

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Frames contemporary poetry in the context of wider literary history: its trends and movements, narratives of its current health or decline, and the critical debate surrounding all of the above.

CHAPTER ONE 9

Anthologies and Canon Formation

This chapter addresses the ways in which the contemporary canon is constructed and contested from one generation to the next with particular reference to the role of the anthology. Engaging with questions of nation, generation and representation, it examines the work of anthologists including Sean O'Brien, Michael Schmidt, Keith Tuma and Roddy Lumsden.

CHAPTER TWO 32

Approaches to Contemporary British Poetry

Turning to individual critics, this chapter considers the challenge to traditional criticism of literary theory and its aftermath. The role of the poet-critic as a guarantor (or interrogator) of poetic authority is examined through the contrasting examples of poet-critics Geoffrey Hill and Paul Muldoon, while the category of poetic form is revisited in the work of Angela Leighton and Peter McDonald.

CHAPTER THREE 54

Postcolonialism

This chapter studies the ways in which postcolonialism redraws the critical map for the reading of poetry. The project of regional devolution within the UK has renewed the critical focus initiated by Robert Crawford on the postcolonial nature of Britishness. Concepts of marginality and hybridity, as theorised by Jahan Ramazani and others,

are tested against the work of poets engaging with the postcolonial in a wide variety of ways, from Vahni Capildeo and Fred D'Aguiar to W. N. Herbert.

CHAPTER FOUR 81

Gender, Sexuality and Class

The intersections of gender, sexuality and class and the poem form the focus for this chapter. Responses to the work of Medbh McGuckian and Vona Groarke illustrate a tension between identity politics and more formalist approaches drawing on theories of intertextuality, while maleness and the sexing (or queering) of the lyric poem are also examined. Questions of voice and class in the work of Tom Leonard, Douglas Dunn and others are discussed, as is the often fractious debate they stage with the politics of the lyric.

CHAPTER FIVE 110

Experiment and Language

This chapter looks at the experimental tradition, and the critique of language and the self in which critics locate its differences from more mainstream styles: background and context on publishers and movements are provided. Veronica Forrest-Thomson and her theory of 'naturalisation' offer a powerful anti-realist template, whose effects can be traced in the work of poets and critics such as Peter Manson and Andrew Duncan. While experimental poetry addresses itself to questions of language, it does not do so at the expense of questions of politics, as shown in the radical agenda of Keston Sutherland, and his imbuing of experimental poetry with a new sense of transformative possibility.

CHAPTER SIX 136

New Environments

This chapter looks at the new domains explored by ecopoetry. Jonathan Bate's *Song of the Earth* makes the neo-Romantic case for poetry as a force of mediation and salvation, but closer analysis shows how the ecocritic must strike a balance between the detached imagination and ideological wish-fulfilment. These positions are explored in relation to a range of poets including Kathleen Jamie, Helen Macdonald, and R. F. Langley, and the debates they have inspired.

CONCLUSION	161
------------	-----

Criticism Today

Looking at the public face of poetry in Britain today, this chapter considers the difficulty of 'making it new' in ways that go beyond commodification and the selling short of the art in today's market economy. Despite deep anxieties about the future of poetry and the relationship of writer and reader and the general public, criticism nevertheless manages to find fresh and resilient ways of 'keeping going'.

NOTES	169
-------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	186
--------------	-----

INDEX	196
-------	-----