



Toruń, 20.02.2026

city, date

Full name of doctoral student: Agata Rupińska

## DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Scientific discipline: literary studies

Title of the doctoral dissertation: Women, the Beauty Industry, and Personhood: The Poetics and Politics of Face in Selected Contemporary Fiction

Doctoral dissertation abstract: The dissertation is dedicated to the analysis of the female face as a body part, and as a philosophical and sociological concept in selected contemporary Anglophone fiction: *Invisible Monsters* (1999) by Chuck Palahniuk, *Look at Me* (2001) by Jennifer Egan, *Fix* (2006) by Leslie Margolis, *The Fold* (2008) by An Na, *Slant* (2008) by Laura E. Williams, and *If I Had Your Face* (2020) by Frances Cha. The depictions of beauty standards, the impact of the beauty industry on appearance ideals in society, and the key role the face plays in the formation of female identity in the selected texts are discussed.

The interdisciplinary theoretical apparatus employed in the analysis draws on knowledge from diverse disciplines, including literary studies, psychology, sociology, aesthetics, gender studies, and feminist theory. Additionally, a comparative cultural approach is used to underscore similarities and differences in beauty standards across the USA, South Korea, and the Korean-American diaspora.

In the dissertation, the author shows how contemporary literature facilitates a vital space for exploration and analysis of current issues concerning the female face, especially regarding restrictive facial beauty ideals and their consequences. The interpretation of themes regarding the face bridges a gap in the discourse about the role of physicality in the formation of human identity and the acceptance of visual diversity, which to date have been primarily dominated by discussions about the body. As demonstrated in this dissertation, writers criticize facial beauty norms, show the negative impact of the male gaze and objectification on women and girls. The face in the analyzed texts is not only a body part; it also carries vital aesthetic, ethical, and even political meaning. In the contemporary



UNIWERSYTET  
MIKOŁAJA KOPERNIKA  
W TORUNIU

visual culture, the face still plays a key role in human identity, conceptualized through the categories of individuality, separability, and self-sufficiency. The author proves that, as a result, humans are not ready for facelessness and a departure from an individualistic concept of the self.

*Agata Rypinska*

doctoral student's signature