WALTER KALAIDJIAN

Introduction

Increasingly, contemporary critical accounts of what William Carlos Williams called "the local conditions" (1948, 146) of modern American poetry have engaged more worldly expanses of time and space, reading American verse written over the past century in the contexts of United States history and culture that participate in a decidedly global community. This collection in particular stretches the more narrow period term of literary modernism – works published between, say, 1890 and 1945 – favoring a more capacious and usable account of poetry's "modern" evolution over the entire twentieth century up to the present. Supplementing the protocols of literary "close reading" advanced by the so-called American New Critics, studies of modern American poetry have moved beyond attention to the isolated work of literature, the focus on a single author, and the domestic containments of national narration. Not unlike Ezra Pound's 1934 description of the American epic as a "poem containing history," contemporary criticism of American verse has sought to contextualize canonical and emerging poems against wider political, social, and cultural fields and forces. These and other advances in the reception of modern American poetry reflect broader and concerted efforts to question, revise, and expand the received canon of American literature.

Such revisionary initiatives date back to the latter decades of the twentieth century with Paul Lauter's "Reconstructing American Literature" project. It began as a series of conferences sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and Lilly Endowment, later published in the critical volume *Reconstructing American Literature* (1983) followed by Sacvan Bercovitch's scholarly collection *Reconstructing American Literary History* (1986). Changes in critical practice were further popularized that same year in the widely adopted *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1986) and subsequently in literary histories, such as *The Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988), and scholarly journals, such as *American Literary History* (1989), edited by Gordon Hutner. In studies of modern American poetry, several "recovery"

projects, most notably Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery* (1989), questioned the "cultural memory" of the received canon of modern American poetry. Since then, important studies of twentieth-century American verse have unearthed a trove of new schools and movements, new authors, new manuscripts, and new cultural objects that were variously "lost," "forgotten," or politically suppressed in the reception of the modern American verse tradition. A thumbnail sketch of these titles would include Rita Barnard, *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance* (1995), Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde* (1995), Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations* (1997), Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic* (1997), James Smethurst, *The New Red Negro* (1999), Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry* (2001), Alan Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time* (2002), John Timberman Newcomb, *Would Poetry Disappear?* (2004), Walter Kalaidjian, *The Edge of Modernism* (2006), Adalaide Morris, *How to Live / What to Do* (2008), Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (2008), Al Filreis, *Counter-revolution of the Word* (2008), Lynn Keller, *Re-making It New* (2009), Evie Shockley, *Renegade Poetics* (2011), and Maria Damon, *Postliterary America* (2011), to name a few. Thus, how modern American poetry is read and taught now differs significantly in the wake of the theoretical revolution of the past thirty years. The canon of prize-winning authors and valorized texts that have sustained modern American poetry's literary reputation – Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, Langston Hughes, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and Mina Loy, among others – has opened onto a democratic conversation that recovers a hitherto forgotten diversity of poetic voices. Equally important, how we read American modernist poets – whether canonical or noncanonical – differs markedly owing to the ways in which modern American verse is mediated by newer and more sophisticated understandings of nationalism, regionalism, periodization, race, sexuality and gender, ethnicity, class, and culture. Thus, the *Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry* eschews earlier traditions of modern American verse organized under the canonical aegis of individual talents. Instead, it accounts for modern American poetry as a discursive community, a locus not so much governed by common identities dominated by canonical traditions but rather one enlivened and enriched by what Roberto Esposito defines in terms of "plurality, difference, and alterity" (2012, 5). Toward that end, the *Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry* gathers together major critical voices that represent the best practices of contemporary critical approach and method.

This collection provides a sophisticated introduction to the rich archive of modern verse produced over the past century, beginning with John

Timberman Newcomb's account of what modern poets such as Alfred Kreymborg, Harriet Monroe, Louis Untermeyer, and Marguerite Wilkinson characterized as "the New Poetry" following the *fin de siècle*. In "The Emergence of 'The New Poetry'" Newcomb reaches back to the genteel canon of the Fireside Poets, who were underwritten by an insular and nostalgic resistance to the energies of modernity. In addition, he attends to the emergence of a properly modern sensibility in figures such as Stephen Crane, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Edna St. Vincent Millay up through Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens. Intervening in the twentieth-century reception of the early modernist period, Newcomb challenges the received narrative divide between avant-garde and popular poetries promulgated by the American "New Critics" at mid-century. Instead of placing experimental modernists against popular voices of the period, Newcomb argues forcefully for recovering "a spectrum punctuated with surprising alliances and admirations between poets later assumed to be inherently opposed: Vachel Lindsay and W. B. Yeats, Allen Tate and Edna St. Vincent Millay, Ezra Pound and Carl Sandburg."

In "Modern American Archives and Scrapbook Modernism," Bartholomew Brinkman considers theories of archival preservation, provenance, and curation in the institutional formation of the modern American poetry canon, focusing on archival sites, such as the Library of Congress, the University of Chicago, and the University of Buffalo. Such centers of archival consignation, he argues, preserve a more wide-ranging modernism than is represented in volumes of selected or collected poems. Libraries of little magazines and first edition books offer – through their alternative drafts of poems, multiple versions, and early iterations – critical roads not taken. Similarly, archives of letters, drafts, and ephemeral clippings often reveal authorial intention or ambivalence inscribed in withheld or unpublished versions of poems that differ from the seemingly final drafts of canonical works. Offering close readings of Amy Lowell's and Edna St. Vincent Millay's scrapbooks, Brinkman demonstrates how modernist scrapbooking practices present a unique mode of poetry's archival preservation, one that models the most characteristic of modern literary forms: the collage poem.

Alan Golding's chapter on "Experimental Modernisms" attends to the language experiments initiated by Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, T. S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein in the early twentieth century. Beginning in the 1910s with the Imagist and Vorticist movements and the "direct treatment of the thing," this chapter's discussion of experimental modernism offers readings of Pound's early modern lyricism on view in volumes such as *Personae* (1909) and *Cathay* (1915) and in such early critiques of late Victorian culture as "Homage to Sextus Propertius" (1919) and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*

(1921). In addition, Pound's influence is also examined in Hilda Doolittle's early, Sapphic modernism in the compressed pastoral verse of *Sea Garden* (1916). Golding further accounts for what Pound dubbed as *logopoeia* in Mina Loy's early modern verse. The chapter also takes up the contemporaneous work of T. S. Eliot in *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), the prose poems that Stein published as *Tender Buttons* (1914), and Williams's inventive language experiments in *Kora in Hell* (1920) and *Spring and All* (1923). In addition to discussing representative poems from these early volumes, Golding also investigates the cultural and aesthetic contexts of the emergence of experimental modern verse in salons, such as those hosted by Alfred Stieglitz, Walter and Louise Arensberg, and Mabel Dodge in New York and those of Natalie Barney and Gertrude Stein in Paris.

In "The Legacy of New York," Cary Nelson broadens the focus on experimental modernism by considering its emergence in the American avant-garde scene associated with New York City, beginning with the 1913 Armory Show, the initial publication of *Others* magazine in 1915, and the introduction of Dadaist-influenced journals from 1915–1919, such as *291*, *391*, *The Blind Man*, *Rongwrong*, and *New York Dada*. Nelson focuses on readings of William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, and Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who published in such journals as *The Little Review*, *Liberation, Broom*, and *transition*. Moreover, Nelson underscores poetry's representation of progressive, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist political stances in, for example, The New England Anti-Imperialist League's collection *Liberty Poems* (1900), lodged against the U.S. war in the Philippines, and Claude McKay's New York-based critiques of American racism. Finally, this chapter considers poets loosely affiliated through the Greenwich Village scene including Lola Ridge, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and E. E. Cummings.

In "The Modern American Long Poem" Anne Day Dewey next offers an overview of the modern American long poem as an expanded verse form distinct from the classical epic. Unlike the epic's totalizing narratives of nation formation and heroic masculinity, the modern long poem in the United States offers, as she details, a more eclectic, encyclopedic, and differentiated account of the fragmented, nonlinear, and often transnational sprawl of modern experience. In addition to providing an account of the genre theory on, and critical reception of, the American long poem, Dewey reviews formal similarities and nuanced distinctions among major works in this subgenre by Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and Melvin Tolson, among others.

James Smethurst, in "American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance," offers a cultural reading of Harlem as a site of literary production during the 1920s and pays close attention to both canonical and emergent figures

in the critical reception of the Harlem Renaissance as a literary movement. In addition, in accounting for the social history of race and class differences in early twentieth-century America, Smethurst explores the emergence of the "new negro" aesthetic in the work of Fenton Johnson, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, and Jessie Fauset, among others.

Beginning with Louis Zukofsky's February 1931 *Poetry Magazine* issue on "objectivist" verse by Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, George Oppen, Basil Bunting, William Carlos Williams, and Kenneth Rexroth, Rachel Blau DuPlessis reviews, in "Objectivist Poetry and Poetics," the aesthetic tenets that initially defined objectivist poetics in manifestos such as "Program: 'Objectivists,' 1931" and collections like *An Objectivist Anthology* (1932). In addition, this chapter considers the nuanced differences among the actual poets who wrote under that rubric, including Zukofsky's original grouping and later figures associated with objectivist poetry, such as Lorine Niedecker. Finally, this chapter ends by considering the objectivist legacy as it is inscribed in the poetics of the Black Mountain School, the Beats, and Language writers.

In "American Poetry and the Popular Front," Alan Wald offers a reading in the vein of recent recovery projects focusing on American poetry that emerged from the progressive public sphere of the Great Depression. Wald offers a cultural study of how poetry came to reflect the social vicissitudes of the 1930s: widespread unemployment, economic collapse, and global conflicts, such as the Spanish Civil War. But equally important, this chapter explores the relationship between proletarianism and modernism, examining how poetry as a social discourse offered compelling literary representations that agitated on behalf of such social justice issues as workers' rights to a living wage and full employment, women's conditions of labor in the workplace as well as the domestic sphere, anti-discrimination policies for racial and ethnic minorities in employment, housing, and education, and so on. Wald devotes sustained attention to the communist presence in American poetry promoted from grass-roots organizations such as the John Reed Clubs, to groups such as The Dynamo Poets, to little magazines such as *New Masses* and JRC journals such as Detroit's *The New Force*, Grand Rapids' *The Cauldron,* Indianapolis' *Midland Left,* Hollywood's *The Partisan*, Chicago's *Left Front*, Philadelphia's *Red Pen*, and New York's *Partisan Review* as well as to workers' anthologies such as *We Gather Strength* (1933). In addition, this chapter provides overviews of representative figures who made up poetry's "popular front" during this decade: Genevieve Taggard, Herman Spector, John Wheelwright, Lucia Trent, Kenneth Fearing, Joseph Kalar, Edwin Rolfe, Sol Funaroff, Langston Hughes, and Muriel Rukeyser, among others.

Counterbalancing such popular front careers, Kieran Quinlan in "Tracking the Fugitive Poets" traces the evolution of key figures affiliated with the Fugitive Poets at Vanderbilt University during the 1920s and later Kenyon College and the American New Criticism: John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. In addition to reviewing their representative poems, Quinlan also explores their influential theories, as Fugitives, of agrarian and distributive economics, and their critical poetics as major theorists of modern poetry in essays such as Ransom's "Criticism, Inc." and Allen Tate's "Miss Emily and the Bibliographers." The chapter concludes with a consideration of the influence of the Fugitive/New Critical legacy on mid-century modernist poets.

Next, Stephen Burt's chapter on "Mid-Century Modernism" considers a spectrum of mid-century modernist poetics defined by the mastery of fixed forms such as the sonnet, villanelle, and sestina and by common themes such as mapmaking, travel, childhood, and ekphrastic musings in the careers of canonical American poets such as Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, Randall Jarrell, Anthony Hecht, and James Merrill. While contextualizing the immediate postwar moment out of which these poets emerge as significant figures, Burt pays close attention to the aesthetic and thematic likenesses among them, as well as to the distinctive concerns and poetic styles that distinguish each of these major figures as an individual talent.

In "Psychotherapy and Confessional Poetry," Michael Thurston discusses a group of poets led by such figures as Robert Lowell, W. D. Snodgrass, and John Berryman who turn to the analytic truths of psychoanalysis and personal explorations of self, writing what M. L. Rosenthal characterized in a 1959 review as "confessional poetry." The confessional poem, or what Helen Vendler has more recently renamed as the "Freudian lyric," increasingly engaged the psychic foreclosures, political repressions, and social containments of what Lowell dubbed as the "tranquilized fifties" defining American postwar containment culture. In attending to the "confessional" dimension of mid-century modern poetry, this chapter focuses on the particular, institutional contexts of mental illness and its treatment regimens at mid-century as formative influences in the writing of Allen Ginsberg, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath.

Kaplan Harris opens "Black Mountain Poetry" with an account of the American avant-garde aesthetic scene of artists, musicians, and intellectuals located at Black Mountain College that included such luminaries as Josef Albers, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and a group of poets influenced by Charles Olson, the college's rector from 1951 to 1956, and his theory of "projective verse": Robert

Creeley, Robert Duncan, Ed Dorn, Larry Eigner, and Denise Levertov, among others. In addition to reviewing the particular poetics of these figures, Harris ends with a brief discussion of Black Mountain's influence on the poetry of the San Francisco Renaissance through the works of Duncan and Creeley, editor of the *Black Mountain Review*.

Supplementing Harris's review of the mid-century avant-garde in poetry, Maria Damon's account of the Beat counterculture and the San Francisco Renaissance in "Beat Poetry: HeavenHell USA, 1946–1965" reviews the emergence of the Beat movement in poetry first in New York City, initiated through the mutually influencing associations of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and, later, Frank O'Hara and Gregory Corso, as well as Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Diane di Prima's collaborations for the little magazines *Yugen* and *The Floating Bear*. In addition, this chapter also accounts for the emergence of the Beat aesthetic on the West Coast through Lawrence Ferlinghetti's San Francisco-based City Lights bookstore and press and through such inaugural events as the "Six Poets at the Six Gallery" reading, presided over by Kenneth Rexroth and featuring Ginsberg, Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Michael McClure, and Philip Lamantia. In addition, to discussing these major Beat talents, the chapter also considers the contribution of writers such as Jack Spicer, John Wieners, the African-American beat poet Bob Kaufman, and female writers associated with the Beat movement, such as Helen Adam, Diane di Prima, Hettie Jones, Brenda Frazer, Joanne Kyger, and Anne Waldman.

Evie Shockley begins her study of "The Black Arts Movement and Black Aesthetics" by framing the emergence in the 1960s of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) in the context of the Black Power movement of the pre-Civil Rights era in the United States. Inaugurated in the mid-1960s by such African-American poets as Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, who figured prominently in such venues as Harlem's Black Arts Repertory Theatre and the Umbra workshop, BAM was popularized in Baraka and Neal's landmark manifesto and anthology *Black Fire* (1968). This chapter provides an overview of poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks, who adopted a distinctively black vernacular style in the mid-sixties with her move to Dudley Randall's Broadside Press and Haki Madhubuti's Third World Press that published other Black Aesthetic poets, such as Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and Etheridge Knight. In addition to presenting the BAM poetics of these central figures of that period, Shockley surveys the diverse cultural geography of Black Aesthetics as a remarkably plural community of voices, examining more contemporary poets who foreground representations of race in writing out of a distinctively African-American poetic heritage: Lucille Clifton,

Yusef Komunyakaa, and Rita Dove, as well as the Darkroom Collective poet Kevin Young and Pulitzer Prize winner Natasha Trethewey.

Ed Brunner's "New York School and American Surrealism" considers how the urban milieu of mid-century New York City fostered a community of poets and painters that included notably John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Jackson Pollock, Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg but also Barbara Guest, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, Ted Berrigan, Diane Wakoski, Ron Padgett, and Alice Notley, among others. In addition, Brunner surveys what Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly, writing in a 1961 issue of *Trobar*, called "the Deep Image" in reference to the work of Diane Wakoski and Clayton Eshelman and later appropriated and popularized by Robert Bly to characterize his work with Jungian archetypes in verse. The often-surrealist style of "Deep Image" poetics also influences the aesthetic trajectories of such major figures as James Wright and Galway Kinnell. In addition to offering close readings of these poets, Brunner also considers broader examples of an American surrealist poetics variously on view in the experimental linguistic character of such important American poets as W. S. Merwin, A. R. Ammons, and John Ashbery.

Writing against the narratives of individual identity that dominated the so-called "Native Renaissance" of the late twentieth century, Janet McAdams in "Land, Place, and Nation: Toward an Indigenous American Poetics" foregrounds the importance of space and place in imagining an indigenous American poetics, a body of verse considered within what Robert Warrior characterizes as tribal frameworks of native nationalism rather than through the careers of notable single authors. Focusing on the diverse writings of figures such as Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), Diane Glancy (Cherokee), Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Deborah Miranda (Esselen-Chumash), Gladys Cardiff (Eastern Band Cherokee), and Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota), McAdams examines indigenous representations of corporeality and embodiment shaped by America's traumatic legacies of tribal removal and land theft in contemporary Native American verse.

Yunte Huang begins "Transpacific and Asian American Counterpoetics" by reviewing the Orientalist legacy in modern American poetry, examining the "blossoms of the East" shaping the American literary imaginary from Pound and the Imagists through the Beat poets. In contrast to such American Orientalism, Huang presents the diasporic poetics of Chinese immigrants who, while detained at the Angel Island Immigration Station, carved verse on the walls. In addition, Huang offers readings of Japanese internees imprisoned in American camps, such as Tule Lake, during World War II. Huang also considers the politically charged verse of Carlos Bulosan and José García Villa, examining their legacies in the work of contemporary poets, such as

Theresa Cha, Frances Chung, Jessica Hagedorn, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Kimiko Hahn, Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Walter Lew, and Myung Mi Kim.

Barret Watten's survey of "Language Writing" begins with the inception of the Language poetry movement in newsletters and journals such as *Tottle's* (1970), edited by Ron Silliman, *This* (1971), edited by Robert Grenier and Barrett Watten, and *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (1978), edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, among other venues and small presses. In addition to surveying the major manifestoes and theoretical statements, such as Ron Silliman's *The New Sentence* (1987), Barrett Watten considers Language poetry's experimental precursors in such figures as Gertrude Stein as well as such movements and tendencies as literary Dadaism, Russian Futurism, Black Mountain poetry, and Oulipo. He offers accounts of the poetic careers of figures such as Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Harryette Mullen, Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, Hannah Weiner, and Rae Armantrout, among others. This chapter ends with a consideration of the ongoing collective autobiography *The Grand Piano* and the exfoliation of Language verse into new media poetics.

Finally, Evan Kindley's study "Poet-Critics and Bureaucratic Administration" offers a reading of the figure of the "poet-critic" by focusing on the hybrid careers of key American modernists who were not only recognized for their achievement in verse composition but who actively had a hand in the formation and reception of modern American poetry not only through their shaping roles as critics and theorists but, in certain cases, as postwar administrators funded by federal programs and private foundations. The chapter begins with a working characterization of the poet-critic and then moves to a consideration of major examples of poets who were also practicing critics, such as T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Archibald MacLeish, and Sterling Brown. In addition, it reviews the administrative projects of modern American verse at mid-century through a consideration of John Crowe Ransom's leadership of the American "New Critics" and R. P. Blackmur's philanthropic campaign to promote little magazines, underwritten by the Rockefeller Foundation.

"It is difficult / to get the news from poems," William Carlos Williams famously observed, "yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" (1938, 19). Traveling now at the speed of light, digital communication and social media from anywhere on the planet reach us instantaneously and are constantly at our finger tips. Nevertheless, Williams's observation remains, arguably, more pertinent than ever. Thus, committed to poetry's singular powers to, in Pound's dictum, "make it new," the contributors to the *Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry* offer us an invaluable resource that is otherwise hard to come by. Together,

they provide today's authors, students, and general readers doorways into American verse as it continues to evolve across formal, avant-garde, and populist traditions: a body of work that goes to the heart of the American experience in the United States and beyond.

WORKS CITED

Esposito, Roberto. 2012. *Terms of the Political*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Pound, Ezra. *Make It New*. 1934. Faber & Faber: London.

Williams, William Carlos. 1938. *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower and Other Love Poems: That Greeny Flower*. New York: New Directions.

1948. *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*. New York: New Directions.