

While the preface speaks of the fear and uncertainty involved in surviving cancer, and the introduction by Carrie Fisher speaks of the tensions, flammability, flaws and intermittent difficulties in her relationship with her mother Debbie Reynolds, this is soon passed over in favour of the honeyed imagery of mother and daughter stars. Like a Hollywood production, this imagery contributes to the fantasy that there is a perfect relationship we are all seeking. There is a lot of blonde, white and lace; everyone is smiling, many of the mothers have their eyes closed or half closed in an expression of bliss; sunshine often comes streaming through the background so that the warm fuzziness of mother and daughter love is woven into the photographic technique. Why are there no photos of mothers and daughters in cold environments, being icy to each other, or in wild, disgraceful positions? Because this is an extension of Hollywood and the reputation of its stars as mothers and daughters. Mothering and daughtering, however, involves much more than this book represents, as it once again reminds us mere mortals how inadequate our relationships are in comparison to those offered by Hollywood.

Writing in the Feminine in French and English Canada: A Question of Ethics

Marie Carrière
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002

Reviewed by Jill Scott

In *Writing in the Feminine in French and English Canada: A Question of Ethics*, Marie Carrière invites her readers to imagine an ethical space of intersubjectivity and, guided by five poets, dares us to dream alternative material possibilities and negotiate new ways of being beyond the limitations of fixed notions of gender and sexual difference. In this beautifully written and exquisitely crafted book, Carrière fills a significant scholarly lacuna by treating the experimental poetry known as “writing in the feminine” or “écriture au féminin” by writers in both English and French Canada: Nicole Brossard, France Théoret, Di Brandt, Erin Mouré, and Lola Lemire Tostevin. The project transcends the barriers of linguistic and cultural differences to chart a much-needed literary history of a particularly charged period for feminist poetic production from the seventies to the early nineties.

Much more than a critical introduction to these poets' works, *Writing in the Feminine* proposes a theory of relational ethics based on the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Ricoeur, and Luce Irigaray. Carrière is justified in her choice of theorists since the poets in question have all been informed by post-structural thought and often self-consciously invoke their influences, which

also include Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida. At times challenging in its dense philosophical analysis, the chapter entitled “Writing (as) a Feminist Ethics” teases out the intricate conceptual links between the theorists in question, and demonstrates how Lévinas’s challenge to metaphysical ontology and his ethics of alterity finds resonance in Ricoeur’s relational ethics and Irigaray’s ethics of sexual difference.

With this framework in place, Carrière embarks on sophisticated readings of her poets’ works, beginning with the concept of the maternal and mother-daughter relations in Brossard and Brandt. The maternal implies not just motherhood *per se*, but a signifying and socializing space where differentiation between same and other first takes place, the starting point for a model of relational ethics based on intersubjectivity. Writings in the feminine go beyond the essentialism of biology and show the constructed nature of the body in its socialized materiality. Carrière achieves a rare balance here between patient, close readings of poetic texts and a constant awareness of the larger implications of these works in the political and social, but also literary historical arena. Significantly, the author recognizes the importance of “respecting the undecidability and openness of texts,” and resists the temptation to tie up the loose ends her poets have so carefully left dangling.

Other chapters treat the themes of hysteria, mimicry, language, and corporeality, but Carrière is perhaps at her best in the final chapter entitled “An Ethics of Love,” where Brandt’s, Mouré’s, and Brossard’s poetry affords an opportunity to ponder love, friendship, and spirituality as part of an ethical experiment. While this foray into the mystical nature of bonds between women is arguably the most inspiring toward a feminist ethics, this is where Carrière is most concerned to question the utopianism of her poets’ endeavours. She stresses the “material possibility” of ethical exchange (quoting Jessica Benjamin) but cautions against predetermined realization. Recognition of the other is where ethics starts, but this recognition should include the notion of breakdown. The failure of relationships, be they mother-daughter bonds, friendships, or other relations, is inevitable. What is important, says Carrière, is that in spite of these tensions, conflicts, and disappointments we dare to wish for a veritable ethics.

Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects

Steph Lawler
New York: Routledge, 2000

Reviewed by Nancy Gerber

In *Mothering the Self*, Steph Lawler poses the following questions: What does