

regime. A change did occur after 1937, as Italy moved closer to the Nazi state, and to war. Critics of modernism now called for an art expressive of fascist goals, and the state began to solicit works from younger artists dedicated to fascism. Neo-classical styles became more common, and paintings of fascist themes — including racial ideas — were applauded by fascist officials.

Despite this final development in Italian fascist art, much of the art and architecture produced in Mussolini's Italy was the creation of independent artists allowed to pursue their aesthetic interests creatively. Indeed, what remains with me after reading this essay is the 1932 architectural design of the facade for the main pavilion of the Venice Biennale of International Art — the location for the regime's biannual art exhibitions. The previous facade had followed the traditions of Renaissance design, displaying Corinthian pilasters and ornately designed towers; the new facade stripped away the ornamentation and introduced clean lines and a flat roof, with four simple columns supporting the word *Italia*. The look is modernist, even while incorporating elements of classicism, and speaks to the regime's pluralistic approach to art. With examples such as this, it becomes harder to dismiss all fascist art as banal propaganda, without any aesthetic value. While I would argue that political art reached its apogee on the left — in Berlin Dada and the brilliant photomontages of John Heartfield — it is clear that some of the fascist art and architecture featured in this book deserves further study. I would highly recommend *Fascist Visions* to scholars and students of both fascism and twentieth-century culture.

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Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds., *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

We all know about wicked stepmothers. We were raised on stories of them, our hearts breaking deliciously as we heard how they sent their pure and good stepdaughters to sweep cinders or to have their hearts cared out by tender-hearted woodsmen who risk death rather than obey the unnatural parent. Ever-present in these stories — although we never saw her — was the saintly (dead) mother. We knew that had the mother lived, the lovely daughter would have grown up in light and sunshine and endlessly rosy days. The prince who comes to carry her away is just the sort of boy mother would have chosen for her. In fact, she probably did.

I wonder how many girls dream of growing up to be that perfect mother, and how many boys dream of marrying her. How many girls and boys, that is

to say, dream of growing up to be or to marry dead mothers? For that is the one thing all of these mothers have in common: they are all dead.

As living mothers know, endless rosy days are the stuff of fairytales — and of gender oppression. They are the stuff of fairytales that shape our expectations of ourselves, that make whatever we do never enough, and that make our choices (whether we parent or not, work or not) always selfish and inadequate ones. The authors of the essays collected by Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky in the anthology *“Bad” Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* turn to history to explain why. The anthology is well conceived: the essays are well balanced, ranging from case studies to historical overviews, personal accounts to theoretical musings. And the editors frame them well in their co-authored introduction, which chronicles the history of “the ‘bad’ mother label” from the “Republican Motherhood” of the late eighteenth century through the changing gender roles of industrialization to the “scientific motherhood” of the turn of the century and into the twentieth century. As they suggest (and as the essays demonstrate) the label surfaces with the anxiety of widespread social and economic changes that involve dramatic, and characteristically unacknowledged, shifts in conceptions of gender and prompt the need to renegotiate gender norms. “A glance at the ‘bad’ mothers of any age,” write Ladd-Taylor and Umansky, “reveals the fate of women who violated the gender norms of their time, whether by choice, by fiat, or by the force of circumstance” (6). *“Bad” Mothers* offers more than a glance. As a whole, this collection demonstrates the power of labels to shape the experiences of individuals and the expectations of societies.

For the most part, the essays in *“Bad” Mothers* do not engage in finger-wagging. Rather, they offer sustained analyses of how gender operates, often invisibly, in the constitution of nations and individuals and how attention to the “bad mother label” yields insight into the shaping of public policies as well as personal choices. Mother-blaming emerges as a complex and sometimes counterintuitive strategy, as in Ruth Feldstein’s essay, “Antiracism and Maternal Failure in the 1940s and 1950s.” The progressive replacing of “biologically based theories of race” with “interdisciplinary psychosocial research” led, as Feldstein demonstrates, to a strange interarticulation of race and gender that left “bad mothers” as the repositories of blame for individual and cultural biases, especially racism. Placing blame for the dominant site of social tension on bad mothering, white or black, allowed liberals to imagine a locus both for those tensions and for the possibility of solving them. In “bad mothers,” they not only embodied the problem but also enabled visions of cross-racial male solidarity: “mothers jeopardized the very codes of masculinity and citizenship that liberals deemed essential to American strength and interracial health in this period” (159).

In the analyses that emerge from *“Bad” Mothers*, the problem inheres as much in the concept of “mother” as in the adjective “bad.” Specifically, it lies

in the homogenizing implication of some common ground intrinsic to the experience and even language of motherhood. To what exactly does “motherhood” refer, and to whom exactly does the name “mother” apply? The collection is motivated most forcefully by those questions, and Rickie Solinger takes them up most pointedly in the book’s provocative final essay, “Poisonous Choice.” The very watchword of the woman’s movement, “choice,” according to Solinger, marks an accommodationist moment when mainly white middle-class women sought to identify a woman’s right to an abortion with the women’s movement generally and replaced the more radical concept of women’s rights with the less confrontational idea of women’s choice. In some sense these women repeated the very conventions they sought to overturn as they made reproduction the centre of quests for gender equity and social justice. As a result, Solinger quips, “by the end of the 1970s ... men had rights, children had rights, fetuses had rights. In what was arguably the most profound irony of the decade, while fathers, children, and fetuses had achieved rights, women had achieved merely choice, and even that was increasingly provisional” (395). Moreover, the shift from the language of “rights” to that of “choice” underscores the white middle-class dominance of the women’s movement; one woman’s choice is another woman’s compulsion: “choice, like motherhood, has become a class privilege: for most women with economic resources, ‘choice’ signifies the ability to make motherhood decisions. For women without, ‘choice’ equals license and calls for restraints. ‘Choice’ frames an updated set of class-based laws of procreation and provides a class-based guide to answering the question, Who is a mother?” (396)

“Bad” Mothers is productively multi-vocal. While chronicling and contemplating the structuring principles of gender, and the consequences of gender inequity, it also features the voices of women whose own experiences with the label “bad mother” attest to the importance of this investigation. Relentlessly investigating the categories that structure all of our lives, *“Bad” Mothers* bears witness to the impossibility of separating our personal from our professional lives. In the injunctions that motivate us to try to do so, we continue to perpetuate the structures and live the experiences registered and perpetuated by the “bad mother label.”

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