Abigail L. Palko, *Imagining Motherhood in Contemporary Irish and Caribbean Literature*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. xii + 256 pp. (Cloth US\$95.00)

Imagining Motherhood ... enters the current of texts seeking to read Caribbean and Irish literature in a comparative postcolonial context (see Maria McGarrity's *Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature* [2008], Michael Malouf's *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Poetics* [2009], the edited collections *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diaspora* [2009] and *Caribbean Irish Connections: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* [2015]). Abigail Palko sets out to examine the representation of mothers and mothering relationships in eight novels from the 1980s and 1990s by Caribbean and Irish women writers. She suggests that these texts are connected through a type of placental metaphor, and she uses her analysis of the novels to redefine notions of the maternal imaginary and explore radical representations of nonnormative mothering practices that disrupt patriarchal and colonial expectations for women's subjectivity.

The first two chapters outline her methodology, drawing heavily on Western feminist and theological sources to establish how these women writers are reimagining motherhood. Using the placental metaphor to make the case for a different model of literary influence that complicates a center-periphery colonial model, Palko argues that attention to gender in her work is the key addition *Imagining Motherhood* provides to the critical conversation about Caribbean/Irish connections. The second chapter formulates a notion of the maternal imaginary that centers on the figure of the mother and establishes the contentious space of writing motherhood in a postcolonial context of developing nationhood and citizenship.

The remaining chapters each compare one novel from Ireland and one from the Caribbean. Chapter 3, "The Traumatized Not-Mother," examines representations of abortion in Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl* (1996) and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). Chapter 4, "The Motherless Not-Mother," considers how power structures such as colonialism and patriarchy break the mother-daughter bond and produce an ambivalent refusal of motherhood by the daughters in Clairr O'Connor's *Belonging* (1991) and Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* (1996). Chapter 5, "The Lesbian Daughter," links emergent sexual identities to the mother-daughter relationship in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) and Emma Donoghue's *Hood* (1995). Chapter 6, "The Lesbian Mother," considers the challenges posed by a possible lesbian mother

identity in national contexts that erase this possibility for women in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998) and Mary Dorcey's *Biography of Desire* (1997).

This is a well-researched study, and while the sources often overwhelm the author's voice in the initial chapters, the strength of the work lies in Palko's close readings of the novels themselves. The organization is easy to follow, so interested readers could quickly locate the sections of the book that pertain to their research, whether Irish or Caribbean literature, or both.

The organization of the text belies its main weakness, which is that the necessity of its comparative Caribbean/Irish approach ultimately fails to become clear even though the novels are placed side by side. The danger of venturing into comparative territory is the tricky task of establishing a new methodology that justifies the approach, and I remained unconvinced that the placental metaphor ("mother-placenta-child" is to "Ireland-Atlantic-Caribbean" [p. 218]) adequately explains why we should read these particular texts together, beyond their thematic commonalities. These same questions of mothering and the colonial context appear throughout the global postcolonial literary canon, so why limit it to women writers from these particular places? While mastering multiple national and regional canons is always a challenge, there were particular blind spots in Palko's study, especially the lack of attention to the large amount of scholarship on Caribbean women's writing. The connection between these canons via the colonial condition was also underutilized as England remained a specter in the background of the study but was not clearly deployed to unite what Palko suggested were particularly postcolonial responses to conceptions of motherhood.

While the book does not offer a compelling theoretical approach to transnational studies of literature, it would still appeal to students and scholars of feminist literary studies, as well as those interested in Palko's readings of the individual novels. Her attention to queer mothering relationships is a useful contribution to the study of women loving women in Caribbean literature, and her study of the novels reminds us of the difficulties women across the Atlantic face when confronted with the often impossible subjective demands of potential and actual motherhood.

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