ForeWord Reviews

The Gendered Atom: Reflections on the Sexual Psychology of Science

Theodore Roszak
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Treading the tepid waters of its own psychology, science—with its proud progeny of method and laws—is met with an unfamiliar reflection in The Gendered Atom, as the waterwings of its unchallenged heritage are stripped away. Routing the turns of his insights against a gothic literary backdrop Roszak, scholar and teacher of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, presents an unlikely, yet surprisingly fitting metaphor for the wretched results of reckless science. Though void of the coarsely stitched sutures that joined the cyanic flesh of a monster's limbs, Roszak suggests that modern science does, none-the-less, share a common tailor.

Entering an arena that surely shall invite critical attack, the foreword, penned by pioneering scientist Jane Goodall, effectively quells the advances of caustic eyes reminding us that while scientists strive ideally for objectivity, "…we cannot remove ourselves from the equation." A professor at California State University Hayward and noted author, Roszak embraces feminist psychology which "contends that science cannot know the whole of nature because scientists themselves are not whole, no more so than the rest of us."

Roszak traces the current of modern scientific theories and laws, including the basic structure of atomic and sub-atomic structures, to the far tributaries of their exclusively patriarchal history and psychological genesis. The author suggests that the classical atom, for example, becomes a mirror for "stereotypic characteristics of the male personality," sharing such traits as autonomy, rigidity and isolation. At CERN, which houses a gigantic European subterranean particle accelerator, scientists employ "reductionism," which champions the use of force to reduce atomic particles to their components, rather than consider the relationships and interconnectedness of constituents—a gentler approach. The author urges that "The effort to find something more "fundamental" destroys the more basic phenomenon, which is relatedness."

Roszak follows with a discussion of "Macho Science," a prejudice he finds as tightly bound to its internal politics as the internal politics of gender roles is to the science of child-rearing, culture and socialization. Condemning the pendulum swing toward either extreme of gender bias, The Gendered Atom simply calls for awareness on the crest of a renewed millennium —for the sake of metered scientific strides.

Captivating with its rich literary allusion, The Gendered Atom discerningly draws a wide

readership to its glowing insights, appealing to scientific and philosophical minds as well as admirers of allegorical imagery. A plane is conjured, upon which readers contemplate the slumbering giant at CERN as lying beneath a veil of earth, as thinly laid as the veneer of classic literature.

Karen Wyckoff