Becoming a Mother: Pregnancy and Transformation in English Poems Written by Contemporary Mother Poets

Pussadee Kaewpunya Nghia
English Department, Faculty of Humanities
Chiang Mai University
E-mail: pussadee.k@cmu.ac.th

Abstract

This interdisciplinary research study employs Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's sociological conception of liminality (or the rite of passage), as a tool through which to study mothering experiences as represented in selected American English poems about pregnancy, birthing and nursing written by contemporary white mothers. The research also follows the argument of Jean Shinoda Bolen, in arguing that becoming a mother is a sacred journey, and by way of this consideration, explaining the spiritual transformation of the various mother personas in the selected poems. The research attempts to testify that mothering experiences, despite some prevailing tension and hindrances, paradoxically enable women to delve further into their individuated consciousness of womanhood, uncovering the autonomous power already present within and enabling them to grow spiritually. It aims to honor the precious bond between mothers and their children, promote mothering as a source of female empowerment and also foster public recognition of the incipient potentiality of women's creative power as mothers.

Keywords: Pregnancy, Transformation, Rite of passage, Liminality, Spirituality, Contemporary English Poetry, Contemporary mother poets

Pregnancy is a major biological, spiritual and socially transformative life event for all women. Similar to birth, coming of age, marriage and death, a pregnancy is a rite of passage in which both the pregnant woman and her child are on the verge of life and death during the process of pregnancy, as well as during labour. The rite of passage framework (or the concept of liminality), derives from the work of Arnold van Gennep, a French ethnologist and folklorist, and was also developed and used in anthropological discourse by Victor Turner in the 1960s and 1970s. This particular model has been successfully used to analyze changes in the behaviours of mothers in areas as diverse as nursing, psychology, anthropology and sociology. However, there have not previously been attempts made to use the 'liminality framework' to study poems about this same liminal space in the works of mother-poets, who have written about their personal experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and nursing. Influenced by the second-wave feminist tradition and the genre of *confessional poetry*, contemporary woman poets have been writing more

honestly and authentically about the bodily, psychological and spiritual changes brought about by these real-life events. This phenomenon has led to a wealth of realistic depictions of pregnancy, labour and nursing in the varied first-person narratives of these mother poets.

This research examines the changes of the liminal self of the would-be mothers during the three stages of separation/pregnancy, limen/transition/ labour/delivery and reincorporation/postpartum—as portrayed or represented in the selected poems written by contemporary white mother poets. In so doing, the research analyzes the poems to see how the selected mother poets transform their maternal experiences into art or poetry. The research is based on the thesis that mothering can empower these mothers to achieve their spiritual growth as they bond with their child.

Literature Review

The rite of passage framework extrapolated from the anthropological works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner has been widely used not only in sociology and anthropology but also in nursing and health science. In "Pregnancy as a Rite of Passage: Liminality, Rituals and Communitas" (2009), the writers propose that pregnancy can be viewed as liminal, or a space between social structures. They state that it is inadequate to think of pregnancy as merely a physiological state. Case studies are presented to show how clinicians and medical scholars can apply this framework to understand normative and non-normative pregnancy experiences (pp. 67-87). In an article entitled "Birth: A Rite of Passage" (2013), Jacinto and Buckey confirm that childbirth is much more significant than the mere traditional understanding of physical and physiological changes. Thus, they divide their work into three maternal stages, which are: pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period; in accordance with *the three ritual stages* of the rite of passage model. They also provide a comprehensive guideline for birth educators and caregivers to better assist expectant mothers in their journey through this developmental rite of passage (pp. 11-14).

The idea that pregnancy and mothering can be a source of self-empowerment and spiritual potentiality for mothers is supported by scholarly works in various fields. Reviews of research into spirituality during pregnancy confirm that child-bearing women are able to establish powerful spiritual relationships with their unborn children (Hall, 2006; Hall & Taylor, 2004). Thomas writes in her article "Becoming a Mother: Matrescence as Spiritual Formation" (2001) that through motherhood, women experience spiritual awakening, union and embodiment, as well as a phenomenon called 'survival love' and also other ethical changes (pp. 88-105). In "Motherhood as Opportunity to Learn Spiritual Values: Experiences and Insights of New Mothers" (2013), clinical psychiatrists Athan and Miller indicate that their

research participants, who are new mothers, admit to having improved themselves in six overlapping and interrelated aspects: "unconditional love and interdependence; transcending ego or self-centeredness; compassion and empathy; mindfulness and heightened awareness; meaning and purpose in life; and faith in a higher power" (p. 220).

Medical research into maternal hormonal changes during pregnancy and subsequent to birthing is also valuable in providing an insight into the relationship between a new mother and her child. Maternal hormones are crucial to the survival of all animal species. Hrdy (2000) says, "right after conception, as soon as implantation of embryos occurs, the placenta starts to manufacture extra estrogen and progesterone to sustain the pregnancy and also, rather like a love portion, to put the mother in a nurturing mood" (p. 153). In *A Woman's Book of Life: The Biology, Psychology, and Spirituality of the Feminine Life Cycle* (1998), Joan Borysenko, a clinical psychologist and a leading expert on stress, spirituality, and the mind/body connection, explains that the presence of the foetus stimulates the placenta to release human placental lactogen (HPL) and at birth, the pituitary gland will start to secrete the hormone prolactin. Both HPL and prolactin cause the hypothalamus to stimulate various forms of maternal behaviours in the new mother, such as risking her life to protect her newborn. At birth, oxytocin, which is another hormone created in the hypothalamus, helps the new mother in her birthing and nursing. Oxytocin is known as a love hormone which helps us feel calm, lowers blood pressure and promotes our happiness and friendliness. "The very sight, sound and smell of the child help releasing oxytocin, which creates feelings of warmth, contentment and arousal. Biology has created infatuation to make sure that we will dote on our babies," reports Borysenko (pp. 95-96). The more oxytocin the mother has, the more maternal and affectionate she becomes. When the nursing mother weans her baby, the amount of oxytocin decreases. This causes the mother to feel less and less infatuated with her child. As in other forms of relationships, the emotionally healthy mother will be able to develop an attachment and eventually a true love for her child.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

The main research methodology is the textual analysis method, which includes a close-reading of the selected contemporary poems in terms of subject matter and poetic techniques. The main theoretical approach employed to analyze the transitional experiences of maternity in the mother personas is the sociological concept of liminality—or the rite of passage framework, which was expanded upon by Victor Turner. The research will further employ its application using the model of Bolen's concept of liminality as a sacred or spiritual journey for women—a discourse in turn grounded in *Jungian*

archetypal psychology, which provides a locus for examination of the idea of *the Great Goddess*.

Rites of passage, in the present scholarly context, were introduced by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and redefined by Victor Turner (1969). They describe three stages of what an individual person experiences in various stages as follows: the first stage is called separation, which begins when the ritual objects move into the rite and detach themselves from their former social and cultural state of being. The second stage is margin, limen (or "threshold" in Latin), or the liminal period. During this stage, the ritual subjects' identity is "ambiguous" for they are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony. The last stage in the rite of passage is reaggregation or reincorporation, where subjects are able to construct their new identities and assume their new social roles (p. 95). Jacinto and Buckey (2013) point out that in the separation stage, the woman becomes pregnant and is informed of her new status. In the liminal stage, the pregnant woman is in the transition from a woman to a mother. She experiences her baby's growth stages inside her body as well as her feelings of uncertainty and anticipation. This is the trial period, during which the mother undergoes a difficult physical, emotional, and psychological test, especially during labour. Finally, in the re-aggregation stage or postpartum, the mother is recognized by society in her new role (pp. 11-12). Through navigation of these stages, the mother is "able to integrate her religious or spiritual views in order to understand her experience of pregnancy and birth," comments Schneider (as cited in Jacinto & Buckey, p. 12). Using the concept of liminality, this research will analyze how the would-be mother's liminal self is presented in the selected poems by mainly looking at how these mother-poets perceive and act on their physical and spiritual changes.

The belief in the spiritual growth or potentiality of the liminal self of the mother-to-be is supported by Jean Shinoda Bolen, a famous Jungian psychoanalyst, who used the concept of liminality to describe her spiritual journey of self-discovery and renewal in her book *Crossing to Avalon* (1995). Her reflections on the female life cycle touch on various aspects of women's life, including pregnancy, labour and nursing. She describes pregnancy as a liminal space, which can be taken as a sacred journey in which a maiden physically and spiritually transforms into a mother. She writes, "pregnancy was an initiatory experience that changed my body, shifted my consciousness, taught me surrender, and was the beginning of the dawning awareness of the physical, psychological, and spiritual demands and gifts that would come through being a mother" (p. 53). She also argues against a proto-feminist conviction that pregnancy and mothering hinder the would-be mother's creative faculty. "Pregnancy is like the creativity that comes from making a descent into one's own depths, in which the person is changed in the process of bringing forth the

work–creative work that comes out of the soul and is the child of it," (pp. 63-64). Bolen also develops her idea on female archetypes from Carl Gustav Jung's concept of archetypes, which illustrates fundamental psychic patterns in the human collective unconscious, or a set of memories and ideas shared by people throughout history and in all cultures. An archetype is the role or model image of a character or personality. Several familiar archetypes are mother, father, wise old man and clown or joker. In *Goddess in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (1984), Bolen comments that Jung's archetypal masculine and feminine polarities of gods and goddesses, limit men and women to be either masculine or feminine, thus inhibiting them from realizing their potentiality—or wholeness. Therefore, she integrates feminist ideas with Jungian archetypal psychology by describing an image of a "woman-in-between" who is influenced by her powerful inner forces, (or archetypes), as well as the outer forces, or stereotypes, which compel her to conform to society's expectations. "The "goddesses" are powerful, invisible, transcendental forces that shape behaviour and influence emotions. Knowledge about the "goddess" within women is new territory for consciousness-raising," says Bolen (pp. 4-5). She believes that different archetypal goddesses that already exist within women are evoked in different circumstances throughout their life. She points out that the prehistoric Great Goddess and Demeter, the Greek Goddess of fertility, are the main archetypes that are present in mothers.

Research Methodology

This research studies only the first-person-narrative poems of contemporary white mother poets on the subjects of pregnancy, labour and nursing. One reason is that these highly-trained intellectual female poets not only acknowledged—but were also actively engaged in the feminist movements of the Twentieth Century; during which time they were pregnant and became actual mothers. They have won several prestigious awards and scholarships for their poetic writing, and most of them have become editors and university professors in renowned institutions. This particular group has been chosen for homogeneity—and not at the exclusion of poets from other social backgrounds, who may have very different reflections on motherhood. The author acknowledges that different readings of the poems under current consideration could well be given if one were to utilize, for example, a Marxist, New-Historicist or Queer Theory methodological perspective in explicating these works.

The following poems are classified according to the different stages in the mothering transition.

1. pregnancy

"Poems for the New" by Kathleen Fraser born 1937
(published in 1966)

"Pregnancy" by Sandra McPherson b. 1943
(published in 1970)
"The Stethoscope" by Anne Winters b. 1939
(published in 1986)
"Letter in July" by Elizabeth Spires b. 1952
(published in 1992)
"Pregnant Poets Swim Lake Tarleton, New Hampshire"
by Barbara Ras b. 1949
(published in 1987)

2. labor/birthing and nursing
"Notes from the Delivery Room" by Linda Pastan b. 1932
(published in 1982)
"Sounding" by Carol Muske b. 1945
(published in 1984)
"The Cambridge Afternoon Was Grey"
by Alicia Ostriker b. 1937
(published in 1989)
"Infant" by Diana O'Hehir b. 1929
(published in 1988)
"Night Feed" by Eavan Boland b. 1944
(published in 1990)
"The Chair by the Window" by Anne Winters b. 1939
(published in 1986)
"Night-Pieces: For a Child" by Adrienne Rich 1929-2012
(published in 1978)
"Night Light" by Anne Winters b. 1939
(published in 1986)
"Eating Babies" by Chana Bloch 1940-2017
(published in 1992)
"Seizure" by Jeanne Murray Walker b. 1944
(published in 1986)
"The Language of the Brag" by Sharon Olds b. 1942
(published in 1980)

The Selected Mother Poets' Resistance to Patriarchy

The background of radical feminism in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's can help explain the political and social context in which the selected mother poets had their mothering experiences. These female poets were educated in colleges and were conscious of various forms of inequality in society. Joining their male colleagues, many women at that time were actively involved in the American Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1950s to late

1960s, the anti-war movement, the New Left—and other movements—which fought for peace and equality. Ironically, they suffered verbal and non-verbal forms of female oppression, brought about by their male associates and eventually separated themselves to continue their fight for women's individual rights. Radical feminists encouraged women to come together and share their personal experiences in the forum of consciousness-raising groups. This allowed them to discuss their problems and led to *female bonding or sisterhood*. The phrase *"the personal is political"* was coined during this period of societal change, to connect women's bodily, sexual and psychological experiences with the fight for gender equality. The female body and all its connected experiences, which had earlier been considered as inferior in terms of patriarchal discourse, became a source of female writing. And this area (and other related) was explored by both Anglo-American Gynocritics such as Elaine Showalter, as well as by Continental feminists such as Luce Irigary, Julia Kristeva and most prominently, Helenè Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976). Moreover, Kathleen Fraser, one of the mother poets in this study, wrote in "The Tradition of Marginality" (1989, p. 24) that "there were political needs — raw, bottled-up feelings wanting out — and a call for the immediately accessible language of personal experience as a binding voice of women's strength. Many women focused on the poem as a place for self-expression, for giving a true account, for venting rage…" This intellectual movement of women extended to *spiritual feminism* in the 1970's, as some of these consciousness-raising groups continued their search for an expanded female consciousness, which was not subject to patriarchal, religious and cultural presuppositions. Some spiritual feminists studied Old Europe's worshipping of the Great Goddess, dating back over 5,000 years before the rise of male-oriented religions. Connected to nature and fertility, the Great Goddess was responsible for both creating and destroying life (Gimbutas, 1982, pp. 22-31). Spiritual feminists believe that the Great Goddess, or the Great Mother, is the powerful life-giving force within all women, which is contrary to the authoritative and violently hierarchical "power over" of the patriarchal binary logic. Furthermore, women can realize their own channel for the creative and nurturing power of the Great Goddess through the various experiences of their own bodies. The Great Goddess has become the symbol of a new political movement for women to resist patriarchy, a way to honor the female body and an inspiration for artists. Instances of these attempts to view women's bodies as both spiritual and political can be found in the works of many female writers and intellectuals of our time, including the selected poems studied in this particular research.

The trope of mother as nature, however, can be problematic. In "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism" (1990), K. J. Warren argued against the dichotomy between men/humans and women/nature by saying that such conceptual connections are based on the logic of patriarchal domination. In

this oppressive framework, women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical, while men are identified with the human and the realm of the mental, thus, making men superior to women and justifying their power to control and exploit women. She added that the domination of women is conceptually and historically connected to the domination of nature (pp. 125-144). As cited in Plumwood (1993, p. 19), women's connections to the world of nature have long become a tool to oppress them as is evident in several sources:

> 'A woman is but an animal and an animal not of the highest order' (Burke 1989:187); 'Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men's business' (Freud 1989:80); 'Women are certainly capable of learning, but they are not made for the higher forms of science, such as philosophy and certain types of creative activity; these require a universal ingredient' (Hegel 1989:62); 'A necessary object, woman, who is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink' (Aquinas 1989:183).

This oppressive tradition of men as being metonymically associated with reason and women as nature has stabilized masculine power for generations. Although this research is based on the mother poets' perception of themselves as archetypically connected to nature, which can be contextualized as replicating these patriarchal conceptual connections, it actually investigates the real power and autonomy of the biological configuration of women and nature, which cannot be exploited, within the parameters of masculine discourse. The thesis presented here contests that the connectedness between women and nature through the experience of mothering paradoxically presents women as autonomous beings, within their own psychical and biological space.

In "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" (1982), Alicia Ostriker, another mother poet studied in this research, states:

> [C]ontemporary women poets employ traditional images for the female body— flower, water, earth — retaining the gender identification of these images but transforming their attributes so that flower means force instead of frailty, water means safety instead of death, and earth means creative imagination instead of passive generativeness. I want to look at larger poetic structures and suggest the idea that revisionist mythmaking in women's poetry may offer us one significant means of redefining ourselves and consequently our culture. (p. 71)

The use of nature imagery in women's writing then does not necessarily need to be read as conforming to the patriarchal logic of women/nature. Reclaiming the sacredness in nature and women's bodies is politically necessary for recreating gender equality in our society. In addition, feminine spirituality is not just for women. "Goddess religion was earth-centered …body-affirming not body-denying, holistic not dualistic. The Goddess was immanent, within every human being, not transcendent, and humanity was viewed as part of nature, death as a part of life," indicated Gadon (1989, p. xii). Therefore, men can also benefit from discovering the qualities of the Great Goddess within them.

Another form of female oppression that the selected mother poets are fighting against is the idealization of women and mothers. Throughout history, women have been stereotypically represented under patriarchal influences. According to Gilbert and Gubar (1996, pp. 288-291), in the middle of the eighteenth century, Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher who fought for human liberty and political reforms, ironically articulated some restrictions upon women, which later became the nineteenth century's ideology of femininity or the Victorian cult of the "angel in the house". He wrote in *Émile* (1762):

> The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life sweet and agreeable to them---these are the duties ofwomen at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy. (as cited in Gilbert, & Gubar, 1996, p. 289)

His vision of the ideal woman as "pure, submissive, decorous and even angelic" was one representative of a standard used to measure every woman's conduct. Such an ideal was elaborated by most male and female writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a famous poem about femininity entitled *The Angel in the House* (1854), Coventry Patmore characterized the feminine ideal as a self-sacrificing or selfless angel. Also, painters in the nineteenth century usually portrayed angels as female. In the combined views of both British and American ideologies of femininity, the model woman was delicate, frail and ethereal. She had to look and act like a fragile person in order to certify her spirituality and refinement. The ideology of femininity also perpetuated conflicting stereotypical images of women as both angel and monster. To be an acceptable wife and mother, a woman needed to submerge her own interests in those of her husband and her children. Those women who refused to be passive were considered unwomanly. This Victorian ideology of femininity, also known as the American

cult of true womanhood, continued to be influential in the twentieth century leading to both support and angry responses.

Feminist activists, including the mother poets studied in this research, have argued against this patriarchal ideology of femininity. American feminist, mother, poet and theorist Adrienne Rich wrote in her book *Of Woman Born*, first published in 1976, that there is a clear distinction between "two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (p. 13). Rich attacked motherhood as defined under patriarchy, rather than mothers or mothering as a practice. Rich's reference to the nurturing power of the Great Goddess is clear when she defines maternal power as "not power over others, but transforming power, was the truly significant and essential power, and this, in pre-patriarchal society, women knew for their own" (p. 99). In her talk "Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap" (1978) collected in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978,* Rich stated:

> Woman mothering her child was a being with dignity in the world, who respected her body, who had as much power as any other individual person to act upon and shape her society, and who possessed the wherewithal to meet her own needs and those of her children, whether she chose to live with a man, with a woman, with other parents and children, or in a separate household with her children. These are minimal conditions; but implied in them are enormous social and political changes. (p. 272)

Rich emphasized that such mothering love and care is most honored and a woman can best perform her motherly role when she is free from the domination of patriarchy. Andrea O'Reilly, however, observes in her book *From Motherhood to Mothering* (2004) that although Rich's *Of Woman Born* does not fully discuss or theorize mothering and how its potentiality can be realized, it paves the way for later feminist scholars on mothering to utilize it as a site for women's power and resistance (pp. 9-10).

This paper will argue that this patriarchal ideology of femininity paradoxically offers women independence through the experience of motherhood itself. In the rite of passage, a woman assumes a new social role as a mother, right after giving birth to her child. This is the time when she will experience the stress between nursing or taking care of her newborn and being "a good mother" as socially and traditionally prescribed. This research will partly explore whether or not the mother personas in the selected poems

experience this tension. It will do this by analysis using the framework of the following questions: How do these feminist writers view themselves in relation to their newborn? How do they respond to its needs? And do these conflicting moments of maternal love and obligations help foster their spiritual growth?

Crossing the Threshold into Liminality

Pregnancy is a powerful life-changing experience for women. Once a woman decides to respond to the call to motherhood, she allows herself to enter a rite of passage which will change her life forever. Drawing from Jung's concept of synchronicity, Bolen (1994) describes the moment the woman learns about her pregnancy as the synchronicity of time and opportunity to embark on her journey toward motherhood—if she decides to respond to it (pp. 8-9). As explained by Victor Turner's the rite of passage (1969, pp. 94-95), in the first phase of separation, the woman realizes that her social status and identity as a maiden is no longer valid. With her decision to become a mother, she leaves her former identity, crosses the threshold into the rite and assumes a liminal self during her transitory passage to motherhood. In the second phase of transition, her social identity becomes ambiguous and indeterminate, which can lead to a feeling of vulnerability and the loss of selfhood. The pregnant woman becomes the liminal persona or threshold person who is "betwixt and between" social positions.

Based on their personal experiences, the mother poets are able to vividly describe their physical and emotional changes in the liminal state. Their accounts are both realistic and political because they include both positive and negative experiences, thus making their maternity dissimilar to the one idealized in the patriarchal framework. The expectant mother-persona in "Pregnancy" by Sandra McPherson addresses her confusion and loss of control over herself while going through the liminal passage. She candidly describes her negative emotional experiences, as being "highly explosive" (l. 17) and "stone-mad" (l. 29) for a lengthy period before labour. She cannot be as angelic as the ideal woman. Like most expectant women, she is easily irritated due to stresses and anxieties. She is "reckless" (l. 21) and "bouncing odd ways/ [l]ike a football" (l. 21-22). The odd movements of the round-shaped football clearly signify her incapability of asserting definite control ɔn her life. She also feels "trapped" (l. 29) in the process and lacks the power to decide and do things as she usually would, when she mentions that, "[t]he queen's only a figurehead" (l. 25). Instead of having the supreme authority, the queen has little real power and is reduced to a synecdochic wooden model, placed at the front of a sailing ship. During its nine months sea voyage, or the woman's gestation, the ship drifts in the "amnion sea" (l. 28) under the power of nine planets and the moon showing the pregnant woman's vulnerability during this liminal stage. Nevertheless, she is able to

recognize her relatedness to the universe and allows its power to guide her. Feeling lost and ambiguous about her identity, the four-month pregnant persona in "Letter in July" by Elizabeth Spires says that she is "neither here nor there" (l. 39). It shows that she has detached herself from her former state and way of life and is now partaking in the liminal journey towards her new position. She compares her four-month pregnancy to an unmown summer field, with signs of wreckage all over. This image reflects that she finds her liminal state uncertain and threatening, although she knows that it is also the best time in her life as suggested by the image of summer which symbolically relates to the golden time of one's life. She further says that "all is expectancy" (l. 7) to signify that the liminal self she is experiencing is not really her true self and is actually in a transitional stage.

However, with its fluid state, liminality can be a site of potentiality and can be perceived as sacred or holy because it provides experiences of unprecedented power, according to Turner. He gives examples of prophets and artists who are also liminal or marginal people or "edgemen" who try to rid themselves of clichés and relate with other men through fact or imagination. Consequently, they are able to write about human potential in "an expression of evolutionary life-force" which has not yet been fixed in structure (p. 128). Turner also indicates that in most cultures the powers that shape the ritual subject in the liminal stage are believed to be the protective powers of the divine—or more than human powers (pp. 105-106). These ideas are supported by Bolen as she views pregnancy as a sacred spiritual journey, which enhances the woman's potentiality and reconnects her with the Great Goddess and other women. During the liminal passage, the pregnant woman undergoes tremendous physical, emotional, and spiritual changes, previously unknown to her. These experiences can bring about not only insecurity and irritation but also the possibility for new growth. This also echoes the spiritual feminist idea, which values maternity as a site of liberation and empowerment for all women. The pregnant speaker in "Pregnancy" by Sandra McPherson, states that pregnancy is a unique experience that should always be cherished. In her dairy imagery, the enlarged belly is portrayed by a simile as "like a yoghurt" (l. 3) suggesting the wonder and the benefit of pregnancy. As yoghurt is made from milk and bacterial culture and is best known for its nutritional value, her pregnant body is transforming into something that can nourish life. The image of the big belly as an "[u]nbelievable flower" (l. 4) relates her body to nature, flowers and natural fecundity. It is a celebration of the female form and a trope that portrays the baby as a seed grown out of the flower or her beautiful blossoming body. She continues by saying that "[a] queen is always pregnant with her country" (l. 5); illustrating women's perpetual role as life-givers and nurturers of mankind—a possible allusion to the worship of the prehistoric Great Mother. Neumann (1955) points out that the Great Earth Mother is the mother of all vegetation and

her central symbol is the fruit-bearing tree, with its power to bear, transform and nourish (pp. 48-49). She is also represented by mythopoeia, as the pregnant goddess of fertility and is worshipped as the goddess of pregnancy and childbearing (p. 96). Bolen (1994) also describes women's mystical awareness as being derived from the Great Goddess or Gaia, since they too can bring life to earth (p. 55). Maternity then becomes divine—as mothers are synonymous with the Great Mother. This mythopoetic troping of women, in the form of confessional poetics, whilst seeming to confirm gendered constructions of femininity, paradoxically constructs a space for women, into which the male persona cannot enter.

To reflect the power of the Great Mother and elevate women's role as creators, the pregnant body is compared to a healthy, happy, and well-nourished tree in several of the poems. Based on an affectionate relationship with her husband, the would-be-mother persona in "Poems for the New" by Kathleen Fraser, for instance, views her pregnant body as "[v]oluptuous" (l. 16) and vital to him as his bones, bark and root with his growing child inside. These images clearly allude to the Great Mother and help put the mother persona in a respected position. In addition, fat is related to the reproductive capability because it nourishes the unborn child and eventually becomes one component in the milk production for breastfeeding. The 25,000-year-old statue of the Great Mother called the "Grimaldi Venus" is a proof of the connection between fat and fertility (Hrdy, 2000, p. 125). The pregnant persona's enlarged body is alluring and highly celebrated as it attains the highest potential of life creation, thus empowering other pregnant women who find their changing body abominable and a cause of low self-esteem. The baby is repeatedly called, "new thing new thing" (l. 22) to suggest mutual parental love and excitement. Its presence is honored and celebrated by a larger-than-life image of the lion, symbolically regarded as the king of the forest, prowling the sky and shaking his tail to welcome the baby. This imagery illustrates that the baby is a new and miraculous being inside his mother's dignified body. Moreover, in "The Stethoscope" by Anne Winters, the expectant mother describes her womb as a tree which provides comfort and refuge to the unborn child as he connects his root to it in order to gain nourishment from the nearby lake of capillaries or tiny blood vessels. Her baby is related to her through the "breathing bonds" (l. 13). With an allusion to the Great Mother, the tree imagery makes pregnancy both an organic and a sacred experience, as well as a source of empowerment for women.

Furthermore, the symbolism of the belly-vessel carries significant weight in the belief about the Great Mother as a container, or the Great Round with "the creative aspect of the uterus and the potentiality of transformation," and the belly is usually compared to a jar and a kettle, an oven and a retort (Neumann, 1955, p. 46). The belly-vessel symbolism suggests the power of the womb in

creating and nurturing life. In "Sounding" by Carol Muske, for example, the mother's womb is compared to a forge. The forge is used by blacksmiths to make metal goods and equipment by heating metal and shaping them. The process requires a great deal of strength and perseverance in order to create something meaningful and valuable. This is compared to the creation of a child, as the mother persona says, "the soul rung forward into image,/as metal is stunned into coin" (l. 28-29). The mother is willing to undergo all hardships in order to give birth to her child and in so doing, she experiences her inner power which transforms herself into a better person, hence making pregnancy a spiritual and transformative experience. Moreover, women can gain inner peace and happiness through pregnancy. In "Letter in July" by Elizabeth Spires, the expectant mother persona describes her liminal self as being asleep and curling like a leaf in a rowboat that floats and is gently touched by the water in a still pond. Her pregnant body is bathed with the sunlight and is being shaped "into something languid and new" (l. 14) by "a wand, an enchantment" (l. 13). This imagery shows that the expectant mother is herself very much like an unborn child inside the womb. She is in the transitory state towards becoming a mother. The peaceful atmosphere suggests that pregnancy can enrich a woman's life with joy and contentment and provide an opportunity for quiet contemplation of her autonomous inner self.

Last but not least, pregnancy is a shared experience that helps create and empower an unflinching bond among women—thus reflecting the feminist idea about female bonding or sisterhood. The poem "Pregnant Poets Swim Lake Tarleton, New Hampshire" by Barbara Ras, starts with a description of two eight-month-pregnant mothers enjoying themselves swimming across the lake from one side to the other, fighting the water currents and giving each other support. Along the way, the speaker, who is one of the swimmers, describes the changes in their body, behaviour and mind, using the pronouns "we" and "our," thereby suggesting the universal female transformation that pregnancy brings about in women. She tropes being pregnant as a pasture in summer to illustrate that it is the best moment in a woman's lifetime, since a pasture is the most fertile locus for feeding life in the summer. She adds the lines "pregnancy like a state of mind so full/ nothing else can be" (l. 11-12) and compares it to a tomato which can retain its freshness after several days of being kept inside a pocket. The poem then ends with a cheerful and empowering note to all women to cherish their magnificent role in life-creation; the pregnant speaker says, "[w]e are the gardens. We are the toads./ The season of wetness is upon us" (l. 25-26). According to Walker (1988), toads are symbolically connected to magical rebirth. The Aztecs related them to the underworld womb of regeneration; and the wife of the sun in North American Indian belief is a Toad Goddess (p. 391). Both the gardens and the toads allude to the archetypal Mother Goddess, whose power to bestow fertility upon mankind is invested in women.

Labour: An Ultimate Test for the Liminal Mother

Labour is a crucial liminal time for both mothers and their child. It is their ultimate test because they have to encounter death in order to transform into life. This fearful process brings about not only the birth of a child but also the birth of the maiden's new identity as a mother. Bolen (1994) asserts that through the experience of labour and delivery, she has "a mystical sense of oneness with all women through time….I was everywoman, anywoman, Woman" (p. 61). This resonates with the feminist idea of sisterhood or female bonding because birthing is the most powerful collective experience for all women who have been through it. It is another channel for female empowerment. However, due to a lack of understanding and sensitivity, the public fail to facilitate new mothers in both childbirth and nursing, which are significant moments in their transitory state. Based on her own experience and those of many other women, Adrienne Rich (1986) defines birthing in Twentieth Century American hospitals as "alienated labour": "The loneliness, the sense of abandonment, of being imprisoned, powerless, and depersonalized is the chief collective memory of women who have given birth in American hospitals" (p. 176). In "The Mother/Child Papers" (1978), Ostriker recalled how her male obstetrician reacted to her request to make her own decision about a spinal block. She wrote, "He smiled tolerantly to the ceiling. I remarked that childbirth gave a woman an opportunity for supreme pleasure, and heroism, in her own body. He smiled. They teach them, in medical school, that pregnancy and birth are diseases" (p. 85). A vivid description of a woman in the midst of labour is given in "Notes from the Delivery Room" by Linda Pastan, another poet who is well-known for having taken "ordinary events in the life of a woman and mined those for the powerful themes that dwelled beneath the surface" (Olivetti, 2015, p. 104). The mother persona informs us that she is "strapped down" (l. 1) like a "victim in an old comic book" (l. 2), while the male doctor commands her to "[b]ear down" (l. 7). She is in such terrible pain that she wishes for babies to be grown in fields as beet or turnips instead. She uses the word "the audience" (l. 20) to refer to the nurses and adds that they are now becoming "restive" (l. 21) or impatient. She even compares herself to an apprentice magician, who is unable to get a rabbit out of her "swollen hat" (l. 23), hence boring the audience. The poem clearly illustrates that organized and mechanized childbirth in hospitals rids the women of their natural, organic and powerful maternal power. The doctor-patient relationship turns out to be a foreman-labourer one. The nurses become the audience and the mother an actress. Instead of being compassionate, the doctor and the nurses are unkind to the new mother. They are just performing their roles—without any emotional engagement. However, at the end of the poem, the mother speaker welcomes her newborn child by emphasizing the fact that they are both barefoot, suggesting that they are equal

in their relationship and that they have survived the life-and-death trial of the liminality passage, and achieved their birthing in the purest and most innocently natural terms. Despite all the almost unbearable physical and psychological pains in the delivery room, the mother discovers the strength in her inner self and feels empowered.

Adjusting to the New Mothering Role and Discovering Her Power

In the third phase of the rite of passage, or incorporation, the ritual subject constructs his or her new identity and is expected to follow societal norms and standards (Turner, pp. 94-95). After birthing, the liminal woman is recognized by society as a new mother and has to adjust herself to social expectations. This is one of the most difficult periods, as she is torn between the needs of her individual self and the needs to relate to her baby and other people. It is the time for new mothers to develop strengths and qualities within themselves, the qualities necessary for their own survival and growth. Right after giving birth, the new mother's first and foremost maternal duty is breastfeeding—regardless of her exhausting physical condition. Nursing the newborn is essential to the survival of all mammalian species. As for humanity, breastfeeding was highly regarded in all ancient cultures. According to Neumann (1955), the transformation mysteries of the woman are primarily blood-transformation mysteries, which allow her to grasp the experience of her own creativity. The first blood-transformation mystery in woman is menstruation, and the second is pregnancy, since the embryo is created from the blood. The third blood mystery takes place after birthing as her blood transforms into milk, which provides the foundation for the mysteries of food transformation (pp. 31-32). Therefore, nursing can be a site of power and resistance for women because lactation is related to the powerful life-nurturing forces within the Great Mother and all women; moreover, they hold the key to the survival of the human species.

However, breastfeeding has become less honoured in modern society. According to "Breastfeeding in the Course of History" (2015), since the Industrial Revolution at the end of the Eighteenth Century and the rise of capitalism in the Nineteenth Century, women who have nursed their child have been forced to work out of home to contribute to the family income—resulting in the replacement of breastfeeding with artificial feeding of various forms. During the 1950s and 1960s, when some of the selected mother poets nursed their babies, breast-feeding steadily decreased, and by the early 1970s, only about 25% of infants were breast-fed at the age of one week. Another factor was that mothers felt ashamed of breastfeeding in public, as the breast is related to female sexuality (p. 7). In the poem "The Cambridge Afternoon Was Grey" by Alicia Ostriker, the mother persona recalls how her newborn is brought to her by a nurse's aide in a grey uniform sometime after the delivery, which suggests the

mother-child separation right after birth. She also stresses that the hospital is "full of Sisters of Mercy starched/ [t]o a religious ecstasy/ [o]f tidiness" (l. 3-5). These Roman Catholic women commit their lives to God and charity. The mother and her child are being greeted by a group of Sisters of Mercy, while she feels a natural urge to breastfeed her baby. She says, "[m]y hot breast/ [w]as delighted, and ran up to you like a dog/ [t]o a younger dog it wants to make friends with" (l. 16-18). The aide is "scandalized" (l. 19) or shocked and offended by the mother's exposure of her breast as well as the actual act of breastfeeding. She steps out and closes the curtains to leave the mother and the baby alone. This clearly shows that breastfeeding, which is natural and instinctive, is devalued and stigmatized as disgraceful. There is a dichotomy presented here between the mechanical-industrial and natural-organic; the organic is the figurative (and literal) space where the woman not only bonds with her progeny but also finds a separate space—her space presented by the imagery of a secret space between herself and the child—a space untraversed by the mechanical, "starched" patriarchal world of the nurses, doctors and of medicine.

Taking care of a newborn is not an easy task. During the postpartum, new mothers have to encounter countless physical and emotional stresses, while attempting to meet the conflicting needs both of themselves, as well as those of their child. Some women suffer from postpartum depression, making it impossible for their full motherhood identity to be developed. New mothers' frustrations over their maternal responsibilities and relative adjustments are realistically presented in the selected poems in contrast to the idealized Victorian angel in the house. In Adrienne Rich's "Night-Pieces: For a Child" a love-hate relationship between new mothers and their children is examined. In the first section of the poem "The Crib", the baby wakes up from a nightmare to find its mother even more frightening. The mother persona says, "Mother I no more am,/ but woman, and nightmare" (l. 13-14). She wonders if she has become "death's head, sphinx, medusa" (l. 9) to the child. This contradicts the idealized image of mothers as being kind, gentle, selfless and virtuous. In the second section of the poem "Her Waking", the mother persona also tells us about her nightmares, with fearful references to "knives" (l. 21) and "murderous hider and seeker" (l. 22). She abruptly wakes up in the dark feeling as "hourless as Hiroshima" (l. 17) which implies that she also goes through nightmarish experiences during her waking hours. Taking care of her child can be both a stressful and fearful obligation, in that it leaves her with nightmares. As cited in Green (2015, p. 201), British pediatrician and child psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott introduced the theory of "the good enough mother" in 1953 saying that:

> The good-enough mother…starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she gradually adapts less and less completely, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure. [In fact, it is] the mother's failure to adapt to every need of the child [that] helps the child adapt to external realities.

Green has commented that like Winnicott, Rich bravely admitted that mothers are not always as perfect as the feminine ideal. The "good enough mother" experiences love, hate and resentment toward her child and does not "give herself completely to her child, nor to the role of parenting" (p. 201).

Diana O'Hehir also clearly depicts the new mother's alienation and detachment from her newborn in the poem "Infant". Unable to relate herself to the baby, the new mother persona calls her baby a "cuckoo [c]hild" (l. 7-8, which insinuates the idea that her child is a usurper or in some way lacks fidelity to the mother. Her guilt is demonstrated in her recurring dreams about forgetting to feed it. She even admits that she "would/never/[b]e used to this" (l. 17-19). While holding the baby, she perceives it as "a sullen bean bag" (l. 22), which objectifies the child, rather than identifying it as a baby with a soul born from her own flesh and blood. The reference to the "heavy weight" (l. 21) of the bean bag "between [her] arm and [her] body" (l. 21) signifies her notion that the baby poses an immense responsibility to her. She also perceives herself as a failed mother as the beanbag (or the baby) is bad-tempered and displeased with her. The poem ends with the mother unable to desert her baby but rather "pulled … into it" (l. 24), suggesting the irresistible power of the baby in attracting, charming and inviting the mother to fulfill her natural maternal role.

Another poem which addresses the new mother's sense of responsibility towards her newborn is "Night Feed" by Eavan Boland. The sleep-deprived mother-speaker describes herself as an early bird that has become a "keeper" (l. 14) for her baby. To be a keeper, in this case, is to guard and take care of the baby. Struggling with her feeling of inadequacy or self-blame, she regretfully says, "[t]his is the best I can be,/ [h]ousewife/ [t]o this nursery" (l. 17-19). Instead of viewing herself as the baby's mother, she feels that she is a housewife, which implies her physical and emotional submission and exhaustion. The poem ends with the mother speaker tucking her baby in, which illustrates her tender affection for her child, which in turn enables her to sacrifice her daily happiness for it. However, her daily happiness is subsumed by the patriarchal norms and discourse; a zone that is replaced by what Showalter (1981) would call "the wild zone" of both herself and her baby—a symbiotic zone in which the neonate thrives—and she herself experiences spiritual growth and regeneration.

In "The Chair by the Window" by Anne Winters, the mother persona compares herself to a cow and her baby a "frowning farmer" (l. 10) to imply the

demanding nature of childcare in the life of new mothers. She, nevertheless, can experience a maternal love and joy while breastfeeding her infant, when she says, "we/ are two who sit and smile into each other's eyes" (l. 8-9). The mother-child connection is established and strengthened when given enough time and intimacy. Bolen (1994) points out that breastfeeding, despite its demanding nature, can be a sacred communion, which helps deepen the experience of the mother. It is "an extraordinary experience of oneness and stillness and communion and symbiosis" (p. 64).

A steady bond between new mothers and their infants is also developed during the postpartum, enabling the mother to actualize her spiritual potentiality. Their infatuation with the child, which is initially stimulated by maternal hormones, is superseded by their attachment to it after a long period of childrearing. The new mothers feel an intense love for their child and abhor any physical separation from it. While quietly gazing at her sleeping child, the new mother speaker in "Night Light" by Anne Winters, is overwhelmed with joy and tenderness. She feels that her heart gradually opens to the baby's "tiny flame" (l. 8). This suggests that the happiness that she has gained from her bonding with her child is so powerful that it warms her heart and chases away all obscurity, doubts and weariness of mothering. She compares herself and the child to two planets revolving around each other. Despite the space or the distance between them, they exist symbiotically, together: "One planet loves the other," (l. 14). This beautiful image shows that the mother recognizes, accepts and respects a space between them and is delighted in giving her child the best protection and love. In "Eating Babies" by Chana Bloch, the baby becomes its mother's source of infinite happiness and fulfilment. In both affectionate and humorous tones, the poem portrays an image of a mother who cannot stop tasting, licking, nibbling, touching, watching, and biting her baby all the time. She says, "it's your own/ life you lean over, greedy/ going back for more" (l. 43-45). This sensual pleasure ultimately helps establish an enduring bond between the mother and her child.

Becoming a mother is obviously seen here as being about more than giving birth and care to the baby. It is a sacred journey in which mothers discover the best in them and eventually feel empowered. As in other kinds of relationships, negative emotions are present and have to be dealt with before positive ones can be realized. The poem "Seizure" by Jeanne Murray Walker provides an honest depiction of maternal frustration and resentment. At the beginning of the poem, the mother persona bitterly complains about all the sacrifices she has made for her baby, such as giving it her flesh and blood and confronting death during delivery. She repeatedly announces that this is "the last time" (l. 6,7,9) that she will make such sacrifices. However, when witnessing her 15-month-old baby having a seizure, she is shocked and desperate. In her wild attempts to save her baby's life, she discovers her true love for it. She is

willing to exchange all her blood, meaning her life, for her baby's life and will not consider that the baby owes her anything. Her immense maternal love has transformed her into a selfless mother—a person with new spiritual heights.

The poem "The Language of the Brag" by Sharon Olds, challenges the traditional American idea of greatness by boldly declaring that becoming a mother is more celebrated and honoured than any heroic deeds ever performed by men. The poem starts with the female persona's recollections of actions which, as part of society as a whole, she once believed to be the most admirable. It has always been her dream to be at the center of attention and to be able to use her "excellent body" (l. 8) and her "extraordinary self" (l. 10) to excel in fierce, violent, athletic quests such as knife-throwing and crossing fire and waterfalls. But all she is allowed to do is "[standing] by the sandlot/ and [watching] the boys play" (l. 11-12) as all those activities are reserved for men only. The repetition of the verb-phrase "I have wanted" throughout the first three stanzas suggests her strong desire for an equal chance for women to be accepted and admired by society. The persona then describes how her female body undergoes tremendous physical changes during pregnancy and is finally put at the center of attention in the delivery room. Like heroes in legends and real life, she has lost blood and sweat in order to give life to "the new person" (l. 26-28): a new member of humanity. She finally realizes women's bravery and their power of nurture and creativity, which is totally different from men's. She states that her baby is born and covered with the "language of blood like praise all over the body" (l. 29). Her blood works as a figure of metonymy and alludes to the blood-transformation mysteries of women, which honour women's blood as sacred, due to its connection to the female life-giving force in the Mother Goddess and in all women. Therefore, her baby is blessed with this holy blood to grow physically and spiritually healthy. The poem ends with the celebration of women's bodies:

> I have done what you wanted to do, Walt Whitman,
> Allen Ginsberg, I have done this thing,
> I and the other women this exceptional
> act with the exceptional heroic body,
> this giving birth, this glistening verb,
> and I am putting my proud American boast
> right here with the others. (l. 30-36)

References to Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, who were highly regarded modern American poets, carry the implication that all of the positive changes that these two poets wished to bring about in society, have already been fostered for a long time by women, throughout history. She asserts her right, together

with other women, to be proud of the female body and to be confident enough to boast about it.

Conclusion

This research concludes that mothering is a powerful and spiritually transformative experience in the overall rite of passage for women to becoming more self-aware of their inner strength. Although motherhood has been represented as a construction, upon these readings these apparently gendered expectations and stereotypes actually aid in paradoxically providing women with a space (or wild zone) in which to develop their own identity as difference from the inherent springes of patriarchy. It enables them to become conscious of the life-nurturing forces of the Great Mother archetype, and all the other women within them. It brings out and develops higher qualities in the mothers, as well as connecting and empowering them. This paper celebrates the precious and enduring bond between mother and child. A mother is, in most cases, the child's first love and the first person to establish a relationship with it in life; or in terms of psychology, the mother is the first person to imprint on her child. This study has adumbrated, partly through a close examination of the mythopoetic frameworks of various female poets, the things women have to experience in their liminal journey towards becoming mothers. The researcher hopes to enhance the public's recognition of the crucial role mothers play in the life of their children and of society as a whole. This will enable men to better understand and honour women in their life and it will hopefully foster social changes in future relationships between men and women.

Acknowledgements

This research has been supported by the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University. The author would like to thank Assistant Professor Sarawanee Sukhumvada, Dr. Pasoot Lasuka and Assistant Professor Dr. Wayne Deakin, for their valuable suggestions and language revision.

Works Cited

Athan, A., & Miller, L. (2013). Motherhood as opportunity to learn spiritual values: Experiences and insights of new mothers. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health, 27*(4), 220-253.

Bloch, C. (1995). Eating babies. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 68-70). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Boland, E. (1995). Night feed. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 66-67). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Bolen, J. S. (1984). *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Bolen, J. S. (1994). *Crossing to Avalon*. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.

Borysenko, J. (1998). *A Woman's Book of Life: The Biology, Psychology, and Spirituality of the Feminine Life Cycle*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Cixous, H. (1976). The Laugh of the Medusa. *Signs,* 1(4), 875-893.

Côté-Arsenault, D., Brody, D., & Dombeck, M. (2009). Pregnancy as a rite of passage: Liminality, rituals & communitas. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health, 24*(2), 69-87.

Fraser, K. (1989). The tradition of marginality. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies,* 10(3), 22-27.

Fraser, K. (1995). Poems for the new. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 28-29). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Gadon, E. W. (1989). *The Once and Future Goddess.* San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.

Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (Eds.) (1996). *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Gimbutas, M. (1982). Women and culture in goddess-oriented old Europe. In C. Spretnak (Ed.), *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual power Within the Women's Movement* (pp. 22-31). New York, NY: Doubleday.

Green, F. J. (2015). Re-conceptualising motherhood: Reaching back to move forward. *Journal of Family Studies, 21*(3), 196-207.

Hall, J. (2006). Spirituality at the beginning of life. *Journal of Clinical Nursing 15*(7), 804-810.

Hall, J., & Taylor, M. (2004). Birth and spirituality. In S. Downes (Ed), *Normal Childbirth: Evidence and Debate* (pp.41-56*).* Edinburgh, England:

Churchill Livingston.
Hrdy, S. B. (2000). *Mother Nature*. London, England: Random House.
Jacinto, G. A., & Buckey, J. W. (2013). Birth: A rite of passage. *International Journal of Childbirth Education, 28*(1), 11-14.
McPherson, S. (1995). Pregnancy. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 31-32). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Muske, C. (1995). "Sounding". In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 46-47). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Neumann, E. (1955). *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype.* Translated by R. Manheim. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
O'Hehir, D. (1995). Infant. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 56-57). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Olds, S. (1995). The language of the Brag. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 337-338). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Olivetti, K. (2015). The ordinary, metaphor, and depth. *Jung Journal, 9*(1), 104-115. doi: 10.1080/19342039.2015.988080
O' Reilly, A. (Ed.) (2004). *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born.* New York, NY: State University of New York.
Ostriker, A. (1978). The mother/child papers. *Feminist Studies, 4*(2), 84-90.
Ostriker, A. (1982). The thieves of language: Women poets and revisionist mythmaking. *Signs, 8*(1), 68-90.
Ostriker, A. (1995). The Cambridge afternoon was grey. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 54-55). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Papastavrou, M., Genitsaridi, S.M., Komodiki, E., Paliatsou, S., Midw, R., et al. (2015). Breastfeeding in the course of history. *Journal of Pediatrics and Neonatal Care, 2*(6), 00096. doi: 10.15406/jpnc.2015.02.00096.
Pastan, L. (1995). Notes from the delivery room. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (p. 45). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Plumwood, V. (1993). *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature.* London: Routledge.
Ras, B. (1995). Pregnant poets swim lake Tarleton, New Hampshire. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 40-41). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Rich, A. (1979). *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New

York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
Rich, A. (1986). *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* New York, NY: Norton.
Rich, A. (1995). Night-pieces: For a child. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 83-84). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Showalter, E. (1981). Feminist Criticism in the wilderness. *Critical Inquiry, 8*(2), 179-205.
Spires, E. (1995). Letter in July" In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 39-40). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Thomas, T. (2001). Becoming a mother: Matrescence as spiritual formation. *Religious Education, 96*(1), 88-105.
Turner, V. W. (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.
Walker, B.G. (1988). *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects.* Edison, NJ: Castle Books.
Walker, J. M. (1995). Seizure. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 86-87). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Warren, K.J. (1990). The power and the promise of ecological feminism. *Environmental Ethic. 12*: 125-144.
Winters, A. (1995). Night light. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (p. 60). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Winters, A. (1995). The chair by the window". In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (pp. 60-61). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
Winters, A. (1995). The Stethoscope. In S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, & D. O'Hehir (Eds.), *Mother Songs: Poems for, by and About Mothers* (p. 34). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.