



Book Reviews

Of Woman Born, by Adrienne Rich,
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\$2.95.

Shirley Lynn

In the 'family-centred, consumer-oriented, Freudian-American world of the 1950's,' Adrienne, the poet, became a mother. A non-poet, a one-dimensional assembly line, cranking out a generation of three, perpetuating the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Ingesting and spewing out 'nature' axioms. Intelligence submerged in muddled maternal instinct. Self-realization aborted in resentful selflessness. Natural tenderness distorted in the anger of subservient relations to others. Rich weaves her particular experience of motherhood into the universal institution that mangles human needs.

She defines the enemy, patriarchy, as 'a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men — by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.' Clearly, changes in the social order cannot be effected by an individual woman at the level of the family unit. Rich challenges women to bond together to forge a new, more humane order, to replace the patriarchal system, which has been 'so universal as to seem a law of nature.'

This feminist mapmaker probes, at the

core of patriarchy, the shadow-world, man's disturbing remnants of mother-love and mother dominance; man's ideas of the sacredness of motherhood contrast with the degradation of women in the societies men have created. Rich draws upon extensive reference material from literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis, religion, politics, and medicine to expose the contradictions that define man's rational world.

In the sections 'Hands of Flesh, Hands of Iron' and 'Alienated Labour,' she compiles a brutal history of childbirth, with women excluded from the politics of control over their own bodies. 'As long as birth metaphorically or literally remains an experience of passively handing over our minds and bodies to male authority and technology, other kinds of social change can only minimally change our relationship to ourselves, to power, and to the world outside our bodies,' she warns.

Within the system, men are forging ahead into the unknown, the unknowable. Lives, until the 1960s sacrificed to uncontrolled pregnancies, were wooed for a decade with the Pill, until its deadly side effects threatened. And now, the genetic revolution in progress in laboratories strikes a chilling chord as patriarchy controls artificial motherhood.

The section 'Mother and Son, Woman and Man,' deplores the tyranny of relationships. 'Before we were mothers, we have been, first of all women, with actual bodies and actual minds.' She criticizes the Freudian view of the son that is saturated with the Freudian hostility — and

sentimentality — towards the mother. Freud made guilt a household word. Personally confined by the endless regimentation of motherhood, the author grew increasingly restless, impatient, tired, inconsistent. She recalls a happy respite, living in a country house with sons, nine, seven, and five while her husband was abroad. 'We were conspirators, outlaws from the institution of motherhood; I felt enormously in charge of my life.' Like castaways, they followed a casual rhythm, eating outdoors, half-naked, bedtime delayed to watch bats, stars, fireflies, and for the ancient art of storytelling. Women, she urges, must change the entire community's relationship to childhood. Insist that men, who have made the rules for women to enforce, learn to share equally in care and nurturing. Only then will the rules change. Men will not recognize this new structure of love, will call feminists old names. As they do now, as our sons do now.

Rich introduces the section 'Motherhood and Daughterhood' as the core of her book. 'It is not easy to write about my mother, the gifted pianist, who shut me in the closet when I was four, at my father's insistence.' Mothers shape the legacy for daughters — what it is to be a woman, anxiously enforcing the restrictions of patriarchy in the name of survival. Daughters learn, from the passive, victimized mother, self-hatred, low expectations, rage at the mother's lack of struggle. Rich, it seems, was over-parented, under-nurtured.

Daughters are still culturally nullified by silence. Daughters were the primary