

THE Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry

SECOND EDITION



Edited by RICHARD ELLMANN
and ROBERT O'CLAIR

THE
Norton Anthology
of Modern Poetry

Second Edition

EDITED BY

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Preface to the First Edition

The most acute rendering of an era's sensibility is its poetry. In the twentieth century, probably in reaction to its horrors, poets have created new and powerful consolidations of the imaginative life. Some writers have accepted the discipline of the literary tradition, others have flouted it. During the last seventy-five years in the English-speaking nations, many poets of consequence have written well in an unprecedented range of styles and subjects. This book aspires to present their best work, and also to delineate the many different tendencies of modern poetry in English.

Where to begin a selection of modern verse is a problem that has been solved here by the inclusion of four earlier poets—Walt Whitman first, and then Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Thomas Hardy. These poets either anticipate or influence much verse that came after them. We have chosen to present them, and all modern poets, not according to nationality—though many prided themselves on their national origins—but in terms of generations. For in the twentieth century, distinctions of age more often appear to create boundaries than do places of composition. The history of verse in England cannot be written without considering Pound and Eliot, both born in the United States, while in the history of American verse it has to be noted that Whitman, and Robert Frost after him, found their most sympathetic early audiences in England, and that W. H. Auden, having made his reputation as an English poet, in middle life became a citizen of the United States.

In this book, we have included many poems by each major figure, but we have also provided a generous selection of poets less celebrated but still of commanding interest. This procedure seems preferable to offering the major writers by themselves, since it situates them within the context in which they wrote and were read. It is preferable also to a miscellaneous survey in which all poets are presented through a perfunctory sampling. We have also gathered here in considerable abundance the poetry written since the Second World War, which is so often slighted in collections of this kind. Excellent poems are still being written, and we have tried to suggest their vitality and range. Of course, a choice had to be made among many good poems; doubtless there are not only some poems but some poets that readers may miss, but we hope that few will find this book completely lacking in the *kind* of modern poetry in which they are specially interested.

A book of modern verse bears a responsibility to assist readers who might be put off by the profusion of talent, on the one hand, or by the range of allusion and local reference on the other. Most such collections have been chary of footnotes, even those by the poets themselves, yet the intelligibility of a line, or even a poem, often depends on specialized knowledge. We have provided liberal annotation, translating phrases from foreign languages and explaining allusions when they are not common knowledge, so that every poem can be read without recourse to reference books. The

introductions which preface the selections from each poet attempt to place them in relation to others, as well as to provide a sense of what they wished their work to accomplish. The bibliography will help readers eager to pursue particular poets.

A note about texts: as a general rule, we have given the latest published version of a poem over which the author could have exercised editorial control. Certain exceptions have been made, and these are identified in the footnotes; occasionally lines from an alternative version of a poem are also given. Except where the sequence would be misleading, poems are arranged under each author in the order of their first appearance in book form, and the date of that publication is specified after each poem. For convenience, poems without titles are usually identified by their first lines, which are given in square brackets in the table of contents and above the poem itself. Almost all the poems are printed in their entirety, but a few very long ones have had to be represented by self-contained selections, their omitted portions being indicated by three asterisks. Individualities of spelling, punctuation, and typography have been preserved.

This book has profited greatly from the assistance of friends. We especially wish to thank Professor M. H. Abrams, both avuncular and exigent; Margaret Neussendorfer, who aided in the preparation of the texts; John Benedict, John Francis, and their colleagues at W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., for careful and benevolent editing. The resources and services of the Yale and Harvard university libraries, the Bodleian, and the Manhattanville College Library have been invaluable. We thank Mary Ellmann, who wrote the headnote on Sylvia Plath and contributed to other headnotes, and Margaret O'Clair, who helped select certain of the poems.

Publisher's Preface to the Second Edition

This is a new edition of the book that teachers and readers have for fifteen years accepted as the standard anthology of modern verse in the English language. That *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* has found favor is due in part to the depth and breadth of its coverage, and in part to the practical simplicity of its organization. In making the revision, the editors bring the former up to date but do not alter the latter.

In this edition, the poets are again arranged in order of birth date, for, as Richard Ellmann said in the Preface to the first edition, "in the twentieth century, distinctions of age more often appear to create boundaries than do places of composition." The editors also maintain the balance of including on the one hand many poems by each major figure—in several cases more than in the first edition—and on the other a generous selection of notable works by less celebrated poets. Among the major figures now represented by additional poems are Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, D. H. Lawrence, and W. H. Auden. For these and many others, the editors were at pains to make a selection that demonstrates the scope and variety of achievement over a poet's entire career.

In making selections for the Second Edition, the editors applied two principles. The first was that poets in the first edition who have written a substantial amount in subsequent years—including, for example, Robert Penn Warren, Elizabeth Bishop, Gwendolyn Brooks, Philip Larkin, Adrienne Rich, and Seamus Heaney—should be updated by adding the best of their work published after 1973. In the new edition, therefore, sixty poets have additional poems.

The editors' second principle was that many poets who have become prominent in recent years—or who were unjustly omitted from the first edition—should now be included in the anthology. There are sixty-one added poets. Among the younger of these are such varied practitioners as Robert Pinsky, Marilyn Hacker, Michael Ondaatje, Craig Raine, Ai, Carolyn Forché, Paul Muldoon, and Louise Erdrich. Other additions include, to name only a few, Isaac Rosenberg, Louise Bogan, Judith Wright, and Donald Davie. Some added writers, such as Lewis Carroll or Gertrude Stein, may be regarded among the "precursors" of modern poetry; still others are American poets whose roots are in the West, such as William Stafford, Richard Hugo, Galway Kinnell, and David Wagoner.

It is an undisputed fact that many of our best poets happen to be women. The Second Edition includes thirty-nine women poets, of whom twenty-four are new. They range from Emily Dickinson, whose innovations fostered modern verse, to Cathy Song (b. 1955), the youngest poet in the book.

In the first Preface Ellmann remarked that "the most acute rendering of an era's sensibility is its poetry." Some of the most notable renderings of a new sensibility in recent years have been made by writers in what have come to be called "other American" literary traditions. To the first edition's

unusually full selection of poets of the Harlem Renaissance and of the Black experience the editors now add such younger exponents as Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Michael Harper, and Rita Dove. Although the roots of the Native-American and Mexican-American traditions go back for many generations, their entry into current poetry has been comparatively recent, but remarkable: the editors represent here the work of four young Native Americans (James Welch, Roberta Hall Whiteman, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Erdrich) and, in the Chicano tradition, of Gary Soto, Alberto Ríos, and Lorna Dee Cervantes.

The editors have also cast their geographical net more widely, to give greater representation to poets outside the United States and Great Britain. The selections from Irish poetry were always full, but are now brought up to date: Seamus Heaney is generously represented, as is Paul Muldoon, one of the best of the younger Ulster poets. With the advice of teachers and critics in Canada, the editors fully revamped the Canadian offerings: there are now nine Canadian poets, from Earle Birney through Margaret Atwood to Susan Musgrave. There are more Australian poets as well, from A. D. Hope through Judith Wright to John Tranter.

In making new selections of all poets and poems, the editors were guided by the responses of the many teachers who have used the earlier edition, as well as by Robert O'Clair's unerring sense of how well a poem works in the classroom. The difficult decisions to omit some of the first-edition poets and poems were based on a canvass of teachers, which showed that they were seldom if ever taught.

The editors also took into account the prominent fact that more modern poets are writing longer poems. Accordingly, they include an increased number of self-contained and teachable excerpts from long poems written throughout the course of modern poetry, from Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* and H. D.'s *Tribute to the Angels* through James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* to Seamus Heaney's *Station Island*. They include also a number of long poems in their entirety; among these are Earle Birney's "The Gray Woods Exploding," James Dickey's "Falling," Kenneth Koch's "To Marina," Adrienne Rich's "Yom Kippur 1984," and Michael Harper's "Debridement."

Since the editorial apparatus in the first edition was found eminently useful, the editors, in this revision, simply updated it—although "simply" is a misleading term here, since a number of the poets had never been written about before, nor had a number of the poems ever been annotated. The editors rewrote and brought up to the present the general introduction to the anthology. They kept the introductions to the individual authors as quietly helpful as before, updating them and writing new ones as needed. And they provided even fuller annotations of poems, without, however, usurping the prerogative of students and teachers by interpretative analyses. Other editorial practices are as described in the Preface to the first edition.

In a work of revision as massive as the present one, editors and publisher are indebted to many friends for many things. First among these friends—too numerous to list—are the many teachers who patiently filled out questionnaires and answered other questions about their use of the book in the classroom. Other friends are listed in a separate Acknowledgments section that follows.

Richard Ellmann—seconded by Robert O'Clair—insisted on one other small editorial change. Rather than giving a living poet's dates as, say,

“1923- ,” they preferred “b. 1923.” The difference, they argued, is that the former suggests that we are morbidly waiting to fill in the death date; the latter suggested a life being lived.

Since both Ellmann and O’Clair lived such full lives, it is intolerable to us that their own death dates have both been filled in: Ellmann’s on May 13, 1987, O’Clair’s on May 15, 1989. Ellmann had finished his work on *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* but did not live to see the new edition published; O’Clair, ironically, had just finished his work on the alternate edition, *Modern Poems*, but did not live to see it published. The publisher hopes that both volumes may reflect in some measure their learning, their wit, their concern for good teaching, and their devotion to the art of poetry.

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