

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

Chopin's *The Awakening* by observing the "double-voiced discourse" in a novel that "privileges the language of birth" not only in imagery but in structure as well. Had they read Debra Beilke's essay on little-known writers Julia Peterkin and Frances Newman, my students could have explored the psychological dilemma of mothers in the early decades of twentieth-century America. They could have broadened their understanding of the mother role through essays on African-American mothers, Native American mothers, and mothers whose children are the products of incest. For this is a book about pregnancy and childbirth in American women's writing and it will be most used in literary circles; it also provides a valuable overview of the history of feminist theory concerning mothers.

Like any study, however, it has its weaknesses. In their introduction, the editors acknowledge that "the voices of Asian-American and Latina mothers are not heard," but since no single book can be responsible for representing all perspectives, that flaw seems less problematic than the fact that the collection lacks an index. For a work to be useful to scholars, it must contain a detailed, thoughtfully constructed index that enables readers to ferret out information. Perhaps, though, the editors did not have a scholarly audience in mind, which is suggested by the two essays that frame the collection. The lead essay, a first-person rumination on the effect of childbirth on writer Karen Haas-Howland, creates a false first impression of a book that is largely objective and scholarly in tone. Equally out of place in this volume is the final essay, a series of introspective journal entries in which author Kimberly Blaeser reflects on her son's first three years and the impact of his birth on her writing. Both Haas-Howland and Blaeser are eloquent on the subject of women writers and the challenges they face when they become mothers, but perhaps their essays would have been less jarring if they had followed the eight academic pieces, accompanied perhaps by a brief introduction to announce the volumes shift in tone.

Despite these complaints, however, feminists in all fields, and especially those of us involved in the study of literature, will feel grateful to Tharp and MacCallum-Whitcomb for this valuable collection that illuminates an important but often neglected subject in American letters.

## **Mothers Talk Back: Momz Radio**

Margaret Dragu, Sarah Sheard and Susan Swan, eds.  
Toronto: Coach House Press, 1991

## **Reviewed by Merryl Hammond**

This book is unusual in that each chapter is a transcript of a radio interview that features a woman (and one man) reflecting on one aspect of their experience as a parent. Contributors are coping with: a premature baby ("[Some months after