

emotional support, companionship, affection, and caregiving, with their in-laws than do women.

Merrill found that “living at a distance is related to worse relationships with parents for daughters” and explains that, in some cases, geographical distance not only preserves the parent-child relationship, it influences how their individual and respective roles are viewed. For example, women in Merrill’s study referred, and often deferred, to the “primary grandmother,” the mother of the daughter or son who lived closest, when they considered their own living arrangements.

This book will prove useful to marriage and family counselors, as well as undergraduate and graduate classes focusing on family relationships.

Bite Your Tongue

Francesca Rendle-Short
North Melbourne, Victoria: Spinifex, 2011.

Reviewed by Julia Lisella

“Some stories are hard to tell, they bite back. To write this one, I’ve had to come at it obliquely, give myself over to the writing with my face half turned.” Despite her warning of an oblique narrative, *Bite Your Tongue* tells a difficult story with directness, honesty, and a great deal of love. The story captures the deep longing of an adolescent girl for the approval and love of a mother who was so focused on her moral crusade—to rid Queensland, Australia of “smutty” literature during the 1970s—that she sacrificed her daughter’s well-being and safety throughout the years of middle school and high school. Though the narrative trajectory recalls many other daughter-mother memoirs, Francesca Rendle-Short circumvents the pitfalls of blame and revenge to tell an intricate tale of attachment, disappointment, and finally acceptance, even admiration for her mother.

Rendle-Short interweaves public and private documents as much as she interweaves fiction and memoir. X-rays of her mother’s hands, family photographs from an old instamatic camera, and copies of documents from library archives reveal her mother’s vulnerability as well as her determination and drive. The blending of fiction and archival research also allows Rendle-Short to examine and eventually understand her own history. For example, Rendle-Short’s fictional character Glory discovers that MotherJoy (the fictional mother) read all of the books she recommended banning; Rendle-Short’s real

mother, Angel, may not have done so: “As she read, MotherJoy mumbled to herself, incoherently. It must have been about what she was reading, the content of these pages, because there was an exultation of colour along the line of her jaw across her cheeks. Did she read these books because she *wanted* to?” (190). In the memoir section that follows, Rendle-Short writes, “I wondered whether my mother Angel read the books on her death list” (191). Yet Rendle-Short discovers one document that reveals that Angel did read *Lolita* and found it both “beautifully written” and “a rotten book” (192).

The fictional side of the story frames reality in interesting ways. At one point the fictional narrator, Glory, notes that she and her older sisters all attended different high schools, none of them in her neighbourhood. The story told in Francesca’s own voice reveals the possibility that each high school may have been a target of her mother’s long-term coordinated anti-smut campaign. And while fictional Glory will go to great lengths to prove her loyalty to her mother when she participates in one book burning reported in the story, the adult narrator, Francesca, visits bookstores hunting down the titles her mother had once tried to ban from schoolrooms and university reading lists. Rendle-Short points out the limitations of both fiction and memoir, however, in her juxtaposition of events. The fictional MotherJoy holds her daughter’s hand, accepts the ministrations of her six daughters the day before she dies; the actual Angel Rendle-Short drives her six girls away days before her death by causing “a scene.”

Despite the pain recalled, the story is also poignantly funny. Rendle-Short uses the hymn *Onward Christian Soldier* to name her characters, i.e. the father’s name is Onward and his surname is Soldier. Determined to teach her youngest two daughters about sex before the educational system influences their impressionable minds, MotherJoy uses a pig’s head to teach her girls about the female anatomy—one of the few times she uses her previously earned medical degree! Through inventive storytelling and loving attention to language, *Bite Your Tongue* manages to transpose a shameful personal history into a celebration of language, text, and the intricate bond between mother and daughter.