BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION, 1960–1980: FLOWER POWER

This volume traces transitions in British literature brought about by the rapid, momentous and far-reaching changes of the 1960s and 1970s, illuminating a diverse range of authors, texts, genres and movements. It looks at innovations in form, considering experimental poetry, fiction and drama, and explores the literature of emergent identities in race, gender, sexuality and class. It considers changes in attitudes and in the mind itself: the growth of environmentalism, perceptions of the past, psychedelia, the Sexual Revolution and information control. It examines local and regional developments, visiting Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England. Finally, it focuses on shifts within the oeuvres of individual authors – two poets, two dramatists and a novelist: Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes, Harold Pinter and Caryl Churchill, and Iris Murdoch.

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BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION, 1960–1980: FLOWER POWER

EDITED BY

KATE MCLOUGHLIN

University of Oxford

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For Jacqueline Brookes

and in memory of Beryl Heighton

Contents

Notes on Contributors *page* x
General Editor's Preface xiii
Acknowledgements xvi

Introduction 1
Kate McLoughlin

PART I: VENTURES IN FORM 31

1 Error and Experiment in the 1960s British Novel 35
Julia Jordan

2 'A Different Kind of Inclusiveness': Reading Poetry from The Group to the British Poetry Revival 50
Hannah Brooks-Motl

3 'A Revolutionary Proposal': Alexander Trocchi, Dramaturgies of Disruption and Situationist Genealogies 65
Grant Tyler Peterson

PART II: EMERGENT IDENTITIES 81

4 'Sight, Sounds and Meaning': Voice/Print Transitions in Black British Poetry 86
Rachael Gilmour

5 Fate and Freedom in the Fiction of the Second Wave 102
Abigail Rine Favale

6 Affluence and Its Discontents: Working-Class Literature of the 1960s and 1970s 117
Katy Shaw

7 Coming Out: The Emergence of Gay Literature 131
Alison Hennegan

PART III: CHANGING MINDS 147

8 From Countryside to Environment: Reaching *Common Ground* 152
Terry Gifford

9 Nostalgia and the Elegiac Mode 167
Marina MacKay

10 The Spiderhood: Psychedelic Literature, Literary Psychedelia and the Writing of LSD 182
James Riley

11 'Little Things': Writing the Sexual Revolution 197
Claire O'Callaghan

12 Inhuman Factors: The Intelligence of British Spy Fiction 211
David Pascoe

PART IV: LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS 227

13 In and Out of the Nation: *Poetry Wales* in the 1960s and 1970s 232
Matthew Jarvis

14 Performing on the Fringe: Basil Bunting and Morden Tower 247
Edward Allen

15 Rejecting the Knitted Claymore: The Challenge to Cultural Nationalism in Scottish Literary Magazines of the 1960s and 1970s 263
Eleanor Bell

16 Oh So Loinerly: Geographical Transitions and the Struggle to Belong in Tony Harrison's *The Loiners* 275
Rory Waterman

17 The End of 'Home': Heaney, Muldoon and the Return of the Dead 289
Peter Mackay

PART V: INDIVIDUAL TRANSITIONS 303

18 Iris Murdoch: An Anatomy of Failure 308
James Clements

19 Larkin's Light 322
Kate McLoughlin

20 'Operating on Life, Not in It': Gender and Relationships in the Plays of Harold Pinter 337
Mark Taylor-Batty

21 'The Small Box': Ted Hughes and the Figure of the Child 352
S. J. Perry

22 Caryl Churchill and the Vectors of Unhappiness 368
Rachel Clements

Index 383

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General Editor's Preface

British Literature in Transition maps a century of change. It is a project of revision and reappraisal that aims, through innovative juxtaposition and ambitious realignments, to reconsider the habitual practices and critical norms that shape our understanding of twentieth-century writing.

Each volume is distinctively the work of its editors and contributors: there has been no attempt to impose theoretical or methodological conformity. Rather, the aim has been to create a space of possibility for the reimagining and reconfiguring of twentieth-century literature. The century has been broken down into twenty-year blocks, with a view to disrupting habits of periodisation (most obviously, the decade). Twenty-year blocks are no less arbitrary or problematic, but, by moving to this model, British Literature in Transition is able to ask new questions of the boundaries, books and narratives, the critical perspectives and the canons, through which the century has come to be known. Crucially, the volumes seek to build a picture of literature *in its time*. This historical focus gives new impetus to old questions, while also requiring us to interrogate the selective picture of the century that survives in publishers' catalogues and the reading lists of academia. The multiple volumes of the British Literature in Transition series ask, then, questions as diverse as: What is the modern and whose writing exemplifies it? Does the First World War represent a break in the development of literary practice? Why, habitually, have we come to see the literature of the 1920s and the 1930s as radically different? Why has the writing of the first age of austerity seemingly disappeared without a trace? What were the effects on literature of decolonisation and mass immigration? What did the Cold War do to British literary culture, and how did one woman – Margaret Thatcher – come to have such a profound influence on the writing of a generation?

As these questions suggest, this series pays close attention to the dynamic relationship between literature and history, asking questions not just about the canon that has survived but also about the writing that has been

unjustly forgotten or excluded. The series examines both the prestigious and the popular and aims to understand literature's role in mediating the developments of the past hundred years. British Literature in Transition argues for the importance of both politics and aesthetics and it seeks to understand the constraints and generative possibilities of challenging cultural contexts. An acknowledgement that the outside world shapes literary creativity, or that literature engages in a process of 'world-making', is hardly new, but the seeming onset of an age of historical amnesia suggests it is acquiring fresh significance. What, we might ask, in the aftermath of the 2016 'Brexit' vote, will *British* literature come to mean in the next decades of the twenty-first century? The evidence of the vote suggests that a significant proportion of the nation had forgotten why a European Union was once so urgently needed and desired. It also suggests the instability of narratives of progress, tolerance and integration, exposing the fears of a world that – at the end of the twentieth century – seemed to be becoming inescapably global. At the time of writing, the political and economic consequences of the Brexit decision remain mired in uncertainty, but statistics already reveal its profound social impact. The rhetorical register of the campaign, suffused with a misplaced nostalgia for the 1940s, has given new legitimacy to the violent expression of prejudice. Reasserting a firmly bounded concept of the island nation has equally reinstated discredited discourses of xenophobia, racism and homophobia.

The 'contemporary' thus tells us that transition itself is unstable, unpredictable and even – disturbingly – cyclical. Its manifestations across the twentieth century are far from uniform, and there is no necessary correlation between historical event and literary transition. The years 1940–60, for example, a time of almost unimaginable geopolitical change and social upheaval, emerges as a period of relative stasis – full of radical innovations, but uncertain in direction and beset by more or less readily acknowledged nostalgia. It is hard here to detect a paradigm shift in *literary* form. Quite the opposite might be argued of 1920–40, where 1922 stands out as a -defining year in the literary understanding of the modern. But is 1922 an end or a beginning? Should the game-changing literary outputs of that year – *The Waste Land, Ulysses, Jacob's Room* – be taken as the zenith of a modernity evolving since the nineteenth century, or do they represent a year zero, the moment that literature took a decisive turn – a transition – that criticism would herald, and thus enshrine, as an aesthetic watershed? The answer, of course, is both, and more. Consequently, as each volume in the series approaches its subjects, it does so with multiple concepts of

transition in mind. Transition might mean movement – some notion of progress, transit or return – or it might mean flux, indeterminacy and the liminal. Transition is equally a change of state, a recognition of the unsettled and the refusal to occupy a fixed or determined place. In literary terms, this means that the innovative and the experimental might take radically different forms – and, to expose this, the Transitions series changes both the *dramatis personae* of literary history and the company they keep. The usual suspects of the twentieth-century canon are here, but they appear in different contexts and in dialogue with unexpected others. These realignments are not the product of editorial whim, but rather an attempt to reconstruct a historical context that recognises the worlds in which these writers wrote, and in which their work was received. The five volumes of the Transitions series thus seek to reinstate the often complex and disingenuous relationship between literature and its contexts. Previous critical work is scrutinised and debated, and fossilised canons are cracked apart and enlarged, to provide readers at all levels, from undergraduate to research professional, with a richer picture of the possibilities of a transformative century.

I began by suggesting that British Literature in Transition was a mapping project, but no map is ever definitive. Cartographers revise their work in the light of emergent knowledge, fresh technologies and new ways of seeing; they fill in blank spaces and reveal occluded paths. To function effectively, critical maps must also periodically be redrawn, and this is one such re-plotting that forges new routes through territory we have, perhaps erroneously, long thought familiar.

University of St Andrews GILL PLAIN

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