Clarion Review

General

Fraudulent Fertilisation
Ricardo Ludovico Gulminelli
Trafford Publishing
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Fraudulent Fertilisation is a strikingly realistic paternity struggle set in Mar del Plata Argentina during the 1980s. It comments critically on laws which cause innocent women to lack choices and on the broad vulnerability to involuntary reproduction that now exists. It packs a scared straight effect similar to that stimulated by the movie *Fatal Attraction* but does so as a character study of modern romantics and intelligent schemers. This legalistic drama is built around a purloined condom and predatory behavior aided by medical technology. It reveals Argentina's clandestine abortion practice as widespread despite the operation's illegality and the disapproval of the Catholic church. Doctors' risk-heightened fees outstrip the amount women or girls from poorer families can pay without exposing themselves to compromising situations.

At the center is the plight of Roberto Buran a financially comfortable divorced lawyer of fifty years. Known for professional competence and reserved cosmopolitan charm Roberto resolves "to stop being a mere spectator" on life when he grows attached to a woman in her twenties named Alicia. Their passionate bond includes fatherly overtones. Roberto proves effortless prey for an extortionary trap; he's sued for child support and inheritance rights but not by his young lover. A complete shift in viewpoint away from Alicia as presumed protagonist occurs; she disappears from the action for quite a while after delivering an astounding revelation.

The mores of romantic relationships in the Western Hemisphere's most European of countries feature as a large part of the literary fabric. While fighting the patrimony claim Roberto and his lawyer Rocio talk with escalating immediacy toward consensus on the ideal components of a nonconfining romance.

This novel's characters do not simply appear and take action. Extended exposition causes stalls as each one's life experiences are reviewed from social habits and systems of mental organization to the battle scars of former loves. Roberto's friends assist legally and

perhaps extra-legally as well if it turns out that enemies intend to put him in the ground ahead of the natural schedule. The events of their youths—largely irrelevant to the spine of the story—are brought into the narrative out of apparent affection for their roman a'clef source figures.

The author is an arbitrator and a professor of commercial law at Argentina's Universidad de Mar del Plata. Gulminelli uses this figurative soapbox to decry aspects of the law which currently beg greater fairness or clarity. The story's moral in the narrowest sense with its chilling effect on would-be playboys is delivered through the voice of a villainous gynecologist: "…if men with a certain fortune knew the danger they were in they would no longer go around hopping into bed with strangers." Advances in genetic science are yielding unintended consequences and fresh plot lines also. The premise is a sure hook; such an unforeseen nightmare is only one of many new dilemmas societies must solve or suffer from as rapid scientific advancement merges with eroding expectations of privacy and individual sovereignty. All things considered *Fraudulent Fertilisation* is an original and worthy read.