

Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson, eds. *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007. 241 pp. + 14 figures. \$99.95. Review by NANCY M. BUNKER, MACON STATE COLLEGE.

In this ambitious volume, editors Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson collected seventeen essays, each contributing to a unity of purpose—maternity as “performed and performative;” its activity laced with complex nuanced qualities in its actions and suggestions of meaning (3). Both public and private aspects of motherhood are analyzed in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*. The essays invite exploration of the maternal body’s cultural representations, noting that every body “functions as a potent space for cultural conflict, a site of imagination and contest” (1). Each essay argues for “appropriated, interpreted, and reinvented” representations of maternity (7) along the lines of cultural practices that shape social life (4). Readers will be thoroughly engaged by the wealth of historical documents and artistic representations employed to further the collection’s attention to maternal agency and production of gender identity in the period.

Part I: The Performance of Pregnancy concentrates on the staged pregnant female body; prescriptive literature of the time that included methods to determine fertility and conception as well as conduct expectations speak to and confront the “cultural demands associated with maternity” (8). Sid Ray’s essay on *The Duchess of Malfi* argues for the heroine’s authority because she bore a child; she “rules in her son’s stead” (19). The culturally figurative King’s Two Bodies is linked with the Duchess and suggests Webster’s progressive view of pregnancy as overtly political. Kathryn Moncrief uses gynecological manuals and midwifery guides in her discussion of the staging of Helena at *All’s Well That Ends Well*; the unsettling ending reminds us that paternity is always unknowable to the man. Illusions of twinning and doubling in *The Winter’s Tale* inform Michelle Ephraim’s argument for superfetation, an early modern medical term for women being simultaneously pregnant with children by two different men. Her discussion notes the “competing cultural discourses that simultaneously encourage and assuage contemporary fears about the pregnant woman’s sexual au-

tonomy” (48). Thomas Middleton’s *A Mad World My Masters*, according to Robert Bell, uses “counterfeit” maternity to critique urban culture and the genre of city comedy (69). Inverting the performance issue, a surprising and single reference to children in Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* receives Lisa Hopkins’s attention. She notes the play’s emphasis on male social bonds and that the mother “colludes in her excision from the patriarchal narrative” (83).

Part II: The Performance of Maternal Authority addresses the reclamation of maternal status in a period assuming paternal superiority. Janelle Jenstad argues for childbirth as empowering characters and authors. She interrogates the “lying in” (92) and rituals associated with childbirth, including secrecy, in this “gynocentric space” in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Witch* (90). An important aspect of her essay focuses on *The Magnetic Lady*, and her designation of the playwright, Ben Jonson, as theatrical widwife. The male Jonson’s treatment reveals truths about maternity, and he gains “power by gaining control over women’s secrets” (92). Mother’s advice books and the “struggle of the construction of motherhood” contribute to Christina Luckyj’s essay (102). Examining two pamphlets, *The Answere of a Mother Unto hir Seduced Sonnes Letter* and the “expanded version,” *A Mothers Teares over hir Seduced Sonne, or a Dissuasive from Idolatry*, Luckyj studies the divide between acceptable 1620s Puritan and Catholic maternal performance. Male mothering and Prospero’s maternal rhetoric is taken up by Suzanne Penuel, in Part II’s final essay. She argues *The Tempest* “eventually resuscitates the figure of the mother within the figure of the father . . . in part through a redistribution of moral value between the gendered figures of the witch and the magician” (116).

Part III: The Performance of Maternal Suffering shows ways suffering, grief, and death figure into maternal identity. Even the liturgical rite of churching, “the new mother’s appearance at her parish church in the company of her birth attendants,” according to Kathryn McPherson, shows conflicted responses to maternity (131). Notably, the Alice Wadensford and Elizabeth Cavendish Egerton autobiographical writings include but also depart from conventions of public thanksgiving and piety. They complain about suffering and languish over the loss of children in the cause of a religious motherhood, giving authority and influence to women’s suffering. In one

of the volume's most unique and thought-provoking examinations, Chris Laoutris asserts the funerary monuments of the period—with their feminized tropes of death—move “beyond the limits of heraldic iconography,” and bear witness to the mother’s legacy. He reads *Antony and Cleopatra* as memorializing maternity through Cleopatra’s “dying postures,” which appropriate “dynastic” display and simultaneously challenge constructions of memory (157). Stuart women’s spiritual diaries celebrate the childbirth experience. More prevalent, Avra Kouffman outlines, are fear of loss, bereavement, and acceptance of inevitable child loss. The church “allowed [a mother] only limited latitude in inscribing her experience of maternity,” but the diarists studied suggest a new conception of motherhood for those who shared their written maternal experiences (172).

Part IV: The Performance of Maternal Erasure exposes early modern restrictions imposed upon maternity in essays that attend to the constructed nature of gender.

Maternal power and influence could be subverted, Donna Woodford suggests in her examination of nursing mothers, by fathers who send the newborn to a wet-nurse; thus increasing the possibility the mother would conceive again soon. Using *The Winter’s Tale*, she shows how the play removes the maternal influence of “nursing and nurturing children” and demonstrates the “male attempt to appropriate and take credit for the female power of childbirth and reproduction” (194). In Gloria Olchowy’s essay, murder is refigured as birth in her reading of *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth, she argues, in helping her husband murder the king “as a means of giving birth to a new version of himself,” acquires a new identity for herself in the process (204). Within the world of the play, however, the absence of women creates havoc with inheritance and increases probability for revolutionary rather than hereditary succession. Olchowy also addresses the ideologies Elizabeth I employed to maintain mother/monarch messages and addresses James I’s “rigorous paternal conception of state power” that eliminates motherhood “altogether” (202). Examining the relationship between domesticity and politics, Mary Stripling unpacks Christopher Marlowe’s potentially threatening version of maternity. Invincible Tamburlaine’s weakness lies in the maternal power of his wife, Zenocrate. Her influence and nurturing of their sons destabilizes

him; his displacement of her role and elimination shows the “tyrant [who feels he] must wrest control of his family away from his children’s mother” (223) In the volume’s closing essay, Douglas Brooks looks closely at the paternity and writing technology issues present in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. He contends the metaphors borrowed from printing to express anxieties of legitimacy, ethnicity, sexuality and Christianity are new in the period, one attempting to understand its gendered roles.

The scope of *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England* is manifested in the remarkable treatment of little-known texts alongside familiar works. Scholars interested in links among literature, drama, performance, gender studies, and cultural influences will find this volume replete with the ways “ideologies of maternity” inform the period (12). Well-argued, these essays of “enacted and embodied” maternity contribute to the existing conversation and advance current scholarship (1). Each author offers fresh insights into cultural construction as well as synthesizes the many competing discourses that make up the performances of maternity.

Peter Shoemaker, *Powerful Connections: The Poetics of Patronage in the Age of Louis XIII*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007. 291 pp. \$60.00. Review by GEOFFREY TURNOVSKY, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON.

Patronage has tended to count amongst those cultural institutions of the Old Regime which are primarily characterized by their archaicness and negativity for holding writers back and impeding their “natural” self-expression and development. Peter Shoemaker offers a much needed corrective to this commonplace view in his provocative new study *Powerful Connections*. “Instead of merely assuming that patronage is constraining,” he asserts in the introduction, “I argue that we might also consider the dynamic possibilities that it offered” (23). Given the centrality of the phenomenon to early modern intellectual culture, Shoemaker’s reevaluation of it is extremely compelling, fruitful and important. The backdrop is France of the 1620s and 1630s at a pivotal moment, as the Kingdom reinvented itself under the political