

and intuitive, than a political loyalty. [...] Call us members of the Mothering Party” (5). Despite this intended separation, however, the overwhelming majority of the collection’s essayists are, in fact, left-leaning mamas who announce their political affiliations. Again and again, for example, we read of the writers’ disappointments regarding the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. As a left-leaning mama myself, I identify with their sentiments. And yet, I wonder about the absence of maternal voices from the “other side” of the fence. Sarah Werthan Buttenwieser’s “The Secret Lives of Babysitters”—albeit indirectly—is one such essay. Framing her contribution around the backdrop of the 2004 election, Buttenwieser describes her struggle to make sense of the discovery that one of their family’s favourite babysitters is also the vice-president of the Young Republicans club. While diatribes from women whose motherhood inspired them to become anti-abortion activists would be out of place in this volume, surely there could have been a way to include the middle ground and thereby add a little diversity to challenge the reader and strengthen the collection.

Diary for a Daughter: August 1969 - August 1970

Katherine Dickson.

United States: Xlibris Corporation, 2006.

Reviewed by Margaret Machara

Katherine Dickson’s *Diary for a Daughter* is an intriguing peek inside the mental journey of a mother after the birth of her second child. Present throughout the challenges and doldrums of everyday life is the author’s family: husband, son, and especially her new daughter. As she seeks to define herself as a woman, a mother, and a writer, tension rises between Dickson and the members of her family.

Dickson’s book begins with change: relocation to a new home and the impending birth of her second child. Overwhelmed by a sense of euphoria she states, “everything seems so beautiful, and the whole atmosphere is swathed in mysterious expectation. I love the house. I love Frank. I hope to God this doesn’t all change after the baby is born. Everything I could possibly want is right here” (18).

Not long after the birth of her daughter, however, the new mother begins to fear losing herself. Throughout her daughter’s first year, she is troubled by an inability to write. In addition, although she loves her husband Frank, her doubts about her own role and personal aspirations manifest as resentment and anger towards him. She invites Frank to help define her goals but soon interprets his interaction as controlling: “I need lines like in the coloring book. Frank offered ‘lines,’ then slowly blurred the picture” (64). Issues of

identity and control recur throughout the book as Dickson tries to reconcile her conflicting feelings. In one diary entry, she feels “like a slave” (49); a few days later, however, she resolves “to enjoy my life, Frank and the children. I don’t want to have regrets, or resentments. Somehow I feel I have come into my own” (52). That Frank recognizes his wife’s unease is revealed in the following entry: “Frank said I was a paradox—a combination of gentleness and fury. Once before, he said I was compassionate and ruthless” (106). While she accepts responsibility for her actions, Dickson openly expresses anger: “I discovered that what I really resent about Frank is that he listens to his own drummer and I don’t” (115).

One dairy entry sums up the ambiguity and struggle of the entire year: “I want to feel my experience as a whole, to merge political and existential concerns, and to keep intact at the deepest levels, the interdependence of subjective and objective realities” (112). Although Dickson’s book is about the journey of a new mother, her struggle to achieve equilibrium will be relevant and familiar to most readers.

Backhand through the Mother

Renee Norman.

Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2007.

Reviewed by Joani Mortenson

Backhand through the Mother, Renee Norman’s book of poems on motherhood and loss, is exquisitely produced. Norman writes about several issues, such as the Jewish Diaspora, celebrating the physical and emotional development of her daughters, grieving the passing of a parent, her own aging process, and the multifarious acts of mothering. Her lyricism evokes an evolving and fluid sense of self and her poetic “snap shots” compel the reader to look and look again.

Norman’s poems describe traditional Jewish practices and feature prominent critical theorists Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger as extended family. She negotiates the tension between traditional religious practice and the demands of contemporary life. Norman brings the reader into her kitchen where she serves up poems which capture the minutiae of parenting. She reminds readers of the tender mercies to be found in the bones of raising children. Norman exposes herself as undone and undressed by the grief of her daughters leaving home, the aging and passing of a parent, and the passage of time as marked on her own female, maternal body.

In “Backhand through the Mother,” Norman explores the tender intimacy of being mothered while mothering her own daughter. This poignant poem