

represent the dialectical influence of historical women's adaptive and often resistant practices of motherhood. Unfortunately, the volume is not able to overcome the historical dearth of archival access to the lived experiences of poor women and women of color, and in many cases, the treatment of the mainstream ideal of motherhood overshadows the silence of real women's voices. In recognition of this problem, Vandenberg-Daves calls for increased awareness of cultural diversity and focused historiographic attention to the mothering practices of women of color.

Within the broad scope of this review, three principal themes emerge: the consistent tendency of American women and culture in general to privatize the experience of motherhood and its often excruciating "choices"; the struggle to control women's reproduction and assign meaning to the maternal body; and the rhythmic resurgence of maternalist activism in women's attempts to influence public policy. Each of these themes is shown to play out in different ways in the changing ideals of model motherhood, as the national imaginary moved from reverence for the moral mother, through deference to experts and the ideal of scientific mothering, to the twenty-first century private struggle of intensive mothering. Within all of these models, mainstream attitudes distinguish the "good" mothers from the "bad," and distribute public resources accordingly.

In this ambitious volume's contextualized story of these tensions and the nature of their interplay with other historical forces, *Modern Motherhood* fills a significant gap in motherhood studies and is an important addition to the bookshelves and course syllabi of historians, sociologists, and cultural critics alike.

Fresh Hell: Motherhood in Pieces

Carellin Brooks.

Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2013.

REVIEWED BY FAITH GALLIANO DESAI

Carellin Brooks holds a doctorate from Oxford University and is a mother of two children. Her book, *Fresh Hell: Motherhood in Pieces*, is a bluntly honest and darkly humorous exploration of the realities of being a mother. It is a compelling memoir enhanced by its conversational style, and delves into the complex and chaotic world of mothering. Through 52 short ruminations, Brooks reflects on a variety of pertinent topics from sleepless nights to baby poop. The book is organized chronologically during the baby's first

year and this works well to highlight the tapestry of challenges over the baby's development. Her experiences of motherhood vacillate between love and frustration while acknowledging the chasm between the myth and the messy realities of motherhood.

Today's current mothering culture has firm assumptions on what constitutes being a good mother (being selfless) and assumes that having children means suspending your identity as a woman (only allowing self to be defined as a mother). Brooks shares several experiences that clearly illuminate how she had to suspend aspects of her identity as a woman (such as sexual being) in order to better meet the needs of her child. Such instances are in many ways a reflection of the current cultural phenomenon of intensive mothering. Intensive mothering, a concept introduced by Hays, contends that responsibility for child rearing falls primarily on the mother, is focused on the needs of the child at all times, and in providing the best possible environment and opportunities for the child (Hays; Shuffleton). The main criticism against intensive mothering is that it often induces feelings of guilt and shame in mothers for not being able to attain these unrealistic cultural ideals (Badinter; Thurer). In this context, it is refreshing to read narratives such as Brooks that are balanced between affection for the baby and dysphonia and an awareness of retained individuality giving a look at how mothering affects one's life and identity.

There is an unspoken social and cultural expectation that all mothers fall gracefully into motherhood and are always enchanted by their babies. Most mothers are reluctant to truthfully share many aspects of their mothering experience that are not in alignment with this 'myth of motherhood' for fear of being labeled a bad mother. Brooks pushes past this notion and gives voice to the dark thoughts and feelings that many mothers experience such as, "The terrible baby has begun to scream" (23) and "Month Eight: became more annoying. Month Nine: discovered it could move. Became really super incredibly annoying" (66). In doing so she does not get stuck in her fear and shame by refusing to hide her thoughts and feelings, from herself and rest of the world. Through her essays she explores the paradoxical feelings motherhood evokes, the spectrum of gray, which exists between the two polarities and shows how a mother can hold contrasting and opposing views of motherhood (hating the responsibility that comes with being a mother while being genuinely in love with her baby). Brooks is neither alone or the first in this endeavor. Hager, in deconstructing her personal myth of motherhood, has described vividly how she felt terrorized, dazed, alienated, and pained after becoming a mother to her twins and shared feelings of losing her identity. Smokler has also shared with candor some of her own imperfect and negative mothering experiences. It is through these real life mothering experiences

that the distinction between the culturally normative perfect motherhood and the experience of mothering can challenge and begin to shift the current ideology of motherhood to a more fluid and forgiving alternative view, one that allows mothers to be imperfect. These women and their writings are a testament to Badinter's and Rich's efforts to defend women against the impossibility of being a perfect mother and the myths of maternal instinct. Brooks' essays depict the reality of how societal expectations of motherhood and the internalization of those expectations combine to reduce and limit the freedom and personhood of women.

This book opens up a helpful discussion in which the intertwined elements of a mother's expectations and reality of motherhood serve as talking points of what it means to be a mother. It gives voice to a different perspective and shows how a range of mothering experiences can be normal. The bold book title aptly conveys the raw honesty in the book. Overall, I found the book to be very well written and many expectant and new parents would find the book's content useful, and its style refreshing.

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