



Changing Subjects: Digressions in Modern American Poetry

Srikanth Reddy

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Theoretical accounts of modern American poetry often regard literary texts as the expression of a subjectivity irremediably fractured by the dividing practices of power. In *Changing Subjects*, Srikanth Reddy seeks to redress our critical bias toward a fatalistic poetics of rupture and fragmentation by foregrounding a fluent tradition of writers from Walt Whitman to John Ashbery who explore digression, rather than disjunction, as a rhetorical strategy for the making of modern poetry.

Mapping the ramifying topography of literary digression, *Changing Subjects* offers a wide-ranging anatomy of "the excursus" within twentieth-century American poetics. Moving from aesthetics to the archive to narratology to figures of identity, Reddy considers various spheres in which American writers revisit and revise our models of purposeful discourse by cultivating a poetics of digression in modern literature. In new readings of authors such as Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Frank O'Hara, and Lyn Hejinian, this study proposes that "changing the subject" offers a digressive method for negotiating the vexing complexities of art, knowledge, history, and subjectivity under the curious conditions of modernity. The book concludes with a survey of "Elliptical" strategies employed by a new generation of poets, writing in the wake of John Ashbery's aleatory craft, who seek to extend the digressive project of American poetry into the twenty-first century.

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