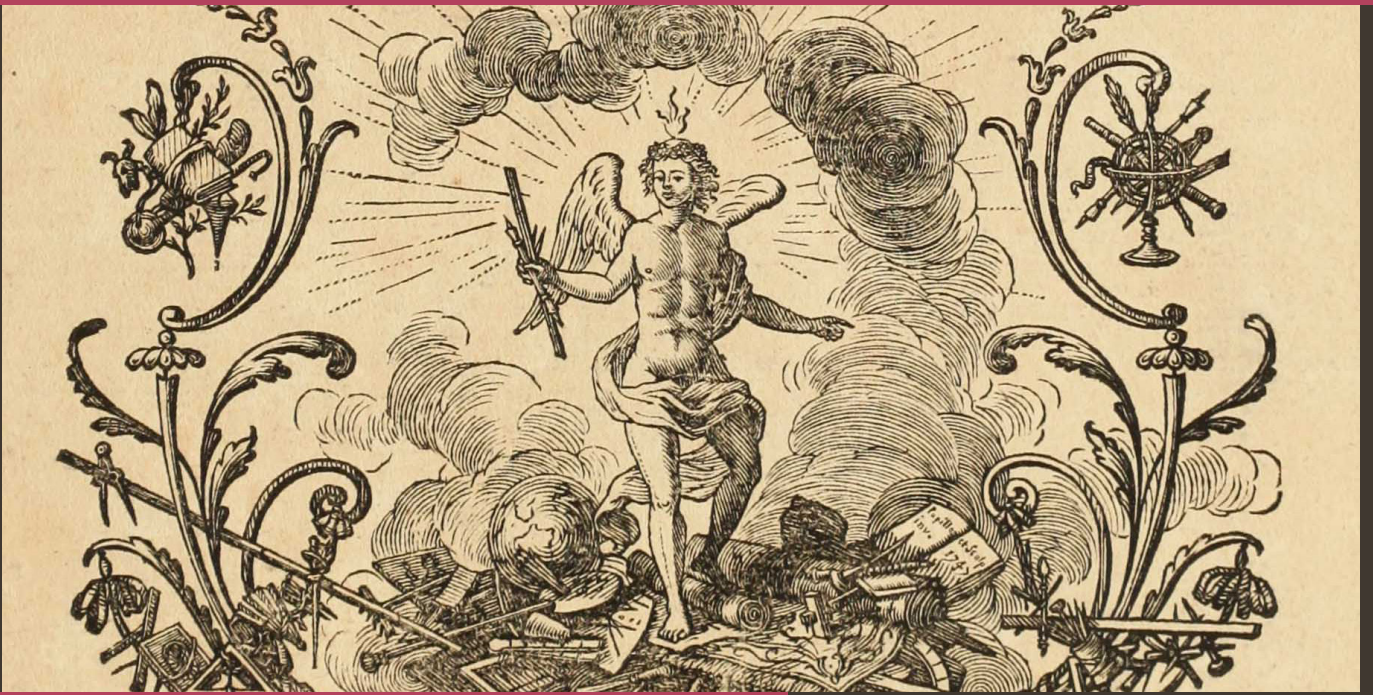


ENLIGHTENMENT, SEX, VIOLENCE, & CONSENT

GNDR_ST 490/ENGLISH 441



This seminar will examine foundational liberal articulations of feminine sexual consent—as well as their historical, political, philosophical, and corporeal failings. From the perspective of political theory, feminist legal studies, feminist and queer theory, and literary history, we will track the constitutive exclusion of feminine sexual consent from social contract theory over the long eighteenth century in Britain and its colonies (1660 - 1820). Social contract theorists like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke base political power on consent, not force; but they exempt domestic power—the power of husbands over wives, fathers over children, masters over servants and slaves—from contractual reform. The uneven development of liberal patriarchy is distilled in an ostensibly free woman’s agency: she has the contractual power to agree to marry, but in so doing she ratifies her natural inferiority to her husband. Become a wife or feme covert, she grants preemptive sexual consent irrespective of her desire. Even more constitutively repressed by the liberal polis is the intimate violence endured by enslaved African women. With these foundational occlusions, the seminar will consider pornographic constructions of women’s anatomy as performative figurations of feminine consent and pleasure; representations of sex work as potentially critical reflection on legally stipulated masculine conjugal right; sexual violence, rape law, and constraint (within and outside slavery); and women’s queer desire and resistance to marriage. We will also analyze two contemporary cruxes in feminism, feminist legal theory, and the late liberal public sphere: intersectional evaluations of racial difference and feminism; and the sex wars, dominance feminism, and, with resurgent debate over Title IX, critical claims for feminine weakness as a condition of disciplinary intervention.

Helen Thompson

Th 2-4:50
Univ Hall 418