

constructed and at-times convoluted relationship between gender, sexuality, caring, and unpaid work.

Despite the editors' claim that "the global conversation has now begun," what rises is a series of presentations of women's experiences mothering at home—primarily in global north economic regions—that might represent issues for feminism, but could also serve causes antithetical to feminism. The book's concluding chapter might be its most tenuous, as it remains trapped in the rhetoric of choice it strives to criticize, while it also reproduces a gender binary as it attempts to "recognize and appreciate differences between women, as well as differences between men" (314). Though of course the collection's limitations are reasonable, certain exclusions leave its feminist orientation open to question: the intersection of globalization and exploitation of migrant labour for filling the care gap, the stigma of mothering at home for women of colour and poor women on welfare, the erasure of queer and trans folks and queer kinship structures in motherhood studies, and the unique and serious struggles of women with disabilities. The book might have better served its feminist aim if the chapters were threaded as part of an overtly political conversation about women's bodies and the work that they do. Without defining their feminist approach and international perspectives, the chapters hang as a set of "international" perspectives that are of course limited, and not grounded by critical, transnational, feminist objectives—an omission that is unfortunately too common in motherhood studies. Educators using this book would benefit from reading it alongside the critical work on motherhood from feminists like Patricia Hill Collins, Ange-Marie Hancock, bell hooks, Kim Anderson, Dorothy Roberts, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jen Cellio.

The M Word: Conversations About Motherhood

Ed. Kerry Clare

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REVIEWED BY LAURIE KRUK

"Word-women" is how you would describe the contributors to *The M Word*, all of them being accomplished writers whose many publications and awards signal the arrival of a new generation of Canadian authors (notwithstanding the inclusion of Michele Landsberg, renowned journalist, and her "Afterword: Grandmothering"). However, it is through embodying, resisting, or defying aspects and identities of motherhood that each woman locates her

latest inspiration. That is what makes this collection of twenty-five essays (including Patricia Storms's cartoon panel) so compulsively readable—not just as an addition to the growing “momoir” genre, but as an compilation of strong and talented voices with a diversity of experiences to draw upon.

In her Foreword, editor Kerry Clare distinguishes between the “pop culture-fuelled din” dismissed as “mommy wars,” in which “huge parts of the story” were missed, and what this project presents instead: “women’s lives as they are really lived, probing the intractable connections between motherhood and womanhood with all the necessary complexity and contradictions laid out in a glorious tangle” (10, 11, 12). Rather than simplifying the experience, these writers reveal the fissures, frustrations, failures that go with mothering—or *not* mothering, either by choice or by circumstance. As Clare insists, this book also complicates the distinction between the (presumably happy) mothers and their (presumably unhappy) childless sisters. For instance, note the shock of entering motherhood times-two with the late arrival of twins for Julie Booker: “the stress of trying to make this all work: the money, the patience, the sleep deprivation, the grandparents too old to babysit, the endless scrubbing down of poo-stained cribs, the eternal Cheerios trail behind bookcase and sofa...” (“Twin Selves” 33). Or the wry recognition of your own inevitable maternal “uncoolness” as the mother of teenagers, in “I Taught my Kids to Talk.” Speaking from the presumed “margins” as a lesbian single mom “of sorts,” Nancy Jo Cullen’s lament may strike a chord with more “mainstream” parents: “Somewhere, about the halfway point of grade seven, both of my kids experienced a seismic shift, one away from me and toward their peers... No dancing on the sidewalks, no public displays of interest in anything that might embarrass them (that’s everything, in case you’re wondering)... I should shut the eff up, for I have become TOTALLY embarrassing” (87). Darker notes are struck in Myrl Coulter’s (recent) history of being an “Unwed, Not Dead” mother in the 1960s, a sobering reminder of the belatedness of true reproductive choice. Even more tragically, the devastating death of newborns in “These Are My Children,” where Christa Couture insists on her claim to motherhood even through double maternal loss. And in Maria Meindel’s edgy “Junior,” a fibroid “false pregnancy” is used to dramatize a woman’s own refusal of motherhood after being her sick mother’s caretaker for years, with the creation of the monstrous baby-doll of her title.

Stepmothering and the creation of “blended families” are also thoughtfully explored for their distinct challenges in Saleema Nawaz’s “Bannanagrams” and Susan Olding’s “Wicked.” While some writers attack the cherished notion of maternal fulfillment as being an essentialist trap, and write pieces (like Priscilla Uppal’s “Footnote to the Poem ‘Now that All My Friends Are Having Babies: A Thirties Lament’”) to demonstrate it,