



A Poetics

Charles Bernstein

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This rich collection is far more than an important work of criticism by an extraordinary poet; it is a poetic intervention into criticism. "Artifice of Absorption," a key essay, is written in verse, and its structures and rhythms initiate the reader into the strength and complexity of the argument. In a wild variety of topics, polemic, and styles, Bernstein surveys the current poetry scene and addresses many of the hot issues of poststructuralist literary theory. "Poetics is the continuation of poetry by other means," he writes. What role should poetics play in contemporary culture? Bernstein finds the answer in dissent, not merely in argument but in form--a poetic language that resists being easily absorbed into the conventions of our culture.

Insisting on the vital need for radical innovation, Bernstein traces the traditions of modern poetry back to Stein and Wilde, taking issue with those critics who see in the "postmodern" a loss of political and aesthetic relevance. Sometimes playful, often hortatory, always intense, he joins in the debate on cultural diversity and the definition of modernism. We encounter Swinburne and Morris as surprising precursors, along with considerations of Wittgenstein, Khlebnikov, Adorno, Jameson, and Pac-Man. *A Poetics* is both criticism and poetry, both tract and song, with no dull moments.

A Poetics Details

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From Reader Review A Poetics for online ebook

Joe says

There are about three essays in here I wish I had read before I even thought about reviewing books for Phoebe. "State of the Art" thinks about the "Balkanization" of poetry, the necessarily decentered, marginal role of poetry, the utility of voices that refuse the universal. Makes a case for thinking just as hard about the context of the book before passing judgment on the content. Similarly, "Optimism and Critical Excess" makes a case for the importance of the claims a poet/poetry makes for itself, how it situates itself, and the necessity of exclusionary practices in order to carve out social space for poems to be written. Its also fun to watch his own strategies of undermining his own authority play out over the course of the book. Not that he's always convincing (beware the phallogocentric voice of truth (except mine)). Either way, Bernstein's willingness to eschew convention and be a little winkingly ridiculous makes him, even when he's getting eye deep in debating fine-po-mo-theory-points with Frederic Jameson, one of the most readable essays on radical poetics (& video games) I've encountered.

Sherry Chandler says

I kept reading, thinking eventually I'd understand, but I never did.

John says

A little dated. Good thoughts and still some interesting thought on modern poetry, but the essays are starting to feel out-dated and remnants of the culture wars from the early 1990s.

David Hirt says

It felt like he was trying to call his writing poetry because it was lineated. Some good ideas, though.

Christina Marie says

Incredible collection of poetic manifestoes!
