

Lapeyre-Desmaison on Adler, Ernaux, and Laurens and the death of a child (by abortion in Ernaux's case), concerns writing as need and risk in relation to the authors' traumatic experiences of giving birth to "both life and death."

As with most collections of conference proceedings, the quality of the contributions is inconsistent, but this volume contains some interesting essays on an important and prevalent theme in contemporary culture. While individual essays are suitably theorized, a more substantial, theoretical introduction would have given the book more weight, and an index would have been helpful.

The Maternal Is Political: Women Writers at the Intersection of Motherhood and Social Change

Shari MacDonald Strong, ed.
Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008.

Reviewed by Rachel Epp Buller

Today it goes without saying that motherhood is a political act. Whether or not to breastfeed, co-sleep, baby-wear, or send your child to daycare—all of these are choices fraught with political implications. While a few of the essayists in *The Maternal Is Political* discuss politics in terms of these mothering life style choices, many more consider their entry into motherhood as a time of political awakening. For a majority of the writers, motherhood shifted their viewpoints from seeing themselves as individuals unable to make a difference, to realizing that mothers have access to a collective well-spring of power, if only they work together to tap into that power.

Editor Shari MacDonald Strong divides her collection into three sections—"Believe," "Teach," and "Act"—and she compiles cohesive groupings of essays under these headings. Judith Stadtman Tucker's opening contribution, "Motherhood Made Me Do It, Or, How I Became an Activist," provides a strong grounding for the volume. While Strong includes essays by important women, including Benazir Bhutto, Barbara Kingsolver, and Nancy Pelosi, many of the strongest essays are written by lesser-known writers. Each mother reading this compilation will feel drawn to different essays. For this reviewer, Jennifer Brisendine's text on teaching high school English in the era of No Child Left Behind and Valerie Weaver-Zercher's "Peace March Sans Children" are especially powerful.

In her introduction to the book, Strong pinpoints motherhood as a time of political awakening but separate from political party allegiance. She asserts that she has "tapped into something more primal, more global, more far-reaching

and intuitive, than a political loyalty. [...] Call us members of the Mothering Party” (5). Despite this intended separation, however, the overwhelming majority of the collection’s essayists are, in fact, left-leaning mamas who announce their political affiliations. Again and again, for example, we read of the writers’ disappointments regarding the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. As a left-leaning mama myself, I identify with their sentiments. And yet, I wonder about the absence of maternal voices from the “other side” of the fence. Sarah Werthan Buttenwieser’s “The Secret Lives of Babysitters”—albeit indirectly—is one such essay. Framing her contribution around the backdrop of the 2004 election, Buttenwieser describes her struggle to make sense of the discovery that one of their family’s favourite babysitters is also the vice-president of the Young Republicans club. While diatribes from women whose motherhood inspired them to become anti-abortion activists would be out of place in this volume, surely there could have been a way to include the middle ground and thereby add a little diversity to challenge the reader and strengthen the collection.

Diary for a Daughter: August 1969 - August 1970

Katherine Dickson.

United States: Xlibris Corporation, 2006.

Reviewed by Margaret Machara

Katherine Dickson’s *Diary for a Daughter* is an intriguing peek inside the mental journey of a mother after the birth of her second child. Present throughout the challenges and doldrums of everyday life is the author’s family: husband, son, and especially her new daughter. As she seeks to define herself as a woman, a mother, and a writer, tension rises between Dickson and the members of her family.

Dickson’s book begins with change: relocation to a new home and the impending birth of her second child. Overwhelmed by a sense of euphoria she states, “everything seems so beautiful, and the whole atmosphere is swathed in mysterious expectation. I love the house. I love Frank. I hope to God this doesn’t all change after the baby is born. Everything I could possibly want is right here” (18).

Not long after the birth of her daughter, however, the new mother begins to fear losing herself. Throughout her daughter’s first year, she is troubled by an inability to write. In addition, although she loves her husband Frank, her doubts about her own role and personal aspirations manifest as resentment and anger towards him. She invites Frank to help define her goals but soon interprets his interaction as controlling: “I need lines like in the coloring book. Frank offered ‘lines,’ then slowly blurred the picture” (64). Issues of