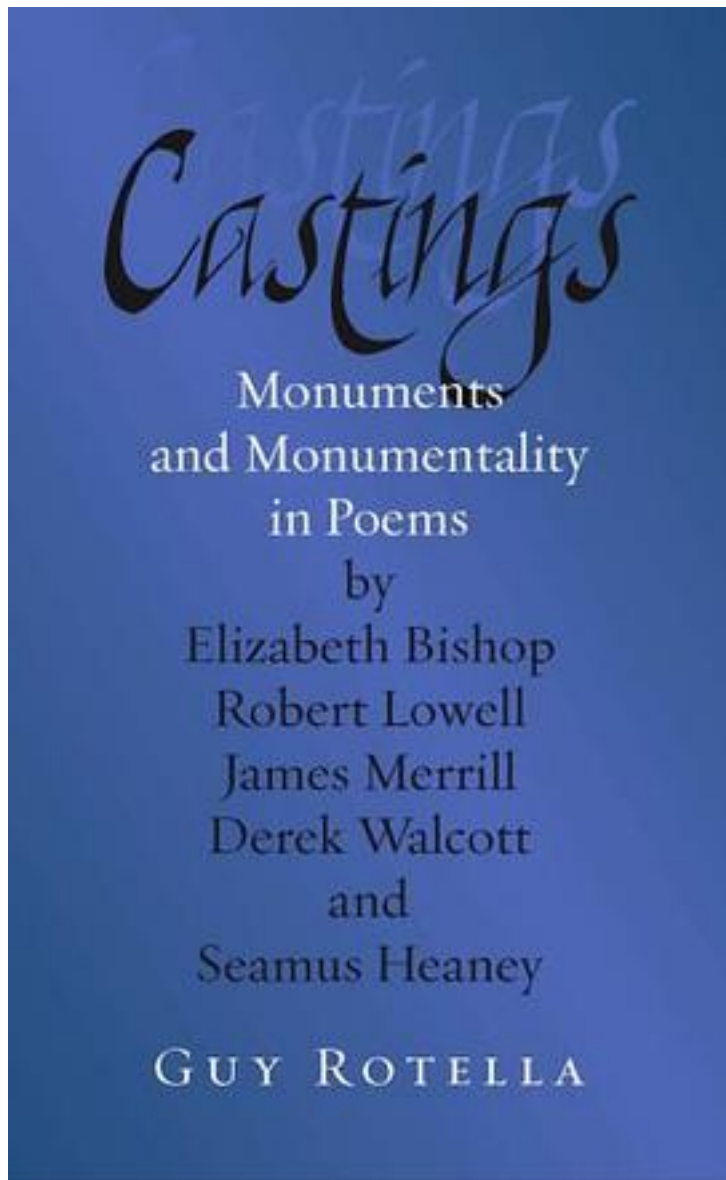


Castings



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Whether looming over public squares or dotting old battlefields, monuments certify a culture's present by securing its past and pledging its future. They embody exemplary persons or events and the shared ideals they stood for, prompting an obligation to keep those ideals standing now and forever. But monuments also exaggerate the staying power of civilizations and of art. In the second half of the twentieth century, postmodern critics often decried monuments not only for their pretensions and stiffness but also for their supposed role in perpetuating oppressive cultural conventions. Even so, many artists and thinkers of the same period tried to reimagine monuments in ways that were humbler and more provisional but still culturally confirming. In "Castings," Guy Rotella examines the work of five important poets who have engaged in that effort: Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney. Considering their wider careers as well as particular poems including Bishop's "The Monument," Lowell's "For the Union Dead," Merrill's "Bronze," Walcott's "The Sea Is History," and Heaney's "In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge" a Rotella argues that these writers are less concerned with defending or condemning monuments than with pursuing ancient and current debates about the political, aesthetic, and broadly cultural issues that monuments condense. Among these concerns are the competing claims of life and art, persistence and change, meaning and meaninglessness, the self and society, and the governing and the governed. Original and provocative, Rotella's readings will make us ponder how the human impulse to build to last, to reify our culturally derived and ideologically driven faiths, might coexist with those other creeds of our place and time: relativism, multiculturalism, and diversity.

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