

### BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY LISA GERLITS

*An Unlikely Truth* by Sondra J. Byrnes (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2023). 124 pages (Unnumbered). 4.25" x 6.5". Color covers, perfect-bound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-36-0. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

In *An Unlikely Truth*, Sondra J. Byrnes delivers a satisfying collection of haiku and senryu. Divided into four sections—*the butterfly effect*, *soul searching*, *ménage à trois*, and *forgiveness*—the book explores subjects ranging from aging to friendship to sticky matters of the heart. Byrnes's juxtapositions are apt and the lines between the natural world and the human are so effortlessly drawn that we feel ourselves as an indistinguishable part of nature: *a whisper / between friends— / aspens turning*. Like a practiced dancer whose every languid gesture is backed by years of hard work and intention, Byrnes wields her words with the same appearance of ease, carefully crafting each line but leaving much unsaid: *identity theft / I'd give so much / away*. Adept at the clever twist, Byrnes makes use of words with multiple meanings to create layers and depth. But she never gets too clever. Likewise, she employs a tongue-in-cheek approach to many of the Zen-influenced poems. I particularly enjoyed her falling/fallen leaf and snow poems sprinkled throughout the collection. While using similar and familiar imagery, Byrnes finds a fresh take with each poem, as in this monoku: *so light it falls up spring snow*. All in all, this is a collection that calls for lingering: *dim porch light / the white moth scribbles / a death poem*. □■

## BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

*Dreamer's Moon* by Mark Forrester (Buddha Baby Press, Windsor, CT: 2024). 73 pages, 5" x 5". Paperback. ISBN: 979-8-9892491-0-7. \$15 (for USA residents) and \$20 (for international orders). Order from the author at: [maforr@umd.edu](mailto:maforr@umd.edu) or from <http://buddha-rat.squarespace.com/>

*Dreamer's Moon* is a chapbook of 60 haiku by Mark Forrester. Cicadas, blossoms, rain, and relationships appear throughout several of these haiku. A few favorites: (1) *rising up / from our ancestor's graves / cicada nymphs*, (2) *ebb tide / the night before / revealed*, and (3) *year's end / a different silence / in every room*. The vivid imagery and yugen (mystery) in many poems in this chapbook exemplify excellent haiku. The title of this chapbook also might signify dreaming of a better world from the ground of a seemingly barren and lifeless moon. An impressive list of publication credits demonstrates Forrester's dedication to writing haiku. An enjoyable collection. □■

*Gone / to Seed* by Victor Ortiz (Backbone Press, Durham, NC: 2024). 40 pages, 5" x 7". Paperback. ISBN: 979-8-9881650-4-0. \$10 from [backbonepress.org](http://backbonepress.org)

This is an award-winning chapbook of 55 haiku by Victor Ortiz that is modest in size, spanning 40 pages. Shadows, forests, and birdsongs weave throughout these poems, which also include a handful of experimental monoku and concrete haiku. Readers will appreciate the variety of content in this chapbook from an experienced and sensitive haiku poet. A few favorites: (1) *forest path / with each step / a little less of me*, (2) *inside a prayer the scent of rain*, (3) *belonging / where I don't belong / giant sequoia*, and (4) *rock art dreams of a shaman*. An impressive list of publication credits and testimonials from Chad Lee Robinson, Richard Gilbert, PhD, and Chuck Brickley rounds out this excellent chapbook. I recommend it. □■

***Off the Main Road: Six Contemporary Haiku Writers*** edited by David Jacobs and Andrew Shimield (Alba Publishing, Uxbridge, UK: 2024). 92 pages, 6" x 9". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-912773-60-2. £12 from [www.albapublishing.com](http://www.albapublishing.com). To order, email the book title and ISBN # to: [info@albapublishing.com](mailto:info@albapublishing.com).

This is an anthology featuring haiku by six haiku writers who are well-known, but have not yet published an individual chapbook of their own: David Weston, Meera Rehm, Steve Black, John Pappas, Mary Ann Conley, and Nick Hoffman. After the editor's preface (which describes the process of selecting the poets), short bios are followed by 24 haiku/senryu by each poet. The following are examples of excellent haiku in this anthology: (1) *things left unspoken / a raw north wind / tangles your hair* (Weston), (2) *another year / the twists and turns / of a curly willow* (Rehm), (3) *last view of the sea / from the prison bus / windsurfer* (Black), (4) *returning geese / a few more pebbles / on her headstone* (Pappas), (5) *our unadorned yard / the smirk of the neighbor's / ten-foot Santa* (Conley), (6) *loan application / the chain / on the bank's pen* (Hoffman). Some of these poems are previously published in reputable haiku journals. In short, this anthology is an excellent introduction to the work of these talented haiku poets. Readers will enjoy getting acquainted with each poet's unique voice and style. ◻■

***The White Buffalo: Haiku*** by Chad Lee Robinson (Backbone Press, Inc., Durham, NC: 2024). 32 pages, 5" x 7". Paperback. ISBN: 979-8-9881650-0-2. \$10 from [backbonepress.org](http://backbonepress.org).

This is a chapbook of 52 haiku by Chad Lee Robinson, which won the Backbone Press Haiku Chapbook Contest. Robinson's haiku have deep roots in South Dakota and the Lakota Indigenous Peoples. This book is organized into four sections that correlate with the four seasons: I: A Wind of Many Colors (Spring), II: This Grass, That Sky (Summer), III: Creases in My Cowboy Boots (Autumn), and IV: Heartbeat (Winter). Some of Robinson's haiku are observational, such as: *one of the wolves / shows its face /*

*firelight*, while others show interpersonal moments with Nature: *a few practice casts . . . / the pine air starts to circulate / in my lungs*. Readers will feel an ancient and sacred silence in many of these poems. There are also a few haiku that have playful, haunting, and melancholy atmospheres. A few favorites: (1) *horse pasture / the prairie wind moves / with muscle*, (2) *no one / to inherit the work— / rattle of corn leaves*, and (3) *whirling snowflakes— / a Lakota elder / passes the pipe*. The contest judge, Cherie Hunter Day, writes on the back cover: "The White Buffalo celebrates the land of the Lakota. Not only its rugged terrain but a life lived in harmony with the horse and with the buffalo. There is grief too for the loss of this majesty. Each haiku is a gem: polished and focused. Chad Lee Robinson's poems are unmistakably original and authentic. His connection runs deep to the very spirit of place." I recommend this award-winning chapbook. □■

*Evergreen* by C.X. Turner (Alba Publishing, Uxbridge, UK: 2024). 100 pages, 5.75" x 8.5". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-912773-65-7. £12 from [albapublishing.com](http://albapublishing.com) or visit <https://amzn.eu/d/7Xxhd6x>

The back cover of this book states: "*evergreen* is the debut solo collection of haiku, senryū and tanka from C.X. Turner...This collection captures the moments of joy, pain, acceptance, and growth that arise from unrequited love, and loss...this book offers something tangible to hold onto during difficult times...Just as an evergreen tree is known for its resilience and power to endure, standing tall and green, even during tough winters, so can we remain vibrant to life's challenges..." This collection consists of 95 poems that focus on nature juxtaposed with emotions that are often based on relationships and loss. The emotional charge of Turner's poems seem to be amplified particularly in her tanka. A few favorites: (1) *endless sea in your eyes I anchor*, (2) *twilight / within your skies / a fire burns / my heart talking / to the wind*, and (3) *deep water / since I found you — / floating driftwood*. Some of the poems include broad phrases that are juxtaposed with a specific image, such as: *questioning / what really matters — / Lenten moon*, or *pixie cup lichen / the slow growth /*

of inner healing. In some poems, the two parts seem to mirror each other. It seems Turner's strongest poems in this collection have detailed imagery, but also leave a bit of mystery for the reader: *wiping tears / from the pillow again / a new dawn / in the murmur / of a slow-moving river*. This emotionally-charged tanka maintains a balance between concrete imagery and mystery. While some poems in this book seem to have room for improvement, there are some real gems in Turner's debut collection. □■

***Shocking the Dark: Poems*** by Robert Lowes (Kelsay Books, American Fork, UT: 2024). 104 pages, 6" x 9". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1639805501. \$23 from amazon.com.

This is a collection of longer form poetry, haiku, and senryū by Robert Lowes. The first section "Some Last Ditch" consists of 17 longer poems. The second section "Overnight Snow" is dedicated to 52 haiku and senryū, with four poems per page. My favorite haiku in this section are: (1) *moose on the slope / staring down / at traffic*, (2) *swarming the yard / I thought was mine / a flock of grackles*, and (3) *frozen ground / pigeons nodding yes / to everything*. Many of his haiku and senryū resonate with the section title by focusing on winter and Christmas scenes with family. The third section "After Paul Klee: Paintings" features longer poems inspired by this Swiss-born German painter. The fourth section "Next Exit" consists of mostly longer poems, but it also includes a haiku sequence titled "Fiftieth Class Reunion." The haiku in this sequence are mostly observational. This haiku stood out in the sequence for its strong emotional impact: *stage-four survivor / the reflex of my hand / clutching his shoulder*. His poem "The Goldfish" includes these two lines: *A body electric, Whitman's pet, / shocks the dark with a flash of gold*. Lowe's acknowledges the darkness of human life and suffering, yet he also disturbs the darkness in some of his poems through glimpses of light as Lowe's writes "*with tongues of fire / and night visions as bright / as a thousand flood lamps*." Lowes is a former journalist and was a reporter for Medscape Medical News. It's clear that his career background has informed some of his poetry

as he writes about a range of socio-political issues, yet he has also found a philosophical voice in some of his poems as well. Readers will feel the shock reverberating throughout this book as Lowes wrestles with the psychological dimensions of human life. □■

### BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JEROME BERGLUND

*Red Sky at Night* by Dan McKinley (Red Moon Press, Winchester VA: 2024). 78 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Paperback, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-39-1. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

Malcolm Gladwell famously posited that becoming a virtuoso in a given specialty requires devoting ten thousand odd hours of practice to the pursuit of its mastery. The select fruits in *Red Sky at Night*, such as: *back of his hand / no longer familiar / cutting his cake*, highlights Dan McKinley's impressive journey, representing several landmarks, such as: *old screen door / the scent of lilacs / and the flies*, and outstanding features, such as: *in the brown wake / of the red tractor / white gulls*. These poems were written across a half century, which is the entire lifespan of Basho when his dream went wandering and nearly twice the age reached by Curt Cobain and Jim Morrison, which shows staunch commitment and passion. McKinley demonstrates no less steadfastness in his personal relationships and dedication to a pillar in the haikai community (as the co-written opening piece reveals), which is composed of a meaningful composition as the author traversed upon the haiku road. McKinley's haiku are truly hard-earned prizes to admire. The poet and his collective body of verse herein includes some of the strongest pandemic stanzas and short form poems that I've encountered regarding the subject of ephemerality. In addition, a trio of four-liners near the center are also particularly intriguing and noteworthy, and graphic icons at page corners suggesting season are a constructive touch. These poems exemplify an extraordinary meeting of disparate archetypes in one person chronologically: we see poems from a scholarly intellectual educator on one edge of the rapier and courageous seafaring, while on the other hand

we encounter a cosmopolitan adventurer. Attributions in the second half of the book effectually situate poems like pins on an outstretched map, including diverse locales from Pennsylvania to Greenland and Paris. Charter a course with this seasoned skipper. He won't steer you wrong! ◻■

*Silent After* by Joshua Eric Williams (Red Moon Press, Winchester VA: 2024). 102 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Paperback, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-43-8. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

On the back cover of Joshua Eric Williams' unique new collection, Michael Dylan Welch describes the striking contents, prefaced with a proclamation 'TO LIGHT LIKE LOVE AND LOVE LIKE LIGHT,' which is traceable to—and evident in—the poet's evocation of the Eastern art of *yoin*: that beautiful silence to be discerned following an event's concluding. Like T.S. Eliot's whimper with which the world ends, this *haijin* provides memorable haiku, time and time again, throughout charged vignettes of noiselessness that are no less weighty, heightened, or impactful. These poems epitomize the much rarer, finite pole in relief against our new normal of a frenzied cacophony. Employing highly inventive verbiage, such as: *april sun / crucified in / my window*, deft enjambment, as well as potent, unexpected imagery, connections, and juxtaposition: *silent disco / a park blooms / ear buds*, this collection will charm and captivate enthusiasts of modern approaches to haikai. This book also offers a couple of the neatest concrete pieces in recent memory that fans of *gendai*, postku and tanshi (sympathizing publications like *Bamboo Hut*, *Bones*, *Five Fleas*, *Heliosparrow*, and *Kingfisher*) will appreciate. Two provocative *haibun* round out the many-splendored multitudes within. Highly recommend while sitting quietly, readers can bask in moments of meditative reflection: *silent after / the shooting / stars* with gravitas for a spell. ◻■

*Moonlight* by David Kāwika Eyre (Red Moon Press, Winchester VA: 2024). 136 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Paperback, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-39-1. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

A particularly handsome and elegant book, which additionally offers resplendent illustrations reminiscent at different times to the best works by Matisse, Klimt, Gauguin, Klee, and Van Gogh's blue period, as well as (collaborator and daughter) Emma Eyre's sumptuous brush work. There is a masterful command of color and line that is worth the price of admission to David Kāwika Eyre's glorious poetics, his highly refined and polished vision, and impeccable techniques. The author's vivid capturing of the intriguing dialectic of his life encompasses navigating the stark polarities of Sweden and Hawaii—between which he regularly travels—creates a fascinating tension and countless compelling opportunities for comparison and contrast, imbuing multifaceted verses with an instrumental, pronounced perspective and a qualified, sophisticated appreciation for the Earth's diversity in climates and the variance of inhabiting life more than most haikuists. This is a volume that will please adherents to the minimalist philosophy and school of haiku and tanka who savor the deliberately streamlined and aerodynamic micropoetry of Sanford Goldstein. Eyre's haiku are compact diamonds in the *Dictionary of Haiku*. These are poems with mystique: *windflower / accepting darkness / star by star*, and chutzpah: *inexorably / irrefutably / springtime*. Readers will be hard-pressed to locate material less verbose or more ergonomic. Environmentalist and conservation oriented themes, as in: *fingerprint / on tree rings / chainsaw oil* are also thoughtfully articulated throughout, which make for stirring highlights in this gorgeous holistic collection. ◻■

*One Set of Footprints* by Robert Loomis (Red Moon Press, Winchester VA: 2024). 88 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Paperback, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-38-4. \$25 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

*One Set of Footprints* is a perfect marriage between outstanding interdisciplinary hybrid artworks (collage, mixed media, painterly watercolors, colorful flora and fauna) and superlative storytelling by a modern maestro who instructively hoists the blazing torch of the haijin Beats poets, fans the flames, and upholds the important legacy of contemporary English-language haiku innovators, such as Jane Reichhold. Robert Loomis is an esteemed haiku practitioner who espouses an affinity for Buson and Shiki, in a landscape that is more accustomed to the approaches of Basho and Issa. He applies a hardboiled economy of language, gifts for observation, and a deduction-honed approach (perfected throughout his career in journalism) to the micropoem with stupendous precision and sensational flair. Compatriot in creative arms with Susan Jokelson's application of eclectic and original materials (leaves, maps, wrappers, her motto 'One person's trash...') gives rise to incredibly interesting and stunning results. Pairings of poem and image are always appropriate and inspired, generating fresh layers of additional meaning to synergies when regarded in concert. This book is an attractive and engaging read that will mesmerize and enchant audiences young and mature alike. Enjoyers of *karumi* and the impressionist landscape or still life paintings will be particularly dazzled by this evocative material. Amidst polished nature poetry, such as: *spring rainfall / old rowboat keeps / nudging the dock*, and *rainswept street / neighbors porchlight / swims across*, there are also some immensely witty flourishes of subtle *senryu*: *several songbirds / along the fence top / joining flute practice*, and *through the service / cemetery birds / keep singing*. Readers will also note the mirroring or reversal between the above poems evincing spring and fall *kigo*. Loomis possesses a studied appreciation and deployment of contextualizing words and topics with elegance and proficiency that few are able to achieve so perceptibly. Seasoned sections provide a strong backbone in this book and are effectively

delivered through the line-spanning breadth of text. This book could make a fantastic gift for literary friends or family. It could also be a valuable entrance into the genre and haikai traditions for new haiku poets. □■

#### BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY ALLYSON WHIPPLE

*Again & Again* by Guy Nesom (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 120 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Full color cover, perfect softbound. 978-1-958408-40-7. \$20.00 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

With his fourth haiku collection from Red Moon Press, Guy Nesom brings together his lifelong botany career with his love of music. While the sections of this book also include People, Time, and Places, the undercurrents of science and music are strongest throughout the poems. The opening haiku: *touch-me-nots . . . / startled / again and again* connects human emotion with the automatic reactions of a plant to stimuli, implying the interconnectedness of all things. The senryu *child's xylophone . . . / so many songs / still there* is a poem that does a masterful job of incorporating sentiment without being cloying. *Again & Again* also provides an excellent opportunity to brush up on botanical knowledge; I encourage readers to take the time to look up any unfamiliar plant names or musical references that are encountered. Not only will you have a more nuanced understanding of the haiku, but your life will be enriched by learning about a new plant, or discovering a new-to-you musical composition. Guy Nesom has clearly lived a rich life, and the breadth and depth of his experience permeate his haiku.

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## BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY RANDY BROOKS

*No Heroic Measures: Haiku and Related Poems* by Roland Packer (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024) 134 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-958408-41-4. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

*No Heroic Measures* is Roland Packer's first full-length collection of short poems and haiku. The collection includes a wide range of approaches including playful circle-poems, enjambed poem words, typographical experiments, senryu, and haiku. The title poem is a monoku: *so soft the snow no heroic measures*, which presents a beautiful scene that saddens with connotations of "no heroic measures" being a phrase associated with "do not resuscitate" instructions in a living will.

One of my favorites in this collection is: *crescent moon / seats of the Ferris wheel / swaying*. This is a luxurious visual haiku with the curvature of the moon echoed in the circle of the Ferris wheel. Both have their own illumination. Then, we get the contrast of the seats of the Ferris wheel swaying, which creates an illusion of the crescent moon swaying as well. Everything is under a spell of magical wonder! On the other hand, this enjambed minimalist poem: *zerotichemistry* suggests an entirely different feeling. Everything is hurried and rushed because there is "zero chemistry" in this "erotic ... tryst". The whole thing smashes together into awkwardness. Later in the collection we find a haiku where the couple is connected by the chemistry of dancing: *street tune / an elderly couple / step into a waltz*.

I enjoy Packer's word-trick poems and the occasional syllogism poem such as: *cold soup / a Boltzmann brain / thinks I am* that sends readers to the web for explanations. However, my favorites in the collection are haiku from a living, perceptually-aware, human being, such as this one: *evening breeze / through the barnboards / final bid*. ◻■

*Before the Rules: Tanka and Tanka Prose* by John Budan (Lulu: 2024) 104 pages, 6" x 9". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1304593887. \$15 from Amazon.com.

John Budan was first introduced to tanka by Jane Reichhold and Sam Hamill. However, he did not start writing tanka and tanka prose until about three years ago. *Before the Rules* is his second collection. His tanka place us in the middle of a scene, then turn so that we understand the internal emotional significance of that moment. Here is an example: *broken bike lock / clinging to a pole / I walk in darkness / unable to forgive / or let go*. At first glance, this is about a stolen bike. The lock provided the illusion of security but failed to keep the bike from thieves. The only thing it kept was its “clinging to a pole” and, in a similar way, the narrator has lost the person or relationship with someone they couldn’t forgive. The narrator is left with the anger of not forgiving someone. With the tanka prose, Budan provides a short sketch of someone’s life, then shifts into a tanka that expands to others related to the scene. For example, “Eviction” starts with “The prolonged blast announces a ship entering the Manitowoc harbor. She is familiar with the routine. ... She is hesitant while selecting her heels and most revealing dress. Yet her rent is overdue, and she is facing eviction.” The prose description of the ship’s arrival and her predicament is followed by this tanka: *foghorns / penetrate the mist / lonely sailors / walk ashore / seeking love*. This is an excellent collection of tanka and tanka prose for those who enjoy tanka’s mix of outer and inner weather in its characters. □■

## REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

*Walking Widdershins: An Ode to Joy* by Jenny Ward Angyal and Autumn Noelle Hall (Windy Knoll Press, Independently published: 2024). 134 pages, 8.5" x 8.5". Paperback, with four full-color mandala illustrations by Denver Kennedy Hall. ISBN: 979-8333118172. \$20 from amazon.com.

This is a moving, heartfelt collaboration of 108 tanka sequences by Jenny Ward Angyal and Autumn Noelle Hall. Together, they wrote an impressive total of 540 tanka in this book. In the preface, Jenny Ward Angyal writes: "In these poems, we have chosen to honor those fellow travelers by capitalizing the common names of the myriad species who share our world... [and] the Otherworldly Beings who populate the Human imagination... we come down firmly on the side of the sacredness of the whole interconnected web of the Cosmos." Autumn Noelle Hall adds, "There is a hidden healing in this practice. Hearing our Human voices as tiny notes in a wild and wondrous chorus can repair the rift between us and renew a sense of our own significance and sacredness as well...*widdershins*, a word denoting movement counter to the sun's, but so often used to mean backwards or contrary, is our way of expressing that countershift away from Western society's mistaken sense of separation from Nature."

To distinguish between the two poets, Angyal's tanka are italicized throughout this book. As an ongoing conversation, there are five tanka per page, organized in a visually cascading effect of call and response tanka. Here is a sample of three tanka: (1) *an Osprey / circles widdershins / above my head / for once in my life / I'm not asking why* (Hall), (2) *Swallows / swoop over the garden / nourishing / themselves and me— / so many ways of knowing* (Angyal), and (3) *Great Horned Owllet / in the Ponderosa Pine / patient as stone / all day long / we're fed—or not—by others* (Hall). There is transformational power in these tanka that liberate us from linear ego-centered thinking and reveal our deep interconnectedness with all of life. There are some melancholy tanka, however most of the tanka are

embedded with a deep reverence for Mother Earth, sometimes juxtaposed with human arrogance: *Hummingbirds vanish / into the Sugar Maple / as if / into a green void— / what else do we fail to see* (Angyal). The following tanka includes Irish mythology with a cautionary message: *her fire in the hearth / Brigid pulls up a blanket / of wooly snow . . . / the waterfall still secretive / beneath its vow of ice* (Hall). Other tanka show our limitations as humans and the need for us to see far into the future: *my Daughter and I / follow the Osprey / to the limits / of our vision, conscious / of how far we still must go* (Hall). A few tanka also provide a clear warning that depicts the extinction of humans if too many people continue to live as excessive consumers, fueled by the flawed economic system of Capitalism that extracts resources from Mother Earth in severely damaging and unsustainable ways: (1) *deep magic / bubbles in the cauldrons / of deep-sea vents— / life will find a way / when we're long gone* (Angyal), and (2) *Gaia weaves / a ribbon of Sweetgrass / in her hair— / she knows how Life will blossom / when Humankind is gone* (Angyal).

In the afterword, former *Ribbons* editor David C. Rice writes, "If the root problem of our planetary crisis is that we see ourselves as separate from the natural world, not just another part of it, couldn't two poets writing together offer poems that would help connect us with the natural world...?" He continues, "By choosing to write 108 poems [sequences], the poets tap into the ancient spiritual, mala-bead tradition with the number that represents the awareness that we—people, plants, animals, fungi, the whole universe—are all part of what is, has been, and will be, forever connected." The beautiful mandala illustrations by Denver Kennedy Hall also reflect the interconnectedness of life on Earth and the cosmos.

In summary, this collection of collaborative tanka sequences are love songs to Mother Earth and to our inherent connections with Nature. The transformational power of these tanka aid in decolonizing our own minds so that we can let go of the severely limited and consequential "conquer Nature" mentality, which is the root cause of many problems that we face today. □■

## REVIEWED BY AGNES SAVICH

*Crossing Bridges: A Haibun Anthology* (Lulu Press, Inc., 2024) edited by Shelley Baker-Gard and Shasta Hatter. Layout by Tanya McDonald. 100 pages, 6" x 9". Paperback. No ISBN. \$15 from [lulu.com](http://lulu.com).

*Crossing Bridges* is the second anthology by The Portland Haiku Group, featuring their haibun work, following the 2018 release of *New Bridges*, which featured haiku and tanka. A committee of five members put their expertise together to assemble the anthology. I was particularly impressed with the sequencing done by Shasta Hatter; there is a really salient flow thematically between the haibun which gives the collection a nice cohesion. The Portland group is a sort of supergroup with guest members from outside of Oregon as well, ranging from John Stevenson in New York to Chandra Bales in New Mexico, and Terry Ann Carter in British Columbia to Diana Saltoon in Hawaii. It's a rare treat to see haibun from a range of writers that include long-time masters of the form and those who find delight in experimentation and learning to write in it. Twenty-one poets present seventy-one haibun and eleven works of art. Snail Dreams, the charming cover image by Carolyn Winkler, heralds the journeys of imagination through our world that the collection holds within.

A multidimensional variety is achieved through the themes running through the anthology. Different geographic settings run across varying times and seasons, with a wide range of human and natural experience. The book functions as a travelog, taking readers through US states, Japan, India, Canada, Germany, England, and Switzerland.

Readers will traverse the seasons haunted by vivid, unforgettable images. In *Early November*, Maggie Chula sits with a dying friend in autumn; "Her birdfeeder is empty. [...] The gourd, with its lumps and warts, keeps us company." In *Lifeline*, we're struck with the image of Lisa Gerlits carrying a black Singer sewing machine through a snowy winter night. John Stevenson shows us a practical

plow unceremoniously too close for comfort to old graves in *Spring*. In *Dusky Rose*, Maggie Chula's hot girl summer moment in California in a sexy pink satin floral flowing robe will remind you too of being carefree and twenty-five.

I've not run across much of John Stevenson's haibun before, which are among the briefest in this collection. I enjoyed the short and powerful, perfectly balanced trilogy of title, prose, and haiku in his haibun, such as the one just mentioned above:

"Spring

There is no fence or enclosing wall, no waste of space or undue sentiment.

country graveyard  
the close pass  
of a plow"

World history makes an appearance in several of the haibun, intermingled with the personal histories. Steve Bahr intersperses the story of runner Roger Bannister's historical 1954 record breaking the sub-4-minute mile barrier with Roger's own quotes about the hunter-prey relationship of African lions and gazelles in *Milestone*. Carolyn Winkler writes about artist Judy Chicago's contribution to feminism and women's rights in *Every Step We Take*. Cathy Merritt takes us back to the Summer 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany where her father-in-law snuck away from his post in the Marines to attend events in *Let the Games Begin!*

In *Nuclear Darkness*, David Rosen describes his poignant visit to the Peace Park Museum in Hiroshima:

"When the Atomic bomb exploded, a man was sitting in front of this segment of the wall; all that remained was his shadow. That night I couldn't sleep; I was haunted by the souls of the 140,000 people killed (mostly women and children). I felt shame at being human.

Shadow burnt into the wall—  
rain falls, leaving no sound  
behind”

Continuing the variety, the poets explore memories of humble beginnings, different lifestyles, and tragic endings. We peer into people’s households rich in sensory imagery. In Jacob Salzer’s *Gravity*, he takes us back to “In grandpa’s basement, the musty air lingers with motor oil, dirt, and metal. [...] Boxes overflowing with nails.” Shelley Baker-Gard shows us a slice of life in *Three Cats in the House Life Used to be...* “My husband sits in his nightly spot - the depression in the couch stays whenever he leaves. The white trimmed tortoiseshell cat, Bandi, was a previously feral cat adopted from the bike trail and is cozily curled next to him.” Cathy Merritt takes us back to New Year’s Eve, 1973 in *What a Ride*; “A black, 1950s Lincoln Continental rolled up to the entrance of the family’s massive home, and my date and I, his father and wife, got inside.”

We journey further with the writers through other life events such as divorces and deaths, scenes of love and friendship, new beginnings across all stages of adulthood, and memories of childhood.

In Shasta Hatter’s *The Eyes of a Child*, her mother unloads the meager contents of the church’s monthly food box and examines her \$119 of food stamps:

“We won’t go hungry this month,” she tells me, smiling.

fresh peaches  
my mom slices  
the bad spots away”

Marilyn Stablein hilariously describes the fate of her new pets in *Ajar*:

“...so I squished raw hamburger into a bloody meatball to attract

flies. The frogs I figured could help themselves.

Garden fish bowl  
hop, plop, scatter  
two frogs on the run”

Carolyn Winkler gives us another moment of humor in *Third Grade* when she and her girlfriends decide to entertain some fellow boys with scarves from her mother’s drawer. The haibun culminates with:

“We were so exotic and the boys loved it. Our first encounter with being sexy.

unraveling  
restraints  
summer’s heat”

In *My Long-Eared Child*, Chandra Bales humorously calls her sister’s newborn baby’s hands “paws” and the haibun continues tongue-in-cheek with her continued questioning of whether she ever wants kids, reflecting on her desire for neatness, precision, and order in her life with her husband. Things take an interesting turn with the adoption of a bunny rabbit as a pet... and long story short, I challenge any reader to not laugh out loud at this conclusion:

“My husband builds him a house with a porch [...] Reach in to stroke him. And Brown Bunny bites me.

spaghetti meal  
my niece wipes her mouth  
on my white blouse”

Another haibun full of self-deprecating humor by James Rodriguez mentions the many doppelgangers called to mind by his grown out mustache. The clincher haiku in *Hey, Good Looking* seals the end of the book with a wink and a blown kiss. ◻■

## BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

*Upside Down: The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2023* edited by Jim Kacian & the Red Moon Editorial Staff (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 208 pages, 5.5" x 8.25". Perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-37-7. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

The *Red Moon Anthology* series started in 1996, making this edition the 28<sup>th</sup> volume. *Upside Down: The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2023* consists of 146 haiku and senryu, 21 linked forms (haibun, renku, rengay, and sequences), and six critical essays on the reading, writing, and study of haiku. The haiku and senryu are written by poets from the following countries: the United States, Ghana, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Poland, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, Australia, the Netherlands, Italy, Russia, India, Montenegro, England, Scotland, Spain, Israel, and Japan. The linked forms are written by poets from the United States, Ireland, Switzerland, Peru, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Portugal. The majority of the haiku, senryu, and linked forms in this anthology are written by poets who live in the United States. The essays are "Repetition in Haiku" by Brad Bennett, "Famous Japanese Haiku Narrators" by Randy M. Brooks, "Punctuation Words in English-language haiku" by Randy M. Brooks, "Clerikus: R H Blyth" by Jim Kacian, "Clerikus: Marlene Mountain" by Jim Kacian, and "Clerikus: Robert Spiess" by Jim Kacian. The RMA (Red Moon Anthology) process starts by receiving more than 3,000 haiku and related works by more than 2,000 authors that are nominated by the RMA editorial staff, journal editors, and book editors. The full process is described on page 208 and seems a bit daunting. The result is a fine selection. The RMA editorial staff for this anthology are Jim Kacian, Francine Banwarth, Randy M. Brooks, LeRoy Gorman, Maureen Virginia Gorman, Gary Hotham, David Jacobs, Tomislav Maretić, David McMurray, Julie Schwerin, and Sandra Simpson. This anthology starts with a haiku by the late Adjei Agyei-Baah from Ghana: *approaching storm . . . / a butterfly enters / the flower shop*. I recommend this anthology. ◻■

*My Wife & Other Adventures* by Bob Lucky (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 112 pages, 6" x 9". Perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-45-2. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

This is a collection of 63 haibun by Bob Lucky, who was a past editor of *Contemporary Haibun Online* (*cho*). The haibun in this book focuses on Lucky's travel adventures in the following countries: Bahrain, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Jordan, Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Turkey, and Italy (Trieste). He covers a lot of ground, in more than one way, as his haibun involve psychological, social, and cultural observations, in addition to his own thoughts. Lucky's personality comes through his prose and his haiku are crisp and clear. Many of the haibun titles are also intriguing. I found Lucky's most powerful haibun avoid repeating subjects, offering a multi-dimensional, link-and-shift approach between the title, prose, and haiku. There are a few ounces of humor and unexpected moments in some haibun as well, some of which involve the behavior of tourists. Several haibun also begin with quotes by various people. Readers will receive a real glimpse into Lucky's mind while experiencing different cultures, cityscapes, and landscapes through his eyes. An interesting read that encourages world travel and exposure to different cultures. □■

*Shadow Elephants: Haiku* by Malintha Perera (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 108 pages. 4.25" x 6.5". Paperback, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-46-9. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

The cover drawing of this book is of an elephant with chains around his or her ankles. On the copyright page, there is a note that states: "All profits generated by this book will be donated to organizations that care for elephants, in captivity as well as in the wild." The dedication page states: "Dedicated to Athinni, the mama elephant of Habarna Safari Camp in Sri Lanka that touched our hearts." The foreword expresses concern for the treatment and abuse of elephants and calls for a more compassionate

view beyond social and religious traditions. Here is a sample of Perera's haiku: (1) *sesame flowers — / a newborn calf / struggles to its feet*, (2) *elephant orphanage — / under bathing water / glimpses of chain*, and (3) *temple procession / in between drumbeats / elephant chains*. There are a total of 90 haiku in this collection, which is substantial. Almost all the haiku in this book include the word elephant. By the end, I think readers will see these beautiful beings in a new light. I appreciate Perera bringing the issues of elephant abuse into awareness and for her genuine efforts to support them. ◻■

***Coming Storm: Haiku*** by Dave Reynolds (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 132 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-48-3. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

This is an impressive collection of 109 haiku by Dave Reynolds. His haiku are organized by month and he finishes the book with a New Year haiku. Some of Reynold's poems are observational nature scenes, such as: *still winter morning / the sound of / raven wings*, while others have interesting psychological juxtapositions: *first date / by the fireplace / she waits for the flames*. As readers, we can decide what the meaning is regarding the flames. Family, social scenes, death, and sensual moments appear throughout, and there is emotional vulnerability in some poems as well: *arguing with my brother / the distance / between stars*. There are also a few humorous senryu: *swearing in traffic / on the way / to yoga*. It seems his strongest haiku juxtapose Nature with his human relationships. Here is a haiku that stands out: *snowy hike / crossing another bridge / with my daughter*. The physical bridges in this haiku could also mean psychological bridges or thresholds they are crossing together. While a handful of Reynold's haiku have juxtapositions with relatively close associations, others provide more space for the reader to enter the poem in their own way. This is an enjoyable collection that allows us to follow the poet throughout a year-long journey. ◻■



condemned apartment block  
demolition workers  
put back the sky

-Mark Miller

Rounding out the 46 featured poets is a selection of four artworks that lend visual respite points and complement the poems. This slim volume works well as a travel take-along to help inspire writing while out and about. ◻■

*For the Birds* by Sarah Paris (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 74 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-43-8. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com)

*For the Birds* by Sarah Paris doesn't just feature bird haiku, although feathered friends feature prominently as subjects in many of the poems. Originally from Switzerland, Sarah lives and writes in the San Francisco area. The book is dedicated to her mentor "Hando" Fr. Thomas Hand, S.J., whose adopted name means "crossing over together." One can see the influence of zen guidance in these fine observational poems that take care to notice the little things, as many haiku poets do. In each of the four sections of the book there are poems that illustrate both their theme and this keen observer sensibility.

Section one, Rising, contains this little gem:

gracenote  
on the mailbox  
a bluebird

One would only notice this for the few seconds it was happening by simply observing, as birds tend to rise up and away from whatever they land on quickly; it offers both a visual and auditory grace note to the scene. It calls to mind the amusing possibility of a "carrier bluebird" bringing the mail, and marries the image of the common blue U.S. postal mailbox to the tiny bird of the same color.

In section two, Drifting, my favorite poem is:

drifting downstream  
ducks, maple leaves,  
this day

This lackadaisical zen observation is so relatable; as we observe our little moments flow together into the passage of time.

Parting is the third section's theme, where this haiku directly honors the memory of Hando:

left behind  
my teacher's old hat  
and raking instructions

And finally in section four, Vanishing, we can appreciate the *wabi-sabi* imperfections around us while accepting change and weathering gracefully as we melt away into our thoughts seeking peace:

meditation retreat a blue mug with a chipped edge      □■

#### **BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY MICHAEL DYLAN WELCH**

*First Notes* by Dan Curtis (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 116 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". ISBN 978-1-958408-47-6. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com)

It seems fair to say that many books of poetry are celebrations, especially first books. That's true of Dan Curtis's *First Notes*, his premiere collection of haiku that celebrates a decade of devotion to the haiku genre. In his bio note, he says he's "relatively new" to haiku, having had his first haiku published in 2014—a modest statement regarding his perception of experience. Though seemingly "new" to haiku, Curtis shows that he's a seasoned writer, as the extensive publication acknowledgments testify, and as the

poems themselves confirm. These haiku notes are strong ones. The book's title poem, *the first notes / of a familiar song / winter solstice*, reminds us that the subjects of most haiku themselves are familiar songs—as they should be. Curtis has divided his book of 101 haiku and senryu into five pleasingly named and mostly seasonal chapters: “Moon Halo” (13 winter poems), “Sun Puddle” (24 spring poems), “Sweet Melon” (29 summer poems), “Frost Shadow” (23 autumn poems), and “Nightfall” (12 perhaps miscellaneous poems that tend to focus on growing old). Here's a choice selection from each chapter:

the fridge shuts off    sound of snow

hospice lounge  
the jigsaw puzzle  
unfinished

family picnic  
a thundershower  
clears the air

salmon spawning eagles

my friend  
in high places  
the moon

Such immediacy, recognition, and delight in these examples. I could showcase many other favourite domestic and nature-focused poems from each section. *First Notes* celebrates the author's rich contribution to close seeing, and I invite you, as a reader, to join the celebration. There's a quiet confidence to these astutely observed poems, a sure-footedness that shows Dan Curtis to be an old soul at the haiku art. □■

## BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY MICHAEL KETCHEK

*Raking Leaves* by Yu Chang (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024) 104 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Color Cover, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-50-6. \$20.00 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

There is a gentleness to Yu Chang's haiku that leaves the reader feeling that they would much enjoy spending an afternoon with the poet, perhaps drinking tea with him in a pleasant garden. Unable to do that, one can have a very enjoyable time with *Raking Leaves* (perhaps while drinking tea in a pleasant garden). Some of Chang's haiku harmoniously blend human activity with the natural world: *bamboo flute / autumn wind / through the pines* and the title poem: *raking leaves / a tiger moth / takes wing*. It is not only nature that Chang captures in words but also precious moments in his life: *watching a rerun / my granddaughter / in my daughter's arms* and *evergreen / a long walk / with an old friend*. I especially like how the unchanging nature of the tree in the previous haiku reinforces the steadfastness of a long-time friendship. After reading *Raking Leaves*, I am left with the feeling that is expressed in this haiku: *cubes of tofu / in the miso soup / we are all brothers*. ◻■