

deeply expansive chapters, ranging from close readings of literary texts and art installations to substantive interviews and meticulous historical analyses. The book also features several powerful interventions in comparative analysis. For example, Chancy's comparisons of Julia Alvarez's and Edwidge Danticat's takes on racialized violence in Hispaniola are dynamic and compelling. Her discussion of the limitations of how Haitian and Dominican writers can and do bear witness to long histories of violence is not a rehashing of old critical discussions but a vibrant intervention into the field. However, what is perhaps most impressive about this text is that it is truly interdisciplinary. Chancy deftly and seamlessly discusses history, literature, and art, in addition to adroitly engaging several bodies of critical literature. Additionally, several of the book's chapters offer richly detailed interviews with artists and authors Danticat, María Magdalena Campos-Pons, and Loida Maritza Pérez that go well beyond the usual questions asked of writers. The omission of black queer theorists such as Cathy Cohen and Roderick Ferguson in the discussion of queer sexuality struck me as curious; nevertheless, Chancy's discussion of transgressive and subversive portrayals of women's sexuality is compelling and necessary. Indeed, this book skillfully covers so much territory that it will undoubtedly be required reading in discussions of contemporary Caribbean women's art and literature for many years to come.

Both *Black Internationalist Feminism* and *From Sugar to Revolution* offer critical interventions in their respective fields—modeling interdisciplinarity in vital ways, underscoring the importance of a diasporic critical lens, and providing significant interventions to the study of literature by transgressive women of color.

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***The Darkness of the Present: Poetics, Anachronism, and the Anomaly.* By Steve McCaffery. Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press. 2012. xii, 282 pp. Paper, \$34.95; e-book, \$34.95.**

***Changing Subjects: Digressions in Modern American Poetry.* By Srikanth Reddy. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. 2012. x, 192 pp. \$40.95.**

***A Common Strangeness: Contemporary Poetry, Cross-Cultural Encounter, Comparative Literature.* By Jacob Edmond. New York: Fordham Univ. Press. 2012. xv, 272 pp. Cloth, \$70.00; paper, \$26.00.**

***The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde.* By Ruth Jennison. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. 2012. x, 232 pp. Cloth, \$60.00; e-book, \$60.00.**

Throughout the latter decades of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, discussions of avant-garde and experimental works were closely tied

to the professed poetics of their practitioners. These often contentious but historically situated discussions did much to articulate differences among practitioners as they claimed an exceptional status for poetry apart from dominant periodization and intellectual concepts of the day. As such they tended to vitiating and leave in their wake commonplace intellectual identifiers such as modernism and postmodernism, structuralism and poststructuralism, and, more recently, finely honed distinctions between communicative and material languages.

The work collected here raises a question: What is the relationship of poetic form to poetics? Form (as the entire formation of a work inseparable from its content) is at once the most and least accessible aspect of a work. Poetics may describe and insist on certain linguistic practices, but rarely, if ever, does a poetics encompass form completely. Poetics are best at identifying what is new—or what must change—but often fail to account for the continuance of the past or the onset of the future.

For Steve McCaffery, the present is dark because it does not know itself except through forms emerging in a time whose instrumentalizing, disciplining, and surveillance propensities at once necessitate but also marginalize ludic economies. McCaffery is not interested in origins per se, but rather in the conditions that give rise to new formations best comprehended not by attempting to locate these in preexisting orders, but by investigating what is anachronistic and anomalous. For McCaffery, the contemporary is always “partly reiterative and refractive” (3). He is far more interested in considering the historical conditions of emergence and the processes of invention than in differentiating the new from the old. Thus, for instance, he will recount the “life and death of the sound poem” through scrutiny of Hugo Ball’s diary writings: “To understand Ball’s invention beyond a merely formal synopsis requires an investigation of his motives, activities, and state of mind both on and prior to June 13, 1916” (14). Postulating that speech precedes music, and that acoustical sound and not music is the destination of poetry, McCaffery finds in William Collins’s 1774 “Ode to Evening” “ambient sound sampling” as music succumbs to “insect noise” and “silent breathing” (187).

In turning to Kenny Goldsmith’s “unoriginal creative writing,” McCaffery links its problematics with Orphic recovery, quoting Blanchot: “How can I recover it, how can I turn around and look at what exists *before*, if all my power consists of making it into what exists *after*?” (91). Far more sinister, examining Alfred Jarry’s “pataphysics” (167) with its emphasis on the state of exception, he finds linkages with Auschwitz. The overall effect of McCaffery’s samplings and ministrations is to greatly open up our sense of avant-garde art and the contemporary well beyond the regime of the signifier. He provides at times a surprisingly workmanlike set of descriptions and histories of avant-garde poetics that are exceeded by formation itself.

Srikanth Reddy provides an account of a poetics of fluent digressiveness in opposition to a poetics of disjunctive fragmentation as defining for modern

poetry. Conducting his analysis entirely through discourse formation (the regime of signifier), Reddy slips, without acknowledging it, between digressiveness as poetic form and a rhetorical strategy. For poets such as Marianne Moore and John Ashbery, a digressive poetics is defining for the form of their poetry, since it is closely aligned with their subjectivity that “favors association over ratiocination, provisionality over consistency, and distraction over concentration” (51). Yet, for other poets in this study, namely Walt Whitman and Lyn Hejinian, while they at times engage digressiveness as a mode of writing, their formal commitments partake of a different ethos. Whitman’s great subject is not a “drifting” self, but the self; and Hejinian’s “Rejection of Closure” does not so simply celebrate the open text as to call attention to how form itself as “differentiating” keeps one from the “claustrophobia” of being “overwhelmed by undifferentiated material” (in *Language of Inquiry* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2000]). Hejinian’s early emphasis on the “cold of poetry” and her engagement with procedural methods partake of rather different inclinations than those poets who seek out digressiveness not just as a means of writing their poetry but as a primary form that answers to their modern dilemmas.

Yet, Reddy’s account is a rich one because of how he engages digressiveness as a means of exposition within this study. Reddy recounts multiple eighteenth-century texts with much specificity in order to ferret out their Enlightenment logics and the disruption of these. His overall query into how modern poets challenge Enlightenment knowledge through digressive modes provides much insight into knowledge formation itself. Reddy quite tellingly traces Moore’s poetry as tied to the eighteenth-century practice of natural history in its quest for the singular and unusual, and draws attention to the eclipse of this kind of observational study by the hierarchical discipline of zoology, which Moore chooses to ignore.

As poets, both McCaffery and Redding explore poetics and poetic forms generative for their own work. Jacob Edmonds and Ruth Jennison create overreaching historical perspectives that enable inquiry into the relationship between poetic form and poetics. Edmonds’s concept of *common strangeness*, a term first coined by Maurice Blanchot and aggressively developed by Edmonds, allows him much acumen in addressing the ways that formal experimentation responds to changing global and transnational realities. Edmonds’s success in engaging through a single term what could amount to a reductive reading of a complex set of poets and poetics can be attributed to the neologism of the term itself, including the ways that it allows for the elucidation of binaries as it refuses them, namely homogenizing global cultures and local singularities, universals and particularities, sameness and difference. Edmonds provides a deeply comparative approach to the study of avant-garde writers from China, Russia, and the United States, most often studied within national frameworks. The singularity of the poets’ work is not compromised by this historical overview,

but rather articulated by addressing the worldly issues to which their work responds, sometimes directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously.

Edmonds approaches these poets through two different mappings: poets from diverse nations who engage in significant cross-cultural interactions and poets for whom globalization issues are defining for their work. Edmonds recounts that Hejinian made eight trips to Russia, in order to explore (along with other West Coast Language poets) Russian formalism and to engage in an exchange with the Russian poet Arkadii Dragomoshchenko—a relationship that brought changes to both of their works. In these interactions Shlovsky's important concept of *ostranenie*, estrangement or defamiliarization, became a concept by which these poets became familiar with each other, constituting a common strangeness. Hejinian recounts that this exchange led her to ask questions not only about the "how" but the "why" of literary writing. Turning to the work of Charles Bernstein, whose own poetics undergo redefinition in responding to US multicultural agendas in the 1980s and 1990s, Edmonds notes Bernstein's engagement with the worldly stage as pitching him between rhetorics of commonness and strangeness. Bernstein refuses to resolve this dialectic, evidence of his refusal to syncretize historical dissonance through poetic form.

*The Zukofsky Era* refuses a separation between poetic form and poetics, intrinsic to the poets and the poetry it describes. So far the presumption of this review is that poetic form as emergent, even when an enactment of a legible and ambitious poetics, is greater than its poetics. Jennings in describing a poetics that is at once anticapitalist and adequate to its revolutionary period—of Depression economics and Marxist exegesis—claims that the Objectivists in taking up the paratactic poetics initiated by Pound rework them so that they are pedagogical. These poetics at once manifest the commodified aspect of objects within a capitalist economy as they correct for this commodification, through the gap between the particulars so named. Their approach is one of "patient indirection," and their self-explorations are mediated by a consciousness of the languages by which they can know themselves and as such serve as meditations on subjectivity itself. Jennings presents an understanding of these poets' practice as one that engages the ethos of social and cultural reading or interpretation over and against Pound's ethos of "make it new." Both Pound and Objectivist paratactic poetics are constructive, yet whereas Pound courts the irrational and libidinal, the Objectivist poets, as Jennings presents them, are politically corrective and circumspect. Jennings has gone some distance to produce the historical framework and poetic readings that validate this particular interpretation. It is in close sync with this poetry's form and poetics and constitutes an important contribution to our understanding of Objectivism.

*The Zukofsky Era* leads most assuredly to the 1970s and 1980s Language movement in which it was anathema or simply nonsensical to separate out questions of poetic form from poetics. At a time in which the turn to language

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radically challenged multiple academic disciplines and art practices both internationally and nationally, Language poetry insisted on the formative powers of language itself. For many practitioners, poetry was poetics. We are now in a different time—a time in which further inquiry into the relationship between poetic form and poetics is needed.

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***The Ethics of Swagger: Prizewinning African American Novels, 1977–1993.* By Michael DeRel Hill. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press. 2013. ix, 195 pp. Cloth, \$51.95; CD, \$14.95.**

***The Time Is Always Now: Black Thought and the Transformation of US Democracy.* By Nick Bromell. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. 2013. ix, 190 pp. Cloth, \$29.95; e-book available.**

What can the black experience teach us about the construction of community and the makeup of US democracy? Both Michael DeRel Hill and Nick Bromell return to this issue of cultural distinction by advancing new arguments about the value of African American culture today, as it becomes increasingly marketized. Hill chronicles the relationship between African American writers and the expectations of literary prize committees. He explains why blacks received more major literary awards in the seventeen years between 1977 and 1993 than in any other period of equal length. Bookended by Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, which won the National Book Critics Award, and Ernest Gaines's receipt of the same prize for *A Lesson before Dying*, as well as Morrison's Nobel Prize in Literature, the period "signaled the end of black writers' journey through insecurity toward autonomy" (5). Hill argues that it was the aesthetic choice of these writers to "shed anxieties regarding Eurocentric literary ideas" and excavate their literary traditions—a choice to "walk with . . . dignity," or to "swagger"—that ironically afforded them such a high number of prizes (1).

Hill spends most of his time drawing thematic connections between the work and the author's attitude toward prize-granting bodies. Mirroring Morrison's move from valuing "prestige" to investing in the "esteem" afforded by "black creative fellowship," in *Beloved* (1987), Paul D and Sethe initially "submit to white authority" but eventually turn to each other and their community for support (34–36). Likewise, Celie's reinterpretation of faith in *The Color Purple* (1982), and Rutherford's awareness of the African diaspora in *Middle Passage* (1990) reflect, respectively, Alice Walker and Charles Johnson's negotiation of their relationship to white mentors. Extending his study of black "communion" through Ernest Gaines's *A Lesson before Dying*, which desexualizes "male-female interaction," at times Hill risks a forced comparison between an author's professional life and larger historical events (78).