

of women as mothers—magnified when the women are not formally subordinated to husbands—makes such odd national passions possible.

Islands of Women and Amazons: Representations and Realities

Batya Weinbaum
Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999

Reviewed by Gail M. Lindsay

In *Islands of Women and Amazons*, a reader looks over Batya Weinbaum's shoulder as she delves into history, literature, popular culture, folklore, and personal experience to inquire into the feminist meaning of myths and images of women. I imagine Weinbaum as an Amazon herself, in search of community and meaning in contemporary American society. Archetypal theory informs Weinbaum's study of the history, mythology, science fiction, culture, and anthropology of societies of women, often located on islands.

Weinbaum hypothesizes that Amazon archetypes are used in three ways: to reclaim women's lost power; to keep women within patriarchy and reverse the gains of the women's movement; or to build links between Amazons and contemporary women's lives and spirituality. Weinbaum examines the use and development of the Amazon archetype throughout history to the present. She shows how Amazons have been used in writing as a symbol for women's lives and to support or deny women's autonomy.

Beginning with Greek legends, Weinbaum traces the Amazon archetype in women who are lesbian, black, connected to nature, their bodies, maternity, and matriarchy. Weinbaum notes, "those who represent Amazons reveal themselves and their own social context" (60). There is no absolute truth or single representation of Amazon women. A particular strength of this book is its contextualized analysis of Amazon scholarship across history, disciplines, geographic settings, and forms of creative expression (dance, poetry, oral narratives). Weinbaum also argues persuasively that earth-based, female-centred cultures had to be subdued by patriarchal Christianity.

Weinbaum offers a powerful analysis of oral lamentation – women's response to being left by men who go off to war – in a variety of societies. She examines the world of Amazon women: how women's collectives were formed, where they lived, how they bore and raised children, how they related to men and boys, how they related to one another, to Mother Earth and Goddess figures. Weinbaum moves across European myths and archeology to Columbus's journals of North America, Marco Polo's journals of the Far East, and Celtic

myths of Avalon. She takes us on a fascinating journey through ancient myths and Renaissance scholarship.

Finally, Weinbaum takes us to the Isla Mujeres (Island of Women) off the coast of Yucatan. Here, she shares her daily life as diviner, graduate student, pregnant woman, and later as mother to illustrate the cultural collision of “primitive folk wisdom” and the “advanced Western mind.” Weinbaum claims, “we project a transference onto the island’s opaque open door from our own need to compensate for loss in Modern society” (161). Readers learn how Weinbaum and the indigenous people relate: she comes from the culture the islanders envy and mimic, while she is searching for what predates tourism and the stage-managed, packaged local culture. These oppositions come together in her experience of childbirth where she is attended by a senora midwife, a British woman doctor, and a local young woman educated to be a nurse. Although she seeks guidance from her midwife, Weinbaum’s fear and lack of knowledge cause her to turn to the British doctor during labour. She acknowledges that we are “part and parcel of what we study” (234) and finally comes to see how Amazons and islands of women are rendered invisible. Weinbaum concludes that in the “unhinged culture” of America, people are searching for “an Eden of sustained nurturance” (239). She invites her female readers to create their own stories of Amazons, to deepen their sense of being embodied, generative, and spiritual women.

Mothers and Motherhood: Readings in American History

Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden, eds.
Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997

Reviewed by Donna Varga

Mothers & Motherhood: Readings in American History brings together a compilation of social and cultural writings on the issue of mothering as constructed and lived. Of twenty-five chapters, all but three have been previously published; with one exception, the chapters were first published in the 1980s or 1990s. The readings have been organized into four thematic sections: the social construction of motherhood; motherhood and reproduction; social and cultural settings; and public policy. Within each section, contributions cover a variety of issues and focus on a range of historical periods. For example, the section on the social construction of motherhood includes a chapter on breastfeeding and