

Walt Hunter, *Forms of a World: Contemporary Poetry and the Making of Globalization* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 190 pp.

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Walt Hunter's *Forms of a World* offers a significant contribution to the wave of recent titles—by Michael Dowdy, Jacob Edmond, Harris Feinsod, Rachel Galvin, Matthew Hart, Christopher Nealon, Jahan Ramazani, Anthony Reed, and Margaret Ronda, among others—that read contemporary verse through the economic, social, and cultural formations making up today's public sphere. In particular, Hunter pays sustained attention to the rise and global reach of advanced capitalism as it shapes the governing themes of early twenty-first-century poetry. But equally important, Hunter attends to the power of poetry's formal resources both in mourning and contesting the planetary ills of the Anthropocene: global climate change, erosions to citizenship, the attenuation of democratic government and worker communities, genocide, and the disastrous precarity of migrant communities around the world.

Hunter breaks with traditional strategies of reading contemporary verse either in relation to literary modernism, or by major author and/or by recent schools and movements. Instead, *Forms of a World* examines major poetic forms and subgenres—landscape poetry, odes, lyrics, hortatory verse, and the prospect poem—that bring into sharp focus four distinct, and decidedly dystopian, symptoms of global capitalism. Thus, chapter 1, "Stolen Landscapes: The Investments of the Ode and the Politics of Land," examines the landscape poetry of contemporary Irish lyricists Paula Meehan, Mary O'Malley, Sarah Clancy, and Seamus Heaney. Their landscape verse, Hunter argues, depicts the dire consequences of social dispossession owing to the global financial ebbs and flows of capitalist land speculation and debt expropriation resulting in Ireland's housing bubble and subsequent burst of the 2010s. In the context of commodification and its social displacements, Hunter discusses the "block" and "grid" grammatical format in Keston Sutherland's *The Odes to TL6IP* (2013), which takes its title from an outmoded product code for a Hotpoint dryer. Hunter also offers close readings of Ann Boyer's prose poem "The Animal Model of Inescapable Shock" (2015). Chapter 1 concludes with a reading of Manal Al-Sheikh's prose poem "Destitution" (2013) that constitutes an odal form of multiple dispossessions whose several enumerations perform, paradoxically enough, an excess of loss.

Chapter 2, "Let Us Go: Lyric and the Transit of Citizenship," offers, arguably, the strongest, most useful readings in *Forms of a World*. Here Hunter turns to the attenuation of citizenship by the onslaught of racial micro-aggressions witnessed in Claudia Rankine's lyric rendering of contemporary black experience in the US. Hunter

locates Rankine's *Citizen* (2014) in the tradition of Whitman, as she dilates his catalogues and lengthy line units into paragraphs that make a collage out of personal lyricism, intimate anecdotes, sports coverage, and popular journalism. In this vein, Hunter aligns his close readings of Rankine's expansive experimental verse with the New Lyric studies that treat the lyric not as the sullen art of the private self, but situated—as critics such as Virginia Jackson, Rei Terada, and Jonathan Arac argue—amidst “contingent historical manifestations” (54). Along the way, Hunter foregrounds Rankine's worldly attention to race in the context of global, multiracial capitalism. Specifically, her pronominal positioning of the reader in what Evie Shockley calls “white cross-racial identification” marks, for Hunter, a distinctive advance beyond earlier, racially unmarked “citizen lyrics” by white, mid-century poets such as Robert Lowell, Richard Hugo, and James Wright.

Chapter 3, “The Crowd to Come: Poetic Exhortations from Brooklyn to Kashmir,” begins by revisiting Walter Benjamin's reading of Charles Baudelaire and the modern shock effects of urban crowds. In contrast, Hunter's reading of Sean Bonney's *The Commons* (2013) and Myung Mi Kim's *Commons* (2002) assumes that the solidity and solidarity of the modern crowd by now in the twenty-first century has melted into air. Given the social erosions of today's public sphere, Hunter considers poetry's hortatory resources in resistance to global capital's outsourcing of production, casual labor relations, neoliberal militarization, and digital flows of information media that have attenuated and dispersed the communitarian habitats, collective enclaves, and “crowds” as such of working men and women. Instead of any Romantic returns to a pre-industrial common land, however, Bonney employs the lament and ballad modes to critique global capital's enclosures of labor. Significantly, for Hunter, Bonney deploys poetry's verbal resources to intervene in the financial discourses that sustain the precarity of oppressive working conditions around the world. Hunter similarly reads Kim's exhortations as couched in an anti-absorptive poetics, one that defamiliarizes the reader's habits of consuming commodified discourse. Instead, Kim projects the poetic commons as a linguistic space where the work of transformation, translation, and transvaluation can unfold through decidedly experimental verse practices.

Chapter 4, “The No-Prospect Poem: Poetic Views of the Anthropocene,” presents a genealogy of the key term “Anthropocene” and the ways in which it implicates capitalism with climate change as well as broader epistemological shifts in the scientific understanding of ecology and global earth systems. Following such theorists as Rob Nixon and Timothy Morton, Hunter is alert to the challenges that the Anthropocene's long-term environmental degradation—its slow-moving violence in duration and global scale—poses for narrative representation. Nevertheless, Hunter proposes the “prospect poem” as a capable verse subgenre for both exposing the limits to

capitalism's environmental sustainability and imagining the planet's dystopian settings to come. Unlike the poet's visual mastery of landscape as you find it in the Greater Romantic lyric tradition of, say, Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," the contemporary viewing subject in the work of British poet J. H. Prynne, Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor, and US poets Natasha Trethewey and Juliana Spahr surveys the "prospect" of the Anthropocene—both in terms of its topology and temporality—as a global panorama of ecological precarity whose apocalyptic end-time appears imminent. Each of these poets, in Hunter's account, adopts an uncanny, seemingly posthumous "view from the hill" so as to reflect on contemporaneity's ecological disasters. Prynne's *The White Stones* (1969), Awoonor's *The House by the Sea* (1978), Trethewey's *Beyond Katrina* (2010), and Spahr's *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015) give witness in various ways and at different moments to the ongoing evidence of global capital's accumulation of natural and social disasters: its investments in human slavery, nonsustainable technologies, and short-term profits at the expense of long-term environmental damages and species loss. If there is a future to be gleaned from this devastating vantage-point, Hunter tentatively affirms it in the prospect poem's proleptic "call to come" (117).

Forms of a World ends with a short coda that begins with John Ashbery at the threshold of the posthuman, but here Hunter is reluctant to venture very far beyond the traditional, humanistic consolations to be found in poetry's "possibilities for and limits to lateral relations with others" (117). Symptomatically perhaps, his coda returns to a critical problematic that Hunter briefly raises as an aside in his introduction: that is, the pitfall of making "an equivalence between globalization and the experience of an Anglophone or Global-North elite" (2). The coda revisits Anglophone poetry's troubled relation to globalization as a kind of afterthought to the book's thematic and formal readings of twenty-first century verse in English. Nevertheless, Hunter clearly lays out here the ironic dilemma "for poets writing about globalization in English—namely, that the spread of English itself has been inseparable from the violence of the global and has abetted its propagation" (121). Hunter attempts to finesse what, for postcolonial studies, is a well-known, historical problematic: English as an imperial vector for global domination. In the coda, he borrows from Emily Brown Coolidge Toker's distinction between "globalized English" vs. "global Englishes," which are keyed to the social dialects and vernacular nuances of local communities.

As a case study of Anglophone poetry's critique of global English, Hunter offers the example of Iranian-American poet Solmaz Sharif's 2016 collection of verse *Look* that examines her intervention in globalized English evinced in the 2007 *U.S. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. Sharif, for Hunter, shines a light on how neoliberal military discourse takes the everyday usages of English not so much to

commodify language in the interests of international finance and commerce, but more aggressively to speed the plow of US technological warfare in its drive to disrupt, appropriate, and remap sovereign territories around the globe. Hunter joins the coda's abbreviated reading of Sharif's *Look* to a shortlist of similar volumes that critique US military discourses and practices in the poetry of Rob Halpern, Sara Uribe, and Srikanth Reddy. Poets such as Sharif and Agha Shahid Ali, Hunter concludes, "write poetry as an exilic practice, from the standpoint of those who are prevented, in different ways, from having the right to Anglophone poetry" (125).

Beyond Hunter's coda, which does go some way toward addressing Sharif's and Ali's "exilic" poetics, *Forms of a World* might have more productively foregrounded the trouble with English within Anglophone poetics as a consistent thread throughout the book's close readings. Nevertheless, despite this critical caveat, Hunter's *Forms of a World* remains a major achievement in contemporary criticism: one that advances beyond the national boundaries of American literature to address just how far twenty-first century poetry in the US matters to the planet and its global challenges to come.