

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

from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds write about the deaths of their mothers. This is an unusual collection: it gathers personal, emotional narratives by men on the subject of their mothers. The accounts reveal an array of emotions—idealization, ambivalence, anger, and regret towards mothers—so readers will discover work that touches a chord or offers insight into the power of the mother-son relationship, from the son's perspective.

Much of the writing included here—especially where it has been written for the book—attests to an ongoing connection with the dead mother experienced either positively (effective mourning, a return to the mother) or negatively (incomplete mourning, depression, resentment). Psychoanalytically, Blauner identifies this return to the mother as “a man's midlife task” (xvi), undertaken either before or after the mother's death. Blauner is all too aware of difficulty in negotiating the all-powerful archetypes of the Good Mother, the Bad Mother, and in dealing with the “backlog of repressed emotion” (xv) a mother's death uncovers.

John Updike's piece describes how the older and frailer his mother becomes, the younger grows his image of her (taken from photographs rather than his own memory). Both Gus Lee and Norman Sasowsky, whose mothers died when they were children, explain how as adults they set out to learn about their mothers' lives, in order to discover who their mothers were “other than dead mothers.” T. S. Matthews charts the “physical labor” of dying and attests to the coping difficulties of families. One of the most powerful contributions—by Nick Davis—takes the form of a letter refusing Blauner's offer to write a piece for the collection because he is unable to make sense of his fragmented memories. By far the most painful image in the book is Wallace Stegner's “mind clenched like a fist” following his mother's death (164).

On the whole, the anthology avoids sentimentality. A pleasant touch are the photographs included as centre pages to give a human face to the mothers who, in death, become the objects of so much rarely voiced male emotion.

## **Interwoven Lives: Adolescent Mothers and Their Children**

Thomas L. Whitman, John G. Borkowski, Deborah A. Keogh, and Keri Weed  
London: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 2001

### **Reviewed by Dawn Zinga**

This book examines the interrelated development of adolescent mothers and their children. Unlike many studies that focus exclusively on the risk factors and potential developmental deficits faced by children of adolescent mothers, this book also explores the developmental changes experienced by adolescent mothers.