

Dictionary of Literary Biography

Volume 169:

**American Poets
Since World War II
Fifth Series**

Dictionary of Literary Biography® • Volume One Hundred Sixty-Nine

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American Poets Since
World War II
Fifth Series

Edited by
Joseph Conte
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Per la famiglia Conte

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Plan of the Series

. . . *Almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, is its native literary product – when that product is fine and noble and enduring.*

Mark Twain*

The advisory board, the editors, and the publisher of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* are joined in endorsing Mark Twain's declaration. The literature of a nation provides an inexhaustible resource of permanent worth. We intend to make literature and its creators better understood and more accessible to students and the reading public, while satisfying the standards of teachers and scholars.

To meet these requirements, *literary biography* has been construed in terms of the author's achievement. The most important thing about a writer is his writing. Accordingly, the entries in *DLB* are career biographies, tracing the development of the author's canon and the evolution of his reputation.

The purpose of *DLB* is not only to provide reliable information in a convenient format but also to place the figures in the larger perspective of literary history and to offer appraisals of their accomplishments by qualified scholars.

The publication plan for *DLB* resulted from two years of preparation. The project was proposed to Bruccoli Clark by Frederick C. Ruffner, president of the Gale Research Company, in November 1975. After specimen entries were prepared and typeset, an advisory board was formed to refine the entry format and develop the series rationale. In meetings held during 1976, the publisher, series editors, and advisory board approved the scheme for a comprehensive biographical dictionary of persons who contributed to North American literature. Editorial work on the first volume began in January 1977, and it was published in 1978. In order to make *DLB* more than a reference tool and to compile volumes that individually have claim to status as literary history, it was decided to organize volumes by topic, period, or genre. Each of these free-

standing volumes provides a biographical-bibliographical guide and overview for a particular area of literature. We are convinced that this organization – as opposed to a single alphabet method – constitutes a valuable innovation in the presentation of reference material. The volume plan necessarily requires many decisions for the placement and treatment of authors who might properly be included in two or three volumes. In some instances a major figure will be included in separate volumes, but with different entries emphasizing the aspect of his career appropriate to each volume. Ernest Hemingway, for example, is represented in *American Writers in Paris, 1920–1939* by an entry focusing on his expatriate apprenticeship; he is also in *American Novelists, 1910–1945* with an entry surveying his entire career. Each volume includes a cumulative index of the subject authors and articles. Comprehensive indexes to the entire series are planned.

With volume ten in 1982 it was decided to enlarge the scope of *DLB*. By the end of 1986 twenty-one volumes treating British literature had been published, and volumes for Commonwealth and Modern European literature were in progress. The series has been further augmented by the *DLB Yearbooks* (since 1981) which update published entries and add new entries to keep the *DLB* current with contemporary activity. There have also been *DLB Documentary Series* volumes which provide biographical and critical source materials for figures whose work is judged to have particular interest for students. One of these companion volumes is entirely devoted to Tennessee Williams.

We define literature as the *intellectual commerce of a nation*: not merely as belles lettres but as that ample and complex process by which ideas are generated, shaped, and transmitted. *DLB* entries are not limited to "creative writers" but extend to other figures who in their time and in their way influenced the mind of a people. Thus the series encompasses historians, journalists, publishers, and screenwriters. By this means readers of *DLB* may be aided to perceive literature not as cult scripture in the keeping of intellectual high priests but firmly positioned at the center of a nation's life.

*From an unpublished section of Mark Twain's autobiography, copyright by the Mark Twain Company

DLB includes the major writers appropriate to each volume and those standing in the ranks immediately behind them. Scholarly and critical counsel has been sought in deciding which minor figures to include and how full their entries should be. Wherever possible, useful references are made to figures who do not warrant separate entries.

Each *DLB* volume has a volume editor responsible for planning the volume, selecting the figures for inclusion, and assigning the entries. Volume editors are also responsible for preparing, where appropriate, appendices surveying the major periodicals and literary and intellectual movements for their volumes, as well as lists of further readings. Work on the series as a whole is coordinated at the Brucoli Clark Layman editorial center in Columbia, South Carolina, where the editorial staff is responsible for accuracy of the published volumes.

One feature that distinguishes *DLB* is the illustration policy – its concern with the iconography of literature. Just as an author is influenced by his surroundings, so is the reader's understanding

of the author enhanced by a knowledge of his environment. Therefore *DLB* volumes include not only drawings, paintings, and photographs of authors, often depicting them at various stages in their careers, but also illustrations of their families and places where they lived. Title pages are regularly reproduced in facsimile along with dust jackets for modern authors. The dust jackets are a special feature of *DLB* because they often document better than anything else the way in which an author's work was perceived in its own time. Specimens of the writers' manuscripts are included when feasible.

Samuel Johnson rightly decreed that "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors." The purpose of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* is to compile literary history in the surest way available to us – by accurate and comprehensive treatment of the lives and work of those who contributed to it.

The *DLB* Advisory Board

Introduction

Dictionary of Literary Biography 169: American Poets Since World War II, Fifth Series, as well as the sixth series to be published later, is devoted to American poets who have made a significant contribution to their art after 1945. Such a criterion allows for the inclusion of poets of different age groups, diverse styles, and competing poetic principles. Some of the poets presented here had already established their careers by the close of World War II; others have only recently begun to attract – or provoke – the critical attention that their talents deserve. The presence of poets accomplished in traditional forms and familiar genres alongside those practiced in a resolutely avant-garde approach is not an accident of this volume but its intention. Readers of DLB volumes naturally can choose to read according to their inclinations, but the juxtapositions of poetic careers that either reinforce or contend with one another is perhaps the chief advantage of a book with such variety of subjects and contributors. In the estimation of this editor, the poets included all have a strong claim for their importance in the period; however, the thorough critical appraisal, biographical information, and bibliographical support provided by the contributors will enable readers to judge each case for themselves.

The selection of entries for this volume gives special consideration to its relation to those prior volumes in the DLB series that address American poetry after 1945. *DLB 169* extends the selection of contemporary poets made by this editor in *DLB 165: American Poets Since World War II, Fourth Series* (1996) and supplements entries found in *DLB 120: American Poets Since World War II, Third Series* (1992) and *DLB 105: American Poets Since World War II, Second Series* (1991). A particular concern was to review the treatment of poets included in the two-volume *DLB 5: American Poets Since World War II, First Series* (1980). In the fifteen years since the publication of *DLB 5*, several of the poets included there have produced major new works or have since been the beneficiaries of extensive critical studies. Such changes called for an entirely fresh appraisal. In other instances, it has been deemed sufficient to update and revise the treatment originally afforded the poet to account for less dramatic shifts in a career. The passage of even fifteen years has naturally seen the decline of interest in certain midcentury authors, but

it also brings a demand for a reassessment of postmodern poetry with entries devoted to previously overlooked – but by no means minor – poets. And finally, this volume presents several poets whose work was still in a gestational stage in 1980 and who thus appear in the DLB for the first time. Such poets may well introduce the poetics that will carry into the next century.

From this vantage point near the close of the twentieth century, the history of postmodern poetry can be described broadly in three generational clusters. The first generation of postmodern poets are those born shortly after the turn of the century. The milestones of high modernism, such as the publication of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), were written while they were still quite young. In a literal manner they regard the modern poets of their day – Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, Eliot, Robert Frost, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams – as both their elders (by some twenty or more years) and as their mentors. With these mentors they carry on an extensive personal and epistolary contact. Their early mature work appears between 1929 and 1944, marked by the grinding demands of the Depression and often inflected by leftist politics and economic theory. They are well aware that their writing follows upon the dramatic breach with the genteel aesthetic of late-nineteenth-century poetry as found in Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), Pound's first gathering of his epic in *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930), or Stein's cubist poetry in *Tender Buttons* (1914). In one sense they are late-modernists; they regard their work as an extension of the modernist campaign to "make it new." But they also struggle "to witness / and adjust" (adapting Williams's phrase) to the modern condition, interjecting within the revolutionary aesthetic the social, political, and personal concerns of their generation.

Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978) is a representative type of the first postmodernist, embarking upon his career under the close and sought-after tutelage of Ezra Pound (chronicled in their extensive correspondence between 1927 and 1963). The first half of Zukofsky's own eight-hundred-page epic poem, "A," resembles the canto structure of Pound's "poem including history." After 1951, however, Zukofsky's work becomes increasingly hermetic,

procedural in form, and language-oriented. In short, the latter part of his career represents a departure from his modernist mentor and his hortatory manner and culminates in such distinctively postmodern achievements as *80 Flowers* (1978). However different in style and biography, other members of this first generation follow a similar pattern that realizes a slow sundering of the mentor/disciple relationship. Among poets in this volume, Louise Bogan (1897–1970) immersed herself in the New York avant-garde of the 1920s that included Williams, Lola Ridge, Mina Loy, and Edmund Wilson before crafting her own formal lyric style. The famous meeting of Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) and Marianne Moore on the steps of the New York Public Library in 1934 initiated yet another lasting friendship and tutelage of a literary career, though Bishop's poetry assumed a more personal idiom than Moore's. The presence of these poets in this volume is not only justified by the substantial work they completed after 1945 but by their continued influence on contemporary poets. Their careers serve as instructive graphs of the transition between modern and postmodern poetics. In some cases the first postmoderns worked in relative obscurity until discovered, published, and in turn adopted as mentors by members of the postwar generation. Essays on several important poets born in the first decade of this century, including Charles Reznikoff, Edward Dahlberg, Laura Riding Jackson, Langston Hughes, and Stanley Kunitz, can be found in *DLB 45: American Poets, 1880–1945, First Series* (1986) and *DLB 48: American Poets, 1880–1945, Second Series* (1986).

Several recent studies, among them Albert Gelpi's *Coherent Splendor* (1987) and Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery* (1989), have shown that modern American poetry was hardly the monolithic program that the New Critical canon had suggested. Fissures arising from differing relationships with romanticism, in the test of domestic or expatriate affiliations, and in the conflicting political allegiances of the 1930s and 1940s suggest that the spate of movements and groupings that were identified or actively promoted after 1950 were an inevitable result of such disagreements.

The postwar generation of postmodern poets are those born in the second quarter of the century, with a particularly distinguished class of 1926–1927 that includes A. R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Robert Bly, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, James Merrill, W. S. Merwin, Frank O'Hara, and James Wright. Their notable early works appear between 1955 and 1970. It may be judicious to describe the attitude of postwar poets to their modernist forebears as am-

bivalent; that is, capable of registering strongly positive or negative responses in separate cases. Creeley, for example, rejects the symbolist mode of Eliot for the immediate contact with the real he finds in Williams. This shift from a poetics of transcendence to one of immanence becomes a defining characteristic of midcentury poetry, as Charles Altieri has argued in *Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry* (1984). Charles Olson, who was the first poet to identify himself as "post-modern" in "The Present is Prologue" (1950), espouses a posthumanism and posthistoricism that runs counter to the romantic ideology found in Stevens. But Ammons, Ashbery, and James Schuyler have retained a close affinity for the romantic imagination expressed in Stevens's "poem of the act of the mind." Robert Lowell's first three volumes emulated the dense symbolic language and impersonal registers of Eliot, only to follow Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) into a confessional mode in *Life Studies* (1959) that made a virtue of traumatic personal revelation. As M. L. Rosenthal and others have noted, the shift from an impersonal to a personal register and the disclosure of the self in the poem are distinguishing aspects of postwar poetry. In the end, the postwar poets neither denied the continuing relevance of the modernist writers, nor pledged absolute fealty to their principles.

An additional source of generational tension stems from the longevity of the modernist poets whose major late works appear simultaneously with the important early works of the postwar poets. Thus one finds Creeley's landmark *For Love* published in the same year as Williams's remarkable *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962). Ashbery's *Some Trees* (1956) closely follows Stevens's *Collected Poems*, issued on his seventy-fifth birthday in 1954. Bishop, who was slow to publish and whose reputation accrued gradually, arrives at her *Selected Poems* in the same year as Moore's meticulous edition of her *Complete Poems* (1967).

One finds in the work of these postwar poets many acts of homage to their still-productive modernist predecessors. But these homages are accompanied by profuse statements on poetics that suggest their project was not merely to extend modernism but to advance from it. Olson's "Projective Verse," Denise Levertov's "Some Notes on Organic Form," Ginsberg's "First thought best thought," Robert Kelly's "Notes on the Poetry of the Deep Image," O'Hara's "Personism: A Manifesto," Lowell's autobiographical essay "91 Revere Street," and Adrienne Rich's politically charged "When We Dead Awaken" are among the landmark documents

that challenge modernist precepts, add new concepts to the encyclopedia of poetics, and found postmodern schools of poetry. The proliferation of movements and manifestos at midcentury can be read as an attempt by second-generation postmodernists to accentuate their differences from and exploit the fissures within the dominant mode of modernism. Each school challenges the New Critical emphasis on an ironic and distant voice, the mastery of a well-wrought form, and the limiting of poetic language and subject matter to the decorous. The proposition of an organic process in poetry by the members of the Black Mountain School, the chatty casualness of the New York School, the reliance upon intuition among the Beats, and the confessional provocations of a psyche-in-distress contribute to the expansive modulations of postwar poetry.

If the poets of the 1950s and 1960s suffered somewhat from the anxiety of influence, they also enjoyed the largest and broadest readership for poetry in this century: unofficial tabulation from royalty statements, course enrollments, political rallies in public parks, and the burgeoning popularity of poetry readings in academic lecture halls and bohemian clubs suggest that the cachet of poetry reached its peak in this countercultural era. Books by Bly, Creeley, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Gary Snyder, and Ginsberg sold tens of thousands of copies. Like many other aspects of American life at midcentury, poetry enjoyed a period of unbridled expansion.

Third-generation postmodern poets are most likely the contemporaries of many readers of this volume. Born during the twenty years after World War II, they count themselves among the Baby Boomers. Their numbers are legion; their achievements are still under evaluation. They are college graduates for whom "Modern Poetry" was a three-credit course in their major; most hold graduate degrees in literature or creative writing; many teach their craft in university writing programs. They have had the opportunity of sitting at a seminar table with acclaimed members of the postwar movements who have been the holders of distinguished professorships and whose papers fetch large sums from special collections. But contemporary poets do not identify themselves with postwar movements beyond an acknowledgment of their historical importance. They often feel only slight indebtedness to the prior generation for the battles fought – mostly between the academics and the bohemians, the "cooked" and the "raw" poetries – that are now largely resolved. Few marvel that the renegade

poets of the 1960s are now ensconced in the university or in textbook anthologies or that "open" and "closed" forms cohabit in little magazines or in the latest volume by Ashbery.

The field of contemporary poetry cannot be solely described in terms of movements and schools. Instead one finds a four-sided mandala of less tightly bonded interest groups, or PACs (Poetry Action Committees). In one quarter reside the traditionalists who have assumed the mantle of the academic poets of the postwar generation, though in a more discursive and less intricate language. Aided by recent collections – such as *The Direction of Poetry: An Anthology of Rhymed and Metered Verse Written in the English Language Since 1975* (1988), *Expansive Poetry: Essays on the New Narrative and the New Formalism* (1989), and *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women* (1994) – an alliance of New Formalists calls for a return to traditional rhyme and meter (to recoup what they view as the slack practice of the 1960s and 1970s) and a renewed emphasis on narrative to foster a general, educated audience for poetry (which the diffuse poetries of the counterculture had supposedly lost). Alfred Corn (b. 1943), Timothy Steele (b. 1948), Vikram Seth (b. 1952), Brad Leithauser (b. 1953), and Gjertrud Schnackenberg (b. 1953) revive many stanzaic forms and metrical devices fallen into disuse. Though some among their group combine neoconservatism with a return to traditional forms, one should note that the lesbian formalist Marilyn Hacker (b. 1942) addresses the milieu of homosexual life in her sonnets, and businessman-poet Dana Gioia (b. 1950) has successfully resisted both an academic appointment and the republicanism of the management class. Entries on all of the New Formalists mentioned here can be found in *DLB 120: American Poets Since World War II, Third Series*; a fresh assessment of the career of an important mentor and sponsor of the formalists, Anthony Hecht (b. 1923), can be found in the present volume.

In the opposite quarter reside the experimentalists whose antiestablishment convictions preclude participation in the "professional verse culture." They are widely published (in small-press books, financially precarious but daring magazines, and on always-warm laser-jet printers), but poorly distributed. They form an underground wholly ignored by the Associated Writing Programs and by the prize-selection committees that announce the winners of the latest competition in their newsletters. The Language poets are the most identifiable of this group, attacking the conventions of the personal voice and transparent, "absorptive" language in the

lyric. Important poets of the Language movement included in this volume are Charles Bernstein (b. 1950), Kathleen Fraser (b. 1935), Michael Palmer (b. 1943), and Ron Silliman (b. 1946); others appearing in recent DLB volumes are Lyn Hejinian (b. 1941), Susan Howe (b. 1937), and Bernadette Mayer (b. 1945). These poets muster an array of antiabsorptive techniques that provoke self-consciousness about the reading process. Blatant artifice, syntactical disruptions, phonetic play, typographical anomalies, impermeability, and splicing and co-opting of itinerant texts and popular iterations combine to assert what Bernstein in *A Poetics* (1992) calls the "skepticism, doubt, noise, [and] resistance" of postmodern culture. The Language poets' elaboration of poststructuralist theories of language and their recourse to marxist attacks on a publishing industry that commodifies referential language have heightened their appeal to a theoretically aware university readership. A few Language poets, such as Bernstein, Howe, and Bob Perelman (b. 1947), have in fact entered the professoriat. In contrast to the foregrounding of textuality in Language writing, performance poetry – such as the shamanistic songs and Yiddish vaudeville of Jerome Rothenberg (b. 1931), the parodic lectures of the scholar-translator in Armand Schwerner's (b. 1927) *The Tablets*, and the free-form "talk poems" of David Antin (b. 1932) in this volume – stresses the improvisation of an oral performance incorporating autobiographical, ethnographic, musical, or other nonliterary sources.

In a third quarter reside poets for whom identity politics are a prominent consideration. Issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual preference constitute the subject matter of their work, which ranges from the most intimate personal revelation to broad public pronouncements. They are less concerned than either traditionalists or experimentalists by debates over poetic form, though they pursue styles that differentiate their work from the speech and experience of white middle America. The espousal of an opaque or overly literary language runs counter to the political statements they feel compelled to make. Their charge is to give voice to previously repressed segments of American society, and therefore to introduce a pluralist concept of community. They speak first to an audience with whom they share their experience of alterity and marginality, but they consequently seek the understanding of a larger readership. In the gender and hemispheric politics of Carolyn Forché (b. 1950), in the pan-African rituals and the tonalities of jazz as recorded by Nathaniel Mackey (b. 1947) and the ever-combative Ishmael Reed (b. 1938), in

the reconciliation of Asian tradition and modern Hawaiian life in Cathy Song (b. 1955) and Indonesian-born Li-Young Lee (b. 1957), in the bilingual culture of Simon Ortiz (b. 1941), American poetry overcomes its monochromatic and monotonal historical origins.

The fourth quarter is occupied by the practitioners of the most pervasive mode in American poetry today, the personal (or postconfessional) lyric. These poets extend the confessional mode of Lowell, Plath, W. D. Snodgrass, John Berryman, and Sexton, though they are less strident in their attack on decorum and perhaps no longer able to shock through autobiographical revelation in the era of tabloid journalism. Despite the moderation in tone, these poets continue to explore the psyche and emotions in poems that test the propositions of the self against the experience of the world. They exhibit a general disregard for formalist techniques (including meter) that might impede immediate expression; and they refuse to distract from the presentation of the self by calling attention to the language-as-object. Poets such as James Wright (1927–1980) and James Tate (b. 1943), who are discussed in this volume, as well as Louise Glück (b. 1943), Robert Hass (b. 1941), Jonathan Holden (b. 1941), and Sharon Olds (b. 1942) have pursued the family drama and childhood's traumatic incidents, psychic distress and substance abuse, sexual adventuring and marital strife as their common subjects. Beyond the immediate relation to confessionalism, these poets share an exploration of subjectivity that is the legacy of the romantic lyric. Like the odes of William Wordsworth or John Keats – in a language only slightly heightened from the American vernacular and soothing to the contemporary ear – these poems call upon remembrance within a dramatic setting and often reveal the poet's sensibility and identity. Despite Olson's midcentury warning against "the lyrical interference of the individual as ego" in "Projective Verse," the self in the postconfessional lyric once again assumes the role of arbiter of meaningful experience. These are the poems that dominate such verse magazines as *American Poetry Review* (with its author photographs accompanying poems), *Shenandoah*, *Prairie Schooner*, and the *Denver Quarterly*. And these poems represent the majority of those discussed in writing workshops where the dynamic of group therapy now reigns. The personal lyricists are the most likely to be directors of writing programs and to have published award-winning volumes in university press poetry series.

The four-part mandala of contemporary poetry here described is not intended to locate poets

permanently or exclusively in particular quarters. Adrienne Rich (b. 1929), for example, began her career as a formalist in the school of W. H. Auden and underwent a conversion to become one of the foremost exponents (in poetry and prose) of feminist politics. One observes among recent writers a more flexible alliance not permitted by the close-knit movements of midcentury. Poets are often not responsible for the labels attached to their work, and contemporary poets frequently resist the scholar's restrictive and ultimately reductive labels. While Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones, b. 1934) abandoned his association with the New York bohemian schools to lead the Black Arts movement, Reed, Lorenzo Thomas (b. 1944), and Mackey now move more easily between an African American poetics and an experimental mode. Similarly, female poets such as Levertov (b. 1923), Fraser, and Carolyn Forché have worked to correlate the terms of lyric poetry and political activism.

The third generation of postmodern poets may also be characterized by outright resistance to the aesthetic and political program of modernism. In this regard the poets are in alignment with much that has transpired in literary criticism and theory in the past twenty years. The poets of identity politics have been especially critical of the Eurocentric and masculinist bias that permeated modernism. The pluralism that espouses the equal validity and aesthetic worth of disparate cultural experience directly challenges the elitist, sexist, and discriminatory attitudes implicit in modernism. The postmodern lyric's renewed emphasis on personal expression serves as repudiation of the impersonal and objectivist slant of modern verse and reinstates the individual to authority over totalizing systems. Whereas the modernists held the word as sacred and symbolic *Logos*, with intrinsic and incantatory meaning, the postmodern avant-garde regards language as a plastic medium that can be reshaped without lingering impressions. Rather than aspire to a pure, refined art, the postmodern poet appropriates theoretical jargon and demotic speech, the embedded phraseology of commerce and the free signifier. Lastly, there exists a reactionary postmodernism that dubs the modernist revolt against nineteenth-century aesthetics a failure because of its disregard for the general audience and urges a return to traditional forms, public statement, and coherence of narration and setting. On all fronts there is little doubt that the contemporary poet now disdains many of the precepts of modernism. A new literary period has begun.

Contemporary poetry has been even more agitated by debates about the canon than other fields of literary endeavor. Popular acclaim and satisfied booksellers temper judgments as Susan Sontag displaces E. B. White in essay collections, or as Toni Morrison captures the Nobel Prize that eluded Vladimir Nabokov. But because poetry continues to operate within a limited economy and an eroding readership outside the university — only a few volumes are published by trade houses, and reviews of poetry in major newspapers and magazines have virtually vanished — arguments as to who the important figures are, how they are identified, and why they should be taught preoccupy the field. The literary canon demands selectivity. It should guide the reader toward works that are significant or rewarding. In the past decade especially, pluralists have argued that such "guides to reading" are neither benign nor impartial. The canon creates a hierarchy of writers, and it traditionally reinforces the dominant culture at the expense of the marginal or disenfranchised. Literary history has a greater obligation to inclusivity, in an attempt to establish a thorough cultural record and to recover unjustly neglected or repressed works. Thus the canon-reinforcing process of evaluation sometimes clashes with the politics of inclusion and efforts at suitable representation of the diversity of American voices.

In 1929 Pound asserted in his own effort at canon formation, "How to Read," that poetry should be chosen for an anthology "because it contained an invention, a definite contribution to the art of verbal expression." He argues that one should not "sub-divide the elements in literature according to some non-literary categoric division. You do not divide physics or chemistry according to racial or religious categories" (*Literary Essays*). Although Pound deplored the conservatism of the anthologist, he nevertheless equates the terms of literary selection with the supposedly impersonal and universal truths of science, which is precisely the object of complaint among today's pluralists: the universal category too often turned out to be male and white.

In their efforts to expand the canon, pluralists have introduced a remarkable number of special-interest anthologies that identify poets by gender, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, and nationality, or some combination thereof. Among these are *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets* (1983), *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry* (1987), and *Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time* (1988). As Alan Golding observes in "American Poetry Anthologies," an essay in *Canons* (1984), such collections have the notable

virtue of preserving a specific tradition and rehistoricizing our understanding of literary heritage. But they are also symptoms of an increasing literary balkanization through which one reader's familiar figures of contemporary poetry escape the notice of another. And as Charles Bernstein points out in his 1992 essay "State of the Art," "Too often, the works selected to represent cultural diversity are those that accept the model of representation assumed by the dominant culture in the first place" (*A Poetics*).

Pound's premise about anthologies should not be considered invalid, but the criteria he posits must evolve as the tradition advances. Inventive writers of all descriptions continue to be neglected by the canon in favor of aesthetically conservative writers. Cultivating those works that, as Pound says, contain "an invention, a definite contribution to the art of verbal expression" is crucial to the survival of poetry in America. The canon of contemporary poetry persists because one must finally discriminate between inventive and stale work. New critiques that persuasively describe daring work to a skeptical readership, in tandem with the poetics of inclusion that represent a panoply of American traditions, make a revised and expanded canon essentially beneficial to American poetry. One recent anthology that proposes a multicultural and international solution to the dilemma of representation is *Poems for the Millennium* (1995). In the first of two volumes, extending "From Fin-de-Siècle to Negritude," editors Rothenberg and Pierre Joris offer a capacious gathering that embraces a wide cultural heritage and delineates the innovative contributions to twentieth-century poetry.

The entries in *DLB 169: American Poets Since World War II, Fifth Series* are substantial enough to supply biographical and literary-historical context in addition to an extensive evaluation of the poet's oeuvre. At the same time the entry length limits the number of poets that can be treated. Although each volume contributes to a thorough understanding of the literary history of the genre and period, it cannot offer a complete representation of the work in the field. One should regard this volume as a companion and supplement to entries in the earlier volumes of the series. Readers will also find entries on important poets writing after World War II in *DLB 16: The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America* (1983); *DLB 41: Afro-American Poets Since 1955* (1985); *DLB 82: Chicano Writers, First Series* (1989); and *DLB 122: Chicano Writers, Second Series* (1992). As an incremental series these volumes combine critical selection and comprehensive literary history.

The movements and schools that were so prevalent at midcentury partially depended on the personal association of the poets. The New York School poets were fellow students at Harvard before relocating to lower Manhattan's art community. Olson and Creeley kept up a voluminous correspondence before they met at Black Mountain in North Carolina. With the institutionalization of creative writing programs, contemporary poets move to jobs at colleges and universities across the country. Among the results of this distribution of talent are the affiliation of poets by publishing venues and by their practice in certain genres and forms.

While the personal lyric is the most prevalent contemporary type of poem in terms of quantity, the meditative poem appears to be growing in importance. The lyric devotes itself to the physical and the passionate; in its intimate voice, the lyric provokes an emotional response. The meditative poem retreats from the turbulent desires of the ego; it is cognitive rather than sensual, abstract rather than particular. The lyric is hot, the meditative poem cool. The chief modernist predecessor in the meditative mode is Stevens, who sought to define modern poetry as "the act of the mind." The major exponents of the meditative mode are now Ashbery and Ammons. Their excursions of thought find a comfortable rhythm in longer works such as "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975), "A Wave" (1984), and *Flow Chart* (1991) by Ashbery; and *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (1965), *Sphere: The Form of a Motion* (1974), and *Garbage* (1994) by Ammons. Younger poets at work in meditative poetry include Robert Hass and Ann Lauterbach (b. 1942). In the present volume one finds a strong meditative vein in the work of performance poet David Antin. His *Meditations* (1971) represents a formal investigation of the mode, and his later "talk poems" should be considered as improvisational meditations on a given theme. James Schuyler's long impromptus, such as "The Morning of the Poem" (1980) and "A Few Days" (1985), combine the Stevensian "act of the mind" with the casual conversational style that one encounters among other members of the New York School such as O'Hara and Ted Berrigan (1934–1983).

The appeal of the meditative poem resides in the patience with which the mind of the poet deploys, maps, and inscribes itself. As a reaction to the abstract language and indeterminacy of scene in meditative poetry, there have been several recent exponents of a return to narrative verse. With James Merrill's elegant masque, *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1983), now completed, poetic works de-

playing many characters and eventful linear narratives followed. Vikram Seth chronicles the foibles of Bay Area yuppies in his 307-page novel-in-verse, *The Golden Gate* (1986). Frederick Turner and Frederick Feirstein issue a manifesto on behalf of the New Narrative in *Expansive Poetry* (1989).

The fizzling of several modernist epic poems and a distaste for the hierarchical structures and belief systems that frame them has led many postmodern poets to serial composition. Poems written in many loosely associated parts also signify the impatience of poets with the short, personal lyric demanded by journals. The series is a modular form in which individual sections are both discontinuous and capable of multiple orderings. In contrast to the linear causality of most narrative forms, the serial poem is desultory and polyvalent, accommodating an expanding and heterodox universe. Among the first postmodern examples is George Oppen's *Discrete Series* (1934). Midcentury practice includes the open-ended "Passages" of Robert Duncan (1919–1988), published through several volumes; Robert Creeley's *Pieces* (1969); *The Journals* (1975) of Paul Blackburn (1926–1971); and the later books of Jack Spicer (1925–1965). Among contemporary poets the examples include *Notes for Echo Lake* (1981) and *At Passages* (1995) by Michael Palmer (b. 1943), who is included in this volume, as well as Robin Blaser's (b. 1925) *Pell Mell* (1988) and Robert Kelly's (b. 1935) *flowers of unceasing coincidence* (1988). The serial poem represents postmodern poetry's innovative contribution to the long form.

In contrast to the return to traditional poetic forms espoused by the New Formalists, some postmodern poets have invented their own constricting formal devices. These procedural forms consist of predetermined and arbitrary constraints that are relied upon to generate the context and direction of the poem during composition. Unconvinced by the presence of any grand order in the world, the poet discretely enacts a personal order. Procedural forms present themselves as alternatives to the well-made metaphorical lyric once touted by the New Criticism. Louis Zukofsky composes the densely inscribed *80 Flowers* in honor of an eightieth birthday he did not live to see; each "flower" comprises eight five-word lines. In such books as *Themes and Variations* (1982) and his Norton "lectures" *I-VI* (1990), John Cage (1912–1992) invents the mesostic, a form of acrostic poem in which he "writes through," or "across," a proper name or aesthetic term centered vertically in the text. Ron Silliman (b. 1946) employs a mathematical sequence known as the Fibonacci series to determine the

number of sentences in each paragraph of his book-length prose poem, *Tjanting* (1981). Rosmarie Waldrop (b. 1935) has written an abecedarium based on a text by George Santayana. These poets advocate constraint for its paradoxically liberating and generative effect.

Many critics and poets have lamented the increasing marginalization of poetry in American culture and intellectual life, with the postmortem examination performed in essays such as Joseph Epstein's "Who Killed Poetry?" in *Commentary* (1988). Few were disturbed by Epstein's declaration that there were no longer any great poets who spoke of language as an "exalted thing" and went forth as "a kind of priest." The passage of such romantic postures was not lamented because neither American poets nor their readers were any longer comfortable with the production or consumption of a cultural artifact in an elitist or quasi-religious vein. Few contemporary poets wish to see themselves as so detached from the secular and egalitarian American experience; few readers wish to worship much of anything.

Epstein scored more heavily when he attacked poets where they live, challenging the cultural efficacy of "poetry professionals" who are wholly supported as teachers in creative writing programs and whose publications are largely subvented by grants and foundations. Poetry became irrelevant – or at least marginal – to American life when poets needed only to perform their academic obligations of workshops, readings, and the publication of a quadrennial volume to secure their careers. Epstein's accusations hurt because he pointed to the most prestigious institutions among the society of poets as the culprits of the genre's decline. Responses that prescribed solutions, rather than merely denying that the patient had expired, include Dana Gioia's "Can Poetry Matter?" in *The Atlantic Monthly* (1991), Jonathan Holden's *The Fate of American Poetry* (1991), and Vernon Shetley's *After the Death of Poetry* (1993). All stop short of suggesting that poets resign their tenured positions. These essays contend that the intensive and self-absorbed "difficulty" of poetry – promoted by modernists as a required response to the complexities of their world, and in disdain for the common reader – has increasingly repelled a general audience. Poetry, these commentators argue, must appeal to and engage the intellectual and cultural concerns of the general reader whose attentions have been captured by prose.

While critics argue over the death of poetry, the writing of poetry has never been more demo-

cratically practiced. Gioia estimates that writing programs "will produce about 20,000 accredited professional poets over the next decade." The quantity alone is impressive, but these poets – whether professional or freelance laborers – will surely be more diverse in their backgrounds than their predecessors. The result of American pluralism is that there are now many more types of poets and poetry than there were in the homogenized, New Critical 1940s. The absence of a "major" poet may be the price paid for the gradual dissolution of the dominant culture that would have identified and rewarded him. Production has increased with the workforce. As Rochell Ratner observed with a touch of weariness in an essay for *American Book Review* titled "Superfluous?" in 1994, "a recent 'Poetry Showcase' at Poets House in New York City had nearly 1000 books on display, all published in 1993." As readership erodes in the relentless surf of popular broadcast media, one wonders whether the chapbooks and small-press publications have not already outnumbered the people who purchase them. But the almost tenfold growth in noncommercial literary presses between 1965 and 1990 documented by Loss Pequeño Glazier in *Small Press* (1992) suggests something important: even as poetry appears to decline in prestige and in the attention paid to it by major markets, there is a thriving "back channel" of writing and exchange that escapes the notice of culturally conservative institutions. This alternative ferment, separate from the résumé stuffing of some eminent poets and critics, may yet provide the next significant advance in poetics and speak to poetry's role in the next century.

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