



Myths of Hymen

Tuesday 31 October 4.30 – 5.45pm

Speaker

Prof Margaret Ferguson
University California, Davis

Location

Theatrette

Sir Roland Wilson Building,
Building #120, McCoy Cct, ANU

Lecture followed by light
refreshments

Enquiries

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This lecture is free and open to the
public

HRC Seminar Series information:
hrc.anu.edu.au/seminars

Presented by

Humanities Research
Centre

Research School of
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Arts and Social Sciences

Professor Ferguson will speak about her current book project entitled “Myths of Hymen,” which analyzes a web of strange relationships between an ancient Greek god of marriage named Hymen, who was born a lower-class human, and a body part (or “site,” as some feminists prefer to call it), also called hymen-- meaning “thin membrane” in Greek-- that all human females are now alleged to possess at birth and that has been fetishized--along with its accompanying sign of blood-- in many different times and places, although it was not known in ancient Palestine or Greece, according to historians of virginity. She asks why, and what cost to women and to the nation-states in which they mostly live today, the fetishization has occurred. Such nations have often been figured as virginal (bounded) female bodies, requiring securitization by men.



Queen Elizabeth I of England with sieve proving her status as a Virgin.

Margaret Ferguson is a Distinguished Professor Emerita of English at the University of California, Davis. She taught at Yale, Columbia, and the University of Colorado before coming to Davis in 1997. She chaired her department between 2006 and 2009, and served as President of the Modern Language Association in 2014. A Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, she has co-edited thirteen books including, with Jennifer Wicke, *Post-Modernism and Feminism* (Duke University Press). Her book *Dido's Daughters: Gender, Literacy, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (University of Chicago Press) won awards from the Sixteenth-Century Society and from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women. She has received fellowship support for work on her current project, “Myths of Hymen,” from the American Council of Learned Societies and from the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study as well as—presently-- from the HRC.