
Reviewed by Joyce Burnette (Wabash College)

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Commissioned by Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Red Deer Polytechnic)

*Laboring Mothers* uses eighteenth-century British texts (where "texts" includes images such as prints as well as nonfiction books) to explore the how eighteenth-century society viewed various types of working mothers. The reader will not find a description of the typical working mother, but that's not the question Ellen Malenas Ledoux is asking. This is a book of cultural studies; it focuses more on how mothers were presented in the texts than on the realities of their work. While Ledoux checks the historical accuracy of what is presented in the texts, her main focus is on the interpretation of the texts, and how society thought about various types of mothers.

Ledoux does not examine working mothers in general, but focuses on six specific occupations. The book is divided into three sections based on the relationship between women and the texts: women who speak for themselves, women who are spoken for, and women who are spoken about. Each chapter offers close readings of a few primary texts. These texts are not unknown, and most of them have a robust critical literature. Ledoux draws on this literature and adds to it by focusing on the role of motherhood in women's lives.

The privileged women in part 1 were able to address the public directly. Actresses could use autobiographies and the stage to depict themselves as good mothers. Sarah Siddons added an epilogue to the play *The Distrest Mother* and brought her children on stage in order to frame her move from Bath to London as her maternal duty. Mary Robinson used her *Memoirs* to counter critiques and depict herself as a devoted mother. Midwives faced competition from man-midwives but were able to argue their case in the birthing manuals they wrote. While man-midwives emphasized their formal education, midwives argued that having given birth themselves made them more sympathetic birth attendants. Rather than being an impediment to work, motherhood was a
credential. For women in part 1 motherhood did not hinder their work and may have even helped. In the rest of the book, though, work and motherhood are generally incompatible.

Part 2 examines women who were spoken for, whose biographies were dictated by the women themselves but written down by male editors. These women had some opportunity to shape the narrative, but their stories were filtered through an editor who had a specific agenda, making it more difficult to know what these women felt themselves.

Chapter 3 considers narratives of two women soldiers and how children limited their ability to pursue their chosen profession. Christian Davis had to leave her children with others (one with her mother, and one with a paid nurse) when she entered the military to follow her impressed husband. Christian feared that a pregnancy would end her military career by revealing her sex, but eventually it was a hospital stay that revealed the truth. The thesis of the chapter is that women faced "compulsory maternity"; women who wanted to live single lives found that society pressured them into marriage and motherhood. For example, Hannah Snell initially rejected offers of marriage and continued to wear male dress after her sex was discovered, but she eventually married twice more.

In chapter 4 the biography of Mary Prince demonstrates that the conditions of life for enslaved women made mothering impossible. Mary's mother couldn't protect her from being sold away, or from being beaten by her new master. This helplessness might have encouraged enslaved mothers to distance themselves emotionally from their children. Mary also tells the story of Hetty, who lost her unborn child due to a brutal beating. Even when their children were present, the heavy workload meant that enslaved women had little time to spend mothering.

The women of part 3 are unable to speak for themselves and are depicted by others. The women themselves have no voice, and stories told about them bear little relationship to their actual lives. In chapter 5 Ledoux examines images of street sellers in popular prints. Sometimes street sellers were depicted as neglectful mothers, unable to feed their children due to their work or the distractions of sexuality. At other times women were depicting as doing the impossible, easily combining their paid work with care of an infant. Neither depiction tells us how these women actually experienced motherhood.

Prostitutes were not only spoken about but were also denied motherhood. Founders of the Magdalen House, a charity for reformed prostitutes, assumed that the women were childless, and the rulebook for the house does not mention children. By contrast, The Histories of Some Penitents of the Magdalen House argues that women turned to prostitution in order to feed their children. These women, though, had to give up their children before entering the Magdalen House, an act which the Histories paints as a noble self-sacrifice.

A few words about what this book is not: it is not historical research. Ledoux does not do archival research; the primary sources are all published texts and images. The historical material she uses is from secondary texts. That said, the historical assessments of the book are correct. Ledoux describes the various types of work that women did as "gigs" (p. 11); this is an entirely appropriate analogy, since women's work was often part-time and temporary. This book is also not an attempt to describe the typical working mother. All of the working mothers described in the book constitute a small minority of the population. Street sellers would be the most numerous of the occupations, and female soldiers the least numerous (with sixteen known cases in the eighteenth century). Also, Ledoux is not interested in the day-to-day details of women's working lives. We learn a lot about how people thought about women, and how wo-
men presented themselves in public, but little about the actual daily work of mothering.

Ledoux is successful in the task she does pursue. The readings of the texts are thorough and convincing. I particularly appreciate the focus on images. The only chapter that doesn't use images is the chapter on soldiers. The discussion of street sellers examines only images, but the other four chapters use both texts and images to support their claims. The images that Ledoux focuses on are included in the book. Many images that are mentioned as comparisons are not reproduced in the book, but I found that I was generally able to find these images via a Google search.

Though I do economic history rather than cultural studies, I am in favor of any book that reminds us that, contrary to the common assumption, women have a long history of combining work and motherhood. Readers who want to know how mothers were depicted in eighteenth-century texts and images will find that this book gives them careful readings of a broad ranges of texts.

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