

Short Circuits: Aphorisms, Fragments, and Literary Anomalies

James Lough, Editor

Alex Stein, Editor

Schaffner Press (Apr 2, 2018)

Softcover \$17.95 (384pp)

978-1-943156-37-5

In an ideal world, we would be no shorter or taller than we need to be, no thinner or heavier, smarter or dimmer. We would be what we needed to be.

Similarly, writing need not be short or long to be what it needs to be. When the work is completed, nothing more is necessary to write. Good writing, like good art, should always amount to the least that is needed—its irreducible minimum. Abbreviated writing for brevity's sake doesn't belong in the conversation.

But the best short writing—in the form of aphorisms, koans, haiku, for example—has special powers to shake us out of our conceptual biases and actually rewire our neurological pathways. James Lough, coeditor of *Short Circuits: Aphorisms, Fragments, and Literary Anomalies*, calls these *aha* moments of brilliantly worded aphorisms “little enlightenments” that “actually manage to separate us from ourselves”—*detachment*, in Buddhist speak—and help us solve problems, avoid worry and fear, develop empathy, and feel more “peaceful, tolerant, and open-minded.”

Following up on *Short Flights: Thirty-Two Modern Writers Share Aphorisms of Insight, Inspiration, and Wit* (2015), Lough and Alex Stein assembled the short-writing thoughts, creative ideas, and favorite short works of another stellar list of contributors (Charles Simic, Lydia Davis, Sarah Manguso, Stephen Dobyns, Joy Harjo, and Yahia Lababidi, to name a few). Careful thinkers of all stripes will find a great deal to enjoy.

MATT SUTHERLAND (May/June 2018)

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