

as maternity nurses — on to the Nurses Act 1971 — when midwives lost their right in law to practise independently of doctors — which culminated in the 1990 Act, when midwives regained their autonomy. The point is well made that in order to be self-governing — and thus a profession in its own right — midwifery had to break free from nursing.

This approach overlooks a few complexities, however. The tensions between different kinds of midwife, for example the older, married woman and the young, 'modern', hospital-trained midwife in the 1920s, are not developed because the foci of attention are the battles, at three levels, between midwives and nurses, midwives and doctors, and doctors and 'consumers'. Where historians may take issue with this interpretation is in its focus on 'wholes' rather than parts, which has the effect of neglecting difference. Consequently 'women' and 'doctors', too, tend to be seen as a class. This does not sit well with feminist scholarship which has deconstructed the category 'woman', for instance, to show how, historically, an alliance between doctors and middle-class women cemented medical control, while (as the authors acknowledge) a general practitioner with a hospital midwife is still the commonest choice made by New Zealand women to assist them through childbirth. The relationship of the woman doctor with the midwife is similarly left unexplored.

That it has stimulated such questions itself suggests this study's worth. Papps and Olssen have collaborated to produce a rigorous and rewarding account which is to be highly recommended for providing an overview of changes to childbirth in the twentieth century from a theoretical perspective, for privileging the midwife and midwifery and for bringing the analysis of the struggles for control over birth into the 1990s. In particular, it illuminates the resurgence of the midwifery model. This had to be acknowledged as a safe and viable alternative to the medical model's assumption that birth is a medical event for the autonomous midwife. What New Zealand has witnessed since 1983 has been a shift 'back to the future', as a result this time of an alliance between midwives and middle-class women. So far this swing back has been in terms of who catches the baby; whether there will be a return to home births has yet to be seen.

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Mothers and King Baby: Infant Survival and Welfare in an Imperial World: Australia 1880–1950. By Philippa Mein Smith. Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1997. 330pp. NZ price: \$59.95. ISBN 0-333-67827-3.

AFTER READING Philippa Mein Smith's chapters on the causes of infant mortality, you will never again look at milk in the same way. Mein Smith has captured, in horrifying detail, the struggles of mothers trying to keep their babies alive in a world without sanitation, sewerage, or refrigeration. *Mothers and King Baby* is an engaging exploration of what Mein Smith calls the 'white health transition' (p.8), the period between the 1890s and 1945, during which the real numbers of white babies dying in Australia halved. Her purpose is to consider the claims that the infant welfare movement was an important factor in this health transition by examining, among other things, the cultural, social and economic changes affecting motherhood and maternal practices, and by probing the nationalist myth-making and the place of mothers within this myth-making (p.9).

Mein Smith's study is part of a growing body of Australian literature in which babies

and children are central. In particular, it complements Shurlee Swain's *Single Mothers and their Children* (CUP, 1995) by illuminating what Swain called 'the triumph of the bourgeois marriage' (p.1). Mein Smith's study reveals that the results of bourgeois marriage were less triumphant than they appeared. Despite the improvements made in the survival rates of children over the age of one month in the first half of the twentieth century, maternal death rates and those of babies up to one month did not drop until the 1940s. Her study is also about shifts in ideas regarding the causes of infant death, from sanitation to milk to maternal culpability and the ensuing supervision of mothers; in the wake of urban sanitary reform, the behavioural component, or 'maternal ignorance', loomed large (p.61).

In exploring the cultural, social and economic factors affecting motherhood and infant welfare, Mein Smith crafts a complex web of cause and effect: the clean-up of cities and the important role of the water supply; the emergence of Baby Health Centres; the limiting of family size, and the ways class cut through each of these developments, create what Mein Smith refers to as the 'synergistic effects of social change' (p.190). The infant welfare movement was not solely responsible for the fall in the infant mortality rate, and indeed, as Mein Smith argues, 'mothers deserve more credit' (p.191). What the movement did achieve was the promotion of babies in a culture which did not allow for the promotion of mothers except in very specific ways (p.139). The movement also conquered the enormous difficulties of caring for babies and mothers in a country of vast distances. The use of infant welfare carriages on trains, and an infant welfare correspondence scheme in Western Australia, were some ways in which these groups overcame this problem. Mein Smith also presents a fascinating case study of a group of Victorian mothers who, through interviews, revealed the impact of the various prescriptions on them as young mothers in the 1930s and 1940s.

The book ranges widely from environmental factors affecting both adult and infant mortality, and the enormous impact the Royal Commission into the Decline of the Birth Rate had on ideas about infant health, to imperial and nationalistic agendas driving the state's concern with infant welfare. It discusses debates within the infant welfare movement and its post-World War II extension into caring for preschool-aged children.

The one disappointment I have is Mein Smith's failure to develop the argument about national myth-making and the place of mothers within that. White women's roles as mothers to future citizens had been celebrated since federation. Marilyn Lake has argued that the granting of the Maternity Allowance to white women in 1912 was the recognition of the mother-citizen; however, Mein Smith does not explore these ideas. I was curious to know how the infant welfare movement fitted with these particular manifestations of women within masculinist politics. Following on from this unsatisfied curiosity, there are other tantalizing aspects of the celebration of 'King Baby' and 'His Majesty the Baby' which begged some teasing out as to the ways gender operated within a variety of discourses about the status of the infant.

Mothers and King Baby is detailed, wide-ranging and uses a variety of sources to answer the questions it does pose. It is an ambitious project, and one which succeeds. It will be of interest not only to those who study women's, family and welfare history, but also to urban historians, and those with interests in medicine and disease. Mein Smith has created a book which, while using Australia as a case study, illuminates the development of white infant welfare in western countries more generally.

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