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IHSS Research Seminar Program 2024

Uncertain Life: Moles, False Conceptions and False Pregnancy in British Medicine, 1550–1850

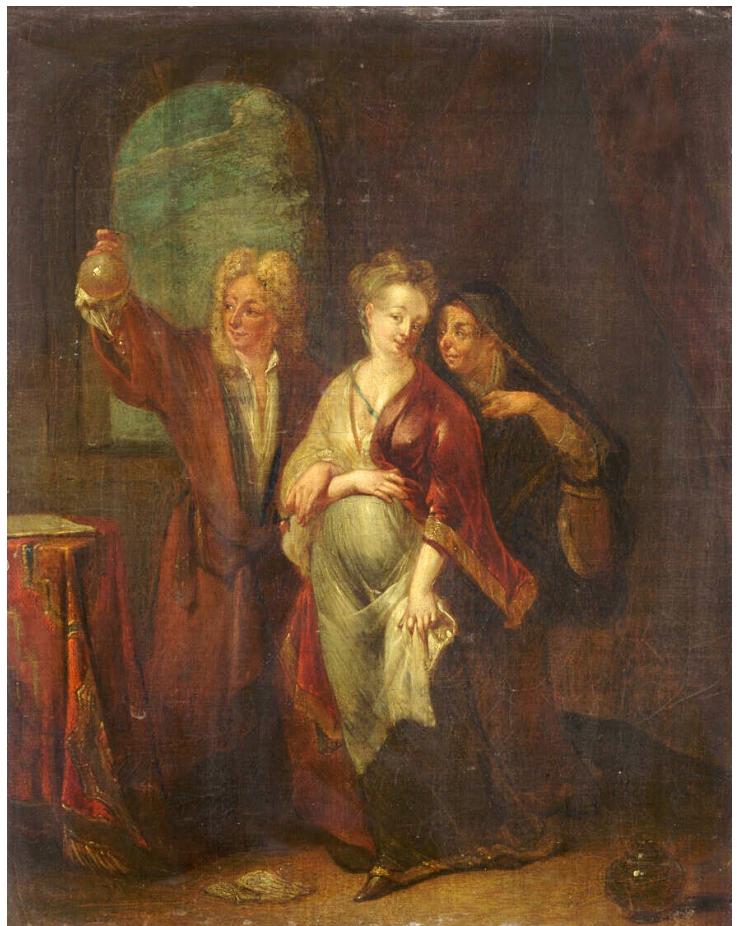
Dr Paige Donaghy (University of Melbourne)

Chairs: Assoc. Prof. Nell Musgrove (NSAH) & Dr. Sarah Bendall (IHSS)

Tuesday 8 October, 12-1pm AEDT

To be held in the Arts Precinct (room 412.1.01) and online via Teams

This paper examines the overlooked history of false generation in British culture and medicine from the mid-sixteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. This term, “false generation”, is one that I use to refer to phenomena in British society during this period known as “false conceptions”, “molae”, “moles” and “spurious pregnancy”. From the medieval era to approximately the mid eighteenth century, it was believed that that women often experienced the pregnancy and birth of formless flesh instead of a foetus, called in this period “false conceptions” or “molae” in the Latin. These false conceptions mimicked the signs of true pregnancy, through swollen bellies and foetal motions, leading women and society more broadly to believe they were truly pregnant when they were not. This paper will outline select case studies of women’s encounters with false generation in early modern England, to highlight how such reproductive experiences shaped medicine, law and culture in this period.



Bio: Dr Paige Donaghy (she/her) is a McKenzie Postdoctoral Research Fellow at The University of Melbourne, where she is researching obstetric medicine, gender and emotions in early modern Europe. She is an award-winning historian who has published widely on sexuality, gender and reproductive medicine in the *Social History of Medicine* and *Isis*.