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*Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature: From the Eighteenth Century to Postfeminism* ed. by Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats (review)

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**Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats, eds. *Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature: From the Eighteenth Century to Postfeminism*. UP of Mississippi, 2016. Print.**

"I dream of going up to her and sitting next to her and taking her in my arms and saying, 'Look, look at me and listen. You will survive. You will have a family of your own: three children. And as hard as it might be to imagine, your daughter will grow up to be a United States Senator, represent our country as Secretary of State and win more than 62 million votes for president of the United States.'"

—Hillary Clinton, Washington D.C., November 16, 2016

Former U.S. Senator, Secretary of State, and First Lady Hillary Clinton delivered these remarks in her first public appearance following her concession to U.S. president-elect, Donald Trump. As Clinton imagines a fantastic scenario in which she mothers her own mother, she acknowledges the despair and vulnerability many supporters felt following her surprising defeat in the Electoral College. Recognizing the disappointed voters as the primary audience of her remarks, however, reveals the irony of Clinton's statement: although she means to comfort them, Clinton also implies that the history of feminist strides occurring since her mother's childhood are not yet enough to elect a woman to the highest office in the country.

Such ambivalent maternal reassurance of her past child-mother makes poignant Clinton's role as future adult-daughter. Indeed, mother-child relations are not so easily determined by age and time, whether in our dreams or in popular culture, especially in literature for the young. This is the very sentiment with which Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats begin their commendable collection: "Whether living or dead, present or absent, sadly dysfunctional or happily good enough, the figure of the mother carries an enormous amount of freight across the emotional and intellectual life of a child" (3). In 2016, Clinton shows how mothers persist in individual and collective imaginations, especially at our most difficult moments—a reflection to which Fraustino and Coats's collection provides a timely scholarly response.

The polysemous representations and functions of motherhood in children's and YA literature is the subject of *Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, whose essays survey a breadth of mother subjects in texts for young people spanning the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries. Indeed, this scope is one of the most impressive aspects of the collection, which seeks to correct "the paucity of discussion of mothering in children's and young adult literature scholarship" (8). Acknowledging tensions between "feminism and motherhood studies" as a potential cause of this scholarly dearth, Fraustino and Coats "expand the theoretical paradigms within which representations of mothering can be understood and applied to a range of topics" (13). Their title suggests a chronological approach, but the book's distinct parts group

the essays into theoretical conversations, which will be of use to scholars seeking to build on the ideas presented here.

In their introduction, the editors promise interdisciplinary approaches that engage with psychological, sociological, scientific, and historical approaches to motherhood in a range of diverse texts. This promise is fulfilled in essays whose cultural-historical investigations emphasize ongoing relevance: Donelle Ruwe shows us how contemporary pedagogies of toddler instruction involving touch, as well as informal styles in children's literature, can be traced to Anna Letitia Barbauld. Koeun Kim examines the influence of author Juliana Ewing's own mother in the domestic story so popular among female writers and girl readers; Ewing's *Six to Sixteen* "continues the legacy of her literary foremothers while also questioning its nature and validity" (46). As a whole, the collection explores vital historical legacies of motherhood and their intersection with narrative theory as storytelling for young readers evolves since the eighteenth century.

Chapters frequently interrogate representations and disruptions of ideal motherhood rooted in Victorian ideals, and contributors' explorations of alternate subjectivities and forms of mothering are especially exciting: Julie Pfeiffer shows how girls, rather progressively, "mother one another without the distraction of husbands or children" (73) in nineteenth-century German *Backfisch* books. Dorina K. Lazo Gilmore also envisions alternate models of motherhood with progressive pedagogies, particularly those that equip children to handle racism. Gilmore shows how mothers of color are allowed an emotional complexity and sexuality that stands in contrast to Giving Tree-type mothers of the mainstream picture books. Other chapters offer equally dynamic claims using different methodologies, such as cultural historical activity theory to interpret "communitarian values" of African-American texts (Lauren Causey and Coats), cognitive approaches to theorize young readers' reception to cross-cultural motherhood myths (Anna Katrina Gutierrez), as well as investigations of scientific discourse in the constructions of motherhood in picture books (Robin Calland).

In spite of editors' and contributors' interdisciplinary aims, the collection does not engage with the substantial treatment of motherhood in feminist media studies. Sara K. Day's chapter on the novels of Sarah Dessen does effectively summarize and draw on the work of key feminist media studies scholars who have defined postfeminism, but I would like to see her findings dialogue with Kathleen Rowe Karlyn's *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers* (2011), which theorizes postfeminist mother-daughter relations in contemporary movies and television. Karlyn's book includes a particularly useful chapter on generational conflicts filtered through the lens of the maternal melodrama, a genre transcending popular literature and other mediums and

meaningful to women and girl audiences since the nineteenth century.

Such an oversight is not particular to Rowe and Coats's collection. Rather, as I observe elsewhere, the field of children's and adolescent literature would benefit from more conversations with feminist media studies, especially on the subject of melodrama given its popularity among young readers. Linda Williams, for example, demonstrates the critical capacity of the maternal melodrama's extremes: the cinematic representation of the sacrificial mother, whose suffering redeems her previous "bad" mothering, actually has empowering rhetorical effects, validating women's contradictory subject positions and frustrations in patriarchy. Situating the good mother/bad mother split in the context of the maternal melodrama in this collection would energize, for example, Alexandra Kotanko's chapter on *Peter and Wendy* and *Coraline*, whose mother-daughter dynamics have already been explored with similar feminist and psychoanalytic (Winnicott) underpinnings in Holly Blackford's study of Persephone in girls' literature. Is it a similar "shock of recognition" (Williams) that accounts for the "hope" Kotanko claims girl readers will feel as they encounter the "good-enough" mother of Barrie's and Gaiman's novels?

Feminist scholars from all disciplines are, to borrow Clinton's presidential campaign slogan, stronger together. I point to the lack of engagement with feminist media studies not as a negative criticism of this collection, but as an observation suggesting avenues for other scholars to travel, demonstrating just one means for the collection's ongoing usefulness to the study of children's and adolescent literature. Fraustino and Coats offer an effective thematic organizational design, presenting insightful essays on both well-known and under-theorized texts, as well as diverse and underrepresented identities, through a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. *Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature* is an essential resource for any scholar—both inside and outside the readership of *The Lion and the Unicorn*—studying motherhood in texts aimed at youth.

#### Works Cited

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**Chris Foss, Jonathan W. Gray, and Zach Whalen, eds. *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Print.**

Although the representation of disability has long played a notable role in comics—in Marvel's Daredevil and Professor X, for example—the intersection of comics and disabilities studies is a relatively new area of scholarship. The recent publications of José Alaniz's *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond* (2014) and M.K. Czerwiec et al.'s *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* (2015) attest to the growing interest and urgency of this intersection. In *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives*, Chris Foss, Jonathan W. Gray, and Zach Whalen endeavor to expand the critical discourse of comics and disability. To do so, they collect twelve essays that address a variety of disabilities in comics ranging from superhero narratives to memoir. Although the collection is not immediately concerned with children's literature, children's literature scholars who work with comics, graphic narratives, picture books, or visual media more generally may find the text useful as the collection parallels ongoing discussions of disability representation in children's literature. However, despite its potential contributions to the fields of visual rhetoric, disability studies, and children's literature, the collection is limited by its nearly exclusive focus on American comics.

The variety of narratives addressed in the collection, from canonized texts such as David Small's *Stitches* to the recent *Dumb* by Georgia Webber, position the collection for possible inclusion in college literature classrooms, ranging from American literature surveys to graduate-level seminars. Although Foss, Gray, and Whalen never position the collection as an explicitly pedagogical text—it forgoes questions of how to teach comics and disability—this diversity furnishes readers an entrance into the intersection regardless of their experience reading comics. For instance, Christina Maria Koch's essay "'When you have no voice, you don't exist?': Envisioning Disability in David Small's *Stitches*" provides analysis of Small's critically acclaimed 2009 memoir that does not depend on an intensive knowledge of comics theory. Koch argues that Small's narrative of muteness and psychological