

Denied the emotional relationship she desires from her mother, Olivia also faces the “emotional labor” demanded by the Smiths. In college, and for once living independently from the Smith household, Olivia nonetheless feels pressured by the Smiths to perform her gratitude for their seeming largesse. But, as Romero points out, “The limits of the Smiths’ ‘generosity’ and real acceptance of Olivia as ‘one of the family’ were starkly drawn when it came to Olivia’s needs for the same benefits as their own children—college tuition, down payment on a house, or other privileges granted to upper-class children” (159). In later chapters, we see Olivia grappling with her painful memories of class inequality while also acknowledging the cultural capital she gained growing up in an upper-class household. These seemingly contradictory identities create friction between her and other Chicano/a students in college. However, as an adult professional working for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and later as a consultant for non-profit organizations and corporations, Olivia’s abilities to negotiate multiple cultural and linguistic spaces enable her success.

*The Maid’s Daughter* makes a valuable contribution to the studies of motherhood, gender, class, and immigrant experience. Romero’s compassionate and astute study brings a much-needed analysis of the class-based differences in mothering practices and ideologies of motherhood.

## Borrowed Body

Valerie Mason-John.

Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY ABIGAIL L. PALKO

Valerie Mason-John’s *Borrowed Body* immediately plunges its readers into Pauline’s world at the moment she spies her chance at reincarnation. An impatience that she only recognizes but cannot understand, however, has impelled her spirit to misread the violent coupling as that of lovers, and as she ruefully explains, “my impatience got me into trouble, and I’ve been paying for it ever since.” Pauline narrates her life story from this disastrous moment of conception until her release two months before her seventeenth birthday from prison; home for her is always a precarious situation as she trades life in fosterage in one of Dr Barnardo’s Villages for abuse at the hands of her birth mother, Wunmi, and then unsuccessfully tries to reintegrate into the Village.

The novel begins with the immature, uneven tone and frenetic pacing appropriate to a child narrator, and as Pauline ages, her voice matures as well; Pauline keeps no secrets from her readers, even when they might welcome her reticence. The reader keeps unquestioning company with the spirits who are Pauline's traveling companions: Annabel, Sparky, Bobby, the cat, Snake; entry into Pauline's mind quickly disarms the reader of any sense that rational Western explanations are always possible, or even appropriate, desirable, or helpful. This powerful novel thus initiates the reader into the world that Pauline must inhabit, making her/him feel as if s/he is on Pauline's other shoulder, sharing the view with the cat who so persistently tries to borrow her body. As Pauline struggles to endure maternal abandonment, physical abuse, and the impact of racism, her belief in the permanence of her spirit and the temporality of her body as merely borrowed for this lifetime serve as a bedrock of strength for her – not that she understands this, as a young girl/teenager. A recurring dream of an African chief, however, has the potential to bring her close to comprehension by the end of the novel of just how her impatience has been getting her into trouble, the price she has been paying for it, and a possible way forward. *Borrowed Body* hurtles the reader along with Pauline on her journey through a childhood marked by multiple experiences of trauma; so intense is its power to affect its audience that the reader wants to dare to hope that Pauline will find peace and happiness ahead.

Mason-John draws deftly on her own experiences as a Barnardo child in 1970s Britain, and the resulting fictionalized memoir opens a window through which we can catch a glimpse of what life was like for children living in a Dr. Barnardo Village. On her website, Mason-John explains why she chose to base her first novel on her childhood: "I wanted to tell an untold story. What I experienced—violence in the home—isn't unique. It's far more prevalent than people will admit." Guided by her adult training in conflict resolution, Mason-John skillfully integrates Pauline's story with objective observations about the strengths and weaknesses of the people in Pauline's life, as well as the socially-created barriers that impact their efforts to help her, thereby drawing out the universal in Pauline's experience.

This edition is a reissue by Demeter Press of the 2005 edition, originally published by Serpent's Tail. Its haunting first person narrative offers powerful testimony to the realities endured by the black children like Pauline who grew up in 1970s Britain as foster children, their experiences complicated by racism and the unhoming of immigration. *Borrowed Body*, in the tradition of important novels like Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (with its examination of Nigerian women's experiences of immigration) and Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey* (with its child narrator's exploration of growing up motherless), documents the harsh reality of the aftereffects of colonialism and their detri-

mental influence on women's ability to mother with authenticity and tenacity. Given the novel's structure, Pauline's relationship with her mother Wunmi exists mostly in the background, but it still provides complex and troubling insights into the immigrant mother's experience, and would richly reward class discussions. *Borrowed Body* demands a prominent place on reading lists devoted to the child's experience, black British fiction, and explorations of women's mothering practices under the pressures of immigration, postcolonialism, and racism. Pauline's voice envelops the reader who enters her world, richly rewarding her/his sojourn in her borrowed body.

### References

- Emecheta, Buchi. *Kehinde*. 1994. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2005. Print.
- Hodge, Merle. *Crick Crack Monkey*. 1970. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2013. Print.
- Mason-John, Valerie. "Profile." *Dr. Valerie Mason-John*. n.p., n.d. Web. 11 Aug. 2014.

## **Unearthing Venus: My Search for the Woman Within**

Cate Montana.  
London: Watkins Publ., 2013.

REVIEWED BY YVONNE RB-BANKS

Montana's *Unearthing Venus* delivers an insightful rendering of what is revealed along a journey that allowed her to look deeply into what shaped her as woman. She shares stories about barriers she faced as a female in building relationships. Each of the eleven chapters highlights a specific time span and allows readers to consider Montana's stage of development at the time of certain events. This book is an excellent resource for teaching in the academy as it offers readers a chance to see what Montana learned about her social development over a span of 47 years from 1957-2010. The work provides a foundation for discussing how gender in some societies may impact decision making, power distribution, or influence.