

Abstracts

Interdisciplinary Panel 1

Katarina Carlshamre (French, Stockholm)

'New father, new mother? The father as caring bodily presence in Swedish mother narrative novels of the early 21st Century: Sveland, Myrén, Sandberg and Nordin'

In my research on French and Swedish mother narrative novels, the role given to the father stands out as a prime locus of difference between the two literatures. In the French mother-narratives, the most striking feature of the father is his absence. In accordance with the 20th Century image of the father, he is typically excluded from the mother-child dyad, and when present, he incarnates not body and care, but rather a traditional image of the father as bread-winner, law-keeper and/or representative for the outer sphere.

In the Swedish novels, things are different. Without idealizing neither the situation in the stories (there are other figures of the father too) nor Sweden as a nation (there are still things which remain to be done) I will, in this paper, display some examples of a new and insistent trope in Swedish mother narrative literature: the father as a caring bodily presence. Partly in light of the French novels, I will explore what this presence looks like, and what it means for the narrating mothers.

Victoria Browne (Philosophy, Hertfordshire/IGRS)

'Oedipus Interrupted: Changing Models of Metaphorical Motherhood within Feminist Discourse'

The use of maternal and generational metaphors within feminist discourse - e.g. the notion of 'feminist foremothers' - has recently become subject to sustained criticism. One of most common criticisms is that maternal models cast feminist relations in 'Oedipal' terms of rivalry, rebellion, prohibition and entitlement, with the result that tensions and conflicts between feminists are over-interpreted in terms of unavoidable tensions between 'overbearing mothers' or 'undutiful daughters'. As such, several theorists have called for an embargo on maternal metaphors within feminist discourse.

This paper, however, will contend that these criticisms of the feminist 'matraphor' often take a rather narrow perspective on maternal tropes and models of motherhood. I suggest that a more productive approach is to explore the variety of significations that maternal metaphors can hold, and to consider the diverse approaches to motherhood being taken within different disciplines. To illustrate, the paper will outline some interesting recent research directions being taken within psychoanalytic theory on 'post-Oedipal' models of motherhood, within 'post-kinship' studies in the field of anthropology, and within feminist literary criticism. The aim is to show that maternal models can have a diverse range of symbolic expression and meaning within different fields and contexts, and moreover, that maternal models and metaphors need not be inevitably 'Oedipal', divisive or stifling.

Signe Howell (Social Anthropology, University of Oslo)

'The kinning of the transnationally adopted child in contemporary Norway'

Using empirical material from my study of those involuntary childless couples in Norway who, due to a virtual non-existence of native children available for adoption, in order to become 'a normal family' decide to adopt a child from a distant and (usually)

unknown land, I shall explore how what I call the kinning process transforms the unknown, unconnected child into “our child”. I shall link the practical and emotional journey that adoptive parents undergo, to changes over the past hundred years in the meanings of family, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood in Norway, and argue that these social statuses have become imbued with increased psychological elaborations and expectations which, in turn, intensify the feelings of those concerned. Transnational adoption raises important questions regarding the significance of biological and social motherhood (parenthood) as well as issues of race.

Interdisciplinary Panel 2

Abigail Lee Six (Hispanic Studies, Royal Holloway)

‘Changing Models of Motherhood and Mother-Blame: *Plus ça change...*’

Esas mujeres rubias (2010) [‘Those Blonde Women’] by Ana García-Siñeriz is a Spanish novel presented as a mother’s first-person account of her life to date, including losing her only daughter at the age of fourteen due to a rare genetic anomaly. Even though the text is presented as having been triggered by the bereavement and is arguably an extended meditation upon that – its causes and its effects – it would be equally accurate to characterize it as a study of three generations of mothers: the narrator in the present day; her mother in the Franco years; and her grandmother before that. It has been argued by scholars in the field of feminist disability studies that scientific advances and consumer culture have together increased mothers’ sense of blame when they have a disabled child. This paper will challenge that, positing that the religious discourse which the scientific one has replaced in secular society resulted in an analogous and equally pernicious basis for mother-blame and that *Esas mujeres rubias* illustrates the point vividly.

Chrissie Rogers (Sociology, Aston)

‘A sociological story about intellectual disability, mothering and care work’

This paper is about mothering intellectually disabled children and the broadly defined ‘care work’ involved that forms a large part of a particular mothering journey. It draws from my past PhD research and more recent policy and theoretical discourse and asks, does a nation care for those who are in need of care and support, and how can interdependence be promoted? Conceptually it engages with three spheres of care work. They are the emotional - where love and care are psycho-socially questioned, the practical - where day to day care is carried out, and the socio political - where social intolerance and aversion to difficult differences are played out. In this sense we might consider care and who cares? By drawing on maternal narratives it takes ideas around emotional work, dependence and interdependence forward by thinking about the relationships between mothers, professionals and everyday life of mothering an intellectually disabled child. It has been found that mothers are often left wondering about their own future and how their caring persona (potentially) spills out into their old age as their ‘child’ becomes a dependent adult. This, indeed, feeds into the notion that disability is a burden; to both individual and society; straddling psychosocial, practical and financial spheres. The need to recognise interdependence will, it is proposed; ultimately lead to a great many enabling and socially just practices. It is therefore important to look to the feminist ethics of care literature and disability literature to address and answer some difficult dilemmas in ‘caring for’ and ‘caring with’ an intellectually disabled child.