

writers in this collection. Moreover, I cannot help but think that we have not advanced much in the last one hundred and fifty years if childlessness is still perceived as a problem today.

Ten Good Seconds of Silence

Elizabeth Ruth
Toronto: Dundurn, 2001

Reviewed by Rita Bode

Elizabeth Ruth's debut novel, *Ten Good Seconds of Silence*, makes a memorable contribution to the eccentric characters who populate Canadian fiction. Although she acknowledges her debt to Timothy Findley's Lilah Kemp, Ruth's Lilith Boot emerges as a unique creation. We first meet her in Toronto's Allan Gardens Conservatory, a "perfect compromise" between "wilderness and civilization," a spiritual and mental space that Lilith has spent most of her life negotiating. Lilith is a clairvoyant; she sees things that others do not see. Her special gifts are particularly evident in her relationship with the natural world which Ruth, in rich, textured descriptions, brings intensely and joyfully alive as she traces Lilith's slow acceptance of herself and her place in the world as clairvoyant and mother: "Clairvoyance is a vocation. *It's who I am*, Lilith thinks. *Not just what I do*. It's like motherhood."

From the opening scene in Allan Gardens, Ruth moves skillfully back and forth in time. Lilith's current job is to assist Sergeant Grant of the Toronto Police Department to find missing children, but we move back to her painful childhood relationship with her parents, her time as an adolescent patient at the Bridgewater mental hospital, and forward again to her own complicated relationship with her daughter, Lemon, who Lilith claims was an immaculate conception. Through memories, visions, and dreams, Ruth validates her characters' struggles to harmonize their inner sensibilities with the outer world, and to gain social acceptance while retaining their individual identities. She effectively employs a multi-voiced narrative, alternating Lilith's and Lemon's voices with a third-person narrator whose access to and insight into the inner lives of all the novel's characters add further depth and understanding to the first-person voices. Moreover, Ruth's alternating narratives move the novel with ease and grace between the two main plots that she establishes, both of which, in different ways, revolve around missing children. The scene in which she reveals the connection between the two plots provides a particularly satisfying moment in the novel.

Least satisfying is Ruth's handling of her younger characters who seem case studies of troubled individuals. At times, their dialogue lacks immediacy.

The two young women, Jan and Lemon, are distinguished, especially in the third-person narrative sections, more by their situations and circumstances than by individualized characterization.

At the novel's centre are lost children, but Ruth suggests that there are no missing children without absent parents. She explores and probes a range of parent-child—especially mother-child—relationships, suggesting both their strengths and their vulnerabilities, their creative potential as well as their threatening limitations. Ruth eschews maternal stereotypes (even that of the wicked stepmother). Through Lilith's relationship with her own mother and her daughter, Ruth dares to confront the fine line between a maternal love that nurtures the child and a maternal love that functions to save the mother herself. In *Ten Good Seconds of Silence*, Elizabeth Ruth faces the complexity of motherhood, for mothers and their children alike.

Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood

Sandra Steingraber
Cambridge: Perseus Publishing, 2001

Reviewed by Moriah Hampton

Near the conclusion of *Having Faith*, Sandra Steingraber recalls preparing for a 1999 United Nations discussion on breast-milk contamination: "I know that I want to speak as a nursing mother. I know also that I want to speak dispassionately, as an ecologist, about the evidence. But how to strike the right balance between the intimate and the empirical?" (361). Steingraber strikes that balance when she introduces U.N. delegates to breast-milk contamination by first passing around a jar of her own breast milk and then proceeding to discuss the effects of toxic chemicals on breast milk and a suckling daughter. A balance between personal and empirical knowledge shapes Steingraber's book.

Part one chronicles Steingraber's pregnancy: nine chapters describe the changes that each month of pregnancy brings to mother and fetus. Intimate disclosure and empirical analysis intertwine and inform one another. Steingraber, the scientist, lucidly discusses menstrual cycles, organogenesis, fetal brain development, among other biological functions. On the other hand, Sandra, the pregnant woman, vividly recalls suffering through morning sickness and feeling her body changing. Steingraber also discloses her own life circumstances: she is a cancer survivor and adoptee. In one scene, she lies on the same examination table for cancer screenings and amniotic fluid testing. An obstetrician charts the fluid surrounding the fetus, while Steingraber's own