

# **Theorizing from the Body: Rethinking Feminist Narratology Through the Concept of Embodiment**

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For many years, the humanities have regarded the body as "a vehicle or object that houses the mind or the soul" (Hillman, Maude 2015, 1). The lack of critical attention to the body can be explained by the popularity of dualisms, which assume a division between mind and body, nature and culture, reason and emotions. These themes have been a constant presence in Western thought, from the reflections of Plato and Aristotle to the works of Descartes, the author of the famous dictum "Cogito, ergo sum." (Williams, Bendelow 1998, 1) However, in recent decades, the situation has been changing, primarily due to the development of cognitive sciences, which promote the idea that the connection between body and mind is much closer than previously assumed and that "they interacted with each other in complex ways to, only together, give substance and form to 'what and how we think, feel, and act'" (Sathi 2023, 1625). One of the results of these changes is growing attention to concept of embodiment. Human body, according to Mark Johnson, encompasses five dimensions of embodiment (biological, ecological, phenomenological, social, and cultural) which must be considered holistically (Johnson 2008, 164-165). Thus, embodiment is not simply "a rephrasing of 'body' but rather a term that indicates the ... framework in which the physical is always situated" (Hartung 2018, 9). By using embodiment instead of body as an analytical and epistemological category, it becomes possible to emphasize "the remarkable extent to which the mind relies upon the body to process its environment" (Sathi 2023, 1625-1626).

My presentation will be grounded in feminist narratology, whose theoretical framework I will reconsider in light of embodiment. The theme of the body remained undertheorized by feminist narratologists, although it would be incorrect to say that no such research has been conducted (Lanser 2022, 118). However, as Daniel Punday rightly observes, despite the central role of the body in feminist thought, feminist narratology pays relatively little attention to the corporeal, focusing instead on "the subjective positions women occupy rather than the bodies these narratives represent" (Punday 2000, 228).

My case studies are novels by contemporary Finnish writer Sofi Oksanen. Throughout her influential work Oksanen depicts female characters locked into their feminine roles. The texts include scenes of sexual violence, prostitution, and human trafficking, descriptions of the oppression of women in patriarchal marriages, eating and mental disorders. For the analysis of research material, I will employ a corporeal scholarly method. By a corporeal approach, I primarily mean, following Susan Lanser's terminology, "a way not so much of theorizing the body as of theorizing from the body" (Lanser 2022, 119). Its core lies in adding the question "who is embodied and how?" to Genette's classic questions "who speaks?" and "who sees?" (Lanser 2022, 124). Through this lens, I will examine what types of bodies and bodily aspects are textually inscribed (or absent), how narrative bodies are distributed within the narrative and discourse, and what relationships are constructed between embodiment, speech, and vision in the text.

Works cited:

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