

## A BOUQUET OF BALKAN HAIKU

*Сенке кестенова, Антологија српске хаику поезије од друге половине XX века до данас/ Shadows of Chestnuts: Anthology of Serbian Haiku Poetry from the Second Half of the 20th Century to the Present*, by Aleksandar Pavic, ed. English translations by Saša Vazic. (Bačka Palanka/Novi Sad, Serbia: Adresa, 2012). 160 pages; 20 cm. Glossy gray card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-86-86761-65-1. No price given; inquire at [vazicsasa@gmail.com](mailto:vazicsasa@gmail.com).

*Without Keys: Haiku Poems with Love*, by Zoran Mimica (No place [Winchester, Va.]: PyTau Press, 2012). 72 pages; 5"×7". Glossy moss green and four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-13-3. Price: \$12.00 + s&h from [www.redmoonpress.com](http://www.redmoonpress.com).

*Malo vjetra u kosi/A Breeze in My Hair*, by Ljudmila Milena Mršić. Edited by Dubravko Korbus. English translations by Đurđa Vukelić Rožić (Ivanić-Grad, Croatia: self-published, 2012). 96 pages; 24.5 cm. Medium gray boards; Smythe-sewn. ISBN 953-5720-50-8. No price given; inquire at [dvrozic@optinet.hr](mailto:dvrozic@optinet.hr).

*Žepski gorocvijeti / Mountain Flowers of Zepa*, by Smajil Durmišević. English translations by Đurđa Vukelić Rožić (Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Meligrafpint, 2012). 107 + 105 pages, in Bosnian and English from opposite ends; 20.5 cm. Glossy green and four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-9958-677-09-0. No price given; inquire at [smaildur@bih.net.ba](mailto:smaildur@bih.net.ba).

*Zi de chenzină; antologie senryū română/Pay Day*, edited by Valentin Nicolitov (Bucharest: Editura Societății Scriitorilor Români, 2012). 186 pages; 22 cm. Glossy four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-973-7700-96-4. No price given; inquire at [valentin.nicolitov@yahoo.fr](mailto:valentin.nicolitov@yahoo.fr).

*O cărare prin ierburile toamnei/A Path Through Autumn Grasses: Photo-Haiku and Other Visual Poems*, by Dan Doman (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Editura Limes, 2012). 204 pages; 21 cm. Glossy white and four-color card covers. ISBN 978-9-737266-73-6. Price: \$20.95 + \$8.00 s&h from [dan\\_doman24@yahoo.com](mailto:dan_doman24@yahoo.com).

*Reviewed by Charles Trumbull*

I would wager that, excepting Japan, there are more haiku poets per capita in the Balkans than anywhere else in the world. As I discovered on my recent travels through Southeastern Europe, haiku is popular and widespread. The main goals of Balkan poets seem to be to enter their haiku in international and national contests and to get their work into book form. We North Americans can be envious that not infrequently grants are available from municipal and central governments to subsidize the publication of poetry books.

Though more compact than the Croatian haiku anthology, *An Unmown Sky* (2011; reviewed in *MH* 43.1), *Shadows of Chestnuts* is every bit as important an event for Serbian haiku. The book features 153 poems by 73 poets, some already well known in the West, others less so:

new year —  
my new face stares  
at my old face

*Saša Vazić*

chasing each other  
among meadow dandelions  
two yellow dogs

*Predrag Cvetković*

In his “Afterword,” Pavić presents a fine review of Serbian haiku history, detailing the first attempts at translation by Miloš Crnjanski in the late 1920s and the inestimable contributions of the academics Vladimir Devidé and Aleksandar Nejgebauer in the 1970s, before turning to more recent developments. The bibliography and poets’ biosketches are useful as well.

Zoran Mimica is a Croatian haikuist who divides his time between his homeland, Vienna, and London. He has been writing haiku since the 1970s and publishing since the mid-1990s, but this is his first published book. As if to catch up all at once, this book packs six haiku to a page for a total of some 474. Of these, 114 appear in a section titled “Published haiku,” the remainder previously unpublished. I find the haiku tend to be purely descriptive and often monotonous, for example, these two, one from the Croatian journal *Haiku* in 2006, and

the second one first published in *Without Keys*:

the snow	Japanese lady
is going	enters by mistake
to melt—soon	the gentleman's

These things, plus rather casual editing, make this book a tough slog.

Ljudmila Milena Mršić is a member of the Three Rivers Haiku Group in Croatia, and *A Breeze in My Hair* is an example of a book subsidized by the city of Ivanić-Grad. Hardbound, edited by Dubravko Korbus, with translations into English by Đurđa Vukelić-Rožić and ink illustrations by Božena Zernec, this volume is really a collaborative Three Rivers production. Like Mimica, Mršić satisfies herself with haiku that are primarily descriptive, often substituting poetic language, irony, or natural oddities for resonant images:

a winter day	New Year's Eve
miller's white moustache,	fireworks tremble
hair and hands	in his shiny eye

Unlike the other poets we are considering here, the Bosnian Smajil Durmišević, by day a public health professor, seems to be writing in virtual isolation in the historical city of Zenica. This, his first poetry collection, intersperses a number of haiku with longer poems. Durmišević's topics are strongly nationalistic in tone, crying out for unity in the most ethno-religiously diverse and vexed country in Europe. He often uses native flora and fauna to voice his passion, and the region's native marble becomes a metaphor for the permanence of the Bosnian people:

Picking young nettles,	Guard the marble,
growing from the bosom	my son, There is our beginning
of a dead village	and our end.

I felt like Sherlock Holmes as I tried to puzzle out the relationship between this all-Romanian senryu anthology and the Romanian-American one edited by Valentin Nicolîţov and Bruce Ross (also 2012,

reviewed in *MH* 43.3). The bilingual book went to press three months before the all-Romanian one and features senryu of fifteen Romanian and fifteen North American poets, whereas *Pay Day* has sixty-four Romanian poets represented. The poems, translations, and author bios in the former book are exactly the same as in the latter, though *Pay Day* includes a few more senryu by each poet. The works range widely in style and quality, from the more traditional, such as the first one below, by Florin Vasiliu, to the more contemporary, as the second one, by Vasile Moldovan:

A child in tears,  
All the snowflakes melted  
in her palm.

His sweetheart  
putting on her wig ...  
Lunar eclipse

Dan Doman's *A Path Through Autumn Grasses* is a substantial collection of the poet's photographs accompanied by his haiku, all nicely printed on coated stock. In an essay at the end of the book Doman argues for photo-haiku as a new form of visual poetry, although he traces the history of the genre back forty-plus years, from Ann Atwood's solo books in the 1970s and collaborations in the 1980s and '90s with Günther Klinge. An introductory essay, "Sign and Color," by Dumitru Radu speaks of the semantic and aesthetic correlations between the poetic text and the photographic image. The problem in this book, however, is that the text/image correlation is too often one-on-one, leaving no room for the viewer/reader to join in and interpret. These two haiku, for example, are accompanied by photos of a snail on a mossy log and a girl in a white dress on a riverbank, respectively:

cloudless sky —  
a snail crosses the stream  
on a log

dry lake —  
stepping over sand, a girl  
in a white dress