

common equation of being able to “pay-for-it” with a license to “go-for-it”— a highly problematic class- (and perhaps also race-) specific presumption. In fact, having sex with or accepting a “direct” donation from a male friend or acquaintance might be the only choice for some of us who could not afford to conceive through medical intervention. Why not “go against the lesbian party line” (39) and explore further the diversity of choices made by lesbians who want to become mothers and the socio-political ramifications of these choices? Moreover, the talk about “boy sperm” and “girl sperm” leaves me wondering what it is that spurs our desire to be(come) mothers. The hope or desire of parents-to-be for a child of one or the other sex is an important issue in any book that deals with pregnancy and becoming a parent. However, when we “design” a child should we not keep in mind the very questionable nature of traditional efforts at gender assignment and the normative expectations that such efforts serve to enforce? Should we not strive to promote frameworks within which our children can reach beyond preconfigured, binary formulae of who they ought to be(come) and empower them to exceed those formulae?

In spite short-comings, *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians* fills an obvious gap by providing queer-friendly and queer-specific information on how to overcome obstacles we often face when we contemplate, map out, and pursue the process of becoming lesbian, bisexual, and/or single mothers. I highly recommend this resourceful and up-to-date compendium of “tips and techniques,” alongside other wholistic guides to women’s bodies/health and in lieu of the more traditional volumes that continue to refuse us a place in the realm of mothering/motherhood.

## **Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England**

Mary Dockray-Miller  
New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000

### **Reviewed by Donna C. Woodford**

“Motherhood is becoming respectable, finally, in feminist circles,” notes Mary Dockray-Miller at the beginning of *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (1). Nevertheless, she notes that this respectability has been a long time in coming: “For years [motherhood] was something to be ignored, embarrassed about, or evaded as feminists defined themselves as daughters rather than as mothers” (1). In academia, motherhood often has been viewed as a trivial subject, not worthy of serious intellectual inquiry. Dockray-Miller’s

new book, however, clearly demonstrates that motherhood can be a respectable topic for feminist scholarship.

Dockray-Miller notes that after becoming a mother herself she began to wonder about the mothers of Anglo-Saxon England. She began to look for Anglo-Saxon mothers and discovered that they were difficult to find, since women's names and women's roles were often left out of the patrilineal histories and genealogies of the period. Nevertheless, using the ideas of three postmodern theorists, Judith Butler, Sara Ruddick, and Luce Irigaray, Dockray-Miller successfully uncovers and examines the mothers in Anglo-Saxon texts. From Butler she borrows the concept of gender performance and expands it to include the idea of "maternal performance." This would include the performance of what Ruddick has defined as the maternal work of "protection, nurturance, and training of children" (2). Finally, from Irigaray she borrows the concept of maternal genealogy, or a genealogy in which the mother-daughter bond is preserved rather than severed for the sake of a patrilineal genealogy that "serves to reinscribe male domination of women and male use of female reproductive capacity" (6). Using these theories as a lens, Dockray-Miller can view, and make visible to her readers, the previously invisible mothers of Anglo-Saxon England.

In her second chapter, Dockray-Miller examines the maternal genealogies of the religious women of seventh- and eighth-century England. She notes that nearly all of the founders of royal abbesses of this time period were related to one another, and she observes a repeated pattern in which a royal widow founds a monastery and then passes on her abbacy to a close female relative. This practice allowed both for a maternal genealogy, which stands in contrast to the patrilineal practice of fathers passing their dynasties on to sons, and for maternal performance, since the abbesses were spiritual mothers to the women in the monastery.

In her third chapter, Dockray-Miller looks at the genealogy of *Ædelflæd*, Lady of the Mercians, but she looks not at the frequently examined male side of her family, but rather at the often neglected maternal side. Dockray-Miller notes that *Ædelflæd* was influenced by four generations of women who protected, nurtured, and educated their children, and that this maternal genealogy is as important to understanding *Ædelflæd*'s rule as is her status as the daughter of Alfred the Great and the sister of Edward the Elder. She thus places her "in a vibrant female community that has been overlooked by scholars who continually place her as an anomalous female isolated in a patriarchal community of her father, husband, and brother" (75).

Finally, Dockray-Miller turns from history to literature and examines the mothers in *Beowulf*. In this chapter, Dockray-Miller comes to the intriguing conclusion that the mothers in the poem do not want their sons to succeed to the throne, even though succession is the goal of fathers and of the "heroic code" that governs the poem. Because the throne was a dangerous site, the desire for royal succession would be counterproductive for a woman concerned with the

maternal work of protecting her child. The mothers of the poem thus tend to “perform maternal work in the face of the heroic code,” though with varying degrees of success (77).

Dockray-Miller’s book is an impressive study of the previously overlooked roles of mothers and other “maternal performers” in Anglo-Saxon England. Her book gives us a useful, new understanding of the time period, and it serves as further proof that motherhood is a respectable and useful area for academic exploration. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the study of Anglo-Saxon England or the study of motherhood in history and literature.

### **This Giving Birth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women’s Writing**

Julie Tharp and Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb, eds.  
Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 2000

#### **Reviewed by Nancy Lewis Tuten**

In their introduction to this collection, the editors observe that since “the baby boom generation has come of age in America, mothers are suddenly back in *Vogue*” and in *Time*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, too. They might well have added a host of academic journals to their list, for the proliferation of scholarly articles on the subject of parenting, and mothering in particular is noteworthy. One might ask, then, what this anthology hopes to add to the flourishing canon of mother-studies given credence in the 1980s by Adrienne Rich, Elaine Showalter, Mary O’Brien, Barbara Katz Rothman, and others, fleshed out over the past ten years by such scholars as Tess Coslett, Patricia Hill Collins, and Naomi Ruth Lowinsky?

I wish this text had been available six years ago when I taught an honours section of freshman composition centred on the theme of mothers and daughters or more recently when I taught a senior honors seminar entitled “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Mother.” While literature was only one component of both courses, from the essays in *This Giving Birth* my students could have learned much more than literary analysis. They would have learned feminist history in the essay “Claiming Our Birth-Write: The Poetry of American Mothers” as MacCallum-Whitcomb traces the “legitimacy of the maternal voice” in the work of poets like Anne Bradstreet, Sharon Olds, and Mina Loy. The essay makes clear the formidable task of being a woman writing poetry in a tradition steeped in the patriarchal injunctions of Emerson and Whitman. Gail Lippincott adds to the enormous body of work on Kate