

Monstrous Births, Scheming Midwives: Childbirth in Europe, 1500-1800
History/FWS 1230
Professor Rachel Weil
Tuesdays/Thursdays, 11:40-12:55 IVS 111

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00 -3:30 and by appointment
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When Mary Toft gave birth to rabbits in 1726, only some (but not all) doctors thought she was faking. Why was her story plausible, and how were the rabbits explained? Who controlled childbirth, and who had the power to decide whether a pregnancy was real? How did Mary Toft experience the event? Monstrous births, dishonest midwives, infanticide, and the powers of pregnant women were topics of fascination and debate in early modern Europe and America. In this course we use writings by midwives, medical treatises, letters, autobiographies, news reports, and trial records to examine practices and beliefs surrounding childbirth, and how these in turn reflected concerns about property, sexuality, health and religion.

Readings

To Purchase at Buffalo Street Books (these can be delivered to class):

Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book

Diana Hacker, Diana Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual

All other readings are on Blackboard, or will be distributed in class.

Grading

Papers (rough and final drafts) : 70 % (see below)

Editorial Comments/peer review: 15%

Class participation, completion of ungraded assignments, attendance: 15%



Grading on Rough and Final Drafts

Your rough draft will be graded in the same way that papers normally are: on the quality of your ideas, how well you support them with evidence, and how clearly you express them. So, you should try to write the best paper you can write as a rough draft. If I think your rough draft is truly superb and could not be improved upon, I will tell you that in my comments, and you turn in the same paper for your final paper.

Final papers for which you have written rough drafts must be submitted with a note of explanation, in which you briefly state the most important points made by the readers of your rough draft (that is, Prof. Weil and your peer editor) and explain how you responded to them, or why you did not respond to them. Note that not only three paper assignments require rough drafts.

Paper #1, 3-4 pages (rough 5 %, final 10%)
Paper #2, 3-4 pages (5 %)
Paper #3, 4-6 pages (rough 5 %, final 10%)
Paper #4, 3-4 pages (5 %)
Paper #5, 8-10 pages (rough 10 %, final 15%)
Paper #6, 3-4 pages (5 %)

Grading on Editorial Comments that you write on rough drafts by fellow students

I expect you to make a good-faith effort to understand the argument(s) of the rough draft you have read, to point out weaknesses, and to make constructive suggestions. You can receive a good grade for your editorial comments, even if your comments on the rough draft are not the same as mine!

Grading on Class participation and completion of ungraded in-class exercises.

I expect *informed* participation. That is, you should show by what you say that you have come to class prepared and have read the assignment carefully.

Ungraded exercises

You will get full credit just for doing them! Not doing them, however, will adversely affect your grade.

Attendance Policy

You are allowed two unexcused absences, no questions asked. You may also take excused absences, but the only excuses accepted will be medical, family emergency, and absences officially recognized as excusable by Cornell University. You must provide appropriate documentation and inform me immediately if you take an excused absence. In every case of absence, you are responsible for obtaining materials and instructions given out in class. Absences in excess of what is allowed will lower the class participation part of your grade. Excessive lateness will also lower your attendance grade.

Note: Because of the H1N1 (swine flu) virus, it may be necessary for you to stay out of class. If you come down with H1N1, or think you have come down with it, you should notify me immediately. I will make appropriate accommodations.

Statement Regarding Academic Integrity:

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit must be the student's own work. The complete Cornell Code of Academic Integrity can be found at:

<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html>

Guidelines on proper citation of sources, and tips for avoiding even the appearance of plagiarism, will be distributed with instructions for the first paper.

Schedule of Discussions, Deadlines and Workshops

Note: You are responsible for doing all the readings prior to class. Bring a copy of the readings with you to class on the day they are assigned.

Thursday August 27 Introduction to the Course

Tuesday, September 1 Who controls childbirth?

Reading (short document handouts)

The Midwife's Oath

The Mistaken Midwife

The Midwives' Petition

Thursday, September 3 Who controls childbirth, continued

Reading:

Laura Gowing, "Ordering the body: illegitimacy and female authority in seventeenth-century England"

Adrian Wilson, "Ceremonies of Childbirth"

Rachel Weil: "The Politics of legitimacy: Women and the Warming Pan Scandal"

Tuesday September 8 Powers of the Pregnant Woman?

Rough draft of Paper #1 due, in 3 paper copies

Reading:

Ulinka Rublack, "Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany,"

Aristotle's Masterpiece (excerpts)

Thursday, September 10 Workshop: Structuring an Argument.

Editorial Comments on Paper #1 due

Tuesday, September 15 Workshop: Cutting the Fat
Final draft of Paper #1 due

Thursday, September 17 The Self-image of Midwives
Reading:

Louis Bourgeois, "Instructions of a famous and dying Midwife to her Daughter, touching the Practice of this Art" in John Pechy, The Compleat Midwife's Practice Enlarged, pp. 345-351

Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book (Front Matter and Introduction, pages 1-13)
Elizabeth Cellier, Elizabeth Cellier, To Dr. ----- an answer to his queries concerning the college of midwives (London, 1688)

Reread and bring documents distributed in Week 1 of the course

Tuesday, September 22 The Self-image of Midwives, continued
Reading:

Louise Bourgeois, The serious and most choice secrets of Madam Louyse Bourgioes, Midwife to the Queen of France in John Pechey, The compleat midwife's practice enlarged (1698)pp. 327-344

Thursday, September 24 Class meets in Rare Book Room
Paper #2 due

Tuesday September 29 Man-midwives
Reading:

Lisa Cody, "The Doctor's in Labour; or a New Whim Wham from Guildford"
William Smellie, A Collection of Preternatural Cases and Observations in Midwifery, volume III (London, D. Wilson, 1764), 1-3, 368-70, 508-510, 533-544.
Letter from Isabella Wentworth

Thursday October 1 Infanticide
Reading

Cornelia Hughes Dayton, "Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village"
R. W. Malcolmson, "Infanticide in the Eighteenth Century"
Infanticide Trial documents, distributed in class

Tuesday, October 6 Workshop: Writing introductions
Rough draft of Paper #3 due

Thursday, October 8 Workshop: Directing the reader
Editorial Comments on Paper #3 due (2 copies).

Tuesday October 13 NO CLASS (Fall Break)

Thursday October 15 Humoral Theory and Women's bodies

Reading:

Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book, Book V (chaps 5-6,9,11) Book VI Book VI (chaps 1-2): pp. 190-204, 215-21,225-28, 235-48)

Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England"

Friday, October 16 *Final draft of paper #3 due in my mailbox by 4:00 PM*

Tuesday October 20 Biology, Psychology and Morality

Reading:

Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book, Book I (chaps 7, 10-13, 16-17), Book II (chaps. 1-8) 23-28,32-47,51-61, 67-118).

Thursday October 22 Discussion continued

Tuesday October 27 How Birth Works

Paper #4 due today

Reading:

Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book, Book III (all), Book IV (chaps 1-3, 8), [pp.127-43, 145-63, 169-73]

Bring in passages from Louise Bourgeois and William Smellie that seem to you to be connected to your readings for today.

Thursday October 29 Breastfeeding and Maternal Ideals

Reading:

Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast"

Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book, Book VI, Chaps 4-5 (pp. 258-271)

Louise Bourgeois, Chapter on Nurses (pp. 342-43)

Tuesday November 3 Discussion of Topics for Paper #5

Find a source that will be the basis for Paper #5. It may be something that relates to the topic of your 4th paper, or any primary source we haven't discussed in class that concerns childbirth in early modern Europe. Bring in a short excerpt, and be ready to tell the class about it/

Thursday November 5 Bad Mothers: Solving the Foundling Problem:

Reading:

Otto Ulbrecht, "The Debate about Foundling Hospitals in Enlightenment Germany"

Joseph Massie, "Observations concerning the Foundling Hospital" in A Plan for Establishing Charity Houses (1758)

Tuesday November 10 Workshop (topic of students' choice)
Rough draft of Paper #5 due, 4 copies

Thursday November 12 Rough Draft Presentations
Turn in one set of editorial comments today

Tuesday November 17 Rough Draft Presentations
All Editorial Comments due today

Thursday November 19 Rough Draft Presentations

Tuesday November 24 Rough draft Presentations

Thursday November 26 THANKSGIVING BREAK

Tuesday December 1 Childbirth in the 21st Century
Final Draft of Paper #5 due

Thursday December 3 Brainstorm on topics for Paper #6
Bring in a source about childbirth in our own time. Be prepared to talk about how that source compares to something you have encountered in this class.

Paper #6 is due in my box at 4:00 PM, Tuesday December 8.