
Seventeenth-century studies have become rather accustomed to the idea of gendered metaphors in the theorization of the early modern state. Recent work by Ann Hughes, Laura Lunger Knoppers, and others has reinforced our sense that this war without an enemy often took for its enemy any redefinition or shifting of gender. However, until now much of the action has been confined to analyses of gender relations based on the respective roles of men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere, with analysts’ occasional irruptions into the home an occasion for reinforcing the boundaries. Now, however, Rachel Trubowitz brings that division of spheres into question through the figure of the mother as an image that traverses the line between private and public through her deployment as a symbol of the emerging and contested nation-state. She focuses particularly on the figure of England as mother, relating this deftly to the increasing interest in supporting maternal breastfeeding as a guarantee of the transmission of parental identity. In this she draws on but also develops the work of historians such as Valerie Fildes and literary critics such as Patricia Parker, as well as work on the symbology of lactation and breastfeeding recently published by Naomi Yavneh and Naomi Miller. In particular, Trubowitz compares their work and that of others on the lactating Virgin Mary to the images of the breastfeeding mother found in Protestant texts, images more often linked to the nourishing God the Father than to the Virgin.
Trubowitz’s important and richly scholarly study begins by examining constructions of the nurturing mother in Puritan domestic guidebooks such as William Gouge’s *Of Domesticall Duties*, constructions she links to the dawn of an era of empire in which English identity was brought into contact and therefore conflict with other and very different nations. Alongside these emergent figures of nationhood, Trubowitz also examines the role of Galenic medicine in the construction of the nursing mother, which for the seventeenth century resonated with the deeply religious origins of the figure in the Old Testament portrayal of God as lactating mother, maintaining the unity and identity of his flock through the “milk” of his Word.

These ideal nursing mothers are compared and contrasted by Trubowitz with the demonized “bad mothers” in Puritan-inflected pamphlets and drama. Her discussion of the role of the “new mother” in *Macbeth* in relation to the Stuart kings’ attempts to adopt that role is intriguing and opens up many unconsidered interpretive possibilities. The ultimate destination of all these ruminations is Milton, on whom Trubowitz has written excellently before. In particular, she examines the way in which the shift from a dynastic nation to a communal nation affects Milton’s reading of the transition from the Old to the New Testament. For Trubowitz, Mary as Second Eve consolidates the ambivalences of the emerging nation and Milton’s eagerness to universalize it as a reformed, Protestant nation. Eve is compared with Adam, and Trubowitz here sees Milton as reducing the role of the biological father in comparison with the new Eve’s role. For Trubowitz, Milton’s biological father makes room for the spiritual nourishment of God, and natural progeny become the spiritual progeny of books and words, so that the final incarnation of the mother is found in Samson, architect of himself as hero of the universal and international godly community.

Trubowitz also examines the “bad mother” in the figure of Dalila in *Samson Agonistes*, who is eventually displaced by the genuine nurture of God. Trubowitz relates this figure to the portrayal of the British nation in Milton’s *History of Britain*, in which the failed deliverers of Britain are aligned with Samson both as failures and as types of the far more successfully redemptive Christ of *Paradise Regained*. For Trubowitz this
repositioning of the new idea of the nation as mother illustrates the contradictions of the new mother — she offers what seems like spiritual wholeness, but only by covering over conflicts on which the reformed nation turns out to rely, such as the relation between the “new” nursing mother and the public sphere. In particular, Trubowitz probes the constantly recycled metaphors of purity in Milton and in Protestant writings carried over from the biological image into the new spiritual icon.

A minor omission is that Trubowitz makes no attempt to think about real lactation rates or real lactation experiences. Admittedly, it is difficult, and some might say impossible, to separate these from the discourses in which they are enmeshed, even in the personal life writings of women. Nonetheless, this reviewer would have liked some acknowledgment of the possible gaps and contradictions between lived experience and precept. Resolutions at the discursive level and the displacement of Adam as father figure obviously have dispiritingly little immediate impact on women’s lives. We need to be scrupulous in acknowledging the limitations of the work we do.

Many of the texts Trubowitz uses are moderately familiar now to those of us who work on gender in the seventeenth century, and one could even debate her coverage. It seems odd that so little attention is paid to the radical sectarian women such as Eleanor Davies and Anna Trapnel, particularly since Trubowitz herself has written well on them in the past. Recent work on the cult of the Virgin is also a trifle neglected, and we might have hoped for more on the history of ideas, on Machiavellian moments, and Filmerian replies. She digs deep, but one could wonder about the extent to which her texts are truly representative. We as literary critics are always prone to make Milton the telos to which all culture is pointing, but this hugely overstates his impact on culture as a whole. The book ends with Samson Agonistes, but it is difficult to share Trubowitz’s view that this finalized anything. Already the Restoration was moving to a new way of considering Stuart kingship as a paternal model, bypassing and yet integrating the helpless, martyred body of Charles I as the bleeding womb of the reborn nation. The “merry gang” was refiguring the body in ways of every kind that all but bypassed the Christian tradition. It does not seem enough anymore to see Milton as an end point.
Despite these slight cavils, I learned from every page of *Nation and Nurture*. Trubowitz’s intelligent and subtle arguments should now have a decided impact on the discussion of the gendered spheres in the wider arena of the history of ideas, not solely in gender studies or women’s writing. This scholarly book is strongly recommended both to those working on women and to those working on the formation of the nation-state.

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