

Performing Parenthood. Non-Normative Fathers and Mothers in Spanish Narrative and Film

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Heather Jerónimo. *Performing Parenthood. Non-Normative Fathers and Mothers in Spanish Narrative and Film*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2024. 258 pages. ISBN 9781487554217.

Though the nuclear family is an expected norm in Spanish society, Heather Jerónimo opts in *Performing Parenthood: Non-Normative Fathers and Mothers in Spanish Narrative and Film* to highlight the multitude of examples of non-normative parenting that can be seen throughout twentieth and twenty-first century Spanish film and literature. This deeply developed text provides theoretical backing and historical context to the performance of parenthood, an act that is traditionally cast by stereotypical gender roles and heteronormative structures, particularly under Francisco Franco. Here instead, Jerónimo pushes boundaries by focusing on alternative portrayals of parenting, including that of queer and non-biological family formations, the representation and othering of the body, and the question of identity in the child/parent relationship.

In chapter 1, “Writing Fatherhood,” reading and writing are highlighted as aids in questioning performances of fatherhood within Spanish standards of masculinity. Analyzed through Lluís Maria Todó’s *El mal francés* (2006) and Santi Balmes’s *¿Por qué me comprasteis un walkie talkie si era hijo único?* (2012), Jerónimo shows how these authors invoke the idea of literary paternity in the novels to explore non-normative presentations of fathering. In Todó’s novel, the protagonist Lluís uses gay literature to understand his queer identity and parental role. Balmes’s character Fernando, in writing a biography on his father, comes to better understand the different enactments of fatherhood that exist. Looking to their own fathers, these protagonists reject the patriarchal father figure expected under Franco. Jerónimo’s exploration of these characters reevaluates fatherhood, employing theory by Friedrich Engels, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Christine Delphy to discuss patriarchy, sexual control, and male property.

Chapter 2, “M(other)hood and Disability,” looks to the futuristic short story “La niña sin alas” (1996) by Paloma Díaz-Mas to showcase the complex representations of a mother who discovers her child will be born without wings, yet decides not to terminate the pregnancy and instead accepts the disabled child. Jerónimo explores the mother as a multifaceted figure who at once supports and subjugates her child, biting off the child’s wings when they grow. Jerónimo utilizes theories by Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Adrienne Rich, and Rosmarie Garland Thomson to discuss the subjugation of the female body in connection to topics such as pregnancy, disability, and the monster.

Chapter 3, “The Shifting Face of Fatherhood,” moves to an analysis of film, centering on impotent Rafa who accepts pregnant Marina into his home and raises her children as his own in Ricardo Franco’s *La buena Estrella* (1997), and Leo, a widow who cross-dresses as his late wife to comfort his grieving daughter in Achero Mañas’s *Todo lo que tú quieras* (2010). Engaging with theory from Michael Kimmel, R.W. Connell, Fintan Walsh, and Judith Butler, Jerónimo investigates the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and gender, underscoring the spectrum of enactments of fatherhood that exist. Characters are evaluated through the lens of body performance, what it means to “father,” and “compulsory hetero-parenting” – a term coined by Jerónimo.

In chapter 4, “Lesbian Maternal Community Formation,” Mila Martínez’s novel *Tras la pared* (2010) becomes the center of Jerónimo’s discussion of motherhood in lesbian relationships. Though she discusses the relationship between Patricia and Sara, a woman raised in a convent who sees the nuns as non-biological mother figures, the focus of Jerónimo’s analysis lies in the relationship between Carla and Mel through Carla’s unexpected pregnancy. Jerónimo outlines the non-biological connection between mother and child seen through Mel, who has the agency to reject motherhood but chooses to stay when she begins hearing the fetus in the womb. Jerónimo brings back the concept of the m(other) here with Carla’s monstrous, magical womb and applies theory from Kristeva and Rich to investigate the interchanging of mother/daughter roles and the sexual needs of a pregnant body.

Non-biological family compositions are the focus of chapter 5, “Beyond the Biological Family,” and chapter 6, “A Family in all Senses,” through Luisa Castro’s story “El amor inútil” (1997), Esther Tusquets’s novel *Varada tras el último naufragio* (1980), and Fernando León de Aranoa’s film *Amador* (2010). In Castro’s tale, Alberto acts as father for his friend’s baby until he falls in love with her. Hoping to one day be considered a romantic partner instead of a father-figure, Alberto moves away, going from a present father-figure to an absent one. In Tusquet’s canonical novel, Eva takes in teen Clara, later ending their parent/child relationship when Clara tells Eva of her husband cheating. A discussion of doppelgängers, incest, and cyclical relationships drives the investigation into these characters, as well as Michael Warner’s “reprosexuality,” Butler’s theory of gender performativity, and Laura Mulvey’s commentary on the male gaze. As noted by Jerónimo, in each case, the parental figures do not adopt the children in question. Instead, they enact their roles as parents for a temporary period, leaving the children abandoned by their non-biological parental figures. The non-biological family created in *Amador* is seen through the affective relationships between Amador and his caregivers: Marcela, an undocumented, pregnant immigrant, and Puri, a sex worker. Though economic needs

motivate the relationships, the care developed creates a stronger bond than that which exists within their biological families. Using theory by Sara Ahmed as a guiding lens, Jerónimo divides the analysis through the five senses, underscoring the way the senses create moments of care between the characters. The precariousness of care work, gender roles, belonging, and the future of Spanish society is questioned throughout the chapter.

Throughout this book, Jerónimo expertly depicts a variety of literary and filmic familial compositions that act as mimetic devices for contemporary Spanish families. Jerónimo showcases how non-normative families can be performed both negatively and positively, empowering or endangering their members. Though Jerónimo does note the purposeful inclusion of the labels “motherhood” and “fatherhood”—as it is through these terms that parenting is often discussed—the author ultimately chooses to reject the patriarchal hegemonic standards of these labels, positioning the enactment of parenthood as a more inclusive ideology of care.