

EDITORS SELECT

Wesley Stace, *Charles Jessold, Considered as a Murderer*, Picador, 2011. Wesley Stace in his own musical incarnation is the folk-rock musician John Wesley Harding. He knows a lot about music, and he has based the figure of his apparently homicidal composer, Charles Jessold, partly on the famous madrigalist-murderer Gesualdo. More than that, he has commissioned some actual music by his hero (from the composer Daniel Felsenfeld) that the reader can access at www.wesleystace.com. Stace leans a little heavily on Alex Ross's magnificent history of modern music, *The Rest is Noise*, but Ross evidently is pleased with that as he writes a blurb for the novel himself. The whole thing is a kind of scholarly romp, as well as a murder-mystery, not as serious as Mann's *Doctor Faustus* or even James Hamilton-Paterson's *Gerontius* (about Elgar) or Eduard Morike's *Mozart's Journey to Prague*, but it is in the tradition of those books, and it is a very good read.

August Kleinzahler, *Music I-LXXIV*, Pressed Wafer, 2009. For more energetic riffs on music like the piece on Alex Ross in this issue, by all means get hold of this book. Kleinzahler is an omnivorous music lover, and his enthusiasms run from Monk to Dylan to Mozart and back. The short essays, in fact, are not unlike

his poems—smart and electric and with plenty of attitude.

David Orr, *Beautiful & Pointless: A Guide to Modern Poetry*, Harper, 2011. This witty primer comes out of the populist side of American poetry criticism, somewhere, say, between Dana Gioia and Robert Pinsky. Orr was converted to poetry by reading Philip Larkin, and he manifests a degree of Larkinesque disenchantment with various things, though in the end he admits to “loving” rather than just “liking” poetry. He writes with good sense about “The Personal,” “The Political,” and “Form,” and a little less convincingly about “Ambition” and “The Fishbowl”—by which he means the strange and mainly academic context in which the reading and writing of poetry now takes place. The book is lively and a pleasure to read, even when one deeply disagrees with the argument.

Nasos Vayenas, *The Perfect Order: Selected Poems 1974-2010*, edited by Richard Berengarten and Paschalis Nikolaou, Anvil Press Poetry, 2011. Vayenas is one of the leading contemporary Greek poets and also a well-known scholar whose work on George Sefaris is particularly influential. In his Introduction, David Ricks compares Vayenas as poet-critic to Donald Davie, and this seems to be just. Translations are by Berengarten, Nikolaou, Ricks,

Kimon Friar, and several other poets and scholars. The volume is an excellent introduction of Vayenas' work. Three poems appear in this issue of *NDR*.

Geoffrey Hill, *Clavics*, Enitharmon, 2011. This is the second of Hill's serial collection of "day books"—there are to be five of these—published in the last year or so. The Welsh matter of *Oraclau / Oracles* is discussed by Jeremy Hooker earlier in this issue. *Clavics* derives formally from George Herbert (as *Oraclau / Oracles* did from Donne), and is in part a tribute to the composer William Lawes. Both books also connect with the ongoing series of Oxford lectures Hill is giving as Professor of Poetry. These can be accessed on <http://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/alumni/past-events/past-events>.

John Wilkinson, *Flung Clear: Poems in Six Books*, Salt Publishing, 2010. *NDR* contributor John Wilkinson has reprinted an ambitious sequence of "six books"—about as different from Hill's five "day books" as could be imagined—originally published in the 1980s and 1990s: "Hid Lip," "Bones of Contention," "The Speaking Twins," "The Interior Planets," "Desert Vanish," and "The Nile." The last book in particular, dated 1990-1991, when Wilkinson was living in Cairo, is resonant and compelling when read in the context of recent events in Egypt that it

sometimes seems to foresee.

The Open Light: Poets from Notre Dame, 1991-2008, edited by Orlando Menes, University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. This excellent sequel to James Walton's 1991 anthology, *The Space Between: Poets from Notre Dame, 1950-1990*, includes the following faculty, former faculty and former students who had published at least one book of poems by the time selections were made: Francisco Aragon, Robert Archambeau, Bei Dao, Karni Pal Bhati, Kimberley M. Blaser, Jenny Bouilly, Jacqu Vaught Brogan, Stacy Cartledge, Michel Coffey, Seamus Deane, Joe Francis Doerr, Kevin Ducey, Cornelius Eady, Beth Ann Fennelly, Kevin Hart, Mary Kathleen Hawley, Joyelle McSweeney, Thomas O'Grady, John Phillip Santos, Michael Smith, Anthony Walton, Henry Weinfield, John Wilkinson, and the editor.

Michael Anania writes that "the principal pleasures of this collection—and rightly so—lie in the richness and diversity of the poems it contains. Varied in style, form, voice, and subject matter, traditional, experimental, centered in the ethnic self, sharply placed in concrete landscapes, or deliberately abstract, they represent the reach, not just of Notre Dame poetry, but of much recent poetry in America. The Notre Dame connections among these poets invite another kind of tantalizing, speculative reading."

Two other new poetry volumes from

Notre Dame. Janet Kaplan, *Dream-life of a Philanthropist: Prose Poems & Sonnets*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. Kaplan's book is the 2011 winner of the Ernest Sandeen Poetry Prize. The "sonnets" are also prose poems, with their titles at the bottom of the page rather than at the top. There's a kind of upside-downness to the book that is fully engaging and leads, as Karla Kelsey says, into a landscape of Tender Buttons meets Claes Oldenburg or René Magritte. Kevin Hart, *Morning Knowledge*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. Former ND faculty member and contributor both to *NDR* and *The Open Light*, Kevin Hart publishes his ninth book of poems, work praised by the likes of Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom. Bloom calls Hart "one of the major living poets in the English language."

David Wojahn, *World Tree*, Pittsburgh Poetry Series, 2011. *NDR* contributor David Wojahn's first volume since his impressive *Interrogation Palace: New and Selected Poems* of 2004 is both "ferocious," as Maura Stanton says, and also "sympathetic and forgiving," as Mark Jarman maintains, in its elegiac moments. Jarman accurately describes Wojahn as a poet for whom "the personal is historical" and "our master of the long view, constantly reminding us that humanity's past, even our prehistoric past, isn't over

or even past. His poems increasingly have grown to be complex webs of allusion in which high culture and low have equal weight." Particularly impressive is the sequence of sonnets based on photographs that alternate prehistoric paintings and other artifacts with scenes from Wojahn's youth and recent history. Of a footprint from Chauvet, c. 27,000 BP, he writes: "The boy crawled lightward, on his feet the pollen of an Aurgnacian spring."

Illuminations, Arthur Rimbaud, translated by John Ashbery, Norton, 2011. One might have expected this translation to have been the work of Ashbery's youth; instead he has saved it for his old age. Still, it is an inevitable and necessary pairing between translator and translated, and will probably become a classic of the art. Ashbery concludes his preface by saying: "If we are absolutely modern—and we are—it's because Rimbaud commanded us to be." He certainly commanded Ashbery to be. This is not only the best translation of *Illuminations*, but also some of the best Ashbery.

Melissa Kwasny, *The Nine Senses*, Milkweed Editions, 2011. Melissa Kwasny's prose poems in this collection would be an excellent read directly following the Ashbery versions of Rimbaud. She, too, is writing "illuminations," and she suggests one direction that the now ubiq-

uitous prose poem is taking in this country. Kwasny's individual poems, though units in a sequence, have the unity and coherence of prose poems by Baudelaire (and only some by Rimbaud). This involves a satisfying sense of closure in each case. The poems are (with a couple of exceptions) just one page/paragraph long, which makes Kwasney's project very different from, say, the prose-poetry in Ashbery's *Three Poems* or Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*.

Kathleen O'Toole, *Meanwhile*, David Roberts Books, 2011. *NDR* contributor Kathleen O'Toole seems to have begun writing poetry comparatively late and has published a really terrific first book after a thirty year professional life in community organizing. Her poem "On Marrying over Fifty" begins: "Like swimming at 8, 200 feet / the breath less sure, resistance—/ weight of muscle and bone—recalibrates / sea level certainties." So, perhaps, does writing poems over fifty, and the reader feels the recalibration, which is exhilarating. O'Toole has a religious, even a liturgical sensibility, but the secular-minded reader shouldn't be put off. This is one of the best first books in a long time.

Kevin Prufer, *In a Beautiful Country*, Four Way Books, 2011. Since *Fallen From a Chariot* (2005), *NDR* contributor Kevin Prufer has gone on in *National Anthem* (2008) and the

present volume to complete an impressive trilogy of post-9/11 books that demonstrate how a deeply vision and an often stunning lyricism need not be incompatible in poetry. Marie Howe spoke of the "courage and compassion" of his poems in *National Anthem*, adding that his poems "should be read on Fox News and CNN." The poems in *A Beautiful Country* would be too much for either, but his treatment of love and art in the context of contemporary history and the imperatives of moral witness should be read in our hearts. Prufer is an absolutely necessary poet.

Dennis Hinrichesen, *Rip-Tooth*, University of Tampa Press, 2011. Hinrichesen's new volume is a worthy successor to *Kurosawa's Dog* (2008, and noticed here upon publication), which included poems from *NDR*. It also has a certain amount in common with Kevin Prufer's book. Hinrichesen, too, grapples with history in the context of lyric subjectivity and family myth: "Johnny Cash is dead. / There are no more drive-ins, no USSR, // summer days at Lake McBride, / no more of Linda's laughter as light as a wren's. // History resolves into a man's nose / my uncle bites off // in a Colorado bar."

L.S. Klatt, *Cloud of Ink*, University of Iowa Press, 2011. *NDR* contributor L.S. Klatt's second book has just won the Iowa Poetry Prize for this

book. All of the poems are short, sometimes classically austere, and often ironic or just funny. The title, and the octopi on the cover, have to do not only with the “maelstrom of inklings” in “Liquefaction,” but also the Wallace Stevens epigraph: “In my room the world is beyond my understanding; But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four hills and a cloud.” Klatt writes his poems under, within, and above that cloud.

Roy Fisher, *Selected Poems*, ed. August Kleinzahler, Flood Editions, 2011. Roy Fisher is one of *NDR*'s favorite poets, and we welcome publication of this Flood selection, edited and introduced by August Kleinzahler. It is the perfect book with which to begin reading Fisher. Less inclusive than the Bloodaxe new and selected of 1986, *The Dow Low Drop*, it includes only representative parts of Fisher's major longer works, *City*, *The Ship's Orchestra*, and *A Furnace*. This is okay, maybe even a good idea for a selection of only 150 pages. The book is bound to make the reader want more, and there exists of course *The Long and the Short of It: Poems 1955-2005*, Fisher's Bloodaxe collected poems of some 400 pages reviewed here on its publication by Peter Robinson. *NDR* will publish a proper review of *Selected Poems* in the next issue.

Michael Collins. *Of Uncertain*

Significance. Corby Books, 2011. Collins' new novel, published nearly two years ago in England under the title *Midnight in a Perfect Life*, has been published here by the small firm, Corby Books, because Collins' American publisher balked, despite the success of the British edition, because the novel was too excoriating on a number of subjects—especially the fertility industry in the United States—for the tastes of his editor and, by extension, what she presumed was the novel's potential audience. Stymied, Collins handed the novel over to Corby Books, under the new title, and supplied a fresh author's introduction, which, in part, reads, “*Of Uncertain Significance* takes us to the heart of conception, asks questions of the soul. What will be our legacy? How do we want to live and be remembered? Within these pages are the atomized particles of relationships laid bare, a vivisection of modern aloneness, an uncertain journey toward meaning in a seemingly godless world.” The novel is a powerful, stinging, and lyrical indictment of contemporary society.

Gaylord Brewer, *Give Over, Graymalkin*, Red Hen Press, 2011. *NDR* Contributor Gaylord Brewer's new book mainly poems written far away from his home in Tennessee—in India during a residency at the Global Arts Village, in France, and at the Can Serrat and Fundación Valpariso

in Spain. As an active playwright, he has produced plays and taught in Russia, Kenya, and other distant places. All of this figures in his new poems. In the spirit of an epigraph taken from E.M. Forster, "I'm a holy man minus the holiness," the first section of the book deals with experiences in India "in the gaze of Swami Keerti." The best of these is probably one about trying to make a long distance phone call to his mother in Kentucky. Part III is set mainly in France, and Part V in Spain, where the poet remembers an earlier visit thirteen years earlier and comes to term with a death only two years in his past. But perhaps the most interesting section of the volume is Part IV, called "The Dead Metaphors." Some of these are, as indicated in titles: "Clouds," "Learning the Bicycle," "Sunlight After Morning Thunder," "Home," "Illness," "Fidelity," "The Number Thirteen," and "Post-Divorce Harley-Davidson. It's a very lively sequence.

Jay Neugeboren, *You Are My Heart*, Two Dollar Radio, 2011. *NDR* contributor, novelist, essayist, poet, Neugeboren's new collection of short stories is, according to Jim Shepard, "an object lesson in imaginative empathy and observational intelligence....One of his great subjects has been the damage that even the most caring and thoughtful can inflict." These stories span the globe, from France, to South Africa,

and back to Brooklyn, mimicking Neugeboren's wide range of genre mastery. A splendid volume by a writer whose indefatigable curiosity continues to produce insightful and illuminating fictions.

Holly Thompson, *Orchards*, Delacorte Press, 2011. Thompson's second novel, after *Ash* (2001), done in free verse (345 pages of it) tells a mordant tale of bullying and suicide in a young adult format, one of publishing's most healthy domains. The story is superficially reminiscent of a bullying-suicide case in South Hadley, Mass., home of Mount Holyoke College where Thompson matriculated, but with enough changes in plot and character to lift the story far away from the tabloid world. Set largely in Japan, where the half-Japanese highschool student, Kana Goldberg, a member of the central mean-girl clique, is sent for reflection and rehabilitation after the fact. *Orchards* ends up being a remarkable meditation about guilt, maturation and redemption, outstripping its YA designation.

Jennie Erin Smith, *Stolen World*, Crown, 2011. An entertaining high-life inspection of low-life, as low as it can be, insofar as Smith chronicles the world of reptile smuggling, both the creatures and their spineless snake-nappers. Which is worse is often hard to tell, in terms of their murky habitats. Smith points out a

fact of American culture that goes underappreciated: the amount of invisible, but thriving, subcultures throughout our land, about which most Americans know nothing, or very little, regardless of the amount of money such activities add to the GNP. I suppose it depends on how you feel about snakes and tortoises and other exotic fauna, but Smith, who also writes fiction, brings a literary sensibility to all the slithering and persistent skullduggery.

man of letters.

John Matthias, *Who Was Cousin Alice?*, Shearsman Books, 2011. *NDR's* John Matthias's new volume of mostly prose, a collection that moves him into the first-rank of poet-critic and essayists, a long tradition, but peopled with only a handful of revered practitioners. Matthias adds memoir to the mix and, through that medium, probes a number of topics, such as insomnia, pornography, murder, as well as the unknowns of family history. Advancing from his earlier collection of literary essays, *Reading Old Friends*, Matthias gives consideration to, and reconsiderations of, 20th century figures such as John Berryman, and British luminaries, including Auden, Britten, Roy Fisher, as well as American poets of his own generation, Pinsky and Hass, among others. *Who Was Cousin Alice?* is a one-of-a-kind-volume by a singular

