



# Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918

*Ellen Ross*

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The feisty warm-hearted mum has long figured as a symbol of the working class in Britain, yet working-class history has emphasized male organizations such as clubs, unions, or political parties. Investigating a different dimension of social history, *Love and Toil* focuses on motherhood among the London poor in the late Victorian and Edwardian years, and on the cultures, communities, and ties with husbands and children that women created. Mothers skills in managing the family budget, earning income, and caring for their children were critical in protecting households from the worst hardships of industrial capitalism, yet poverty or the threat of it molded intimate relationships and left its imprint on personalities. This book is also a case study demonstrating the larger argument that the concept of motherhood is more socially and historically constructed than biologically determined. Shaky household economics, pressure toward respectability, the close proximity of neighbors, the precariousness of infant and child life, and little chance of better lives for their children shaped the work and emotions of motherhood much more than did the biological experiences of pregnancy, birth, and lactation. This beautifully written book, embellished with Cockney slang and music hall songs, addresses fascinating questions in the fields of womens studies, labor history, social policy, and family history.

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