

This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

## FERTILE BODIES

A Cultural History of Reproduction from Antiquity to the Enlightenment  
HSOC 3549 / HIST 3849

**Instructor:** Dr. Melissa Reynolds

**Location:** Cohen 204

**Time:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:15–11:45 am

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 12:00–1:30 pm in Cohen 204, or by appointment.

**Contact:** mbreyn@sas.upenn.edu

### 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.



### EVALUATION & GRADING

Grades will be awarded according to History Department criteria, reproduced at the end of the syllabus. The final grade will be weighted as follows:

<b>Class Participation:</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>In-class presentation (15-minute)</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Response papers (2 to 3 pages, 3x)</b>	<b>30% (or 10% each)</b>
<b>Final research paper (12–15 pages)</b>	<b>40% total, comprised of:</b>
<b>Primary source description</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Annotated bibliography</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Prospectus &amp; Outline</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Informal In-Class Presentation</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Final paper</b>	<b>20%</b>

## **Reading**

Students will read around 100 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 of our readings are available online, either via the library's digital subscriptions or via our course Canvas.

## **Participation**

This seminar requires your full participation. Complete all assigned readings before class and come to class on time, prepared with comments and questions. Class participation will be evaluated by the overall quality of your contributions, which includes attendance and listening as well as speaking. 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.

Given that discussion is such a crucial part of this seminar, only three unexcused absences are allowed; every unexcused absence after that results in an automatic deduction of 10% from your final grade. The only excused absences in this course are varsity athletic competitions, approved accommodations, documented emergencies or illnesses, and observance of religious holidays.

## **Response Papers**

Students will choose three topics (from a total of nine, noted on the syllabus) to which they will respond in a short (2–3 page) essay. This essay should briefly summarize the secondary readings, relate those readings to primary sources, 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 and create a fifteen-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. Presentation dates will be chosen on the first day of class.

## **Final Research Paper**

Each student will produce a research paper of 12–15 pages at the end of the semester in lieu of a final exam. Throughout the semester, graded benchmark assignments (i.e. a source description, annotated bibliography, and prospectus) will keep students on track to completion. Students have two options for their final research paper:

1. Students may select one of the primary sources already listed on the syllabus or they may consult with the instructor or the history of science research librarian, David Azzolina (azzolina@upenn.edu), to discuss other historical (i.e. premodern) topics of interest.

2. One of the primary aims of this course is to demonstrate how premodern theories about generation and women's bodies—though long-since debunked within the fields of science and medicine—nonetheless continue to influence political, legal, social, and cultural structures in contemporary society. You may select an issue or topic within contemporary medicine, public health, or public policy and research the ways that this contemporary debate resonates with themes or specific theories of the body addressed in the course.

Whether you choose option 1 or 2, every student will meet with the instructor during office hours at least once to discuss paper topics before February 26. Research paper topics and a description of your chosen primary source are due March 11. A preliminary annotated bibliography with at least five secondary sources is due April 1, and a prospectus and tentative outline of the paper is due April 17. Five pages of a rough draft are due to your peer reviewer before April 29, and the final paper is due on our assigned final exam date.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Unit One: Ancient Precedents

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#### Monday, January 22: Syllabus Overview and Presentation Selection

Lecture: What is reproduction anyway? And how can we historicize it?

Readings:

1. Nicholas Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming, and Lauren Kassell, "Reproduction in History," in *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present*, (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 3–17.

#### Wednesday, January 24: The Diseases of Women

Short lecture: Ancient Greek Medicine

Readings:

1. Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, pp. 21–39.
2. Ann Ellis Hanson, "Hippocrates: 'Diseases of Women 1.'" *Signs* 1, no. 2 (1975): 567–84.

#### Monday, January 29: Aristotelian Generation

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9am:

Readings:

1. Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, Loeb Classical Texts, Book I, pp. 49–127. (Don't worry, this is a facing-page translation; you've got half this many pages)

#### Wednesday, January 31: Laqueur's One-Sex Body

Short lecture: Greek Medicine in Alexandria and Rome

Readings:

1. Thomas Laqueur, "Destiny is Anatomy," *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 25–62.

#### Monday, February 5: Greek Gender & Generation Revisited

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9am:

Readings:

1. Brooke Holmes, "Let Go of Laqueur: Towards New Histories of the Sexed Body," *Eugesta: Journal of Gender in Antiquity* 9 (2019): 136–175.
2. Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body, Vol. II*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca, 1968), pp. 620–654.

### **Wednesday, February 7: Soranus and Ancient Midwifery**

Lecture: The Medical Legacy of Antiquity

Readings:

1. *Soranus' Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin, pp. 3–7, 27–49, 58–68, 79–80.

## **Unit Two: Religion and Reproduction**

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### **Monday, February 12: Holy Women**

\*\*THIS WEEK: Mandatory office hours this week to discuss final paper topics\*\*

Short lecture: Roman Culture & The Spread of Christianity

Readings:

1. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 33–64, 140–59.
2. "The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas," in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Vol. II, ed. and trans. Herbert A. Musurillo, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

### **Wednesday, February 14: Continenence and Chastity**

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9am:

Readings:

1. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 387–427.
2. *The English Bible, King James Version: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. Gerland Hammond and Austin Busch (New York, 2012), 1 Corinthians 7: 1–40; Ephesians 5: 1–33.
3. Excerpts from St. Jerome, "Contra Jovinianus" in *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, tr. W. H. Fremantle (Edinburgh 1892).

### **Monday, February 19: Jesus as Mother**

\*\*THIS WEEK: mandatory office hours continue this week to discuss final paper topics\*\*

Short lecture: Monasticism and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance

Readings:

1. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, pp. 110–170.
2. Anselm of Canterbury, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, "A Letter to Gundolf," "Prayer to St. Mary (1)," and "Prayer to St. Mary (2)," pp. 106–114.

### **Wednesday, February 21: Jesus as Androgyne**

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9 am:

Readings:

1. Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance* (New York, 2021), pp. 1–39.

### **SUNDAY, February 25: The Virgin Mary (Class visit to the Philadelphia Museum of Art)**

Readings:

1. Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 101–143.
2. *The English Bible, King James Version: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. Gerland Hammond and Austin Busch (New York, 2012) Matthew 1:1–25; Luke 1–2:23.

### **Wednesday, February 28: Be Fruitful and Multiply**

Short lecture: Medieval Motherhood & Religion

Readings:

1. Elisheva Baumgarten, “Birth” in *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 2007), pp. 21–54.
2. *Genesis*, trans. Robert Alter (New York, 1996), 17–21:21 (pp. 72–99).

## **SPRING RECESS**

## **Unit Three: Medieval and Renaissance Medicine**

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### **Monday, March 11: Obstetrics in Theory**

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

Short lecture: The Institutionalization of Medicine

Readings:

1. Monica H. Green, *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine*, pp. 29–69.
2. Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*, “On the Treatments of Women,” pp. 89–112 (facing-page translation).

### **Wednesday, March 13: Obstetrics in Practice**

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9am:

Readings:

1. Sara Verskin, “Gender Segregation and the Possibility of Arabo-Galenic Gynecological Practice in the Medieval Islamic World,” in *Gender, Health, and Healing* (Amsterdam 2020), pp. 291–314.
2. 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): JUST PAGES 207–211.

### **Monday, March 18: Dissecting Women’s Secrets**

Short lecture: The Italian Renaissance

Readings:

1. Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, pp. 77–119, 161–206.

### **Wednesday, March 20: Printed Anatomies (Class visit to the Kislak Center)**

*Readings:*

1. Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, pp. 207–267.

## **Unit Four: The Reformation and the Supernatural**

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### **Monday March 25: The Reformed Womb**

Short lecture: The Reformation

*Readings:*

1. Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England*, pp. 1–52.
2. Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry Weisner-Hanks, eds., “Childbirth,” in *Luther on Women* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 171–185.
3. In-class transcription/translation work with childbirth charms

### **Wednesday, March 27: NO CLASS**

### **Monday, April 1: Witches**

\*\*Annotated Bibliography due\*\*

Short lecture: The Debate over Witchcraft

*Readings:*

1. Lyndal Roper, “Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany,” in *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Religion, and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1994), pp. 200–227.
2. David Harley, “Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch,” *Social History of Medicine* 3, no. 1 (1990): 1–26.
3. Selections from the witchcraft pamphlets from the late sixteenth-century Essex trials.

### **Wednesday, April 3: Monsters**

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9 am:

*Readings:*

1. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, “Monsters: A Case Study,” in *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York, 2001), pp. 173–214.
2. Amboise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, trans. Janice L. Pallister (Chicago, 1983), pp. 3–42.

## **Unit Five: Reproduction and the State**

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### **Monday, April 8: Policing Motherhood**

Short lecture: The Early Modern State

*Readings:*

1. Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2009), pp. 1–16, 149–176.
2. James Hitchcock, ed., “A Sixteenth-Century Midwife’s License,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 41 (January 1967): 75–76
3. Excerpts of various “English Poor Laws” [In-class]

### **Wednesday, April 10: Motherhood in the New World**

Short lecture: Demographic Expansion & the New World

Readings:

1. Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 3–16, 79–104.
2. Natalie Zemon Davis, “Marie de l’Incarnation,” in *Women on the Margins*, pp. TBD.

### **Monday, April 15: The Limits of State Control**

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9 am:

Readings:

1. Julie Hardwick, *Sex in an Old Regime City: Young Workers and Intimacy in France, 1660–1789* (Oxford 2020), pp. 110–139.
2. Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives*, pp. 158–170.

## **Unit Six: Medical Expertise and the Science of Difference**

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### **Wednesday, April 17: Harvey and the Egg**

\*\*Prospectus and outline due\*\*

Short lecture: The Scientific Revolution

Readings:

1. Lisa Forman Cody, *Birth Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 84–119.
2. George Garden, “On the Modern Theory of Generation,” in *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Vol. III: From 1683 to 1694*, ed. Charles Hutton, Richard Pearson, and George Shaw (London, 1809), pp. 431–35. [Canvas]

### **Monday, April 22: Man-Midwifery & Obstetrical Expertise (Class visit to the Kislak Center)**

Readings:

1. Rebecca Whiteley, *Birth Figures: Early Modern Prints and the Pregnant Body* (Chicago, 2022), pp. 87–136.

### **Wednesday, April 24: Anatomies of Difference**

\*\*At least five pages of your rough draft are due to Prof. Reynolds and your peer reviewer by 9 pm on Friday, April 26\*\*

Student Presentation:

Response Papers due by 9 am:

Readings:

1. Lisa Forman Cody, *Birth Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 237–268.

2. Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, "Theories of Gender and Race," pp. 143–183.

**Monday, April 29: Peer Review Conferences in Class/Informal Presentations of Final Paper Topics**

**Wednesday, May 1: Continue Informal Presentations of Final Paper Topics/Course Recap & Discussion**

**\*\* FINAL PAPER DUE during exam week\*\***