

## REVIEWED BY KRISTEN LINDQUIST

**Clay Moon** haiku by Thomas Powell (Snapshot Press, Ormskirk, UK: 2020). 96 pages, 5" x 7.75". Perfect softbound. ISBN 978-1-903543-48-1. \$28 from [snapshotpress.co.uk](http://snapshotpress.co.uk).

Thomas Powell's first full-length collection of haiku contains 88 haiku, one to a page, with no sections or divisions to intrude upon a lovely long ramble through what I imagine to be the countryside of Northern Ireland, where he lives, or Wales, where he's from. This sense of moving along a path is also enhanced by Powell's frequent use of ellipses.

With the book's title and the knowledge that, in addition to being a fine haiku poet, Powell also makes pottery, easy comparisons come to mind. The art of shaping clay and shaping a poem both require careful craftsmanship and a good eye for detail. And in their own way, each are hands-on activities. Several poems in this collection directly refer to pottery-making, and a strong sense comes through of an artistic interplay between the two activities. I envision lines of haiku coming into Powell's head while his hands are at work shaping a bowl or jug on the wheel or while he looks around his studio.

hand-thrown	white glaze dries
another bowl for fruit	on a porous jug . . .
I'll never taste	midwinter dawn

And with his potter's mind, Powell takes an age-old haiku trope and brings it down to earth, as it were, transforming the so-often romanticized moon into a lump of clay that he can get his hands onto. And what does he make? This book, full of "old shadows" that lengthen and linger.

clay moon casting old shadows

Indeed, the rural topography of the poems set outside the pottery studio feels ancient and rough, as if Powell were tapping into some primeval spirit manifested there in rowanberries, loughs and bogs, wildflowers, and birds. The farm animals out to pasture also seem to come from an earlier time:

slowing train . . .	buttercups
the stare of a bullock	the haltered pony
standing in a stream	on its back

At the heart of this stark landscape is an unexpected beauty evoked through deeply poignant, *wabi-sabi* imagery: A hearth warmed only by sunlight, the past-peak fragrance of heather, a “derelict mill” that shelters pheasants, fallen roof slates, various insects, a new gate that already creaks, the inside-out ear of a “giddy” dog (in one of the most joyful poems in the whole book). Every poem in the book is an exquisite example.

bleak dawn . . .	creaking porch roof . . .
closed dandelions line	a pill millipede follows
the towpath	the dustbin’s curves
fading snow	budding trees
in the drumlin’s shadow	a giddy dog’s ear
a figure walking	inside out

Even the human world represented in these haiku hints of bleak prospects. But this isn’t a bleak book at all; each of these pellucid haiku is an object lesson in how to find poetry—and thus some consolation—in the natural world, even if “the natural world” is simply a tiny arthropod wandering through one’s pottery studio:

redundancy notice . . .	a day to myself . . .
an autumn millipede	I follow the river
treks through clay dust	back to its source

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](http://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: