

Rare Books Assignment

Due Friday, May 5, by email

Identify and write a three to five page report on a text written between 1836 and 1866, which has not been reprinted since 1900.

The most efficient way to undertake this assignment:

1. Identify an issue of a periodical that originally published a text we've read this semester. For example, *The Saturday Evening Post* published Poe's "The Black Cat" on August 19, 1843; and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* published Melville's "The Town Ho's Story" (chapter 54 of *Moby Dick*) in October, 1851. (Another example: Dickinson published a poem in *Round Table* on March 12, 1864.) Alternatively, identify a random issue of an important periodical: for example, *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (1837–1859), *The Liberator* (1831–1965), *The Dial* (1840–1844).
2. Arrange to see the issue of the periodical in Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) at Firestone Library, or find a copy online. (The periodicals should all be available online, but I *strongly* recommend you try to see a physical copy. You might even be able to find a copy in the Firestone stacks to check out!) Read through the issue and identify an interesting contribution by a writer who is unknown to you. (The contribution may also be anonymous.)
3. Investigate whether the contribution has been reprinted. Has the contribution been anthologized or collected in a modern edition? Was it ever published in a book? Once you are confident that your selection was not reprinted after 1900, email the citation to me. I will give you the go ahead to complete the assignment. Our investigations about reprinting will not be foolproof. We'll do our best! We can tolerate some exceptions: for example, a facsimile of the entire run of the *Dial* was published in the 1960s; some nineteenth-century periodicals are now available as print-on-demand books.
4. Write a three to five page report on the text. Remember: you might be the only person to have read the text in over one hundred and fifty years! Tell your reader what the text is about and why (or whether) it matters. Speculate about why it did not become canonized. Does the text deserve to be reprinted now? How does it compare to the canonical texts we read this semester?
5. Miscellaneous advice: Select a poem or a story or an essay—not a news article or an occasional piece of journalism. Write me with questions as they arise.