

Review of Motherhood and Childhood in Silvina Ocampo's Works by Fernanda Zullo-Ruiz. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, November 2023 · 240 pages · 216x138mm. Hardback - 9781837720750 · eBook - pdf - 9781837720767 · eBook - epub - 9781837720774. Price 75 GBP.

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As the book's title suggests, it construes the connection between motherhood and childhood in understanding the dynamics of the mother/child relationship in Silvina Ocampo's works. This involves an understanding of a specific type of mother/child dyad, highlighting the importance of exploring the maternal aspect in this relationship. This book is a compilation of Silvina Ocampo's work, an Argentine writer. A renowned writer, Silvina Ocampo needs no introduction. Her literary works, along with her collaborations and connections with other notable writers, have not only contributed to the cul-

tural and literary landscape of Argentina but also to the field of Iberian and Latin American literature and art. Her works often explore themes of identity, surrealism, and the human condition. Her stories often touch upon aspects of the human experience, including emotions, relationships, challenges of existence and tryst with the concept of psychoanalysis, particularly drawing on the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

The introduction starts with a quote from Adolfo Bioy Casares, Ocampo's husband which reveals that her writings were marked by a unique and original style, distinct from the work of other authors. Furthermore, the idea that her works may have been influenced by themselves implies a self-generating and independent creative process, highlighting Ocampo's individuality as a writer.

The assortment of Ocampo's works has been divided into two different yet interconnected parts. The first part is called as *Mater* (Mother) emphasizing the role of mothers and motherhood. It explores the representations of different kind of mothers such as the dead mother in *Rhadamantbos*, (pro)creative mother in *El Cuaderno*, the absent egoistical mother in *Las Invitadas*, the mercenary mother in *La Furia* and gender-bending mother in Santa Teodora. The diverse maternal figures provide a glimpse into the complexity of motherhood as portrayed in her stories. The book also refers to many critical thinkers and their theories such as E. Ann Kaplan's work called

Motherhood and Representation, which discusses the concept of "Master Discourses" to examine the theoretical context for Ocampo's exploration of motherhood. The juxtaposition of transgressive characteristics along with the figure of mother as chapter's titles violate the moral and social boundaries and thus, breaks away from the stereotypical and populist narratives created around motherhood. The collective examination of these works provides a panoramic view of Ocampo's exploration of the theme of motherhood. The stories offer diverse perspectives on maternal roles, highlighting the complexity and variability of motherhood in her body of work.

The second chapter delves into the complexities of the story "Rhadamanthos," exploring its layers of meaning and drawing connections to Greek mythology. It examines the story of a woman named Virginia, who, disturbed by the attention a deceased acquaintance receives at her wake, seeks revenge. Virginia spends the night after the wake executing her scheme, writing love letters from a fictitious paramour to the deceased woman to tarnish her reputation. The title "Rhadamanthos" draws an ironic parallel between the character Rhadamanthus from Greek mythology and Virginia, the envious main character. Rhadamanthus, son of Zeus and an unbiased judge of the underworld, contrasts with Virginia's vengeful actions. Hence, Virginia, in laying down her own law, equates sexuality with morality and revenge with justice. The deceased woman becomes a contested

narrative space where Ocampo reveals the silencing of the maternal voice amid the ongoing chatter about her.

Chapter six discusses the complexities of the extended metaphor of the deceitful body. Teodora, through her dramatic entrance in the mentioned poem, introduces the motif of gender-bending. She disguises herself as a man and enters a monastery, initiating a chain of binary tensions, such as the division of interior and exterior spaces, seen and heard, and fiction and reality. She faces public denunciations, accused of violating a pure girl and subsequently making her pregnant. The external appearance of her body provides evidence for her accusers to condemn her as a sinner. However, she refers to herself as a "pecadora" (sinner) despite presenting as a man in society's eyes. This raises questions about her self-perception and whether she still considers herself a woman despite choosing to live as a man. While both the poem and the unpublished story establish Teodora as rebelling against conventions, the story provides specific reactions and emotions that are not present in any of the three poems.

Whereas, the second part called as *Filius* (Son), emphasizes the connection of mother and the child, distinct roles of gestation and the subsequent creation of a new space, which is childhood, a crucial phase in shaping individuals and their identities. It examines childhood and its association with subject formation, the most studied

aspect of the family unit in psychoanalysis and critical inquiries of Ocampo's works. It discusses psychoanalysis, foundational theories such as Oedipus Complex and the Mirror Stage, key processes in psychoanalysis related to childhood and how their reformulations aim to unravel the mysteries of childhood by examining how subjects are interpellated by the dominant ideology. However, it also critiques psychoanalysis as it also has its pitfalls, and can hence, lead to ethnocentrism and gender normativity. The theories and interpretations may not be universally applicable, revealing potential biases and limitations.

Chapter twelve echoes tension between Roman Catholic and classical imagery established from the outset, echoing the Catholic binary opposition between the soul and the body. The title introduces the theme, stating that symbols of purity and mysticism can sometimes be more aphrodisiacal than pornographic images or stories. This sets the tone for the narrative, hinting at the complexity and blurred boundaries between seemingly pure symbols and spaces. It brings to light that (im)pure objects that accrue in the story, such as the white dress, gloves, pearl rosary, flower, and missal, create an ironic foreshadowing of the events that will unfold during the communion. The missal, typically a sacred book for religious rituals, becomes a focal point for the tension and attraction between the spiritual and corporeal realms. Unlike previous stories that examined childhood in var-

ious spaces such as a city, body, or estate grounds, "El pecado mortal" delves into the placement of the child within her home, exploring both real and spiritual dimensions. The story is described as a re-creation of a narrative that, in the cultural context of the narrator, would typically be disclosed in the sanctum sanctorum of the confessional. This suggests a confessional or introspective tone to the narrative.

The book's assiduous attempt to give a detailed examination of a subversive motherhood, highlighting its uniqueness as a distinct space that gestates (carries and nurtures) and then engenders (gives birth to) another separate space called childhood. It has intended to engage with subversion of various ideologies and discourses, using psychoanalysis as a primary tool but also incorporating social issues and elements such as race, rape, gender and death. It also addresses various psychoanalytic issues, along with commonplace beliefs about childhood, which are noted to emerge in Ocampo's texts. These issues are explicitly or implicitly addressed as the works tackle the notion of childhood. The book also utilizes Freud's spatial metaphors and Lacan's use of myth linking the primitive mind, the child's mind, and femininity. It also wrestles with concepts of Catholicism, capitalism, cinema, and populist narratives to explore and question the complexities of childhood and motherhood.