

EDITORS SELECT

Kathleen Rooney, *Robinson Alone*, Gold Wake Press, 2012. Kathleen Rooney has published both poetry and prose about Weldon Kees in *NDR*. Robinson, the best known of Kees' personae, is reborn and to some extent re-invented in Rooney's new book of poems. Even when part of the art in this book is that of the ventriloquist, the author's own distinctive style, with its high-spirited energy and undertow of emotion that is sometimes elegiac, is very much in evidence. Rooney's poems derive from a long engagement with Kees' poetry. For a long time, he was a poet's poet for a generation now itself growing old, so it is a fine thing to have his signature character alive and talking again through the re-voiced magic of a young poet as good as Rooney is.

Jane Satterfield, *Her Familiars*, Elixir Press, 2012. Since her volume of poems *Shepherdess with an Automatic*, *NDR* contributor Jane Satterfield has been writing poems that move back and forth across the Atlantic, finding settings both in the US and the UK. *Her Familiars* (a title glossed from the *OED* to reach as widely and deeply as possible) is anchored by two superb and ambitious historical sequences—"Collapse," dealing with the American side of Satterfield's background, and

"Clarice Cliff Considers Leaving Edwards Street," dealing with the British side. Before and between these poems appear shorter lyrics on a range of subjects, sometimes domestic and sometimes glosses on life's weird curiosities, written both in form and free verse, fully achieved in both cases. Satterfield has a quirky and original angle on the world of her experience. Our shepherdess still carries an automatic.

Marina Tsvetaeva, *Dark Elderberry Branch: Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva: A Reading by Illa Kaminsky and Jean Valentine*, Alice James Books, 2012. Kaminsky and Valentine call their translations in this wonderful book "a reading." That's what Christopher Logue called his great versions from *The Iliad*, and it's a way to sidestep arguments about fidelity to the literal lexical meaning in translation. Tsvetaeva may be the most difficult of her generation of Russian poets—the one including Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and Pasternak—to render in any kind of English. Many who have tried have perished in the attempt. The non-Russian reader will find these "readings" persuasive poems in English. And the collaborators render linking passages from Tsvetaeva's journal to provide a kind of running commentary on her and their own work. More than that, there is a CD included with Russian readings of the poems by Polina Barskova, Valzhyna Mort, and

Stephanie Sandler. With Kaminsky's brilliant afterword as conclusion to this little book, I cannot imagine a better introduction to Tsvetaeva's work in English.

Geraldine Monk, (ed.), *CUSP: Recollections of Poetry in Transition*, Shearsman Books, 2012. Geraldine Monk describes her book as "a collective autobiography." Contributors include a number of writers American readers will recognize—Peter Riley, Roy Fisher, Tom Pickard, Alan Halsey, and Monk herself—and a larger number who will probably be unfamiliar. For anyone who experienced even a little of the British poetry scene in the 1960s and 1970s, the essays and memoirs collected here make for a kind of angry nostalgia. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. The American anthology of British poetry published in 1970, *23 Modern British Poets*, came very much out of this "cusp," but there was not a lot of trans-Atlantic commerce in those days. As they said of other events from that period, "you had to be there." Monk says that her main objective "is to present the spirit of a brief era which, in retrospect, was exceptional in its momentum towards the democratization and dissemination of poetry. The era of 'cusp' I'm concentrating on is between World War II and the advent of the World Wide Web. Already extraordinary in its social political

and cultural upheaval, it seems even more heightened when set against the technological transformation which has since been unleashed."

Gabrielle Robinson, *The Reluctant Nazi: Searching for my Grandfather*, The History Press, 2012. *NDR* published a chapter from this fascinating and moving memoir. Doing some family research, Robinson discovers that her beloved grandfather was a member of the Nazi Party. "As I worked my way through the diaries, an abbreviation kept appearing more and more frequently. They were two letters: 'Pg.' From dim memories I recalled that this may, no, must mean 'Parteigenossen,' 'Party Members.' Surely not my grandfather? I had not known this. It had never been mentioned in my family." Robinson's account of the war years, and the horrors of living in bombed-out ruins immediately after, are riveting. She sets herself a difficult task, morally, ethically, and aesthetically. Her book adds to our slowly accumulating knowledge of what the war looked like from "the other side," and takes its place beside books like W.G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* and Antony Beevor's *The Fall of Berlin 1945*.

Joan Frank, *Because You Have To: A Writing Life*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2012; *Make It Stay*, The Permanent Press, 2012. *NDR* contributor and winner of the Rich-

ard Sullivan Prize for her 2010 collection of stories, *In Envy Country*, Frank has two books out this year, one, a short novel of friendship and long marriage (*Make It Stay*) and, the other, a book of both instruction and inspiration for how to endure a long career as a writer (*Because You Have To*). The usual Frank frankness enlivens both volumes, along with prose that can be, simultaneously, lyrical and biting. The novel and the nonfiction book are charming examples of an author who can both show and tell.

Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi, *Fra Keeler*, Dorothy Project, 2012. A short novel by the newest addition to the faculty of the ND creative writing program has gathered a large amount of praise in a short time. Michelle Latiolais says, "Van der Vliet Oloomi is the descendent of writers as brilliant and disparate as Max Frisch, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Per Petterson. *Fra Keeler* is a compelling and humorously associative meditation of how 'one lives against one's dying,' and how that living will be in contradistinction to all that explains that death on paper after its fact." And, in a different realm of discourse, *PW* says: "This short but substantial novel both celebrates the process of thinking and offers cautions about the perils of our inner monologues. A rare gem of a book that begs to be read again." Robert Coover likes it, too: "Obsessive.

Surreal. Darkly comic. Chilling." A propitious first outing.

Heidi Jon Schmidt, *The Harbormaster's Daughter*, NAL, 2012.

Schmidt brings her particular brand of literary fiction, following on the success of *The House on Oyster Creek*, once more to the heated world of large audience page-turners, set again on Cape Cod, near the tip thereof, populated with a pleasing mixture of both class and family warfare, mothers and teenage daughters, townies and "washashores," outsiders with either cash or sass, resulting in a compelling story salted with nuggets of fine writing and troubling truths.

Fred Arroyo, *Western Avenue and other fictions*, The University of Arizona Press, 2012. Arroyo's first collection of short stories, etching the diaspora of immigrants from what used to be called south of the border, full of work and displacement and the need to put down roots.

Michael Martone calls this collection, "a fine atlas of stories. *Western Avenue* is an ark of conveyance. These transporting fictions worry the paradox of the road as both a place itself and the means we move through place to a place beyond. Yes, these stories move and they are profoundly moving." The title story's particular *Western Avenue* is in South Bend, Indiana, where Arroyo once lived and worked.

Matthew Kirkpatrick, *Light Without Heat*, FC2, 2012. *NDR* contributor Kirkpatrick's debut collection is inventive and, as the jacket copy says, "formally playful," an oxymoron of sorts, but the results, though varied, are full of appreciation for the odd character and the marginally surreal. Ben Marcus, rightfully, praises the volume: "The stories in *Light Without Heat* are taut, formally inventive forays into the soft, fragile core of families, Kirkpatrick's language is sharp and severe, but beneath the disciplined voice is a writer looking to reveal the most difficult feelings." All the stories in this collection are unlike, so each remains fresh and often startling.

Craig Nova, *The Constant Heart*, Counterpoint, 2012. Nova is the author of a dozen novels and his newest harkens back to one of his most successful novels, *The Good Son*, insofar as it probes family relationships and, particularly, those between father and son. Oscar Hijuelos calls it, "Superb in prose and its evocations of character and nature, *The Constant Heart* is a wonderful novel by a writer whose range continues to dazzle me. As a writer, I marveled at the pure scope of Nova's gifts as a storyteller. As a reader, I simply enjoyed my ride through the emotional heart of this affecting novel." A mature and eloquent disquisition on the problems of men, both young and old, in the

early twenty-first century.

Marshall Brooks, *Paperback Island: Street Bibliography Essays*, Arts End Books, 2013. An eccentric and one-of-a-kind volume, where the author "continued to contemplate the role books play in our lives," along with being a "covert profile of James T. Farrell," not a figure often contemplated these days. The book contains a number of winning photographs, all of which evoke the literary world of Farrell's and the author's own time, the mid 20th century, now a vanishing world of old-fashioned book publishing and literary camaraderie, largely centered in New York City. What once was: a nostalgic and useful trip.

David Hoppe, *Food for Thought: an Indiana Harvest*, with photography by Kristin Hess, Indiana Humanities, 2012. *NDR* contributor David Hoppe's year-long foray into the food world of Indiana, both the production and consumption side. Oral history in the tradition of Studs Terkel, though Hoppe gives the form a few considerable twists; he captures a sense of place as well as history and theme, during what he terms a "dynamic" time in the history of Indiana food. This volume, with its lovely and revealing photos by Hess, has taken a large step into the brave new world of "food-based culture." For those who both eat and think.

Peter LaSalle, *Mariposa's Song*, Texas Tech University Press, 2012. LaSalle, the winner of the Richard Sullivan Prize in Short Fiction for 2014, is the author of a number of works of fiction, including the short story collection *Tell Borges If You See Him*; his new novel is drenched in the world of the US southern border region immigrants and the cultures that both lure them and resists them, the *narcotraficantes* or *la migra*. LaSalle manages to get up close and personal in the telling of Mariposa's world: his prose does manage to let her sing.

Michael Perkins, *Life Sentences: Aphorisms & Reflections*, Bushwhack Books, 2012. Perkins, an *NDR* contributor, poet and critic, has put together a book of aphorisms, modeled somewhat on his friend and mentor Edward Dahlberg's book of aphorisms, *Reasons of the Heart*. To say modeled is perhaps a misnomer, given that books of aphorisms are sui generis, insofar as books of them are one aphorism after another in construction, so all such volumes are similar. A sample from Perkins: "Giving is receiving, when the gift is yourself." And, "If you know who you are, remember it on all occasions." Our current age of Twitter hasn't brought back the aphorism as a leading genre. It still requires a gift, which Perkins obviously has, and, happily, shares.

Barbara Shoup, *An American Tune*, Indiana University Press, 2012. Novelist Shoup enters into the world of 1960s, the Vietnam war period, and its large effects on those coming of age back then. It's historical fiction with a contemporary feel, since Shoup goes back and forth in time. The usually reliable Joan Silber, calls it "a rich and timely story about one generation's outrage and the long reverberations of secrets. Her plot has much to say about the tangle of responsibility and how an ill-advised war disrupts an intricate network of ordinary American lives...a memorable novel, warm, sage, and beautifully written." Shoup, a prize winner for her young adult novels, does yeoman service introducing readers to this ancient, but not unfamiliar, history.

Dan Wakefield (ed.), *Kurt Vonnegut: Letters*, Delacorte Press, 2012. Following the publication of the first substantial biography of Vonnegut by Charles J. Shields, *And So It Goes* (reviewed in *NDR* in the last issue, Summer/Fall, pp. 307-318), this volume of letters gives you Vonnegut undiluted. Arranged chronologically by his novelist friend and fellow native of Indianapolis, Wakefield also supplies useful introductions to the various periods of Vonnegut's life, giving context and some helpful annotations to the missives, which are all full of information and Vonnegut-ian joie de

livre. Even when KV was depressed, which was often, he still was funny when engaging the epistolary form. One does need, as with most major author collections, some knowledge of his life, or work, to be fully informed, but just dipping into these letters provides enjoyment.

Shawn Francis Peters, *The Catonsville Nine: A Story of Faith and Resistance in the Vietnam Era*, Oxford, 2012. History works in strange ways, as does the writing of history, and it took a Catonsville, Maryland native, born 18 months before the event, nearly forty-plus years to write the definitive history of what was often called “arguably the single most powerful antiwar act in American history.” This action, in 1968, created the Berrigan brothers (Dan and Phil) as the media’s celebrity symbols of the new Catholic Left anti-war movement. Peters covers well the history leading up to Catonsville draft board raid, as well as the raid itself and its aftermath, though he misses a few things, since it appears (it is not in the bibliography) he did not read *The Harrisburg 7 and the New Catholic Left*, which first appeared in 1972. The Catonsville Nine might have been Ten had Phil Berrigan’s future wife, Elizabeth McAlister, not absented herself from the action. But, Peters’ book adds much to the larger history of the Vietnam era anti-war history. Because Dan Berrigan’s own 1970

book, drawn from the trial transcript—which became, eventually, a celebrated play and movie—*The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* has become a placeholder for this history over the decades. It is good that we now have this book, along with the new reprint of the *Harrisburg 7* volume, with its new Afterword (excerpted in issue 34 of *NDR*), to tell, if not the full, certainly a fuller, history of that time and those courageous individuals who populated that golden age of anti-war protest.

