

## Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY DAN SCHWERIN

*Ebbing Shore: haiku photographs field notes* by Crystal Simone Smith (Horse & Buggy Press, Durham, NC: 2022). 20 pages, 5.5" x 7.5". Color card covers, side stapled. In limited-edition of 200 copies. Available for \$15 from the author's website: <https://crystalsimonesmith.com/books>.

*Ebbing Shore* is a perfect title for the new collection by Crystal Simone Smith and an apt description of what she is doing with juxtaposition in the poems and between the elements in the collection. Smith employs haiku, photographs, and field notes to evoke time and place. In her dedication she makes clear this work is “for the spirit and blood of my ancestors.”

The 28 haiku in this collection are spare and roughhewn field notes which Smith defines in the following manner: “The haiku in this collection are precisely *field notes*. Many were composed in the fields of plantations that once held generations of enslaved people. Hundreds of plantation complexes and ground sites are historically preserved throughout the United States to reflect on the history of slavery and to ensure the history and memories are kept alive.” Later Smith writes, “While many of the haiku were written on plantation tours, others were written as ekphrastic poems in response to slavery artifacts and exhibits.”

According to the Poetry Foundation website, *ekphrasis* means “description” in Greek. “An ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the ‘action’ of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.”

As a collection, Smith’s presentation of her field note haiku or haibun next to photographs conveys not only juxtaposition with a historical setting, but another ebbing shore in the concomitant location of slave experience. The mere fact of the plantations, the slave quarters, and

their evocation raises questions as to how our present looks upon slavery, and the current systemic racial inequities in the U.S.

overhang balcony  
our tourist view  
of Master's view

In the way Faulkner writes about the American history through Yoknapatawpha County, Crystal Simone Smith breadcrumbs us through a narrative of plantations and slave quarters with images that have the feel of a moment in the ophthalmologist's chair: asking which is clearer, our history or our now?

Comparing *Ebbing Shore* with the current context of haiku poetics in the early part of the 21st century, I welcome more poems and collections that tell a truth larger than butterflies and blossoms. Smith's poems evoke a stance that advocates for a clear look at slavery by means of the images and artifacts that personalize a shared experience. Additionally, they act as a mirror for our inherent connection in time.

plantation parlor  
tick of the home's  
original clock

The strongest poems in the collection either have no verb or a strong verb. The collection's first poem is seven words, and without a verb:

slave quarters  
in one brick  
a thumbprint

Of all the senses, many of Smith's poems are about seeing:

bordered by  
oyster shells  
lynching site

My favorite poem is:

slave museum  
the entrance fountain  
an ebbing shore

The placement of the phrase “ebbing shore” (which is used as the collection’s title) at the end of the poem, after “slave museum” and “the entrance fountain,” lends it rich layers of meaning. The image of a shore not only works nicely with the water fountain but also connotes the arrival of slave ships, and of these voices from history washing up on the shore of the current racial inequities in today’s United States.

Note how these lines slow the poem enough for a reader to connect the external images while also giving the reader time for the images to resonate internally, which is essential for strong haiku.

Following a photograph of 200-year-old oaks on the Oak Alley Plantation in Vacherie, Louisiana, is a poem pulsing with now:

election map  
the bloody south  
remains bloody

The truth will set us free, but first it will hurt.

old slave town  
we put down  
all our baggage



#### REVIEWED BY REBECCA LILLY

*while dreaming your dreams* haiku by Réka Nyitrai (Mono Ya Mono Books, Valencia, Spain: 2020). 105 pages, 5" x 8". Matte four-color covers, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-8409207268. \$19 from online booksellers.

Réka Nyitrai’s enchanting debut collection has a haunting surrealistic atmosphere and otherworldly feel as she deftly combines mythic images with those traditional to haiku, creating