The construction of gender, sexuality and desire in Italo Calvino's works

Dissertation submitted by
Judith Patricia Wooller, B.A. (Hons) (Rockhampton)
in October 1998

in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in the Faculty of Arts, Health and Sciences of Central Queensland University.
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ABSTRACT

Many feminists argue that postmodernism is gender blind and that the deconstruction of metanarratives by postmodernism does not extend to the gender roles. In order to test that statement this dissertation will examine four texts written by the lauded postmodernist novelist, Italo Calvino. The major focus will be on the construction of gender, sexuality and desire within a selection of Calvino's texts covering a thirty year time span. The texts were chosen arbitrarily commencing with one of Calvino's early texts, *Difficult loves*, which is a classic realist text. The next *Baron in the trees* is the middle novella of *Our Ancestors*, and is representative of the fantastic/fairy story genre. The final two texts *Invisible Cities* and *If on a winter's night a traveller*, move into the modernist/postmodernist forms.

An examination of the postmodernist/feminist debate will be undertaken in order to provide a methodology. This debate reveals the differences between these two radical groups and the critique of postmodernism by feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Patricia Waugh and others will serve as a framework by which to examine the texts. The focus of this dissertation, while engaging with postmodern concerns, will be on the lack of contestation of the gender roles within Calvino's works. While it can be argued that his texts progressively point to the construction of knowledge and meaning; the displacement of subject positions and the instability of narrative authority, there is no similar problematization of female subjectivity, sexuality and desire as these have been traditionally constructed within patriarchy. Calvino, like many postmodern writers, does not contest gender roles or when he does, it is superficial and from a masculinist point of view.
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references given.

J.P. Wooller.
20th October 1998
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