why she spent so much time observing the behavior of the young men? Why was Mrs. Cole condemnatory about their tastes? Why do you think that this whole episode was censored in subsequent editions of the novel?

V. 9/26: review.  
9/28: **exam # 1.**

VI. 10/3: Wiesner, chapter 8.

How did political expedience sometimes overturn traditional models of masculinity and femininity? What is the relation between the family and the state? On what principles were hierarchies of gender, class, and race based? How did the gender binarism really work—were there really only two genders? Were all biological males thought to belong to be one group?

10/5: McCormick, pp. 52-3, 177-81, 153-8, 121-5, 131-5.

Note publication dates and who was in power at the time. What sorts of political interests underlie these attacks on transgressive behaviors?

VII. 10/10: McCormick, pp. 53-82, 85-106, 109-116.

Be mindful of both dates of trials and dates of publication. Why so some periods see an upsurge in prosecutions for sex crimes? Is the definition of sodomy clear and consistent? How does reputation influence the proceedings against accused sodomites? What was the purpose of publishing accounts of these trials?

10/12: McCormick, pp. 83-5 (satire—be warned!), 106-8, 147, 150-3, 161-74. Also read account of Wilkes scandal and Charles Churchill (author of poem on pp. 169-72) in *Boswell in Holland*, pp. 72-3, 78-9.

Try to make sense of these writings in terms of the backlash against the pederastic (not necessarily in a sexual sense) relations on which political patronage traditionally was based. Also be aware that these items were published when Britain was in fierce competition with Continental powers over trade and colonies. How were allegations of sodomy used as a political weapon?

VIII. 10/17: Wiesner, chapters 4 and 5 (they're short—really!).

What effects did increased female literacy and literary endeavor have upon politics and gender relations? Why was sexuality such a powerful force in royal courts? How did the salons both challenge and reinforce traditional hierarchies? Why was the distinction between the public and the private continually shifting and hard to determine?

10/19: McCormick, pp. 182-98, 202-7, 210-15, 220-35.

How does the literature depicting Sapphism reflect anxiety about the sort of reading matter to which women were gaining access, exclusively female spaces, and the potential for sexuality to disrupt social hierarchies?

**\*\*\*Analytical Essay #2\*\*\*** due 10/24 before 5pm. Same instructions for first essay apply. Draw upon readings from 10/5 to 10/19.

IX. 10/24 and 10/26 we will view *The Triumph of Love* based on the play by Pierre Carlet de Marivaux, first performed in Paris on 12 March 1732.

In the original, the women are cross-dressed from the very start and convincingly so. How do you think this might affect the meaning of the play? Why do you think this version has Léonide comically unsuccessful in her “passing” as Phocion? Consider the relation between gender and sexuality. What happens to eroticism in the absence of the notion of sexual orientation? How are gender and sexuality constructed? How stable are their attributes? How easily are they subverted?

X. 10/31: review.  
11/2: **exam #2.**

XI. 11/7: Charrière's *Mistress Henley*.

What does this novel suggest about the notion of companionate marriage that was becoming popular at this time? About masculinity and femininity? About the current state of the *querelle des femmes*? Is anyone at fault here? When is the trivial significant? How do Master and Mistress Henley construct their identities?

11/9: Start reading Boswell a.s.a.p. We will begin discussion next week.

XII. 11/14: *Boswell in Holland*.

**Read Pottle's Introduction** so you understand how he selected and organized extant material from Boswell's life. I want you to get some idea of what historians have to work with and the tough decisions editors have to make. Read

Charrière's pen portrait of herself, the "Portrait of Zélide" pp. 184-9, and the letter from Hermenches pp. 262-3. Then read pp. 293-390.

How to read this source: in a word, selectively. Pretend you are a historian looking for evidence to answer the discussion questions below. You don't read this material in the same way you would a novel or a textbook. Read quickly—skim carefully—in search of relevant material. Do not fret over passages that are obscure unless they seem relevant to the questions. Make a note of such passages, read on, then go back later. Sometimes a writer's comments will become clearer in light of subsequent developments. If you encounter unfamiliar names, use the index to find the first mention, where identification will appear in a footnote.

How did Belle de Zuylen transgress gender norms and what were the consequences? Why was Boswell interested in her? How did each of them construct an identity and assert independence via letter writing? How did passion and reason come into play? Why have historians noted that courtship sometimes was the only time during which women had real power over men? What roles did friends and family play in the courtship ritual? What was the utility in this? What different sorts of men does Belle invoke in her letters? What traditional restraints sometimes deprived men and women of mutual understanding? How were clandestine correspondence conducted and why were they so dangerous? Why was it dangerous to write a direct declaration of love?

11/16: Try to read Boswell pp. 1-160.

What do these letters reveal about friendships between men? Why is Boswell's relationship with his father so difficult? Does Boswell write in different voices to different people and to himself? Why is he having such difficulty finding his place in the world? What role does personal morality play in his sense of self as a man? What is he looking for in marriage? What do the letters tell you about eighteenth-century ideas about the body and the mind? What do you learn about his feelings about Belle? About women in general? Social class and reputation? Libertinism? What is he up to with Mme Geelvinck?

XIII. 11/21: Boswell, pp. 160-291. Continue discussion.

11/23: Thanksgiving.

XIV. 11/28: Wiesner, chapter 6.

How did religious institutions both circumscribe and broaden women's choices and opportunities? How did the Protestant Reformation affect cross-sex relations? What factors influenced the nature of women's lives in convents? How did sexuality and spirituality coexist? How did political circumstances affect religious activities?

11/30: **\*\*\*analytical essay #3\*\*\*** due by 5pm. Same format. Respond to a discussion question from Charrière and Boswell.

XV. 12/5: Wiesner, chapter 7.

Under what circumstances did witchhunts occur? Did the stereotypical early modern witch bear any resemblance to the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>-century Sapphist? Did witch trials bear any resemblance to sodomy trials?

12/7: Review. **Final exam: Tuesday, 12 December, 1:30-3:30.**