

evolved over the centuries as physicians became a “social authority” on childrearing practices. Social opinion followed the lead of physicians and wet nurses, once considered a vital element in the nursery, soon were seen as “moral lepers.” Once employed by upper class women or by women whose health required the use of a wet nurse to feed a newborn infant, the wet nurse was seen as intrusive and disruptive.

Golden examined letters and diaries to compile firsthand, personal accounts of the employment of wet nurses, and the emotional aspects surrounding the need for and utilization of a wet nurse. She also examines newspaper and magazine articles that contain ads for wet nurses, as well as editorial comments that shed light on the cultural debates and social mores pertaining to the use of a wet nurse. As Golden points out, these mores changed drastically with each passing century. As Richard A. Menkel of Brown University notes, Golden’s exhaustive and comprehensive research helps “illuminate the complex and multilayered social, medical, domestic and labor relationships that constituted wet nursing as a practice.” *A Social History of Wet Nursing* is a must read for anyone interested in the changing cultural, social, economic, and medical influences on mothers throughout American history.

Mother Time: Women, Aging, and Ethics

Margaret Urban Walker, ed.
Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999

Reviewed by Emily Jeremiah

Common to all the articles in this volume is a freshness that reflects the book’s novelty. As editor Margaret Urban Walker claims, *Mother Time* is “a sampler, an experiment” that charts “initial and exploratory journeys” (4, 1). As Walker argues persuasively in her introduction, the enmeshed issues of aging, gender, and ethics barely have been touched upon in any discipline, and they demand investigation. This collection offers a range of possible starting-points for such an investigation.

For theorists of maternity, the collection is significant in two important ways. First, several of the articles are concerned with the nature and status of work that traditionally has been performed by women, in particular the issue of care. Martha Holstein, for example, provides a subtle analysis of the gendered nature of caregiving. And Sara Ruddick, characteristically rigorous and inspiring, develops new insights into the ethics of such caregiving. Her

understanding of “virtue” as “an ongoing and relational process” (51) is especially suggestive in this context.

Second, several of the authors deal with ideas of autonomy and relationality, also issues of concern to contemporary theorists of maternity. Walker’s admirable discussion of the notion of autonomy poses a formidable challenge to the concept of the “career self” held dear in individualistic, capitalist societies, a challenge echoed elegantly by James Lindemann Nelson and by Ruddick in her conception of virtue as relational. Susan Wendell also is excellent on the individualistic “illusion of control” that we maintain collectively (138).

But the collection—too dense and varied to be summed up—offers many other intriguing titbits. Hilde Lindemann Nelson’s examination of the “narrative figurations” which shape self-identity is interesting. Also of note are articles by Peggy DesAutels and Walker that investigate the often overlooked significance of religion and spirituality in women’s lives. In addition, the issues of appearance and self-image are dealt with powerfully by Frida Kerner Furman, in particular.

The volume showcases the diversity and sweep of contemporary feminist scholarship. Many of the articles are stringent and passionate, and the book frequently is moving. Very occasionally, I was troubled by the anecdotal quality of some of the pieces, and by the “othering” potential of anecdotes told about (or on behalf of?) other individuals. Also, I detected the odd generalization and momentary lapses into “self-help-speak.” I wonder if the novelty of the book led to these lapses—which I note unwillingly and with the discomfiting idea that perhaps I am imprisoned by traditional, masculinist notions of scholarship. It remains to be seen how thinking in the enmeshed areas of aging, gender, and ethics will develop to become more assured. This volume, in general stirring and impressive, no doubt will play a vital role in furthering such development.

Our Mothers’ Spirits: Great Writers on the Death of Mothers and the Grief of Men, An Anthology

Bob Blauner, ed.
New York: Regan Books, 1998

Reviewed by Gill Rye

Our Mothers’ Spirits is an anthology of poetry and prose, some previously published, some commissioned or written especially for this volume. Although he acknowledges the influence of Adrienne Rich’s writing on the mother-son relationship, Bob Blauner’s selection is limited to writing by men. Here, men