

Professor Francus
English 387W: Mamma Mia: Mothers and Monsters in Western Culture
Fall 2010
Rare Book Room Essay (3-4 pages)

This assignment provides framework for students to think about books as commodities that circulate ideas, and reflect culture, marketing, and aesthetics. In doing so, this assignment offers strategies for students to evaluate books as artifacts of culture.

As you work through this exercise, please keep the following in mind:

You must comply with all of the rules of the Rare Book Room.
Please wear gloves (which are provided by the Rare Book Room) while handling all texts.
Please handle all texts with care; do not bend book spines back, bend pages, and so on.
You may only use pencils while working in the Rare Book Room; pens are not allowed.

Choose one of the following texts:

The Tyburn Chronicle, the Sarah Wilmshurst case (pp. 151-154)
The Tyburn Chronicle, the Elizabeth Branch case (pp. 122-125)
The World, Volume III (Letter to the editor, pp. 234-239)
The World, Volume IV (Letter, pp. 136-139)
The Tatler, Volume I (issue #15, pp. 88-91)
The Guardian, Volume II (issue #105, pp. 88-91)

The Tyburn Chronicle is an 18th-century compendium of criminal cases; *The World*, *The Tatler*, and *The Guardian* are 18th-century periodicals. Each of these selections presents issues concerning mothers, children, and/or monstrous motherhood.

Based on your knowledge of the historical period and/or the form of motherhood, develop a thesis and argument about the way(s) the text represents, interprets, and circulates ideas about mothers, motherhood, and/or monstrosity.

Suggestions:

1. As you evaluate the selections, consider the tone, style, genre, and audience for the piece.
2. Evaluate the book in which the selection appears. Consider the size, contents, illustrations (or lack thereof), preface or dedication (or lack thereof), and marketing materials (or lack thereof). What do the physical aspects of the book suggest about the intended market for the book? The audience who might be reading this work?
3. Take a look at the Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO) Database and/or WorldCat, available through the WVU Library Database system, which will provide a sense of the number of editions of these works in the eighteenth century. ECCO offers scanned versions of many eighteenth-century texts (but not all), which may help you as you think about the text you choose.

4. State your thesis at the beginning of your essay. Your thesis may focus on the style or content of the passage in terms of the circulation of ideas, or marketing of the book and the circulation of ideas, etc. Remember that a thesis is a position statement, and that you need to stake a position about the way this text circulates ideas about mothers, children, or monstrosity in your essay.
5. The more specific evidence you use in your essay to prove your point, the better.
6. Each paragraph of your essay should support your thesis statement. Please make sure that there are transitions between paragraphs, so that each paragraph leads to the next, and that each paragraph builds upon its predecessor.
7. Every book reflects a cultural moment. Your job is to make sense of it.
8. This assignment does not require external research—although you may choose to pursue research on periodical journalism if you wish. (If you do so, be sure to cite your sources.) This assignment does require careful viewing, thinking, and writing.