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The Cambridge Companion to British Poetry, 1945-2010

Edited by Edward Larrissy

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This addition to the well-established *Cambridge Companions* series shares affinities with earlier titles notably *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century English Poetry* (Corcoran, 2007) (RR 2008/348) and to a lesser extent *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century British and Irish Women's Poetry* (Dawson, 2011) and *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry* (Campbell, 2003). The title of these volumes signals the area of focus within each. *British Poetry, 1945-2010* shares similarities but, as its own title indicates, is concerned with what might be signalled by the term "British Poetry" and extends its concern with poetry beyond the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. As one would expect there is some continuity between *Companion to Twentieth Century English Poetry* and *British Poetry, 1945-2010* in terms of the poetry discussed and also, neatly, some editorial continuity, Edward Larrissy, the editor of the latter volume, contributed a chapter on William Empson, Dylan Thomas and W.S. Graham in the former.

Other *Companions* I have reviewed present their contents through subdividing them into smaller sections. This *Companion* does not do that and feels more approachable as a consequence. There are 16 chapters, each presenting a specific area of focus which is clearly signalled in the chapter title. In his *Introduction*, Edward Larrissy provides a concise

overview of how a starting point, a year, for this *Companion* was identified. Following this, he provides some context for mid-twentieth century poetry and discussion about how "nation" intersects with the poetries in this volume. Chapters 1 to 7 proceed in roughly chronological order. In Chapter 1, C.D. Blanton looks at Poets of the Forties and Early Fifties: The Last Romantics?, covering, among others, F.T. Prince, Sidney Keyes, the "New Apocalypse" poets, Dylan Thomas, George Barker, Kathleen Raine and W. S. Graham. Chapter 2, The Movement: Poetry and the Reading Public, sees Patrick Dean discuss the Movement, the variety of poetry with which most readers are likely to be familiar, not least in the form of poetry by fellow librarian Philip Larkin. Dean's chapter examines some of the social and cultural influences which contributed towards the shaping of Movement poetry. Survivors from before the War: Late Modernists and Poets of the 1930s looks at W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, David Jones and Basil Bunting in John Matthias' Chapter 3, followed by coverage of Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, Charles Tomlinson and Roy Fisher in Eric Falci's Chapter 4, Beyond All This Fiddle. Chapter 5 examines public receptions of poetry through the lens of Poetry and Performance: The Mersey Poets, The International Poetry Incarnation and Performance Poetry which includes a section on the significance of listening in relation to performance. In Chapter 6, Simon Perril writes about poetries which are too often absent from our library collections and until very recently have, arguably, been out of sight and out of mind for a large majority of readers, even those who might consider themselves to be avid readers of contemporary poetry. Under the title, High Late-Modernists or Postmodernists?, Vanguard and Linguistically Innovative British Poetries since 1960, the idea of distinguishing between modernist and postmodernist facilitates Perril's discussion of poets such as Geraldine Monk, Robert Sheppard, Denise Riley, Allen Fisher, J.H. Prynne and Andrea Brady, among many others who are writing and publishing today. Natalie Pollard's Chapter 7 Stretching the Lyric: The Anthology Wars, Martianism and After examines, as the title suggests, the role of the poetry anthology in shaping cultural, historical and more immediately public receptions of poetry.

Chapters 8 to 16 approach poetry through categories, a pattern familiar to those who regularly examine academic publications on poetry. Here again, we find poetry discussed under the rubric of chapter headings which, while perhaps convenient categories for academics, students and scholars, working within their confines of disciplinary study (and

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associated funding) also annexes these poetries as separate from the main stream and the mainstream of poetries. Chapter 8 examines Poetry and Class and includes coverage of Tony Harrison, Ken Smith, Tom Pickard, Sean O'Brian, Don Paterson, Douglas Dunn, Tom Leonard and right at the very end of the chapter, one woman is mentioned, Liz Lochhead. Chapter 9 "In a Between World": Northern Irish Poetry, covers – as one might expect – Seamus Heaney, and short discussions of a large number of other poets by way of considering the shaping of what might be identifiable as "Northern Irish poetry". This is followed by Chapter 10 Scottish Poetry, 1945-2010 and Chapter 11 Welsh Poetry since 1945. The former includes discussion of significant anthologies and the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid, W.S. Graham, George Mackay Brown, Iain Crichton Smith, Robert Garioch, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Norman MacCaig, Edwin Morgan, Jackie Kay and Liz Lochhead. The chapter on Welsh poetries includes Glyn Jones, Dylan Thomas, R.S. Thomas, Idris Davies, Lynette Roberts, Gillian Clarke and Gwyneth Lewis. Chapter 12 Black British Poetry is divided into sections which cover distinct areas including the issue "Black British" or "British?", Una Marson, James Berry, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Black British Poetry and Feminism, Anthologies and Millennial Poets. Chapter 13 continues the by now long tradition of separating discussion of poetry which happens to be written by women into a distinct category, here presenting under the title Poetry, Feminism, Gender and Women's Experiences. This chapter discusses social, cultural and overarching historical factors in terms of the shaping of poetry which is read as relating to the issues represented in the chapter title. Many poets are mentioned in this chapter, although treatment of their work is shorter than in chapters which appear earlier in this volume. Individual names which leap out include Stevie Smith, Denise Riley, Wendy Mulford, Gillian Allnutt, Jo Shapcott, Carol Ann Duffy and Jackie Kay.

The final three chapters look firmly at topical approaches to poetry, relating to current trends in academic scholarship, so Chapter 14, Ecopoetics and Poetry; Chapter 15, Poetry and the City; and Chapter 16, Poetry's Outward Forms; Groups, Workshops, Readings, Publishers approach contemporary poetry through the thematic lenses indicated in each title.

Further reading is presented across 13 pages at the end of the book, arranged under the chapter title headings, and includes a list of General Works. This makes an excellent starting point for readers wishing to pursue any of the

chapter topics in greater depth. The Index comprises 19 pages, ensuring readers can approach the book for a short dip, pursuing perhaps a reference query, or follow specific trains of thought. This volume meets the high standards we expect from the *Cambridge Companion* series. Each contributor is an academic with expertise in the area on which they write. Each chapter is engagingly and accessibly written, providing a necessarily selective overview of the subject.

This title is recommended for university libraries supporting English literature courses and public libraries seeking to ensure their poetry collections reflect current thinking in the field. The title is also available within the *Cambridge Companions Online* package.

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The Cambridge Companion to the American Modernist Novel

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The Cambridge Companion to the American Modernist Novel part of the *Cambridge Companions to Literature* series, provides over a dozen original, analytical essays about American modernist novels and their relations to global literatures and movements. The text's editor, James L. Miller, an Associate Professor of