

The Invisible Labour of Informal Care: Parentified Caregiving in David Chariandy's *Soucouyant*

Authors : Walter Rafael Ramos Villanueva

Abstract : The overwhelming majority of scholarship on David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant* focuses on how Adele's dementia represents the preservation of "cultural memory" and the perniciousness of "historical trauma." However, by metaphorizing Adele's mental condition, these critics risk treating her dementia as mostly figurative, and they thus elide a more detailed discussion of the literal ramifications of her dementia diagnosis. To move beyond these readings, then, my paper will approach Adele's disorder as a literal medical condition and explore how her caregiving needs affect not only her but also those around her. *Soucouyant* subverts traditional caregiving narratives by depicting the difficult and typically invisible labour of informal caregiving that is undertaken by the families and friends of those who are ill or otherwise disabled. Because Adele's family is unable to access proper public healthcare resources within the community, the burden of care falls upon the protagonist and his brother, who become "parentified children." Parentified children, according to Nancy D. Chase, are "parents to their parents, and fulfill this role at the expense of their own developmentally appropriate needs and pursuits." The novel provides a depiction of informal caregiving that is multi-faceted and asks us to question why is it exactly that we place the burden of care on those who are not equipped to handle such pressures instead of putting the onus on the government and the public healthcare system to take care of its most vulnerable members. Ageing Studies scholar Larry Polvika notes that although policymakers often offer "pious expressions of appreciation" and acknowledge that informal caregiving is "the backbone of our long-term care system," governmental support for these caregivers remains inadequate. It is my belief that, by showcasing the struggles of informal caregivers, Chariandy's text combats this dangerous and empty political rhetoric.

Keywords : caregiving, dementia, literature, parentified children

Conference Title : ICDS 2020 : International Conference on Disability Studies

Conference Location : Vancouver, Canada

Conference Dates : August 06-07, 2020