

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:SS 2009

Department:English

Degree:MA

Title:POSTWAR MASCULINE IDENTITY IN
ANN BANNONS _I AM A WOMAN_

Postwar men experienced an identity destabilization that was unique to the era. Lesbian pulp fiction provided the opportunity for heterosexual men to "try on" alternate identities while simultaneously asserting their heterosexuality. Genre theory allows me to isolate discrete elements of lesbian pulp fiction, particularly the conventions of that genre, and explore those conventions in relation to other genres and in relation to the critical approaches those genres have prompted. The critical approaches of lesbian pulp fiction and romance are alike in that each has posited gender as a fundamental determiner of where a reader is positioned in relation to the text. (Is the reader inside the text or outside? Or is the text outside of the reader or inside?) Cognitive narratology, however, provides evidence for a non-gendered experience of a text where the conventions of the genre themselves determine the reader's position.

I will show how Ann Bannon successfully disrupts a gender specific experience of the text by blending genres, by controlling the gaze within the text, and by employing cross-gender focalization. In so doing it is my intention to argue for the formative power of popular literature to shape the identity of the reader. Specifically, I intend to prove that Ann Bannon's *I am a Woman* expressed postwar masculine identity issues and altered that straight male identity.