

reviewed

Bruce Ross et al, eds. *A Vast Sky: An Anthology of Contemporary World Haiku*, Bangor, ME: Tancho Press, 2015, 198 pp., perfect bound. ISBN 978-0-9837141-2-5. US\$15.95 with postage (\$3 for US, \$15 for other countries) from Bruce Ross (dr_bruce_ross@hotmail.com).

Reviewed by Beverley George

This aptly titled anthology of contemporary world haiku written between 2000 and 2014 is tangible proof of the universal nature of this diminutive poetry genre; the way in which it can be shared in countries beyond Japan. As Katō Kōko writes in her introduction to the bilingual Japanese section: “We may say that the haiku has become a quiet ambassador of peace and harmony under the vast sky embracing the earth and its future.”

Another favorite description, rather than definition, of haiku by John Bird springs to mind, and endorses this: “A haiku is a brief poem, built on sensory images from the environment. It evokes an insight into our world and its peoples.”

The anthology is divided into four sections: Japan, Europe, The New World, and The Rest of The World, with each of the latter three sections being subdivided by countries.

Nearly five hundred voices come together under *A Vast Sky*. Given the diversity of the contributing countries there is a remarkable harmonious quality to the collection, as poets share their experiences in a way that is true to the moment, and accessible.

Katō Kōko writes about the effects of landscape on spirituality;

“that the Japanese traditional view in which everything is seen as part of the natural world, has growing value and importance.”

The far north country . . .
somewhere within myself
the snow lives on

Fujiki Tomoko (Japan)

This poem can be understood even by someone who lives in a consistently warm climate, and resonates.

Many haiku, regardless of native landscape, combine effortlessly in the reading process and are simply to be enjoyed. Imagistic haiku that take the reader straight to the moment include:

Appearing out of
a heat mirage comes
the winning horse

Gotō Tatsuo (Japan)

in the park
two lovers
and the rest of us

Marcus Larsson (Sweden)

year's end
her skipping rope
too short

Maria Steyn (South Africa)

School excursion
lined up under the frame
of a dinosaur

Yamao Tamamo (Japan)

Lyrical language invites reading aloud, as in these examples:

The flowing waters
of ultramarine turn to
a winter river

Amamiya Kinuyo (Japan)

dusk on the cape...
the last fisherman
shoulders his rod

Rodney Williams (Australia)

Some haiku about a particular sound invite attention:

morning mist
whistling to the birds' songs
an old bike

Anatoly Ilyustchyts (Belarus)

walking the marina
wire halyards and the wind
make music

M L Grace (Australia)

winter starlight
the sound of the tuning fork
goes on forever

Lorin Ford (Australia)

autumn wind
its own song
in the cottonwoods

Elizabeth Searle Lamb (United States of America)

Also, so simple, but the chiming between fading and wait and the reversed *sk* sounds of sky and dusk make this a satisfying haiku to read aloud:

fading sky
I wait for a dusk
of kangaroos

Keitha Keyes (Australia)

Word choice is all important. The precise word “unpacks” works so well for this haiku.

a box turtle
unpacks its legs...
first warm day

Kirsty Karkow (United States of America)

Tenderness and sadness can be skilfully conveyed in so few words and enlist our empathy.

dark winter morning
he carries the old dog
back into the house

Charles Trumbull (United States of America)

how to dress her
for eternity—
blossom rain

Carolyn Hall (United States of America)

Vulnerability, but also spirit, are hallmarks of these poems:

Buying flowers
just to ask the way—
Bastille Day

Uetani Shōken (Japan)

hospice visit he still beats me at chess

Joanne Preston (New Zealand)

swimming lesson
my son floating away
from me

Mark Brager (United States of America)

winter window
this lonely face hidden
behind my breath

Damir Damir (Montenegro)

Diverse places and objects beyond our experience can trigger our interest; invite us to find out more. This one sent me on a rewarding search for images of butter lamps.

lighting butter lamps
death anniversary
what else can I do

Sonam Chhoki (Bhutan)

Poems about the renewal of the human spirit can hearten us, too, as well as cheering the poet who pens them:

after all the things
that have gone wrong—
plum blossoms

Sanjukta Asopa (India)

Like another world
a seed-packet showing
flowers in full bloom

Katō Kanabun (Japan)

in spite of everything forsythia

Peggy Willis Lyles (United States of America)

Haiku for and about children are often appealing and stir feelings and observations we can readily share with others around the world.

chasing grasshoppers
the child opens
empty hands

Belinda Broughton (Australia)

Field of wild grasses...
the children playing
with a single rope

Hajimoto Eiji (Japan)

For little children
holding their balloons
let war never come

Kohiyama Shigeko (Japan)

Again a baby frog
at the edge of the rice-paddy
in the rain

Shimobachi Kiyoko (Japan)

There is always pleasure in recognising a situation mutually experienced, but well expressed, as in:

walking in the sun—
a bird's shadow swoops
through mine

Cathie Bullock (New Zealand)

And also poems that demonstrate something unexpected, a different way of saying things:

crescent moon
a bone carver sings
to his ancestor

Ron C. Moss (Australia)

my guest departs
the waters in the creek
louder and clearer

Michael McClintock (United States of America)

These “unexpected” topics, as above, can make us look at something in a new way:

Cold moon.
On the windowsill a fly
alone in its death

Smajil Durmišević (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

snowflakes—
the jerking dance
of a marionette

Sara Winteridge (England)

Why do trees
receive Winter
naked?

Albano Martins (Portugal)

We read countless haiku that celebrate some aspect of nature, like cherry blossom, but this is a haiku about working with, not against, one of nature's potentially harsher aspects.

How many miles left
old and frail I've learned
to lean on the wind

Riita Rossilahti (Finland)

The managing editor's guiding principle for the four editors was to focus on the quality of the selected work, with "each poet expressing their haiku through a unique sensibility."

A Vast Sky: An Anthology of Contemporary World Haiku is a book for our times; an affirmation of the way in which haiku can heighten our perceptions of the world and help us to understand those of others.'

Beverley George is the past editor of Yellow Moon and the founding editor of Eucalypt, Australia's first journal dedicated to tanka. She was president of the Australian Haiku Society from 2006–2010, has presented at poetry conferences in Japan, convened the 4th Haiku Pacific Rim Conference. Beverley has received many haiku awards, including the British Haiku Society JW Hackett Award.