

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgments	x
1 The American Poem	1
The United States ... the Greatest Poem	1
The Poem is You	8
The Breaking of the New Wood	21
Forging the Uncreated Conscience of the Nation	27
2 Beginnings	39
In My Beginning is My End	39
The word and the Word: Colonial Poetry	44
Towards the Secular: Colonial Poetry	53
Writing Revolution: The Poetry of the Emergent Republic	57
Across the Great Divide: Poetry of the South and the North	63
To Sing the Nation: American Poetic Voices	69
To Sing of Freedom: African American Voices	89
Looking Before and After: Poetic Voices of Region and Nation	91
3 The Turn to the Modern: Imagism, Objectivism, and Some Major Innovators	106
The Revolution is Accomplished	106
The Significance of Imagism	111
From Imagism to Objectivism or Dream	115
From Imagism to the Redemption of History	128
From Imagism to Contact and Community	136
From Imagism to Discovery of the Imagination	141

Contents

In Search of a Past: The Fugitive Movement and the Major Traditionalists	153
The Precious, the Incommunicable Past	153
The Significance of the Fugitives	157
Traditionalism and the South	160
Traditionalism Outside the South	174
Traditionalism, Skepticism, and Tragedy	179
Traditionalism, Quiet Desperation, and Belief	185
Traditionalism, Inhumanism, and Prophecy	191
The Traditions of Whitman: Other Poets from Between the Wars	201
Make this America for Us!	201
Whitman and American Populism	205
Whitman and American Radicalism	211
Whitman, American Identity, and African American Poetry	217
Whitman and American Individualism	224
Whitman and American Experimentalism	232
Whitman and American Mysticism	237
Formalists and Confessionals: American Poetry since World War II	250
A Sad Heart at the Supermarket	250
From the Mythological Eye to the Lonely "I": A Progress of American Poetry since the War	253
Varieties of the Personal: The Self as Dream, Landscape, or Confession	258
From Formalism to Freedom: A Progress of American Poetic Techniques since the War	264
The Imagination of Commitment: A Progress of American Poetic Themes since the War	270
The Uses of Formalism	274
The Confessional "I" as Primitive	278
The Confessional "I" as Historian	281
The Confessional "I" as Martyr	285
The Confessional "I" as Prophet	289
New Formalists, New Confessionals	292
Beats, Prophets, and Aesthetes: American Poetry since World War II	302
Who Am I?	302
Rediscovering the American Voice: The Black Mountain Poets	306
Restoring the American Vision: The San Francisco Poets	316

Recreating American Rhythms: The Beat Poets	323
Resurrecting the American Rebel: African American Poetry	330
Reinventing the American Self: The New York Poets	340
And the Beat Goes On: American Poetry and Virtual Reality	351
8 The Languages of American Poetry and the Language of Crisis: American Poetry into the Twenty-First Century	367
What is the Language of American Literature?	367
The Actuality of Words: The Language Poets	376
The Necessity of Audience: The New Formalists	384
Remapping the Nation: Chicano/a and Latino/a Poetry	395
Improvising America: Asian American Poetry	418
New and Ancient Songs: The Return of the Native American	448
Legends of the Fall: American Poetry and Crisis	476
Epilogue: What Is an American? The Problem of Literary Nationality	509
Index	519