the vulnerability Laike first admired in him: “a boy of two/breaks easily
on concrete/the weight of suffering/
crushes/a man of forty”. Ruth Pan-
ofsky doesn’t polarize husband and
wife here; rather, she wisely reveals
how the two respond in different
shades and with varying nuance to
trauma, even as that trauma all but
breaks them.

Part III moves the reader to
spawned suburban angst with the
abusive marriage of the couple’s
daughter, Hannah. In this last
segment, Laike finds some healing
when she finally acknowledges her
daughter’s pain and her own past
inability as a mother to breach the
silence between them. Laike and
Nahum quietly yield to their hard-
won knowledge of the inevitability
of loss, and in doing so, become
open to renewal in a future that lies
waiting. Panofsky closes the book
with Nahum’s voice as he reclaims his
deepest love for Laike. In the following
brief lines, Nahum fervently wishes
his family will again be bonded. His
words are a prayer and plea, sup-
ported by resolve and underlying
faith: “I will/the pardoning of souls.”
His words can not help but resonate
with readers.

I enter the world of this delicate
book and discover its humanity, un-
covering new meanings with a ripple
effect, which is all or more than I can
hope a book of poetry will do.

Carol Lipszyc (Lipson) is a published
author of poetry and prose whose work
has appeared in journals like Parchment
and Midstream. Her Literacy/ESL
Reader, People Express, with accom-
panying chants and songs was published
by Oxford University Press in Canada.
Carol earned her doctorate in educa-
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**NOBODY’S MOTHER: LIFE WITHOUT KIDS**

Lynne Van Luven, Ed.
Vancouver: Touch Wood Editions, 2006

**REVIEWED BY BETH PENTNEY**

On my long flight from Vancouver to
Northern Ontario during the holiday
break, I devoured the new collection
of essays _Nobody’s Mother: Life With-
out Kids_, edited by Lynne Van Luven.
First and foremost, this book wants
sharing. Second, it would do well on
a Women’s Studies syllabus. That it
can accommodate both a popular and
an academic audience is significant,
since feminist literature about moth-
ing (and non-mothering) rarely
extends beyond narrow academic
circles. The twenty-one authors who
contribute to the collection provide
a diverse terrain of voices on the
subject of (biological) childlessness
within a mostly-Canadian context.
They earnestly explore the emotions,
experiences, and ideological baggage
associated with not bearing children,
and they challenge well-worn gender
norms in the process.

Recognizing the need for literature
by women who do not have children,
rather than literature about women
who do not have children, Lynne
Van Luven has compiled a range of
essays that are poignant, direct, and
witty. What emerges most clearly
from the collection is the unified
insistence that one need not birth
a child in order to be motherly, and
one need not be a mother in order
to be a woman fulfilled. While this
is hardly earth-shattering for many,
as a PhD student in Women’s Studies
struggling with the choices available
to me as a female academic (children
or career, rarely positioned within a
“both/and” structure of thought), I
see this collection as a welcome ally.

In a pro-natalist culture that rewards
women’s allegiance to the domestic
and maternal as it simultaneously
brands the childless narcissistic or
neurotic, _Nobody’s Mother_ offers
women and men an intelligent and
insightful discussion about life
without kids.

Several of the authors are success-
ful creative writers and teachers; this
makes for a smooth read and touching
moments of insight that are often
missing from more clinical studies
of childless women. As well, the es-
says reflect a variety of political and
personal subject positions, includ-
ing contributions from Aboriginal
women, lesbian women, immigrant
women, women of colour, academic
women, rural women, working class
women, young women, and old
women. The collection is heavily
inflected by a West Coast authorship,
which I perceive to be a strength.
It would be exciting to compare a
similar anthology by women from
the East Coast, Northern or Central
Canada. Since most of the authors
call British Columbia home, _Nobody’s
Mother_ can be read for its regional
nuances in interesting ways. Notably,
the landscape factors into the essays
more than one might think upon
consideration of the topic at hand.

Highlights of the collection include
contributions from writer Katherine
Gordon, journalist Mary Jane Copps,
professor Jennifer Wise, Canada
Research Chair Smaro Kamboureli,
writer and carpenter Kate Braid,
and writer Sarah Leavitt. Katherine
Gordon’s “No Child of Mine” is
composed as a dialogue between her-
self and the voice of the typical nosy
stranger, who asks all-too-familiar
questions like: “Who’s going to look
after you in your old age?” and “Don’t
you realize how much children make
you part of a community?” While
some of the essays move towards
sentimentalism, Gordon is direct in
this mock conversation: she has never
wanted kids and doesn’t think there
is anything wrong with her. She is
happy. She thinks that people who
call non-parents “selfish” do so as a
way to displace their own frustration
with the “negative consequences
of having children.” Her essay will
have you alternately laughing and cheering.

Nobody’s Mother is not an anthology by women who hate kids. It is not an anthology by women who regret not having had children. It is a complex and varied collection that explores multiple ways to parent, and relationships between women and their mothers, women and their partners, and women and themselves. It addresses abortion, adoption, step-parenting, caretaking, travel, abuse, work, love, and writing. Nobody’s Mother would be an excellent text for use in university courses on mothering, women and popular culture, intro to women’s studies, Canadian literature, and creative non-fiction. It is also a book to pass on to women and men we know and work with outside the university, since it creates an opening for respectful discourse where little exists that is not sensationalized or condescending.

Beth Pentney is a Ph.D. student in Women’s Studies at Simon Fraser University. Her research areas include makeover culture, feminist television studies, and online audience studies.

WOMEN AND THE GIFT ECONOMY: A RADICALLY DIFFERENT WORLDVIEW IS POSSIBLE

Genevieve Vaughan, Ed.

REVIEWS BY JOANNA SWANGER

The World Social Forum (WSF) has performed a vital function for people dedicated to economic restructuring toward social justice and sustainable peace: it has empowered them collectively by introducing them to one another. Still, much of the discourse at the WSF also demonstrates that when people convene on the basis of a shared frustration with the global economy, they might use the opportunity primarily to create a space of comfort, which is accomplished in the WSF through the ritual refrain of such grievances as corporate irresponsibility, environmental devastation, and the long-known complicity of economic structures in exacerbating racism, classism, and sexism. To go no further than this, however, means an opportunity is lost, for the question of what is to be done must be answered through dialogue and collaboration grounded in critical analysis. The 33 contributors to this creative and analytically rich volume have answered the call to continue WSF-inspired discussions and collaborate in the necessary work of peace-building through cultural change toward economic transformation.

This collection resulted from a post-WSF conference in 2004 on the theme of transforming Patriarchal Capitalism via the gift economy. The authors argue the need for a paradigm shift to make solutions visible by recasting the nature of the problem. It is not a lack of individual morals or integrity on the part of certain actors—e.g., the agents of transnational lending institutions, corporations, and the investor class—that causes the aforementioned grievances. It is the cultural logic of exchange, the systemic imperative of near-sole reliance upon the profit motive to mobilize resources. The logic of exchange attempts to harness self-interest in the service of the greater good, but it has failed to meet needs, in large measure because this is not what it is designed to do. The cultural logic of gift giving, however, takes as its fundamental objective meeting the needs of others. Genevieve Vaughan writes: “The gift interaction is transitive and … [creates] a relation of inclusion between the giver and the receiver…. Gift giving implies the value of the other while the exchange transaction … is reflexive and implies the value only of oneself. Gift giving is qualitative rather than quantitative, other-oriented rather than ego-oriented, inclusive rather than exclusive.”

The emancipatory potential to be unleashed by and through the gift economy begins with quelling cynicism by making manifest the extant gift economy in operation, and this collection presents wonderful examples in this vein, such as Jeannette Armstrong’s description of gifting among the Syilx people of Okanagan (British Columbia); Rabia Adelkarim-Chikh’s discussion of solidarity economics within women’s banking networks in Senegal; and Yvette Abrahams’ discussion of gifting among the Khoekhoe prior to European colonialism in South Africa and vestiges of gifting that remain. This volume also contributes to liberation by excelling at highlighting the efforts of two vast groups of people who have historically been underrepresented—or ignored altogether—by prominent leftist critiques: Indigenous peoples and women. Both Jeannette Armstrong and Mililani Trask argue that what most unites Indigenous cultures in contradistinction to the culture of patriarchal capitalism is precisely reciprocity, both sociocultural and ecological. Thus, Indigenous cultures are the vanguard of workable economic structures, which, the authors