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

it mean, in late twentieth century early twenty-first century Euroamerican societies, to be a mother? To be a daughter? How are maternal and daughterly selves produced? To address these issues, Lawler, a lecturer in sociology at the University of Durham, examines the first person accounts of 14 white working-class and middle-class women whom she interviewed individually and collectively in 1992 and 1993.

Lawler contextualizes her argument at the intersection of several debates on the social construction of selves in Western culture. Noting that the Western "self" is understood as unique, bounded, rational, autonomous, and stable—a model inscribing the male-gendered subject—Lawler observes how psychological discourse has defined the self as that which is produced by the mother's mothering, and the social order as an entity composed of "well-adjusted selves." Thus, the figure of the mother is overdetermined in her embodiment as producer and guarantor of the ideal democracy, an argument familiar to readers of *Democracy in the Kitchen* by Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey (1989).

Lawler's work also refers to D. W. Winnicott and Nancy Chodorow. In contrast to Freud and Melanie Klein, Winnicott focused on the mother of an infant's lived environment rather than on an intrapsychic projection. Winnicott believed that the mother is innately, uniquely equipped to meet her developing infant's physical, emotional, and cognitive needs. Lawler points out that while his concept of the "good-enough mother" appears attainable, it is predicated on the insistence that the mother be completely attuned to, and absorbed by, the needs of the child. This stance of "sensitive mothering" demonizes working class mothers, who have neither time nor resources to devote to it. Lawler then turns to Nancy Chodorow, who theorizes that mothers tend to see their sons as more separate and their daughters as more alike. The mother's different reaction reproduces gendered personalities in which boys learn to value autonomy, fear connection, and seek dominance. Girls yearn for the early sense of unity experienced with their mothers, which they can attain only by mothering daughters. Lawler observes that Chodorow's argument has been read by many feminists to pathologize mothers, who project their unsatisfied sexual desire onto their sons, and to privilege fathers, who are necessary to disrupt the mother-child dyad.

The book considers mothers and daughters rather than mothers and sons, not because mothers are insignificant in the lives of sons, but because mothers and daughters are understood to share a closer social and emotional identification, and because a woman may simultaneously occupy the "mother" and "daughter" positions. Lawler wonders whether mother and daughter inhabit the same body and whether they are the same person, speaking with two voices, a question also raised by Marianne Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989).

Lawler's contribution lies in her contrapuntal use of mothers' first-person accounts. The 14 working-class and middle-class women interviewed range in age from 38 to 55. In response to a question about the usefulness of baby care books, one mother responds, "I was quite annoyed and amazed at this image [of

maternity] they were putting forth ... of the pretty little cottage and this glorious experience." When asked about identity, another mother responds, "You've got to be able to provide yourself with some kind of nurturing ... so that you can get refreshed." As I suspected, feminist maternal theory emerges from maternal scholars' openness to mothers' voices, because the dominant culture has turned a deaf ear to what mothers have to say.

The Bitch in the House

Cathi Hanauer, ed.
New York: Morrow, 2002

Reviewed by Michele Pridmore-Brown

The Bitch in the House presents an eloquent barometer of professional/writing women's domestic lives at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Editor Cathi Hanauer writes in her preface that the book is born of anger (hence the title), but anger seems largely absent from this collection of essays by 26 highly successful women writers, including *New York Times* best-selling authors and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists. Aside from the science writer Natalie Angier, a self-described feminist warrior, the tone is postfeminist: musing rather than strident; resentful at times, rueful at others; sometimes sassy; sometimes revelatory; often rationalizing as in the case of an anonymous writer who meticulously tallies the costs and benefits of an open marriage.

Perhaps this constitutes its radicalism: the singular angel of the house identified by Virginia Woolf as the *sine qua non* of Victorian patriarchal culture has not so much been transmuted into a bitch but into a cacophony of voices that, in disparate ways, muse over the burden and promise of freedom from pre-scripted lives and pre-scripted gender roles. Cynthia Kling, for instance, describes the antithetical pulls of the marriage contract and eroticism. Some contributors lament their romantic choices—co-habitating with laid-back spongers, for instance—while others praise the enabling qualities of long-distance relationships. The writer Daphne Merkin ultimately opts for the risks of loneliness over those of intimacy. Twice-divorced Karen Karbo points out the risks of entering uncharted territory: of being "not just the cow with the milk, but also the farmer with the money to buy it." Helen Schulman poignantly describes being caught between the equally visceral demands of ageing parents and young children, her husband tellingly relegated to a spectral role in this conflicted drama. At best, the women have a modicum of control over the messiness of their lives, over the competing claims of work, love, and family. None, however, would exchange the mess for the domestic straitjacket of their foremothers.