

## Briefly Reviewed

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**Lenard D. Moore & Dave Russo, eds.** *Learning to See the Truth*. Pittsboro, NC: Rosenberry Books, 2014, unpaginated, hand-bound softcover, 9 x 6 inches. No ISBN. US\$20.95 from [www.rosenberrybooks.com](http://www.rosenberrybooks.com).

This hand-bound chapbook, with stab binding, cotton cover stock, and silk flyleaves, serves up a visual and tactile treat from the North Carolina Haiku Society, commemorating their 35th Haiku Holiday Conference. Featuring some 43 haiku, 25 or so poets, and more than a dozen illustrations by Diane Katz, this small collection reveals hidden depths to the writing of haiku in regional community. *after the burial . . . / my father's smile / on so many faces* (Curtis Dunlap); *lover's moon / the tide between / our toes* (Chase Gagnon); *breezy afternoon / children chasing children / chasing leaves* (Maria Tadd). ~MRB

**Rick Tarquinio.** *Mostly Water*. Self-published. Unpaginated, perfect softbound, 4.5 x 7 inches. ISBN: 978-1-63110-158-8. US\$12 + shipping from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or <https://ricktarquinio.bandcamp.com/merch>.

In this first collection comprising nearly 120 previously unpublished poems, Tarquinio displays his thorough command of all that is fine and spare in contemporary English-language haiku. He captures moments “interesting, significant, beautiful or humorous” with surprisingly slant juxtapositions, sonorous sound values, and effective re-visions of conventional metaphoric thought. In his hands, the simplest of observations dig deep: *twilight stars / a boy with a bucket / rescuing tadpoles; mackerel sky / a dead branch dips / a dove's worth; new leaves / a breeze turns / them over*. ~MRB

**Chad Lee Robinson. *The Deep End of the Sky*.** Arlington, VA: Turtle Light Press, 2015, 40 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 8 inches. ISBN 9780974814759. US\$12.50 from [www.turtlelightpress.com](http://www.turtlelightpress.com).

Winner of the Turtle Light Press Haiku Chapbook contest for 2015 (judged by Penny Harter), Chad Lee Robinson's third chapbook is a quiet, unassuming, and nearly perfect work of art. To say that the 47 poems arranged in four parts chart the seasonal round in the rural prairie world of South Dakota is both to understate and overstate the case. Robinson's articulation of the "suchness" of spring, summer, autumn, and winter is so subtle and fresh, one feels drawn to the weather, the farmer's work, the moss on gravestones as if for the first time. And yet, these seasonal rhythms do not take precedence in a collection that is about so much more: the equally sacred rhythms of daily life, shared community, and generational devotion to place—to the land, certainly, but to the heavens as well, for Robinson's masterful articulation of the particular creates startling moments of penetrating consciousness:

night fishing  
the gentle pull  
of the nearest star

As if to say, this is what we have, this place, this infinity, the collection begins and ends by juxtaposing poems picturing prairie with poems evoking what lies just "beyond":

at  
the  
deep  
end  
of  
the  
sky  
prairie

meadowlark—  
all you'll ever need to know  
about sunrise

ponies a pasture beyond  
the last known color  
in the twilight sky

a farmer sets  
the curve of his cap  
prairie skyline

There is poetry here: the “grunts” that break axles, the shake of harness bells on a snowy night, the “scattered sun of dandelions.” But most of all, there is a poet and a voice:

what I did with my time wheatshine brightens and dims

I highly recommend this chapbook for its poetry, quiet and true. ~MRB

**Lee Gurga & Scott Metz, eds. *Haiku 2015*.** Lincoln, IL: Modern Haiku Press, 2015, unpaginated, perfect softbound, 5.25 x 4.25 inches. ISBN 0-9741894-7-2. US\$8 plus shipping from <http://modernhaiku.org/mhbooks/>.

This chapbook is second in a series of yearly supplements to the 2011 anthology *Haiku 21*, an enterprise meant to scout out the forward-looking in contemporary English-language haiku. The 100 poems by 100 poets gathered here display what the editors take for breakthroughs of one sort or another—that is to say, these ku embody some novelty of form or purpose or content in combination with effective communication and meaningful expression. A brief introduction describes this year’s touchstone idea, the “poetic spell” characterized in a 2010 article by Martin Lucas and Stuart Quine. Thus it is that Gurga and Metz set themselves to watch for originality in season phrase, word order, and “cut” position; for language that flirts with irrationality, ambiguity, and uncertainty. It only remains for the reader to taste, devour, digest the ku gathered here for poetic originality that matters. *cello solo the owls in my bones* (Tanya McDonald); *through eyes of rain leaf light* (Ann K. Schwader); *whale song / I become / an empty boat* (Michelle Tennison). ~MRB

**Terry Ann Carter. *On the Road to Naropa, My Love Affair with Jack Kerouac: A Haibun Memoir.*** Edmonton, AB: Inkling Press, 2015, 80 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 8 inches. ISBN 978-1-928147-24-4. \$15 from [www.inklingpress.ca/](http://www.inklingpress.ca/).

Author of four collections of lyric poetry, five chapbooks of haiku, and some haiku primers, Terry Ann Carter is a poet to be reckoned with. In this memoir, composed of haibun and a couple of tanka sequences, bits and pieces of her life link and shift together to create a strong chain of associations and meanings that hold strong throughout. With perceptiveness and poignancy, she writes in loose, yet compelling manner of the “random moments that we remember”: the spray of a garden hose against the ten-year-old’s bare legs; the satin dress she wears to her first piano concert; the painting she purchases on her honeymoon; her son’s “hot dog” twist of a lacrosse stick; the rediscovery in an old box of a grandmother’s fox neckpiece. One quibble: Carter notes in her preface that “[s]omeone once said that it was absurd to write a life in chronological order.” This is to beg an obvious question, for she does just that, emphasizing the passage of time by titling each haibun or series of haibun with the date. These range from 1946, with one entry recounting her birth year, to 2013, with seven entries ranging over the existential crises, moral callings, familial concerns, and artistic passions that have filled the life lived in between. True, there are flashbacks and flashforwards, and it is this fluidity of memory that suggests how time which defines and confines us may be transcended, if only momentarily. In the last haibun of the collection everything circles, recircles, and flows together:

Satori. Something cracks open. The cumberbund [a word the poet has just seen chalked on the sidewalk] is an enso circle. Great om of the universe . . . Darkness of Jack Kerouac’s alcoholism and early death. Roman candles of his life. My brother’s schizophrenia and disappearance. A husband’s failing health. Friends to hold me up. Capturing the moment in haiku. Like Jack. I know it won’t last.

snow lions  
melting  
in sun

~MRB

**Marshall Hryciuk and company. *Petals in the Dark, 15 renku.*** Carleton Place, Ontario: Catkin Press Ontario, 2015, 76 pp., perfect softbound, 5 x 7 inches. ISBN 978-1-928163-02-2. US\$20 postage paid from Marshall Hryciuk, 30 Laws St., Toronto, ON M6P 2Y7 Canada. Contact [imagorediron@gmail.com](mailto:imagorediron@gmail.com).

Marshall Hryciuk has been leading renku sessions around the world for nearly 25 years. And with Hryciuk at the helm extemporaneous and collaborative composition of linked verse becomes a happening party, far less concerned with polished craft than it is with the “doing” or “committing of poetry.” What matters, the introduction to this welcome chapbook suggests, is attentive listening and uninhibited response. As *sabaki* or leader of the session, Hryciuk steers course towards a loose, intuitive style based on an “abbreviated renku outline handout” of guidelines derived from contemporary Japanese practice. Readers will consequently find in this selection of pieces written between 2003 and 2012 any number of interesting deviations from classical form (if there really is such a thing) as well as numerous instances of linkage that are very fine, indeed. From “November Sunlight,” the opening *hokku* (head verse) and *wakiku* (second, supporting verse):

November sunlight  
some ginkgo trees  
still green (Marshall Hryciuk)

we talk about buying  
two pairs of tabi (Lenard D. Moore) ~MRB

**Peter Butler. *The Trouble with Mona Lisa, A Haibun Collection.*** Uxbridge: Alba Publishing, 2015, 60 pp., perfect softbound, 5.75 x 8.25 inches. ISBN 978-1-910185-17-9. US\$15 from [www.albapublishing.com](http://www.albapublishing.com).

For anyone who wants more from haibun than the usual round of nature writing, travelogue, memoir, or, simply, personal essay, this collection, Butler’s second, may be just the ticket.

“Having spent my working life as a journalist and editor,” he writes in the preface, “I was looking for alternative forms of expression.” Note the word, alternative. After a turn with traditional poetry, he found haibun, all the more appealing for its lack of “fixed rules.” Indeed, there is as much fiction in the pages of this book as “faction,” as much imagination running free as artistic control, as much sci-fi as historical fantasy. Butler leaves it to his readers to decide which is which. Whether the poet inhabits the mind and voice of Leonardo da Vinci cajoling Madonna Lisa to sit still, or a man and a woman crossing paths in a bus stand, or the left boot of a British soldier killed at the Battle of Ypres in 1916, or a voice the reader may only hope is the real Peter Butler, the result is a joy ride beyond the edges of haibun territory and back:

Have You Noticed?

Trees speak with different accents in the wind. Have you noticed? Bird song comes in different shapes. Water growls when rippling on uneven stones. Car engines pitch an octave higher in the drive. Words, softly spoken, taste of marshmallows. Pedestrian crossings smell of elderly shoes, kids’ shirt tails, sweaty collars. Kerbs jolt, fences splinter, cycles skid. The blind see things differently. Have you noticed?

conversing in sign  
the blind men  
lean forward

~MRB

**Ellen Compton. *Gathering Dusk*.** Ormskirk, U.K.: Snapshot Press, 2015, 80 pp., perfect softbound, 5 x 7.5 inches. ISBN 978-1-903543-33-7. £9.99 from [www.snapshotpress.com](http://www.snapshotpress.com).

This fine first individual collection by Ellen Compton gathers seventy previously published and award-winning haiku from 1996 through 2014. (She has co-edited four member anthologies for the Towpath haiku group and the Haiku Society of America.) *Gathering Dusk* is dedicated to the memory of her parents, and the poems throughout are rich in images that appeal to the senses. The reader enters into her world, past and

present, into the dusk and into the light, and all that falls between. The opening haiku guides us gently in:

gathering dusk . . .  
a ripple in the meadow  
where the fox goes

The theme of dusk is portrayed in the time of day and season as well as through imagery of human suffering and loss:

grating ginger; the day-end voices of katydids	must be thousands on Arlington's hill fireflies
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But there is light reflected, also, albeit broken at times:

kaleidoscope  
the little sound of a star  
shattering

When one is able to master the interplay of emotion, imagery, and language, as Compton does (every word matters), the writer and reader are richly rewarded. ~FB

**Marilyn Appl Walker. *Listening to the Sky*.** Madison, GA: Appl Tree Haiku, 2015, unpag. (52 pp.), hardback, 5.5 x 7 inches. ISBN 978-0-692-32933-7. US\$20 in USA, US\$25 overseas, from Marilyn Appl Walker, 1060 East Avenue, Madison, GA 30650.

The author introduces her first book of haiku as “reflections of my young life on the farm.” It is a solid collection of forty haiku rooted in her growing-up years on the family farm in Wichita County, Kansas, “in a period of time at the threshold of unimaginable change.” The poems, many of them published and award winning, come alive with homegrown imagery:

suppertime the corner hay bale props up the sun	barn party autumn leaves do-si-do
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Walker brings to the pages the agrarian lifestyle of the 1940s and 1950s, an era when family farms were passed down from generation to generation. The workday is long and life sustained with the harvest of field, home, and family relationships: stallions in the pasture, wheat rustling in the wind, father in the fields, mother in the garden and kitchen, grandpa whittling in twilight, grandma's bread dough rising. And there are moments when time slows and seems to stop altogether:

the longest day  
he stills the tractor  
at twilight

dog day afternoon  
we take turns moving  
the garden hose

This collection took me back to my growing-up years and time spent on my grandmother's farm in western Illinois. When I hear the wind moving through the pines or the trill of a red-winged blackbird, I am a child again on the rope swing at the edge of her garden. That poems so small have this much power is reason enough to practice and celebrate the art of haiku. ~FB

**Caroline Gourlay. *Across the Silence*. With paintings by Sara Philpott.** Knighton, U.K.: Five Seasons Press, 2015, 72 pp., hardback, 7 x 9.25 inches. ISBN 978-0-947960-69-8. US\$25 from [books@fiveseasonspress.com](mailto:books@fiveseasonspress.com) or [gourlaycm@gmail.com](mailto:gourlaycm@gmail.com).

The inspiration for *Across the Silence* was the shared landscape of the Welch border country, where Gourlay spent her childhood and Philpott visited in her twenties. For each, this country has been and is home, a land they deeply appreciate and love and "wanted to share with others for whom it might still be unexplored territory." Gourlay is the former editor of *Blithe Spirit*; this is her fifth published collection of haiku. Philpott, painter and print-maker, exhibits her work in London and Welch galleries. One expects the work to be extraordinary and it is! There is more here than simply the recounting of moments and scenes through words and painted imagery. The land is living, breathing, with varying seasons and moods, which are interpreted by author and artist in 49 haiku and 21 paintings. There is discovery in the layers of what is unsaid:



dawn meditation  
a trout breaks the surface  
of the hidden pool

a trap springs . . .  
the rabbit's footprints  
fill with snow

and in layers left to the imagination as each artist interprets the landscape through her own state of mind. As we read the haiku and study the paintings, we realize a subtle shift from landscape to dreamscape, from a sense of beauty and belonging to one of concern for the threat of climate change:

dream  
almost forgotten—  
first spring walk

melting ice floes  
bluer and bluer  
the scorched flower

*Across the Silence* is an inspired, and inspiring, collaboration, one that weaves intricately between the light and shadows each artist brings to the pages. ~FB

**Ellen Peckham. *Arrested Ephemera: Haiga*.** Guttenberg, NJ: Paper Crown Press, 2015, 132 pp., hardback, 8.5 x 12 inches. ISBN 978-0-985200-0-2. US\$28.50 from [peckham@atelierae.com](mailto:peckham@atelierae.com).

An exquisite collection of contemporary haiga with haiku interpreted in etching and collage, “each designed with a base paper, two plates . . . and two forms in chine collé (fine papers melded with the base paper).” The forty-five haiga prints and collages were originally set in three limited-edition volumes, revised (each image reflects rather than copies the original), and gathered in this new edition. Peckham has honed a personal aesthetic to match her artistic vision, a style that focuses on form, color, and placement of imagery to convey an “abstract visual expression of the words.” The artistry is impeccable, alive on the page, multidimensional, with fine attention to every imaginable detail. The haiku range in subject matter and syllable count and, like the collages, seem to capture and preserve that which is ephemeral: *in New York / Milky Way's just a / candy bar; backlit by store lights / her shadow cast in puddles— / rain pixilates it; the last white roses / now antique ivory against / the new-fallen snow.* ~FB