

In this capacious and energetic volume, Ira Sadoff argues that poets live and write within history, our artistic values always reflecting attitudes about both literary history and culture at large. History Matters does not return to the culture war that reduced complex arguments about human nature, creativity, identity, and interplay between individual and collective identity to slogans. Rather, Sadoff peels back layers of clutter to reveal the important questions at the heart of any complex and fruitful discussion about the connections between culture and literature. Much of our most adventurous writing has occurred at history's margins, simultaneously making use of and resisting tradition. By tracking key contemporary poets—including John Ashbery, Olena Kaltyiak Davis, Louise Gluck, Czeslaw Milosz, Frank O'Hara, and C. K. Williams—as well as musing on jazz and other creative enterprises, Sadoff investigates the lively poetic art of those who have grappled with late twentieth-century attitudes about history, subjectivity, contingency, flux, and modernity. In plainspoken writing, he probes the question of the poet's capacity to illuminate and universalize truth. Along the way, we are called to consider how and why art moves and transforms human beings.

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