Article:
O'Hanlon, K (2018) Modern Literature: British Poetry Post-1950. Year's Work in English Studies, 97 (1). pp. 995-1010. ISSN 0084-4144

https://doi.org/10.1093/ywes/may015

7. British Poetry Post-1950

2016 saw the publication of two major surveys of post-war poetry in the same series: The Cambridge Companion to British and Irish Poetry, 1945-2010, edited by Edward Larrissy, and The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010), edited by Deirdre Osborne. Both volumes exhibit what has increasingly become a hallmark of this series: a judicious balance between an authoritative overview (the expected roll-call of major schools and figures, national poetries within Britain, race, class and gender), and a gathering of neglected and under-examined material. In the introduction, Larrissy does not underestimate the profound impact of the Movement on post-war poetry, offering a dichotomy-cum-spectrum in the form of 'empirical/mythological' approaches to the poet's own material as a governing feature of the period (p. 3). Nevertheless, he intimates antinomies to this pervasive schematisation of poetry after modernism which are taken up in several essays in the book. If the pattern, overall, may seem to be a series of reactions and counter-reactions, the nexuses in terms of unexplored latent influence, and the embeddedness of poetry within institutions and markets which these essays suggest are compelling. C.D. Blanton's essay 'Poets of the Forties and Early Fifties: The Last Romantics?' is an implicit apologia for the 1940s and 1950s neo-Romantic and New Apocalypse poetry against which the poets of the Movement set their faces. He begins with an outrider, the sui-generis F.T. Prince, before considering Dylan Thomas as a presiding genius and probing the affiliations of poets such as Keith Douglas, John Heath-Stubbs, and Sidney Keyes who wrote in Yeatsian strain in an introduction to the 1941 anthology Eight Oxford Poets, 'we are all […] Romantic writers'. Blanton's crucial point in the essay is that this belated strain of Romantic imagination docked the original's transcendental and totalising reach (p. 15). His chapter joins an ongoing recuperation of this period and the loose coterie which straddled the war years: William Wooten's 'Friendship and the Gift in the Poetry of George Barker, W.S. Graham, Dylan Thomas, and Vernon Watkins' (English 65:ii[2016] 115-37) theorises this inter-generational exchange through the metaphor of gift economy; and the PN Review published James Keery's 'One from the Groves of Academe, the Other from Bohemia's Seaport' on David Wright and Movement-antagonist, Donald Davie (PNR 43:i[2016] 23-26), and Henry King's 'Literary Enough?' (PNR 42:v[2016] 70-72) on John Heath-Stubbs.

In Larrissy's collection, Fran Brearton's '"In a between world": Northern Irish Poetry' offers a reflexive examination of the anthological rationale (and inevitable controversy either way) involved in whether to include or exclude Northern Irish poetry in

'British' anthologies. Jon Glover's 'Poetry's Outward Forms: Groups, Workshops, Readings, Publishers' gives a fascinating account of the emergence of institutional frameworks for post-war poetry including the Gregory Fellowships at the University of Leeds and the shadow cast by Philip Hobsbaum and The Group. Natalie Pollard's 'Stretching the Lyric: The Anthology Wars, Martianism and After', a sparky account of taste, branding, and literary consumption, focuses on Andrew Motion and Blake Morrison's controversial Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry [1982] and the market (and marketed) dominance of Martianism and the New Generation poets. This essay builds on Pollard's previous study of lyric address in terms of literary economics, Speaking to You [2012]. Patrick Deane's 'The Movement: Poetry and the Reading Public' gives a brisk, nuanced overview of Larkin's domain. 'Survivors from before the War: Late Modernists and Poets of the 1930s' by John Matthias examines the Auden generation and modernist remnants such as Basil Bunting and David Jones. 'Beyond All this Fiddle: Hughes, Hill, Tomlinson and Fisher' by Eric Falci complicates A. Alvarez's critical interventions of the sixties, examining the way poets of the era conform (Hughes), complicate (Hill and Tomlinson), or evade (Fisher) Alvarez's categories. Cornelia Gräbner's 'Poetry and Performance: The Mersey Poets, the International Poetry Incarnation and Performance Poetry' provides an engaging snapshot of the performative energies of poetry influenced by the Beats. In 'High Late-Modernists or Postmodernists? Vanguard and Linguistically Innovative British Poetries since 1960', Simon Perril gives a comprehensive idea of the contours of avant-garde poetry. Sandie Byrne's 'Poetry and Class' focuses on the vexed navigations of class and education in Tony Harrison, Ken Smith, Tom Pickard, Don Paterson, Douglas Dunn, and Liz Lochhead.

In 'Scottish Poetry, 1945-2010', Alan Riach charts an iconic group of seven post-war poets headed by Hugh MacDiarmid, as well as the wellsprings of Gaelic writing, experiments in multimedia, and hybrid Scottish identities. Katie Gramich's 'Welsh Poetry since 1945' adopts a similar approach, taking in less familiar poets such as the surrealist-influenced Glyn Jones, Lynette Roberts, and Alison Bielski, with 'praise poetry' (p. 166) pitched as a key Welsh mode. In 'Poetry, Feminism, Gender, and Women's Experience', Jan Montefiore troubles the notion that there is a 'ghettoization' inherent in a 'feminist poetics' by examining the relative strengths and weaknesses of that argument in relation to influential anthologies of women poets. Fiona Becket's 'Ecopoetics and Poetry' conducts a gripping study of Jon Silkin's political poetry as forming the basis of a 'contiguity between "nature" and "man"' (p. 215), and finally, 'Poetry and the City' by Peter Barry develops a thesis on urban poetics,

taking in situationist practices (made feasible by grant funding) of such 'urban epic' experiments as Zoë Skoulding's Metropoetica (p. 238).

Larrissy's Cambridge Companion also includes Sarah Lawson Welsh's 'Black British Poetry', which celebrates among other things the radical black presses of the 1960s and 1970s, such as New Beacon Books, and Kamau Braithwaite's collective, the Caribbean Artists Movement. Edited by Deirdre Osborne, The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature is similarly strong on the experimental and innovative poetics of Black British writers. It explores the way in which, as Osborne puts it in her introduction, 'British black and Asian writers have claimed their cultural citizenship in the face of […] disregard, and transformed the English language itself, to better equip it as a vehicle for rendering the multiple, multicultural viewpoints in contemporary British society' (p. 2). Essays addressing post-war poetry include 'Liberationist Political Poetics' by Birgit Neumann (pp. 59-76), which focuses on the ways post-war British Caribbean poetry re-defines the terrain by drawing on 'the sonic dimensions of black oral tradition' (p. 73). 'British Black and LGBTQ Writing' by Kanika Batra (pp. 159-76) examines Labi Siffre's black queer poetics as an overlooked area in critical literary histories. Corine Fowler's 'The Poetics and Politics of Spoken Word Poetry' (pp. 177-92) exemplifies the broad approaches adopted in the book, reading the intersections and dynamic exchange between the British Poetry Revival and black spoken word poetry as dismantling binaries, such as regional or transnational (p. 180). Romana Huk's contribution, 'Genre Crossings: Rewriting "the Lyric" in Innovative Black British Poetry', argues that black British poets came to resent being pigeonholed as performance poets, an "othering" association that emerged partly from a postmodern suspicion of the lyric. Huk excavates D.S. Marriott's 'post-postmodern' rehabilitation of the lyric for unironic purposes, the poet's experience of the 'disavowal' (p. 234) of 'forgotten black suffering': a buried collectivity within the personal lyric (p. 237). Her judicious quotations from John Wilkinson's sensitive readings of Marriott, as well as a discussion of the latter's debts to Prynne, indicate the centrality of black British poetics to the avant-garde, while Huk's essay itself is a model of the extremely current critical debates surrounding the status of the lyric, a conversation that is decidedly inflected by avant-garde impulses.

One significant early foray into this territory was reissued in 2016 by Tony Frazer's Shearsman Books, which continues to be a powerhouse for significant critical studies of the post-war poetic vanguard. First published in 1978, Veronica Forrest-Thomson's Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry disputes the idea that poets have access to 'reality in its unmediated state', insisting instead that it is poetry's duty to vindicate 'all the

rhythmic, phonetic, verbal and logical devices' (p. 33) that are its especial jurisdiction. It is instructive to find—almost four decades on—that the problem of the lyric 'I' continues to squat stubbornly on the critical scene (as in Huk's essay), but it is also salutary to reflect on how Forrest-Thomson's interrogations of reductive poetic paraphrase of the external world are now put to radically different uses: at least one reviewer pondered what the author of Poetic Artifice would have to say confronted with a work such as Claudia Rankine's Citizen, a genre-defying 'lyric' which is nothing if not exercised by the 'external world' of racial prejudice.

Shearsman also published a Festschrift for J.H. Prynne's eightieth birthday. For the Future, edited by Ian Brinton, drew ire from some quarters on social media for its ratio of women contributors to men, with someone waggishly touting a Prynne for Girls primer. The handsome book contains illuminating memoir-vignettes by former students: Brinton's introduction includes a detailed discussion of Prynne's seminar notes, including an excerpt from one of these entitled 'Post-Romantic Mind' on Henry Mayhew's mid-Victorian opus London Labour and the London Poor [1851]. This involved discussion views the eminent Victorian's incompatible moral presentiments as correlative to, if not derivative from, the jumbling of perception afforded by urban crowding (pp. 10-15). David Herd's '"To take the whole condition of something": On Prynne reading Olson' investigates Prynne's 'vantage' (situatedness as a reader) in his re-orientation of Olson's Maximus poems in a lecture at Simon Fraser University, 27 July 1971. Michael Tencer's 'Notes on "Es Lebe der König"' provides a close-reading of Prynne's elegy for Paul Celan, which in the spirit of those Cambridge seminars 'is not designed to harass […] into a particular channel of consideration' (p. 6). Michael Haslam contributes a brief memoir, 'Prynne's Gold'. Michael Grant's '"Mixing Memory and Desire": Eliot and the Subjectile' is an intriguing essay (prompted by a pedagogical strategy of Prynne's decades past) on the future anterior and Eliot. In 'And You Too', Anthony Barnett remembers publishing Prynne's debut. Harry Gilonis's 'Looking at/looking for J.H. Prynne's "Stone Lake" focuses on Prynne's Sino-poetics. 'A Bash in the Tunnel' provides a joint memoir by Ian Friend and Richard Humphreys. Another reminiscence by John Wilkinson, 'I Staircase, Gonville and Caius', centres on his tutor's 'hospitality and secrecy' (p. 84). John Hall's 'Learning from Jeremy Prynne, 1963-1967 – An Autobiographical Sketch' is another student-memoir. Peter Larkin writes on Prynne's botany in 'If Flowers of Language Will (Have) Been a Language of Flowers: Trials of Florescence in the Poems of J.H. Prynne'. Nigel Wheale's faceted gem of an essay 'madrigalian / brightness: Renaissance Prynne' is declared 'Heidegger-free' (p. 123). Masahiko Abe writes

on interpreting the work via Cubist practices in 'J.H. Prynne and Grid'. Matthew Hall's '"Assuming banishment for lost time back across nullity": on opening Acrylic Tips' complements postcolonial treatment of the poem in his article, 'Terra Nullius: Colonial Violence in Prynne's Acrylic Tips' (JBIIP 8:i[2016] 5[ko1] paras). Anthony Mellors writes on Prynne's avant-garde distribution networks in 'wynsum wong: J.H. Prynne Inside and Outside The English Intelligencer'. Peter Riley's bouquet for the florilegium is a lyrical memoir, 'It was also…'. Peter Hughes's '"Possente spirto": On First Reading Prynne' provides a personal account of an impassioned reader. Ian Brinton writes on Andrew Crozier's role in the letterpress publication of Prynne's Brass, in 'Brass nearly off'. Peter Gizzi's 'Introduction for The White Stones (NYRB Edition)' is also reprinted here. David Caddy discusses Prynne's influence on his practice as an editor in 'To A Reader'. Joseph Persad provides a review essay of the 2015 Bloodaxe collection in '"For the for you / and these to hold": Receiving J.H. Prynne's Poems'. Finally, 'Hearing Light', Iain Sinclair's elegy for the decade from 1968 to 1979, hints at a mode common to several critical pieces on this period that were published this year. Also in 2016, the Paris Review's published the first major interview with Prynne in its 'The Art of Poetry' series (ParisR 218:iii[2016] pp. 1-23), covering unfamiliar or easily forgotten aspects of his poetic evolution. These include his early tutelage under Donald Davie, whose scholarly responsibility and answerability remained an example, as opposed to the 'crackpot' dereliction of unruly figures such as Pound (p. 7). New avenues for investigation are opened by this interview, against the grain of more familiar avant-garde narratives.

Prynne is, unsurprisingly, a luminary in several other critical works appearing in 2016 on the British avant-garde. The most significant of these is another offering by Shearsman: Clasp: Late Modernist Poetry in London in the 1970s, edited by Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards. The rhizomatic emergence of experimental poetry displaces any reductive narrative in this assemblage of essays and reminiscences, where a key feature is the attention paid to the multifarious institutional and organisational supports. These include Mottram's 'infiltration' of the Poetry Society, of course, but also Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum, art colleges, independent bookshops, and various small presses (pp. 9-12). Clive Bush's essay 'Challenging the "Little England" Consensus in British Poetry: Eric Mottram, Poetry Review and Talus' focuses on the 'reciprocal' aspects of Anglo-American poetic exchange spearheaded by Mottram in that decade (p. 17). Paul A. Green's 'In the Poetry Zones' delves into the 'zones of amazement' of the underground scene, including its interzones, such as the 'sibylline tones of David Gascoyne' mingling with punk ranters at the Angels of Fire festival

in November 1983 (p. 23). John Welch's 'Back Then' recounts meeting Anthony Howell at Norman Hidden's Poetry Workshop, and the 'do-it-yourself' character of much poetic endeavour including Howell's co-operative magazine, Wallpaper (p. 29). Lawrence Upton provides a colourful, partisan account of the "poetry wars' in 'So Many Things'. In 'Tangled up in politics', Elaine Randell recalls navigating those treacherous waters with her then-husband, Barry MacSweeney, as members of the Poetry Society. She offers an intriguing vignette of rumoured CIA men lingering around its meetings at the White House pub (p. 39). In 'Working with Bob Cobbing Through the 1970s', Paula Claire tenders a eulogy to Cobbing's work with the Writers Forum, including an account of an organ-powered recital of his concrete poem 15 Shakespeare Kaku at Southwark Cathedral in 1972. Valerie Soar's 'Whispers from the past' commends the archival acquisitions of avant-garde little magazines undertaken by her husband Geoffrey as librarian of UCL's special collections department in the seventies. Anthony Howell's 'Beige Leather Trousers, Orange Dungarees' revisits the magic of the Film Co-Op and Robert Janz's studio, both housed in 'the Dairy' in northwest London. In a discernible thread of this year's critical work on the British avant-garde, Iain Sinclair's 'Hackney Stopover: Rage in the Eastern Heaven' critiques the chthonic nationalist implications of marketing the vanguard under the banner of 'Albion', alluding intriguingly to BNP cells operating out of dubious indie bookshops with that tag (p. 60). Tony Lopez's 'Brixton, Wivenhoe, Gonville & Caius' provides a personal topography of the scene, and encounters with John Ashbery. Robert Hampson explores the underground vitality of British modernism and the avant-garde debts to MacDiarmid and Bunting consolidated by their presence at the 1974 Modern British Poetry conference at the Polytechnic of Central London in 'King's College and the PCL Poetry Conferences'. In 'A Good Decade for Getting Lost: London in the 1970s', David Miller recounts his emigration from Australia and entrance into the London avant-garde, including an homage to Robert Lax, and Miller's affiliations with other antipodean poets in the city. Another immigrant encounter with the counter-culture and in particular the Association of Little Presses is revealed in Robert Vas Dias's 'My Baptism by Fire'. Will Rowe's essay 'The Translation Workshop and Ecuatorial magazine' provides a fascinating insight into the workshop and its associated print forum, based at KCL, and the significance of translated Latin American poetry to the British avant-garde. In 'Poetry in the 1970s', Stephen Watts provides a helpful personal checklist of the range of supporting networks to experimental poetry, including important second-hand bookshops such as Compendium, access to university libraries, and Bengali poetry emerging in the East End. P.C. Fencott supplies a quirky facsimile (untitled) of a typescript, showing an annotated mix

of essay and collage as a mimesis of that very process in his collaborations with Cobbing on a North American tour in 1982. In ‘Lower Green Farm’, Ken Edwards writes elegiacally about several attempts at creating poetic communes, including the eponymous farm in Orpington. Peter Barry recounts the difficulty of his personal mission to achieve a détente between that world and the academic critical industry in ‘Climbing the Twisty Staircase: “London 1970-85”’. Robert Sheppard laments the surprising lack of funding for the capital’s underground scene in comparison to its regional counterparts in ‘Took Chances in London Traffic’. Gavin Selerie celebrates the fusion of media and breakdown of different artistic categories in ‘Kaleidoscope of Spirits’, including the multimedia experience of a London Contemporary Dance Theatre event at Sadler’s Well in the late seventies. Gilbert Adair’s ‘Islands and Affiliations: Sub-Voicive’ looks at that collective’s history and pooling of readers and audiences with King’s College. Frances Presley’s ‘Experimental poetry and feminism? London 1980-86’ mounts a critique of the male-dominated inner-circles of the underground and explores the ambivalent attitudes towards feminist poetry on the part of women experimental poets she otherwise admired, which she believes were occasionally (but not always) warranted. Finally, John Muckle accounts for the origins of yet another controversial anthology, The New British Poetry [1988]. The book contains a brief but well-chosen bibliography and the essays’ footnotes are awash with intriguing points of departure, making it essential reading for anyone interested in getting to grips with post-war poetry and the avant-garde.

Ian Brinton also edited John Riley: Selected Poetry and Prose. Tragically murdered in 1978, Riley helped set up the Grosseteste Review and its press. He was associated with the Cambridge School, and later became a fixture in the Leeds poetry scene, which has begun to receive more critical attention. Assembling what Ian Duhig calls in his preface Riley’s ‘poetry-in-prose alchemical experiments’ (p. 8), the volume also contains an introductory essay by Brinton, which illuminates Riley’s theological inheritances, from Grosseteste’s treatise De Luce to his conversion to Russian Orthodoxy shortly before his untimely death. It also reveals Prynne’s intriguing worry that Riley’s ‘Czargrad’ would be dismissed as ‘maudlin theism […] cathected into the lyric stream’ (p. 13). However, from the selection Brinton has brought together, it seems that Riley is not easily ‘cathected’ to any project. The prose assembled is idiosyncratic, hybrid, a strannik’s mysticism: neither critical nor annexable from criticism. A short ars poetica which reads like spiritual maxims contains the rueful dictum, ‘when a man wishes to destroy himself, he cultivates objectivity’ (p. 110). Riley emerges as a compelling and marginal figure who merits a wider readership.

Elsewhere, Ross Hair's fascinating study Avant Folk: Small Press Poetry Networks from 1950 to Present conducts a transatlantic-localist investigation of the rural fringes of the avant-garde in the post-war years, centring upon the small press poetry networks valiantly and eccentrically maintained by committed individuals such as 'Scottish Futurist' Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press and Stuart Mills' Nottingham-based Tarasque Press. These figures, Hair argues, 'incorporated modernist poetry forms and strategies with discerning uses of regional dialect, demotic culture, and craft practices' (p. 3) and harnessing print techniques that emphasised simplicity and calm. Other figures of interest in the book include Thomas A. Clark and Simon Cutts. Hair's study is a welcome contribution to the considerable interest in periodical and small press networks that has emerged out of Modernist Studies, and is yet to properly take wing in post-1950 studies. Jeremy Reed's I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Asa Benveniste and Trigram Press is another personal mapping of one such small London-based press and its maverick poet-founder, which valued artists working in conditions of exile.

David Herd's 'Declining National Culture: the Dislocated Poetics of A Various Art' (PNR 42:iv[2016] 29-34) focuses on Andrew Crozier's anthological drive away from a narrow national frame. Similarly, James Cummings's '"The history of Ireland he knew before he went to school": The Irish Tom Raworth' (IUR 46:i[2016] 158-70) explores this avant-garde poet's Irish roots. Cummings reviews the anti-Treaty affiliations of his mother, the Irish Catholic tinges to his work and Raworth's bicultural critique of the nationalistic tendencies of The English Intelligencer: 'I don't really see any reason in terms like "English poet"' (p. 168). Allen Fisher's collection, Imperfect Fit: Aesthetic Function, Facture & Perception in Art and Writing Since 1950 republishes essays written between 1985 and 2011, formalising in one book what is essentially Fisher's riff on reader-response theory. This is extrapolated more broadly to include proprioceptive encounters with any art, influenced by trends in what is most often referred to as 'Complexity Studies', and eclectically enriched by Fisher's broad reading in Foucault, theoretical biology, Outsider art, and Heidegger. Charles Olson, however, is the major theoretical influence on Fisher's poetics. Fisher posits that decoherence – the misrecognition of patterns implicit in both the 'facture' (creation) and perception of art – is an inevitable, and salutary aspect of the 'aesthetic function', something he describes as 'confidence in lack' (p. 18). Chapter 3, 'Necessary Business: Aesthetics and Patterns of Connectedness: Reading Works by cris cheek, Eric Mottram, and J.H. Prynne' applies these concerns to the specific 'damage' caused to the aesthetic function in an era of 'ochlocracy, a mob rule signified by an emphatic interest in power, mass opinion, and

singularity' (p. 44). Fisher links up in a surprising way to Pollard's accounts (discussed above) of much more media-savvy poets of the succeeding generation on the saturation of poetics by questions of appeal, consumption and 'making it new'.

We remain firmly vexed twixt those questions in two hefty volumes reissued by Shearsman, although published previously by other presses: The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry and Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry, both by Andrew Duncan. The first of these is a celebration of innovative poetry in the sixties and seventies that challenged what Duncan reads as an innately-conservative mainstream tendency in British poetry to continually rededicate moribund practices as 'new', while also recognising in a new foreword that 'I suspect that both the mainstream and the Underground positions have collapsed, and that young poets now are faced by a strange and unexplained situation' (p. 26). The second book adapts the same counter-cultural model to examine regional experimentalism versus metropolitan establishment. Duncan evinces a raucous and enthusiastic one-man-band style of criticism, which is, sometimes, catching: 'everyone in the EngLit business shares the same staple culture, the same carbohydrate pack of texts and clever remarks. But people from Oxford have more of it' (p. 19).

Perhaps one of the most vital, undervalued of these figures mentioned in Duncan's books is Christopher Middleton, a formidable translator (most notably from the German of Robert Walser) and a challenging poet. Middleton's death in November 2015 prompted tribute in the PN Review. Drew Milne's 'Noisemakers of Now' (PNR 42:iv[2016] 48-52) is a review essay of Middleton's Collected Later Poems [2014], that places Middleton, in his own words, 'somewhere between Brecht and Mallarmé', whilst noting that the fact that each of his poems remains 'singular and sovereign' may well account for the relative paucity of critical work (p. 47). In 'If there was a snake here, I'd apologise' (PNR 42:iv[2016] 54-5), John Clegg provides a comparative reading of Middleton's poem 'Coral Snake' and the animal poetry of D.H. Lawrence. The composer Michael Hersch discusses his setting some Middleton poems to music in 'Reflections on Christopher Middleton' (PNR 42:iv[2016] 55-6). Thomas Loewenstein's 'On Christopher Middleton' (PNR 42:iv[2016] 57-8) focuses on the early collection Torse 3 and Middleton's 'work beyond Anglophone boundaries'. For Middleton, 'experiment and tradition', Loewenstein claims, 'were no longer antinomies' (p. 55). Finally, Marius Kociejowski offers a moving recollection of their friendship in 'The Very Rich Hours of Christopher Middleton' (PNR 42:iv[2016] 59-61).

On 30 June 2016, Geoffrey Hill died 'suddenly, and without dread or pain', according to the announcement on social media by his wife, the librettist and priest Alice Goodman. In

response, Agenda, a magazine that had championed Hill throughout his long career, dedicated an 'Homage to Geoffrey Hill'. W.S. Milne proffers a vivid eulogy, 'Geoffrey Hill: 1932-2016' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] 16-20), in which he remembers Hill berating the printer of his Agenda Editions, The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy for a sloping 'I' in his surname on the spine: 'I've looked at this closely… and it's definitely leaning to the left' (p. 17). Stephen Romer's tribute, 'The Voice of the Heckler' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] 22-4) draws attention to a metaphor Hill used for his poetry in a lesser-known lecture on poetry and war: a new Israeli tank that redirects fire back on the enemy. Cliver Wilmer's 'Geoffrey Hill: Scattered Reminiscences' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] 27-31) provides more than it promises in terms of critical acuity. Wilmer, for instance, nominates the word 'pinnacled' as the making of Hill's poem 'Merlin', for retaining a sense of polis though Camelot has long tumbled to seed (p. 27). William Bedford contributes a very short personal tribute 'Geoffrey Hill: In Memoriam' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] p. 33). Peter Carpenter provides a personal reading of Hill's King Log and account of his impact on fellow Cambridge students in the 1980s in 'Geoffrey Hill: the Lost Amazing Crown' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] 34-8). The artist Keith Grant writes about Hill sitting for his portrait in 'Geoffrey Hill: a God-given inspiration' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] 41-2). Martin Caseley recollects a reading from The Daybooks in 'Geoffrey Hill: A Reading at Aldeburgh, 2009' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] 45-6). Finally, Peter Dale gives a short but illuminating fragment on Hill's involvement in the literary scene of Soho's pubs in the fifties, in 'Two Anecdotes' (Agenda 50:i-ii[2016] p. 48).

Even before his sudden death, Hill was the subject of numerous critical works in 2016. Alex Pestell's monograph, Geoffrey Hill: The Drama of Reason takes its title from a trope Hill found in Coleridge, which he associated with 'the antiphonal voice of the heckler' (p. 32). Pestell's book treats Hill's poetics as a kind of creative epistemology responding to various aspects of dialogue as the central feature of assessing the grounds for objectivity, which is a (potentially chimerical) good to be definitively distinguished from, and wrested out of, the 'primary objective world' (p. 9). Pestell dwells at length in his introduction on Hill's '"The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure": A Debate', a seminal uncollected essay published in 1971/2 in Agenda; and he argues convincingly that it contains 'in nuce' the thematic and formal preoccupations of a lifetime: poetic-critical thinking as dramatic orchestration, reflexive, contextual, and perhaps most importantly, mimetic. Chapter 1 examines Hill's Coleridgean antiphonal voices, going beyond the popularity of this figure to describe Hill's style to examine it not as 'a pantomimed soliloquy' but a clash of 'historical planes of intellectual activity' (p. 38). Chapter 2 continues to analyse the Romantic poet's

intellectual influence on Hill. Pestell finds that Coleridge's concept of the 'tautegorical, position that concept is activated by form, tends towards a consolatory solipsitic quietism in Hill (p. 66). Exploring Hill's reading of T.H. Green and his poem Speech! Speech!, Chapter 3 stages a Sidnean confrontation between poetry and abstract, utilitarian tendencies within philosophy. Chapter 4 examines Hill's emulation of F.H. Bradley's conditionality, 'non-resolution', as a desideratum in asking the question, 'What is a Bradleian poem?" (pp. 106-107). Chapters 6 and 7 focus on Hill's engagements with Ezra Pound and their distinct yet comparable senses of 'diagnosis' (as opposed to poetry exhibiting 'symptoms'). Pestell offers forensic analysis of the ways in which Hill places strict limits on the imaginative polis that poetry's diagnostic powers are capable of creating (pp. 146-147). These sections on Pound round off with a provocative arbitration between critical apologies and Hill's recoil from Pound's poetics, in order to consider how Hill's reception probes the 'coexistence of rage and creativity' (p. 179). The deft handling of tremendously difficult questions concerning politics and poetics in these two chapters is recommended reading for anyone seeking to get to grips with such vexed terrain. Chapter 7 both acquits and accuses Hill of Tom Paulin's infamous charges, levelled in the London Review of Books in April 1985, that Hill's imagination was 'shabby and reactionary' aestheticism (p. 181). The final chapter sees Hill's post-Canaan work as a shift in his annexation of poetry's proper stance towards civil society, and an exploration of the paradox at the heart of 'intrinsic value' as a desideratum. Hill, Pestell argues, both defends the aporia of such a criterion—its constitution by the contingent, and immediate revelations of value – a move that Peter Robinson has described as 'theological' (p. 211). This is a book of serious ambition, critical probity, and merits attention.

Several articles on Hill also appeared: Travis Helms's 'Alienated Majesty (redux): Geoffrey Hill and a "theology of language"' (Book 2.0 6:i-ii[2016] 97-108) provides an introductory contextualisation of Hill's critical thought in terms of a theological poetics. In 'Finding Consonance in the Disparities: Geoffrey Hill, John Milton, and Modernist Poetics' (MLR 111.iii[2016] 665-83], Steven Matthews attempts to account for the bewildering Poundian project of Hill's late work in The Daybooks. Matthews considers Milton 'a modernist avant la lettre' (p. 667), whose technical example in deployment of line endings and enjambments as both yoking together and holding apart bequeaths to Hill an awkward poetics adequate to the patterned difficulty of modernity and a syntax that draws together dislocation (p. 677). Karl O'Hanlon's '"Noble in his grandiose confusions": Yeats and Coriolanus in the poetry of Geoffrey Hill' (English 65:ccl[2016] 211-33) examines the allusive connection between Yeats and Shakespeare's play in Hill's later work, in light of the

latter's insistence that the play is crucial for understanding 'the presence of polyphony' in the politics of modernist style (p. 233). O'Hanlon also harnesses unpublished material, including drafts of Hill's major sonnet sequence 'Funeral Music', to argue for the influence of a poet often thought of as Confessional on one who has publicly excoriated such displays, in '"The Violent and Formal Dancers": John Berryman and Geoffrey Hill' (CQ 45:iii[2016] 208-23). In '"The Changed Measures of Light": Post-Romanticism and Geoffrey Hill' (Romanticism 22:iii[2016] 331-40), Michael O'Neill returns to legacies that occupied him in The All-Sustaining Air [2007]. This article revisits the post-Romantic 'predicament' of Hill in terms of the guilt of writing poetry which is only expiable in that same process with recourse to the poet's images of light as a Romantic trope of change, deferred revelation. Anthony Rowland's article 'Reading Holocaust Poetry: singularity and Geoffrey Hill's "September Song"' (TPr 30:i[2016] 69-88) uses Derek Attridge's concept of literature as an 'event' to query whether close reading may betray poetry to unethical stances, such as when an ingenuous piece of bravura reduces a poem on atrocity to verbal pyrotechnics. Rowland argues that if silence after the Holocaust is not possible, aestheticising violence may be resisted by adopting an 'awkward poetics' which admits 'the problems of representation within the texts' themselves. Hill succeeds, Rowland suggests, in doing this in 'September Song' (p. 70). In 'Wales and the Spirit: Geoffrey Hill's Oraclau │Oracles' (L&T 30:i[2016] 1-14), Stefan Hawlin sees Hill as writing an anti-materialist 'boldly Christian and humanistic poetic sequence' centering on how Anglo-Welsh biculturalism may displace secular narratives. In its distilled focus, however, Hawlin's argument does not take account of Hill's animus to Christianity throughout his late work. Finally, the sermon-cum-lecture preached by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, at Hill's funeral returns to the insistently 'ethical' character of Hill's work (PNR 43:ii[2016] 8-9).

There were monographs and articles on several of the poets who appeared with Hill in A. Alvarez's anthology New Poetry [1962], as well as a few scattered publications on the Movement poets whose sway Alvarez sought to dismantle. Palgrave published Philip Larkin by Robert Evans in their Readers' Guide to Essential Criticism series, an introductory chronological overview of Larkin which charts his contemporary reception with a tight assemblage of reviews and critiques by contemporaries such as Charles Tomlinson and Richard Murphy. Craig MacKenzie's short article 'Philip Larkin's Vision of the Future in "Church Going": What the Manuscripts Can Tell Us' (Expl 74:iii[2016] 173-76) argues that drafts of the poem show an even starker suggestion of dystopic regression towards

superstitious atavism. James Underwood's article '"A Kind of Homosexual Relation, Disguised": Larkin's Letters to Monica Jones' (English 65:ccxlviii[2016] 38-57) eschews an author-centred approach to re-situate Larkin's personal correspondence to his lover as the projection of a textual identity, particularly paying attention to allusion and intertextuality. Underwood reads Larkin's immersion in the prosaic details of the everyday ('I have four rolls of pink toilet paper on my low table') as the assumption of an old maid-ish persona, which is extrapolated into Larkin's 'particular version of lesbian femininity' (p. 53). In 'Larkin Aloud' (LitRevALSC 18:ii[2016] 168-79), Andrew Hodgson plumbs the depths of Larkin's exploitation of ambiguity between the printed poem and its voicing, paying particular attention to the ways in which his numerous recordings miss something of the 'mordant and sad' movement on the page. Another poet associated with the Movement receives a re-appraisal by John Greening in 'Everything Should Mean: the Poetry of D.J. Enright' (PNR 43:i[2016] 33-36), in which his colonialism is indicted, his unsuspected religious colourings to his poetry are adumbrated, and overall, a positive reckoning with his ars poetica: 'Everything should mean, never mind how humbly' (p. 78).

Following on from the furore of Jonathan Bate's biography, 2016 saw sustained interest in the presiding genius of Alvarez's 'Extremist poetry', Ted Hughes. In 'Disclosing the World: Parousia in the Poetry of Ted Hughes' (L&T 30:iii[2016] 265-77), Janne Stigen Drangsholt argues that Hughes mounts an assault on the spiritual valences of Western metaphysics, using the idea of parousia to probe the ways in which Hughes's religious thought (a blind spot in existing studies) centres around an 'ontotheological' recuperation of divine presence (p. 267). Michael Nott's article 'Ted Hughes's and Fay Godwin's Elmet: the remains of photography' (W&I 32:iii[2016] 264-74) focuses on the evolution between the original collaboration between poet and photographer in 1979 to the later revised edition, Elmet [1994], arguing that Hughes later came to see his poetry as subservient, 'trapped', in his own words, 'in the focus of the photograph' (p. 271). Anthony Rowland's 'A Dialectic of Forgetting: János Pikinszky and Ted Hughes' (CL 68:i[2016] 46-58) assesses an alternating current of influence between Hughes and the Hungarian poet based on a shared species of necessary forgetting. Paul Bentley's monograph, Ted Hughes, Class and Violence is passionate about its subject, although some of its readings seem eccentric: 'Pike' is deconstructed as a unruly exploration of Ireland as England's unpalatable unconscious, 'a demonised, goblinish power'. This subtext seems to be supported by little more than its colouring, 'green tigering the gold' (p. 65). Nevertheless, Bentley does succeed in complicating critical dismissals of Hughes as a poet who eschews political and social

concerns for a retreat into myth by exploring suggestive threads hitherto underexplored. This includes confrontation between Hughes' South Yorkshire background and Cambridge; and 'a repressed or veiled political dimension' in his Laureateship (p. 98), which erupts in poems such as 'The Best Worker in Europe'. Situated against the Miners' Strike, Bentley argues convincingly for an ambivalence in Hughes's political aesthetics between an identification as a 'simple honest Northerner' and antipathy to Scargill's Marxism (p. 100). Similarly, he attempts to deconstruct a reductive binary reception of the respective classicisms of Hughes (royalist, mythic) and Tony Harrison (republican, political). For Bentley, Hughes' renovated Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, and marginal writings reveal a shared working class disdain with Harrison towards received pronunciation. If Bentley protests too much at times, his intervention does serve to helpfully problematize the poetics of a poet who has of late been seen as politically and personally beyond the pale.

The British class system and Tony Harrison is also the subject of Agata Handley's Constructing Identity: Continuity, Otherness and Revolt in the Poetry of Tony Harrison. This theory-inflected study grapples with Harrison's position 'at the friction point of two cultures' (p. 11): his working-class background and his grammar school education out of it. Following Zygmut Bauman, she reads Harrison as writing of individual and social identity precisely at the point where such a question becomes inevitable, 'where a man is pulled out of "wherever could pass for his natural habitat"' (p. 68). The thrust of her chronological exploration of Harrison's writing on the theme of identity is away from any lyric sense of the private self, towards what Harrison describes rhetorically and self-accusingly in his translations of the fourth century poet Palladas ('where's the public good in what you write?' (p. 191)). As with Hill's poetry, this zeal for the public good arguably stems from the Leeds poetry scene that formed around Jon Silkin's magazine, Stand. Silkin has received more attention of late (see Fiona Becket's essay in Larrissy's Cambridge Companion) and Jeremy Munday's article 'Jon Silkin as Anthologist, Editor, and Translator' (T&L 25:i[2016] 84-106) draws on his substantial archive in the Brotherton Library to attempt a 'micro-history' of translating in the twentieth century (p. 85). Particular attention is paid to Silkin's projected, but uncompleted anthology of Hebrew poetry, a fractious undertaking that witnessed major arguments with his collaborators. This a process was repeated in work towards a Japanese anthology, where he harangues his interlocutor, 'you make harsh and terse what IS NOT IN THE TEXT', complaining 'everyone sounds like Ashbery' (p. 103). For Silkin, so Munday's 'micro-history' suggests, an ethical responsibility for translating the original was also weighted towards language firmly moored in social and political realities.

Roy Fisher's Slakki: New and Neglected Poems, arranged by Peter Robinson for Bloodaxe Books, carried a reflection by the author entitled 'Roy Fisher on the Nature of Neglect' (pp. 73-5), which focuses on his juvenilia, and (another elegy) the vanishing of the busy, adventurous world of the late-modernist small presses in the eighties and nineties. It also contains a bibliography of these lesser-known poems, that will prove useful to future scholars of Fisher and little magazines of the post-war period alike. Ian Pople also explored the ekphrastic beginnings of Fisher's 1966 prose work, *The Ship's Orchestra*, including its Noah's ark woodcut illustration in the Fulcrum Press edition from David Jones, and its debts to Picasso's Three Musicians, in 'Roy Fisher, *The Ship's Orchestra*' (PNR 42:v[2016] 60-63).

Older survivors of modernism writing well in to the later decades of the twentieth century were well-served by publications in 2016. Long-awaited, The Poems of Basil Bunting, edited by Don Share, was published by Faber over six decades after Eliot refused to publish Bunting's poetry. Share's variorum edition publishes in one volume poems Bunting published or intended to publish in his lifetime, poems published posthumously by his editor, and fragments that illuminate his published work. In addition to providing all traceable textual variants, Share's editorial apparatus is formidable, and includes excerpts from Bunting's correspondence, transcriptions of recorded readings, publishing histories, and historical source material including the Northumbrian wellsprings of his language. For all that the book comes in at just under 600 pages, the editorial hand is nimble, largely due to the marshalling of an excellent introduction. Owing methodological debts to John Haffenden's edition of William Empson, Share's innovation lies in correlating material within the annotations with Bunting's personal library held at the University of Buffalo, and his transcribed integration of recorded material with print versions of the poems (p. xxii). Doubtless a discipline inculcated during his studentship under Geoffrey Hill and Christopher Ricks at Boston University, the Oxford English Dictionary and the Northumbrian elements of Wright's English Dialect Dictionary are constantly fed in to Share's annotations, which are in the main richly rewarding. Indeed, etymological shades of meaning that Share might have missed became a theme in the letters pages of the Times Literary Supplement in the weeks after this volume was reviewed there. Several reviewers also noticed typographical errors, which are doubtless frustrating for an editor who sets out 'to rectify anomalies in the printing of Basil Bunting's poems' (p. xiii), but these have been corrected since the first print run. To take Bunting's most celebrated poem as a test case, Share's annotations haul in the affinities of the poem with the unconscious 'ancient Quaker life' (p. 328); its debts to cynghanedd in

Welsh prosody; its epigraph from the Libro de Alexandre; the tinctures of dialect words (tape, oxter, thole-pins, kelt); biographical information from unpublished and remote sources on its inspiration Peggy Greenbank, and much more besides. An article on Basil Bunting's Persian translations also appeared, Simon Patton and Omid Azadibougar's 'Basil Bunting's Versions of Manuchehri Damghani' (T&L 25:iii[2016] 339-62) focusses on how Bunting adapted technical knowledge from these experiments to his own verse. With a volume of Bunting's prose edited by Share to come and a forthcoming edition of the letters, it would seem that critical work on the poet is just beginning.

Hugh MacDiarmid is represented by essays in two books on Scottish literature published in 2016. Unsurprisingly, giving the combined fallouts of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and subsequently Brexit, Scottish post-war poetry has received attention in both books in terms of political and social ideas of identity. Andrew Monnickendam's 'The Nature of Aesthetics in the Work of Mary Brunton, Hugh MacDiarmid and Alasdair Gray' (in Ian Brown, David Clark and Rubén Jarazo-Álvarez, eds. Taking Liberties: Scottish Literature and Expressions of Freedom, pp. 93-110) recasts the familiar lineaments of MacDiarmid's nationalism in a subtle comparison of his concerns with Mary Ramsay's Calvin and Art [1938]. This includes a dissent from the opinion that would lay all the ills for Scottish philistinism at Calvin's door. There is also an admirable essay by José-Miguel Alonso-Giráldez on the 'Scottish and Galician background in Pearse Hutchinson's poetry: freedom, identity, and literary landscapes' (in Brown, David Clark and Rubén Jarazo-Álvarez, eds. pp. 187-212), that fruitfully resituates the important translator in Scottish (as well as northern Spanish) contexts as opposed to his usual placement in Irish literature. In Community in Modern Scottish Literature, edited by Scott Lyall, the editor's contribution, 'Hugh MacDiarmid's Impossible Community' (pp. 1-24) defends the poet from caricature as an extremist, rejecting Kailyard stereotypes as impossible while defending an equally impossible political community, singular and spiritual. This volume also contains Emma Dymock's 'Speaking for Oneself and Others: Real and Imagined Communities in Gaelic Poetry from the Nineteenth Century to the Present' (pp. 61-81), which considers Sorley MacLean's melding of tradition and innovation and his awareness of 'the disapproving gaze of the community' (p. 75). Dymock also glances at Derick Thompson, Ian Crichton Smith, and Angus Peter Campbell. Questions of Scottish identity in terms of religion are also at play in Maria Fengler's chapter 'Aspects of Catholic Spirituality in George Mackay Brown' (in Ioanna Zirra and Madeline Pottineds. The Literary Avatars of Christian Sacramentality, Theology and Practical Life in Recent Modernity, pp. 105-18),

which examines Mackay Brown's idea of Orkney and Scotland as 'a Knox-ruined nation', the rhythms of Orcadian farming allegories for Christ's Passion and Resurrection (pp. 110-111) and the sacramentality of local patterns of living.

MacDiarmid's sometime-nemesis, Edwin Morgan, is the subject of Monika Kocot's *Playing Games of Sense in Edwin Morgan's Writing*, which celebrates and interrogates in equal measure the protean, mercurial, earthy fecundity of Morgan's 'cultural transgression' governed by different rules of play. Attuned to Bakhtin's dialogism and Derridean ideas of play and différance, Kocot organises her material around these 'rules', such as the 'morphodynamics' (fluid shape) of his 'emergent' visual-concrete poems exploring semantic boundaries and indeterminacy of meaning (p. 55). The figure of 'the whittrick' (a changeling weasel-like trickster) comes to stand for preeminent features of Morgan's writing: fluid identity, devious invention, and incessant process (p. 128). It is itself an apt emblem of Kocot's evident zest in the mercurial playground of Morgan's writing, which occasionally gets mired in a queasy blend of 'rules' from radically different theorists. Morgan also features in Jamie Hilder's Designed Words for a Designed World: The International Concrete Poetry Movement, 1955-1971, which unfortunately did not arrive in time for review. James McGonigal's 'Poets Post-War: G.S. Fraser and Edwin Morgan' (PNR 42.vi[2016] 81-4) compares Morgan's resumption of civilian life (he was a pacifist combat medic) with that of his fellow Glaswegian poet, Fraser, and their intersecting correspondences with Max Jacobs, Laura Riding, and Veronica Forrest-Thomson

Another giant national poet who straddled the war years was R.S. Thomas. After his death in 2000, two seminal works of art criticism by Herbert Read, Art Now [1933] and Surrealism [1936], were discovered on Thomas's shelves, with a few dozen ekphrastic poems responding to modern art works wedged in to the pages. These are published alongside images of the art that inspired them in Bloodaxe's handsome volume Too Brave To Dream: Encounters With Modern Art, edited by Tony Brown and Ian Walford Davies. This contains an illuminating introduction, which collates interviews and other writings to chart Thomas's profound wariness about the validity of what he considered to be attempts 'to comment and draw out extended meanings' of the originals 'in a way which most of the painters would have found reprehensible' (p. 10). Nevertheless, the centrality of attention and painterly 'looking' that governs Thomas's entire oeuvre is drawn out in this rich selection from his unpublished poems.

More recent poetry received attention in 2016 in ways that nevertheless accentuated the rich resources of earlier traditions, as well as exemplifying several critical trends identified in

the latter half of Larrissy's Cambridge Companion including ecopoetics, gender, the literary marketplace and consumption. Heather O'Donoghue's 'A Place in Time: Old Norse Myth and Contemporary Poetry in English and Scots' (in Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla, eds. The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture, pp. 277-94) uses Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotype' to examine how the intersections of specific locus and mythic time intersect in contemporary poetries from Ian Duhig, Kathleen Jamie, Don Paterson, Pauline Stainer, and Robert Robertson. Stainer in particular is found to show the most sustained use of Norse myth and 'the dense allusiveness of her work' and its religious themes bearing clear affinities with David Jones (pp. 281-283). Eleanore Widger's 'The "Specific Evidentness" of Radical Landscape Poetry' (English 65:ccli[2016] 363-86) conducts a phenomenological reading of the ecopoetics of Mark Dickinson, Peter Larkin, Zoë Skoulding, Mark Goodwin, Elisabeth Bletsoe, and Harriet Tarlo, arguing that the drive for naming and terminology involved with specific places demands that the reader complete 'a rich trail of connections and dissonances' on the nature of experiencing place as much as fixing and naming that experience (p. 366). Jane Dowson's Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times is the first monograph of its kind on the career of the current poet laureate and first woman to hold the post. Dowson posits the epithet 'Duffyesque' to chart key aspects of Duffy's craft, including a feminist discourse that avoids essentialisation, her urban muse, a 'lens of social justice', and a representative quality of the 'Noughties' just as Larkin may be heard as the repressed and conservative voice of the fifties (pp. 26-30). Dowson reads key volumes such as *The World's Wife* and its panoply of women etched out of the masculinist narratives of myth, fairy tale, and folk culture as a celebration of feminist difference, one that inhabits the same cultural moment of retort upon the misogyny of Freudian mystification of female desire and pleasure as the Spice Girls (p. 136). Duffy's role as laureate is also considered, with Dowson arguing that 'she establishes a public voice that does not sacrifice her integrity and poetic independence' (p. 155). Shelley Roche-Jacques's article '"Out of the forest I come": Lyric and dramatic tension in *The World's Wife*' (L&L 25:iv[2016] 363-75) also concentrates on this visible but understudied poet, probing ways in which dramatic monologue may be a useful way of conceptualising in what degree the 'pragmatic-governed situation' of poetry may be said to exist, pace J.L. Austin (p. 374).

Following on from the appearance of his controversial poem 'Gatwick' in the London Review of Books, Craig Raine's book of critical essays *My Grandmother's Glass Eye*: A Look at Poetry has proven only slightly less divisive. Reviews have concentrated on Raine's essential animus: the waging of critical vendettas and his tendency to appear more passionate about others' misreading than about poems. The eponymous eye of this collection is skewed

away from the work towards questions of commodity: ‘how does [poetry] sell itself?’ he wonders on the very first page. A dispiriting answer follows amidst the stage-managed mauling of fellow critics, such as Christopher Ricks, John Carey, and Tom Paulin.

Regrettably, I did not receive a copy of Sam Solnick’s Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry in time for this review.