

HIS 491/GSS 491  
FERTILE BODIES

A Cultural History of Reproduction from Antiquity to the Enlightenment  
Professor Melissa Reynolds

**Course description:** The ancient Greeks imagined a woman's body ruled by her uterus, while medieval Christians believed in a womb touched by God. Renaissance anatomists hoped to uncover the 'secrets' of human generation through dissection, while nascent European states wrote new laws to encourage procreation and manage 'illegitimate' offspring. From ancient Greece to enlightenment France, a woman's womb served as a site for the production of medical knowledge, the focus of religious practice, and the articulation of state power. This course will trace the evolution of medical and cultural theories about women's reproductive bodies from ca. 450 BCE to 1700, linking these theories to the development of structures of power, notions of difference, and concepts of purity that proved foundational to 'western' culture. Each week we will read a primary source (in translation, if necessary) alongside excerpts from scholarly books and articles. We will begin in classical Greece with Hippocratic writings on women's diseases, move through the origins of Christian celibacy and female asceticism in late antique and medieval Europe, follow early anatomists as they dissected women's bodies in Renaissance Italy, explore the origins of state regulation of women's fertility in early modern England, Germany, and France, and finally, learn how Enlightenment ideals were undergirded by new "scientific" models of anatomical sexual and racial difference. The class will visit Special Collections at the Firestone Library to view magical amulets and manuscripts related to childbirth, and the Princeton Art Museum, to view paintings and sculptures of the Madonna and Child.



**Reading:** Students will read between 100–150 pages per week from a combination of primary sources (i.e. texts written by historical figures in the past) and secondary sources (i.e. scholarly books and articles). All but two of our readings are available online, either via the Firestone library's digital subscriptions or via our course Blackboard. The exceptions are the following two books which are on course reserves at Firestone and may be purchased at Labyrinth:

Gowing, Laura. *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780300207958.

Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1983. ISBN: 9780394711553.

## Evaluation & Grading:

Attendance and participation in our seminar discussions is mandatory. Grades will be awarded according to History Department criteria, reproduced at the end of the syllabus.

Class Participation:	25%
In-class presentation (10-minute)	10%
Response papers (2–3 pages, 3x)	30% (or 10% each)
Final research paper (8–10 pages)	35% total, comprised of:
Primary source description	5%
Annotated bibliography	5%
Final paper	25%

**Participation:** Participation is a critical component of this course. Students are expected to come to class having done the reading and ready to engage in class discussion. Engagement includes both active listening to your fellow students' viewpoints and careful articulation of your own ideas. If you tend to be a talker, please share your thoughts but be sure to make room for others. If you tend to be quiet, know that your voice is essential in our classroom. You will always show respect for your fellow students, even when you disagree with their ideas.

**Response Papers:** Students will choose three topics/readings to which they will respond in a short (2–3 page) essay. This essay should briefly summarize the secondary reading, relate the reading to the primary source, and pose questions or problems that arise from a juxtaposition of the two readings. These papers do not require outside research or reading beyond that assigned in the syllabus. Though students will only present on one of these papers to the class, the student should be prepared to share problems or questions developed in their response paper over the course of that class's discussion.

**In-class presentation:** Students will choose one of their response paper topics/readings and create a ten-minute presentation for the class based on the issues raised within their response paper. The presentation should first, situate the readings within the context of the other readings done thus far in the semester, looking for ways to draw connections between past readings and the current one. The student should be prepared with two or three topics to discuss with the class from the readings, and ideally, these topics should be approached through focused discussion questions. In addition, if background knowledge is necessary to understand the reading (i.e. terminology needs defining, a particular argument needs contextualizing), the student should have done whatever minor outside research is necessary to engage the class. Only one student may present at each class meeting, and presentations will be chosen on the first day of class.

**Research Paper:** Each student will produce a research paper of 8–10 pages at the end of the semester in lieu of a final exam. Throughout the semester, graded benchmark assignments (i.e. a source description and annotated bibliography) will keep students on track to completion. Students may select one of the primary sources already listed on the syllabus as a jumping-off point for selecting a research topic, or may consult with the instructor directly to discuss other topics of interest.

Students will meet with the instructor during office hours at least once to discuss paper topics before week 5. Research paper topics and a description of the primary source chosen are due in week 6. A preliminary annotated bibliography with at least five secondary sources is due in week 10. The final paper is due on May 12, Dean's Date.

**Late Work:** Ten points will be deducted from the final grade of an assignment for every day the assignment is late. Assignments more than three days late will not be accepted. If you have an emergency or extenuating circumstance that may prevent you from completing your work on time, you should be sure to communicate these concerns with me well in advance of the assignment's due date.

**Accommodations for Disabilities:** Students must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) ([ods@princeton.edu](mailto:ods@princeton.edu); 258-8840) for disability verification and determination of eligibility for reasonable academic accommodations. Requests for academic accommodations for this course need to be made at the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible for newly approved students, and again at least two weeks in advance of any needed accommodations in order to make arrangements to implement the accommodations. Please make an appointment to meet with me in order to maintain confidentiality in addressing your needs. No accommodations will be given without authorization from ODS, or without advance notice.

**Laptop Policy:** Students may bring laptops to class and use them to refer to our course readings, nearly all of which are available in digital editions. However, I ask that students disconnect from the Princeton Wifi network, and students must close their laptops during student presentations. If laptop use becomes distracting or disruptive at any point, I reserve the right to ask you to close your laptop and, if necessary, leave the classroom.

## Course Schedule

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### Week 1

#### Feb. 4: Introduction; Greek Philosophy, Generation, and Gynecology

Syllabus discussion; selection of paper and presentation topics

Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, pp. 1–39. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]

Helen King, "Women and Doctors in Ancient Greece," in *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present* [hereafter *Rep:AP*], (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 39–52. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]

#### *Primary Sources*

Ann Ellis Hanson, "Hippocrates: 'Diseases of Women 1.'" *Signs* 1, no. 2 (1975): 567–84. [[JSTOR](#)]

Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium*, Book I, pp. 49–127. [[Loeb Classical Library](#)]

## Week 2

### Feb. 11: Roman Philosophy, Generation, and Gynecology [No student presentations]

Thomas Laqueur, "Destiny is Anatomy," *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 25–62. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

Rebeca Flemming, "Galen's Generations of Seeds," in *Rep:AP*, pp. 95–108. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]

Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, "Debating the Soul in Late Antiquity," in *Rep:AP*, pp. 109–22. [[Cambridge Core Online](#)]

#### *Primary Sources*

Porphyry, *To Gaurus on How Embryos are Ensouled*, trans. James Wilberding (New York, 2011), pp. 31–56. [[ProQuest E-Book Central](#)]

*Soranus' Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin, pp. 3–7, 27–49, 58–68. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 14.1–12. [Blackboard]

## Week 3

### Feb. 18: Virginity and Celibacy

**\*\*Mandatory office hour meetings this week and next to discuss paper topics\*\***

**Class Presentation:** Lauren

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Lauren, Sylvie

Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 5–64, 140–59, 366–408. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

#### *Primary Sources*

*King James's Bible*, 1 Corinthians 7: 1–40; Ephesians 5: 1–33 [Blackboard]

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 95–110, 133–154 [Blackboard]

St. Jerome, Excerpts from *Contra Jovinianus* [Blackboard]

## Week 4

### Feb. 25: Theological Motherhood

**\*\*Mandatory office hour meetings continue\*\***

**Class Presentation:**

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Tatum

Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 101–143. [[JSTOR](#)]

Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, pp. 110–170. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

#### *Primary Sources*

*King James's Bible*, Matthew 1 [Blackboard]

*King James's Bible*, Luke 1–2:23 [Blackboard]

Anselm of Canterbury, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Prosligion*, “A Letter to Gundolf,” “Prayer to St. Mary (1),” “Prayer to St. Mary (2),” and “Prayer to Saint Mary (3),” pp. 106–127. [Blackboard]

## Week 5

### March 3: Holy Mothers in the World

**\*\*In-class visit to Princeton Art Museum for second half of class\*\***

**Class Presentation:** Vedrana

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Vedrana, Sylvie, Haleigh Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 144–193. [[JSTOR](#)]

Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1983), pp. 206–223, 236–269.

#### *Primary Sources*

Jacobus de Voraigne, “The nativity of our lady,” in *Here begyneth the legende named in latyn legenda aurea, that is to say in englyshe the golden legend*, STC (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) 24875, Westminster: Wynkyn de Worde, 1493. [Blackboard; a modern transcription is available alongside this 15<sup>th</sup> c. version]

Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, “The Story of Patient Griselda.” [Blackboard]

Marie de France, “Le Fresne,” *The Twelve Laiis*. trans. and ed. Dorothy Gilbert (New York, 2015), 35–47. [Blackboard]

## Week 6

### March 10: Medieval Gynecology and the Making of a Profession

**\*\*Research Paper Topic & Primary Source Description Due\*\***

**Class Presentation:** Tatum

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Lauren, Tatum, Benjy Monica H. Green, *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine*, pp. 1–69, 118–62. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

#### *Primary Sources*

Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*, “Book on the Conditions of Women,” pp. 70–115 (facing page translation). [[JSTOR](#)]

Monica H. Green and Daniel Lord Smail, “The Trial of Floreta d’Ays (1403): Jews, Christians, and Obstetrics in later medieval Marseille,” *Journal of Medieval History* 34, 2 (2008): 207–211. [[Science Direct](#)]

### March 17: Spring Recess

## Week 7

### March 24: Anatomists and the ‘Secrets’ of Women

**Class Presentation:** Haleigh

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Isabel, Tatum, Haleigh Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, pp. 9–57, 160–267. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

*Primary Sources*

National Library of Medicine site, *Historical Anatomies*,  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/home.html>

Look through illustrations as used by pre-Vesalian authors, either Johannes Ketham, *Fasiculo de medicina* (Venice, 1494) or Jacopo Berengario da Capi, *Isagogae breues, perlucidae ac uberrimae in anatomiam humani corporis* (Bologna, 1523) AND an image from Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. Make notes about what you see and how the images compare and follow the prompt on the Discussion Board forum on Blackboard.

## Week 8

### March 31: The Reformed Womb

**Class Presentation:**

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Benjy

Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan. “Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89, no. 3 (October 27, 2015): 406–33. [[ProjectMUSE](#)]

Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England*, pp. 1–52. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]

Kathleen Crowther-Heyck, “‘Be Fruitful and Multiply’: Genesis and Generation in Reformation Germany,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002): 904–35. [[JSTOR](#)]

*Primary Sources*

Transcription/translation work on charms and prayers for fertility and childbirth from English manuscripts via Discussion Board on Blackboard

Excerpts from Eucharius Roeslin, *The Byrthe of Mankeynde*, trans. Thomas Raynalde (London: 1545). [Blackboard]

## Week 9

### April 7: Midwives, Authority, and the Early Modern State

**\*\*\*Annotated Bibliography Due\*\*\***

**Class Presentation:** Benjy

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Vedrana, Isabel, Benjy

Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2009), pp. 1–16, 52–81, 149–203.

Sylvia de Renzi, “The Risks of Childbirth: Physicians, Finance, and Women’s Deaths in the Law Courts of Seventeenth-Century Rome,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 84 (Winter 2010): 549–577. [[Project Muse](#)]

*Primary Sources*

James Hitchcock, ed., "A Sixteenth-Century Midwife's License," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 41 (January 1967): 75–76 [[JSTOR](#)]

"18 Elizabeth c. 3: An Acte for setting of the Poore on Worke, and for the avoyding of Ydlenes," *Statutes of the Realm, Vol. 4: 1547–1624* (Westminster, 1819)

Excerpts from Nicholas Culpepper, *Directory for Midwives* (London, 1651) [Blackboard]

**Week 10**

**April 14: Monstrous Births/Monstrous Mothers**

**Class Presentation:** Sylvie

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Sylvie, Sam, Haleigh  
Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England*, pp. 53–89, 157–95. [[Pro-Quest E-Book Central](#)]

*Primary Sources*

Pseudo-Aristotle, *Aristotle's Masterpiece, or The Secrets of Generation Displayed in All Parts Thereof* (1684), Chapter 5 "Of Monsters and monstrous Births," pp. 47–59 and final pages (after p. 190) with depictions of monstrous births [<https://digitalcollections.nyam.org/Aristotle>]

*The Ranters Monster: Being a True Relation of One Mary Adams, living at Tillingham in Essex* (London: George Horton, 1652) [Blackboard]

**Week 11**

**April 21: The Politics of Procreation**

**Class Presentation:** Isabel

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Vedrana, Isabel, Sam  
Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 1–123. [[Oxford Scholarship Online](#)]

*Primary Source*

Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives*, pp. 158–192. [[JSTOR](#)]

**Week 12**

**April 28: Science and the Discovery of Difference**

**Class Presentation:** Sam

**Response Papers (due by 10 am on the day of class):** Lauren, Sam  
Thomas Laqueur, "Discovery of the Sexes," *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, pp. 149–92. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, "The Anatomy of Difference" and "Theories of Gender and Race," pp. 115–172. [[ACLS Humanities E-Book](#)]

Sadiah Qureshi, "Displaying Sara Bartmaan, the 'Hottentot Venus,'" *History of Science* 42, no. 2 (June 2004): 253–257. [[EbscoHost](#)]

*Primary Source*

Images of the 'Venus Hottentot' and transcriptions of the court case to free her

Excerpts from Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (Philadelphia, 1788) [Blackboard]

**\*\*\*May 12 (Dean's Date): Final Paper Due\*\*\***