

REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

They Never Asked: Senryū Poetry From the WWII Portland Assembly Center edited and translated by Shelley Baker-Gard, Michael Freiling, and Satsuki Takikawa (Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, OR: 2023). 200 pages. 6" x 9". Paperback. ISBN: 978-0-87071-235-7. \$29.95 dollars from <https://osupress.oregonstate.edu/book/they-never-asked> and online booksellers

They Never Asked is an anthology of 67 senryū by Japanese Americans in Oregon and the Yakima Valley who were removed from their homes and imprisoned in the Portland Assembly Center until September 1942 when they were transferred to incarceration camps after the issue of Executive Order 9066. The Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) forcibly held Japanese Americans in the Portland Assembly Center. Many were part of a Portland poetry group called Bara Ginsha and continued to write senryū to help cope with the realities they were facing. This anthology provides a real glimpse into what life was like during this time based on the journal kept by Masaki Kinoshita.

The anthology begins with a foreword by Masaki Kinoshita's grandson, Duane Watari, who provides more background on his grandfather. This is followed by Acknowledgments and Notes on Terminology. The Introduction, written by Shelley Baker-Gard, provides historical context as well as a brief history of haiku and senryū. The senryū in this anthology are organized by the following subjects: Connections, Talking About Anything, Sensibility and Discretion, Habits, Resolution and Readiness, Confusion, Doubt, and two sections are titled: About Anything. Each poem is published in Japanese and English and each page includes excellent footnotes that mostly describe the literal definitions of certain Japanese words in translation.

Here is a sample of two senryū by Jōnan, followed by one senryū by Kentsuku that depicts the weight of these times in U.S. history:

beyond the barbed wire
a glow of neon lights
stinging my eyes

hands tightly clasped—
I pray our destiny is
to meet again

melancholy laughter
help us pass the time
until the train departs

The community of the Japanese American people showed true strength and resilience during these times of imprisonment, and this comes through some of the senryū. The poems in this anthology also reveal other areas of life, including community activities that took place (such as baseball games and Sumo wrestling demonstrations), yet the harsher realities take precedence in the senryū. As an example, this senryū by Sen Taro shows the harshness of the Executive Order 9066, from which the title of this anthology is found:

they never asked
suspicious or not—
just put us away

This anthology concludes with the following sections: an Afterword, Reflections on First-Person Experience in War Haiku by Fay Aoyagi, notes on American English Senryū and Haiku, a Timeline, Notes, a Bibliography, About the Poets, and About the Editors. This book also includes 29 black and white illustrations, many of which are photographs that provide even more of a glimpse into what life was like.

They Never Asked is a publication that I feel should belong in every history class. This anthology reveals a part of history that perhaps

some people are not aware of or know very little about. Despite the harsh conditions, I feel this book shows the resilience of the dynamic human spirit. I express gratitude to everyone who made this anthology possible and am grateful to all who continue to stand up to injustices today. I highly recommend this book. ◻■

REVIEWED BY RANDY BROOKS

Designated Driver: A Selection of Haiku, Senryu, and Small Poems by Stanford M. Forrester / sekiro (Wooden Nickle Press, a division of bottle rockets press, Windsor, CT: 2023) 80 pages. 5.5" x 8". Four-color card covers, perfect bound. ISBN: 978-1-7366037-8-9. For ordering information, contact the poet by email at: bottlerockets_99@yahoo.com

Stanford M. Forrester has been writing, editing, and publishing haiku and senryu for over 25 years. This collection features many of his award-winning poems as well as favorites from his more recent mini-chapbooks. He started publishing *bottle rockets* magazine in 1999, and, as his title suggests, he has always enjoyed the playful spirit of haiku and senryu. Here is the title poem of this collection:

poetry party —
the designated driver
just listens

This haiku invites readers to join in this literary joyride. Come to the poetry party or just stay sober and listen. The opening section celebrates the life of poetry and poetry publishing:

tattered chapbook —
rusty staples
color the autumn haiku

Ah, the wabi of an old, hand-stitched haiku chapbook. Best read under the amber light of the autumn moon.