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**Myra Macdonald**. *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. v + 250 pp. $16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-340-58016-5.

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Myra Macdonald, a lecturer in Communication and Media at Glasgow Caledonian University, has written a brief (220 pages), readable analysis of twentieth century myths about women as they are promulgated through print and visual media. As Macdonald uses the term, "myths" refer to ways of thinking about a subject that are widely accepted in a specific historical and cultural context, but that do not necessarily have a connection to reality. Thus in a given place and period, popular representations of women (myths) will reflect ideas of "the feminine" that fail to take into account the diversity among women, but instead reduce them to a simple ideological construct.

Recognizing postmodernist theory, Macdonald emphasizes the interaction between the text and the audience, the film and the viewer, in other words, the discourses of popular culture. She is intrigued by the question of why we as women continue to be taken with outworn myths of femininity, even as we criticize them. She makes frequent reference to the greater tendency toward playfulness in media representations of women, not because it is thoroughly liberating but because it is a sort of double edged sword. While advertisers may recognize the value of colluding, even superficially, with contemporary women's refusal to take conventional definitions of themselves seriously, the same advertisers, in Macdonald's view, cling to a rather narrow range of possibilities of what it means to be feminine.

Likewise, despite changes in the portrayals of women in movies–especially the stronger and more overt characterization of female desire–such passion is too often simply equated with sexual desire, and is too often rendered dangerous as it is identified with sexual predatoriness. Macdonald finds equally disturbing the identification of female sexuality with youth, beauty, and the acquisition of consumer goods. On the other hand, she argues that today's young women claim more freedom from the tyranny of myths than previous generations when it comes to fashion and adorning their own bodies.

All things considered, media myths concerning femininity have been quite persistent. When social and cultural developments have demanded some modification in myths, changes have been marginal and often superficial. Perhaps, the author concludes, in addition to including more women's voices in creating popular culture, a major rethinking and revision of myths of masculinity must accompany any reformation of the myths of femininity. And who would do such revision?

There is little that is new in Macdonald's basic argument about the falsity of mass media representations of women. What is most valuable is her extensive and sound synthesis of recent scholarship. Although she writes for an audience of scholars familiar with feminism and postmodernism, her approach is refreshingly sensible and non-ideological. Far from speaking only with the initiated, Macdonald encourages others to access her work by including an excellent glossary, as well as a comprehensive bibliography and filmography.

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