

An Introduction:

American Ex-Po: Experimental Poetry

Rochelle Ratner, Focus Editor

In 1950, when e.e. cummings was still in midcareer and Robert Duncan was just beginning to publish, an experimental poem was fairly easy to define: it didn't rhyme, didn't scan, had several misspellings, and often looked crazy on the page. Today it's a lot more complicated, with separate categories and subcategories—"Visual Poetry," "Concrete Poetry," "Language," "New York School," and those experimentalists such as Ann Lauterbach, who makes her own rules. To confuse things even further, an establishment poet and essayist such as John Hollander published *Types of Shape* in 1991, a book where the poems take the shapes of objects they're describing.

American Book Review has been, is, and always will be open to reviews of the finest experimental works. In recent issues we've covered the writings of Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Rochelle Owens, and Rosemarie Waldrop. By the time these reviews appear in our pages, however, newer and often fiercer experimental works have been created. No matter how quickly we, as readers, approach, those poets breaking the newest ground are two or three steps ahead of us. But that, in itself, is the nature and the pleasure of the craft.

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