

Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu, Femei, corpuri, pasiuni în literatura lui Heinrich Mann. Iași: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza”, Iași. 2012. Pp. 385. ISBN 978-973-703-795-4.

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Abstract:

*Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu's book can be considered a valuable contribution to the surveys dealing with the semiotics of bodies because it focuses on how women's bodies 'talk' to men and because it also analyses the animal metaphors employed to depict the female characters. A revised edition of this book was published at Hartung-Gorre Verlag (Konstanz/Germany) in 2021: *Das problematische Weib in Heinrich Manns Frühwerk*. It seems the semiotics of bodies is a field which highly interests the author as she has published several other articles and book chapters on this topic ("Female Bodies in Interaction: From Figures in Children's Literature to their Animated Representation" or "Sprechende Körper – eine Semiotik der Körper") which discusses how the human body becomes a potential vehicle for different semiotic signs. Starting from Sebeok's and Chandler's theories on semiotic signs, Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu illustrates how the body parts have their own language especially when the female characters are silenced by male authors.*

*The book analyses the women's bodies in the fin de siècle literature written by Heinrich Mann where the bodies 'express' the cultural and social values of the 19th century Germany, 'talk' about the power and authority of a gender over the other, thus various body parts (hair, legs, shoulders, mouth) become semiotic signs (indices, symbols, icons). The construction of women's identity is possible through their gestures and proxemics which transmit the readers the roles of characters based on gender stereotypes. Moreover, Bălinișteanu-Furdu suggests that the human body and the clothes reflect the person's social position, one's cultural background and education. In addition, posture and attitude highlight the difference in status between male and female characters. Make-up and hairstyle, too, become semiotic indices for the women's social status, as they are used by women (instead of their voices) to express themselves in front of men. The author is interested in analysing this new 'language' employed by Heinrich Mann in his novels because women have always been defined as the Other and patriarchal structures have always marginalised and ostracised them, as Simone de Beauvoir suggests in her book *The Second Sex*. Men are ascribed power, strength and reason, whereas women are dependent on men, hence their objectification and marginalisation. So, any attempt of making women overcome their confinement in traditional gender roles contributes to the creation of this new language.*

The readers should perceive Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu's survey on Heinrich Mann's female characters as an attempt at detecting the new language employed by silenced fin de siècle women who express their sensuality by flaunting their bodies and by letting certain body parts 'talk' for them. Speeches or monologues are no longer employed by the German writer; instead, he uses the woman's corporeality, thus the human body becomes a signifying system at the end of the 19th century.

Keywords: Women; Bodies; Passion in literature; Heinrich Mann; Fin-de-siècle literature