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BOOK REVIEWS

Is biology enough?

Mama: love, motherhood and revolution, by Antonella Gambotta-Burke, London, Pinter and Martin, 2015, 240 pp., £11.38 (paperback), ISBN 978-1780662053

Well known as a flamboyant journalist in her native Australia, Antonella Gambotta-Burke's book *Mama* colourfully conjures up her own sort of Pilgrim's Progress towards becoming a mother. As an independent, indeed workaholic, career woman, she had seen motherhood as a 'consolation prize for women who didn't have what it took to make it in the workplace' (p. 19), so she approached motherhood with little intention to be an 'attachment parent': she found the idea of demand-feeding 'ludicrous' (p. 94), and expected to sleep separately from her baby. Her family background suggested that she might struggle with motherhood. She alludes to the corrosive relationship she had with her own mother, and the suicide of her brother. Then, following the traumatic birth of her baby daughter, she was even warned that she was likely to suffer from post-natal depression and might find bonding difficult. Instead, she was taken by surprise by what she calls 'the rapture' (p. 29) of her deep connection to her baby. She rejected calls to 'get back to normal', and had little interest in 'getting her body back'; in fact, she found herself ignoring her husband 'as a man' but revelling in him as 'the father of my child' (p. 32). Sharing ordinary daily life together with their baby – 'life boiled to its bones' (p. 33) – she discovered a new kind of intimacy, based on a shared sense of vulnerability. 'For once, life was enough' (ibid.).

Sooner or later, however, the journalist in Gambotta-Burke resurfaces and cannot resist interviewing others about their take on motherhood. In this book, she intersperses reflections on her own experiences with her conversations with various notable authors on the frontline of love, such as Michel Odent, Steve Biddulph and Sheila Kitzinger. This could have been bitty, but in practice various themes emerge to form a coherent whole. In particular, she highlights what she calls the cultural bullying of mothers to leave their babies and resume business as usual. This ranges from magazines shaming women by asking, 'What's your post-baby body plan?', through to assumptions about protecting her career and maintaining living standards. The pressure is on to resist the child's needs and to resume work. Gambotta-Burke points out that if you know that you soon have to return to work, you start distancing yourself emotionally from the baby, knowing you will have to let go. As the well-known idler Tom Hopkinson puts it, 'You must go back to work quickly. Separation is key. Must encourage separation!' (p. 69).

Gambotta-Burke conjures up a masculine, adrenalized culture characterized by hurry, ringing alarms, constant TV, strong coffee, and the search for efficiency, power and control – the antithesis of a feminine, oxytocin-generating, breast-feeding culture characterized by slowness, relaxation, presence, trust and attentiveness. As Sheila Kitzinger describes it in her contribution, there is a profound sensuality in feeding a baby at the breast, looking deep into your baby's eyes – a blissful state that Gambotta-

Burke would like more women to know about. As she points out, it enables mothers to feel calm, responsive and empathic –promoting maternal sensitivity, which is so repudiated by our culture, but which resides at the heart of our ability to love. She argues that in our 'brutal' masculine culture, intimacy is difficult to achieve; people feel isolated from each other, and sad. Gambotta-Burke believes that '[i]t has reached the point where the lack of intimacy has been normalised. Those who seek intimacy are regarded either as zealots or as enemies of the corporate state' (p. 79).

The picture Antonella Gambotta-Burke paints is a compelling one. She raises the important question of why feminists started off by criticizing the patriarchal model, 'then adopted it as their own, promoting a traditionally masculine definition of success, seeking a traditionally masculine idea of power, and embracing pornography, a traditionally masculine spin on sexuality' (p. 48). In a confused sort of way, women have allowed femininity to be denigrated. They have bought into valuing independence over intimacy. Women end up looking for more 'me-time', 'when what we need is more "we-time"', as Michelle Shearer of *MamaBake*, a communal cooking project, puts it (p. 97).

This book packs a powerful punch, and makes its case with verve and passion. I happen to agree with most of it, but if I did not, I am not sure that this would be the book to convince me, as it does not present its arguments with any rigour. For Gambotta-Burke the biological aspects of the mother's connection to her child are all important. It is, I believe, important to recognize and honour this. However, is it enough? At least a couple of her interviewees do raise more political questions of how best to proceed from here. One of her interviewees, Laura Markham, founder of the *ahaparenting* website, argues strongly that the way forward must be for men and women to share early childcare and paid work – because men are also caregivers, and women also need adult social interaction. She floats Greenspan's 'four thirds solution', where each parent stays at home for one third of the working week, with paid childcare for the last third. Another interviewee, historian Stephanie Coontz, also comments that 'one of the best things women can do for children is to involve men' (p. 152). Yet Gambotta-Burke does not engage with these questions at a political level; she responds, 'how can mothers train their sons to be good partners?'. In essence, *Mama* is a polemic, not a considered argument. It is best read as an honest and searching attempt by one woman to make sense of her own experiences.

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Method in madness

Lacan on madness: madness, yes you can't, edited by Patricia Gherovici and Manya Steinkoler, London and New York, Routledge, 2015, xii + 274 pp., £29.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-73616-9

This wide-ranging 18-chapter collection about 'madness' overturns many preconceptions about the way that psychoanalysis is usually understood to approach the topic.