gent sociological analysis. While she weaves personal narrative and self-reflexivity, she does so without self-indulgence. In her effort to rethink women and produce text, she is determined not to "reproduce the splits of Western descriptions of reality and not to replace one single-focused view with another" (36). To this end, or more aptly a beginning, she draws on social theory, psychoanalysis, feminist thought, ecological perspectives, and spiritual traditions. She is meticulous in her detail and description of terms and concepts, making the book accessible and relevant for both the academic and women's health activist reader, as well as anyone interested in maternity.

Men have been the prime movers of historical process, and creators of the master symbols of Western culture as compensatory for their alienation from natural processes such as birth and lactation. For Kahn, "a new language of birth means making the intact maternal body visible in words on paper and describing the knowledge derived from it" (6). Although abstract knowledge and language have been repositories of patriarchal power relations, Kahn did not take up the challenge of the language and progeny of knowledge as presumed masculine, even by feminists who fail to reflect on their use of the term"disseminate." Rather than a minor criticism of her text, this omission is further recognition of the need for such texts.

"What a Blessing She Had Chloroform": The Medical and Social Response to the Pain of Childbrith from 1800 to the Present

Donald Caton
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999

Reviewed by Gina Camodeca

I recently threw a party where the conversation turned toward childbirth. Of the three women present, two (myself included) were pregnant. The husband of the third women began to brag about his wife's having given birth twenty years earlier without painkillers. His wife shushed him, while I and the other expectant mother squirmed. I'm a proponent of "natural childbirth"; the other soon-to-be mother praises epidurals and jokes that she wishes she could have one for her entire third trimester. We all sensed that the conversation might become political. Undeniably, the management of childbirth is a contentious issue with which not just individual women, but also their societies, are concerned.

In *What a Blessing She Had Chloroform*, Donald Caton, an obstetric anesthesiologist, suggests that childbirth management has been polemical

because historically the *meaning of pain* had traversed the *meaning of childbirth.* It's a compelling thesis, and his narrative of how anesthesia has impacted maternal care since the 19th century is engaging. In a readable approach to a technical subject, Caton follows the impact of anesthesia by narrating individual histories of early supporters and opponents of its use in normal labor, delving into their motivations and influence. Invariably, these figures make flawed medical assumptions, and often have terrible motives and methods. For instance, an early proponent of ether, Dr. James Young Simpson, claimed that the anesthetic was harmless while he did almost no medical research, and he published his "successes" in newspapers, causing a public cry for on-demand "innocuous" pain relief. What is most interesting about Simpson is that he was the first to take the medical matter of childbirth, as a political issue, to women themselves. Conversely, opponents of anesthetics often argued publicly that the pain of childbirth was indistinguishable from its meaning as punishment from God. While these arguments offend, they also encouraged women to consider that their labor was socially meaningful—women would go on to do so variously, in feminist and religious traditions.

Caton's text is also loaded with striking quotes from many major actors in the drama. For instance, Caton quotes William Tyler-Smith, an early opponent of anesthesia, which, he said, to a laboring woman " ... in her hour of trial only offer[s] a choice betwixt poison and pain." And Queen Victoria herself, one of the earliest known laboring women to receive chloroform, speaks the title of the book.

Finally, Caton believes in painlessness, and this bias tips the book's balance. He "discounts critics" of obstetric practice which favors using anesthetics, citing dubious reasons. For instance, Caton narrates the 1914 feminist "Twilight-Sleep" movement, which demanded widespread availability of a dangerous morphine-based anesthetic. His point is that women are often misguided in what they want, and therefore their more recent criticisms should be measured accordingly. Ultimately, however, his assertion that painlessness does not equal meaninglessness is well taken. For A.R.M. readers who want to weigh these issues in medical, personal, and political terms, this book is a sober and sobering resource.

Rock-a-by Baby: Feminism, Self-Help, and Postpartum Depression

Verta Taylor
New York: Routledge, 1996

Reviewed by Kathleen Sorensen

The aim of this work is to use the model of postpartum depression self-help