

Briefly Reviewed

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T.A. Carter. *Hue, A Day at Butchart Gardens: A Haiku Primer.* Lantzville, BC: Leaf Press, 2014, 52 pp., perfect soft-bound, 4.25 x 5 inches. ISBN 978-1-926655-69-7. US\$12 @ www.leafpress.ca.

As the title of T.A. Carter's new chapbook indicates, here is a haiku how-to—a modest, yet handy one, at that. Twenty poems each illustrate a particular haiku technique or principle, very briefly explained on the facing page. Also included are suggested readings for further study especially focused on the work of Carter's fellow Canadian poets. Although pitched to beginners, the primer can serve as a technical to-do list for more seasoned haiku poets as well. This writer has spent more than one delightful afternoon exploring the same experience with one modeled technique after another—and finding unexpected depths in the moment. *Silence / of old growth cedars— / tourist's small talk [contrast]; under the blue sky / hydrangea petals / in the stone bird bath [shasei]; ocean view / through the hole in the hedge / missing cherry blossoms [sabi].* ~MRB

Robert Epstein. *What My Niece Said in My Head.* West Union, WV: Middle Island Press, 2014, 50 pp., stapled, 5 x 8 inches. No ISBN. <http://www.middleislandpress.com>

In this chapbook, Robert Epstein composes his paean to the whimsy, wonder, and disarming naiveté of the under-10 set. Rather than recall his own childhood, he revels in the insights wrung from the charming *bons mots* of an ebullient, highly

imaginative niece. Though some of the 50 haiku and senryu he presents verge on familial anecdote, with little space for expansion of meaning, the sympathetic reader (one who recognizes him or herself in the besotted adult) will find ample room for reflection in many other poems. A light tone and a deft use of italics has the effect of making the child's voice—and the poet's delight—come alive. *my niece's birthday / she wants to sleep tonight / in a flower bed; out of the blue / my niece names the colors / wonder comes in; my niece / folds the sky in half / to save it.* ~MRB

Elizabeth Searle Lamb (posthumous) and **Miriam Sagan**. *Dream That is Not a Dream: A Conversation in Haiku*. Miriam's Well, 2014, 52 pp., perfect softbound, 6 x 7 inches. ISBN 978-1-893003-17-0. US\$15@www.redmoonpress.com.

In this little book Miriam Sagan, friend of Elizabeth Searle Lamb and editor of her collected work (*Across the Wind-harp*), offers up a “posthumous dialogue” with the poet she calls her teacher. With a few exceptions, the poems by Lamb presented here were unpublished and uncollected at her death. The risk in such an enterprise is to include the improvised sketch never meant for public view along with finished work. A number of Lamb's poems (there are 36) may be unfinished nuggets of poetic thought, yet many are polished gems. Beneath each of Lamb's poems, Sagan has placed one of her own, written in “an attempt to enter into the mind of Elizabeth Searle Lamb's haiku.” Many of these responses restate the same material, too close in subject matter to expand the poetics of the original. Those that work well link much more indirectly, in the manner of a free-wheeling exchange of ideas. Still, there is much to treasure in this “conversation.” In one of her haiku, Lamb asks whether she will be able to write her death poem when the time comes. Readers may find that some presented here beautifully fit the bill. *the night sky / curls around itself / slow moving stars* [ESL] *slow stars / above my house / year after year* [MS]; *before I make / the important phone call / fresh lipstick* [ESL] *a thank you note / for a thank you note— / Shinto gate postcard*

[MS]; *the sharp ping / of a breaking harp string / the empty room* [ESL] *at the funeral / the harp suddenly / plays "Carmen"* [MS]. ~MRB

Francis Attard. *Turn Up at the Shrine*. Malta: Stone Curlew Publishing/Veritas Press, 2014, 112 pp., perfect softbound, 8.25 by 5.75 inches. ISBN: 978-99957-0-520-6. Private distribution by the author.

In this second collection, Francis Attard presents an anthology of 350 or more poems (some previously published), along with commentary on haiku and senryu and a dash of experimental verve. Working in English as a second language, he offers up solid haiku of haunting musicality and wry wisdom, unfortunately awash, for this reader at least, in a small sea of less-well-crafted poems. Particularly remarkable for its one-line ku, this is a collection in need of pruning from a poet well worth the watching. *dislikes purple of the moonflower* *Sunday date; year's end in a second-hand bookshop one I autographed; wake to the plaintive cry of the piping plover winter.* ~MRB

George Swede. *Micro Haiku, Three to Nine Syllables*. Toronto: Inšpress, 2014, 108 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 by 8.25 inches. ISBN 978-0-9881179-0-7. US\$15 @ <http://inspress-net.webs.com>.

In this collection of bare bones haiku, George Swede arranges 101 poems by date of composition over thirty-six years. Characterized by technical excellence and poetic acumen, every one of his micro haiku packs a punch and demonstrates—in his publisher's words—"how the world's shortest poetic form can be even shorter and still create resonance." With remarkably little repetition of ideas or images, Swede hones his ku to the sharp edge of comparison, contrast, irony, personification, allusion, linguistic misdirection, paradox, and more. One truly gets the sense that, in whatever way language opens up disjunctive space, Swede has been there, done that and masterfully so. *as i enter moonlight fills her room; snowflakes bricks; brook / sunlight / Bach.* ~MRB

Lee Gurga and Scott Metz, eds. *Haiku 2014*. Lincoln, IL: Modern Haiku Press, 2014, unpag. (110 pp.), perfect softbound, 5.25 x 4 inches. ISBN 0-9741894-6-4. US\$8 + postage from Modern Haiku Press, P.O. Box 68, Lincoln IL 62656 or www.modernhaiku.org.

Three years ago Lee Gurga and Scott Metz coedited *Haiku 21: An Anthology of Contemporary English-Language Haiku* (see review in *Frogpond* 35:2). For this first (hopefully annual) supplement, the editors screened over 10,000 haiku published in 2013 and feature “100 notable ku” by 100 authors. As in the first publication, this edition questions “What can haiku be?” and sets out to explore the possibilities. Many of the poems are innovative and experimental, not in a random fashion but, as the editors explain, in a way that each might engage the reader in “cognitive effect rather than in relation to typography or layout.” Included also are haiku that follow the more traditional approach, but with unique and fresh perspective and appeal. As readers, editors, and publishers we should seek out haiku of excellence in the full range of traditional and modern practice, haiku that speak to us on more than one level, that inspire and challenge us. At times we may feel uncomfortable with the result; we may ask, “Is *this* a haiku?” But if the poem clings to the conscious and/or subconscious mind and reaches us on a variety of levels, including emotional, intellectual, imaginative, and intuitive, we will find ourselves engaged even if we can’t explain the exact meaning or intent of the lines. A few of the many excellent haiku in this collection that speak to me: *another bird dream probing the tenderness under a wing* (Melissa Allen); *in his buttonhole our forgotten war* (Fay Aoyagi); *Parable; / too heavy / for insect wings* (Joe Polsky); *a blue coffin / one nail escapes / the solar system* (Peter Yovu). ~FB

Bill Cooper. *Overtones*. Winchester, VA: Redmoon Press, 2014, unpag. (62 pp.), perfect softbound, 4.25 x 6.5 inches. ISBN 978-1-936848-28-7. US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

A tight little collection of 45 haiku that offer sometimes expected and often surprising juxtapositions. We find encounters human and nature based that pay attention especially to

movement and sound, yet are interlaced with moments of quiet and solitude. This careful balance, coupled with Cooper's eye for detail and keen articulation, adds a quality of "overtone" to many of his poems. Overtones can be heard in harmonic and disharmonic musical compositions. They can be seen in the color of reflected light. They can also suggest secondary meaning and connotation in the spoken and written word. The reader will find all of these elements in this satisfying and engaging collection, which is divided into three sections: "the many paths," "flowing into watercolor," and "softening taps." One poem from each section: *the haiku / of a humpback whale / one breath; feast over / a second round / of soft tuba notes; onshore breeze / the fiddler crab stretching / a smaller claw.* ~FB

Jörgen Johansson. *The Firefly's Signature/Eldflugans signatur.* Winchester, VA: Redmoon Press, 2014, 54 pp., perfect softbound, 4.25 x 6.5 inches. ISBN 978-1-936848-29-4. US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

In both English and Swedish this compact collection of 40 haiku and senryu offers a mix that ranges from the uncanny to the melancholic. One gets a sense that Johansson is confident inside his writing skin, that he sees life and relationships as they are and doesn't hesitate to say so. Contrary to what the title poem suggests—*the firefly's signature / on the night sky / unreadable*—all of these poems are accessible and many suggest something deeper than what first meets the eye. The chapbook is divided into three sections, "their first quarrel," "the wrong window," and "the druid arrives," which set the tone for a good measure of tension, but we also find resolution in many of the poems. Others allow the author's unique sense of play to shine through. Some of my favorites capitalize on Johansson's skill with word choice and diction, for trimming the lines to just what is needed to grab and hold the reader's attention with a range of poems from 6 to 17 syllables. A memorable collection. *a ladybird / b5 to c4; june bride / the church filled / with second thoughts; art deco knob / it was here / i was made; rainy july / bite marks / on the table tennis racket.* ~FB

Madoka Mayuzumi, ed., Hiroaki and Nancy Sato, trans. *So Happy to See Cherry Blossoms: Haiku from the Year of the Great Earthquake and Tsunami*. Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2014, 119 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8 inches. ISBN 978-1-936848-30-0. US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

When the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami struck the Pacific coast of Japan, Madoka Mayuzumi was in Paris serving as Japan's cultural ambassador to Europe. On her return to Japan she visited the stricken areas and held writing sessions with hopes that haiku would help the survivors regain purpose and strength in the aftermath of the disaster. *So Happy to See Cherry Blossoms* features her selection of 126 haiku written by survivors aged 8–91, with an account of the moment that inspired each haiku. The editor includes notes on the *kigo* used and additional translators' notes are provided. Divided by season into four sections, the collection recounts loss and survival through the eyes, hearts, and pens of those who found comfort in cherry blossoms about to bloom, a dandelion in the grass, a lone pine tree, a grandchild singing, wildflowers, fireflies, a pot of roses, moon and candle light, sweet sake, and more. *Within me aftershocks have come to inhabit spring deep* (Saitō Kazuko); *Some large radishes put up to dry in a makeshift row* (Kikuta Tōshun). ~FB

Roberta Beary, ed. *fresh paint: towpath anthology 2015*. Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2014, unpag. (36 pp.), stapled softcover, 3.5 x 5 inches. ISBN 978-1-936848-31-7. US\$5 + postage from the towpath haiku society c/o Lee Giesecke @ lee.g2013@verizon.net.

A small but eye-appealing collection of 32 haiku and senryu by 16 members marking the 20th anniversary of the towpath haiku society. A bright array of voices from the Washington, D.C. area, with an interesting variety of themes and well-crafted poems. *wood chisel / releasing the curve of a wing* (Patricia A. Rogers); *after Mardi Gras / the mockingbird's nest / glittering* (Kathleen O'Toole); *waiting room / how this blood test / is a poem* (Jimmy Aaron/Peach). ~FB

Marjorie Buettner. *Some Measure of Existence* (Collected haibun with introduction by Marian Olson). Red Wing, MN: Red Dragonfly Press, 2014, 83 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.5 inches. ISBN 978-1-937693-52-7. US\$15 from www.reddragonflypress.org.

Those who have had the opportunity to hear Marjorie Buettner read her haibun recognize not only her skill but also her passion for the form, which she expresses beautifully through a heart that has traveled the corridors of wisdom. In this first collection she takes the reader from season to season, and at the end, briefly into a world where dreams fuel the exquisite prose and capping haiku. (Six of the 51 haibun are capped with tanka.) In the words of Marian Olson, these are haibun “composed by a writer who cares about language that draws the reader into her sensual and sensuous musings.” Each one draws us, as the title suggests, into a measure of her existence. This is a collection that will warm your bones through the coming months of winter. ~FB

Glenn G. Coats. *Beyond the Muted Trees*. Prospect, VA: Pineola Publishing, 2014, 97 pp., perfect softbound, 6 x 9 inches. ISBN 978-0615949864. US\$8 from amazon.com/books.

Sixty-three haibun comprise the author’s second collection, which he introduces with this haiku: *summer dusk— / tucked between pages / the pieces of a life*. These are stories wonderfully told from memory and notes Coats has taken through the years about folks from all walks of life, “but with a particular focus on the impoverished, the illiterate, the physically or psychologically wounded, the immigrant.” The capping haiku are as good as the prose and I found myself stopping often to let the language work its magic. Four sections—“Mercy,” “Crossing the Border,” “Side Roads,” and “Trace of a River”—place us in the presence of the author’s humanity. ~FB

Publication Update: James Fuson. *20 Years: Reflections of an Empty Sky* (briefly reviewed in *Frogpond* 37:2) is available at www.softsculpture.org.