

cially Hege's as she struggles to suppress any visible annoyance with Mattis's mannerisms and irrational excitability. When an itinerant lumberjack enters their staid lives, first as the siblings' boarder and then Hege's lover, Mattis's jealousy quickly surfaces.

Vesaas's prose, spare and straightforward, soars with a poignancy of feeling that conveys Mattis's emotions, like his confused feelings of sexual attraction, which he is forced to suppress because those around him cannot reconcile the seeming incongruity of his childlike mind and his sexuality.

Mattis's disability is the pivot upon which the novel unfolds and also serves to amplify the ways that "normal" people, too, are "handicapped." While nature's vicissitudes control Mattis, by turns calming, inspiring, amazing, and frightening him, we have grown complacent to the revelations and mysteries of the natural world, numbed by our varied experiences and skeptical minds. Moreover, unlike Mattis, our self-conscious preoccupation with saying and doing only what is socially acceptable makes us circumspect, inhibiting open and honest interactions. Vesaas allows us see that without Mattis's sensitivity, perceptivity, and honesty, we, too, are impaired, limited from living a full life.

Lori Feathers
Dallas, Texas

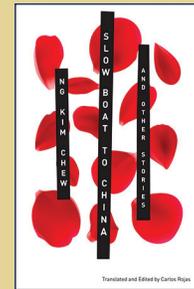
Enrique Vila-Matas. *The Illogic of Kassel*. Trans. Anne McLean & Anna Milsom. New York. New Directions. 2015. 220 pages.

This "novel" is published in tandem with *A Brief History of Portable Literature*, the 1985 prose work that brought Enrique Vila-Matas sustained prominence. Both books epitomize his preference for hybrid genres and contravening conventions, showing a three-decade arc for his prolificacy. Superbly translated by Anne McLean in tandem with Anna Milsom, *The Illogic*

of *Kassel* is becoming his most popular and best received book, gathering major critical praise and endless interviews. That reception is related to his revisiting and putting in perspective the metafictional devices (he appears as a character in about thirty of his works) and themes that he never stops fine-tuning with great wit and erudition.

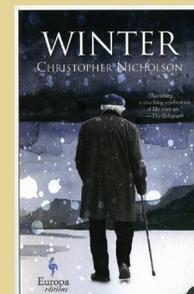
As much as Vila-Matas never disappears into his plots' surroundings, his readers always have the impression that he conveys an internally balanced self, even when replotting or mocking the hinge pins of contemporaneity. *The Illogic of Kassel's* fable turns on his being invited mysteriously to *dOCUMENTA*, the renowned contemporary art exhibition held every five years in Kassel, Germany. He is to spend a week as a writer-in-residence/installation in a Chinese restaurant on the fringes of the town, which gives him the chance to "escape from literature and open up to other artistic disciplines." It turns out to be a revealing aesthetic, existential and linguistic experience/performance, or so it seems. In his brilliant, discursive calibrations (which include literary criticism and events relayed as free association), Vila-Matas surgically sutures fact and fiction, a typical turn complicated here by extravagant translations of languages the narrator actually does not know.

The outcome is not a collection of the many versions of just about everything literary that Vila-Matas had or has in mind, or a "ready-made novel," or an unknown twist that David Shields never knew about. Rather, this is a happy and optimistic coming to terms with what the well-established Vila-Matas writes, a turn started in *Dublinesque*. Within those thoughts there is also a critique of narrative practices vis-à-vis the public. Vila-Matas can be highbrow, full of other arts, and if he garners acclaim from Pedro Almodóvar and Paul Auster, it is because he manages to better their artistic



Ng Kim Chew
Slow Boat to China and Other Stories
Trans. Carlos Rojas
Columbia University Press

A collection of Malaysian author Ng Kim Chew's short stories, Ng writes about issues that are prevalent in the sinophone diaspora community, including ethnic tensions, globalization, and cultural heterogeneity. Integrating many different languages in his own writing, Ng speaks for those who do not fully conform to one culture or identity.



Christopher Nicholson
Winter
Europa Editions

Winter inserts the reader into the last days of writer Thomas Hardy as he draws inspiration from a young actress who is slated to portray his most famous character, Tess, in a stage adaptation of the novel that bears her name. Nicholson's lyrical prose recalls Hardy's own fascination with time and place while humanizing a literary figure known for his obsession with love and the leaving of it.

practices in a fascinating fashion that can be disturbing but friendly and identifiable at the same time.

Will H. Corral
San Francisco

Verse

Lorenzo Calogero. *An Orchid Shining in the Hand: Selected Poems, 1932–1960*. Trans. John Taylor. New York. Chelsea Editions. 2015. 427 pages.

To dip into this volume, with its splendid translator's introduction, is first to connect with a vital Italian poetic tradition. Although Lorenzo Calogero was an *isolani*—a lone poet living at times as a doctor in a village of Calabria, virtually unrecognized in his lifetime—this beguiling selection manages to call forth something of the hermetic aesthetic of early- to mid-twentieth-century Italian poetics, for which we can be grateful.

There is a quiet, brittle craftsman's integrity to this body of work one finds so rarely in our present, hypertextualized cultural space. Authenticity is an elusive property; yet we know it when we sense it. Shearing always close to essence, Calogero has got something of Tomas Tranströmer's elemental concentration—but without accepting resolute sparseness as the price for transcendent clarity. His startling sensuality often relies as well on deft turns of unexpected grammar, as here: "Sleek ribbons from birds / and a black orchid among the twilight kisses / is now holing up in a frown. / You and your dark swollen hair / and, thereby, over this vast oasis, / a fugitive over the waters / in a reverberation of roses . . ."

Something akin to Rilke appears in this volume too—albeit shorn from the latter's immense cultural framework—in the generous selection of fragments given here from Calogero's later notebooks (1957, 1959–61), which echo the offhand depth and brilliance of notebook entries, for

example in the volume of Rilke's *Uncollected Poems* translated by Edward Snow.

John Taylor has labored admirably to retain the poet's fluid, intellectually striking elisions, the syntactic mutations among lines, which show so well an advanced mind grappling into a metaphysics of poetic thought. Mulling over to unlock wisdoms compressed in these elisions is effort well rewarded; reading these poems attentively is to swim in swift strokes toward deep poetic waters.

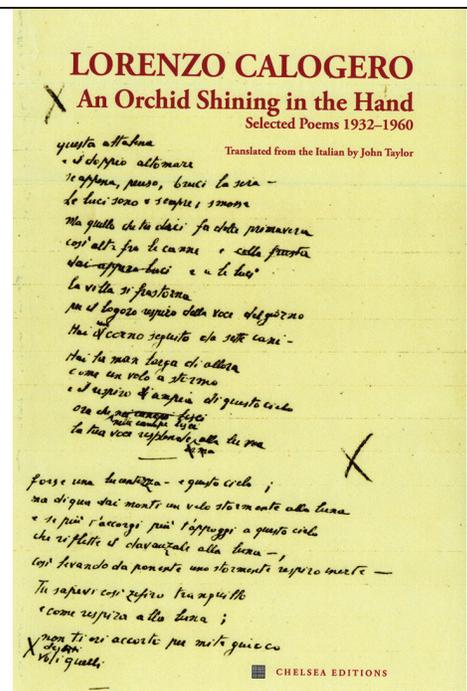
The sheer sonority of the original Italian, which seems to have been a principal compositional metric of Calogero's, cannot be retained whole cloth in these translations, sadly—Italian is made for such hard yet fragrant lyric—nor can the overt difficulty of these poems' original grammar, especially in the later notebook fragments, be retained in fullest obscurity. Yet thanks are due to John Taylor for having labored well and long to conserve this rarefied flavor for us in English. So much of value and beauty is preserved in lines so neatly wrought on nearly every page. "Either this is a prayer / or some foreboding storm. // I expect to call you back by shouting / quickly, heedlessly; or this is the end, / the silence of everything. // And you were so opaque, shapeless to other human beings."

This book serves to reestablish the legacy of a significant twentieth-century Italian, indeed European poet. It belongs in our collective literary soul—and in our libraries.

Andrew Singer
Trafika Europe

Kuno Raeber. *Be Quiet: Selected Poems by Kuno Raeber*. Trans. Stuart Frieber. Rochester, New York. Tiger Bark Press. 2015. 127 pages.

In order to achieve inner stillness, one must first withstand turmoil. Experience of a major world war, a fellow writer's public rejection of his work, and a spiritual crisis



provided Kuno Raeber (1922–92) with enough material to inspire his writing of seven volumes, an occupation through which he worked to achieve calm. This undertaking is reflected throughout *Be Quiet*, a five-section arrangement of Raeber's poetic oeuvre as translated and selected by Stuart Frieber. True to the writer's own collective experience, the compilation illustrates how true quietude cannot exist without clamor.

That clatter is necessary for tranquility encases "Close and Closer," the first segment of the collection. A poignant first impression, the violent confrontation between the world and the individual becomes evident in "Down with It All," which shows the casting off of worldly items as a prerequisite to reaching serenity: "all of it down and into the / sudden fall of the water / down and at the end / down with you and me right behind." The poem summons readers to rid themselves of distractions to achieve stillness. Only when the roar of underwater immersion has taken place can one attain serenity: "the silence the silence the fish / standing open-eyed, its eyes shining in the darkness / taking us both in." This poem, like so many others in the collection, illustrates that noisy, and often violent, eruptions precede moments of clarity.