

the authors return to their framework: it is predominantly women of colour in lower socio-economic classes who experience obstacles to prenatal care.

In part two, Zerai and Banks use quantitative research to humanize pregnant addicts, affording them agency. Despite the “hostile environment,” drug users are cast as “courageous” women who persevere in their attempts to access medical care and rehabilitation. Finally, the authors turn to grandparent advocacy. A common strategy for addicts entering treatment is to solicit the help of grandparents to care for children. Unfortunately, as the authors point out, the legal system does not value this arrangement, often making it difficult to apply for, and maintain, child custody.

Unfortunately, part two, which relies heavily on empiricism and not enough on actual women’s voices, is not as strong as part one. Cocaine users’ agency is described through data rather than interviews, although grandparenting is explained primarily through dialogue rather than statistics. This last piece, however, is brief and would benefit from further development.

The strongest aspect of this book is its focus on the inequality created by race, class, and gender oppression. One example of this is Zerai and Banks’s explanation of why white women are seen as cocaine addicts who merit treatment while black women are perceived as crack addicts who deserve jail time. The authors examine legal rulings in cases where women have been charged with neglect and child abuse based on cocaine use during pregnancy. Deconstruction of the “dehumanizing discourse” present in the legal system and culture at large is the most intriguing section of the book.

Zerai and Banks are activists who charge, “The nightmare of ‘crack mothers’ can only end when the prevailing ideology that demonizes Black women is dismantled” (142). Their commitment to praxis is valuable academic and advocacy work. *Dehumanizing Discourse, Anti-Drug Law, and Policy in America* masterfully unites empiricism and rhetorical analysis; it will be a useful text in a variety of courses.

Birth: A Literary Companion

Kristin Kovacic and Lynne Barrett, eds.
Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002

Reviewed by Miriam Jones

Anyone who has felt exasperated by the prescriptive tone of *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* will delight in this collection of stories of being born, as the editors call it, as parents. From the thoughtful introduction to the final powerful poem, these pieces will resonate with readers starved for represen-

tations that reflect their own birthing and parenting experiences. Editors Kristin Kovacic and Lynne Barrett write that the texts were chosen for their focus on central questions, not particular practices: “We believe there is a language most parents speak, mostly to themselves” (xiv). They speculate that perhaps a new genre is developing—birth literature—analogue to (and possibly an antidote to?) war literature, and they refer to Margaret Atwood’s “Giving Birth,” in which the protagonist speculates that perhaps women don’t remember giving birth because what they experience is beyond language: “events of the body” may be “indescribable” (79). This collection marks an important attempt to evoke, paradoxically, in language, some of that wordless experience.

The collection includes 64 poems, short stories and prose excerpts—62 of them previously published—divided into four sections, each of which takes their name from one of the texts: “First Stirrings,” “Notes from the Delivery Room,” “The Welcoming,” and “Now That I Am Forever with Child,” the title of the poem by Audre Lorde which closes the collection. Fifty authors are represented, of whom 20, interestingly, are men. Practically all are American, though there are one or two canonical writers, such as Margaret Atwood and A. S. Byatt, from elsewhere. Although the group may not be diverse in terms of nationality, it is inclusive of race and different sexualities. For example, the excerpt from Jesse Green’s *The Velveteen Father* is a delicate description of two men meeting their adopted son for the first time: “he looked a bit like an angry monkey, but it didn’t matter, I kissed him on his hot plum cheek, and so I kissed his father” (158).

The first section presents the excitement, the physical changes, the fear of losing oneself, and the realization that the road only leads one way that are characteristic of pregnancy. Many of these writers strip away the clichés and reflect the profound ambivalence many prospective parents feel. In “First Stirrings,” Rosemary Bray writes wryly that “It’s clear to me through the haze of sleeplessness that wanting a baby is one thing; wanting to *have* a baby is quite another” (10); “[T]his baby I had prayed for and longed for would not be joining my life, it seemed, but overtaking it altogether” (12). Others, like Jeanne Murray Walker in “Reading the *New York Times*,” speak to the fears one feels bringing a child into a dangerous world. In Elyse Gasco’s wonderful “You Have the Body,” the protagonist, herself adopted, imagines future arguments with a teenager and worries about her ability to raise a boy.

In the second section, “Notes from the Delivery Room,” many of the writers return to the theme of birth as rebirth: in “Transition,” Toi Derricotte describes how the whole universe changes as she gives birth, so “why wasn’t the room bursting with lilies?” (59). Lee Upton echoes this experience in “Women’s Labors” when she writes, “We are out of history’s singular lens” (68). There are sad stories here as well; all is not ecstatic. Hunt Hawkins’s wrenching poem, “Holding Bernadette,” is about a dying baby, and Eileen Pollack’s tragic “Milk” is about a white mother who witnesses another woman—an African-American

woman—lose her baby due to the racism of the hospital in which they both give birth.

In their introduction, Kovacic and Lynne Barrett write that “All the work collected here is marked by its generous intention, which we share—to capture, for the benefit of those who follow, our own births as parents” (xv). And indeed, individually and collectively, these texts go a long way towards pinning down with words the transformative experiences of birthing and parenting, so that we can try to hang on to them, and remember.

Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss

Hope Edelman
New York: Delta, 1994

Reviewed by Gill Rye

Like Lynn Davidman’s more recent *Motherloss* (2000) (see my review in *ARM* 4.2 (Fall-Winter 2002): 239), Hope Edelman’s 1994 book on the impact on girls and women of the early loss of their mother stems from personal experience. Davidman’s book, like Edelman’s, points to a cultural silence that surrounds the death of the mother. Edelman herself diagnoses the cause of this silence/silencing as a “cultural resistance to mother loss [which is] actually . . . a symptom of a much deeper psychological denial, which originates from the place in our psyches where *mother* represents comfort and security no matter what our age, and where the mother-child bond is so primal that we equate its severing with a child’s emotional death. . . . Even as adults, few women with mothers want to think about mother loss; still fewer want to hear about it” (xxiii). Edelman’s—and Davidman’s—contributions to this painful topic go some way to challenge this personal and cultural denial and to further an understanding of the fundamental effects of mother loss.

Edelman’s personal experience is supplemented by evidence drawn from a sample of women interviewed for the book in 1991 and from the case studies of a small number of selected psychotherapists. The problem of effective mourning is paramount. Edelman calls into question Freud’s “detachment” view of mourning, arguing for a (life-long) process where grief “continues to get reworked” (24), as the loss can never be fully resolved. While idealization of the lost mother is a necessary stage in the mourning process (“we soothe ourselves by creating the mothers we wish we’d had” (15-16), the loss cannot be accommodated unless, Edelman argues, ambivalent feelings with regard to the mother are acknowledged. Chapter 2 covers the impact of the death of the mother during the different developmental stages of the daughter from childhood to young adulthood (and, although dealt with only briefly, into later life). Chapter 3 considers different kinds of mother loss and their effects on the