

the Case of Pregnancy Loss” by Linda Layne, deal with children who differ from the norm and thus challenge their mothers’ status. Both essays deploy the rhetoric of the gift, used here with explicit Christian overtones, to critique consumerism and self-blame. For Landsman, the idea that God “gives special children to special parents”—embraced by many parents of children with disabilities—is eventually displaced by the assertion that the child is the true giver of the gift, a notion that returns the value of the child to “normal.” In the final essay, Layne shows how bereaved mothers use the conceptual and symbolic power of the gift to deal with the moral problem pregnancy loss poses for women in a culture that often understands pregnancy in terms of capitalist production, and the delivery of a healthy child as the result of individual triumph.

Torn: True Stories of Kids, Career & the Conflict of Modern Motherhood

Samatha Parent Walravens.
Seattle, WA: Coffeetown Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Dorsía Smith Silva

Torn: True Stories of Kids, Career, and the Conflict of Modern Motherhood considers various paths of motherhood and whether mothers “can have it all” and at the same time. In many ways, the forty-seven contributors to this volume feel “torn” between caring for their children and the demands of their careers. Drawing on their personal experiences, they explore the guilt women face when they cannot find a balance between motherhood and work. As a result, the narratives emphasize that the “supermommy” complex is dead—the reality of motherhood is that there may not be equilibrium between the worlds of parenting and career.

Most of the tales address this tension with great candour. Liesl Jurock in “Cupcake Crazy,” for example, is conflicted when she must miss her son’s birthday party at daycare to attend a business meeting. Likewise, Lindsey Mead in “A Foot in Two Worlds” is ambivalent about realigning her professional life to raise her children full time. Jurock and Mead note that their respective career decisions are multilayered and seek to reconcile personal aspirations, educational and financial investments, professional goals, parental responsibilities, and several other factors. Each admits that there is no easy or perfect solution for mothers.

The frankness of some essays is unnerving. In “Confessions of a Crazy

Mommy,” Darcy Mayers describes how she “collared” her children, scared them, and wanted them to be scared. She asks readers not to judge her actions, but her tale of physical and emotional abuse is disturbing. “The Pink Post-It Umbrella” by Devorah Lifshutz is also troubling. As she recalls how she smashes her son’s favourite toy, “sandwiches” his body between a wall and table, and “braces” her hands around his neck, she seems like a mother on the verge of a nervous breakdown. These narratives would be more appropriately placed in a volume that explores maternal stress and frustration.

Regrettably, *Walravens* also includes several essays that do not relate to the theme of the collection. For example, in one narrative the speaker laments her decision to divorce her husband because she worries about maintaining her middle-class lifestyle. In another tale, a woman gives details of visiting a food bank and the bureaucracy of the immigration system. The serious issues raised in these essays—economic dependence on men, discrimination, and poverty—are not addressed in terms of motherhood.

Torn offers many tales from well-educated, successful, and professional women who have the opportunity to decide between staying home to raise their children or pursuing their careers. Unfortunately, the voices of less advantaged mothers who grapple with other factors (i.e., depression, breastfeeding, premature children), and come from various backgrounds (i.e., lesbian mothers, othermothers, transnational mothers) are not heard in this volume. Without this diversity, the book becomes another text geared at privileged women who have the opportunity and the means to “opt out” of their careers.

Textual Mothers / Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women’s Literatures

Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O’Reilly, eds.
Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Jenni Ramone

This far-reaching collection of essays is committed to revealing mothers’ stories while establishing firm connections between the fields of Motherhood Studies and Literary Studies. The collection reaffirms a key aim of Motherhood Studies: to create an empowering practice and theory of mothering for women, countering the patriarchal master-narrative of motherhood that maintains notions of the ideal mother and the dangerous binary of good/bad mothering.