

POSTMODERNISM: POETRY

Poetry was already unpopular in the 20th century due to the prevailing rationalism, utilitarianism, and dissociation of sensibility in an age of increasing high technology. Postmodern poetry is an oxymoron. Postmodernists on the whole believe in politics, not art. Feminists will not even read white males. Academic theorists declared the author dead and language meaningless while creative writing teachers in the same English departments are still trying to encourage young poets. Even the rationalists of the 18th century had more respect for poetry than secular liberal Postmodernists.

Yet creative writing programs have been turning out thousands of poets since World War II. Feminist professors and other academics abandoned the social role of English departments as promoters of poetry in order to promote themselves. Consequently, there is not enough objective criticism of contemporary poetry to inform this website. As put by David Foster Wallace, "Literary fiction and poetry are real marginalized right now." Nevertheless, more excellent poets have emerged since 1960—as well as more bad and mediocre ones—than in any period in history anywhere, most of the best distinguishing themselves by writing in traditional verse forms rather than free verse.

"The critical reaction to *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, edited by Rita Dove, has been violent, silly, depressing, and symptomatic—and it hasn't gone nearly far enough... This bewildering and myopic book is not an adequate portrait of American poetry of the late century...how ghostly this vision of the great poets seems! Robert Frost is represented by five short poems and one longer; Stevens by the same number, none of any great length.... A college student would have little idea why these...poets have been the subject of continual study since they revolutionized American verse almost a century ago. Gwendolyn Brooks gets three times as much space as Moore; Melvin B. Tolson more space than Frost, Williams, or Pound; Robert Pinsky more than Stevens, Moore, Cummings, Crane, Auden, Roethke, Bishop, Berryman, or Lowell.... Dove's anthology is so inclusive you're surprised everyone's second cousin isn't here.... It's painful to find [so many] great poets missing and yet a horde of mediocre poets crowding the pages....

When sociology masquerades as aesthetics, your fairness seems immediately unfair to everyone left out (there's a point where 'balance' is prejudice by another name). The blogs have been alight with rage over the absence of Appalachian poets, disabled poets, cyber poets, performance poets, avant-gardists of every stripe, and many other groups implicitly maligned. Once you establish 'representation' as a shibboleth, there's no stopping.... No art is an equal-opportunity art. Talent is always asymmetrically distributed.... Dove has cast a massive [net] and caught a lot of flotsam and jetsam. She has made matters worse by adding four poems by herself, when most of her contemporaries are limited to one or two. To think yourself twice as good as almost every poet of your generation suggests a species of self-delusion common in poets but rare in anthologists, because an anthologist without modesty can't be taken seriously....

Dove gushes with fresh-minted platitudes...goofy drivel...smug, idiotically phrased judgments.... What can you say when one of the most honored contemporary poets can't write a sentence that sounds literate?.... This cliché-addled, *Time*-magazine-style rush to literary judgment is dispiriting but hilarious. Matters are made no better by an alarming number of textual errors and the complete lack of notes in what seems meant as a college textbook. Dove has built a Temple of Mediocrity, scarcely glancing at the century's best poets while lavishing space on the harmless, the hackneyed, the humdrum." William Logan, "Guys and Dove," *The New Criterion* 30.10 (June 2012)