

Book Review

Mothering in the Third Wave. Amber Kimber, ed. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2008; xii + 216 pages; ISBN 1-55014-485-7; \$34.95 (paper).

Captive Bodies: American Women Writers Redefine Pregnancy and Childbirth. Mary Ruth Marotte. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2008; ix + 145 pages; ISBN 978-1-55014-999-9; \$34.95 (paper).

In the edited collection *Mothering in the Third Wave*, Amber E. Kinser provides the reader with works emanating from a vast array of feminists who explore the multiple and complex ways in which feminists (can) mother. This volume is written as a response to other third wave texts which often position feminist mothering as an idealized practice of empowerment. These authors, however, attempt to work through the ways in which they understand feminist mothering as something that is often, but not always, empowering, and often, but not always, oppressive; the major contribution of this collection is to articulate that mothering is not *always* anything other than a politicized and dynamic identity.

The notion of motherhood as a politicized identity can also be read in Mary Ruth Marotte's text, *Captive Bodies: American Women Writers Redefine Pregnancy and Childbirth*, albeit in very different ways. Marotte develops an analysis of "captivity" as it relates to narratives of pregnancy and childbirth produced by some of the most dynamic American women writers in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Her work attends to the ways in which the pregnant body is imbued with cultural scripts that negate a woman's subjectivity and render her captive within a body that is pregnant. Marotte does not merely analyze works that see this negatively, rather she weaves in works that envision pregnancy as the multivalent experience - one that is captivating as much as it can be confining.

The pregnant body is theorized by Marotte as an underdeveloped site in philosophical analysis and, as such, she explores a myriad of texts from Kate Chopin to Naomi Wolf. Despite using overly dense language at times, Marotte clearly conveys her deep appreciation of the complexity that these writers offer through the pregnant "characters" in their texts - most of whom are often overlooked in mainstream critical theory due to their seemingly disempowered impregnated state. This may be the most crucial aspect of Marotte's - she brings to life the relevance and critical necessity that pregnancy and childbirth offer to theoretical explorations of femininity, sociology of the body, and feminist analyses which has, sadly, not always provided a "close reading" of narratives of pregnancy and childbirth.

The strengths of both of these texts are located in the ways that the feminized body (whether pregnant or not) is consistently re-presenting the ways that keep mothering inside political engagement. This politicization of the body is explicitly attended to in Marotte's piece, but it is also reimagined in some of the works included in Kinser's collection. For

example, in Rachel Epp Buller's chapter, "Representing Motherhood: Reading the Maternal Body in Contemporary Art," a re-envisioning of the physicality of mothering as captured through various mediums of art provides the reader with a sense that empowered mothering can go beyond daily activism and into the expression of artistic representations. Similarly, Kinser's own piece, "Embracing the Tensions of the Maternal Erotic," is an engrossing take on the reality of intimacy, rejection, betrayal, repulsion, and the risks involved with naming mothering as erotic. Both of these pieces exemplify the critical importance of Kinser's collection by showcasing feminist engagement in new forms of theorizing and embodying maternal empowerment.

As *Mothering in the Third Wave* is explicitly positioned within a specific feminist frame, it is to be expected that intersectional identities and their relations to power would be attended to in each chapter, and for the most part, this is the case. *Captive Bodies*, however, does a less thorough job of understanding that identities are, at all times, multiple and intersectional. This limitation is evident in the ways that Marotte structures her analysis to attend to "working-class" women writers in one chapter, "African American" writers in another and then making reference to how these contrast "traditional images of pregnancy" (88). The absence of any acknowledgement of the white privilege that is inherent in the majority of the works under analysis is a significant drawback of this text. *Captive Bodies* could have benefited greatly from the use of a more critical and contemporary feminist approach, as the realities of colonialism, social power and the intersectionality of identities need to be addressed cohesively through the entire analysis.

Having said that, there are also limits to the ways in which employing a "third wave" approach, as Kinser aims to do, can be considered useful. The third wave is characterized as many things, but an important component of the "wave" is that it began in the early 1990s and is now often spoken of - even in the introduction to Kinser's text - using past tense. While Kinser does acknowledge that the collection is inspired by third wave "sensibilities," placing a boundary around these authors' engagements with mothering seemingly excludes *other* mothers' feminist engagements with mothering (those that are younger, older, and/or those who do not feel they "fit" with what they understand the third wave to be), even if that is not Kinser's aim. Perhaps we are entering a time beyond waves, as the political action, writing, and experiences of the third wave have taught us that there can be no one notion of the body, feminism, feminists, and more importantly, politicized identities.

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