

Briefly Reviewed

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Abigail Friedman, ed. *I Wait for the Moon, 100 Haiku of Momoko Kuroda*. Berkeley, CA: Stoner Bridge Press, 2014, 144 pp., softbound, 5.25 x 7.25 inches. ISBN 978-1-61172-016-7. US\$14.95 from www.stonebridge.com.

Despite her popularity in Japan, the haiku poet Momoko Kuroda has had few of her works translated into English. This handsome volume remedies the situation and more. Friedman introduces us to the woman and her passions. She provides “literal” (her word) renditions of a wide range of poems that read well in colloquial English. And she engages the reader, too, in the task of translation, discussing where relevant the meanings, rhythms, and associations at play in Momoko’s ku. The 100 haiku presented here are drawn from six collections, the first published in 1981, the last in 2013. Their arrangement, though not strictly chronological, allows readers to trace the poet’s evolution, from *shasei* to an increasingly personal and subjective style of haiku. Momoko is very much a *gendai* poet, yet one who has purposefully revisited perennial concerns, literally as well as figuratively. Her poems speak to years of pilgrimage among famous cherry trees and ancient spiritual sites, to years of immersion in the haiku tradition, with a woman’s touch. *one by one / they fall asleep— / the crickets at the inn; I open a fig— / my violet mother / opens to me; end of the year that thing called moonbathing . . .* ~MRB

David G. Lanoue. *Issa and the Meaning of Animals: A Buddhist Poet’s Perspective*. New Orleans, LA: HaikuGuy.com, 2014, 292 pp., softbound, 5.25 x 8 inches. ISBN 978-0-9912840-2-3. US\$12.99 from www.Amazon.com. Also available in eBook format.

Kobayashi Issa, Japanese poet of the late 18th, early 19th centuries, wrote many haiku about animals. In this book David Lanoue, current president of the Haiku Society of America and Issa scholar, writes a lot about Issa's poems through the lens of modern concern for the ethical treatment of animals. In chapters addressing relevant ethical, religious, and scientific issues, he argues that Issa's thousands of animal ku sketch the poet's deep understanding of insects, frogs, and birds as fellow travelers in an interconnected universe of beings. Often presented in anthropomorphized terms, his animal portraits satirize and admonish their human counterparts. They also express the kind of communion possible for those humans who would reach enlightenment. *gambling in the field— / from the pot / a little butterfly; the buck looks / at cherry blossoms . . . / shedding his antlers; will I grow old / like you? / autumn butterfly.* ~MRB

Roberta Beary & Lenard D. Moore, eds. 7. Durham, NC: Jacar Press, 2013, 52 pp., softbound, 5 x 7 inches. No ISBN. US\$15 & \$3 postage @ www.jacarpres.com.

The preface to this small chapbook opens with a great set of questions posed by the publisher (and writer/poet/teacher) Richard Krawiec—among them: Can someone publish too many haiku? Is there a point where the poems become craft rather than art? How many good haiku can anyone write, anyhow? This last question proved the impetus for the book, 7 representing the number of poems a poet might reasonably expect to outlast his or her lifetime. Krawiec's process for selecting poets and poems (described in the Kanterman Book Awards 2014, Best Anthology honorable mention, this issue) tells us much about an enterprise meant to sift out the best of both. It is largely consensus driven and safe: it features fourteen outstanding poets highly regarded by the haiku community as a whole. It is not inclusive nor particularly prescient: it ignores any number of brilliant outliers, poets whose idiosyncratic or experimental styles have garnered them fewer fans among contemporaries. Yet the annals of creativity suggest that an unexpected mix of folks from the mainstream and the

hinterland will eventually make the canon. (I might also add that creative individuals don't always understand their true contributions, a thought which may bring readers solace when personal favorites or arguably iconic poems fail to appear in these pages.) 7 is no crystal ball; it is, rather, a crystallographer's best guess x-ray of the epitome of haiku practice now, today. Featuring Fay Aoyagi, Tom Clausen, Garry Gay, Ferris Gilli, Lee Gurga, Carolyn Hall, paul m., Marlene Mountain, John Stevenson, George Swede, Michael Dylan Welch, Ruth Yarrow, Roberta Beary, and Lenard D. Moore. As Krawiec advises, "Read. Rave. Discuss. Disagree. Enjoy." ~MRB

John Martone. *mantram*. samuddo/ocean, 2014, 38 pp., softbound, 5.75 x 8.75 inches. ISBN 978-1-312-23608-0.

John Martone. *thrip*. samuddo/ocean, 2014, 88 pp., softbound, 4.25 x 7 inches. ISBN 978-1-312-38714-0.

[John Martone.] *monera*. samuddo/ocean, 2014, 96 pp., softbound, 5.75 x 8.25 inches. ISBN 978-1-312-43841-5. Contact johnmartone@gmail.com.

Whether every small poem in John Martone's most recent books does or doesn't qualify as bona fide haiku is absolutely beside the point. In all three collections, we are called to witness the poetics of obsession.

In *mantram*, the poet dons the mask of junkman/dreamer/seer meditating on the stuff of this world and of the inner life. Fifty or more poems include the words, "little dream." Like so many mantra, these variations on a theme are meant to enable the poet and the believer in us all to cross the sea of the mind.

For Martone that sea is most visibly observed in the petri dish, as in *thrip*, or on the microscopic slide, as in *monera*. In the former, the biologist's equipment becomes the poet's instrument for metaphoric exploration: at close range, the petri dish becomes a mandala, the pipette a "fine-boned birdsong," and beneath the magnifying glass the cell walls of a flower

petal become ocean waves. The “junk man w / his microscope” embarks on a “shaman’s voyage” fueled by empathic communion with the least among us—tiny insects (thrips), pinworms, chloroplasts, and other “little ones.”

In *monera* the same journey settles into a somewhat more focused contemplation of unicellular organisms such as bacteria and blue-green algae. Nearly every page of the book carries a photographic image of some microbial being, described or evoked or addressed verbally. Though often lovely in a dreamy sort of way, these images are blurred and pixelated, precluding any visual precision that might match poetic concision. Nevertheless, the poet seeks a conjoined language for probing microscopic lives, translating back and forth between daily discourse and scientific idiom. Next to a translucent ovoid figure shimmering in a light green sea can be found the cryptic words “dragonfly / telomeres”; under a globular green mass floating in a translucent jelly, “blue-green algae / the great sun / flower.” The poet settles most frequently on the vernacular of sailing the many weathers of water drops: “bobbing / in // a life / raft // dream.”

These poems challenge. They do not resolve in the mind at first glance or even at tenth glance, which is exactly the point:

nature
poems are
codons (*thrip*)

Like strands of DNA, Martone’s acts of minimal language carry elemental information, the kind that can, under the right circumstances, unlock mysteries. One needs to sit with them, repeat them over and over, puzzle out the connections, and bit by bit code the evolution of their meaning. That some poetic sequences make for unnerving, exhilarating haiku is only a bonus. *this spiritual being a junkyard* (mantram); *a bee sting’s / searing all in / timacy* (thrip); *un / tethered // drifting / out / at last // become / that / micro // scope / astro / naut* (monera). ~MRB

Robert Epstein, ed. *The Sacred in Contemporary Haiku.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014, 266 pp., perfect softbound, 6 x 9 inches. ISBN 978-1-500993-01-6. US\$19.50 from online booksellers.

In this carefully assembled anthology of haiku, tanka, and haiga nearly 300 poets explore the sacred nature of the “unassuming moments in church and temple; meadow and mountain; on the train and on the trail; . . .” As much as physical space, these poems realize a place inside where awe, wonder, humility, beauty, sensuality, sorrow, humor, and even doubt have the potential to waken spiritual awareness. Robert Epstein’s publishing background with previous anthologies and collections of grief and death, loss and recovery, renewal and change prepared him well for this endeavor. A fine selection from contemporary haiku practioners is represented with one to six poems apiece that inspire the reader to search for the sacred in this world we call home. *following the hearse / as far / as I can go* (Donna M. Bauerly); *snowy night / rabbit tracks lead / to the chapel service* (Gretchen Graft Batz); *rabbit in the moon / in our broccoli / small buddha voices* (Raymond Roseliep); *this autumn light / the third eye becomes / a rose window* (Ebba Story). ~FB

Tanya McDonald, et al., eds. *No Longer Strangers.* Bellevue, WA: Vandina Press, 2014, 152 pp., perfect softbound, 6 x 9 inches. ISBN 978-1-887381-27-7. US\$15 + postage from wwwcreatespace.com.

The title for this anthology is taken from a haiku by one of Haiku Northwest’s most beloved artists and writers, and founder of the group, Francine Porad: *poolside, we chat / about reincarnation; / no longer strangers*. The collection of haiku, senryu, and haibun by 78 past and present members, living and deceased, celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Washington State region of the Haiku Society of America. It is a celebration of community with contributions by both novice and seasoned haiku poets who share a sense of place, time, and interaction with the human and natural worlds.

Haiku Northwest has a rich and lively history and it continues to thrive. In a section titled “The Inside Story” Connie Hutchinson chronicles the group’s inception and evolution and the dynamics that have fostered its growth and vitality. Many of the members have served (and are serving) the larger haiku community as well. The reader who spends time with *No Longer Strangers* will come to realize that it is not only a celebration of the poems, but also of the poets themselves. *woodpecker— / the silence when my shadow / touches the tree* (Cindy Zackowitz); *forgotten words / we brush eraser bits / off the table* (Carmen Sterba); *fresh gingerbread— / I reread my sister’s / coming-out letter* (Tanya McDonald); *numbers on his arm . . . / a grandchild asks / how he got them* (william scott galasso); *dark moon my escape hatch* (Karma Tenzing Wangchuk). ~FB

Elizabeth Crocket. *not like Fred and Ginger*. Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2014, unpag. (21 pp.), perfect softbound, 4 x 5.25 inches. No price given from www.redmoonpress.com.

The cover of this small chapbook containing 17 short haibun is an eye-catcher: a black and white photo of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in full swing. Delightful! The contents, however, are sobering, as the subtitle “recovery haibun” suggests. Elizabeth Crocket survived cancer not once but twice and somehow found the strength and inspiration to share her journey. How does one write when one is in the eye of a storm? Crocket doesn’t just write, she speaks to us as if we are there with her in the chemo unit, on the surgical table, in intensive care, in the kitchen waiting for the phone to ring with results of the latest diagnosis or prognosis. There is a sense of calm observation on the pages, too, as Michael Rehling expresses in the foreword: “But the haibun contained here have a strange delicacy that you would not expect, and poetry has been created from the crisis, and it calms rather than disturbs.” I believe a measure of calmness is achieved through the skill with which Crocket handles the capping haiku. In all but three she turns her eye toward nature, as if to find respite there in some state of grace. *after the storm / branches / cradling branches*. ~FB

James G. Brueggemann. *After the Night Rain.* Oberlin, OH: Dankworth Publishing, 2014, 102 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.5 inches. ISBN 978-0-9855676-2-0. US\$12.95 from www.Amazon.com.

The personal perspective on where haiku come from shapes the way a writer approaches the art. For this author, a physician and international volunteer, “Haiku are rooted in the concept of place. They are snapshots of personal experience, emotional instants, images of nature mirroring daily life. In them, dual observations may be connected by a single thread.” “Place” may be his home in northern Minnesota, hospital rounds in Europe and China, or time spent with a grandchild. The book cover and the sketch art that precedes each section are moments in themselves and give insight to the author’s sensibility and approach. Some of the haiku may benefit from a little word trimming and less commentary in line three, a different capitalization style, and a stronger break between the parts, but overall it is apparent that the author lives his haiku moments, in addition to recording them. The thread that holds this collection together is the way Brueggemann embraces the experience of being fully aware in the moment, of “noticing chance circumstances” and how it is the little things that make us human. *Turning away from / The sick woman’s bedside; / Wild iris in a cup; The crabapple tree— / shedding blossoms / on two yards.* ~FB

David Grayson, ed. *The Half-Finished Bridge.* Alameda, CA: Two Autumns Press, 2014, 32 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 8.5 inches. No ISBN. No price given, from Haiku Poets of Northern California, www.hpnc.org.

This collection features four members of the Haiku Poets of Northern California, whose work was selected for publication in conjunction with the annual Two Autumns series of haiku readings. All four are seasoned practitioners who bring a diversity of voices to the pages. The editor selected twelve poems from each, haiku or senryu that reflect his taste and represent a little of what each poet has to offer. Some of his favorites,

and mine, too: *condoms: / the checker asks me to slide / my card more slowly* (Rich Krivcher); *fish in my lungs — / news of his impending / deployment* (Tanya McDonald); *heartwood— / the old log's cavity / fills with snow* (Linda Papanicolaou); *my parents' room / two cigarettes / talk in the dark* (Joseph Robello). *The Half-Finished Bridge* marks the 25th publication of the Two Autumns readings (see next review). ~FB

Garry Gay, ed. *One Song*. Santa Rosa, CA: Two Autumns Press, 2014, 72 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 8.5 inches. ISBN 978-1-63443-616-8. US\$10 from www.hpnc.org.

One Song celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Two Autumns reading series, founded by Garry Gay. The collection features 100 poems by HPNC members represented in the twenty-five anthologies published since the first reading in 1990. Many of these voices have influenced the landscape of North American haiku and reading their poems felt like time spent with old friends and mentors, some of whom are no longer with us. Stunning cover and inside photographs by Paul McKown enhance the atmosphere of the collection, and a conversation between Garry Gay and David Grayson recounts the history of the HPNC and Two Autumns series. *out of the hermit thrush / out of the valley / one song* (Laurie W. Stoelting); *winter plum branches / a comet's only visit / during my lifetime* (paul m.); *Summer twilight— / a woman's song / mingles with the bath water*. (Patricia Donegan); *River baptism / for those of us not sure / the rain starts* (Garry Gay). ~FB

Jim Kacian, Bruce Ross, Ken Jones, eds. *Contemporary Haibun, Volume 15*. Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2014, 116 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 8.25 inches. ISBN 978-1-936848-25-6. US\$17 from www.redmoonpress.com.

This annual anthology presents the best in English-language haibun and haiga from around the world, as selected by the editors. Writers and artists who are striving for excellence in these haiku art forms will find inspiration in the 79 haibun and 16 haiga included in the 15th volume. ~FB