Gender and Sexuality, 1300-1550

Course Description
Gender and sexuality represent one of the most lively areas of current research and contentious debate in medieval studies. Gender and sexual identities are neither given nor fixed; they are, rather, learned and insistently fluid. Sex and gender (in all of its myriad manifestations: in academic debate, civic politics, domestic architecture, economic life, church teaching, personal intimacy) lie at the heart of many of the fantasies and prejudices prevalent in the later Middle Ages; moreover, they are absolutely central to our own imagining of what the Middle Ages was all about.

It is the aim of this module to tease out the complexity of medieval gender and sexuality and its representation in a variety of sources from history, literature, history of art and archaeology (including but not limited to court records, imaginative literature like romance and lyric poetry, manuscript illumination, standing buildings both religious and secular, pilgrim badges, social games) and to challenge their and our own assumptions. The module seeks to chart not only normative models of sex and gender, how they were promulgated and policed, but, just as importantly, the ways in which those normative models were interrogated, challenged and even subverted.

The module is team-taught by means of weekly two-hour seminars. Each seminar is led by one or two tutors drawn from a range of disciplines.

Learning Outcomes
After successfully completing this module, students should

- have developed a knowledge and understanding of the concepts of gender and sexuality both as used by modern scholars and as understood in medieval culture and society
- have developed skills in the handling and interpretation of relevant primary and secondary sources
- have developed an understanding of interdisciplinary methodologies

Seminar Programme
The module will include seminars drawn from the following topics: Problematising Gender and Sexuality; Virgins and Whores; Home and Domesticity; Gender and Space; Conjugalilty; Policing Sex and Gender; Envisioning Gendered Bodies; Sexual Hybridity.

Preliminary Reading