

EDITORS SELECT

Carrie Etter, *Imagined Sons*, Seren, 2014. This is an extremely moving sequence of prose poems, interrupted by ten iterations of “A Birthmother’s Catechism,” in which a son, given up as a baby and at present the same age as the poet was when she gave birth, is imagined appearing in a number of touching and sometimes frightening circumstances. The first “catechism” sets the tone: *How did you let him go? / With black ink and legalese / How did you let him go? / It’d be another year before I could vote / How did you let him go? / With altruism, tears and self-loathing / How did you let him go? / A nurse brought pills for drying up breast milk / How did you let him go? / Who hangs a birdhouse from a sapling?*” Some of Carrie Etter’s poems have appeared in earlier editions of *NDR*, and we have noticed her very useful anthology of experimental poems by U.K. women poets, *Infinite Difference*, in this column.

Barry Goldensohn, *The Hundred Yard Dash Man*, Fomite, 2014. *NDR* contributor Goldensohn’s last book, *The Listener Aspires to the Condition of Music*, contained all of his poems on specifically musical themes. This one integrates some of those poems in the context of a fully retrospective new and selected volume. The book constitutes the

impressive work of a lifetime in poetry, and should be welcomed with appreciation by all serious readers of poems. Blurbs by Robert Lowell, Jane Shore, Norman Dubie, Donald Justice, and David St. John, suggest the kinds of readers Goldensohn’s work has impressed.

Nancy Kassell, *Text(isles)*, Dos Madres, 2013. Kassell’s title makes clear how central weaving is to the form and intent of these poems. In “Transgressive Textiles” she writes: “Arachne publicizes gods’ crimes against women, / The kinds of things everyone knows about but / pretends they don’t.” The poems woven in this book, transgressive or otherwise, impress by their craft. “Women, first weavers. Those who ply \thread to thread also / know what binds one person to another.”

Nathaniel Tarn, *The Beautiful Contradictions*, New Directions, 2013. Nathaniel Tarn’s long poem of 1969 is here reprinted in the New Directions pamphlet series. It was a hugely important poem of its moment, and anyone who doesn’t know it should certainly get hold of it in this inexpensive format. It is a major poem that will last—that has indeed already lasted. Its mode is prophetic-discursive, and it is as relevant to the present moment as it was to the last year of the Sixties.

Corinne Demas, *Returning to Shore*,

Lerner Publishing Group (Carolrhoda Books), 2013. *NDR* contributor Demas is the newer sort of Person of Letters, publishing, as she does, novels and short story collections, as well as children's books and YA novels. *Returning to Shore* is one of those. *Booklist* describes it thusly: "Clare last saw her biological father when she was three years old. When her mother goes on a honeymoon with husband number three, the 15-year-old is forced to spend the summer on Cape Cod with the dad she only remembers from photos. Their tentative relationship is much like caring for the endangered northern diamondback terrapin her father studies and tries to save: they must tread lightly, give space, and allow events to happen when the timing is right. And like the terrapin's return to shore, Clare's return to the Cape is just as poignant. As she learns the real reasons behind her parents' divorce and the impact her father's undisclosed sexual orientation had on his decision to stay out of her life, she and her father not only begin to connect as parent and child but also as fellow adults. In this coming-of-age novel, Clare must also decide how she feels about her father's identity, especially when faced with friends' homophobia. A quiet, thoughtful story for sophisticated readers." Indeed, this YA novel exists in an odd zone, given that one wonders how many youngsters grades 7–10 can be described as

"sophisticated readers." It is, rather, an adult novel that the precocious young can enjoy and profit from, say, like *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Van Kirby with David Hoppe, *On the Table by the Window: The Journey of a Gay Dad in Indiana*, Dog Ear Books, 2013. Kirby's memoir, written with the assistance of *NDR* contributor David Hoppe, is an interesting hybrid, a combination of typical memoir and oral history. Neither part is typical though, since the memoir/oral history that results is about the pre-LGBT liberation closeted life of a gay man with a wife and kids in central Indiana in the 1960s and 70s. Kirby's tale has a startling mixture of stereotype (he became a star hairdresser) and its opposite. His first homosexual encounter was a rape, though an unlikely one in circumstance and kind, reminding anyone of how individual lives are, no matter whatever generalities apply. The volume is described as "extraordinarily unvarnished." That it is. And it is a singular and important contribution to gay literature.

Samuel Hazo, *SEXES: The Marriage Dialogues*, TriQuarterly Books, 2014; *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958–2013*, Syracuse University Press, 2014. Hazo, *NDR* contributor and champion, has two books out this year, one a compendium of his poetry from 1958 on and a new

volume, *SEXES*, poetry in dialogue, frisky and fresh on the vicissitudes of a long marriage. Eva Marie Saint, of all people, says, “Sam Hazo has written about love and marriage with insight, heart, and humor.” Jo McDougall writes, “Hazo takes no prisoners in this wise and unsparing collection.” A surprising and inspired volume. Of the poems found in the larger collection, Richard Wilbur has written, “Each of Hazo’s new poems is a spare, sparkling flow of good talk...readers will find this book utterly engaging.”

Dana Roeser, *The Theme of Tonight’s Party Has Been Changed*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2104. Winner of the Juniper prize, *NDR* contributor Roeser’s poems (in this her third collection) are allegedly spoken “by a stand-up comic having a bad night at the local club.” Conversational, though of the monologue sort, we range over 12-step meetings, voodoo dolls, rosary beads. Claudia Emerson calls Roeser “a poet of fierce intelligence and high creative metabolism” and Elizabeth Spires says, “No poet I can think of writes better about the anxiety that fuels modern life,” which this volume abounds with, both the anxiety and the modern life.

Kelcey Parker, *Liliane’s Balcony: A Novella of Fallingwater*, Rose Metal Press, 2013. *NDR* contributor Parker’s latest, an atypical volume that

Michael Griffith warrants “proves stylishly and poignantly that just as buildings don’t have to be huge to be architecturally daring, narratives don’t have to be massive in scale to be grand in accomplishment. The story lines here—a contemporary one set on a tour of Fallingwater, a historical one featuring the original owner, the venturesome, conflicted, and fascinating Liliane—are ingeniously designed and expertly joined. The result is a meditation on marriage, architecture, womanhood, ghosts, and the idea of the genius loci that will linger with the reader long after the book is closed. This reminded me of great novels of architecture and psychology like Kathryn Davis’s *Hell* and Joanna Scott’s *The Manikin*, but Kelcey Parker is a unique talent, and *Liliane’s Balcony* is a revelation,” which we certainly second.

Bruce Dancis, *Resister: A Story of Protest and Prison During the Vietnam War*, Cornell University Press, 2014. Dancis’s life coincides with the history of protest against the war in Vietnam, beginning at age 15 with his participation in the 1963 March on Washington. His growing up mirrors the changes in the movement, from draft card burning, to the melding of the counter-culture (the yippies) with protests, to the beginnings of SDS, and the rise of Black Power movement. Todd Gitlin is full of praise: “Resistance

to the draft helped restore honor to a misguided nation that invaded Vietnam, where it left millions dead. In his admirable memoir, Bruce Dancis, a hero of draft resistance, casts light from fresh angles on the movement's inner life, the course of Cornell's radicals, and the imprisonment that was a price paid for honor," as is Michael Kazin, "*Resister* is that rare memoir by a 1960s radical that teaches as it enthralls. Bruce Dancis narrates his odyssey from childhood in a left-wing enclave of the Bronx, to antiwar activism at Cornell, to prison in Kentucky with a historian's grasp of context and a journalist's flair for anecdote. It is one of the wisest books about this era of conflict I have ever read." A worthy addition to the bookshelf of the period.

Brian Swann, *In Late Light*, Johns Hopkins, 2013. *NDR* contributor Swann's most recent volume of poetry, one where, John Peck points out, "D. H. Lawrence's feeling for families and Basil Bunting's precision meet in these poems 'sharp as chipped chert or fer de lance.'" A postwar English childhood and Catskill seasonal inventories frame a wiry, impish, affecting life review, rhythmically akin to the Italian poetry Swann has translated, and marking a personal summit. "The mountain is a pattern that whirls." Grace Schulman adds, "Brian Swann is a magnificent poet. His

new book, *In Late Light*, is striking for its largeness. He discovers universal truths in a bird's call, or in a remembered family scene, and he makes us perceive them as well. His style is lyrical, passionate yet restrained, immensely knowledgeable and yet attuned to common speech and always revelatory of the human heart."

Floyd Skloot, *Revertigo: An Off-Kilter Memoir*, Terrace Books, 2014. *NDR* contributor Skloot's fourth volume of his medical difficulties, which is, again, another silk purse made out of life's sows' ears. Most of the contents have appeared as essays in a number of journals. Ever since the success of his second such volume, *In the Shadow of Memory*, there has been no impediment to publication, not always the case for victims of disease who pick up a pen or peck at a computer, though it helps to have been a novelist and essayist before the onslaught of eccentric conditions. Poet Ron Slate describes this volume as a "sophisticated yet highly entertaining example of how memoir should serve us. It leads one through its ingenious, varied, and unpredictable form toward a sense that 'vertigo' is not only a specific disorder but something that typifies many experiences we all may identify with." In a number of ways, Skloot has already donated his body to science.

David James Poissant, *The Heaven of Animals: Stories*, Simon & Schuster, 2014. *NDR* contributor Poissant is getting a lot of press for his first collection of short stories. The story we published, “How to Help Your Husband Die,” sits prominently in the middle of the volume, one which Karen Russell calls, “an extraordinary debut—a Venn diagram of the miraculous and the absurd. Like Flannery O’Connor, Poissant’s stories are marked by violence, humor, and grace; like Saunders, Poissant can spoon-bend reality; like Carver and Diaz, he writes scenes soaked in kerosene and seconds from combustion. In these pages you’ll find charming reprobates and self-deluded hustlers, young lovers, alligators and dead dogs, fathers and sons, all the warped love of family, the batshit hilarity of the South, and the ‘geometry of loss.’” A lot of praise, deserved.

