

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

describes her mother's support while the speaker breastfeeds her infant daughter. "Backhand" often refers to being physically struck, but here Norman is struck emotionally by her mother's gentle support. Norman's poetry invokes the notion of a photo album, filled with images that are sharp and distinct as photographs, others that are fluid, alive, and extraordinary in their ordinariness:

Into This Poem

I want to freeze memory
in this poem
 halt change
 erase time
but the squirrels
tear the roof off the bird house
and finish off the seeds
the fingers come out of the mouth
the melodies end
the school bell rings

The Queen of Cups

Colette Yvonne.
Little Britain, ON: Panic House, 2006.

Reviewed by Kittye Delle Robbins-Herring

This satirical novel set in Canada is part comic quest, part cautionary tale: from the very first page the wisecracking narrator Pauline Parril lurches from quandary to quandary, disaster to disaster, in her search for a more satisfying life. Readers will laugh with her as well as at her (and themselves) as they follow her adventures.

Pauline Parril embodies many of the contradictory impulses that confront twenty-first century wives and mothers: "Becoming a mother means adopting ALST (Acceptably Late Standard Time)" (208), juggling personal, professional, and family needs. First, Pauline, unable to choose between two pairs of dress shoes she cannot really afford, buys both and minutes later steps into fresh concrete in her new wedges, leaving nothing but "the shiny gold buckles" visible (1) when she is forced to retreat to safer ground. Her dismay is ironically intensified by the fact that she had just ignored workmen's warning shouts, mistaking their cries for "vile and oppressive behaviours." Next, on return-