

Cusk's account begins with a chapter on pregnancy's "Forty Weeks" and its attendant physical and emotional difficulties: "The baby plays a curious role in the culture of pregnancy," she observes, is "at once victim and autocrat." Her larger purpose in this and subsequent chapters arranged thematically and spanning the author's two pregnancies, however, is to capture the process by which a woman is removed from "the anonymity of childlessness" and is transformed "into a mother," both "martyr and devil.... More virtuous and more terrible, and more implicated too in the world's virtue and terror."

Cusk analyzes the emotional and practical difficulties of sharing childrearing and domestic work in postmodern times: "after a child is born the lives of its mother and father diverge, so that where before they were living in a state of some equality, now they exist in a sort of feudal relation to each other." She documents power struggles with both a recalcitrant toddler and temperamental baby minders. As she reflects on the literature she reads during her children's naptimes, literature that profoundly alters her understanding of artistic expression, Cusk resists interpreting the experience of childbirth and motherhood through the lens of either archetypal life script or popular culture. Evading, and often good humoredly mocking, the well-meant but oversimplified rhetoric of how-to-manuals or the equally worn sass of girlfriends' guides, none of which adequately capture the complexities of a new mother's evolving consciousness, Cusk observes her life and thought with a novelist's dispassionate intensity, mapping the fraught terrain of postfeminist motherhood with clarity and grace.

In the nearly thirty years since publication of Adrienne Rich's groundbreaking *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Experience*, much has—and has not—changed. When she becomes a mother, Cusk maintains, a woman "exchanges her public significance for a range of private meanings, and like sounds outside a certain range they can be very difficult for other people to identify." Cusk's ability to translate this hidden range of meanings and sounds is considerable; in her hands descriptive scenes move swiftly, surprisingly, and effectively into insight and analysis, making *A Life's Work* an essential contribution to the literature of motherhood.

The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger Volume 1: The Woman Rebel, 1900-1928

Margaret Sanger, Ed. Esther Katz
Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003

Reviewed by Roxanne Harde

In 1914, Margaret Sanger helped coin the term birth control, and she made it a fundamental tenet of women's rights. She spent the first half of the twentieth

century defending women's ownership of their own bodies and working to make birth control safe, affordable, and legal. A multi-talented activist with a forceful personality, Sanger was the primary figure in the birth control movement and she interacted with the leading radical figures of her day, on both sides of the Atlantic. Her books, though still widely available, offer only a partial view of Sanger's life, work, and relationships. The four planned volumes of *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger* will provide a much fuller account of one of the most controversial figures of the last century.

The first of these volumes, *The Woman Rebel*, documents Sanger's life from her nurse's training and early socialism to her resignation from the American Birth Control League, which she had helped to establish more than a decade before. The book allows insight into Sanger's motivations and actions, and traces the course of her relationships with family members, and with colleagues who were friends, such as Emma Goldman, or lovers, such as Havelock Ellis. The Sanger who emerges is complicated to the point of paradox. She worked tirelessly to alleviate the burden of too many children for all races and classes even as she peppered her letters with anti-Semitic and racist comments. A concerned and loving mother, she spent very little time with her children. While Sanger went into exile to avoid prosecution for publishing obscenity, she offered little sympathy to her estranged husband upon his imprisonment for distributing her pamphlets. Her commitment to social reform never wavered but neither did her need to be in control of the movement and to be its most public figure.

The stated goal of this volume, and the three that will follow—two that will continue the chronology of Sanger's life and a fourth that will address her work in the international birth control movement—is “to highlight Sanger's distinctive voice and illuminate the multiple narratives of her life and work” (xxvii). Faced with an archive of over 120,000 documents—letters, speeches, journals, and legal and organizational records—Esther Katz and her editorial team have chosen selections that document the critical events and central issues of Sanger's life. The inclusion of writings by people other than Sanger might be the only ill-considered choice in this important edition. Where other notable collections of personal papers—the Benjamin Disraeli letters come to mind—provide deep insight into the thought processes of the writer, the inclusion of letters to Sanger seem an interruption; the information they provide would be just as relevant were it given in notes. In particular, the letters written by women seeking birth control are redundant in light of Sanger's edition of such letters, *Motherhood in Bondage* (1928). The decision to separate the papers that document her work in Europe might also prevent the wide and relatively complete picture of Sanger that these volumes might offer, but that remains to be seen. Ultimately, the work of Katz and her team is critical for a fuller understanding of first-wave feminism, family planning, and one of the century's most interesting women, and I look forward to the next three volumes.