

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

the birth] I turned around and looked at her for the first time and saw that this baby wasn't an it, and that it was a baby girl"); a special needs child ("I think it's not uncommon for fathers to pick up on children's disabilities easier than mothers - perhaps because of the emotional closeness, there just seems to be a greater kind of denial that kicks in with the mother"); being a lesbian mom ("What saved my life absolutely was a mothers' support group that I got into very early on"); step-mothering ("You have to deal with the problems and feelings that are still unresolved from the previous marriage. You are coming in on Act Two"); single parenthood ("I started thinking of prisoners and invalids and mothers in the same breath. I felt the confinement"), and so on.

My favourite chapters feature Jane Grant reflecting to interviewer Diane Martin on "The Male Child: Is he Different?" ("It's not our sole responsibility to raise non-violent boys. Mothers are one person in their children's lives. I'm not going to be responsible for a violent action he makes. That is his responsibility.") and Guy Allen's thought-provoking piece with interviewer Susan Swan, "Mr. Mom: Motherhood Expresses Me Beautifully" ("I've always felt that the best thing a parent can do is live a good life, and then a child can see what that is.")

I was excited by the prospect of reading individual accounts of parenthood and at times I felt tantalizingly close to one of those wonderful moments of insight that can be had in reading. But something prevented those moments.

At times it was the jarring questions and probing style of the interviewers. (At one point, an exasperated Sidney Shadbolt, says: "You've got to be kidding to ask a question like that. Come on, Margaret, get real!") Perhaps, it was the lack of an overarching theme for the project that caused me to feel bogged down by trivia. A good editor (one who was not herself an interviewer) would have cut interruptions, second-guessing by the interviewers, and other extraneous material (like bus numbers and routes in the neighbourhoods, etc.) that have no place in an edited volume. In general, I learned far too much about individuals' circumstances, and not nearly enough from their insights, frustrations, and joys as parents.

In 1991 when this book was published, the idea of an editing a volume to give voice to mothers was obviously excellent. Unfortunately, these particular radio interviews do not translate well in print.