

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

daughter, including the anticipated loss of long illnesses (which may involve “anticipatory grieving” and attendant guilt (71), sudden death, parental suicide which can be experienced, especially by children, as parental rejection, and abandonment (physical or emotional).

Edelman shows how the legacy of premature mother loss continues throughout life: the way the mother is mourned in childhood or early adulthood determines how future losses are dealt with and how “secure” a person the daughter becomes. Three chapters consider the impact on relationships: with the father, with siblings, and with intimate others. The final chapters explore the complexities of identification and differentiation in the mother-daughter relationship when the mother has died young. Despite this cataloguing of the difficult legacy of mother loss, Edelman’s book ends with the assertion that some positive legacies of loss can be identified, including the insights gained, the memories that are retained, and the reparative activities of creativity and intellectual achievement.

Maternal Impressions: Pregnancy and Childbirth in Literature and Theory

Cristina Mazzoni
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002

Reviewed by Nephie Christodoulides

In *Maternal Impressions*, Cristina Mazzoni explores the multiple meanings of maternity (pregnancy, childbirth, post-partum, breastfeeding). Maternal impressions on the fetus, impressions of the fetus on the mother, the transformed maternal body in gestation, and parturition constitute Mazzoni’s main focus. Her bold reading of the continuities and discontinuities of maternity is informed by religion, literature, science, feminism, and psychoanalysis.

Mazzoni invokes the fairy tale of Rapunzel in her discussion of maternal cravings, for example, and she reads Luke’s Visitation scene of Mary and Elizabeth for its significance to feminist theology and not as an example of quickening. Turn-of-the-century Italian scientists such as Paolo Mantegazza and Cesare Lombroso, known for their treatises on the nature of women, are juxtaposed with contemporary Italian feminists Adriana Cavarero and Luisa Muraro. In tracing the “insoluble dilemmas, contradictory solutions” (6) of maternity, she considers the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, as well as nineteenth and early twentieth century Italian women novelists.

Maternal Impressions offers a wealth of information. Mazzoni transforms abstract, critical knowledge into a living text that is highly recommended to mothers, feminists, scholars, and scientists alike.