

EDITORS SELECT

Göran Printz-Påhlson, *Letters of Blood and Other Works in English*, Ed. Robert Archambeau. Open Book Publishers, 2011. This remarkable collection, ably edited and introduced by Robert Archambeau, collects the considerable English-language output of the late Swedish poet-critic Göran Printz-Påhlson for the first time. In addition to a generous selection of Printz-Påhlson's remarkable, adventurous poetry, the book features essays on a surprising range of topics, from Strindberg and Kierkegaard to Ashbery and John Matthias. The centerpiece of the collection is a series of essays called "The Words of the Tribe: Primitivism, Reductionism, and Materialism in Modern Poetics," originally delivered as the Ward-Phillips lectures at Notre Dame in 1984. Restored from partially corrupted manuscripts by Archambeau with the aid of a host of Swedish and American scholars, these essays, with their reflections on the nature and meaning of poetic language, are as fresh as ever.

Jenny Kander and C.E. Greer, Eds., *And Know This Place: Poetry of Indiana*, IHS Press, 2011. This title probably won't sound exciting in New York, London, or Paris, but it should. Somewhat to one's surprise, Indiana has produced a large number of fine poets. Once you get beyond the obliga-

tory selection of James Whitcomb Riley, there is work by the likes of Philip Appleman, Willis Barnstone, Jean Garrigue, Etheridge Knight, Yusef Komunyakaa, Lisel Mueller, Donald Platt, Kenneth Rexroth, Maura Stanton, Ruth Stone, David Wagoner, David Wojahn, and Kevin Young. About fifteen of the poets have some association either with Notre Dame or *Notre Dame Review*—from Ernest Sandeen to Joyelle McSweeney. It's true that some of the poets were only born in Indiana—Rexroth, for example—and then moved on; and that others have only passed through the state for a year or so before establishing careers elsewhere. But the editors are right to claim them anyway. Why not?

Peggy O'Brien, Ed., *The Wake Forest Book of Irish Women's Poetry*, Wake Forest University Press, 2011. Anyone seriously interested in Irish poetry will need to have the second edition of this anthology. Following two separate and wide-ranging prefaces by the editor—one to the first edition published fifteen years ago, the second bringing things up to date—it includes almost book length selections of work by sixteen poets (the first edition contained only nine): Eilean Ni Chuilleanain, Evan Boland, Eva Bourke, Kerry Hardie, Medbh McGuckian, Nuala ni Domhnaill (in both Irish and English translation),

Mary O'Malley, Rita Ann Higgins, Paula Meehan, Moya Cannon, Katie Donovan, Vona Groarke, Enda Wyley, Sinead Morrissey, Caitriona O'Reilly, and Leontia Flynn. Most anthologies include only a small sample of work by the poets selected to appear in them. This is a true and important exception. One comes away from the work of poets represented in this volume with much more than the usual superficial sense of a writer's achievement provided in anthologies of half this length. This book—all 657 pages of it—is a feast.

Herbert Leibowitz, *"Something Urgent I Have to Say to You": The Life and Works of William Carlos Williams*, FSG, 2011. *NDR* published the final chapter, "The Lion in Winter," of Leibowitz's new biography of William Carlos Williams in a previous issue. The book will inevitably be compared to Paul Mariani's 900-page biography published some thirty years ago. Leibowitz's version of Williams is, while admiring, not bedazzled and hagiographical the way Mariani's sometimes is. It is also less anecdotal, being more a biography of Williams' poetry than an account of every moment in his busy life as a poet, doctor, family man, and lover. Mariani's book helped win final acceptance of Williams as a major poet, the equal of Elliot, Pound, Moore, and Stevens. Leibowitz no longer has

to fight that battle. He is even able to dislike everyone's favorite Williams poem, "Asphodel that Greeny Flower," while making a strong case for earlier poems, which he prefers. He also very much admires some of Williams' prose, especially *In The American Grain*. Though there are occasional errors of fact and formatting (especially where it comes to printing the late three-ply line accurately), Williams emerges as a man and poet of great interest and complexity. And, of course, very much "in the American grain."

Lea Graham, *Hough & Helix & Where & Here & You, You, You*, No Tell Books, 2011. All of these poems—including some that have appeared in *NDR*—have the word "crush" in their texts or titles, and from this book onward "crush" is a word that Lea Graham has a kind of patent on. Graham, in fact, has a passionate crush on life, and we all know that even the most adolescent of crushes can suddenly turn to real love. Because of that, we as readers have a crush on Graham and her work, which is vivid and lively and smart. Beneath all the fun in this writing, there's insight and depth and even sadness. Michael Anania writes that in this book we understand that "crush" has at least a double sense—of uncontrollable infatuation and desire of destructiveness. The double and redoubling forces are, for Graham, essential to

perception and affection, grace and need, voiced at times by the poetry of the past but as often by the passing tatters of popular music and the movies.”

Jay Rogoff, *The Art of Gravity*, LSU Press, 2011. *The Art of Gravity* is a perfect title for a book about ballet that concludes with a sonnet sequence of *Dances Macabres*. Dedicated to George Balanchine, Edgar Degas, and Suzanne Farrell, it sports on its cover a magnificent photograph of Maria Kowroski in *Serenade*. The first half of the book, which includes “Making a Fool of Myself over Maria Kowroski”—and from the photograph you can see how one might—is written in a mix of scatter-shot free verse, blank verse, tight quatrains, sapphics, and terza rima. The sonnet sequence, some of which appeared in *NDR*, is variously grotesque, funny, and harrowing. Taken together, the two parts of this diptych make for a very strong book with an unusual focus. With regard to the poems specifically about ballet, one should note that Rogoff is an expert on the subject, having written on dance for *Hopkins Review* and *Ballet Review* for some time.

Wayne Miller, *The City, Our City*, Milkweed, 2011. Now and then it seems that Wayne Miller and his long-time co-editor at *Pleiades*, Kevin Prufer, constitute a literary

movement of two. They are among the best poets in the USA at the moment, and there are very interesting dialogues going on between Miller’s three books and Prufer’s trilogy, *Fallen from a Chariot, The Beautiful Country, and National Anthem*. Miller’s three epigraphs come from W.H. Auden, Octavio Paz, and Italo Calvino—three great poets of the city. And behind them, we suppose, stands Eliot’s London of *The Waste Land*. *The City, Our City* is through-composed, coherent in the unity of its parts, and terribly moving. *Publishers Weekly* has called the book a portrait of “a post 9/11, post-imperial, unjust city, one that tries to get past persistent fears, to find a space for private life while ‘sirens choke back their warnings,’ and silence ‘curls inside the shell that refused to explode.’”

Neil Shepard, *(T)ravel Un(t)ravel*. Mid-List Press, 2011. *NDR* contributor Neil Shepard writes in his fourth volume of poems a book-length rebuke to the remark by Kingsley Amis made famous in Charles Tomlinson’s poem “More Foreign Cities”: i.e., “Nobody wants any more poems about foreign cities.” As in Tomlinson’s work, there are plenty of foreign cities in Shepard’s book. Plenty of foreign rural settings as well. *NDR* has published “Siena,” “Benedictine Monastery at Mount Oliveto,” and “The Ancient Walls of San Gusme,” which defines

a kind of range. As the book (t)ravels and un(t)ravels, five central poems, each identified by the title of the book itself, establish rules of the game with epigraphs from, and dedicatory poems written to, William Carlos Williams, Robinson Jeffers, Wallace Stevens, Edgar Allan Poe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson—American poets who mainly stayed at home. The opening page of the book quotes Dana Gioia: “In some ways, modern American literary history can be seen as an unresolvable dialectic between regionalism and internationalism, as two competing identities for the writer.” Shepard’s own internationalism is very often regional, his regionalism international.

Michael Longley, *A Hundred Doors*, Wake Forest, 2011. A few issues back *NDR* published Lars-Hakan Svensson’s long review of Longley’s *Collected Poems*. The poet has not stopped writing, and *A Hundred Doors* is a gorgeous book. The poems are mostly short, some recalling the Greek lyric epigram. The music throughout is beautifully controlled in what one might call a lush austerity of sound. As before in his work, Longley writes about the First World War as if he had participated in it himself (so close he is to his father’s experience of the trenches), and can write about flowers as if he were the first poet to do so.

John Peck, *Contradance*, University of Chicago, 2011. We will publish a full-scale review of *NDR* regular contributor John Peck’s book in our next issue. For now, it is enough to announce its publication and quote Mark Scroggins’ comments on the jacket: “John Peck is unique among contemporary American poets for the burnished, intricate density of his thought and the rugged, even gnarled lyricism of his lines. The ghosts of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Richard Avedon, Rainer Maria Rilke, Herman Melville, and a host of others stalk gravely through the steps of Peck’s *Contradance*, their spectral presences a ghostly counterpoint to the poet’s preternatural awareness of the buzzy, blooming confusion of the present moment.”

Marylee Daniel Mitcham, *Blacktime Song by Rosalie Wolfe*, Eloquent Books, 2010. An utterly original novel focused on the possibility of spiritual healing, *Blacktime Song by Rosalie Wolfe* is also a meditation on the potential impossibility of narrative truth. Mitcham is an elegant and compelling stylist: her wryly comic tone is the perfect complement to her intense explorations of painful realities: poverty, insanity, cruelty. The plot concerns a single mother voluntarily embracing a poor rural life as she raises her young daughter. Both are spiritual seekers who encounter Mormonism at key moments in their lives: the

novel's droll explorations of believers' ideals, doubts, and foibles is as original a narrative treatment as you will find (and a much cheaper ticket than Broadway's *Book of Mormon*).

Tony D'Souza, *Mule*, Mariner Books, 2011. *NDR* contributor, ND creative writing program alum, D'Souza's third novel is, according to Walter Kim, "the sort of novel I love: it solves nothing but explains everything. It also, thanks to its wicked style and pacing, lets me forget I'm reading serious literature while I follow its terrifying story into the land of the all-American damned." A departure in content from D'Souza's first two novels, the award-winning *Whiteman*, and the growing-up novel, *The Konkans*, but not a change from his central concerns: human beings under stress, facing large and long odds, while attempting to remain sentient and honorable, nonetheless.

Renee E. D'Aoust, *Body of a Dancer*, Etruscan, 2011. Yet another ND alum, and *NDR* contributor, D'Aoust's first book, is a remarkable feat about remarkable feet. Almost every chapter, when published as an individual essay, has been cited by *The Best American Essays* volume as a notable one, in numerous years, including 2009, when "Holy Feet" appeared in these pages. More than a dance book, a memoir of a life lived vigorously in the New York of

the 1990s, both inspirational and moving.

Amina Gautier, *At-Risk*, The University of Georgia Press, 2011. *NDR* contributor (but not a graduate) prize-winning first (The Flannery O'Connor Award) short story collection, which reprints two of her stories that appeared in these pages. It was no surprise to us that she won such a high-status award. The publicity materials included with the book report that Gautier is only the second African-American writer to win the contest in its 30-year history. What is more notable is the quality of the stories, which also update the usual Flannery O'Connor winner's content: citified, frisky, adventurous and redolent of social concerns. Gautier's stories do not resemble anyone else's, one reason why we are so proud to have published her.

Lisa Norris, *Women Who Sleep With Animals*, Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2011. Another *NDR* contributor and prize winner (the Stephen F. Austin State University Press Prize in Fiction), her first volume of short fiction, about which the always reliable Lore Segal has written, "Lisa Norris writes lusty, generous, sophisticated stories about what is harshest in our lives. What's more—they're a pleasure to read." The collection's first story, "Dark Matter," which *NDR* published with

great delight, begins with the line, “So we’re making love, you know, and Al is having a good time,” and sets the tone for what’s to come. Fiction of the highest quality, full of fury, faith and laughter.

Floyd Skloot, *Cream of Kohlrabi*, Tupelo Press, 2011. One more *NDR* contributor, the versatile and acclaimed Skloot’s first, it appears, collection of short fictions. Medical subjects abound in these stories Richard Bausch praises as ones that have a “brave, luminous, searingly unswerving vision of life that exists so powerfully in those persistent dreams we have for ourselves.” The indignities of old age recreated by the venerable author of 17 books, seven of them collections of poetry. Fine writing rendered by a fine mind.

Samuel Hazo, *The Stroke of a Pen*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. An ND undergraduate alum and contributor to *NDR*, Hazo’s first book published by Notre Dame Press, though his volume total (of poetry, fiction, essays and plays) is now in the 30s. A collection of incidental nonfiction pieces, some memoiristic, others criticism of poetry, music, all full of literary erudition and learning lived through a decidedly hands-on approach, which will interest those, as Daniel Tobin writes, “who judge the balkanized, theory-and-jargon-driven engage-

ment of literature to have lost track of the aesthetic dimension essential for the full appreciation of literature and life.” A splendid volume that captures the man.

Joe Francis Doerr, Ed., *The Salt Companion to John Matthias*, Salt, 2011. These “incisive” essays (20 plus an interview), as Marjorie Perloff writes, “on the particulars of Matthias’s challenging poetry make clear that what is needed today is a larger, more capacious conception of postmodern poetics, one that avoids the usual classification so as to redraw the boundaries of the field.” From contributors Michael Anania to John Wilkinson, with all manner of alphabetical colleagues in between, cover the aesthetic waterfront, give Matthias’s stunning output of the last 15 years the consideration it deserves. Not a *Festschrift*, but the volume is a celebration of sorts.



EDITOR'S NOTE

With this issue John Matthias steps down as Poetry Editor (and also as co-editor of the *NDR*); but he will still be actively involved as an Editor at Large, contributing regular pieces along the lines of the one that appears in this issue and, occasionally, commissioning poems and reviews. Filling the position going forward of Poetry Editor will be Orlando Menes, who has been the assistant poetry editor for the last two years. I will continue as Editor. John has been here since the beginning (1995) of the *NDR*, from the small windowless office in the bottom of the Hesburgh Library, to the small, but windowed, office in Flanner Hall. Over the sixteen years of the *NDR*'s existence, its poetry often has been singled out by the annual best-of volumes and the number of poets both young and established published herein has reached the thousands. John, of course, co-edited our 2009 volume, *Notre Dame Review: The First Ten Years*, which showcases the poetry of those early years. In addition, the critical coverage of poetry in the pages of the *NDR* rivals that of any other publication, all brought into existence by the perspicacity, persistence and hard work of John Matthias. We here at the *NDR*, as well as the larger poetry community world-wide, owe John a deep debt of gratitude.