

MOTHER-MYSTERIES

Maren Tonder Hansen. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1997.

BY MARIA BONANNO

This narrative is written in a journal-like style and Hansen introduces herself as a psychotherapist, Unitarian Universalist Minister, wife, and feminist who is having her first child after the age of 30. She is immediately identifiable as one of many contemporary women embarking on the new and exciting experience of motherhood. She begins her story with her first pregnancy and takes us through to the birth of her third child.

It would be a fairly safe to assume that Hansen has very strong Jungian leanings. Each of her pregnancies is peppered with vivid dreams which she interprets for us (and herself), using her insight and experience as a psychotherapist; she uses her knowledge of archetypes to illustrate her feelings of an expanding connection with Mother Earth. However, the exploration of Mother and/or Goddess archetypes is not the main premise of this book; it is really a personal treatise on her motherhood experience. The references to archetypes are subjective and are used only in relation to her own personal journey. For example, she frequently refers to the goddess Artemis in relation to the Mother archetypes, but does not mention that Artemis herself was childless.

As a story of personal growth, *Mother-Mysteries* is notable for its intensity. Hansen has obviously put her heart and soul into writing her story, eagerly sharing her private life with her readers, and there are some moments of genuine humour: false labour in the grocery store, keeping her placenta in the freezer for two-and-a-half years, and considering a ritual that transfers labour pains to someone other than the birthing mother.

Hansen identifies herself as a Berkeley feminist and her feminist

leanings clearly fall into the "cultural" camp, but she makes some statements which must be examined. (I get *very* nervous when the words "biology" and "destiny" are used in the same sentence.) She experiences pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood as a mystic journey and seeks to convince her readers that mothers are the embodiment of all that is natural, moral, and spiritual. She feels a great affinity with Mother Nature because her body has been used as a vessel for the recreation of life; she has entered into a "sacred agreement with nature." "Once a female is inside this covenant, she is one with all mothers, regardless of nation, race, or socio-economic division, and even regardless of species. Mother deer entered into the same contract that I did. So did mother quail and mother cats. I cherish their babies in a new way now, similar to the way that I cherish my own baby." As much as cherishing nature and all its creatures is a noble sentiment, it would appear that Hansen's affinities lie closer to quail mothers than to human nonmothers.

Hansen's strident ideas echo previous ideas about women and motherhood. *The Practical Home Physician* (PHP) is a reference book originally published in 1892 for the layperson, and it may be a useful exercise to compare statements from this book (now over 100 years old) with statements from *Mother-Mysteries* (MM).

"It is the biological destiny of a woman to become obsessed with wanting a baby" (MM). "Woman's entire being, therefore, mental and moral, as well as physical, is fashioned and directed by her reproductive powers" (PHP).

"When the desire to create a new life, to nourish and love a baby, cannot grow in its natural way, then this instinctual urge gets twisted, ingrown, sick, so that a woman will either choose not to bear a child at all or, in extreme cases, kill her children to protect them" (MM). "It is easy to understand, therefore, that if these [reproductive] powers be never completely developed, there will and must be an arrest of development of her

mental and moral nature" (PHP).

"I am no longer in control of my body or my mind. The woman I used to refer to when I said 'I barely exists anymore' (MM). "The pregnant woman[']s ... [m]ental characteristics also are sometimes changed remarkably. An unsteady temper, marked by fits of peevishness and irritability, often nervousness and even hysteria are developed in the earlier months" (PHP).

It is alarming to think that Hansen believes pregnant women are generally not in control of their faculties, that nonmothers are twisted/sick, and that biology rules women. Mothers are the cornerstone of the earth; they are those within the family of women who create, nurture, and sustain life. Their lives as intelligent beings with an intimate knowledge of creation should be appreciated and their contribution to our collective social and psychic health cannot be minimized. However, Hansen's exceptionally strident views are divisive and (ironically) counterproductive, echoing the archaic and repressive beliefs of the nineteenth century.

CUNNILINGUS, OR HOW I LEARNED TO LOVE FIGURE SKATING

Cathy Ford. Salt Spring Island, BC: {m}Other Tongue Press, 1997.

LETTERS TO WILLIAM BLAKE

Susan McCaslin. Salt Spring Island, BC: {m}Other Tongue Press, 1997.

A WOMAN'S FINGERPRINT

Kate Braid. Salt Spring Island, BC: {m}Other Tongue Press, 1997.

BY SHERRILL CHEDA

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