

engaged by Michael Sweet, and Joseph Kramer discusses alternate rituals for gay men, but the Bible is the main rallying force behind these essays. As Mona West explains in the opening to her essay: “Whether or not we consider ourselves religious, and whether or not we consider the Bible to be the inspired word of God, our reality is that the Bible is used against the Queer community to condemn our lifestyles, exclude us from religious communities, perpetuate violence against us, and deny our basic human rights” (51). Point taken, but the Judeo-Christian focus of this book may alienate some readers. On the other hand, these scholars collective re-reading of the Bible may be appreciated.

Overall, any problems with individual arguments are counteracted by other essays, and this is what makes an anthology of this kind work. The editors, Goss and Amy Adams Squire Strongheart, have carefully included a wide variety of perspectives that the reader will find refreshing and informative.

Thinking About the Baby: Gender and Transitions into Parenthood

Susan Walzer
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998

Reviewed by Wendy Faith

This bracingly incisive book focuses a sociological lens on the gender polarization between heterosexual spouses that coincides in American culture with the onset of parenting. Through a study of interview data from fifty new mothers and fathers, Susan Walzer reveals that parents unwittingly replicate Victorian-based images of motherhood and fatherhood that persist in the tacit sentiments of older family members, the clichéd messages of television programs, and the patent advice of baby-care “experts.” Reinforced by gendered wage disparity, these images promote the idea that child-rearing is the primary responsibility of mothers while only an auxiliary activity of fathers.

By accentuating the numerous social pressures that help to shape parental consciousness, Walzer smartly debunks the humanistic assumption that maternal and paternal divisions of labour are reasonably negotiated between self-determining partners. She contrarily maintains that parents—“driven by complex feelings of accountability, anxiety, insecurity, and entitlement”—rationalize the preexistent “models of mothers as ever-present nurturers and of fathers as providers and part-time playmates.” Especially commendable is her analysis of these roles, which circumvents the tiresome nature versus nurture polemic. While accepting in principle the claim that gestational, hormonal, and

lactational states affect the normalization of maternal behaviour, she undermines biological determinism by exploring the meanings that are socially imputed to such factors. In so doing, she casts considerable light on “why mothers experience significant stress in entering a role considered to be ‘natural’ for them.”

But although this book begins with the wholehearted conviction that the sociological influences on parenting are generally “underrated,” it ends with the halfhearted notion that men and women “*can* try to make fair choices within a less than fair social context.” Included in the final chapter is advice on how individuals can protect their relationships from the negative effects of stereotyping. I appreciated the soundness of these suggestions; however, I expected greater discussion on what might be done collectively, rather than interpersonally, to combat the increased gender differentiation that concurs with sexual reproduction.

Nonetheless, this accessible study will be an eye-opener for many new mothers and fathers who unknowingly attempt to meet both the current demands of family life—such as the need for a dual income—and the neo-Victorian expectations of parenthood. As Walzer’s analysis clearly shows, it is common for partners to profess that gender roles have changed and, at the same time, evaluate their own and their mate’s parental conduct in terms of conservative cultural ideals. Thus, the model of the ever-present mother, who indefatigably devotes her physical, emotional, and mental energy to the well-being of her children, prevails even when both partners are required to provide financially for the family. Such insights prompted me to recollect my own experiences as a new mother only to discover (to my chagrin) that I had internalized some of the same gendered cultural imagery as Walzer’s interviewees. Readers will undoubtedly find *Thinking About the Baby* not only engrossing but also illuminating.

In Her Mother’s House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing

Wendy Ho
Oxford: Altamira Press, 1999

Reviewed by Andrea Riesch Toepell

In Her Mother’s House, by Wendy Ho, is part of the Critical Perspectives on Asian Pacific Americans Series, published by AltaMira Press. There are five other titles in this series.

In Her Mother’s House is subtitled *The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*. This is a good description of the fairly narrow field covered