

LINDA A. KINNAHAN, *LYRIC INTERVENTIONS* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2004).

Oriel Winslow

LYRIC INTERVENTIONS

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Finding Kinnahan's book was really exciting; I came across it while in the process of writing my dissertation, in which I am exploring fragment and lyric in female self-representation. Kinnahan solidified and articulated many of the ideas that I was beginning to formulate.

One of my personal questions about the work of some experimental poetries is whether fragmenting language can communicate the self, and whether in challenging the referential nature of language the concept of the 'I' is thrown into such doubt that the assertion of any identity becomes impossible. However, this concern, for me, goes alongside an awareness that the concerns of the avant-garde poets seem vital in order to move forward into a new feminist practice. This conflict is one which Kinnahan's book directly addresses; seeking 'alternatives to the banishment of the personal and of the "I" encouraged by much contemporary avant-garde practice' (xiii). She looks in detail at the current feminist debates and the post-modern debates, questioning whether the two are compatible. She also addresses the fact that many of the ideas associated with language poetry exclude women, or if they do not, have certain expectations of what it means to be a woman writer within this. Kinnahan sees this as a continuation of a patriarchally dominated writing space, and recognises the importance of the creation of *HOW(ever)* and, later, *HOW₂* as spaces away from both the traditional language control and editorial control.

She engages with debates presented by critics such as Rachael Blau Du Plessis, Ann Vickery and Elizabeth Willis and leads the reader through the diverse and complex contemporary debates surrounding language poetry. She writes of the desire to 'weaken the term *language* as an umbrella term for all formal experimentation' (p. 15). Her critique of the singular notion of 'language poetry' is one of the strongest elements of the book.

Her inclusion of Carol Ann Duffy in her consideration of experimental poetry illustrates a refusal to be bound by conventional categories. Duffy is not usually placed alongside poets such as Kathleen Fraser and Erica Hunt, and in doing so, Kinnahan questions who decides what qualifies as 'experimental poetry', something that women poets have been struggling with. The notion of inclusion and exclusion based on content is something that Kinnahan explores throughout her book. This chapter considers the different notions of 'innovative' across the Atlantic. She argues that although Duffy's 'poetics seem less formally innovative' (p. 133), it is important to consider the different geographical location of her work. Through including Duffy she also challenges the notion that innovative work must be overtly innovative in form, and begins to break away from fixed categories about what 'innovative' might mean.

She concludes the book by highlighting the differences and similarities of the British poets Denise Riley, Geraldine Monk, and Wendy Mulford to the opening poets Fraser and Guest. In doing so she draws attention to the different political situation that necessarily informs these poets, in particular what she terms the 'capitalist conservatism of the Thatcherite Right and its legacy' (p. 183). This transatlantic discussion is important not only in terms of considering the differences in language poetry, but also what the construction of a feminine self might mean in different cultural locations, something that I had not fully realised the implications of in studying innovative poetry.

Her chapter on the 'visual-verbal collaborations of Erica Hunt, Alison Saar and M. Nourbese Phillip' extends the notion that experimental poetry remains on the page, and also foregrounds the importance of the body in female identity. In this chapter she discusses the body as a text, something that is read through the social and historical setting, and therefore its importance in subjectivity. Just as the poets

she addresses in the first chapters challenge the idea of the self as a stable concept within language, in this chapter, Kinnahan skilfully draws parallels between this process and the destabilising of the concept of body. The interplay between the language of the visible body and the subjectivity of the body builds on contemporary debates about the subjectivity of language, and brings the notion of the body into these debates. Just as language is based on white, male terms, she illustrates here that the notion of the body is similarly affected by these ideologies. She argues that in challenging the ideologies embedded in language, our reading of the body can also be challenged.

This is an ethical and considerate discussion of the notion of the lyric self in relation to contemporary debates. I was excited to find an ally in this book, and many of her connections and arguments challenged me to develop further ideas that I was considering. She also helped to formulate concerns that I hadn't managed to articulate, but that I knew rested uneasily with me.

I would recommend this book to anyone concerned with the 'explosion of the 'I'' advocated in many language poetics. A thoughtful, and thought-provoking study on an important question.

Oriel Winslow is an undergraduate at Royal Holloway University of London, and has recently become very interested in the Language Poets, having completed an undergraduate course in Poetic Practice. She has just completed her dissertation in 'Writing the Self in Lyric and Fragment: Language and Female Self-Representation in Kathleen Fraser, Lydia Davis and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha'. Next year she will be studying for the Poetic Practice MA with Dell Olsen, where she hopes to continue women's relationship with the language movement through her own work. Her poetry to date explores many of her concerns surrounding Language Poetry as a practice, and what this means for marginalised voices, the creation and communication of a self, and the presentation of Trauma.