

BUCHI EMECHETA. *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1979. 224 pp. \$8.95.

Whether this novel is touting motherhood or not, the author certainly makes it clear that being a mother is not a simple or an easy task. The setting is Nigeria prior to, during and after World War II, but there is much here with which any woman can identify, particularly if she is, or has mated.

Nnu Ego, in her effort to fulfill traditional expectations during times of rapid social change, finds herself not only struggling for physical survival, but also struggling to understand why her life is so difficult.

She grew up as a favored child of a chief. Her misfortunes begin when she fails to produce offspring immediately during her first marriage. If one measures a woman's success by her ability to reproduce, her fortunes vastly improve when a second marriage proves fruitful.

Buchi Emecheta has written a novel that is engrossing, if not a technical masterpiece. Because of her attention to detail, the reader is able to feel the rhythms and nuances of life in both the Ibo village and in that teeming metropolis, Lagos. The author's best work is her presentation of Nnu Ego's frustrations and apprehensions.

Through this traditional Nigerian woman's experience trying to adapt to modern times, one can see the confusing complexity of the role of women from another cultural perspective. The surprise is that the "woman question" in a different time and a different place is so similar to here and now. Perhaps it should not be a surprise after all, because the source of the "question" is not a particular culture, but rather a particular physiological apparatus which permits roughly half of the human race to give birth and denies that privilege to the other half.

All these years we've heard about "penis envy," a theory no doubt postulated by a man, but perhaps the real reason for the almost universal suppression of women is womb-envy. For if women were in control of themselves, they could not only decide whether or not to have children, but how many children to have, and by whom.

It is not difficult to understand why in days when under-population was more of a threat than over-population, that that part of the human race with greater physical strength would move to control their potential resources. It is equally understandable that now that over-population is becoming a serious world problem, women are allowed, yea, encouraged, to find ways of amusing themselves away from home and the cradle.

As usual, with all changes in traditional social behavior, those who were most uncomfortable with tradition accept the new order with alacrity. Those for whom tradition was more advantageous, are most recalcitrant.

Each reader of *The Joys of Motherhood* will decide whether or not the title of this novel is cynical. As the joyous mother of an only child, my own opinion is necessarily biased. I look forward to reading Ms. Emecheta's three previous novels, *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, and *Second Class Citizen*.

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