

METAMODERNISM AND CONTEMPORARY BRITISH POETRY

This book discusses contemporary British poetry in the context of metamodernism. It argues that the concept of enigmatical poetics helps to recalibrate the opposition between mainstream and innovative poetry, and investigates whether a new generation of British poets can be accurately defined as metamodernist. Antony Rowland analyses the ways in which contemporary British poets such as Geoffrey Hill, J. H. Prynne, Geraldine Monk and Sandeep Parmar have responded to the work of modernist poets as diverse as Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, H. D. and Antonin Artaud since the 1950s. He shows how enigmatical poetry offers an alternative vision to that of the contemporary British novel.

PROFESSOR ANTONY ROWLAND is Chair in Modern and Contemporary Poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is the author of seven books, including *Poetry as Testimony* (2014) and *Holocaust Poetry* (2005). He received an Eric Gregory award in 2000 from the Society of Authors, and the Manchester Poetry Prize in 2012. He is a member of the Higher Education Committee for the English Association.

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY
 LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Editor

Peter Boxall, *University of Sussex*

As the cultural environment of the twenty-first century comes into clearer focus, Cambridge Studies in Twenty-First-Century Literature and Culture presents a series of monographs that undertakes the most penetrating and rigorous analysis of contemporary culture and thought.

The series is driven by the perception that critical thinking today is in a state of transition. The global forces that produce cultural forms are entering into powerful new alignments, which demand new analytical vocabularies in the wake of later twentieth-century theory. The series will demonstrate that theory is not simply a failed revolutionary gesture that we need to move beyond, but rather brings us to the threshold of a new episteme, which will require new theoretical energy to navigate.

In this spirit, the series will host work that explores the most important emerging critical contours of the twenty-first century, marrying inventive and imaginative criticism with theoretical and philosophical rigor. The aim of the series will be to produce an enduring account of the twenty-first-century intellectual landscape that will not only stand as a record of the critical nature of our time, but also forge new critical languages and vocabularies with which to navigate an unfolding age. In offering a historically rich and philosophically nuanced account of contemporary literature and culture, the series will stand as an enduring body of work that helps us to understand the cultural moment in which we live.

In This Series

Joel Evans

Conceptualising the Global in the Wake of the Postmodern: Literature, Culture, Theory

Adeline Johns-Putra

Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel

Caroline Edwards

Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel

Paul Crosthwaite

The Market Logics of Contemporary Fiction

Jennifer Cooke

Contemporary Feminist Life-Writing

Garrett Stewart

Book, Text, Medium: Cross-Sectional Reading for a Digital Age

Antony Rowland

Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry

Sherryl Vint

Biopolitical Futures in Twenty-First-Century Speculative Fiction

Joe Cleary

The Irish Expatriate Novel in Late Capitalist Globalization

Ankhi Mukherjee

Unseen City: The Psychic Lives of the Urban Poor

METAMODERNISM AND
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH
POETRY

ANTONY ROWLAND
Manchester Metropolitan University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-84197-9 — Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry
Antony Rowland
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108841979
DOI: 10.1017/9781108895286

© Antony Rowland 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-84197-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-84197-9 — Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry
Antony Rowland
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

In memory of Richard Jones (1972–2018)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-84197-9 — Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry
Antony Rowland
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> viii
Introduction	i
1 Contemporary British Poetry and Enigmaticalness	24
2 Continuing ‘Poetry Wars’ in Twenty-First-Century British Poetry	42
3 Committed and Autonomous Art	59
4 Iconoclasm and Enigmatical Commitment	88
5 The Double Consciousness of Modernism	117
Conclusion	134
<i>Notes</i>	149
<i>Bibliography</i>	217
<i>Index</i>	227

Acknowledgements

When I first discussed the outline of this book with Dr Richard Jones in summer 2014, we were enjoying a bumper season of Red Admirals and outsized artichokes. Richard worked in the Geography department at the University of Exeter, and we had plans to create an app for Dartmoor that would explain physical aspects of the landscape, matched with excerpts of literature. I would like to think that we had an indefinite but important sense of the poetics of each other's subject. Mud was not just mud for Richard, but the beginnings of narratives of memory, adventure and trauma, from stories of caked showers when attempting to corral his samples to the uncovering of skulls when coring in China. My memories of learning physical geography at school included the savouring of new language ('cwm', 'arête', 'col') and the imaginative acts of trying to square the diagrams of glaciers with recollections of family hikes on Coniston Old Man and Helvellyn. Both of us were responding to the poetics of place in different but connected ways: bloom lines on Ordnance maps react to the landscape of Dartmoor in an imaginative way just as literature might respond expansively to its tors. I can see Richard smiling: 'Yes, but when you get lost in the fog near Ponsworthy, try getting home with a poem'.

*

Our children grew, and then there was COVID. I would like to thank all those colleagues and friends who have been so generous with their time in reading draft chapters during this difficult period, including James Byrne, Nikolai Duffy, Ben Harker, Marius Hentea, Peter Howarth, Tim Kendall, Angelica Michelis, David Miller and Sandeep Parmar. Especial thanks must go, as ever, to Emma Liggins, who had a major influence on the final shape of the book. A clumpy or overly complicated sentence is (Quorn) mincemeat in her eyes. An Arts and Humanities Research Council award in 2017 allowed me to explore the ideas surrounding metamodernism with a wonderfully diffuse and enthusiastic set of academics, students, writers and non-academics, including Jeroen Boon,

Acknowledgements

ix

Katherine Burn, Linda Ceriello, Andrew Corsa, Greg Dember, Tom Drayton, Alison Gibbons, Robert Gould, Mika Hallila, Chantal Hassard, David James, Dennis Kersten, Janien Linde, Sarah Maclachlan, Divya Nadkarni, Alistair Noon, Kasimir Sandbacka, Will Self, Samuel Stuart-Booth, Robin van den Akker, Niels van Poecke, Tim Vermeulen, Usha Wilbers and Graham Young. I shall always be grateful for their papers, readings and conversations in European countries and towns that, during the COVID epidemic, have been very difficult to visit. As noted by some PhD students and early-career researchers, the conferences and symposia were remarkable for their supportive environments and a lack of academic ‘edge’. Staff at Arendsnest in Amsterdam provided us with a perfect final venue: Bockbier on tap after the curtain closes; I am not sure we shall ever organise an event in a more salubrious abode. I would also like to thank the following colleagues, whose insights have improved this book, whether on the scale of Zoom support, discussions about theoretical contexts, copyright requests or a tweaked sentence: Robert Eaglestone, Martin Eve, Suzanne Fairless, Tony Frazer, Daniel Gavin, John Goodby, Angela Jarman, Germaine Loader, Gail Marshall, Edgar Mendez, Berthold Schoene, Portia Taylor, Scott Thurston, Dale Townshend, Jeffrey Wainwright, Tony Ward and Dinah Wood.

I am grateful to a number of staff at the Geoffrey Hill and Tony Harrison archives held in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds. Even with an electrical fault that took out the entire campus at one point, they still managed to accommodate me. Colin Taylor kindly allowed me to use a reproduction of his painting ‘Mother Courage no. 3’ for the cover of this book. The following publishers have granted copyright permission to reproduce extracts for Chapter 5, and lines of poetry from the authors discussed in this book: Arc, Bloodaxe Books, Faber and Faber, Graywolf Press, Knives Forks and Spoons, Oxford University Press, Salt and Shearsman Press. Some material for Chapter 5 is reproduced by permission from my chapter ‘Modernism and the “Double Consciousness” of Myth in Tony Harrison’s Poems and *Metamorpheus*’, in *New Light on Tony Harrison*, ed. Edith Hall (London: Oxford University Press) © The British Academy 2019. The Don Paterson excerpt from ‘The Sea at Brighton’ from *Landing Light* is reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company LLC on behalf of Graywolf Press, www.graywolfpress.org © Don Paterson 2005. The extracts from Geoffrey’s poems are used by permission of the literary estate of Sir Geoffrey Hill. Jeremy Hill and Kenneth Haynes kindly allowed me to quote from his poems and the extensive Geoffrey Hill archives in the

Acknowledgements

Brotherton Library. Tony Harrison himself agreed that I could use material from his own archives in the Brotherton. In his characteristically direct way, Tony commented that ‘I wouldn’t have put the stuff in there if I didn’t want people to use it’. If I have missed any copyright permissions, we would be happy to correct this in future editions of this book.

I would like to thank the series editor, Peter Boxall, for offering unwavering support and for responding patiently to my requests about submission details. I am indebted to Ray Ryan from Cambridge University Press for his initial faith in this project: we first exchanged emails about the book during that hot summer and autumn of 2014. My amazing family – Emma, Polly and Clara – has kept me going during some difficult years of changing jobs, COVID and family illness. They are indeed, as Polly once said, ‘electric to glitter’. They even responded kindly to a flat in Newark when I worked in Lincoln. Last but not least, the late-night cheese boards in Tavistock with Richard and Sharon Gedye have kept me fuelled with ideas and striking dreams for many moons.

*

In 2016, Richard was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Despite increasing debility, he still walked with us to those tors and around the Devon and Cornwall coast: Cotehele, Bere Alston, Fowey. Just before he lost his eyesight, we wandered into an old railway cutting above Tavistock, exploring the tea-coloured water and sharp edges of dynamited stone. Chatting about mutual friends, he laughed in his characteristic way: ‘There’s been too many funerals this year!’ Typical of Richard’s humour, it is still the most astonishing thing I have ever heard anybody say. In April 2019, we visited his memorial stone at Urswick tarn in Cumbria. The village was peaceful and unseasonably warm, and our families milled around the stone’s position at a jetty’s edge. A plaque explains that ‘Dr Jones was a physical geographer whose research at this tarn and elsewhere around the world added greatly to knowledge of the Holocene’. Given that this book completes the project that I had first discussed with Richard six years earlier, it would be suitable to end these acknowledgements with a poem:

Marl

Hérons stumble the fetch: Urswick
 holds its flash, setting the tarn
 with our wake, appropriate
 as our grief through laughter, where grass
 spikes the meniscus and sun-motes blur
 our digital snap. Hug

Acknowledgements

xi

the embarrassment of this plaque:
mourning as clear as fish that roll
air and under the boardwalk. We
taste the edge of marram, faces
in all-shore directions; eyes
string the reed buntings jittering
their pad. Marl adds
to our knowledge of the Holocene:
your core sampler hods to pollen
where forests mould to a crick
and insects peat our memory. Grain
fires the cap to a dating spree.
Photos out-tilt the jetty's pitch, as
we walk out in our guilty retrieval.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-84197-9 — Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry
Antony Rowland
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)
