

Images of Woman in Literature(*)

by David Holbrook

David Holbrook's *Images of Women in Literature* approaches the issue from totally unusual angle, that of philosophical anthropology. He claims that a significant theme that remained unexplained to him emerged after a number of publications in poetry, on education, notably English literature, novels and literary criticism and philosophy. The theme in question is the association between woman and death. To be more specific, he wishes to examine *the problem of a man's relationship with his female element and the phantom woman of his unconscious*.¹⁾

He examines images of women in literature by looking at two plays by James Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan* and a selection of Shakespeare's plays.

It sounds a bit too literary at first, but the style and philosophical analysis presented by Holbrook is capturing. Concerned with the nature of human nature and symbolism, woman is studied as a symbol. The emphasis is on the fact that everyone of us comes from a woman, was inside a woman's body. Each one of us was totally dependent on a woman without whom we would have died. Even more extraordinary is that being inside a woman means being inside a woman's psyche.

As far as literature is concerned, the connection we have to make is between the truths of philosophical anthropology - a discipline that takes into account the subjective and intentional - and the phenomena of consciousness surrounding our subject - that is, we must examine the symbolism of woman and the meanings attached to woman as a subject of poetry, fiction, and drama.⁽²⁾ I found it easier to understand what Holbrook means when I read another sentence in the same paragraph where he says that the women in various literary works may be understood as *attempts to express the author's attitudes to woman and their own female elements and the female component in human nature. They embody the author's attitudes to female knowledge and other modes, particularly within the authors' themselves*⁽³⁾

Holbrook takes the reader on an in-depth journey into the psyche of men and women, tracing back the personal philosophy implied in the authors' characterization of their female characters. It is an interesting and brainstorming book. •

(*) David Holbrook, *Images of Woman in Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 1989. ISBN 0-8147-34600-X.

(1) Ibid. pg. 1-2.

(2) Ibid. pg. 63.

(3) Ibid.



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