

grated her work and her midwives. It was her niece, her appointed successor, who argued for women alone handling the birthing process, that women's modesty not be compromised by male doctors. Her niece spoke her mind; Madame du Coudray was always the politician.

Beyond the story of this woman's life, the historian will find this book invaluable to fill in the details of a revolution in midwifery, moving from the birthing descriptions in Gélis's *History of Childbirth*¹, where babies were butchered in breech births, to the careful instruction of fresh young women to go back to their villages and try to practice the new techniques. The transition was not without conflict. In an amazing segment, Gelbart translates the protest of an experienced midwife to the young trainee trying to take over into a breathtaking account of traditional birthing techniques and culture. Gelbart illustrates the dynamics of resistance and change. Madame du Coudray was convinced that clean linens were important; her niece promoted the use of gloves, warned about the danger of puerperal fever, illustrated the use of forceps, the caesarean operation, vaccination for smallpox, and other medical advances. Madame du Coudray published her book, and the response of physicians was to publish their own. She built a model; they adapted models found in Paris. She developed a second model with clear and red liquids to demonstrate loss of blood and waters, primarily for the surgeons, who were called in when the pregnancy was going to end in the death of either the mother or the baby. She promoted breast-feeding and set up guidelines for selecting a wet nurse if breast-feeding wasn't possible. Gelbart makes a good case for crediting du Coudray with the survival of many infants and mothers in the eighteenth century and of midwifery itself in nineteenth-century France.

This is social history at its best, bringing together the personal and political struggles of an eighteenth-century entrepreneur in the realm of women's health and infant survival. While caught up in the richness of the tale and the intricacies of the historian's craft, the reader cannot help but recognize the intersection of gender and power. And so, Nina Gelbart brings to life an amazing woman who maneuvered her way through the labyrinth of royal bureaucracy and made an impact on innumerable women and families in France.

NOTE

1. Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991).

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Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes, eds., *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925*. New York: St. Martin's, 1997, pp. viii + 171.

Maternal Instincts is a collection of essays by scholars in history, film, and literature exploring conflicting images of motherhood and its relationship to sexuality from the late Victorian period until the years immediately following World War I. The editors, Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes, suggest in the Introduction that while there had always been considerable dissent about the nature of motherhood and about the ability of different women to live up to whatever the ideal might be at the time, during the course of this particular period there was a decline in what they call, "iconic maternity." This decline occurred, they argue, within the context of contestation about sexuality and the relationship between sexuality and maternity.

Collectively, the essays dramatize the contestation and fluidity of the meanings of motherhood, the nature of femininity, and appropriate standards of female sexuality. The first two

essays, for example, deal with the varying and changing criteria used by the courts to judge whether or not mothers should be awarded custody of their children. Nancy Fix Anderson's essay, "'Not a Fit or Proper Person,' Annie Besant's Struggle for Child Custody, 1878-9," reveals how, at least in this case, a woman's social reputation rather than her relationship with her child could determine custody. Annie Besant's fitness to mother her daughter was brought into question by the notoriety she had gained by her public statements supporting the value of sexual pleasure without fear of pregnancy (within marriage). Her own sexual morality had never been brought into question. While her opponents and eventually the judge questioned her capacity to be a good mother because of her notoriety, Besant herself apparently knowingly refused to give up the "cause of free speech and birth control for her child's sake." But the fact that she did not typify the image of the self-sacrificing mother was not made an issue in the courts. Anderson suggests that the version of motherhood privileging social reputation over the emotional relationship between mother and child conflicted with the period's sentimental idealization of motherhood, which stressed the significance of the emotional importance of the mother.

Ann Sumner Holmes tracks the transformation of the law and court decisions dealing with parental custody. She notes that it was not until 1839 that mothers obtained very limited statutory rights regarding the custody of their children. Prior to that time, the courts upheld common law that gave fathers absolute authority over their children. By the 1839 statute, Parliament specifically excluded mothers found guilty of adultery from its provisions. But from 1873, the welfare of the child rather than the purity of the mother was to guide judges in making custody decisions. Holmes suggests that custody decisions between 1886 and 1925 show a cautious willingness on the part of judges to grant custody to adulterous mothers. Judges thus "abandoned the mid-Victorian belief that a woman who had broken certain sexual taboos was 'unnatural' and therefore unmaternal" (p. 52). Their decisions reflect a collapse of the polarization of maternity and sexuality that had characterized Victorian ideology.

During the same time period in which the basis of custody decisions was changing, fears about "racial" degeneration fueled debates among eugenicists, as George Robb discusses in his essay. On one side were arrayed those who argued a position that Robb calls "moral eugenics," which used scientific language to argue that women in contrast to men were morally equipped to ensure that the next generation was free of vice. On the other side were those advocating "progressive eugenics" who maintained that degeneration was a consequence of sexual repression, not sexual excess. Moral eugenicists were social purity feminists who maintained that neither sexual desire, itself (even for men), nor male dominance of society were natural. Society was to be improved by sexual continence. In contrast, progressive eugenicists such as Karl Pearson, George Bernard Shaw, and Olive Schreiner and other post-Victorian writers saw "Victorian values as enervating to British society and instead proclaimed unfettered sexuality as a constructive force that would arrest national degeneration" (p. 67).

Taking up the theme of empire and its imaginings through images of female sexuality and maternity, Lillian Nayder presents a critical reading of Bram Stoker's story, "The Squaw," published in 1893.¹ Her reading highlights the story's focus on motherhood as represented by a young English bride, a native American, and a cat. Nayder argues that the story needs to be seen in the context of a period when motherhood and female fertility became central to Britain's imperial mission. In Stoker's story, according to Nayder, the fertile bride is contrasted with a "female figure who dissociates sexuality from reproduction. Shirking her maternal obligations and exercising the sexual autonomy generally reserved for men, she emasculates the Empire, embodying, in female form, a frightful image of imperial decay" (p. 93).

Claudia Nelson's essay, "'Under the Guidance of a Wise Mother' British Sex Education at the *Fin de Siecle*," explores the debates about who should be responsible for educating children about sex. On one side of the debate were those that Nelson calls "professionalists" who believed regulating sexuality was the domain of professional men—primarily schoolmasters and physicians. On the other side were those Nelson dubs "maternalists," who sought

to purify sexuality by having it controlled by mothers whose expertise was based on their supposed superior morality. She ends her essay with a brief but thought-provoking discussion of how the rhetoric of sex framed and made resonant the claims of those who opposed smoking, reminding us “that the discussion of sex was also the discussion of the manners and rituals of daily life” (p. 116).

Susan Grayzell’s essay discusses the complex World War I scandal regarding “war babies,” initiated by a debate about whether or not separation allowances should support common-law wives and their children. It was fueled by fears that there would be rising rates of illegitimacy as a consequence of the war (a fear that actually did not materialize). As Grayzell puts it, “The war baby received extensive public attention because it represented an explicit and potent mingling of the problems that women posed as sexually active persons and as actual or potential mothers” (p. 123). The controversy pitted concern about women’s sexual promiscuity with the production of soldiers’ children. Grayzell concludes with the insight that the focus on motherhood as central to “all women” mirrored the state’s interest in “all men” as soldiers.

The final essay, by film historian Anne Morey, examines films exhibited in Britain during the First World War. She argues that many dramatic films of the war years fragmented sexuality and desire, femininity and femaleness, and maternity and procreation—these became “free-floating qualities” that could be attached to any character regardless of gender. She maintains, in particular, that maternity and sexuality were fragmented in representations linking the home front and the battlefield. Women’s sacrifices were allied with those of men, and men were portrayed as capable of taking on nurturing roles. Morey maintains that in addition to questioning where the battle line was to be drawn, these representations also challenged the logic of separate spheres for women and men.

The essays in the volume should be of interest to scholars concerned with the changing conceptions of motherhood and the history of sexuality. Because the editors never define “iconic motherhood,” however, it is hard to discern its decline during the period as was suggested in the introduction by the editors. Rather, the essays underscore the continuing inconsistencies and contradictions in cultural attitudes concerning the meanings of motherhood, the changing value of the child (a subject that usefully could have received more attention in the book), and debates about sexuality and its import.

NOTE

1. Bram Stoker, “The Squaw,” reprinted in Peter Haining, ed., *Midnight Tales* (London: Owen, 1893), 85-97.

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Julio César Pino, *Family and Favela, The Reproduction of Poverty in Rio de Janeiro*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997, pp. 199.

Visitors to Latin American cities often describe in horrified tones the shantytowns they saw from the distant vantage of a fast-moving bus. Whether these are called *favelas* as in Brazil or the euphemistic *ciudades juvenes* (young cities) as in Mexico, observers—both foreign and domestic—often consider these agglomerations the apotheosis of everything that is wrong with modern Latin America. As Julio César Pino points out in a groundbreaking book, these observers only see the surface of the favela and, as a result, they miss the point. According to Pino, these ragged