

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

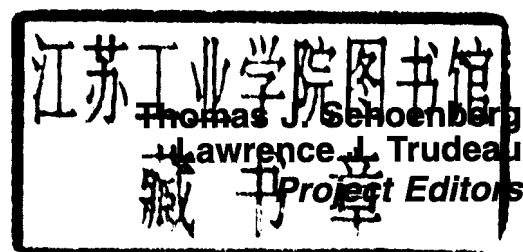
TCLC

191

Volume 191

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 191

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Kathy Acker

1948-1997

American novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist, and screenwriter.

The following entry provides an overview of Acker's life and works. For additional information on her career, see *CLC*, Volumes 45 and 111.

INTRODUCTION

Kathy Acker is recognized as one of the most prominent and controversial literary figures associated with the punk movement in America during the 1970s and 1980s. She is also considered among the most significant proponents of radical feminism and the postmodern aesthetic in art and literature. Acker is best known for her avant-garde novels *Great Expectations* (1982), *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984), and *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream* (1986), in which she bluntly treats such taboo subjects as violence, sadomasochism, incest, and sexuality and plagiarizes texts from other writers, including Charles Dickens, Marcel Proust, and Miguel de Cervantes. Although Acker's work has received a mixed response from critics because of its violent, pornographic imagery and its experimental form, many acknowledge its influence on postmodern fiction and praise it as an important contribution to feminist discourse. In 1989, Naomi Jacobs noted that "through semantic and stylistic crudeness, pastiche-appropriations of famous literary texts, and outrageous manipulations of historical and literary figures, Acker attempts simultaneously to deconstruct the tyrannical structures of official culture and to plagiarize an identity, constructing a self from salvaged fragments of those very structures she has dismantled."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Acker was born April 18, 1948, in New York City. She was raised by her mother, Claire, and her stepfather, Donald Weill. Her biological father, Harry Lehmann, left her mother before Acker was born. Acker studied at private schools during her early education and later attended Brandeis University and University of California, San Diego, where she earned a bachelor's degree in 1968. In 1966, she married Robert Acker, but they were later divorced. Acker spent two years as a doctoral student in classics and philosophy at the City University

of New York and New York University, before she quit to pursue a career in literature. In the 1970s, while trying to get her work published in small press publications, she lived in New York and worked as a secretary, a stripper, and a performer in pornographic films. She was also deeply influenced by the visual artists that she encountered in New York during that time. Her mother, Claire, committed suicide when Acker was in her thirties.

In 1972, Acker published her first book, a mixed-genre work titled *Politics*, which was influenced by the work of Beat Generation novelist William S. Burroughs. She published her next book, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, under the pseudonym Black Tarantula in 1973. Acker wrote and published four more novels during the 1970s, including *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac* (1974), *Florida* (1978), *Kathy Goes to Haiti* (1978), and *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec by Henri Toulouse Lautrec* (1978). Her second marriage, to composer Peter Gordon, in 1976 also ended in divorce. In 1979, Acker won a Pushcart Prize for her novel *New York City in 1979*. It was during the 1980s, however, that she wrote and published her most notable work, including *Great Expectations*, *Blood and Guts in High School*, *Don Quixote*, and *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). Early in the decade, Acker left the United States and moved to London. In the mid-1980s, she began experimenting with other artistic mediums. She collaborated on an opera libretto with Peter Gordon titled *The Birth of the Poet*, which was performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1985. A film based on her screenplay *Variety* appeared that same year. In the 1990s, Acker returned to the United States and published several more novels, including *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), *My Mother: Demonology* (1993), and *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996). She began teaching as an adjunct professor at San Francisco Art Institute in 1991 and also as a visiting professor at a number of universities in California and Idaho over the next few years. In 1997, Acker published a collection of essays titled *Bodies of Work* and a book of short fiction titled *Eurydice in the Underworld*. She died of breast cancer on November 30, 1997, in Tijuana, Mexico.

MAJOR WORKS

Great Expectations, Acker's first novel to attract major critical attention, blends drama, fiction, autobiography, poetry, and the epistolary form with sections of plagia-

rized texts taken from various sources, most notably Charles Dickens's famous nineteenth-century novel by the same name. The narrative begins with a revision of Dickens's introduction to *Great Expectations* and employs—while it deconstructs—the novel's *Bildungsroman* structure. In part one of the book, titled "I Recall My Childhood," Acker introduces multiple protagonists, including Peter, a character reminiscent of Dickens's protagonist, and an unnamed young girl, who is mourning the death of her mother. The second part of the novel, which some scholars consider autobiographical, relates the experiences of Sarah, a woman haunted by her mother's suicide. In addition to Dickens's novel, Acker borrows text from the erotic novel *The Story of O*, by Anne Desclos, and alludes to writings by Herman Melville, John Keats, and Madame de La Fayette. The novel ends with a comma instead of a period. Despite the formal disjointedness of *Great Expectations*, recurring themes of maternal suicide, sadomasochism, and gender, as well as issues of personal identity, connect the three parts and help to establish a sense of cohesion.

Violence and sexuality are also dominant themes in *Blood and Guts in High School*. The plot of the novel centers on the misadventures of ten-year-old Janey Smith, who is involved in an incestuous relationship with her father. Janey, who is infected with pelvic inflammatory disease, is ultimately rejected by her father, so she flees to New York and joins a gang. As a gang member, she participates in numerous violently sexual acts. She is then captured by a Persian slave-trader, who gives her daily instruction on how to be a prostitute. He releases her after she is diagnosed with cancer. Janey travels to Tangiers, where she wanders the desert with the French writer Jean Genet. Other well-known figures also appear in the novel, including feminist author Erica Jong and former president Jimmy Carter. Once again, Acker makes use of other texts within her novel. Her plagiaristic manipulations of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* are used to signify Janey's quest to discover her identity. When Janey is alone during her captivity, she begins to write a "book report" on Hawthorne's novel. Gradually, the lines between the text and Janey's own life story begin to blur, and she transforms the protagonist, Hester Prynne, into a version of herself. Many critics consider *Blood and Guts in High School* a harsh critique of patriarchal, capitalist society. In 2004, Susan E. Hawkins argued that in this novel Acker voices "one long, outrageous scream at America, its obsessive economic motor and capital-driven social values, its naïve, shallow, destructive politics."

In *Don Quixote*, Acker re-envisioned the titular protagonist of Cervantes's novel as a woman. Quixote's sidekick, Sancho Panza, is also recast, as a dog named St. Simeon, and together the two characters wander through London and New York. Acker explores themes of abor-

tion and alienation in *Don Quixote*, and she interweaves figures from events of the period, such as former-president Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. Other texts, including passages from African folktales, history books, German plays, and English novels, also infiltrate the narrative. In the novel, Acker confronts organized religion, particularly Catholicism, as well as the institution of the American family. The religious leaders that Don Quixote encounters are characterized as wild dogs, and their antipathy for her is rooted in misogyny. In a section titled "A Portrait of an American Family," a daughter returns home from urban horrors to seek refuge; she finds that family life is indeed safe but only because it is a prison to which she must submit her freedom. Like Cervantes, Acker uses the quest structure in her novel to challenge contemporary social mores. In 1999, Christopher L. Robinson described Acker's *Don Quixote* as "an effort to undermine the androcentric conventions of romance and the masculinist system of beliefs and values that give rise to and sustain those conventions in both literary and sociopolitical contexts."

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Acker's avant-garde and complex novels, which subvert traditional literary forms and challenge established methods of engaging readers, have elicited a broad range of responses from critics, both negative and positive. Whereas some scholars have praised Acker's formal skill and linked her stylistic and thematic choices to the writings of Jean Genet, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, and William S. Burroughs, particularly the latter's cut-up formal method and frank treatment of sexuality, others have argued that her methods, including her unapologetic use of plagiarized texts, are unnecessarily confusing and indecipherable. Many critics, however, maintain that Acker's technique of appropriation serves a thematic purpose in her art and results in works that are both imaginative and innovative. For example, writing in 1991, Richard Walsh pronounced that Acker had elevated plagiarism "into a formal strategy, emptied of its pejorative connotations by the blatancy of its operation." And Rod Phillips argued that "her fictions may begin with what seem to be borrowings, extensions, or plagiarisms of male works; but they move quickly beyond these original works—into new meanings and new forms that their authors could never have imagined."

Acker's focus on graphic violence and sex in her work has also generated mixed reactions from critics. In 2006, Robert Glück observed that "Acker expanded the range of what can be said about the body, and all who write about sex owe her a debt of gratitude." Similarly, Catherine Rock lauded Acker's writing for giving a "voice to the cultural underside, in order to symbolize libidinal

activities and desires that have been muted or made unspeakable by normative representations." On the other hand, some commentators have asserted that the potency of the pornographic imagery in her fiction is undermined because of its frequent occurrence, and that readers eventually become numb to its shocking effects. In response to these critics, Rock concluded that "the contention aroused by her work issues from the fact that she takes up rather than averts the violent oppression wreaked upon the margins, and textualizes also the ambivalent complexities of trying to turn pain into a new, productive state." Despite such differing opinions among scholars, most regard Acker's contributions to postmodern literature as significant and influential. In 1989, Ellen G. Friedman asserted that "Acker's narratives, in their subversive appropriations of master texts, their aggressive assertions of criminal perspectives, their relentless interrogations of art, culture, government, and sexual relations, are designed to be jaws steadily devouring—often to readers' horror and certainly to their discomfort (which is part of the strategy)—the mindset, if not the mind, of Western culture."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Persian Poems* (poetry) 1972
Politics (novel) 1972
The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula: Some Lives of Murderesses [as Black Tarantula] (novel) 1973; also published as *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula*, 1975
I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac: Imagining (novel) 1974
The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec by Henri Toulouse Lautrec (novel) 1978
Florida (novel) 1978
Kathy Goes to Haiti (novel) 1978
New York City in 1979 (novel) 1979
Great Expectations (novel) 1982
Hello, I'm Erica Jong (novel) 1982
Algeria: A Series of Invocations because Nothing Else Works (novel) 1984
Blood and Guts in High School (novel) 1984
My Death My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini (novel) 1984
The Birth of the Poet (libretto) 1985
Lulu Unchained (play) 1985
Variety (screenplay) 1985
Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream (novel) 1986
Empire of the Senseless (novel) 1988
Literal Madness (novels) 1988
In Memoriam to Identity (novel) 1990
Portrait of an Eye (novels) 1992
My Mother: Demonology (novel) 1993

- Essays* (essays) 1996
Pussy, King of the Pirates (novel) 1996
Bodies of Work (essays) 1997
Eurydice in the Underworld (short stories) 1997
Requiem (play) 1997
Essential Acker: The Selected Writings of Kathy Acker (novels and short stories) 2002

CRITICISM

Ellen G. Friedman (essay date fall 1989)

SOURCE: Friedman, Ellen G. "'Now Eat Your Mind': An Introduction to the Works of Kathy Acker." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9, no. 3 (fall 1989): 37-49.

[In the following essay, Friedman interprets the attitude toward the relationship between narrative description and reality in the works of Kathy Acker.]

GET RID OF MEANING. YOUR MIND IS A NIGHTMARE THAT HAS BEEN EATING YOU: NOW EAT YOUR MIND.

—Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*

In a 1984 *Artforum* article, "Models of Our Present," Kathy Acker summarizes some current models of time and knowledge in theoretical physics and applies them to personal time and personal knowing. These theories, including the principle of "local causes," quantum mechanics, and the Clauser-Freedman experiment, interrogate, according to Acker, the dominant way of knowing, the way of apprehending the world, which depends on Newtonian causal relationships. She asks, "what possible experimental model doesn't have the form, 'If I do x then x_1 happens'?" She offers two alternatives, gleaned from interpretations of quantum mechanics. The first is the Many Worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, which implicates the observer in the phenomenon observed: "Whenever a choice is made in the universe between one possible event and another, the universe splits into different branches." That is, "If I do x, then x_1 and $-x_1$ and . . . happen" (ellipsis in original). The second, also involving the observer in the observation, is the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, which proposes that "the model is not the reality"; "any model's utility depends on the experience of the experimenter."¹ Both interpretations assume a non-Newtonian and relativistic model of causality. Acker's interest in these "models of our present" is clearly reflected in her fictional world, which is informed by them. It is a world filled with sets of disrupted moments over which not even discontinuity rules since Acker's

texts, constructed of fragments, generally have a central persona embarked on a quest, although that persona is often metamorphic and fades in and out of the narrative. Indeed, instability and unpredictability provide a liberating context for Acker's works, all of which are profoundly political. As a character in *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula* asserts, "I can see anything in a set of shifting frame-works" (97).²

Description in such a model of the present cannot be objective; rather, it is always an interpretation. This insight helps to explain the directness of Acker's fictional method. Invoking the words of the English physicist David Bohm, Acker suggests that "Description is totally incompatible with what we want to say." In this view, the link between description and the described is tenuous, if not broken. Description is neither an approximation of, nor a substitute for, the described. Acker questions the motives in describing since description is a mode of control, a way of gaining authority over the object described. She writes, "The act of describing assumes one event can be a different event: meaning dominates or controls existence. But desire—or art—is." Description interprets; it does not replicate. She illustrates her theory by asking her reader to "examine the two statements, 'Help!' and 'I need help.'" Making the point that "The first language is a cry. The second, a description," she explains, "Only the cry, art, rather than the description or criticism, is primary. The cry is stupid; it has no mirror, it communicates" ("**Models of Our Present**" 64). In offering the emotion itself, without a description or interpretation of it, Acker attempts to bring fiction closer to unmediated experience, also thereby relinquishing authorial control over readers' reactions.

In a second *Artforum* example, Acker illustrates the direct engagement with (and often assault on) her readers that her fiction attempts by contrasting two images that she entitles "Past Time" and "Time Renewed":

Past Time

For *Women's Wear Daily* Helmut Newton photographed two women, their legs against a grand ancient city street. The women, being fashion models, are desirable and untouchable. This is that time which is separate from the observer, that time which is enclosed: time gone.

The past's over. It's an image. You can't make love to an image.

Time Renewed

Now in color: In front of an orange yellow street, female long red stockinged legs in black pumps're nudging female long blue stockinged legs in black stilt heels. Touching me. This is our time cause we're making the world. This is a description of *Honey, Tell Me . . .*, 1983, a painting by Jenny Holzer and Lady Pink.

(62)

The difference that interests Acker between these two images may be described with the distinction Roland Barthes makes between the readerly and the writerly text. "Past Time" is a readerly text: conforming to traditional codes, it is complete, closed, culturally determined. Since its function is to exhibit products, the relationship it establishes with the viewer is formal and distant. Any desire the image wells up within the viewer must be satisfied outside the frame of the image. "Time Renewed," on the other hand, is a writerly text, experimental, open, and incomplete. The viewer is involved with the image; they are in a relationship of play. The image is erotic, suggestive, inviting the viewer into its frame. It violates cultural norms and promises danger. With its disturbing signposts—e.g., strident colors, suggestive relationship of female legs—it undermines complacency, extends to the viewer the hope of risk and ultimately self creation. As a mystery, it inspires desire for itself.

II

It is important to emphasize the intellectual contexts of the work of Kathy Acker because her work does not feel quite "literary," despite her frequent adaptations (appropriations, plagiarisms and cannibalisms) of literary works from Shakespeare to Beckett.³ Although her works are writerly, Acker eschews the rhetoric of ambiguity so valued among literary critics, particularly since the advent of modernism. Her surfaces are almost anti-literary, despite their allusiveness, deliberately assaultive and overt. She hopes to make the abstract material, physical. In *Empire of the Senseless*, she pleads, "It seemed to me that the body, the material, must matter. My body must matter to me." She makes explicit her treatment of the body as a desiring and desirable "text": "If my body mattered to me, and what else was any text: I could not choose to be celibate" (64). Her works offer many justifications of this position. Through the words of her female Don Quixote, for instance, Acker proffers one explanation of her emphasis on the body: "All the accepted forms of education in this country, rather than teaching the child to know who she is or to know, dictate to the child who she is. Thus obfuscate any act of knowledge. Since these educators train the mind rather than the body, we can start with the physical body, the place of shitting, eating, etc., to break through our opinions or false education" (*DQ [Don Quixote]* 165-66). The language of the body in Western culture is taboo, therefore not as thoroughly constructed by the cultural powers as the mind.

Thus, the body, particularly the female body, becomes the site of revolution. In this regard, Acker, perhaps more directly than many other women writers, creates the feminine texts hypothesized by Hélène Cixous in essays such as "Castration or Decapitation?"⁴ Feminine writing, according to Cixous, should be rooted in the

woman's experience of her body, her sexuality.⁵ In *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula*, Acker connects writing and sexuality in a way that Cixous would approve: "My work and my sexuality combine: here the complete sexuality occurs within, is not expressed by, the writing" (84). Such writing creates an erotic and thus, for Acker, subversive text: "Every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of putting to question the established order of a society" (*BG* [*Blood and Guts in High School*] 125). Like Acker, Cixous feels that women must overthrow their education, the metalanguage of their culture, in order to really speak: "Stop learning in school that women are created to listen, to believe, to make no discoveries. . . . Speak of her pleasure and, God knows, she has something to say about that, so that she gets to unblock a sexuality. . . ." The return of this repressed language of female sexuality would, according to Cixous, "'de-phallocalize' the body, relieve man of his phallus, return him to an erogenous field and a libido that isn't stupidly organized round that monument, but appears shifting, diffused, taking on all the others of oneself."⁶ Through the delirium of her protagonist Abhor in *Empire of the Senseless*, Acker offers an iteration, though qualified, of Cixous's insight:

A man's power resides in his prick. That's what they, whoever they is, say. How the fuck should I know? I ain't a man. Though I'm a good fake lieutenant, it's not good enough to have a fake dick. I don't have one. Does this mean I've got no strength? If it's true that a man's prick is his strength, what and where is my power? Since I don't have one thing, a dick, I've got nothing, so my pleasure isn't any one thing, it's just pleasure. Therefore, pleasure must be pleasurable. Well, maybe I've found out something, and maybe I haven't.

(127)

For Cixous, reorganization of education to unblock female sexuality would not only expand possibilities of expression, but in revolutionizing narrative—the way we construct our world—would also transform modalities of thought. Acker, as the last sentence of the above-quoted passage suggests, is less sure of the ramifications of "de-phallocalization," though her narratives relentlessly indict law by the phallus. Both Acker and Cixous define the obstacles in the way of such reorganization similarly. In Cixous's words, it would be "very difficult: first we have to get rid of the systems of censorship that bear down on every attempt to speak in the feminine" (50-51). These systems imply not only the metalanguage of education, but all the metalanguages that direct individual and group thought and action, values and goals in Western society.

A particular system of censorship of the kind to which Cixous refers has been vigorously applied to Acker. She is a media figure in England, where she now lives, called upon to represent the interesting or evil, but de-

finitively crazy fringe, the extreme by which the public measures its distance from the edge. Thus defined as the products of the devil or madness, or at least eccentricity, her books—as far as the public is concerned—have no authority and are thus disarmed. Applying a different system of censorship, some mainstream feminists, particularly in England, take her work seriously enough to condemn it as pornography. Since her language is often crude—not just "fuck" or "shit," but "cunt juice," for instance—and she graphically depicts sadomasochistic sexual acts, they view her work as misogynistic; the pornographic sequences typical in it, they argue (quite correctly) would not be tolerated in the work of men.

Acker's texts are, however, marked by radically feminist positions and attitudes. In the following passage, Acker slides from truism to profundity as she describes the power of language to work the ends of masculinist culture:

Traditionally, the human world has been divided into men and women. Women're the cause of human suffering. . . . Men have tried to get rid of their suffering by altering this: first, by changing women; second, when this didn't work because women are stubborn creatures, by simply lying, by saying that women live only for men's love. An alteration of language, rather than of material, usually changes material conditions . . .

(DQ 27)

Acker sometimes renders her sense of the patriarchal grip of culture in lashing, gutter metaphors. For instance, she has her feminist protagonist Hester Prynne declare: "The most important men in the world decide it's their duty to tear the mother away from her child. They want to keep the child so they can train the child to suck their cocks. That's what's known as education" (*BG* 94). Since she habitually casts feminist positions and attitudes in brutal language that is a cry, those feminist literary critics intent on smoothly executed social reform have generally not taken up the challenge of her texts. Feminist narratives such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and even such a feminist classic as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* seem mild in comparison with Acker's terroristic cultural assaults. Most readers would agree that Atwood's work is not intended to challenge certain progressive *ideals* of marriage, motherhood, and childrearing. She would simply like to see society live up to them, provided that women have equal opportunity to develop full personal and professional lives. Such a goal in the context of patriarchal cultural incarceration seems to Acker (who views cultural oppression as crushing) simply delusory. Jong, on the other hand, does seem, as Acker suggests, rather self-congratulatory as she triumphantly describes male genitals and seems self-promoting as well in her self-consciously "daring" descriptions of sex from the "woman's point of view." Thus, she has perhaps earned