

## Briefly Reviewed

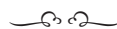
by Randy Brooks

*Moon Music* by Bill Cooper (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 114 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-45-6. \$15 from redmoonpress.com.

One of the best contemporary writers of haiku, Bill Cooper has gathered another outstanding collection of his work in *Moon Music*. In this collection we find a wide range of human experiences expressed with a playful, witty voice of self-awareness and discovery. The first section, "Nodding Ferns", comes from this haiku about connections with new life: *the foal and i / on nodding terms / early daffodils*. In another haiku we jump to a playful classroom scene: *duck and cover / the love note sealed / with gum*. The following one contrasts spring versus contemporary social angst that requires another kind of "duck and cover": *quiet bluebirds / a preschool lesson / in lockdown*. The second section is called "Slow Carousel" from this haiku: *slow carousel / the toddler hugs / a raised hoof*. In the following haiku we see another image of innocence in a broken world: *baby toes / curling and uncurling / a vigil for peace*. The third section, "Trombone Smile", celebrates summer in haiku like: *ball four / the catcher adjusts / his knee* and the more gruesome haiku: *a breathless crab / in the sandcastle moat / red tide*. The fourth section, "Entering Bogalusa," features a small community just north of New Orleans where we come upon: *once a soldier / wading upstream / fishing rod held high*. I related to this modern-day fairy tale: *3am / the foot in search / of a slipper*. Some of his characters are more intimate: *library stacks / she whispers / not here*. The final section, "A Looping Strand," comes from this haiku: *first day of cursive / a looping strand / of pretzel*. This collection contains evocative haiku that invite us to feel the moon music in our lives. I'll close with one more favorite, taking me back to a small-town movie house: *loosening a red scarf / in the single-screen theatre / real butter*.

*One Branch* by Stuart Bartow (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 120 pages, 4.25" x 6". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781947271470. \$15, redmoonpress.com.

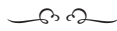
Stuart Bartow is a professor at State University of New York (SUNY) where he is chair of an environmental group, the Battenkill Conservancy. His commitments to nature and to creative imagination are evident throughout this second collection of haiku. *One Branch* starts with an invitation: *open all night / the path / into the woods* (no page numbers). Several of these haiku were written during a writer's residency at the Adirondack Center, but most come from Bartow's explorations near his home near a marsh. He explores the immediacy of nature: *waking at 4 a.m. / a blizzard / of white moths*; and he explores things that arise from imagination: *frozen marsh / who / is dreaming whom*. One of my favorite haiku blends both worlds: *heaven in a wild flower / a bumblebee / emerges*. He also celebrates creative spontaneity in this haiku: *sculpture park / the best piece / someone's snowman*. Of course, some of Bartow's haiku come from pop culture as we see in this one with a Wizard of Oz allusion: *someone whistling / in the diner's kitchen / if I only had a brain*. This is an excellent collection of haiku which asks us to find the magic that comes from living in both the here and now AND the great beyond: *from my porch / a distant star / strange to have two homes*.



*Umbrellas Rising* by William McCrea Ramsey (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 62 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-49-4. \$15 from redmoonpress.com.

At first glance, much of the haiku in *Umbrellas Rising* seem to be written from a dystopian view. However, when reading the haiku closely, I found an optimistic voice seeking peace. The last haiku in the book is the title poem: *umbrellas rising / my*

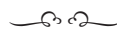
mouth angled upward / to receive. While the umbrellas are going up to protect others from the rain, the narrator of this haiku faces up to the rain, mouth open, to receive the blessing from above. I see this same thirst for justice, peace and spiritual health throughout the collection. In one haiku Ramsey writes: *my sick boy's heart scan — / I try to locate a spot / that may be his soul*. Another expresses a feeling of being trapped: *what destination / can one ever reach — / my circling goldfish*. This same thirst for more life spirit is seen in this one: *they never croak for love / nor leap in any pond / my stock transactions*. He has several anti-war haiku including: *one more holy war — / nothing I can do but eat / this divine sunrise*. On opposite pages, he contrasts an attempt to escape from nightmare news: *girls raped in Sudan.../ fishing for relief / I cast a bare hook*, with this haiku of consolation: *no wealth, no fame — / yet these minnows smooch / my ankles*. I recommend this book for all seekers of blessings within the rainstorm.



*The Golem & The Nazi: Haibun* by Anna Cates (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 118 pages, 6" x 9". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781947271487. \$15 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

*The Golem & The Nazi* is an outstanding collection that demonstrates Anna Cate's mastery of the literary art of haibun. I say this because of the high quality of individual haibun and the wide range of literary traditions and approaches evident in this collection. Her haibun are loaded with literary and cultural allusions. She imaginatively examines folklore, myth, popular culture, poetry, history, and anthropology. She also employs a multitude of narrative voices, styles and perspectives. In the first section, which is also the title of the book, Cates includes five haibun about the holocaust and genocide. The haibun "Good Friday" ends with this haiku: *flag country— / a swastika tattoo / in stubble* (18). The second section,

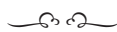
“Here There Be Dragons,” gathers haibun that explore fantasy, mythology and magic from a variety of cultures. One of my favorites from this section was the story of Delilah which begins with three paragraphs of prose: “It wasn’t the sweetness of grapes that she slipped onto his tongue, but olives soaked in brine. It wasn’t love she offered, but comfort, ease after his toils, for a man as powerful as he was always sought out—he, the man with the magic hair that had never been cut—he who had yet to break his vows”. This haibun ends with “He awoke to sky naked of clouds, ropes binding him, and his head cold, cold! And the grin on her face was without remorse”. Then we get the subsequent haiku: *a witch doctor / with a bag of bones.../ dragon’s blood* (34). The third section, “Exegesis on Genesis,” explores creation myths from various religious traditions, with an emphasis on the birth of human consciousness of good and evil. The last section, “Between the Lines,” gathers a variety of haibun. Several of these celebrate poetry as in this “Honkadori Haibun” which alludes to and imitates the famous red wheelbarrow poem by William Carlos Williams. Cates writes: *it just / depends / like water does / or doesn’t / have sound / or color / it just / depends* followed by her haiku: *the red wheelbarrow / a bit rusted now.../ autumn glaze* (66). *The Golem & The Nazi* by Anna Cates is a delightful collection of literary haibun, well worth the investment of reading, imagining and re-reading.



*Sitting Upright: Therapy Haiku & Senryu* by Robert Epstein (2019, Middle Island Press, West Union, WV) 152 pages, 5" x 8". Four-color card covers, saddle stitched. ISBN 9781734125436. \$13 from Amazon.com.

In this collection Robert Epstein draws on his experience as a psychotherapist providing an insider’s collection of haiku about psychotherapy. In the introduction he writes that “the aim of psychotherapy is, for me, the collaborative effort to

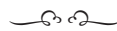
help another come to realize his or her wholeness beyond the sum total of self-doubt, insecurity, ambivalence, regret, guilt or shame” (xvii). He goes on to explain how haiku “saved my life, because it enabled me to stay present in the face of great pain and distress, but it also allowed me to ground my anguish and sorrow within the broader context of nature” (xix). Often the haiku reveal the anxiety or brokenness of a client as in this one: *therapy hour— / she begins / with hand sanitizer* (11). Some reveal ways of connecting with a client: *grumbling stomach.../ he accepts / my banana* (20) and *Kerouac—/ the new client & I / find common ground* (80). Some provide a glimpse of self-care for a therapist: *day’s end—/ a colleague whispers / to her peace plant* (41). And sometimes there is wholeness: *more chitchatting / we both come to realize / our work is done* (116).



*Field: Haiku & Senryu* by Kinshu Ori (Ronda Wicks Eller) (2019, HMS Press, London, Ontario) 36 pages, 5.5” x 8.5”. Four-color card covers, saddle stitched. ISBN 9781552530832. \$8 plus \$3 shipping from [hmspress.ca](http://hmspress.ca).

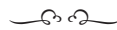
*Field* is a first collection of haiku by Ronda Wicks Eller, an accomplished poet, editor and novelist from Ontario. For her creative foray into haikai arts, she has taken up a haijin name, “kinshu ori”, which means “little pen”. While I’m not a fan of pen names in general, I am also aware that several English language haiku writers have taken on “haijin” names for various reasons. In the worst cases such oriental names are a form of cultural appropriation, a kind of literary “black face” mocking or pretending to be the stereotype of someone from another culture. If the subsequent haiku and senryu employed fake broken English, abundant oriental topics, and stereotypes of oriental perspectives, the suspicion of cultural appropriation would be confirmed. I am glad to report that in this collection, most of the topics, language and perspectives remain true to Ronda Wicks Eller’s own cultural experiences.

She takes up the “little pen” name in the spirit of playful poetic creativity. In her opening sequence about the origins of Kinshu Ori, we get this haiku: *toronto traffic: / whirring outside the window — / flowing breast milk* (3). Her collection moves through the seasons then ends with some senryu and sequences. I especially liked this haiku: *a killdeer nest / near the clothesline — / my dress has new spots* (6). Here is a surprising, but effective, comparison: *black on blue / crows mottle the horizon — / a bruised thigh* (7).



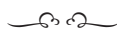
*Cosmic Symphony (A Haiku Collection)* by Pravat Kumar Padhy (2019, Cyberwit, Allahabad, India) 64 pages, 5.5” x 8.5”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9789389074321. \$15 from cyberwit.net.

Pravat Kumar Padhy has a PhD in geology and enjoys writing haiku that celebrate scientific exploration of the cosmos. In the introduction he notes the longstanding tradition of “haiku with reference to heavenly bodies and cosmic references”. With interest in exploring a “dream-home on the moon and beyond” Padhy writes about “time and space with poetic effervescence for the universal truism, here and beyond” (20). Here is one that expresses our desire to imagine the unknown: *half-moon — / the child wonders / the rest* (25). I relate to this one: *morning son — / the sunflower and I / turn up for breakfast* (29). Here is an example of looking for life beyond our current knowledge: *deep dark space / many cosmic townships / with their own light* (31). Sometimes we’re just too busy to notice: *supermoon — / the girls busy playing / basketball* (38). And then again, sometimes there is not enough time: *early moonset / so much to speak before / she left smiling* (59). This is an excellent collection that demonstrates that we are connected to the heavens, heavenly bodies and the cosmos.



*Furrows of Snow* by Glenn G. Coats (2019, Turtle Light Press, Arlington, VA) 54 pages, 5.25” x 8”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9780974814766. \$12.50 from [turtlelightpress.com](http://turtlelightpress.com).

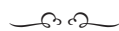
*Furrows of Snow* received the Turtle Light Press Chapbook Award for 2019. The judge, Susan Antolin, wrote that “Glenn Coats brings the reader into a contemplative space where time passes at the unhurried pace of the river that he describes.” This is a beautifully produced book, with one haiku per page. The book includes photographs from the author of himself and family members on the river. In the afterward, Coats explains that “Rivers have always been a big part of my life” and that he finds being on the river “very inspiring for me; I always loved being on the water.” You can see the reverence in the first haiku: *Sunday sermons / rivers that bend / my knees* (1). Consider the quiet scene of this evening haiku: *night sky / I release the minnows / all at once* (3). Interspersed throughout the collection are haiku about his mother, Rachel Coats. He recognizes her as another source of inspiration for his creativity and states that like rivers, she has been “the source of my being here and a source of finding peace and comfort in my life.” Here are a couple of haiku about his mother: *rippled water / I see mother’s cursive / in mine* (15) and this one: *summer currents / I speak more slowly / to my mother* (2). These are haiku written out of and expressing contemplation. I will close with the title poem: *furrows of snow / the river threads a way / to the sea* (32). I highly recommend this book!



*Windmill Sails: 3D Haiku / Вятърни мелници* by Zdravko Karakehayov (2019, Sofia, Bulgaria) 54 pages, 5.5” x 8.25”. Card covers, perfectbound. Dual-language edition. ISBN 9786199117606.

*Windmill Sails: 3D Haiku* is a dual-language edition of haiku

by Zdravko Karakehayov, a professor of computer science at New Bulgarian University. Previously he spent eight years as a professor in Denmark, and many of the haiku in this collection capture scenes from the seaside. For example, here is the opening title poem: *early morning / boats leave harbor / windmill sails behind* (9). Most pages in the book gather three related haiku (Bulgarian on the left page and English on the right) which reminded me of Raymond Roseliep's frequent publication of haiku triplets. These miniature sequences are what Karakehayov calls "3D haiku", offering three related perspectives on a theme. For example, here is the trio of haiku on page 17: (1) *ballads and bullets my father's military uniform*; (2) *the cannon in the park / where / we sometimes meet*; and (3) *printing letters — the silver bullet* (17). Through proximity on the page, the reader is invited to make connections between three haiku, blending atmosphere and attitude between the parts. Here is one more example of a trio related to clocks and time: (1) *next to the stopped clock / flowers / and petals*; (2) *wound spring the first second*; and (3) *watching / the changing of the guard / my grandson and I* (47). I like it when poems speak to poems, so I find this collection of 3D haiku to be an enjoyable reading experience.

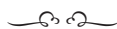


*Ostrich Stride* by Kurt Westley (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 64 pages, 6" x 4.25". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781947271470. \$15 from redmoonpress.com.

*Ostrich Stride* is Kurt Westley's second collection of haiku. It is published on a horizontal page in order to accommodate some of the longest one-line haiku my eyes have ever chased across the page. Many of these haiku are also loaded with literary devices and surprising metaphors. For example, check out the alliteration in this one: *frantically fleeing foggy zoo enclosure ...big-city sparrow!* In the introduction Westley notes that he



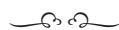
admires and emulates Jack Kerouac's spontaneity. I admit that some of these poems breathe easily in their Whitmanesque expansiveness and convey a sense of spontaneous expression. Here is the title poem: *riding atop agitated zoo ostrich's huge strides...insect-snatching blackbird!* As I spent more time with this collection, I enjoyed the adventure and playful imagination that lies just beneath the surface of his rush of words. I found that his haiku convey contemporary themes including rust and ruin, fake nature, city landscapes and the escape of baseball. Here is a rustbelt haiku: *rust-blistered coal cars rumbling right through hamlet's darker secret...*and another one: *fog-filled junkyard dog snoring half-under muscle car's smashed ribs...*Yes, both of these haiku end with ellipsis. Most of Westley's haiku end with ellipsis as if there is no end to these run-on images. Perhaps that's the point. His observations and feelings run on and on and each haiku snatches a glimpse of these along the way like the blackbird snatching insects riding on the back of an ostrich in full stride.



*I Reckon: Haiku & Haibun* by Francis Wesley Alexander (2019, Bottom Dog Press, Huron, OH) 108 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Paul Lawrence Dunbar Series. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781947504189. \$16 from smithdocs.net.

Although this is Wes Alexander's first collection, the acknowledgements page indicates that his haiku and haibun have been published in leading journals from 1990 to the present. This collection is organized as a memoir about growing up in Sandusky, Ohio. As the author states, "This book is meant to be a travel journal as I continue down life's path. In *I Reckon*, I give the sights, sounds, tastes, and other sensations of my times on the Southside of Sandusky, at Cedar Point Amusement park; throughout Ohio, Michigan, and Detroit" (7). The first section features haibun and haiku from his childhood. I especially enjoyed a haibun about his

Uncle Billy who survived a submarine wreck. The closing haiku reads: *Bath time — / dipping the toy submarine / under the suds* (14). The second section features haibun and haiku from Alexander's days as a young man working at Cedar Point Amusement Park. The third section features memoirs from college and work in Ann Arbor and Detroit, Michigan. Here is one of his Detroit haiku: *deep cold / vacant factory buildings / and a bus stop* (55) and a haunting haiku: *fog / long after our goodbyes / his ghost story lingers* (64). The last section covers coming back home to Sandusky to be with family. He writes: *paralyzed on her right side, / to the music Grandma moves / her left toe* (75). Several haibun feature survivors including veterans as in this last example: *veteran bugler / attacks the horn / still at war within* (92). This is an outstanding collection of insightful haibun and compassionate haiku.



*The Slant of April Snow* by Laurie D. Morrissey (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 78 pages, 4.25" x 6". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781947271456. \$15 from redmoonpress.com.

In this collection of haiku, Laurie D. Morrissey has a keen eye for what's happening, out there, in nature, this time of year. She writes seasonal haiku as in the title poem: *red-tipped maples / the slant / of april snow* (no page numbers). However, she also has a keen third eye for what's happening inside, within us, as we respond to nature: *spring wind — / she stands / on the pedals*. For summer, we get a pure nature haiku: *alpine bog / cotton flowers / do the wave*. Then we encounter a very human experience: *all-day rain / a tentful / of ghost stories*. For autumn, I especially enjoy: *potato harvest / blackbirds / pepper the field*. For winter, she shares a survival haiku: *snow swirl / all the bottom branches / nibbled*. Morrissey writes haiku that take us out into nature and bring us back into our vibrant natural selves. This is a quality collection.