

THE SLOW PROCESS OF DECOLONIALIZING LANGUAGE:
THE POLITICS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCES
IN POSTMODERNIST FICTION

BY

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the political value of postmodernism, by taking as its analytical focus the interrelationship between the conceptualizations and figurations of subjectivity that have been formulated by postmodernist theorists and writers. The study assumes that postmodernist discourse, being involved in the deconstruction of binary concepts, offers a fruitful terrain for re-thinking the human subject beyond the essentialist versus nominalist dilemma, thus thematizing sexual differences both without falling into the traps of the reductionist, dualistic, oppositional-complementary model of gender structures and by always contextualizing sexuality in relation to other discriminatory differences. Its main hypothesis is that postmodernist fiction is a privileged site for a critique of the concept of gender versus sex, and that feminist postmodernist fiction provides the most provocative suggestions for re-thinking subjectivity in complex, relational, provisional and yet historically substantive and thus politically determinant terms. The analysis works through readings of the following texts: "Entropy" by Thomas Pynchon; The Passion Artist by John Hawkes; Spanking the Maid by Robert Coover; Don Quixote, Empire of the Senseless, and In Memoriam to Identity by Kathy Acker; The Stain, Entering Fire, The Fountains of Neptune, and The Jade Cabinet by Rikki Ducornet; The Bone People by Keri Hume;

Annie John, At the Bottom of the River, A Small Place, Lucy, and "On Seeing England for the First Time" by Jamaica Kincaid; "Homesick" and Dogeaters by Jessica Hagedorn.

An introductory chapter focuses on feminist poetry-theory within the epistemological context of the crisis of modernity, in order to argue for the necessity of a feminist stance in order to liberate subjectivity from a preconstituted identity, posited as either natural or discursive, and to figure it instead as an endless proliferation of localized—figuratively decolonialized—images of the subject. It develops into a critique of the limitations of the concept gender, also in its connotation as "technology" (Teresa de Lauretis); it argues for the adoption of the alternative critical concept sexual differences, and discusses historically grounded—and thereby not mythical—elaborations of Donna Haraway's "myth of the cyborg." It does so through a discussion of the fruitful encounter among the discourses of feminism, postmodernism, and anti-colonialism, and emphasizes that the urgent task of feminism in the present historical juncture is to articulate a logic of interconnections, including the relationship between poetry and theory, which are both given equal status of critical elaboration. In a world in which the global reach of capitalism is increasingly accompanied by a fragmentation that invests not only politics and subjectivities, but also knowledges, it is imperative to stress that feminism is not only oppositional politics, but also epistemological and moral socio-cultural engagement. This logic allows us not only to conceive "woman" as the privileged locus of différance and feminism as a discourse which resists the balkanization of critical theory, but