

Briefly Reviewed

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Anita Krumins. *Susurrus*. Toronto, Ontario: Inšpress, 2013, 56 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.5. ISBN 978-0-9881179-1-4. US\$10 from <http://inspress-net.webs.com>.

In this first solo book we hear the rustling of an unusual voice, one that regrets the waning vitality of the female body, even as it rejects—with a great deal of wit and irony—the braggadocio of those who chose intellectual debate or social squabbling over sensual appetites. Unexpected leaps juxtapose kisses on the mouth with the pure body of oysters and other shellfish; female fat with moons and dunes; and forays into nature, as in pursuit of haiku, with a multitude of small deaths. Indeed, Krumins, past associate editor of *Frogpond*, teaches us to look with a certain amount of distrust on the pillaging of experience for the sake of our poems, which, in conjunction with youth and life, “dart away” like the goldfish in a pond. *bitten by / the haiku bug / she drowns / a dragonfly; the two men debate / reputations / she cracks crawfish shells; in a civilized mood / she plays Bach on the bones / of dead elephants.* ~MRB

Tom Smith. *Morningstar*. Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2013, unpag., perfect softbound, 4.25 x 6.25. ISBN 978-1-936848-25-6. US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

This second collection of haiku does not surprise so much as it surrenders to the genre’s discipline of, as an afterword puts it, “observation, precision, and restraint.” Smith’s poems are organized by season and focused on the outdoors, where trees, birds, flowers, toads, and the occasional child provide material for a quiet, thoughtful vision of life fully mixed with the fragrance of “mint in the grass.” If some haiku go no further than things in and of themselves, the poet demonstrates in

many more a fine control of the sounds and meanings of words and the insight-laden reversals of narrative expectations that they may, under the right compression, yield. *green mountains / rise a little earlier / each morning; a white spider / in the white lily cup / somebody practicing scales.* ~MRB

Tom Clausen. *Laughing to Myself.* Rochester, NY: Free Food Press, 2013, unpag., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 8.25. No ISBN. US\$12.50 (includes shipping) from www.freefoodpress.com.

In a short editor's note at the head of this collection spanning 24 years in a life of haiku, Michael Ketchek describes the poetry of Tom Clausen as "insightful, honest and often humorous." That it is. The book begins with, indeed borrows its title from, *before sleep / laughing to myself / at my self.* Set within such disarming self-deprecation, the other-directed sympathies and outward attentions that follow appear as modest as they are deeply thought and aptly wrought. There is a finely expressed sense of our brief, borrowed existence: *our turn / to stand here— / falls overlook.* Our purpose, too, is given shape in the simplest, irreducible terms: *in the wind / the little girl helping / milkweed seeds.* So are many of our daily frustrations: *staff meeting / I identify / with the last donut.* This poet is alive to change, renewal, hope, and love: *the spread of stars / the wind moves the snow / from where it fell; morning light / reaches the old bottles / in the barn; a couple / holding hands / testing the ice.* The occasions for these meditations are as humble as their substance—eating lunch, reading a book, soaking up sun. Reading this book, this reader found herself responding to ku after ku, delighting in the fresh clean breeze of Clausen's poetic sensibility: *between poems / the wind / in the microphone.* ~MRB

Jim Westenhaver. *Prognoses.* Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2013, 64 pp., perfect softbound, 4.25 x 6.5. ISBN: 978-1-936848-26-3. US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

In this first collection of haibun, the accumulations of advancing age, illness, doctor visits, and downright "curmudgeonism" quickly approach an algebraic limit as to what may be

easily absorbed. By using the second person throughout, the poet distances himself from his own intuitions, adding to the overall detachment of observer from observed. Printed in difficult-to-read font, a minimalist prose sets the tone for terse monoku that, at their best, deliver an abrasive punch—and reward persistence:

Speed Limit

A family of ducks gathering in the middle of the street. A brightly colored bird is on its back.

a flower by the pond you cry

~MRB

William Hart. *Cloud Eats Mountain.* Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2013, unpag., perfect softbound, 4.25 x 6.25. ISBN 978-1-936848-24-9. US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

Hart's special talent in this encore collection of haiku and senryu is a fine empathy for the mute and inanimate: snails, buttons, rose petals, kites, clouds, shadows, and more. With a sure hand, he frequently skirts the formal juxtaposition of images, composing poems that may or may not depend on that device, yet display a deft and delicate shift in perception that delivers insight. There are gems here. *when clocks fall back / the shadows in our house / hurry all day; while we dreamed / a lily bloomed / in the gift bouquet; sparrows pour / through a blue hole / into our gray world.* ~MRB

Caroline Giles Banks. *The Clay Jar.* Minneapolis, MN: Wellington-Giles Press, 2013, 84 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.5. ISBN 978-0-9645254-4-3. US\$12; \$4 shipping. Contact: wellingtongilespress@gmail.com.

If this book, a third collection of haiku and senryu plus a trio of nested haibun, comes larded with the genuine article—and it does—Banks especially excels in the second of these three forms. Alive to the patterns of life, especially those broken symmetries of human community, she layers her senryu with

telling ironies and teasing wordplay. Hers is an anthropologist's eye, turned to the magical thinking and symbolic gestures that often guide behavior despite reason or experience. She takes for subject the personal, the political, the religious, the secular. With regard to the global interactions of cultures, she achieves a poignancy that transcends mere reportage and unearned sentiment. *his turn to cook / again he can't find / the thyme; tossing Buddha one more coin / the incense stick / finally lights; CNN News / the Somali boy wears / my son's old tee.* ~MRB

Marsh Muirhead. *Her Cold Martini.* Bemidji, MN: The Island Journal Press, 2013, 46 pp., perfect softbound, 5 x 8. ISBN 978-0-9814995-4-3. US\$9. Contact: mgmuirhead@midco.net.

In this nicely turned-out first collection, the reader will find a refreshing mix of poems. Alongside haiku of the natural world there are those (many of which might more properly be called senryu) focused on the human world, with its daily chores, abiding relationships, and occasional encounters zinging with adventure and sex. Unafraid to speak what is often unspoken, Muirhead delivers fresh perceptions and fresh images. Read *Her Cold Martini* for a decidedly masculine take on groceries, hot tubs, and carnivals and for a keenly expressed sensitivity to the human condition. *howl of the wolf / all the space / between the stars; anniversary dance / just us / across the tongue and groove; produce aisle / not buying an eggplant / all my life.* ~MRB

Brett Brady. *A Translucent Moon.* Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line Press, 2013, 30 pp., stapled, 5.25 x 8.25. ISBN 978-1-62229-264-6. US\$12 from www.finishinglinepress.com.

Brady bookends what looks to be a first collection of “haiku, senryu and other frogchirps” with a preface that sets forth his take on form and an afterword of quotes from a number of luminaries. Between the two, he takes care to repeat his own dictum: “sketch, suggest and deliver.” In a somewhat uneven selection the very best of his poems do just that. Playing upon

the meaning of words in multiple ways, they offer the reader new notions to ponder within a full gamut of haiku forms, from 5-7-5 to one word per line, from juxtaposed images to single phrases over three lines. *dark / deepening / silence; sundown— / a translucent moon / filling in; ghetto moon— / long long cello notes / from somewhere soft.* ~MRB

Steven Carter. *Paper Doors.* Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2013, 210 pp., perfect softbound, 4.25 x 6.5. ISBN 978-1-936848-29-4. US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

Is there a difference between the personal essay/memoir and haibun? Readers who think not will relish Carter's new collection. Many pieces seem lifted from the pages of a journal, characterized by the diary's associational flow of thought and privately meaningful non sequitur. From pithy, off-hand exposition to the hard-wrung revelations of obsessive memory, the prose takes front and center for its lovely metaphorical language, wide-ranging literary and scientific reference, and apt quotation and paraphrase. Too often, the haiku read as afterthoughts. In balance, however, prose and poetry strike musical chords. In "Fog on the lake," Carter ruminates on the physics of representation as the philosophy of shadows, realizing at last that love, too, is a nonembraceable "substitute for something impersonal" . . . *leap / of an eagle / the branch still rocking.* ~MRB

George Swede. *embryo: eye poems.* Toronto, Ontario: Inšpress, 2013, 60 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.5. ISBN 978-0-9881179-2-1. US\$20. Contact A. Zariņš at azarins3@gmail.com.

What a delight to enter and read George Swede's most recent collection of visual poems, which yes, indeed, do stray from strict haiku form. Most of the 52 poems presented in chronological order have appeared more than once in print and online publications, and for this gathering, the author has added 12 new poems to the mix. Swede, previous editor of *Frogpond* and a poet skilled in all degrees of haiku form, has a mind (and pen) that plays with word and image, dances them around

and across the page, knows when to “quickstep” and when to “hold,” when to “dip” and when to “lift” the reader with his own style of wit, irony, and subtle turns of wisdom. A variety of poems experiment with a few words or parts of words:

M ss ng

DNA

Thiiief!

Do Not Attempt
to fly

(a)void

Others seem to turn words or phrases inside out with images or whole poems that climb the page, or span the vertical and horizontal spaces. The poet deftly keeps the reader’s eye and mind moving, and the intellect too, as in some poems that morph from one word or phrase—and meaning—into another:

words
worsd
wosrd
wsord
sword

his tale
her etal
ish alet
rhe leta
shi leta
erh alet
his etal
her tale

Swede sustains a finely tuned energy throughout the pages of a collection that engages, informs, and entertains the reader above and below the surface of his poetry. ~FB

Richard Gilbert. *The Disjunctive Dragonfly: A New Approach to English-Language Haiku.* Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2008, revised and updated 2013, 132 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 7.75. ISBN 978-1-936848-30-0. US\$17 from www.redmoonpress.com.

In 2003, when Richard Gilbert drafted the first published version of this essay, he noted the award-winning haiku by Jim Kacian:

my fingerprints
on the dragonfly
in amber

In a discourse titled, “The Disjunctive Dragonfly,” Gilbert examined how this haiku “goes beyond *shasei* and realism, utilizing four semantic modes of disjunction” (disunion, separation): perceptual disjunction, misreading as meaning, overturning semantic expectation, and linguistic oxymoron. At the time, he identified 17 disjunctive types and featured work illustrating each by practitioners experimenting with the haiku form in English. Ten years later, having expanded his research in the field of English-language haiku technique, he has revised the essay to include 7 new disjunctive types, with 275 poems illustrating a total of 24 modes of disjunction. Gilbert recognizes a proliferation of new poems and perspectives on topic, style, and approach; on experimentation and innovation; on a willingness not to dismiss elements of traditional haiku practice (juxtaposition, *kireji*), but to “add dimension and open the form.” Buy a copy of this book, read it, study it, examine the author’s premise that it is in disjunctive technique that poetic power lies. It will deepen your writing life. ~FB

Other Collections Received

Jane Reichhold. *Naked Rock*. Gualala, CA: AHA Books, 2013, 71 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.5. ISBN 978-094467-61-03. US\$12 from Amazon.com. Three-time winner of the HSA Merit Book Award, Reichhold offers reflections on captivating full-color photographs of unusual rocks in the Southwest; one haiku per page facing the rock that inspired it. *tightly furled / before it blossoms / sand stone*

Klaus-Dieter Wirth. *Im Sog der Stille / In the Wake of Silence*. Hamburg, Germany: Hamburger Haiku Verlag, 2013, 240 pp., perfect softbound, 5.75 x 8.25. ISBN 978-3-937257-72-3. €16.90 from the publisher at www.haiku.de. An expansive collection of haiku in German, English, French, Spanish, and a few Dutch translations by a haiku practitioner of more than 40 years. Each poem is dated, and senryu are identified with a capital “S.” The author views haiku as the “elixir of life” because we use all of our senses to perceive our surroundings. *by each step / camellia-red blooming out / of the mountain fog; octopuses / beside a scarecrow, / hung up to dry*

Paul Friedrich. *a goldfinch instant.* Macao: Association of Stories in Macao, 2012, 164 pp., perfect softbound, 4.75 x 8.5. ISBN 978-99965-42-7. No price given; inquire from the publisher at macaustories@yahoo.com. Most of the poems in this collection are fully 17 syllables and reflect physical as well as spiritual place. *last hues of autumn / fading notes for the sound of / my father's cello*

Gary Hotham. *Our Waves Meet the Ocean Waves.* Greenriver, VT: Longhouse, 2013, unpag., letterpress/accordion folded, 3 x 4.5. No ISBN. US\$12 from the publisher at www.LonghousePoetry.com. Beautifully designed, and just small enough to fit in your pocket, with 16 haiku reflective of this seasoned poet's life. *no old habits— / the newborn's / cry*

Michael Kriesel. *Whale of Stars.* Buffalo, NY: Sunnyoutside, 2012, unpag., letterpress/hand sewn, 4 x 4.25. ISBN 978-1-934513-33-0. US\$20 from www.sunnyoutside.com. Another handsomely produced, tuck-in-your-pocket collection of 13 poems. *old paperback / writing my name / under dad's*

Miriam Sagan. *All My Beautiful Failures.* Santa Fe, NM: Miriam's Well, 2013, limited edition, 68 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 5.5. No ISBN. Free for the cost of shipping, US\$2.50, from the poet at 626 Kathryn St., Santa Fe, NM 85705. The poet celebrates her 60th birthday with 60 poems and a striking cover design. *even, if, because / plum blossoms / in the courtyard*

Elliot Nicely. *Tangled Shadows: Senryu & Haiku.* Pittsboro, NC: Rosenberry Books, 2013, unpag., handbound cardcovers with hemp binding, 5.75 x 8.75. No ISBN. US\$8.75 from www.rosenberrybooks.com. Twenty poems that deliver a sense of entanglement throughout, which makes the book nicely thematic. *the last time we spoke tangled shadows of telephone wires*

Lenard D. Moore and Dave Russo, eds. *The Stone House: An Anthology of Haiku from Bolin Brook Farm.* Pittsboro, NC: Rosenberry Books, 2012, unpag., handmade, hardcover with hemp binding, 5.75 x 8.75. No ISBN. US\$23.95 hardcover, US\$12.95 softcover, from www.rosenberrybooks.com. An eye-appealing collection that features 19 haiku by poets of the North Carolina Haiku Society.

The following four new collections of haibun exhibit well-developed prose, tone, and mood, and authors who are comfortable with and agile in the form. (Woodward's and Coats's also feature a selection of haiku.) Places of childhood and youth; the remembered, and sometimes forgotten, past; ruminations and reminiscences, all come alive on the pages of these collections.

Jeffrey Woodward. *Evening in the Plaza.* Detroit, MI: Tournesol Books, 2013, 94 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.5. ISBN 978-061583-47-57. US\$12.95 from Amazon.com.

Peter Butler. *A Piece of Shrapnel: A Haibun Collection.* Spalding, Lincolnshire, UK: Hub Editions, 2012, 38 pp., 5 x 8.5. ISBN 978-1-930746-96-7. UK£5.75 from the author at peppercornpoets@aol.com.

Glenn G. Coats. *Snow on the Lake.* Prospect, VA: Pineola Publishing, 2013, 89 pp., perfect softbound, 5 x 8. ISBN 978-061579-91-17. US\$12 from online booksellers.

Michael Ketchek. *The Places in Between.* Rochester, NY: Free Food Press, 2013, 46 pp., hand sewn, 6 x 8.5. No ISBN. US\$7.50 + \$0.50 shipping, from www.freefoodpress.com.

Three annual collections that feature some of the best in haiku, haibun, and emerging voices in the genre today, and worthy additions to your bookshelf; all published by Red Moon Press, US\$17 each, and available from www.redmoonpress.com:

Jim Kacian & the Red Moon Editorial Staff, eds. *Nothing in the Window: The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku.* 2012, 214 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.25. ISBN 978-1-946848-20-1.

Jim Kacian, Bruce Ross, and Ken Jones, eds. *Contemporary Haibun: Volume 14.* 2013, 112 pp., perfect softbound, 5.25 x 8.25. ISBN 978-1-936848-20-1.

Jim Kacian & Dee Evetts, eds. *A New Resonance 8: Emerging Voices in English-Language Haiku.* 2013, 175 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8.25. ISBN 978-1-946848-22-5.