



The Ekphrastic Encounter in Contemporary British Poetry and Elsewhere

David, Dr Kennedy

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Examining a wide range of ekphrastic poems, David Kennedy argues that contemporary British poets writing out of both mainstream and avant-garde traditions challenge established critical models of ekphrasis with work that is more complex than representational or counter-representational responses to paintings in museums and galleries. Even when the poem appears to be straightforwardly representational, it is often selectively so, producing a 'virtual' work that doesn't exist in actuality. Poets such as Kelvin Corcoran, Peter Hughes, and Gillian Clarke, Kennedy suggests, relish the ekphrastic encounter as one in which word and image become mutually destabilizing. Similarly, other poets engage with the source artwork as a performance that participates in the ethical realm. Showing that the ethical turn in ekphrastic poetry is often powerfully gendered, Kennedy also surveys a range of ekphrastic poets from the Renaissance and nineteenth century to trace a tradition of female ekphrastic poetry that includes Pauline Stainer and Frances Presley. Kennedy concludes with a critique of ekphrastic exercises in creative writing teaching, proposing that ekphrastic writing that takes greater account of performance spectatorship may offer more fruitful models for the classroom than the narrativizing of images.

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