

I regret the absence only of a sampling of the book reviews. While the ones collected in *The Presence of Grace and Other Book Reviews* (University of Georgia Press, 1983) are all rather brief, the best half dozen or so do reflect an intriguing side of O'Connor's talent and are worth preserving in her *Collected Works*. This sentence from her review of Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* is especially memorable: "Because Teilhard is both a man of science and a believer, the scientist and the theologian will require considerable time to sift and evaluate his thought, but the poet, whose sight is essentially prophetic, will at once recognize in Teilhard a kindred intelligence." A more ironical and irreverent tone is evident in many of the other reviews. Thus when reviewing the Catholic magazine *The Critic*, she is quick to point out: "The poetry will probably be tolerated, though not read, and the fiction read but not tolerated." She begins a review of Julien Green's *The Transgressor* with this sentence: "Spokesmen for the deliver-us-from-gloom school of Catholic criticism have found that this novel commits the unpardonable sin: it is depressing." She ends a review of a novel she finds especially distasteful: "The result, fictionalized apologetics, introduces a depressing new category: light Catholic summer reading." O'Connor had the gift of aphoristic turn; a handful of her more successful reviews reveal this talent. It is rather a shame that they did not find a place in *The Library of America* volume. But in every other respect Sally Fitzgerald has served O'Connor readers well

Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, eds.

*BREAKING THE SEQUENCE: WOMEN'S EXPERIMENTAL FICTION*

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Reviewed by Emma Kafalenos

"Three words. Three difficulties." With this succinct statement Christine Brooke-Rose introduces the three categories of problems that still confront an experimental woman writer: to be a writer, to be a woman writer, to be an experimental woman writer. In her essay "Illiterations," she traces these difficulties to two sets of prejudices or "ill iterations of untenable positions in the face of change" (55): a prejudice against women writers, on the part of (not necessarily male) theorists of innovative narrative, who usually devote their attention to texts by male authors; and a prejudice against experimental writers, on the part of feminist critics, who tend to emphasize thematic studies and the restoration of "lost" women to the canon. As a result, it is "not only more difficult for a woman *experimental* writer to be accepted than for a woman writer (which corresponds to the male situation of experimental writer vs. writer), but also peculiarly more difficult for a *woman* experimental writer to be accepted than for a *male* experimental writer" (65).

*Breaking the Sequence*, in which "Illiterations" appears, is ideally designed to rectify the situation Brooke-Rose describes. After an introduction by the editors, Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, the volume offers two essays (including "Illiterations") on the present situation of women's experimental fiction, followed by articles on individual writers, categorized according to the publication dates of the fiction. In the section on the first generation (before

1930), which treats Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein, in an essay titled "Woolfenstein" which for this reviewer is particularly illuminating, Rachel Blau DuPlessis proposes that whereas "early and middle Woolf was challenged by Dorothy Richardson's *Pilmgrimage*," in the late works Woolf may similarly have been "challenged" by Stein (101). Essays by Ellen G. Friedman, Donna Gerstenberger, Larry McCaffery, Marjorie Perloff, Sharon Spencer, Philip Stevick, and others address authors of the second generation (1930-60)--Jean Rhys, Djuna Barnes, Jane Bowles, H. D. (her *fiction*), Anaïs Nin--as well as eight writers of the third generation (after 1960), including Brooke-Rose. A short section on twentieth-century women writers in France concludes the sequence of essays.

Friedman and Fuchs demonstrate the breadth of their research, first in their introduction to the volume, in which they outline the history of the reception of women's experimental fiction, and analyze and categorize the work not only of the writers to whom essays are devoted but of a number of others too; and second in an extensive and wonderfully useful bibliography of published texts by "women experimentalists" writing in English which, for the generation after 1960, includes the work of more than forty women. The thoroughness of the accomplishment of Friedman and Fuchs in the creation of this bibliography can be illustrated by the entrance for Madeline Gins, whose *Word Rain* published by Viking in 1969, this reviewer had discovered and admires, and for whom Friedman and Fuchs have found four additional works published (in English) in Munich, Milan, Paris, and by "graphicstudio" in Tampa.

*Breaking The Sequence* is of inestimable value because of the vacuum it helps to fill. Competent analytical essays on structurally innovative fiction by women are almost nonexistent in the published literature. At the present stage of research in the field, the problem of whether "evidence of . . . feminism" can be found in the formal innovations of women's fiction (44) is one that Friedman and Fuchs wisely refrain from attempting to answer. One might question the editors' strategy in defining cumulatively, as an additive construct, their term *experimental fiction*; to have proposed initially at least a tentative definition, differentiated by period (e.g., modern/postmodern), would have allowed it to be supported or modified--and thus strengthened and clarified--by the definitions of the variously named movements that are quoted, as well as by the descriptions of individual works, both in the introduction and in the essays that follow. But whatever omissions and imprecisions one might detect, in every case they are the consequence of the infancy of the discipline. When Raymond Federman published in 1975 the first collection in English of substantive critical essays on recent innovative fiction (by male authors), *Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow*, he was in a position to select essays, some of them previously published, by writers including Jean Ricardou, Philippe Sollers, Italo Calvino, John Barth, Richard Kostelanetz, and Jonathan Culler. If the 1990s bring more, and more sophisticated studies of innovative fiction by women, *Breaking The Sequence* will have fulfilled its purpose and will be remembered with esteem.