



Intricate Thicket: Reading Late Modernist Poetries (Modern & Contemporary Poetics)

By Mark Scroggins

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In *Intricate Thicket: Reading Late Modernist Poetries*, Mark Scroggins writes with wit and dash about a fascinating range of key twentieth- and twenty-first-century poets and writers. In nineteen lively and accessible essays, he persuasively argues that the innovations of modernist verse were not replaced by postmodernism, but rather those innovations continue to infuse contemporary writing and poetry with intellectual and aesthetic richness.

In these essays, Scroggins reviews the legacy of Louis Zukofsky, delineates the exceptional influence of the Black Mountain poets, and provides close readings of a wealth of examples of poetic works from poets who have carried the modernist legacy into contemporary poetry. He traces with an insider's keen observation the careers of many of the most dynamic, innovative, and celebrated poets of the past half-century, among them Ian Hamilton Finlay, Ronald Johnson, Rae Armantrout, Harryette Mullen, and Anne Carson.

In a concluding pair of essays, Scroggins situates his own practice within the broad currents he has described. He reflects on his own aesthetics as a contemporary poet and, drawing on his extensive study and writing about Louis Zukofsky, examines the practical and theoretical challenges of literary biography.

While the core of these essays is the interpretation of poetry, Scroggins also offers clear aesthetic evaluations of the successes and failures of the poetries he examines. Scroggins engages with complex and challenging works, and yet his highly accessible descriptions and criticisms avoid theoretical entanglements and specialized jargon. *Intricate Thicket* yields subtle and multifaceted insights to experts and newcomers alike.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Now that we stand in the light of what feels like the last embers of postmodernism, we’re better positioned to see what Mark Scroggins has been scrutinizing for fifteen years or more: the poetic monuments of a late modernist aesthetic. Allusive, fragmented, often opaque, these late modernists range from old objectivists like Louis Zukofsky and George Oppen to figures whose creative work is flourishing even now: Rae Armantrout, John Matthias, and Anne Carson, just to name a few. Fluent, honest, and undecivable, Mark Scroggins is just what a critic ought to be.”

—Robert Archambeau, author of *Home and Variations, Laureates and Heretics: Six Careers in American Poetry*, and *The Poet Resigns: Poetry in a Difficult World*

“Mark Scroggins takes us on a tour of the ‘intricate thicket’ of the poems and poetry that have long preoccupied him. In admirably clear prose that rises at times to an ‘electric punchiness and grace,’ he returns frequently to the writers that, for him, represent the ‘fire sources of the contemporary’—Louis Zukofsky, Charles Olson, Ronald Johnson, and Guy Davenport—while also undertaking many side-forays, illuminating the poetics of, among others, Rae Armantrout, Anne Carson, Robert Duncan, Theodore Enslin, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Peter Gizzi, Harryette Mullen, and John Taggart. What Scroggins says of John Matthias’s long poems is true, too, of his own essays: they are ‘an effective recalling of something loved,’ and it is a delight to follow and learn from him as he elucidates ‘the pattern and permutations of language’ in work by his favorite writers. *Intricate Thicket* is poetry criticism at its best.”

—Brian M. Reed, author of *Nobody’s Business: Twenty-First Century Avant-Garde Poetics*, *Phenomenal Reading: Essays in Modern and Contemporary Poetics*, and *Hart Crane: After His Lights*

About the Author

Mark Scroggins is a poet, biographer, and literary critic. He is the author of *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge*, *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky*, and three collections of poetry. He is the editor of *Upper Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky* and a selection of uncollected prose for the expanded edition of Zukofsky’s prose called *Prepositions+: The Collected Critical Essays of Louis Zukofsky*.

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