

Some Recommendations for Contemporary Anglophone Poetry

This is a reading list of (fairly) recent anglophone poetry collections, designed especially for students eager to explore contemporary poetry. Diving into poetry can feel daunting, and therefore I chose these collections for their accessibility, emotional resonance, perhaps for their unconventional approach, and definitely for the pleasure they might offer to new readers. They feature a diverse range of voices and styles, each inviting you to experience the world through fresh, lyrical perspectives. Some of these writers I've followed and read for many years, sometimes I have been to their readings. Some of them are friends; others, colleagues. Some are both.

Whether you're looking for poems that speak to everyday experiences, address social issues, or transport you to imaginative realms, I hope this list has something to spark your interest and ignite your passion for poetry.

Happy reading!

NB: Contrary to the proper MLA format I ask people to adapt in their academic work, this list is kept deliberately simple, to account for the fact that some of these collections might be accessible to you in multiple formats and may have been (re)published by different publishing houses.

(* = available via PLUS library)

(1) For the Brave Beginner

- Armitage, Simon. *Tyrannosaurus Rex Versus the Corduroy Kid*. (2006)*
→ Armitage is Britain's current Poet Laureate. He also did my favourite translation of the Pearl Poet's Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.
- Cope, Wendy. *The Orange and Other Poems*. (2023)
- Duffy, Carol Ann. *The Bees*. (2011)*
→ Carol Ann Duffy was Britain's Poet Laureate before Simon Armitage. Her work is very accessible and often becomes the gateway drug for emerging poetry readers.
- Feaver, Vicki. *The Book of Blood*. (2006)
- Flynn, Leontia. *Profit and Loss*. (2011)
- Jones, Russell (ed.). *Where Rockets Burn Through: Contemporary Science Fiction Poems from the UK*. (2012)
- ---. *The Green Dress Whose Girl Is Sleeping*. (2015)

(2) For Those Breathlessly in/out of Love

- Carson, Anne. *The Beauty of the Husband. A Fictional Essay in 29 Tangos*. (2001)
- Duffy, Carol Ann. *Rapture*. (2005)*
- Hughes, Ted. *Birthday Letters*. (1998)*
- Kay, Jackie. *Life Mask*. (2005)
- Oliver, Mary. *Felicity*. (2015)

(3) For the Blossoming Ones Who Seek to Explore Identities

- Boland, Eavan. *The Historians*. (2020)
- Dunmore, Helen. *Inside the Wave*. (2017)
- Kandasamy, Meena. *Ms Militancy*. (2010)
- Tempest, Kae. *Let Them Eat Chaos*. (2016)* [in German/English]
- ---. *Divisible by Itself and One*. (2023)

(4) For the Braw Travelers to Scotland

- Burnside, John. *Gift Songs*. (2007)
- ---. *The Hunt in the Forest*. (2009)
- ---. *Black Cat Bone*. (2011)
- ---. *All One Breath*. (2014)
→ John suddenly passed away last year, to our great shock and sadness. He wrote some of the best poetry of the past few decades.
- Jamie, Kathleen. *The Tree House*. (2004)
- ---. *The Bonniest Companie*. (2015)
- Jamieson, Robert Alan. *Plague Clothes. Poems from the Covid-Recovery Love-Stream*. (2020)
- Leonard, Tom. *Outside the Narrative*. (2009)
- Morgan, Edwin. *New Selected Poems*. (2000)
→ anything by Edwin Morgan, really, comes highly recommended
- Paterson, Don. *Landing Light*. (2006)*
- ---. *Rain*. (2009)

(6) For the Brazen Ones Expanding Multi-National and/or (Post)Colonial Horizons

- Ali, Agha Shahid. *The Country Without a Post Office*. (1997)*
→ This is a classic from and about Kashmir.
- Alvi, Moniza. *Europa*. (2008)
- Kassabova, Kapka. *Geography for the Lost*. (2007)
- Miller, Kei. *There Is an Anger that Moves*. (2007)
- Nagra, Daljit. *Look We Have Coming to Dover!* (2007)*
- ---. *Tippoo Sultan's Incredible White-Man-Eating Tiger Toy Machine!!!* (2012)
- ---. *British Museum*. (2017)
- ---. *Idiom*. (2023)
→ I realise I'm rec'ing four Nagra collections here, but he's truly amazing.

- Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. (2014)*
- Tretheway, Natasha. *Native Guard*. (2007)
- Vuong, Ocean. *Night-Sky with Exit Wounds*. (2016)
- Zephaniah, Benjamin. *Propa Propaganda*. (1997)*
→ Unexpectedly, Zephaniah passed away in December 2023; a shocking and painful loss for the international poetry scene, and for the British scene in particular. The interview Elizabeth Day did with him on her podcast *How to Fail* in June 2022 (<https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/how-to-fail-with/s14-ep7-how-to-fail-benjamin-pTnAI52mdSr/>) offers us beautiful insight into an extraordinary poet and person.

(7) For Those Bewitched by Classical Material Retold

- Duffy, Carol Ann. *The World's Wife*. (1999)*
- Greenlaw, Lavinia. *A Double Sorrow: Troilus and Criseyde*. (2014)
→ Rewriting of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.
→ Not a poetry collection, but Greenlaw's 2007 memoir *The Importance of Music to Girls* is also a beautiful read.
- Oswald, Alice. *Memorial*. (2011)
→ Rewriting (of sorts) of Homer's *Iliad*.
- ---. *Nobody*. (2019)
→ Water-stories coming from Homer's *Odyssey* (btw, the best *Odyssey*-translation currently out there is by Emily Wilson [2017; she recently also translated the *Iliad*]).
- Tempest, Kae. *Hold Your Own*. (2014)* [in English/German]
→ Based on the mythical figure of Tiresias.

(8) For the Bedazzling Ones Hunting for Hidden Gems

- Ballou, Emily. *The Darwin Poems*. (2009)
→ These warm-hearted, compassionate poems imagine the life of Charles Darwin. It's like a portrait of the scientist, in verse.
- Boruch, Marianne. *Cadaver, Speak*. (2014)
→ I met Boruch 2012 in Edinburgh, when she was on a fellowship at UoE to finalise this extraordinary collection and gave a reading of some of the poems from the title sequence, which is set in an anatomy lab, spoken by a 99-year-old woman who donated her body for dissection by medical students.
- Dallat, C.L. *The Year of Not Dancing*. (2009)
- Morgan, Esther. *Grace*. (2011)
- Pope, Lauren. *Announce This*. (2017)
- ---. *Close Your Eyes When You Look at Me*. (2022)
- Wiman, Christian. *Every Riven Thing*. (2010)
- Wright, Charles. *Scar Tissue*. (2006)

(9) For the Blazing Ones Who (Prepare to) Teach Young People

- Burton, Tim. *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*. (1997)
- Gorman, Amanda. *The Hill We Climb*. (2021)
→ Gorman recited the title poem of this collection at Joe Biden's inauguration in January 2021.
- Kay, Jackie. *Red, Cherry Red*. (2007)
- Lowe, Hannah. *The Kids*. (2021)
- Zephaniah, Benjamin. *Talking Turkeys*. (1995)

(10) For the Bold Adventurers

- Bergvall, Caroline. *Meddle English*. (2010)
→ Bergvall rewrites and reshuffles Early and medieval poetry and other texts and often performs her material in cooperation with sound & light designers.
- Carson, Anne. *Glass and God*. (1998)
→ Anne Carson is way out there with the amazing, stark images she builds in her poetry, the deep cuts she delivers with a single phrase, the many intertextual connections she offers. The first part here, "The Glass Essay", is a meditation about love and loss, and in the last part, "Short Talks", we find some surprising hidden gems. The interrogation of God and of religion, which makes up the middle part, is striking.
- ---. *Decreation*. (2005)
→ This amazing collection not only offers an "Ode to Sleep", it also features the wildly evocative story-starter poem "Seated Figure with Red Angle".
- Rich, Adrienne. *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve*. (2011)
→ This collection explores what role the creative arts may play in our lives, and whether they are obliged to "serve".

(11) For the Bookish Ones Who Like Verse Novels

- Barber, Ros. *The Marlowe Papers*. (2013)
- Carson, Anne. *Autobiography of Red*. (1998)* [in German]
- Castilo, Ana. *Watercolor Women Opaque Men*. (2005)
- Clarke, George Elliott. *Wylah Falls*. (1990/2000)
- Evaristo, Bernardine. *The Emperor's Babe*. (2001)*
- ---. *Lara*. (2010)*
- Murray, Les. *Fredy Neptune*. (1999)
- Schultz, Philip. *The Wherewithal*. (2001)
- Tempest, Kae. *Brand New Ancients*. (2013)* [in German/English]
- Tretheway, Natasha. *Belloq's Ophelia*. (2002)