

CONTEMPLATIVE MAN

Brock Guthrie. Sibling Rivalry Press, 2014. 90pp. \$13.46.

In an age where the worst crime a white male poet can commit is to write poetry about being white and male, *Contemplative Man* bravely asks its audience to approach the book on its own terms—the language and content much like that of a Mark Halliday piece or a Raymond Carver poem. Guthrie folds the quotidian into origami cranes, the wisdom in each poem scribbled on the extremities of each wing, and the speaker, an extension of the poet himself, critiques hyper-masculinity by simultaneously embracing it. The result: a book of poems containing the most tender, magical “bro-ments,” enveloped in the hyperbolic uncertainty of a generation of men who wear their emotions on their rolled-up sleeves.

—Peter Tival

EDITORS SELECT

Ian Bostridge, *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession*. Knopf, 2015. One of the best books about poetry published this year is a book also about music—Schubert's settings of Wilhelm Müller in his song cycle, *Winterreise*. The book is really *sui generis*. Bostridge, one of the major tenors at work these days, is also a fine scholar and writer (he has a Ph.D. in history). Both on a large scale—the way the poems and songs relate to the Napoleonic wars and the Hapsburg Empire—and the almost microscopic—various possible interpretations of a brief phrase of words or sounds—he makes this greatest of all song cycles an enormous adventure for the reader as well as the listener. Bostridge's own translations of Müller's poems, along with his commentaries, persuade us that the poems are more than they are often thought to be—i.e., simply minor stuff to be consumed by the music. Beautifully produced by Knopf, the book contains artworks from the period of *Winterreise's* composition and from modern and contemporary artists whose work illuminates the poems and songs. Schubert's work is forever of its moment but also deeply of our own, and Bostridge stresses how Beckettian it is at its heart. Released a little earlier, was Bostridge's semi-acted film version of *Winterreise*, directed by David Alden. Anyone reading the

book will want to order the DVD.

Roy Fisher, *An Easily Bewildered Child: Occasional Prose 1963-2013*.

Shearsman, 2014. British poet Roy Fisher's poetry has been very much admired by a small group of enthusiasts in the US, though more widely read in the UK. His work is forever associated with the city of Birmingham, which he has claimed as his own poetic territory—"Birmingham's What I Think With"—ever since the publication of *City* in 1961. This selection of miscellaneous pieces of prose, edited by *NDR* contributor Peter Robinson, is the perfect companion to Fisher's poetry. And the poetry itself is some of the best there is in English, US or UK, written during the past half-century.

Ciaran Carson, *From Elsewhere*.

Wake Forest, 2015. Ciaran Carson's last volume of versions from the French was *In the Light Of: After Illuminations by Arthur Rimbaud*. This time, Carson turns to the poetry of Jean Follain, matching each translation with a poem of his own, and so establishing a dialogue, which runs throughout the book. matching poem to poem was also the technique of Carson's *For All We Know*, where the model was musical and fugal. He has also established a full scale dialogue between his books *Until Before After* and *On the Night Watch*. Along with Paul Muldoon

and Michael Longley, he is now one of the best Irish poets still producing major work.

John Tranter, *Starlight: 150 Poems*.

BlazeVox, 2015. This selection of poems by the Australian poet John Tranter is his first by an American publisher. John Ashbery writes, "Welcome to Tranter's medicinal coruscating world. You'll like it. It'll do you good." Like Ciaran Carson in *After Illuminations*, Tranter enters into a dialogue with Rimbaud in his fine sequence called "Speaking French," and with Baudelaire in the sequence "Contra-Baudelaire." These two French sources of modernism achieve a kind of apotheosis by negation in Tranter's postmodern poetics.

Lera Auerbach, *Excess of Being*. Arch

Street Press, 2015, Lera Auerbach, the Russian-American composer, is well known for her music—symphonies, concertos, songs, string quartets, operas, and ballets. In Russia, she is also a widely read poet. And she is a painter. *Excess of Being* is a book of aphorisms written in English and illustrated by her own art works. Auerbach is a polymath who must never sleep. Many of these aphorisms may keep the reader awake at night as well.

Paul Pines, *Message from the Mem-*

oirist. Dos Madres, 2015. Paul Pines's new volume of poetry is also

illustrated—in this case by Mark Shaker. The poems and illustrations make up a lively dialogue throughout. Like Lera Auerbach, Pines is also something of a polymath, and his poems manifest a deep interest in fields ranging from cosmology to jazz, the movies, and baseball. He also draws on his experience as a psychotherapist. Like one of his heroes, the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, Pines' basic sense of well-being is derived from a memory that remembers itself.

John Wilkinson, *Schedule of Unrest: Selected Poems*. Salt, 2014. Former Notre Dame colleague and still *NDR* Advisory Editor, Wilkinson has given over the selection from his many books and pamphlets to Alex Pestell, who is thanked for “for grasping the nettles I shied from.” Any selection, by definition, leaves things out; and one reader or another might miss a favorite poem here and there. But the book is over 260 pages long and the work is difficult. It is the ideal volume for a new reader of Wilkinson to acquire. Tom McCarthy says that “Wilkinson's poems are kinetic, they are organic, they are chemical, political somatic. Through the sear of their disjointedness and speed, a miraculous coherence emerges, just as when in the heat-glare above a petrol-station forecourt, a hidden world—a real one—shimmers into view.” You must, I'm afraid, read the entire

book to understand how accurate a description that is.

Michael Martone and Bryan Furrness, Editors, *Winesburg Indiana: A Fork River Anthology*, Indiana University Press, 2015. Though spookily reminiscent of the *Spoon River Anthology*, *Winesburg Indiana: A Fork River Anthology* may, or may not, speak with a forked tongue, or, at least, a tongue planted firmly in a cheek, but this compelling compendium also accomplishes the necessary task of surprising readers with an alternate Indiana, the literary one, that stands in polar opposition to the crowd of yammerers who fill the State legislature in Indianapolis. Here in this particular Hoosier RFRA—Righteous Fulminations Requiring Artistry—you will find thirty of Indiana's most articulate observers and writers, some well known, some not so much, all full of sass and humor as they take on a host of contemporary stereotypes, spinning them on their heads and leaving any reader dizzy with admiration. Includes sparkling contributions from *NDR's* own Joyelle McSweeney and Valerie Sayers.

Michael Perkins, *The Pocket Perkins: Brief Writings*, Bushwhack Books, 2014. Another *NDR* contributor, Michael Perkins's new volume is sub-sub-titled: *Life as a Writer, Walker, Pagan, Poet, Philosopher, Flaneur, Provocateur, Libertarian, &*

Libertine. Malachy McCourt, who is a few of those things himself, says spiritedly, “The only reason to interrupt your reading of *The Pocket Perkins* to the last page would be sudden death. The man writes in spectacular colorful words hoisting the English language to places it’s never been. I did not mind dashing to the dictionary at intervals as I was learning new ways of telling the story from this master.” A small book, but with a large range.

Harry Mark Petrakis, *Song of My Life*, The University of South Carolina Press, 2014. Petrakis’s memoir, a portion of which we had the honor to publish in *NDR*, is a capstone work by a prolific and award-winning novelist and nonfiction writer, a thredony for a long life lived fully and deeply. As the short story writer Stuart Dybek tells us, “To be lost in a babble of voices is to be mute. Chicago writers—African American, Asian, Hispanic, Irish, Jewish, Polish—have set themselves to transforming a turbulent city’s port of entry babble into the mnemonic clarity of beauty in story and song. That is what Harry Mark Petrakis has done for the Greek community over a lifetime of empathetically powerful stories. That vision is the gift to readers that he continues to give us all in *Song of My Life*.” A remarkable and moving tale.

Mark Brazaitis, *Truth Poker*, Autumn House Press, 2015. Brazaitis, long-time contributor to *NDR* and winner of ND’s Sullivan Prize of 2012, offers us a new collection of stories, two of which *NDR* published. Obviously a writer we admire and we are not alone. Sharon Dilworth says of this volume, “Phantom girls appearing on dark, lonely highways, Guatemalan cops with hand painted playing cards brokered as bribes, a man who fixes people’s eyes without the benefit of a medical degree.... These innovative stories capture characters doing exactly the wrong thing at exactly the wrong moment. Exquisite!” So say us all.

