


June 2020

## Walt Hunter. *Forms of a World: Contemporary Poetry and the Making of Globalization*. Fordham UP, 2019.

Jeremy Glazier

Ohio Dominican University, glazierj@ohiodominican.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl>

 Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), [Literature in English, Anglophone outside British Isles and North America Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#), [Poetry Commons](#), and the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Glazier, Jeremy () "Walt Hunter. *Forms of a World: Contemporary Poetry and the Making of Globalization*. Fordham UP, 2019.," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 44: Iss. 1, Article 10. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2146>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

---

Walt Hunter. *Forms of a World: Contemporary Poetry and the Making of Globalization*. Fordham UP, 2019.

**Abstract**

Review of Walt Hunter *Forms of a World: Contemporary Poetry and the Making of Globalization*. Fordham UP, 2019. 190 pp.

**Keywords**

contemporary, poetry, criticism, globalization, Claudia Rankine

Walt Hunter. *Forms of a World: Contemporary Poetry and the Making of Globalization*. Fordham UP, 2019. 190 pp.

The global pandemic will likely prove to be a watershed not only for poetry but also for the criticism of poetry. Just as the major disruptions of the past—from the Great War to 9/11—led to seismic shifts in both the production and valuation of literature, so too will our current crisis. While it is impossible to predict what that valuation will look like post-pandemic, Walt Hunter’s *Forms of a World: Contemporary Poetry and the Making of Globalization* promises to be an essential marker of where criticism of English-language poetry was just before the upheaval of COVID-19. Readers and scholars specializing in world languages such as French, German, and Spanish will profit from the book’s emphasis on globalization as well as a theoretical framework informed by Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Giorgio Agamben, and others.

Hunter, who is Associate Professor of World Literature at Clemson, is also a practicing poet and translator. He writes frequently for *The Atlantic* on the intersection of poetry and current events. *Forms of a World* posits four key poetic acts—possessing, belonging, exhorting, and prospecting—each of which is the focus of its own chapter. A wide-ranging introduction lays out the book’s theoretical framework, focusing on economic theory and a post-Marxist critique of neoliberalism. Clearly influenced by the work of thinkers who shaped ideas about globalization at the turn of the millennium (from Anthony Giddens’s 1990 work *The Consequences of Modernity* to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s 2004 *Multitude*), Hunter argues that the last half-century of Anglophone poetry “is best understood when situated within historical capitalism” (135).

This is a book that is keenly aware of the breadth and depth of contemporary poetry, the global conditions that create it, and the shifting terrain of contemporary poetry criticism. Hunter offers deep dives into the work of poets likely to be familiar to readers of recent poetry in the United States—Natasha Trethewey, Juliana Spahr, Agha Shahid Ali—as well as important figures from the broader Anglophone world who may have escaped their notice: the English poets Sean Bonney and J. H. Prynne, the Korean American poet Myung Mi Kim, Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor, the Iranian American poet Solmaz Sharif, and others. The work of these poets is often placed in contrast to the received canon of Anglophone poetry, with its long-privileged whiteness and maleness, through abundant examples from Walt Whitman, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, and—in an extraordinary Coda that closes the book—John Ashbery. Occasional references to major European poets (Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, Friedrich Hölderlin, Rainer Maria Rilke) provide a broader poetic and linguistic context.

Each chapter is fairly self-contained. One focuses on the work of poets who reimagine the ode—one of poetry’s oldest forms—as a response to “expulsion, displacement, and dispossession” (22). Here, the work of Irish poets such as Paula Meehan and Mary O’Malley, as well as the Iraqi poet Manal Al-Sheikh, are brought to bear on questions of global migration and displacement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A lengthy section on Keston Sutherland’s 2013 volume *Odes to TL61P* (whose title refers to a replacement part for a laundry machine) situates the work “within the current brutality of global capitalism” and “vanishing commodity” (33, 35).

Another chapter—perhaps the most important—centers on the concept of global citizenship, a “liberal fantasy” that “pairs awkwardly” with the interior subjectivity associated with lyric poetry (45). Here, Hunter offers an extended analysis of one of the most celebrated books of poetry of our time: Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric*. In Hunter’s reading of this important work, Rankine marshals the traditional forces of lyric subjectivity—apostrophe, prosopopoeia, and eavesdropping—to create a work in which “the very notion of the subject is predicated upon the denial of citizenship to black lives” (56). While the analysis occasionally (perhaps inevitably) risks coming across as whitesplaining, it largely avoids that pitfall through its close attention to the historical trajectory of the concept of citizenship.

The last chapter abruptly shifts its focus to tackle a serious problem posed by ecocriticism: that of prospecting, or “a way of telling the future when the future seems dramatically foreclosed” (92). This chapter feels the least developed; originally published (in part) in the *minnesota review*, it feels too cursory for its subject, as though it should have been developed into a book of its own—a project that, given the tantalizing suggestions in this chapter, would be most welcome. Here, Hunter explores the eco-poetics of J. H. Prynne and Kofi Awoonor, after a brief trek through the critical discourse and a glance at the pastoral legacy of the Romantics.

Buried within Hunter’s analysis is an old but still-active fault line in poetry criticism: the legacy of the New Criticism. At one point he takes Jonathan Culler to task for what he sees as Culler’s ahistorical formalism in his 2016 magnum opus, *Theory of the Lyric*. Yet even while rejecting that methodology, Hunter’s sensitive textual analyses suggest he may be a formalist at heart. For example, a small poem by Sean Bonney contains a “-blank-” that Hunter describes as “a prolepsis,” possibly “also a musical rest, a withholding of sound or word, a single beat that calls attention to the absence of what might fill it” (75). Throughout the book, Hunter revels in form—whether in the highly structured ghazals of Agha Shahid Ali or the less conventional, avant-garde L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E-like games of Myung Mi Kim.

Hunter obliquely acknowledges that his book is itself a product of the institutions (i.e., academia, academic publishing, po-biz, etc.) that are, for better and worse, part of the capitalist, globalist enterprise he critiques. This book—published exactly a decade after *The Program Era*, Mark McGurl’s influential examination of institutionalized creative writing programs—and many of the poems it references, could hardly exist without those institutions. Nevertheless, this is a timely and thought-provoking book that will be of interest to scholars of poetry and poets themselves, as well as students and academics looking to navigate 21<sup>st</sup> century literature through adjacent fields touching on politics, economics, social justice, and the climate crisis.

Jeremy Glazier  
*Ohio Dominican University*