

going to school the day of the Ulvalde shooting. In “Naughty” the haibun is narrated by a woman entertaining a peeping tom. It starts with: “My husband no longer notices me or my clothes anymore.” In “Wheezer” the narrator asserts, “I am the real Wheezer from *The Little Rascals*. I think I am. I know I am. I hope I am.” The haibun, “Progress,” is about changes related to women in the workplace written from a granddaughter’s perspective. “During WW2, my grandmother was a volunteer dancer at the U.S.O. Club.” This haibun ends with “As the boss of a construction crew, I never experience abuse. They call me “BITCH” only when I am absent.” The haibun closes with this haiku: *grandma’s truck / her lipstick / under a chainsaw*. Perhaps one of his last haibun in the collection, “Saved,” best exemplifies how our identities shift: “I was born a Catholic. At age three, my mother had me re-baptized in a Lutheran church. Recently, a minister told me that I was a bona fide Christian, while a Trappist friend explained that since they got to me first, I was officially a Catholic. Meanwhile, I’m attracted to Buddhism and have joined the Unitarian men’s group where every member claims to be an atheist.” Budan’s collection of haibun is a tromp through contemporary North American life. Through the multiplicity of personalities and their life stories, we get a sense of how our identities carry cultural burdens but also shift and change with social circumstances. Why shouldn’t we write haiku and haibun with a familiar shifting of real fictional identities? ■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY LISA GERLITS

Tastes of Sunlight: Haiku for the Seasons by Mary McCormack (Independently-published: 2022). 70 pages, 5.25” x 8”. Glossy color covers, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-0-9981720-3-3. \$9.99 from online booksellers.

Reading Mary McCormack’s debut haiku collection is like taking a walk with the poet while she points out delicate observations along the way. Arranged by seasons, the book begins in winter. The immersion is so complete that by the time I neared the end of the first section, I found myself longing for spring. As the

title suggests, McCormack often employs synesthesia to cast an ordinary moment in new light: *citrus scent / lingering in the sky / late winter sun*. She also makes use of the full range of senses, pausing to share the sensation of cotton on bare skin, a sip of blackberry wine, a lavender sachet, or one of my favorites: *tucked away / beneath the ivy / a pocket of silence*. Occasionally, McCormack prompts the reader to fill in large portions of the story by using only a few words to evoke a scene: *bluebells / cowbells / wind*. Other times she veers off the path completely and invites us into a storybook fantasy: *starlight / woven into the tapestry / a white stag*. Throughout the collection, McCormack's mindset of wonder and delight comes through, even in moments of uncertainty, as in this monoku: *the pear tree's white petals in the dark a path emerges*. ◻■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY RANDY BROOKS

Serendipity by Robert Witmer (2023, Ciberwit, Allahabad, India) 100 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Four-color card covers, perfect bound. ISBN 978-9395224-52-9. Available for \$15 from cyberwit.net.

Robert Witmer starts with a definition of serendipity: "Making happy and unexpected discoveries" and further explains that "I am happy that I have put into words something of myself and my experiences, and of the world in which I wandered and wondered. The sense of wonder keeps our eyes open. It allows us to see what is unfamiliar in the familiar." *Serendipity* collects a large number of Witmer's haiku, senryu and haibun. The book is organized into groups of poems on specific themes or subjects interspersed between autobiographical haibun. I will highlight a few haiku or senryu from several sections. For example, in "Mother Nature" are haiku such as *wind / in a waterfall / the sun's smithereens* and *hunger moon / a crow's beak / in the cat's bowl*. In the section "Song of Myself" are personal haiku: *retirement / new wrinkles / in my suntan*. My favorite section, "The Soul of Wit," features senryu with a playful voice of understated irony. Here are two favorites: *taxing year / I cover my losses / with a comb over* and *old diary / the things I forgot*

/ to do. Witmer's section on "Love is Blind" is almost a sequential novella of haiku moving through young love, romance, marriage, disenchantment, and divorce. Here are a couple of haiku along the way: *bare feet / squelching through mud / our first kiss* and *back home / how quickly she removes / her smile*. After several additional sections, he concludes with a section, "Enter time . . . an imaginary garage," featuring surrealist haiku. As he explains, "Surrealism aims to release the creative powers of the unconscious mind. Central to the surrealist method is the use of strange, even bizarre, imagery to reveal more mysterious aspects of living." Here are two of my favorites from his surreal haiku: *a ghost / in the machine / writing a wild horse* and *a ninja / wearing a cowbell / climate change*. Witmer's collection is well worth reading, imagining, and re-reading. ◻■

Human: An Anthology of Bulgarian Haiku edited by Dimitar Anakiev (2023, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 96 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1958408-155. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

Human is an excellent anthology featuring one haiku each by 75 Bulgarian authors. Editor Dimitar Anakiev selected poems that highlight "the three most typical characteristics of Bulgarian authors, namely animism, mythology and traditionalism, and immediately after that, imagination and picturesqueness of expression." While English readers may miss some of the subtle cultural associations, these English translations provide a clear glimpse into the hearts, souls and creative spirit of Bulgarian haiku writers. Here are four examples: *Butterfly / fixed with a pin — / a new Calvary* by Dimitar Stefanov. *Quiet Revolution — / fields of sunflowers along the road / eyes fixed on the ground* by Boryana Bogdanova. *the hope / with a paper boat / to swim across the ocean* by Petar Plamenov. And one more: *an old rug / the language / of several generations* by Zornitza Harizanova. ◻■

Longevity: Poems in the Key of Helen by Richard Grahn, (2023, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 80 pages, 6" x 9". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1958408-04-9. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

Longevity is a collection of tanka prose and haibun by Richard Grahn. The haibun are loosely gathered into three sections: "Learning to Swim" features memories of growing up; "Helen" features recollections of his grandmother, Helen, who died in 1999; and the last section "Up from Here" chronicles struggles with mental health issues. Some of the best haibun are the last in the collection. "Inside the Gold Mine" focuses on memories of grandma's basement—complete with her canning pantry and grandpa's rock collection. This haibun ends with an excellent haiku: *old songs / playing on the radio . . . / a pear blossom opens*. Another haibun near the end of the collection is "Light as Air" in which the narrator imagines the life of a butterfly: "... we are both travelers, navigating our way through the flowerbed of life." □■

Contemporary Haibun 18 edited by Rich Youmans, (2023, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 156 pages, 5.25" x 8.25". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1958408-17-9. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

Contemporary Haibun 18 continues the tradition of collecting some of the best haibun and haiga published in journals, magazines and books from 2022. This edition includes 97 haibun and 36 full-color haiga. Haibun has grown in popularity over the last two decades with several writers declaring it to be the primary focus of their literary creative works. As the editor notes in the foreword, several haibun writers are exploring new approaches such as "adopting personas" or "telling what can only be described as tall tales." Of course, several still feature "traditional autobiographical content" but "they arrive in all shapes and styles — from 'standard' formats (a haiku or tanka dangling from one or more paragraphs of prose), to pieces where the prose is replaced by

verse, to the increasingly common ‘interwoven’ or ‘braided’ style (in which the individual lines of the poem are interspersed among the prose).” There are so many outstanding haibun and haiga in this collection. One favorite is a tanka-prose by Bryan Rickert:

The Little Things

Packing up the old man’s books into boxes, a little piece of paper slides out from between a few pages. A note written with a much younger hand and in a language none of us learned to read, hidden away but obviously important enough for him to keep. I put it on the small stack of other papers we’ve found pressed in these books.

papa’s
old accordion
the tunes
he sang to mama
need no translation

The editorial team (Rich Youmans, Tich Davis, Terri L. French, Peter Newton, Kala Ramesh, Bryan Rickert, Harriot West), and haiga editor, Ron Moss, are to be commended for gathering another outstanding annual collection. ◻■

Pressing Matters: Haiku, Senryu and Haibun Poems by Caroline Giles Banks, (2023, Wellington-Giles Press, Minneapolis, MN) 84 pages, 6.15” x 9.25”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9645254-9-8. \$12 from Amazon.com and other booksellers.

Pressing Matters is one of the best collections I have read this year. It is Caroline Giles Bank’s seventh collection gathering work from 2020 to 2022. As in previous collections, she draws on a variety of sources for inspiration including her interest in ekphrastic poetry, environmental change, and issues of social justice. Part 1

considers “the increasing degradation of the natural environment ... our dependence on nuclear energy and concentrated fossil fuels. ... [and] the whipsaw of droughts and deluges.” Here are two examples: *car trip / tank filled on credit / fossil remains* and *the Rio Grande / trickles down / to a misnomer*. From a section on extreme drought in the West, she writes *dry spell / no ripples / in the frog pond*. Part 2 shows her concern for “urgent social issues of economic disparity and insecurity, intolerance and racism, conflict and war.” For example: *protest sign / wanting to overcome / semantics* and *SCOTUS / weight watchers / recalibrate the scales*. On the war in Ukraine, she ends a haibun with *rockets can't read / their names / 109 empty strollers*. Part 3 concludes with “poems about the COVID-19 pandemic, aging, illness, and death.” Haiku in this section move from the personal: *embers smolder / still using my ex's / last name* to the cosmic: *fasting / there is no fat / in heaven*. I enjoyed the humor in this pandemic senryu: *following orders / to stay-at-home / kneading dough*. Here are two senryu about getting older: *50th reunion / the photographer asks us / to lift our chins* and *wedding march steps / getting to know / my new knee*. The book closes with a haiku that harkens back to one of the author's earlier books, *The Clay Jar*. Banks writes: *the clay jar / some day / holding me*. From the first to the last page, the haiku, senryu, and haibun in this collection display the author's serious commitments and playful literary creativity and humor in the face of our shared difficult times. ◻■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

the new green by GRIX (Cuttlefish Books, Cleveland, OH: 2021). 62 pages, 4" x 6". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-7350257-3-5. \$5. Order from the author at: robinsmithhaiku@gmail.com

In this collection of 53 haiku, GRIX bravely invites us into their world. This collection features a variety of haiku forms, including monoku, three-line haiku, two-line haiku, and concrete haiku. The poems offer a mix of raw and surreal moments that bend the edge of reality and dreams. There are also excellent Nature-based haiku

in this collection. Two examples include (1) *stormy beach / a herd of elk / breaks the tide*, and (2) *floating along the depth of a mountain*. Other haiku contain powerful human-nature juxtapositions that give readers a glimpse into the author's life. Two favorites include (1) *orange blossom / not as soft / as I appear*, and (2) *damsel / I, too, am mistaken / for what I am not*. The surreal haiku also provides a portal into the author's interior landscape, including these two haiku: (1) *deciduous dreams my tree*, and (2) *washi paper I fold my ailment into a swan*. This is a revealing book that inspires readers to write with honesty and depth vs. settle for surface-level values and appearances, as the author writes in this monoku: *black swans calling everything into question*. A powerful and inspiring collection.

□■

Saffron Skies by William Scott Galasso (Galwin Press, Laguna Woods, CA: 2022). 127 pages (includes related material and photos), 6" x 9". Paperback. Matte four-color covers. ISBN: 978-1-7327527-3-3. \$16.95. Order from online booksellers or from the author at: scottgalasso@yahoo.com

Saffron Skies is William Scott Galasso's seventeenth book of poetry and his twelfth book that features Japanese poetry forms. This collection includes a mix of haiku, senryu, tanka, and haibun across a wide range of subjects involving modern life, Nature, romance, family, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other tragedies involving immigration and the war in Ukraine. The variety of Galasso's work paints an ever-changing picture of his life and observations. Two favorite Nature-based haiku in this book are (1) *waterwheel / gathering the stream / giving it back*, and (2) *on its body / colors of prairie and sky... / Blue sage bee*. Galasso's sense of humor in his senryu come alive in contrast to the pandemic and tragic poems. Two senryu that stood out to me are (1) *spring rescue / his dog's need gets / the old man out*, and (2) *a game of bocce / the wine drinkers / full of advice*. Some poems are haunting, such as this haiku: *attic trunk / all the secrets kept / in wartime letters*, and this tanka: *acid rain / the tears that roll / from eyes to chin / when prayers / cannot stop bullets*. However, Galasso also depicts his spiritual disposition in this poem: *words on plaques / the spirit of friends / lives on*. I feel

some of Galasso's strongest poems in this collection involve a juxtaposition between human emotions and Nature. While I feel some poems didn't have as much resonance, these too are part of the tapestry of Galasso's life journey and observations. If you are new to Japanese poetry forms in English or a well-seasoned poet, with a blend of darkness and light, in *Saffron Skies*, there is something for everyone. ◻■

Soundings by Keith Polette (Alba Publishing, United Kingdom: 2023). 58 pages, 5.8" x 8.25". Paperback. ISBN 978-1-9127735-4-1. \$15 from www.albapublishing.com. To order, email: info@albapublishing.com

In *Soundings*, Keith Polette offers 43 haibun with deep psychological, ecological, and social undertones that combine descriptive passages with surrealism. As a result, I found this book to be engaging and creative. As one example, in the haibun titled "from Red Riding Hood's Blog," the prose includes passages such as: *I traversed the woods like a lit match on a path that was dangerous, dark, and deep.* The haibun ends with this haiku: *ice cave— / the dragon's heart stirring / in the dark.* Another creative example is the haibun "When Your Mind Is about to Change." One passage reads: *Sunday newspapers will open their wings, shake themselves free from ink, and fly south; people below will comment how they look like thin tombstones or rectangular manta rays.* These kinds of sentences demonstrate Polette's skill at combining concrete imagery with imaginative power. The cover of *Soundings* is a photograph of a glacier that shows both the surface and the depths beneath. In turn, there is a mix of the conscious and subconscious mind in Polette's haibun. This book also includes a short reflective essay on the art of writing haibun. A truly interesting and inspiring collection. ◻■

ALL MY KIND by John Martone (Tufo, Unknown City, State: 2022). 84 pages, 6" x 4". Paperback. No ISBN or price. The author can be contacted at: jpmx@protonmail.com

In this collection of 80 poems, John Martone's original voice and style becomes immediately recognizable. I found most of the haiku in this book have a borderline surreal mood and atmo-

sphere that sometimes stretches our sense of time. Here are three examples: (1) *planting more ferns / try to get hold of / the landscape before*, (2) *her lifelong / vow of silence / buried here*, and (3) *I lift one stone / and place it / 800 years later*. Another interesting example is: *more sunspots — / our languages collide / at the speed of light*. A handful of Martone's poems juxtapose an image with a thought. As an example: *cold waves slap / the rowboat's hull — / I should know better*. I found these types of poems to be interesting, yet they seem to be more personal. Other poems are observations that read as haiku without a juxtaposition, such as: *tomatoes in a paper bag / in the garage / have ripened*. I appreciate the perspective of seeing life through the eyes (and ears) of butterflies in this haiku: *harvester butterflies — / how big and loud / the human machines*. Death and rebirth also find their way into some of Martone's poems, while climate change pierces through the page in this haiku: *prairies howl — / there's nothing where / our glacier was*. I appreciate Martone's authentic voice and tone throughout this book. I feel his poems have an inescapably relaxed, and almost nonchalant atmosphere that renders unexpected beauty and, at times, reverence, concern, and subtle humor. The book itself has an elegant and simple design. In short, I found the poems in this book to be experimental, authentic, and a breath of fresh air. I look forward to reading more of Martone's work in the future. □■

amber i pause: triveni volunteer dhanyavaad anthology edited by Kala Ramesh, Lakshmi Iyer, and Teji Sethi. (Hawakal Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi & Calcutta, India: 2023). 109 pages, 5" x 8". Paperback. ISBN: 978-93-91431-87-7. \$14.99 from amazon.com

This anthology of haiku and tanka titled *amber i pause* has roots in Triveni Haikai India: an international online hub for haikai. This book features 76 poets from seven countries: Australia, England, India, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the USA, and the Philippines. In the spirit of collaboration, the preface states: "In the Indian tradition, Triveni means the confluence of three major rivers: Ganga, Yamuna, and Sarasvati. Here, it signifies India, Japan, and the rest of the world coming together to revel in haikai and tanka literature." There are two poems per poet in this relatively concise

anthology. Some of my favorite haiku are: (1) *dharma retreat / pondering the i / in all of t h i s* (Suraja Roychowdhury, USA), (2) *endless pines i become a proverb* (Richa Sharma, India), (3) *tai chi park / the synchronized drift / of cherry petals* (Ravi Kiran, India), (4) *plucked jasmine / a funeral / on my hands* (Kala Ramesh, India), and (5) *nightfall the key turns into a blackbird* (Alan Summers, UK). Some of my favorite tanka are: (1) *by a sun-lit grille / a dove in her nest / unafraid / she knows / i am a mother too* (Richa Sharma, India), (2) *at sunrise / the night jasmine petals / scattered face down / I pray that I may die / as peacefully* (Priti Aisola, India), (3) *deep in autumn / I am haunted by horses / the color of moonlight / running like quicksilver / in the wake of dreams* (Jenny Ward Angyal, USA), and (4) *stepping / into the sunlit mist / in my dream / I follow the trail / of a blackbird's song* (Jayashree Maniyil, Australia). The afterword includes this quote that summarizes the spirit of this anthology: "Swami Vivekananda advised us to be thankful not for what we are given, but for what we can give. *amber i pause* is an extension of this willingness." □■

Soul to Soul: Aphorisms for Life by David H. Rosen (Resource Publications, Eugene, OR: 2021). 70 pages, 5" x 8". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-7252-9573-5. \$9 from online booksellers

In this collection, David H. Rosen, M.D. has focused on 51 aphorisms, followed by a paragraph of his thoughts and reflections. At the end of 11 aphorisms, Rosen includes one or more haiku. There are a total of 35 haiku in this book. Some of my favorite aphorisms that he includes are: (1) *The feminine matters*, (2) *Dreams lead to discoveries*, (3) *Nature is sacred*, and (4) *Each person has a link to the divine*. There are three haiku in particular that I enjoyed: (1) *Wind in the pines / angels whispering*, (2) *Near autumns end / walking with my shadow / in the forest*, and (3) *Finally / looking at a peony / speechless*. I especially appreciated Rosen's words in *The feminine matters* when he writes: "The tie between the feminine and these important aspects of human life is very ancient, and is found in the many traditions which refer to the earth as our mother." I also appreciated Rosen's words in *Dreams lead to*

discoveries when he writes: “...most Indigenous peoples have known the importance of dreams...” and “[Jung] also met with the Indigenous Pueblo leader Chief Mountain Lake and highlighted the value of Native knowledge about dreams.” Most of the text reads like a self-help book and is not focused as much on haiku. However, Rosen’s reflections are concise, which makes this book a light yet insightful read. ◻■

REVIEWED BY PIPPA PHILLIPS

disclosure(s) by John Martone (*Tufo, Unknown City, State: 2022*). 167 pages, 6" x 4". Paperback. No ISBN or price. The author can be contacted at: jpmx@protonmail.com

John Martone’s *(disclosure)s* is a spare, white volume, pocket-sized but thick—each poem is apportioned a page. It is the sort of book you want to carry around so that you can consult it when the mood strikes you. The poems therein exist in a liminal space, somewhere between micropoetry and haiku. Martone’s work vacillates between poles—suburban shasei (two tin/cans and//string or/just space) and abstract minimalism (things as/bottom/of things). His strongest work is expressionistic and asynchronous, as in the following tone poem: *crepuscolare//olive-drab/camion//our Mineola/doppoguerra*. The staccato pace and uneasy linguistic juxtapositions create a sense of being at the edge of war. There is a strong element of classicism running throughout the volume, and a contrasting streak of *karumi*, which sometimes collide, as in: any time now Herodotus. Despite the minimalism, a majority poems in the volume have a sense of depth or complexity. Others are slight, leaning a bit overmuch on what they reference. Some are charming, verging on cute: summer is bicycles. Overall, *disclosure(s)* is a satisfying read, leaving you with a sense of the kind of nostalgia you get in a home library.

Editor’s Note: Martone’s title is spelled both ways in this collection as: *(disclosure)s* and *disclosure(s)*

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY TOM SACRAMONA

even tiny things by Anthony Lusardi (buddha baby press, Windsor, CT: 2022). 12 pages, 3" x 4". Green card covers; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. \$4 from the author at lusardi133@gmail.com

Anthony Lusardi's third mini chapbook *Even Tiny Things* is green to signal spring. The chosen ten poems all reference that season. These two were my favorites: (1) *snowdrops . . . / even tiny things / have long shadows*; (2) *white wisteria / enough shade for two / watching butterflies*. Instead of page numbers, tiny dots in the page corner change by each two-page spread. Most dots have a tinier dot inside, but for a few poems this is not the case. Instead, there are white circles without an inner dot. Why? Paired with Lusardi's poetry, I think they might reinforce the missed targets the poem discusses: *indian summer / a dozen haiku rejections / one acceptance*. Across from that poem, an empty circle works to exemplify the nothingness: *over the hedgerow / the sound of air strikes / and nothing else*. ◻■

weathered clapboard by Elliot Nicely (buddha baby press, Windsor, CT: 2023). 12 pages, 3" x 4". Limited Edition of 150 in three different colors numbered & signed by the poet; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. \$3 from the author. Send orders and inquiries to elliotnicely@yahoo.com

weathered clapboard by Ohioan Elliot Nicely consists of nine haiku that are set among barns and country prairies. These are haiku of direct experience by a poet who is carefully attuned to the changing heavens and moved by its skies and nuances of light and darkness. Nicely's haiku ask the reader to recognize the beauty that is all around us, as well as suggest that we should yield to the natural world which points the way to see "the shades of purple / in the killdeer's call" while instilling in us the power to conquer any despair when life's "darkness edges in". Other favorites: (1) *low-hanging sun the pregnant heifer's gait*; (2) *wisps of fog / gathering morning light / a steelhead rises*. ◻■