

Book Review: *What's Cooking Mom? Narratives About Food and Family*

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Book Under Review

Cassidy, Tanya M., and Florence Pasche Guignard, eds. 2015. *What's Cooking, Mom? Narratives about Food and Family*. Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2015.

The first of two volumes that discuss different cultural and personal approaches to the association between nurturing and motherhood, *What's Cooking, Mom? Narratives about Food and Family* jumps off the shelf for the heterogeneous nature of its contributions and approaches to what might seem a straightforward topic.

Editors Tanya M. Cassidy and Florence Pasche Guignard (2015) describe the collection as a “potluck or buffet-style get-together with friends and family” (2). The volume presents this variety in chapters on the most disparate approaches to a broad and multifaceted topic. Travelling through space and time, the readers discover mothers struggling with the task of feeding imposed on them by their cultural contexts, be they in twenty-first-century Japan or post-war France, and with the private and public forces that shape and are in turn shaped by eating habits. The work exposes these “foodways” as the meat of the subject matter, and brings together a varied assortment of approaches to burning subjects such as breastfeeding, cultural integration, and the role of the food industry in everyday life. The form of the contributions—from academic articles to autobiographical narratives, poems, and even a play—reflects this search for variety and offers the opportunity to choose one's own order of reading.

The contributors are both active subjects and reflective narrators who present their work as a blend of theoretical and “spontaneous” articles from which the subjective perspectives of the writers emerge between the lines. By including their personal experience as academics and mothers, the editors put themselves on the plate, serving up their experiences as reflections of their struggles with “balanc[ing] the demands of professionalism and motherhood” (11). Interestingly, the role of father as an active member of the family is only evident in two contributions in the collection. This raises the question of whether this was done intentionally to underline the isolation that the mothers in most of the contributions experienced in their role. What is

more, despite the richness of cultural backgrounds, the social context of the writers is limited to the academic world and this prevents the reader from getting a truly comprehensive perspective on motherhood, including that of low-income mothers.

In its entirety, this bold attempt to offer a better understanding of the role of eating and nourishing in the lives of individuals highlights the centrality that family and food have in culture and society, and the book brilliantly presents this to the readers. Both the specialist reader and the enthusiast will find this work accessible and rich in new ideas related to food as both a bond and a boundary on multicultural, economic, and emotional levels.