

Radical poetics and transforming poetry culture



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Steven Critelli, Critic



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Consistently singled out by reviewers and critics as the most important poet of his generation in the UK, Professor Keston Sutherland – poet, editor, critic, reviewer, theorist and Director of the annual Sussex Poetry Festival – has contributed decisively to the UK's literary avant-garde. His poetry, known for its growth out of and contribution to critical theory and Marxism, has inspired poets to write in radical new styles and has had a transformative impact on international literary culture that has been compared with that of TS Eliot.

Overview

The Odes to TL61P is a suite of five 'massive, turbulent, tender and satirical' odes, a 'dedicated love song' to the product-ordering code of a now obsolete Hotpoint tumble dryer. Among other things it has been described as a 'wild work of revolutionary theory' that investigates in minute detail the difference between commodities and human lives. Like much of the work of Keston Sutherland (Professor of Poetics at the University of Sussex), *The Odes to TL61P* makes original, theoretical arguments about life under capital.

Known for its growth out of critical theory and Marxism, Sutherland's poetry is saturated with research into literature, philosophy, theory and history. In all his work, he closely tracks and illuminates the transmission of words and ideas through history, producing subtle and highly detailed accounts of the growth





Keston Sutherland's work has helped create a new culture of poetic experiment and dialogue.

and transformation of meaning under the pressure of social relations and capital. He is particularly esteemed for his original interpretations of Karl Marx. *Marx in Jargon* rereads the German version of *Das Kapital* against existing translations into English, describing how satirical elements in the original have been omitted from the translations. In doing so, Sutherland restores to full view the complexity of Marx's satire against consumption. For example, he provides the first philological account in Marxist criticism of Marx's term for 'dead labour', 'Gallerte' – a gelatinous substance made from the boiling of miscellaneous animal parts. *Hot White Andy* has been described as both 'the most remarkable poem in English published this century' (John Wilkinson, poet and Professor of Practice of the Arts, University of Chicago) and 'the restoration of the very possibility of a socially efficacious poetry' (JH Prynne, poet).

Sutherland's poetry incorporates and develops this philosophical, philological and literary critical research and is widely acknowledged to be a significant contribution in its own right to the field of critical theory and Marxism. Lauren Berlant (George M Pullman Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of English at the University of Chicago) cites his work as among the most inspiring now being written by any living theorist (*Textual Practice* 2013), and *Radical Philosophy* 175 (Sept/Oct 2012) described his poems as 'resolute interventions' in the field of literary theory. Sutherland's poetry and criticism comprise a highly original and complex dialogue that establishes the importance of theory for poetry and, equally necessary, of poetry for theory.

Achieving impact

The transformation of the literary field is not an easy thing to demonstrate. Yet there is a virtual consensus among critics and reviewers that Keston Sutherland's work has transformed poetry culture and inspired a proliferation of previously unimagined new experiments in form and argument. Critic Steven Critelli writes:

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Sutherland's impact stretches beyond impressing critics and influencing academic and professional poetry circles by exerting a significant impact on practising poets and on the wider poetry-reading public. His influence has been especially powerful on practising poets and he has been singled out as the leading poet of the 'New British School', reinvigorating literary culture in the UK. His work has shaped the writing and performance of both emerging and established poets, and a survey presented in the introduction to the anthology of young British poets, *Better than Language* (2011), found that the majority of younger poets represented claimed Sutherland as the most significant influence on their work.

Sutherland's poetry has also influenced academic curricula internationally and has impacted on the experimental poetry scene. His work is taught at many universities in the US and the UK (including the University of California, Berkeley and the Universities of Chicago, Sheffield, Cambridge and London). Additionally, as an editor of Barque Press and through prolific publication of his work he has helped create a new culture of poetic experiment and dialogue. Since joining Sussex in 2004, he has brought more than 100 poets to read on campus and at Brighton's Nightingale Theatre. Sussex is now recognised as a hub of cutting-edge poetry in Britain.

Finally, Sutherland's work has wide impact and public appeal. He has been singled out by articles in *The Guardian* and *The White Review* as having major influence on the 'public life of poetry today'. His books of poetry have sold more than 3,500

copies in the last five years, in a market where most single-author collections sell fewer than a thousand. His work is also frequently published in anthologies, most recently in *Dear World and Everyone In It* (Bloodaxe 2013), and translations of his poetry have appeared in Chinese, Czech, Dutch, French, German and Greek. In addition, there have been significant public performances of Sutherland's poetry, contributing to the public appreciation and understanding of his work. He is regularly invited to read at literary festivals and universities, both at home and abroad, and his readings online attract around 1,000 viewers within weeks of being uploaded; a performance of *Hot White Andy* was viewed on YouTube by 10,818 people by July 2013.

Future impact

Sutherland was the Holloway Poetry Fellow at the University of California at Berkeley in 2013, and will be a visiting poetry fellow at Princeton in 2015. An edition of his collected poems so far will be published by Enitharmon in 2015. His forthcoming critical work includes a collection of essays on Marx and poetry and a complete edition of the prose works of JH Prynne.

Working with us

If you are interested in working with us, please contact:

Dr Ian Carter
Director of Research and Enterprise
Sussex House
University of Sussex
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RH
E impact@sussex.ac.uk
T +44 (0)1273 877718
www.sussex.ac.uk/research

For further information about Keston Sutherland's work, visit:
www.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/176509/research

For more on research in the School of English, visit:
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