

AHRC-funded Motherhood in post-1968 European Literature Network
Aims and Research Questions for Workshop 3
'Changing Models of Motherhood' (Friday 18 January 2013)

Aims:

Workshop 3, 'Changing Models of Motherhood', and the author reading event which follows it, will discuss shifting perceptions and what might be called 'non-standard' mothers and models of mothering. This might include lone mothers, lesbian mothers, teenage mothers, adoptive mothers, imprisoned mothers, and mothers of disabled children, as well as older mothers, surrogate mothers, disabled mothers, drug addicted mothers and mothers who leave their children. The topic may also take in (in)fertility issues, new reproductive technologies and the issue of children having multiple 'mothers'. Of course, mothers such as these are very common, but they are often marginalised or demonised in relation to normative discourse on motherhood and familial relations. The workshop aims, on the one hand, to identify specific problem areas relating to changing models of motherhood in Europe, asking what kinds of insights literature may offer to the issues raised. On the other hand, it aims to consider the positive aspects of changing family patterns and relations in Europe, exploring alternative kinship formations in both theory and literature.

Research questions:

1. What are the key contemporary issues which impact on what we are calling 'non-standard' mothers and mothering in different European countries?
2. What specific problem areas arise in debates around these mothers and different models of mothering?
3. How do specific national contexts, laws and politics affect such mothers and mothering?
4. What particular issues arise from cross-cultural comparisons of 'non-standard' mothering?
5. How do such mothers get their voices heard in the public sphere, and their specific needs met?
6. In what ways do what we are calling 'non-standard' mothers and mothering offer positive models of motherhood?
7. What are the implications of the multiple mothers and mothering involved in infertility treatments and/or lesbian mothering?
8. How are changing kinship patterns and models of motherhood being theorised and approached within different disciplines?
9. How do literary texts respond to and/or shape current debates on 'non-standard' mothers and mothering, and vice versa?
10. What kinds of literary techniques and effects are employed to convey meaning in relation to this topic?
11. What insights can literary narratives and representations relative to the topic offer to interdisciplinary discussion?
12. What kinds of relationship are there between literature and real life experience, and between literature and contemporary social issues regarding the topic?