



Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik. *Femininity as a source of socio-cultural anxieties. Crystallizations and Dispersions*. Poznan 2020: Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 181.

If one wishes to become conversant with recent trends in femininity research and thinking about the timeless icons of womanhood, Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik's recently published book is as good a source as one can find. The emphasis is largely on the interpretation of the literary, medical, religious, philosophical and iconography sources of the past few decades, with a focus on its ambivalences and contradictions. An attractive aspect of the publication is that the author seeks to construct substantial interfaces with the Western culture which is rediscovered with new, universal and important feminine stories.

Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik's book is the final result of her previous publications and research dedicated to gender studies, femininity and social inequalities of the last two decades. Those aspects are extensively described in the introductory chapter. Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik is a professor and the head of the Multicultural Education and Social Inequality Research Department at Adam Mickiewicz University (Faculty of Educational Studies) in Poznań. She has written numerous articles in both Polish and foreign academic journals, which are mentioned in the beginning of the book. The reviewed book is based on her long-term interests and careful observation of the dynamics of the female identity.

The publication is divided into three sections with three chapters each. The first presents classical figures: Ophelia, Salome and the Lady of Shalott, examined through literature, art and the social context. The second section focuses on the relationship between the femininity and fairy tale characters. Only in the third section does Gromkowska-Melosik examine the femininity attributes, which are presented as a confrontation between the objectification and emancipation. After the final summary, the reader will find the extensive references list. The structure of this book is chronological which makes it clear and easy to follow the author's thoughts. What is more, the language of the volume is poetic and reader-friendly from the first to the last page.

The first part of this book is a section concerning the anxieties around femininity such as the fear of women's emancipation and power. Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik describes them based on the Lady of Shalott who is imprisoned in a symbolic patriarchal tower, Salome—a femme fatale embodiment and Ophelia—a woman consumed by madness. A careful reader will notice the changes

in the social position of women in the second half of the XIXth century, which are presented by the author.

The heart of the publication is constituted by the middle section with three chapters dealing with the magic of fairy stories in terms of social norms and values as well as in the classical and sexual contexts. The following characters: Cinderella, the Snow Queen and Little Red Riding Hood are analysed and interpreted in the light of the meanings inscribed in them from the past until now.

According to the author, these popular fairy colourful characters represents the femininity-related anxieties.

The last section of the book concentrates on the symbols of femininity: red lipstick, high heels and a corset. On the one hand, these objects were perceived as sexual synonyms of women's subjugation and oppression, but on the other hand many women perceive them now as a symbol of empowerment, freedom and control or even, more importantly, their dominance over men. The section has much to offer to the readers who interprets carefully the changes in the mass culture, they will value it the most.

To step into this book is to enter the dual sensitivity of the author as a scientist and as a woman who is a part of the male dominated world. That is why this particular publication truly teaches about the femininity in the modern times maintaining the past and present perspective. It is interesting to see how this book reflects some of the current efforts and concerns in the gender studies. This publication clearly fulfills its stated purpose and serves as a valuable resource for the next generation of scientists, women and everyone who is concerned with the problems described by the author.

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