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Chapter 2: Mothering in Context

“Mother” is best understood as a verb, as something one does, a practice which creates one’s identity as intertwined, interconnected and in-relation. Mothering is not a singular practice, and mother is not best understood as a monolithic identity. (Mielle Chandler)

Mothers, in the West, have long been objects of competing discourses. From the Judeo-Christian tradition, they are condemned, with Eve, to pain in childbirth as punishment for the ills of humanity, whereby female sexuality is constructed as a threat (Gen. 3:16). In Catholicism, the figure of the Virgin Mary as sacred icon embodies an idealized and desexualized motherhood.¹ In Western literature and culture, through the ages, mothers have been mythologized, in the Barthesian sense,² positioned, contained as figures of feminine plenitude, and yet denigrated and feared as evidence of (transgressive) female sexuality and *jouissance*. In psychoanalytical terms, the mother’s body, as originary place, is aligned with the abject, that which produces feelings of revulsion and horror.³ At the very margins of identity, it is threatening to it. And, in yet another, different, context and level of analysis, men as well as women have appropriated the mother as a metaphor for artistic creativity.

The workings of multifarious discourses such as these have been analyzed at length by feminist thinkers. However, feminist theories also share a similar

ambivalence towards motherhood, and feminist debates throughout the twentieth century from psychoanalytical, sociological, and literary based perspectives have grappled with its contradictions, from women's relations with their mothers to women's experiences as mothers. In this chapter, my study of narratives of mothering in contemporary French literature is, then, located first against a backdrop of feminist thinking and debate, from Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*, originally published in 1949, through both Anglo-American and French feminist work from the 1970s to the 1990s, to the most recent (at the time of writing) research on mothers in France arising from the growing interest in new family patterns. The second part of this chapter goes on to situate the study in a literary context.

Mothers and Feminism

Beauvoir is perhaps one of the most quoted of twentieth-century feminist thinkers when it comes to motherhood. In *Le deuxième sexe*, she famously diagnoses motherhood as the stumbling block to women's existential transcendence and liberation. Beauvoir's denigration of mothers and motherhood has been influential as well as severely criticized, but, in its favor, it is worth remembering that it never loses sight of the situation of women in society, emphasizing that laws, political discourse and socio-cultural attitudes of the time work to position women as mothers, albeit, in Beauvoir's optic, as passive, masochistic, and narcissistic. Above all, writing soon after the end of the Second World War and shortly after women in France finally gained the right to vote, Beauvoir could not envisage how motherhood and a career could be successfully combined.⁴

Motherhood went on to become a central issue and a real problematic for second-wave feminism. The influence of Beauvoir's negative analysis can be perceived in some of the now classic US feminist texts of the 1970s, in which

motherhood is considered to be a key factor in women's oppression. For example, Shulamith Firestone's radical *The Dialectic of Sex* places motherhood – or, rather, its rejection – at the very heart of the feminist revolution, arguing that women must seize control of new reproductive technologies in order to escape the burdens of their biology and that children should be brought up in community units so as to free individual women from the ties of motherhood.⁵ Other key works aimed to highlight and account for the oppressive aspects of motherhood. Adrienne Rich engages with motherhood from the position of both mother and daughter; her seminal *Of Woman Born* is particularly influential for its differentiation between motherhood as institution (motherhood as determined by dominant discourses) and motherhood as practice (the experiences of individual women).⁶ Moreover, Rich suggests that mothers' own practices are powerful and can subvert the hold of the hegemony of the institution. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* offers an explanation of women's mothering based on object-relations psychoanalysis. Here, Chodorow ultimately argues for the need for fathers to be involved in primary childcare in order to change the relational dynamics contributing to the reproduction of women's mothering through the generations. Although her text is a frequent reference point, it has been widely criticized for its reliance on the model of the white, heterosexual, middle-class, nuclear family.

In the UK, Ann Oakley's socialist feminist analysis, *Becoming a Mother* was published first in 1979, the revised edition being published under the title *From Here to Maternity*. Oakley draws on interviews with first-time mothers, focusing on the transition to motherhood and the impact of normative social expectations once women become mothers.⁷ Analyses such as these do not, however, constitute a wholesale rejection of motherhood among 1970s Anglo-American feminists, as is sometimes thought. Rather, they contribute to the unpicking of the social conditions and

discourses which surround it and which impinge on the experiences of individual women as mothers. As Sheila Rowbotham explains, there was a certain freedom in being able to express the ambivalences of motherhood – from drudgery and loss of self to intense pleasure and fulfillment – and the general impulse among pro-motherhood feminists of the time was “to make a life in which there could be a new balance between mothering and a range of other activities for women.”⁸

In France, during this same period, feminist debate on motherhood was even more polarized. Socialist feminists such as Christine Delphy and the collective Les Chimères followed in the heritage of Beauvoir’s analysis and theorized motherhood as a key factor of women’s oppression, while other French feminists such as Annie Leclerc celebrated maternity, especially its corporeal aspects, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, as a source of power and *jouissance* for women.⁹

Psychoanalytically based “French feminism” of the 1970s also made a significant contribution to feminist debates on motherhood, with texts by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva as particularly influential.¹⁰

Luce Irigaray’s work emphasizes ways in which motherhood is entwined with women’s subjectivity. She offers, on the one hand, a negative diagnosis of mother-daughter relations under patriarchy. For her, this relationship is based on rivalry and, indeed, matricide – socially, since the woman in the mother is negated in favor of her maternal function, and, in psychoanalytical terms, since the mother, as primary object of desire, has to be rejected. On the other hand, Irigaray’s work also has a positive forward-looking impetus, and this is why her thinking is still so often drawn upon, especially in feminist literary criticism. As a philosopher of change, Irigaray maintains that the mother-daughter relationship must – and can – be fundamentally re-imagined, in order to allow new possibilities for women’s subjectivity.¹¹

In Cixous's work, motherhood is largely metaphorical. In her early essay "Sorties" ["Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays"], writing is posited as giving birth to oneself, while, in the more recent "Obstétriques cruelles" ["Cruel Obstetrics"], Cixous figures the writer (herself) as a mother ("la mère à plume" ["the pen-mother"]), transmitting the unsayable on behalf of others and drawing attention to their plight.¹² Paradoxically, Cixous's *fictional* work portrays the mother in more *literal* terms, especially in her later texts: on the one hand, through the figure of the narrator's mother, for example, in *Osnabrück, Benjamin à Montaigne: il ne faut pas le dire* [*Benjamin to Montaigne: It Shouldn't Be Said*], and *Hyperrêve* [*Hyperdream*]; and, on the other, by figuring the narrator herself as a mother in *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* [*The Day I Wasn't There*].¹³

Kristeva's work on motherhood continues to be a principal reference point, in particular her early essays on representations of maternity in relation to the Virgin Mary, and her analyses of the role mothers play – or can potentially play – in society.¹⁴ What is rarely acknowledged, however, is that Kristeva has continued to write about motherhood in a variety of contexts: from a novel and an epistolary co-authored essay with anthropologist Catherine Clément, to a three-volume study of female genius in the twentieth century.¹⁵ Indeed motherhood is an ongoing theme of Kristeva's oeuvre, concerned as she is with the different types of crisis that threaten the modern subject.¹⁶ Kristeva's perspective is important, because, although, as a practicing psychoanalyst, she emphasizes the role of the mother as the maternal function in the formation of the psyche and identity of the individual, she does not omit to theorize motherhood from the point of view of the woman *as* mother.

The strand of "French feminism" represented by Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva, although influential, has not been without its detractors, who have criticized it for its so-called essentialism and a-historical analysis, in particular its metaphorical

use of the pre-oedipal relation with the mother as a (perhaps utopian) space or source for writing.¹⁷ Thus there has been a certain polarization too between the kind of French feminism that attends to sexual difference and risks toppling into essentialism and Anglo-American feminisms, which cluster around the concept of gender and equality, and which rue biological determinism and notions of feminine specificity.¹⁸

Meanwhile, feminist historians Élisabeth Badinter, Yvonne Knibiehler, and Catherine Fouquet have contributed to debates on motherhood in France in somewhat different ways. Knibiehler's and Fouquet's richly illustrated *L'histoire des mères du moyen-âge à nos jours* of 1980 aims to break the silence with which the history of motherhood had been surrounded. They show how, in France, motherhood has been caught up, successively, in religious, political, medical, and ideological discourses: policed by the Church throughout the Middle Ages and on through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; celebrated and idealized in the Enlightenment; raised to the status of political symbol in the French Revolution, returned to the patriarchal authority of the family in Napoleon's *Code civil* [Civil Code] in the nineteenth century; rendered, in the twentieth century, a pawn of the *patrie* [fatherland] in the pronatalist discourse of Vichy France; and, ultimately, becoming a choice, thanks to feminist activism and medical advances, yet nonetheless still controlled by a plethora of experts of different kinds.¹⁹ This history demonstrates, as Knibiehler subsequently notes, that "the production of children has always been, and still is, caught up in the forces of power," even if, according to Rich, women in their own mothering practice have also managed to evade some of that control.²⁰

Badinter's history of motherhood, *L'amour en plus* [*The Myth of Motherhood*], also published in 1980, is an influential, if controversial, reference point for its deconstruction of the maternal instinct. By tracing changes in practices and social attitudes from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, and by revealing the

discourses that have been brought to bear on motherhood – from Rousseau’s glorification of mothers in the eighteenth century to popular psychology of the twentieth – Badinter argues that the maternal instinct is a myth and that what is often referred to as instinct is in fact maternal love, a much more variable phenomenon. 1980 too saw the publication of Christiane Olivier’s polemical *Les enfants de Jocaste* [*Jocasta’s Children*], in which she reformulates Freud’s male-centered Oedipus complex in an attempt to take account of the daughter’s relation with the mother.²¹

Following these three texts, and aside from the work of Kristeva mentioned earlier, there was something of a hiatus in France in the theorization of motherhood, lasting until the end of the 1990s. Apart from the always-full shelves of popular self-help books for mothers, only rather normative and negative psychoanalytically based texts, which, like Olivier’s, lament the power of mothers and the absence of fathers, address motherhood during this period in any sustained way.²² This was undoubtedly as much to do with the lack of interest in Women’s Studies, Gender Studies, and Cultural Studies in the French academy and the concomitant lack of funding available for research in those areas, as with the continued dominance of psychoanalysis as an epistemological framework in France during this period. As Knibiehler puts it, even at the beginning of the twenty-first century: “Motherhood . . . is still not a real object of research. The human sciences – anthropology, sociology, demography – are only indirectly interested, in order to understand transformations in the family or variations in fertility.”²³ In the 1980s and 1990s, France seemed more interested in fatherhood, which was perceived to be in (post-feminist) crisis.²⁴ However, by the end of the 1990s and into the first years of the twenty-first century a resurgence of interest in mothering is evident, albeit, as Knibiehler’s quote above confirms, not necessarily feminist in perspective. Apart from Knibiehler’s own work, which continues to engage directly with mothers,²⁵ many of these new studies are concerned with

changing family demographics and with new forms of parenthood (*parentalité*) rather than with mothers *per se*.²⁶ However, this work comprises, in part at least, an important interrogation of what motherhood (and fatherhood), mothering (and fathering), maternity (as well as paternity) mean in contemporary France, given the increasing gaps between those who parent in practice and those who are considered to be parents under French law. Chapter 7 deals with this issue, since it specifically relates to same-sex parenting, which has given rise to a burgeoning body of work.²⁷

In contrast to the French situation, a great deal of Anglo-American feminist thinking in the 1980s and 1990s engaged with women's ongoing desire to be mothers, fueling feminist debate – Patrice DiQuinzio's *The Impossibility of Motherhood* formulating the “problem” that motherhood continues to be for feminist politics in terms of a conflict between individualism and essentialism.²⁸ One of the most influential texts from this period is Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking*, in which Ruddick theorizes the thinking that comes out of mothering practice. Here, though, far from claiming any kind of specificity for women, she distinguishes between practice, on the one hand, and biology and birth, on the other, arguing that mothering practice is, at least potentially, “gender-free work.”²⁹

Just as feminism in France foundered at the beginning of the 1980s until the resurgence of new groups in the mid 1990s,³⁰ so the British and North American Women's Liberation Movements fragmented amidst, among other conflicts, accusations of ethnocentrism. And motherhood was one of the key issues that divided feminists, both in the US and the UK: the dominant feminist discourse of motherhood as oppression was not recognized by many Black feminists, who, on the one hand, retained and celebrated the notion of a maternal genealogy, and, on the other, pointed to a Black tradition of “othermothering” and collective responsibility for children which affords a quite different experience of motherhood from that of the oppressed

woman in the nuclear family.³¹ Rather than trying to formulate a feminist grand narrative of motherhood, then, Anglo-American feminist work of the 1980s and 1990s went on to engage with mothering in its complexity, focusing on particular groups, such as single mothers or lesbian mothers,³² or on specific issues, such as maternal ambivalence or maternal guilt.³³ As Diane Eyer argues, maternal guilt owes its pervasiveness to the widespread culture of mother blaming, whereby constantly reinvented concepts of the good and bad mother police women's mothering.³⁴ Meanwhile, Estela V. Welldon's *Mother, Madonna, Whore* is notable for its specific engagement with the figure of the bad mother in an attempt to understand the dark side of mothering (incest, infanticide).³⁵

In the tradition of socialist feminist analyses of the 1970s, British journalist Melissa Benn's study of modern mothers takes account of poverty and the gap between women's experiences as mothers and the social policy and politics that pronounce on them.³⁶ In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Caroline Steedman finds both socialist and psychoanalytical analyses useful but limited, and proposes – and performs – a methodology using her own working-class autobiography and relation with her mother as a case study and to hold both discourses in check.³⁷

The mother-daughter relationship, which is the main focus of Steedman's text, has proved to be one of the most frequently recurring topics in feminist work on motherhood, confirming how, in various ways, individual women's sense of self is closely tied up with their relationship with their mother.³⁸ As Alison Fell's study of mothering in the work of Beauvoir, Violette Leduc, and Annie Ernaux finds, despite the three writers' critique of the dominant discourses of motherhood in their respective historical moments, when it comes to writing about their relationships with their own mothers, as they all do, their narratives are more ambiguous and complex.³⁹ Marianne Hirsch recounts a similar conflict as a member of a feminist mothers'

discussion group in the 1980s: “Although as mothers we were eager to tell our stories, as daughters we could not fully listen to our *mothers’* stories.” The women found they had sympathy for and were respectful of each other’s different accounts as mothers but, when it came to speaking, as daughters, about their own mothers, the old stereotypes of “‘impossible mothers’” returned.⁴⁰ Although the mother-daughter relationship continues to be figured as ambivalent – or, in France, even as a murderous Lacanian “ravage”⁴¹ – much contemporary European and Anglo-American feminist work is concerned with exploring the dynamics of identification and differentiation in the mother-daughter relationship along the lines of continuing connection rather than separation, and through intersubjectivity rather than relations of power.⁴²

Some of the most illuminating insights into the mother-daughter relationship, and mothers more generally, arise from studies of literature and other cultural production.⁴³ Hirsch’s *Mother/Daughter Plot* is a landmark text in this respect, and, indeed, is at the root of my own project, *Narratives of Mothering* being in part a response to Hirsch’s identification of the historical silencing of the mother’s voice in literature. Hirsch shows in her study of North American and Western European novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that mother-daughter plots tend, for the most part, to negate the subjectivity of the mother in favor of that of the daughter. Mothers in the fiction she analyses are, overwhelmingly, objects of their daughters’ narratives, rather than subjects of their own. However, Hirsch does point, tentatively, to the emergence of a “maternal subjectivity” via the mother’s voice in the most recent texts of her study. Hirsch’s analysis here rests on texts by Black American writers, such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, who, Hirsch recognizes, “clearly identify themselves as a new feminist generation in relation to the maternal tradition of the past, writers for whom fathers, brothers, and husbands occupy a less prominent place,

writers who are in a more distant relation to cultural and literary hegemony.”⁴⁴ My own exploration of the development of the voices and subjectivities of mothers in contemporary French literature necessarily takes a somewhat different trajectory, and the scope of my analyses of mothering narratives goes beyond, while also including, the mother-daughter relationship that is the focus of Hirsch’s study.

If mothers’ voices have largely been absent from literary texts, the voices of real-life mothers have been expressed in feminist studies, through interviews with mothers (as in Oakley’s *From Here to Maternity*) and in collections of experiential narratives by feminist mothers.⁴⁵ However, since the beginning of the new millennium a group of fresh mothering voices have come to the fore. A series of celebrities – or at least well-known to their respective publics – have published their own narratives (or “maternal memoirs”)⁴⁶ about being or becoming a mother: in the US, media feminist Naomi Wolf’s pregnancy diary, *Misconceptions: Truth, Lies and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood*; in the UK, writer Rachel Cusk’s *A Life’s Work: On Becoming a Mother*, about pregnancy and the first year of motherhood; and TV personality, Mel Giedroyc’s *From Here to Maternity*, appropriating Oakley’s title, also a pregnancy diary.⁴⁷ As their titles suggest, these texts “tell it like it is,” often with humor, entertaining while demystifying pregnancy and motherhood, and letting their readers into the secrets of what it is like to become a mother, of telling what (they say) no one told them.⁴⁸ These twenty-first century examples of mothers’ textual voices come across loud and clear, and their popular and high media profile means that their stories of mothering reach a wide audience. In France, best-selling novelist Marie Darrieussecq’s *Le bébé* [*The Baby*], published following the birth of her first child, can also be seen as part of this trend. Taking in the first year of her son’s life, Darrieussecq’s text is particularly important for its sweeping away of both commonplace *idées reçues* and theoretical concepts that swaddle babies and regulate mothers’

lives. For example, the narrator rejects the special place of the mother as primary caregiver – “Que le bébé, les premiers mois, n’ait besoin que de sa mère, la théorie me paraît louche” [“The theory that the baby, for the first months, needs only his or her mother seems rather dubious to me”] – arguing that anyone who loves the child can fulfill the role just as well.⁴⁹ She also throws doubt on psychoanalytical and psychological theories of infantile separation.

As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, feminist work over the years veers between the use of the terms, “motherhood,” “mothering,” and “maternity” to describe what mothers do and the relations they have with their children. Hirsch prefers the adjective “maternal,” since, for her, it “signals that there is no transparent meaning of the concept.”⁵⁰ However, “maternal” does carry strong connotations of care which, as Ruddick argues, are not necessarily gender-specific, but which resonate closely with the notion of the “maternal instinct” that is associated with Rich’s oppressive institution of motherhood. My own chosen term of analysis is “mothering.” Whatever term is used can be critiqued, of course, since everything to do with mothers is so ideologically loaded, but my preference for “mothering” lies in its ability to privilege the multiple and individual *experiences* of mothers over Rich’s *institution*, even if the latter mutates over time. Although Rich largely retained the term “motherhood” for both institution and experience in *Of Woman Born*, other feminist commentators have gone on to develop the distinctions she made between the two by employing “mothering” for individual experience and practice.⁵¹ This distinction is very useful and allows for terms and definitions that have a bearing on mothers to be challenged and interrogated. However, as we will see, especially in Chapters 6 and 7 (on single mothers and lesbian mothers respectively), mothering and motherhood still exist in an uneasy and conflictual relationship with each other, and motherhood as institution continues to impinge on mothering as practice.

The term “mother” is itself also open to question, of course. What does it mean to mother, to be a mother, in particular circumstances? Hansen discusses this at length at the start of her study, drawing attention to the complexity and fragmentation of the concept in contemporary times, “in which one child may have a genetic mother, a gestational mother, and a custodial mother, each of whom is a different person.”⁵² However, the division of mothering between different mother figures that Hansen comments on is not actually new. Although she relates it specifically to the current epoch’s access to highly developed reproductive technologies, one does not have to look far to find situations where children were brought into the world by a biological mother, but where their primary care was passed over to a nanny or nurse, and their spiritual and intellectual care was assumed by governesses or convent nuns and teachers.⁵³ But if parallels can be found across the centuries, as the historicizations of mothers I have discussed above show, meanings also change, depending on the historical and cultural moment, and according to academic discipline and level of analysis. It is always difficult to continue to use a term while simultaneously also opening it up to interrogation. Here, rather than imposing a single definition, I use the term “mother” in a general sense to describe a range of experiences, acts, and relations, allowing the literary narratives of those who are mothering to offer a range of different meanings.

But why mothers at all? If, as Badinter, and indeed Ruddick, argue, mothering is gender-free work, would it not be more informative to focus on parenting – on fathering as well as mothering? Moreover, if, as Knibiehler and Neyrand note, the new notion of *parentalité* [parenthood] has emerged in France precisely in response to questions about the changing meanings of “mother” and “father,” why limit this study to narratives of mothering?⁵⁴ My focus on mothers and mothering is not intended to negate the role of the father or of any other parental or kinship relations, formal or

informal, nor is it to deny that men can mother.⁵⁵ Rather, it is to recognize that inequalities still exist between the sexes, and between women, that despite decades of feminist theorization, activism, and achievement, women are, on the whole, still the ones who are responsible for primary childcare, and that they continue to experience difficulties in negotiating the conflicting demands of mothering and other aspects of their lives.

The aim of my study is also to engage with the momentous new trend in narratives of mothering in women's writing in France that I outlined in Chapter 1, arguably the first time in French literature that mothers in reasonably large numbers have become narrative subjects and that mothering has become the subject of their narratives.⁵⁶ First, however, it is necessary to situate this body of work in a literary tradition.

Mothers and/in French Literature

Mothers are everywhere to be found in French literature. Even a rapid scan across the ages reveals numerous examples. In the seventeenth century, the mother in Mme de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* has a long-lasting and controlling influence on the eponymous protagonist. In the eighteenth-century, Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* raises the mother to new heights of idealization, and, in doing so, confines women to motherhood. In the nineteenth-century, mothers become the romantic, idealized, objects of desire of young male protagonists in Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir*, Balzac's *Le lys dans la vallée* and Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale*. Yet, elsewhere in nineteenth-century literature, mothers are denigrated as representatives of their social class and milieu, as, for example in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, in which Emma Bovary's boredom with life as bourgeois wife and mother leads to her (self-)destruction, and, in Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels, where, in accordance with

his “scientific” method, the working-class Gervaise from *L’assommoir* transmits her moral and social decline as a pathological heritage to her children in later novels. In the first half of the twentieth century, the mother is once again idealized in literature, famously, in the work of Colette. Colette – or, rather, her “autofictional” narrator – speaks, variously, as both daughter and mother, but, on the whole, mothers in French literature up until this time are objects of narration, not narrative subjects in their own right. Important exceptions to this rule, such as Christine de Pisan in the fifteenth century, who was a mother and also wrote, among other things, educational treatises for mothers,⁵⁷ Mme de Sévigné’s extended and extensive correspondence with her daughter in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth, Mme d’Epinay’s *Conversations d’Émilie*, point to a sparsely populated yet existing tradition of mother-centered narratives.⁵⁸

In the wake of 1970s feminism and the Mouvement de la Libération des femmes [Women’s Liberation Movement] in France, the mother continued to be a dominant theme in literature, especially in writing by women. The mother is, for example, a key – and highly ambivalent – figure in the work of Marie Cardinal, Chantal Chawaf, Paule Constant, Marguerite Duras, Annie Ernaux, Nancy Huston, Jeanne Hyvrard. However, as in Hirsch’s analysis, the mother is, on the whole, portrayed here from the point of view of the daughter, although in some texts – notably Marie Cardinal’s *La clé sur la porte* [*The Key in the Door*] – the narrator recounts her own experiences of mothering.⁵⁹

In the 1990s, the relation between mother and daughter is still portrayed as complex and ambivalent from the perspective of the daughter, in, for example, texts by Nina Bouraoui, Marie Darrieussecq, Régine Detambel, Clothilde Escalle, Michèle Gazier, Justine Lévy, Marie Ndiaye, Soraya Nini, to name just a few. Increasingly, though, mothers are also now to be found as narrative subjects in literature by women.

Gazier's novel *Nativités* [*Nativities*] is a case in point, and almost comprises a microcosm of the whole corpus in its compilation of accounts of birth, sterility, miscarriage, abortion, contraception, pregnancy, stepmothering, lesbian mothering, and even male mothering, although not all of these are narrated by the mothers concerned.⁶⁰ Marie Darrieussecq's oeuvre is another good example, as it illustrates a trajectory in which the mother's voice becomes progressively stronger, coinciding with the author herself becoming a mother. In Darrieussecq's first, best-selling, novel *Truismes* [*Pig Tales*], in which the narrator metamorphoses into a sow, the mother is, ultimately, silenced, killed by her pig-daughter in self-defense. In her second novel, *Naissance des fantômes* [*My Phantom Husband*], relations with the mother are less dramatic but nonetheless distant. In *Le mal de mer* [*Undercurrents: A Novel*], as we will see in Chapter 8, the mother's own voice begins, hesitatingly, to be expressed. *Bref séjour chez les vivants* [*A Brief Stay with the Living*] brings the mother's internal consciousness (as well as those of her three daughters) fully into narrative, as, on a daily basis, the mother mentally checks on her daughters who live away from home. *Le bébé*, already mentioned above, is a mothering narrative *par excellence*.⁶¹ Darrieussecq's next novel, *White*, includes a traumatic narrative of infanticide, albeit not narrated by the mother, and concludes with a stunning narrative of conception. The novel, *Le pays* [*The Country*], is a form of pregnancy diary, while the collection of short stories *Zoo* includes several different kinds of mothering narratives. And published just before this book goes to press, the novel *Tom est mort* [*Tom is Dead*] takes the form of the narrative of a bereaved mother.⁶² Éliette Abécassis's ironically titled *Un heureux événement* [*A Happy Event*], which came to my attention too late to be considered in depth here, is a demystifying narrative about the ambivalence of pregnancy, childbirth, and early motherhood, documenting the loss of individuality to

the “universality” of being a mother, yet acknowledging some of the pleasures, including the *jouissance* of breastfeeding.⁶³

Undoubtedly a sign of the changing times, since “writing is above all an expression of freedom,”⁶⁴ the emerging voices of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first, suggest not only that mothers, albeit late- come to Virginia Woolf’s room of their own, are finally able to make time and space to write, but also that mothering is a topic to reflect on and to interrogate from the mother’s point of view. However, writing about mothering (and one’s children) may, for writing mothers, be the ultimate taboo. In response to an interviewer’s question, “What topic would you never write about?” Annie Ernaux, whose oeuvre addresses a number of other “taboo” subjects, replies “My children.”⁶⁵ Whilst the autobiographical – or autofictional – nature of Ernaux’s work arguably accounts for her reticence on the topic, in *Le bébé* new mother Darrieussecq acknowledges a similar hesitation in writing fiction: “Aujourd’hui je tuerai autant de bébés qu’il le faut à l’écriture, mais en touchant du bois” (54) [“Today I’ll kill as many babies as writing needs, but I’ll touch wood”]. Nancy Huston, who also writes about mothering, makes a similar point: “In order to write, I must forget that I’m a mother ... A mother has to be “moral”; a novelist must be able to go to the limits of his or her madness. Above all, she must not be “moral.” Even if I draw out images, emotions from my maternal experiences, I don’t write as a mother. ... From that point of view, to be both a mother and a novelist is potentially a conflict, it’s vertiginous even.”⁶⁶

Indeed, as the controversy surrounding Christine Angot’s autofictional treatments of mothering confirms (see Chapter 8), the risks – and courage – of transgressing such taboos are not to be underestimated. This has become ever more apparent to me during the period of the preparation of this book. Admittedly some of the narratives of mothering I have presented in seminars and conferences address

difficult topics but it is clear that, even in an open-minded academy, mothers are sacrosanct and there is a reluctance to engage with their voices.⁶⁷ Such reluctance suggests an underlying fear that, “if one is inscribed (determined) to some extent by one’s mother, then the work of the writing mother lays bare the context and motive for this rendering.”⁶⁸ Since “*representations* of motherhood reverberate with the complexities of our own maternal bonds,”⁶⁹ it follows that *narratives* of mothering may explode the myths and fantasies – and fears – of the mother that are part of our own emotional investment and subjectivity. Juhasz links a perceived paucity of narratives of mothering with the complexity of mothers’ subjectivity: “Because of the social construction of motherhood as an idealized selflessness, mothers are often wary of revealing to others the range, complexity, and contradictions of their subjectivity – a major reason, I believe, why so little mother-writing is done. Readers, too, who come to the text as daughters, or as mothers, or as sons or fathers, have their own vested interests for not wanting to encounter the multiplicity of maternal subjectivity.”⁷⁰

It is thus interesting to speculate why so many narratives of mothering have emerged in France in a relatively short period, since this is not always the case in other national literatures. In Germany and Austria, for example, mothers are present in contemporary literature but are generally represented, negatively, from the perspective of their daughter.⁷¹ In Spain, the daughter’s narrative still dominates,⁷² although, from the 1990s, an increasing number of narratives of mothering appear, written mostly by women writers who were born before the civil war and had children in the 1970s and 1980s, as opposed to the prevalence of younger women penning narratives of mothering in France during the same period. In Italy, as Adalgisa Giorgio shows, literary narratives of mothering have begun to increase, also from the 1990s on; here, they voice, above all, the problems of living out motherhood in contemporary society,

and also, interestingly, the difficulties of actually becoming a mother in a country which has the lowest fertility rate in the world.⁷³ Since the beginning of the new millennium, a distinct trend can be identified in UK and US popular and middlebrow works for maternal memoirs or “mother-lit” (some of which I mentioned in the first section of this chapter). In higher end literary texts in these territories, there are still few narratives of mothering written from the mother’s perspective, but some titles are beginning to emerge, particularly around the theme of a mother’s grief for the loss of a child. As for francophone territories outside the metropole, narratives of mothering from the mother’s perspective are still rare in Algerian, sub-Saharan African, and Caribbean literature, and no significant trends are identifiable, although, as elsewhere, some individual titles have appeared. African women writers, it seems, have been keen to distance themselves from the “mother Africa” stereotype that appears in so much male-authored writing; and there has been a similar refusal of motherhood and narratives of it in francophone Caribbean literature by women. In contrast, mothers emerged as subjects of narration in relatively large numbers in Quebec literature in the 1980s, a decade earlier than in France.⁷⁴

In the French context, as we have seen, the trend coincides with the emergence of a new generation of women writers, who voice many different aspects of women’s lives and experiences in controversial new ways. It also coincides with the weakening of psychoanalysis as the dominant French theoretical paradigm – a paradigm that hitherto had offered little space for the mother’s voice. That is not to suggest that psychoanalysis is a redundant theoretical model, but rather that a post-feminist, post-psychoanalytical time and space has emerged in France in which narratives of mothering – whether they are poignant, shocking, thought-provoking, or taboo-busting – are finally able to seek recognition.⁷⁵

However, whatever the theories are that are put forward to explain the emergence of these narratives in the contemporary moment, it is time, now, for us to consider what mothers themselves have to say at the turn of the millennium in women's writing in France...

Notes

¹ See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976).

² See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected by and trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993); originally published in French as *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).

³ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); originally published in French as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), first published 1949. What would Beauvoir have made of Segolène Royal, 2007 presidential candidate for France's *Parti Socialiste* [Socialist Party] and mother of four, a high profile example of the changes in women's lives and expectations over the last half century?

⁵ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Women's Press, 1979); originally published 1970.

⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985); originally published 1976.

⁷ Ann Oakley, *From Here to Maternity: Becoming a Mother*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986); originally published as *Becoming a Mother* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1979). See also Tina Miller, *Making Sense of Motherhood: A Narrative*

Approach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), for a more recent analysis of the gap in such expectations based on interviews with pregnant and new mothers.

⁸ Sheila Rowbotham, “To Be or Not To Be: The Dilemmas of Mothering,” in *Women’s Studies: A Reader*, ed. Stevi Jackson (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 205.

⁹ Christine Delphy, “Proto-féminisme et anti-féminisme,” *Les Temps Modernes* 30, no. 346 (May 1975); Les Chimères, *Maternité esclave* (Paris: Union Générale d’Éditions 10/18, 1975); Annie Leclerc, *Parole de femme* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1974).

¹⁰ I have enclosed “French feminism” in quotation marks here because, as we have seen, other currents of feminism exist in France. See Christine Delphy, “The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move,” *Yale French Studies* 87, “Another Look, Another Woman: Retranslations of French Feminism” (1995); Delphy argues that both the term and the concept of “French feminism” were actually coined by Anglo-American academic feminists.

¹¹ See, especially, Luce Irigaray, “Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother” and “Divine Women,” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); originally published in French as *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* (Montreal: Éditions de la pleine lune, 1981) and “Femmes divines,” in *Cross-References, Modern French Theory and the Practice of Criticism*, ed. David Kelley and Isabelle Llasera (Society for French Studies, Supplementary publication 8, 1986), respectively. See also Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), for an excellent general study; and Amber Jacobs, *On Matricide: Myth, Psychoanalysis, and the Law of the Mother* (New York:

Columbia University Press, 2007), for a recent engagement with Irigaray's work on motherhood.

¹² Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); originally published in French as *La jeune née* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions 10/18, 1975); "Obstétriques cruelles," *AUTODAFE: La Revue du Parlement International des Écrivains* 1 (Autumn 2000): 115.

¹³ Hélène Cixous, *Osnabrück* (Paris: des femmes, 1999); *Benjamin à Montaigne: il ne faut pas le dire* (Paris: Galilée, 2001); *Hyperrêve* (Paris: Galilée, 2006); *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* (Paris: Galilée 2000), translated as *The Day I Wasn't There*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ For the first, see Julia Kristeva, "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), first published in French as "Maternité selon Giovanni Bellini," [1975], in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); and "Stabat Mater," [1976] in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), published in French in *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983); for the second, see "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), originally published in French as "Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident," *Tel Quel* 74 (Winter 1977); and "Women's Time," in *The Kristeva Reader*, originally published as "Le temps des femmes," *3444* 5 (Winter 1979).

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Possessions* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), translated as *Possessions: A Novel*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva, *The Feminine and the Sacred*, trans. Jane Marie Todd

(Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), originally published in French as *Le féminin et le sacré* (Paris: Stock, 1998); *Hannah Arendt*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), *Melanie Klein*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), *Colette*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), originally published in French as *Le génie féminin, la vie, la folie, les mots, I: Hannah Arendt* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); *II: Mélanie Klein* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); *III: Colette* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), respectively. See Pierre-Louis Fort's Preface to Kristeva's *La haine et le pardon: pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse III* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), which does emphasize that motherhood is "one of the subjects most dear to her" (10).

¹⁶ This can be seen clearly in the published version of the radio interview with Marie-Christine Navarro, Julia Kristeva, *Au risque de la pensée* (La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 2001).

¹⁷ See, for example, Domna C. Stanton, "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Gender is now becoming a more common term of analysis in the social sciences in France, via the term "genre," aided by the belated translation into French of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990): *Trouble dans le genre: le féminisme et la subversion de l'identité* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2005).

¹⁹ See also Yvonne Knibiehler, *Histoire des mères et de la maternité en Occident*, *Que sais-je?*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004); 1st ed. 2000; and *La révolution maternelle depuis 1945* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1997). Here, Knibiehler extends and updates the history of motherhood in a more concise

form in a volume for the *Que sais-je?* collection, and she also addresses the “maternal revolution” of the second half of the twentieth century.

It is interesting to note the emergence of a return to stay-at-home mothering in contemporary France; see François Busnel, “L’entretien: Élisabeth Badinter, ‘Les femmes retournent à la maison. Pourquoi?’,” *Lire* (May 2006), for an interview with Élisabeth Badinter on this topic, who suggests that its revalorization is linked to France’s current high rate of unemployment.

²⁰ Knibiehler, *Histoire des mères et de la maternité en Occident*, 3.

²¹ Élisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, trans. R. de Garis (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), originally published in French as *L’amour en plus: histoire de l’amour maternel (XVIIe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980); Christiane Olivier, *Jocasta’s Children: The Imprint of the Mother*, trans. George Craig (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), originally published in French as *Les enfants de Jocaste: l’empreinte de la mère* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1980).

²² See, for example, Aldo Naouri, *Les filles et leurs mères* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998).

²³ Knibiehler, *Histoire des mères et de la maternité en Occident*, 3.

²⁴ See, for example, Élisabeth Badinter, *XY: On Masculine Identity*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), originally published in French as *XY: de l’identité masculine* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992); Didier Dumas, *Sans père et sans parole: la place du père dans l’équilibre de l’enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1999).

²⁵ See Knibiehler, *La révolution maternelle; Maternité: affaire privée, affaire publique* (Paris: Bayard, 2001); *Histoire des mères et de la maternité en Occident*; Yvonne Knibiehler and Gérard Neyrand, eds., *Maternité et parentalité* (Rennes: Éditions de l’École Nationale de la Santé Publique, 2004).

²⁶ See, for example, Roudinesco, *La famille en désordre*; François de Singly, *Sociologie de la famille contemporaine*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004); 1st ed. 1993.

²⁷ See, for example, Martine Gross, *L'homoparentalité, Que sais-je?*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), 1st ed. 2003; "Les familles homoparentales: entre conformité et subversion," *Chantiers politiques* 3 (2005); *Homoparentalités, état des lieux*, coll. 'La vie d'enfant' (Ramonville Saint-Agne: Éditions érès, 2005); Martine Gross and Mathieu Peyceré, *Fonder une famille homoparentale: questions éthiques, juridiques, psychologiques... et quelques réponses pratiques* (Paris: Ramsay, 2005); Anne Cadoret, *Des parents comme les autres: homosexualité et parenté* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002); "Une réalité bonne à penser: les familles homoparentales ne sont que la suite d'une évolution de la construction familiale," *Libération*, June 24, 2005. For other useful interventions, see Marcela Iacub, *L'emprise du ventre: une autre histoire de la maternité* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); and Halpern, "Maternité en révolutions."

²⁸ Patrice DiQuinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism and the Problem of Mothering* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

²⁹ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xii; 1st ed. 1989.

³⁰ See, for example, Lillian Halls-French and Josette Rome-Chastanet, eds., *Féministes, féminismes: nouvelle donne, nouveaux défis*, coll. Espaces Marx (Paris: Syllepse and Espaces Marx, 2004), for an "internal" view of such special interest and often mixed feminist groups, based on an "Espaces Marx" seminar in Paris; and Roger Celestin, Eliane DalMolin and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *Beyond French*

Feminisms: Debates on Women, Culture, and Politics in France, 1981-2001 (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), for an anthology edited in the US.

³¹ See, for an example of the first, Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983); and of the second, Patricia Hill Collins, "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother-Daughter Relationships," in *Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers & Daughters*, ed. Patricia Bell-Scott *et al.* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

³² See, for example, Elizabeth Bortolaia Silva, ed., *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); and Laura Benkov, *Re-inventing the Family: The Emerging Story of Lesbian and Gay Parents* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1994), respectively.

³³ For examples of the first, see Wendy Holloway and Brid Featherstone, eds., *Mothering and Ambivalence* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); and Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Virago, 2005), 1st ed. 1995; and of the second, Diane Eyer, *Motherguilt: How our Culture Blames Mothers for What's Wrong with Society* (New York: Random House, Times Books, 1996). Anne-Marie and Isabelle Filliozat, *La défi des mères: comment travailler, élever ses enfants et s'épanouir avec eux* (Paris: Dervy, 1994), offers a rare treatment of maternal guilt in French. Authored by a psychoanalyst and her psychotherapist daughter, it is, however, a somewhat strange mix of analysis of testimonies and a self-help book.

³⁴ See also Shari L. Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

³⁵ Estela V. Welldon, *Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1992), first published in 1988.

³⁶ Melissa Benn, *Madonna and Child: Towards a New Politics of Motherhood* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998).

³⁷ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1997), first published in 1986.

³⁸ For two quite different treatments, see, for example, Nancy Friday, *My Mother/Myself* (London: Sheldon Press, 1979), a personal account by a US feminist; and Steph Lawler, *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), a sociological study of the narratives of both mothers and daughters. See Lynn Davidman, *Motherloss* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000) and Hope Edelman, *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss* (New York: Delta, 1994), on the effect of the death of the mother on the daughter's self.

³⁹ Alison S. Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003).

⁴⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 26; my emphasis.

⁴¹ Marie-Magdeleine Lessana, *Entre mère et fille: un ravage* (Paris: Pauvert, 2000).

⁴² See, for example, Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, "Beyond Daughtering and Mothering," in *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed*, ed. Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, Karlein Schreurs, and Liesbeth Woertman (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Sharon Abbey *et al.*, eds., "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Mothers, Daughters, and Feminism," special issue, *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme* 18, nos. 2-3 (Summer/Fall 1998); Terri Apter, *Altered Loves: Mothers and Daughters during Adolescence* (New York: John Wiley

& Sons, 1990). See also Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1990).

⁴³ See, for example, Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, eds., *Representations of Motherhood* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, ed., *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Laurie Corbin, *The Mother Mirror: Self-Representation and the Mother-Daughter Relation in Colette, Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996); Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity*; Giorgio, *Writing Mothers and Daughters*; Hansen, *Mother without Child*; Mary Jacobus, *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995); Saint-Martin, *Le nom de la mère*; Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Feminist Intertextuality and the Laugh of the Mother," in *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant Garde* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), and *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), ch. 1-3.

⁴⁴ Hirsch, *Mother/Daughter Plot*, 16.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Katherine Gieve, ed., *Balancing Acts: On Being a Mother* (London: Virago, 1989); Maureen T. Reddy, Martha Roth and Amy Sheldon, eds., *Mother Journeys: Feminists Write about Mothering* (Minneapolis: Spinsters Ink, 1994); Susan C. Staub, ed., *The Literary Mother: Essays on Representations of Maternity and Child-Care* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2007). Also see *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, which frequently carries such testimonies of mothering experiences. For further information of this interdisciplinary and international Association, see <http://www.yorku.ca/arm/>.

⁴⁶ Ivana Brown, “Mommy Memoirs: Feminism, Gender and Motherhood in Popular Literature,” *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 8, nos. 1, 2, special double issue “Mothering and Feminism” (Summer 2006): 200.

⁴⁷ Naomi Wolf, *Misconceptions: Truth, Lies and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood* (London: Vintage, 2002); Rachel Cusk, *A Life’s Work: On Becoming a Mother* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001); Mel Giedroyc, *From Here to Maternity* (London: Ebury Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ One could also cite, as part of this growing trend for narratives of mothering, the art exhibition, “Maternal Metaphors: Artists/Mothers/Artwork,” curated by Myrel Chernick, at The Rochester Contemporary, New York, April 30-May 23, 2004, which brought together the work of artists who integrate their mothering into their artwork and/or their artwork into their mothering; and Patricia Dienstfrey and Brenda Hillman, eds., *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), an anthology of writings on the impact of motherhood on the composition of poetry by practicing poets.

⁴⁹ Marie Darrieussecq, *Le bébé* (Paris: P.O.L., 2002), 20.

⁵⁰ Hirsch, *Mother/Daughter Plot*, 13.

⁵¹ See, for example, Andrea O’Reilly, ed., *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich’s Of Woman Born* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2004); O’Reilly, ed., *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2004).

⁵² Hansen, *Mother without Child*, 1.

⁵³ See, for example, Paule Constant, *Un monde à l’usage des demoiselles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), an essay on the education of the daughters of the aristocracy; and *Le grand Ghâpal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), Constant’s fictional treatment of the same.

⁵⁴ Knibiehler and Neyrand, *Maternité et parentalité*, 5.

⁵⁵ See Andrea Doucet, *Do Men Mother? Fatherhood, Care, and Domestic Responsibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), on the subject of whether men mother.

⁵⁶ Knibiehler and Fouquet maintain that mothers have written in the past but that they have not written much about mothering (*L'histoire des mères*, 6).

⁵⁷ See Knibiehler and Fouquet, *L'histoire des mères*, 15.

⁵⁸ See also Simone de Beauvoir, *La femme rompue, L'âge de discrétion, Monologue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), translated as *The Woman Destroyed*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Putnam, 1969). Indeed, given Beauvoir's devastating critique of motherhood, it is quite ironic that she should be one of the few writers in the history of French literature to pen a set of maternal narratives, although these three short stories are only partly that.

⁵⁹ Marie Cardinal, *La clé sur la porte* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1972). See Lucille Cairns, *Marie Cardinal: Motherhood and Creativity* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), for a study of the mother in the work of Marie Cardinal.

⁶⁰ Michèle Gazier, *Nativités* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

⁶¹ Marie Darrieusscq, *Truismes* (Paris: P.O.L., 1996), translated as *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Faber and Faber, 1998); *Naissance des fantômes* (Paris: P.O.L., 1998), translated as *My Phantom Husband*, trans. Helen Stevenson (London: Faber and Faber, 1999); *Le mal de mer* (Paris: P.O.L., 1999a), translated as *Undercurrents: A Novel*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: The New York Press, 2001) and *Breathing Underwater*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Faber and Faber, 2001); *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (Paris: P.O.L., 2001),

translated as *A Brief Stay with the Living*, trans. Ian Monk (London: Faber and Faber, 2003). See Marie-Claire Barnet, “Du A bleu sur le front au Z rouge sur le nez: le corps-à-corps de Marie Darrieussecq avec l’écriture/*Le bébé*,” paper presented at “Focalizing the Body: Contemporary Women’s Writing and Filmmaking in France” conference, London, U.K. October 16-17, 2003; and Jordan, *Contemporary French Women’s Writing*, 90-111, for in-depth analyses of *Le bébé*.

⁶² Marie Darrieussecq, *White* (Paris: P.O.L., 2003), translated as *White*, trans. Ian Monk (London: Faber and Faber, 2006); *Le Pays* (Paris: P.O.L., 2005); *Zoo* (Paris: P.O.L., 2006); *Tom est mort* (Paris: P.O.L., 2007). See Gill Rye, “Marie Darrieussecq’s *Le Pays*: Threshold Worlds,” in *The Fantastic in Contemporary French Women’s Writing*, edited by Margaret-Anne Hutton, forthcoming, for a study of *Le Pays* as a narrative of pregnancy.

⁶³ Éliette Abécassis, *Un heureux événement* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005).

⁶⁴ Knibiehler and Fouquet, *L’histoire des mères*, 6.

⁶⁵ Catherine Argand, “L’entretien: Annie Ernaux,” *Lire* (April 2000), n.p.

⁶⁶ Nancy Huston, “Une aventure imprévisible et passionnante,” *Le Monde*, April 22, 1999, supplement “L’avenir des femmes: du ‘Deuxième Sexe’ de Simone de Beauvoir à la parité.”

⁶⁷ See also Jordan, *Contemporary French Women’s Writing*, 90-3, on the press reception of Darrieussecq’s *Le bébé*, which reflects this point; likewise see Susan Ireland, “La maternité et la modernité dans les romans de Monique LaRue,” *Voix et Images* 28, no. 2 (83) (Winter 2003), 51, on the resistance to and denigration of narratives of mothering in Quebec literature. In interview, Rachel Cusk, too, attests to a similar response to her account of motherhood, *A Life’s Work*: “My anxiety was that people would find it trivial. I was surprised they found it so offensive ... I was

surprised that people didn't want to hear the dissenting voice. It seemed to threaten them to the core. I never encountered my separateness from others more intensely than in the experience of people reading this book" (Anon. "Spirits of the Ages," *Source* [2007]).

⁶⁸ Laura Moriarty, "The Writing Being," in *The Grand Permission*, ed. Dienstfrey and Hillman, 106.

⁶⁹ Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan, *Representations of Motherhood*, 2; my stress.

⁷⁰ Juhasz, "Mother-writing," 407.

⁷¹ Chris Weedon, "Power and Powerlessness: Mothers and Daughters in Postwar German and Austrian Literature," in Giorgio, *Writing Mothers and Daughters*.

⁷² Christine Arkininstall, "Towards a Female Symbolic: Re-presenting Mothers and Daughters in Contemporary Spanish Narrative by Women," in Giorgio, *Writing Mothers and Daughters*.

⁷³ Giorgio, *Writing Mothers and Daughters*, 149.

⁷⁴ Ireland, "La maternité et la modernité." With grateful thanks to Maria-José Blanco, Sheila Dickson, Patricia Geesey, Adalgisa Giorgio, Sam Haigh, and Nicki Hitchcott for their generous assistance with information about the situation in Spain, Germany, Algeria, Italy, the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa respectively, and to Egle Kackute and Emma Parker for their very helpful contributions about trends in the US and UK.

⁷⁵ Juhasz, "Mother-writing," makes the point that "maternal writing, like daughter-writing, is a gesture towards recognition" (404) of "its construction of maternal subjectivity" (421).