

**Katarzyna Szumlewicz. *Love and economics in literary biographies of women*. Warsaw 2017: Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Pp. 206.**

The author analyses and compares the fate of heroines of selected novels and theatrical plays from Europe, the United States, Canada and India throughout nineteenth and twentieth century. According to Szumlewicz, literature under cover of fiction (often disclosing the fates and experiences of the creators themselves) best reflects the reality of the social mechanisms that crushed the subjectivity of a woman in a human, economic and psychological dimension. The author helps the reader in the emancipatory understanding of the fate of heroines showing them through an interdisciplinary approach, that is, in literature, sociology, philosophy and pedagogy context. She understands emancipation as breaking up with subjugation and inequality, which leads to the enslavement and suffering of women, albeit differently perceived according to their social position. Szumlewicz critically analyses love of higher class women, servants, black women and prostitutes, their dreams of great affection, social responsibilities and marriage as a financial agreement. All these women are patriarchal hostages without being able to make subjective decisions in the sphere of their life, body, economy, work or divorce. She draws attention to the heroines' childhood, their upbringing and their development of the concept of love and femininity, the experience of motherhood in various socio-economic contexts, also in the setting of social changes at that time.

The subject of love and economy seems to be conventional and many times processed, but this time the author, in addition to the analysis of women's adjustment and conformity, seeks the manifestations of their resistance strategies, rebellions, and factors enabling nonconformity in future generations of women. Although female characters in literature are stifled and subordinated in a socially sanctioned manner, they show their revolt against the Victorian era women's role. They express emancipatory aspirations depending on their social affiliation, skin colour and geographical context. All women in the analysed novels desire the right to pursue their ambition, subjectivity, ability, self-fulfilment, free choice, decision-making, open feeling and interpretation of the world, security, the right to exercise their sexuality in the way they choose. The rebellion and the desire to fight are not marginal to the nineteenth and twentieth-century of literary fiction created by female and male writers. It is worth to look at this monograph precisely from this context.

The book consists of ten chapters preceded by the introduction.

In the first chapter, Jane Austen's novels characters are subject to the analysis. The unfavourable financial situation and the threat of declassification are the underlying motives for the pursuit of a marriage of well-educated women from the higher spheres. Only beautiful maidens, with a dowry or noble origin,

are expressing their opinions. Conversely, those with a lost sense of economic security usually present the conservative submission attitude. The punishment for 'disobedient' women is social ostracism, communal and matrimonial exclusion.

In Chapter Two, the analysis of the governess' biography in the novel by Charlotte Brontë, leads to the conclusion that a woman who finds in herself an adequate self-esteem can take on the pursuit of her ambition. Her character went beyond psychological and social boundaries at the time. But not all women benefit from the liberated energy of emancipatory aspirations in the constructive direction, for example, the characters from *Wuthering Heights*.

The third chapter reveals the heroines of the Victorian period in Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Sarah Waters, Michel Faber novels, which show examples of woman's mental incapacitation in the light of existing law. Wives who didn't want to subdue to iron rules of Victorian marriage, i.e. the misappropriation of the wife's property by her husband, the different standards of sexual behaviour, the inability to divorce, were diagnosed with mental illness and were deprived of their freedom. Women who were mentally healthy and emotionally resilient that is who had male characteristics at the time, could persist in exclusion, plan to escape, take revenge and fight for the abolition of the Victorian ideal of femininity.

Chapter Four deals with the subject of prostitutes' lives in the light of the novels of Alexander Dumas and Emilie Zola. The prostitute decides about her own life, about her body and finances, unlike patriarchally accepted, but without sexual experience, asexual, obedient and reduced to the maternal role wife. Ranks of prostitutes swell with working women, whose wages are substantially lower than men's, and are not high enough to sustain themselves and their children. Prostitution was the rebellion of women against social inequalities which was reducing their emancipatory energy. It was a challenge to the adopted vision of women's allegiances. Prostitution was punished by depriving a woman of her dignity in a hospital or prison and was accompanied by a vision of premature biological death. When at the funeral, the solidarity of women (then the niche) was a prelude to the collective strength of women.

The fifth chapter presents the women in the view of Henry Ibsen. The role of a show-and-idle wife or sacrificing mother was not enough. Literary heroines possess the necessary skills and are successful in culture and entrepreneurship, but the effects of their activities are given away and attributed to men. Ibsen notes that there is an impulse for emancipation in these spheres, they begin to reveal their ambition and self-fulfilment, which in turn strengthens their sense of dignity.

The sixth chapter analyses the fate of women called 'invisible', in the light of selected novels by Gabriela Zapolska and Zofia Nałkowska. The servants are the subject of instrumental treatment, including sexual ones, and are consequently condemned to professional and economic exclusion. There is no hope for emancipation for these women, except for the conscious, voluntary acceptance of the role of a prostitute.

Chapter seven touches the topic of the relationship of women from higher socioeconomic status with men of a lower rank. Characters of the novel 'Lady Chatterley's Lovers' and 'The God of Small Things' do not enjoy their existing sex life, therefore are seeking satisfaction with men from a lower class, while risking the loss of identity and economic security. This behaviour can be interpreted as the expression of women's rebellion against the different standard of sexual behaviour, as an expression of emancipatory aspirations in the pursuit of sexuality, in an individually chosen way.

In the eighth chapter, heroines from Alice Munro and Marilyn French novels, show the origin of the sense of defeat of emancipated women. The causes of mental failures are pointed out in socially instilled expectations of conformity, a sense of lesser value and life and erotic passivity. The dream of emancipated women of equality in their relationship, the right to their own lives, in the light of social mechanisms, sexual discrimination, often ends with reconciliation of heroines with reality. Reflection on the factors of failure of women's emancipation is an opportunity that can be seen to their constructive changes.

Chapter nine is an analysis of the fate of black women in novels 'Beloved' and 'Purple'. There is a stereotype of a sexual assault consent, but also women's role is being reduced to the housewife only. Black women were charismatic and had a group power and were not perceived as weak or incapable of undertaking difficult life challenges, unlike white women.

The final chapter of the book includes heroines from novels by Elfriede Jelinek and Marlene Streeruwitz. Women who are aware of their abilities choose emancipation in a professional activity, but the expected independence takes the form of fiction due to vocational abuse, power disparities and women's occupational discrimination. Socially expected to finish a professional episode by becoming a wife and taking up work at home. The success of literary heroines is to break the tradition of anti-female propaganda and to toughen up their daughters.

After this selective review in the context of the emancipatory struggle of literary heroines across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is worth verbalising, what is added value of this writing, in addition to its evident cognitive qualities. A semblance of happiness and fulfilment of women together with social recipes for them existed and still exist. Reading can stimulate a critical reflection on the individual sense of complete self-fulfilment of a woman and the degree to which she uses the subjectivity, which previous generations of women have won incurring the enormous psychological, social and economic costs. The challenge of this book may be to look for our emancipatory demands because we have an exceptional courage for it today.

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