

[stanza break]

To burst the pod...

Moon-women, ...

We sprinkle that knowing-dust
Into our daughter's eyes.

And men? They are "that thrashing," a mere staccato lunge into fecundity and then no longer central to the heritage of women.

Lying to Our Mothers

Katherine Lawrence.

Regina: Coteau Books, 2006.

Reviewed by Nancy Gerber

Katherine Lawrence's collection of poetry, *Lying to Our Mothers*, is the poetic equivalent of a bildungsroman, the novel that explores personal growth. Memorable and moving, these poems map the speaker's journey from girlhood to womanhood. With its emphasis on images and memory rather than plot and sequential time, poetry is a genre especially suited to representing the complexities and contradictions of maternal subjectivity, allowing readers to witness the speaker's transformation from daughter to mother and from being her mother's daughter to becoming her daughter's mother.

The poems are divided into four sections. The first, "You Knew – Didn't You?", explores the emotional geography of female coming-of-age in the 1960s: the desire for freedom and adventure, the value and vicissitudes of girls' friendships, the pain of mother-daughter conflict. In "Mud Wars," the tension between a strong-willed mother and an equally strong-willed daughter is announced: "Our first house / a battlefield / because the address told us so: 61 Battlefield Drive, / the ravine across the road / site of all our wars: mother versus a small muddy daughter" (3). The speaker brings her feminist perspective to bear in acknowledging her mother's domestic entrapment: "How could we stop ourselves? / You tied at the waist / to stove and sink. Me, fixed on spring's wild / riot beyond the door" (3).

The second section, "The Soft Give of Flesh," includes an eponymous poem where a mother meditates on the impossibility of protecting a teenage daughter from violence: "She is immunized against pertussis / tuberculosis,

chicken pox / not rape” (33). The speaker describes the dark moment that connects the two women: “Bedsheets soaked in cold sweat / girl screaming help with no voice ... eyes black / pool of crimson blood / between my legs, her legs” (34). Later the speaker recalls her own experience of violation: “I was cornered in a parking lot / his thick hands, my back pushed against brick” (39).

The third section, “Letters Home,” is an alphabet acrostic (sometimes called an abcdarium) in which each letter of the alphabet begins a new stanza of the poem. The letters mirror the daughter’s journey: they take flight as the daughter leaves, carrying the mother’s hopes, wishes, and fears for the daughter’s well-being into the world and back home. The mother mourns her daughter’s departure even as she understands its purpose and necessity in establishing female autonomy: “Once upon a time / you would have liked me, / a time before I was your mother / a time when I was a girl / who wanted to leave home” (59).

The fourth and final section, “Slipping the Blindfold,” examines a grown woman’s life, with poems on marriage, illness, friendships, sexual desire, and domestic arrangements: “Sharon’s lost interest in cooking and sex / so you’d think Jim would lose interest in Sharon / but turns out she married a resourceful man / who now goes to market on Saturdays” (71). The first poem in this section, “Fabric,” describes the generational continuity that binds mothers and daughters even as daughters ceaselessly create new patterns: “We are the daughters of thread-and-needle mothers / women who stitched their lives from a pattern ... cut” (67).

Lawrence, a development officer for the Royal University Hospital Foundation, is the author of a previous collection of poetry, *Ring Finger, Left Hand*, which won the First Book Award at the Saskatchewan Book Awards. Her new book is a valuable addition to the literature on mother-daughter relationships, women’s friendships, and complex relationships that resonate in women’s lives.

Embracing Brings You Back

Pat Clifford.

Regina: Coteau Books, 2006.

Reviewed by Dorsía Smith Silva

Embracing Brings You Back is a collection of poetry that describes the journey of ovarian cancer survivor Pat Clifford. The poems could easily have become maudlin and sentimental, but Clifford’s work resonates with powerful images and poignant lines. Here, the poet braves the possibility of her death and laments the loss of women who succumb to ovarian cancer.