

Borderlands and Crossroads: Writing the Motherland

Jane Satterfield and Laurie Kruk, eds.
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REVIEWED BY KATHY MANTAS

Borderlands and Crossroads: Writing the Motherland is an edited collection comprised of two sections. The first section includes thirty-five poems and the second part contains twenty-three works of fiction and/or creative non-fiction. This creative and compelling anthology is bookended by an introduction written by Jane Satterfield, a conclusion authored by Laurie Kruk, and opens with the following quote from Adrienne Rich, “*The words are maps.*”

In the introduction, Jane Satterfield, a poet and professor, explores the maternal body as “a primal landscape” and motherhood as a “strange new country” with “shifting borders.” Using various images and metaphors of travel, the co-editor acknowledges the “transformative and empowering” aspects, but also interrogates the disruptive qualities of motherhood. In an effort to “revise assumptions, presumptions, and inherited scripts” we, along with the poets and authors of this collection, are encouraged to re-engage with the concept of motherhood “as literal landscape, as inheritance, or home.”

Given the range of forms and topics included in this compilation, it is integrated beautifully and flows thoughtfully from one text to the next. Themes addressed in this provocative collection include, but are not limited to: breastfeeding; losses and developments; grief and suffering; birth and death; mothering daughters and sons; matrilineage; memory, memoir, memorialization, and commemoration; family, home, heirlooms, and heritage; adoption; geography, border crossings, emigration, and exile; war, peace, love, and hope; health and wellness; abortion; miscarriage; religion; race and class; moving between realities, countries, languages, and ways of knowing and being.

This volume, which offers a multiplicity of voices and cultural viewpoints, adds depth to the discussion on maternal landscapes of all sorts. As well, it challenges our understanding of what it means to write the motherland in the twenty-first century from a more global, but also personal and political perspective. Since “the motherland is...often unrecognized or unarticulated” states the co-editor Laurie Kruk, who is also a poet and professor, she closes this collection by bidding us to ponder further, “How...we write the motherland?” and invites us to “become the travelling companions of writers who chart journeys of the heart,” as the contributors of this collection do with such grace and courage. I fully relished voyaging, from beginning to end, through the rich and complex writings of motherlands embodied in this literary collection.