

University of Silesia in Katowice
Faculty of Humanities
Institute of Literary Studies
H/Story Research Group
Centre for Old Norse and Old English Studies

www.hstory.us.edu.pl/erotic-discourses
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V International H/Story Conference
Sense and Sexuality: Erotic Discourses in/of History

Katowice, Poland, Sept. 22nd–23rd 2023
CINiBA University Library and Scientific Information Centre

CALL FOR PAPERS

“Everything in the world is about sex,” goes an apocryphal Oscar Wilde saying. Everything “except sex. Sex is about power.”

The intricate and compelling entanglement of sex with history – with politics and power, with human experience and narratives – is perhaps best illustrated by the role both sexual encounter and erotic desire play in some of the oldest texts of literature that survive today. Indeed, among the earliest stories known to mankind, the erotic aspect frequently appears in their pivotal points. Such is the beginning of what is arguably the oldest written narrative existing on Earth, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*: after an uninterrupted act of coitus lasting for six days and six nights between a sacred mortal prostitute Shamhat and Enkidu, the latter abandons the animals among whom he has lived and becomes human, fit not only to be King Gilgamesh’s friend, but also to tame the wild ways of the king himself. In another epic, the oldest continually told and retold, a ten-year siege of Troy is the result of the erotic desire, both that of the three competing goddesses, and of a man to a woman. The Romans and later the English positioned this narrative at the heart of their national myths of origin. In history proper, the erotic has frequently been at the centre of political crises. It is enough to mention selected historical figures whose identities have largely been shaped by the associations with the erotic: from Cleopatra, Messalina, Eadwig, Edward II, Henry VIII, Catherine the Great and Marquis de Sade, to John Profumo, Bill Clinton, General Petraeus, and Donald Trump.

What, then, are the multiple dimensions of the connections between human erotic desire and the course of events shaped by it? And what are we to make of the ways in which historical narratives of desire have been used and abused by those who found in them convenient tools of control and influence? In his classic work on the history of sexuality, Michel Foucault argues that it is the “existence in our era of a discourse in which sex, the revelation of truth, the overturning of global laws, the proclamation of a new day to come, and the promise of certain felicity are linked together. Today it is sex that serves as a support for the ancient form – so familiar and important in the West – of preaching.” Variants of such preaching have been present in numerous erotic narratives, which have been both liberating and limiting, enlightening and deceptive, emancipating and controlling. Thus, by engaging with the erotic in history, we engage with the past and present discourses and senses of power.

With all this and much more in mind, the H/Story Research Group invites scholars working in various disciplines and fields of study to participate in the V International H/Story Conference, *Sense and Sexuality: Erotic Discourses in/of History*. Its aim is to consider the points of intersection between broadly understood ideas of eroticism, sexuality, and history, and the ways their senses have been woven into narratives of the past as well into the ways of narrating the past. We intend the conference to open

possibilities of engaging in a discussion concerning the representations of these intersections in different media across cultures and centuries.

Specific topics may address, but are not limited to:

- histories of sex and sexualities;
- history of eroticisms: conceptualisations of eroticism across the ages;
- historicising the erotic, eroticising the historic(al);
- history of erotic writing;
- social, psychological and biological functions of eroticism;
- the public, the private: the historic(al) and the erotic;
- the erotic and propaganda in history;
- politics of eroticism in history and history of regulatory politics related to the erotic;
- discourses of sex, desire, and eroticism across history;
- the aesthetics of sex and the erotic in historical and cultural contexts;
- pornography: its politics, political economy, discourses, aesthetics;
- history of sex work;
- intersectional perspectives on sex, sexuality, and eroticism in history;
- fertility, morality, and sexuality in history;
- the scandalous in history, sexual and erotic transgression in history;
- sex and sexuality as objects of historical analysis, issues of methodology.

We are delighted to announce that **the conference's keynote addresses** will be presented by two eminent specialists on the history of sexualities: [Prof. Clarissa Smith](#) (University of Northumbria), co-author of *Studying Sexualities. Theories, Representations, Cultures* (2013); and [Prof. Jana Funke](#) (University of Exeter), author and editor of *Sculpture, Sexuality and History: Encounters in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (2018).

We welcome scholars from various academic fields to submit their proposals (ca. 250 words) by **31 March 2023**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by **8 May 2023**. A selection of papers will appear in a post-conference monograph to be published by a high-profile academic publishing house or a journal. The proposals should be sent to: eroticdiscourses@gmail.com

The conference fee is 130 EUR (for participants from Poland the fee is 600 PLN). The fee includes meals, coffee breaks and conference materials.

The conference venue is the CINiBA University Library and Scientific Information Centre building in Katowice: <https://www.ciniba.edu.pl/en/>

Find us on: www.hstory.us.edu.pl/erotic-discourses and <https://www.facebook.com/Hstory-437485846310918/>

Contact us at: eroticdiscourses@gmail.com

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