

The skillful configuration of cosmic-banal elements throughout the book makes one wonder if the author is an astronomer. In the closing haibun “Hale-Bopp,” where the two lovebirds await the comet that comes every 4,000 years, and where we have the title verse, we read:

“Me, the house, the birches—all are swallowed by the deep night. Then I look toward Ann. Her eyes, bright as planets, peer toward the great sky, watching, hoping . . .”

our small house
under galaxies—
all the windows lit

Every piece in this collection is a painstaking yet effortless display of deftness by a Master of haibun – Rich Youmans – an editor of the defunct *Haibun Today* and Editor-in-Chief of *contemporary haibun online*, as he takes his reader by the hand and walk him through haibun aesthetics. His exploration of natural environment to set beautiful plots for his narratives is commendable. And the spontaneity of these powerful and personal stories make the work unputdownable.



This One Life by Renée Owen (2020, Backbone Press, Durham, NC), 7” by 5” perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9994659-7-4. \$10.00 from backbonepress.org.

Reviewed by Sharon Pretti

This One Life won 2nd place in Backbone’s Haiku Chapbook Contest. It follows Renée Owen’s first full-length haiku collection, *Alone on a Wild Coast*, and is equally rich, layered, and skillfully written. Renée explores our relationship to impermanence along with our connection to nature and our fellow humans. These are poems by a poet who cares deeply about the world and knows how to use language to shine light

on the world's complexities. The chapbook is divided into four sections and opens with "Borderless Days."

needing
no permission
sky blue lupine

This poem sets the tone for the poet's conversation with nature. There is a feeling that the poet longs to be free of constraints, to break free of the body and join what she reveres: indian paintbrush, top-knotted quail, breaking waves. Renée is a poet keenly aware of what it is to be human in this world and she expertly expresses both the joy and sadness of this life.

dusk on the mountaintop as if I had wings

first light
titrating the edge
of longing

"Rippling Wind," the book's second section, continues to explore the poet's relationship with nature. Can the natural world soothe or guide or strengthen us as we confront loss and the passage of time? Renée inhabits these questions with all of her senses.

a thousand shapes	holes
in the river rocks	in a long life
all with your name	leaf skeletons

We aren't told whose name or whose life. This openness becomes a doorway the reader can walk through. The quietness of these poems is deceiving. They accomplish the best of what a haiku can accomplish: the poems are never static, offering us a new journey each time we read them.

Renée is a poet who lives in northern California. She has witnessed the devastating wildfires of the past several years.

In “Nothing But Smoke,” the third section, she directs her unflinching eye to the human and natural losses that remain all too relevant to present day climate changes.

cry	atlas
of a screech owl	of a lost neighborhood
burn zone	sifting ash

This is docupoetry, an especially difficult achievement in haiku form. Renée does not fall into simply recording an event. She writes from within the event, using strong sensory images and feelings that are never heavy-handed.

The tone of reverence for all that is alive continues in the book’s last section, “Thin Line Of Hope.” Like all seasoned poets, Renée offers no answers. Hope is not put forth as a balm to remedy our losses. Renée respects the present moment. This is where she grounds her experience and vision.

this one life	whale spouts
I move the sparrow	this thin line of hope
to higher ground	migrating north

In a world that is overflowing with distraction, the understated voice can be the one that is most arresting and most needed. Renée Owen succeeds in making us stop and listen. *This One Life* is a beautiful haiku collection that belongs in everyone’s hands.



Briefly Reviewed by Randy Brooks

The Ohio Haiku Anthology edited by Joshua Gage (2020, Cuttlefish Books, Huron, OH) 164 pages, 4.5” x 6.25”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781735025704. \$10 plus \$3 postage from <https://pottygok.wixsite.com/cuttlefishbooks/books>.