

exorcising this head
of nonsense . . .
sedge warbler's song

work prospects . . .
I search the sky
for yesterday's swallows

A question I've been asked several times at gatherings of writers: "If you could take one book to a desert island, what would it be?" Well, when I received this book to review, I did actually take it to a (nearly) deserted island, where I read it every day. It held up very well to the "desert island challenge," its pensive mood and thoughtful images perfectly suited to wandering trails alone in a remote place of stark natural beauty. But one doesn't need to be familiar with the kind of landscape that inspired these haiku to appreciate and be moved by the skilled artisanship that shaped them into being. This is a stunning book that I plan to keep close at hand for a long time. □■

REVIEWED BY TOM CLAUSEN

Sirens and Rain haiku by Barry George (*Accents Publishing, Lexington, KY: 2020*). 79 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Glossy cover, perfect softbound. ISBN 978-1-936628-62-9. \$16 available from accents-publishing.com or online booksellers.

In *Sirens and Rain*, Barry George serves as a masterful haiku reporter on the streets of his home city, Philadelphia. The cover photograph, taken by the author and depicting his center city neighborhood, is the starting point for a celebration of the city and its people in 100 indelible haiku and senryu that are by turns poignant, humorous, subtle, delightful, sublime, and insightful. It is an inspired extension of George's 30-page chapbook from 2010, *Wrecking Ball and Other Urban Haiku*, from which two poems are republished, so this gathers much of the wonderful work he's written in the interim with some standouts having placed in contests, such as the following poem:

the stylist
rinses away
the sound of her voice

The collection is divided into five sections: “Heat Warning,” “Cicada Season,” “Moon Gazing,” “Midwinter Sun,” and “Bowling to Dandelions.” There are one or two haiku per page, providing a relaxed presentation that creates ample space for appreciating each haiku individually and in concert with the whole book that has an amazing cohesiveness despite the wide-ranging subject matter. Window washers, street vendors, police, homeless vets, as well as a dentist, a comptroller, a school crossing guard, a waitress, and a diva are not the only Philadelphians depicted:

musty and somewhat worn around the edges— the used bookseller	fall morning— sequins sparkle on the girls’ hijabs
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For anyone who might doubt or wonder about a city being a viable source of one’s haiku, this book is a revelation and a reality check that haiku are indeed everywhere. There is great instruction, encouragement, and inspiration in this collection for anyone living in an urban setting to recognize how bountiful the “nature” of a city can be. Throughout *Sirens and Rain*, there are stellar examples of haiku to be found in parks, alleys, shops, and literally any place you may find yourself:

South Philly in spring— the hoagie shop’s signed picture of Stallone	rower’s statue— raindrops hang from his oars
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In these and other poems, George displays a sensitivity to his subjects that is warmly rewarding. There are haiku of beautiful subtlety that are the work of a poet with a keen eye attuned to his environment and its details:

long afternoon—	sidewalk pigeons
again at the blinds	scattering
the wasp's shadow	the day moon

Philadelphia is a city that is known for being as tough as it is soulful, and George reveals both sides. The time you spend reading an accomplished collection of haiku is a great gift to yourself, and this is a book I highly recommend. □■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY RANDY BROOKS

Without Syntax haiku by Lee Gurga (*Modern Haiku Press, Champaign, IL: 2020*). 32 pages, 5.5" x 4.25". Four-color card covers, saddle stitched. ISBN 978-0-9600855-3-8. \$3 from modernhaiku.org.

Without Syntax is a mini chapbook featuring 18 haiku by Lee Gurga. This collection is missing the author's name, but I can assure you that it is by Lee Gurga, and notably, that it received an honorable mention in the Touchstone Distinguished Book Awards. The book is arranged for a pleasant reading experience with one-line haiku on the left pages and vertical haiku (one word per line) on the right pages. The title comes from this vertical poem: *without / syntax / the / bare / skin / of / dawn*. I prefer the vertically-arranged haiku because this format slows the poem down and lets us take in the significance of each added word. In this title poem, we end up with our bare feet planted squarely on dawn. This is an excellent title poem because Gurga is a master of playing with the tension between language and sensation. Sometimes his poems push an abstract word into sensation as in this haiku: *an unspoken assumption tracks through the petals*. But in the best of his work, a technical word becomes a spiritual, life-giving mystery. For example, I have always admired this fresh perspective: *floating in the sonogram summer moon*. Sometimes we get lost in words and find ourselves in the sensations of living. I will end with this one: *looking up from my thesaurus dusk*.