

Book Reviews

infant care in England and America from the late 1500s to the late 1700s; a chapter on mother love in the nineteenth century; and a chapter on maternal grief arising from miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death during the period 1920-1985. The section on public policy includes chapters on topics such as health, birth control, and maternal employment. While the majority of the book focuses on European and American women, eight chapters deal specifically with minority cultural groups. Two examples are Loretta J. Ross's, "African American Women and Abortion, 1800-1970" and George J. Sanchez's "Go after the women': Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929."

The thematic organization of the book allows for a wide variety of topics and eras to be covered. As a result, however, *Mothers & Motherhood* does not thoroughly discuss a single period or topic. This might not suit readers who are seeking a focussed examination of a specific issue. Readers also will find that the book does not offer a comprehensive study of mothering history. Rather it encourages knowledgeable readers to discover connections among the various chapters.

Since much of the book consists of reprinted material, many scholars already may be familiar with its content. The range of readings included, however, and the narrow scope within which most academics work, makes it likely that many will uncover new material. The book will be useful in women's studies courses, since most chapters will be accessible and interesting to undergraduate students. In my own experience of teaching of Rima Apple's "Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," I received enthusiastic feedback from students and found that the chapter more than adequately dealt with the issues of child development and mothering. In addition, graduate students and those teaching specialized courses on mothering will find the book useful. The editors' provision of bibliographies for each section extends the value of the book. Overall, the high quality of the book's content and its range of material make it highly suitable for personal and institutional libraries.

Fragments of Motherhood

Batya Weinbaum
E. Montpelier, VT: Angel Fish Press, 1996

Reviewed by Roxanne Harde

In the three brief poems included in this chapbook, Batya Weinbaum captures the essence of mothering a toddler. Weinbaum's work, both free verse and

prose poems, combine her experiences as mother and professor of English. Despite several typographical errors and some idiomatic Spanish, the book is a delight to read. Weinbaum's descriptive passages are especially well turned; for example, she describes herself undergoing root canal as "dependent and helpless and psychologically buckled into that crinkly leather chair." Such succinct description characterizes Weinbaum's acute observations.

These observations are linked by Weinbaum's overarching theme of motherhood. The opening poem, "Return to Isla: January 1995," describes life with a toddler. The speaker has become "Just tits, and a stool to / climb on. Something to bite." The poem, however, turns to the better parts of mothering a two-year-old, "the appreciation of small moments." While "Return" lacks the depth of subsequent poems, it is itself a "small moment" of appreciation of all mothers. "The Abscess of Desire" rejects the image of the mother presented in "Return," as the speaker opens with a rich description of her desire for the dentist on a small Mexican island. The eroticism of the opening poetry gives way to the humorous prose description of her painful root canal and her curiosity about the other mouths her dentist examines. These musings soon turn to the reality of motherhood, her physical and emotional attachment to her young daughter, and their departure from the island. The eroticism of the speaker's desire balances her otherwise mechanical attention to life's details.

"Our Silly Mom" is a charming conflation of generations as Weinbaum gives a toddler's view of her mother's quest for spiritual enlightenment. Every move made by the mother to find transcendence with a group focussed on motherhood is countered by the reality of the child she mothers. As the toddler's noise and movement are restricted by women in the ashram, her mother privileges the child who must move and sing. The poem carries multiplicities of meaning as the voice of the child wavers between adult sophistication and descriptions of things children like. For example, she directs the narrative with description – "our silly mom got very purposeful" – and interjections – "so, as I was saying." She also dwells on the childlike wish to live in a school bus. The results are charming; the mother of a toddler has her hands full, but this toddler's description of her mother's quest makes clear that enlightenment is more likely to be experienced in the intimacy shared by child and mother.

Implicit in *Fragments of Motherhood* is Weinbaum's criticism of those who cleave to the ideal of motherhood but dismiss the labour of actual mothering. She makes explicit, however, her understanding that the rewards of motherhood are available through physical and emotional work.