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Emily Leithauser Date

“Remembering Poetry: Figures of Scale in the Postwar Anglophone Lyric”

By

Emily Leithauser

Doctor of Philosophy

English

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“Remembering Poetry: Figures of Scale in the Postwar Anglophone Lyric”

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Abstract

“Remembering Poetry: Figures of Scale in the Postwar Anglophone Lyric”

By Emily Leithauser

This dissertation examines how mid-twentieth-century and contemporary Anglophone verse employs poetry’s techniques of measurement and its contrasting figurations of scale to record shifts in consciousness, to chronicle the failures of memory, and to document minute changes in perception. Poetry is rooted in ideas of measurement and scale. We perceive this initially in a technical sense: meter, line, and stanza. Poetry’s figurative devices, such as metaphor, similarly involve questions of measurement. I argue that poetry offers genre-specific means of preserving information. Very little contemporary theoretical work has explicitly combined memory and metaphor studies. Poetry and memory have historically been intertwined, as have poetry and metaphor, but I interrogate how poetry, memory, and metaphor intersect. I contend that contrasts of scale and figures of measurement are a defining feature of post-1945 Anglophone poetry, and of an increasingly globalized community of poets.

With the intersections of metaphor and memory in mind, I examine how four Anglophone poets—Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott, Gjertrud Schnackenberg, and Agha Shahid Ali— accommodate the pressures of a world that is changing rapidly, and which has accelerated the rate and scale of change. These four poets have at once positioned themselves as outsiders to, and members of, the Anglo-American poetry establishment. This conscious outsider status attunes these poets to ways in which poetry both bridges and fails to bridge geographic, national, and cultural divides through figuration. Recording not just experiences, but the experience of writing poetry as global poets, these writers question how poetic form will adapt, as it documents and remembers our increasingly interconnected world.

“Remembering Poetry: Figures of Scale in the Postwar Anglophone Lyric”

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