

reviewed

The Wonder Code: Discover the Way of Haiku and See the World with New Eyes edited by Scott Mason (2017, Girasole Press, Chappaqua, NY). 370 pages, 5¼×8", Clothbound. ISBN 978-0-692-93035-9. \$24.95 from thewondercode.com.

Reviewed by Randy Brooks

Scott Mason opens this anthology with Louis Armstrong's "what a wonderful world" and argues that:

Wonder abounds. What's more, it can be experienced by anyone, anywhere, and at any given moment. The question to ask—if we truly seek more balance and happiness in our lives—is how to tap into the wonder around us. The method I propose in these pages is to learn to see the world anew through "haiku eyes" (2).

Drawing on poems first published in *The Heron's Nest* online journal, *The Wonder Code* is a collection of examples demonstrating how writers discover and share the wonders of happiness and being alive through haiku. He declares that:

the practice of haiku poetry—especially the attentive reading and assimilation of haiku poems—can start to act as a corrective and even an antidote to wonder deprivation (3).

Mason organizes the anthology as five "galleries" exhibiting five imperatives for discovering and sharing wonders. Scott suggests that we: think small, come to our senses, feel the moment, prepare for surprise, and only connect. Following is a brief synopsis of each imperative with an example or two from each gallery.

THINK SMALL. The first gallery emphasizes “the wonder in what’s hiding, here and now, in plain sight” (15):

Haiku poetry brings us into the world of small wonders in multiple ways. First and foremost it plainly asserts, through its choice of subjects, that the modest things we tend to overlook and the common events we take for granted are worthy of our attention (13).

Here is one of the haiku from this gallery, by Jay Haskins (38).

high tide
a plastic dump truck
moves another shell

COME TO YOUR SENSES. In this gallery, Mason suggests that haiku can “serve as a gentle corrective” to lives of “electronic dependency” in which we are “cocooned and plugged in” but have “opted out—of a world filled with sensory wonders” (46).

He explains:

Comprised of mere words, how can haiku help us “come to our senses”? Quite simply, an effective haiku encapsulates an instant of keen perception in a form that can be released and experienced anew by the receptive reader (47).

So haiku “guide us back to what’s real and alive” (48). Two examples from this gallery, by Jim Kacian (58) and Peter Yovu (71):

catch and release
a little shine left
on my fingers

a shooting star —
the short grass
tickles my neck

FEEL THE MOMENT. The third gallery emphasizes the scene or aesthetic atmosphere of a haiku:

Haiku are recorded in the present tense. This practice is more than convention: it helps convey the freshness of sensations and the immediacy of emotions from poet to reader across time and space (108).

He concludes: “to develop a haiku sensibility is to live in the wonder each and every moment brings” (123). A haiku from this section, by Francine Banwarth (130):

our daughter’s wedding
dusting the room
she dreamed in

PREPARE FOR SURPRISE. Mason writes:

The most affecting “surprise haiku”...share the added quality of *veracity*. To surprise us with what also somehow “rings true” is one of the best ways not only to attract our attention but also to challenge conventional wisdom (173).

A haiku of unexpected wonder by Sabine Miller (189):

hide-and-seek
the weeping willow
giggles

ONLY CONNECT. The last gallery emphasizes the interconnection of things, including humans with the environment. Mason writes:

Spending time with haiku cannot help but activate a greater sense of participation, and ultimately a greater actual engagement, in the world around us (215).

An example from this gallery, by Julie Warther (245).

cloud of no-see-ums ...
bluegills
tease the bobber

The anthology closes with a selection of haiku by Scott Mason, also arranged into the four galleries of wonder. Here are a couple of his haiku (286, 325):

full moon
one giant leap
for a water strider

inchworm
how long it took to return
to wonder

This is an excellent anthology of haiku with just enough prose to help beginners understand that:

Haiku poets and their readers revel in what's found in nature, on their doorstep, or even closer at hand. All these discoveries originate with something "outside" the poet. The impulse to *share* such discoveries carries all the excitement of *Look what I found!* (277).