

This haiku gem could be a companion piece to one I've always admired and remembered by Peggy Willis Lyles, first published in *bottle rockets* No. 24 in 2011:

first violets
its all about
staying small

which applies, certainly, to the size of font used for the poems in *Out of Translation*. The dimensions of the collection nicely accommodate the intriguing cover art, "Six Queens," by Sarah Raad (first published in *The Broken Plate*, 2013). On the inside the font is smaller than one would expect, given each pair of haiku, which leaves the bottom half of every page blank... an emptiness that perhaps resonates with the reader, a space to realize the reverberations felt for the delicate complexities and intricate nuances the author delivers in the lines of the poems.

Ikuya's Haiku with Codrescu's Haiga, edited and translated by Itō Isao, haiga by Ion Codrescu (Japan: Ronsō-sha, 2015), 162 pages. Hardcover. ISBN 978-4-8460-1424-7. Price: ¥2,700 from online booksellers.

Reviewed by David Burleigh

The *Collected Haiku by Katō Ikuya* (1929-2012) published in the year 2000, is a substantial volume, gathering the work of ten earlier collections. It weighs more than a kilo, is bound in dark blue silk, and has a presence suggestive of the poet, who was wearing a kimono of similar material when Kimiyo Tanaka and I went to visit him some years ago. He was the recipient of one of the 21st Century Ehime Haiku Prizes, and we had been asked to render a selection of his work into English for a memorial booklet to be printed in Matsuyama, where the awards were made in 2002. He responded graciously to questions about his haiku, while we

sensed fully that he was not just another haiku poet, but one of literary weight and substance too.

Ikuya's work was much more challenging than that of the other poets who required translation, sometimes because of the technique, learnt from experimental predecessors like the Modernist poet Nishiwaki Junzaburō (1894-1982), but also because of the rich allusions, drawn at once from traditional haiku of the Edo period, poetry in foreign languages, and other fields of knowledge. The annotations to his selection were much more detailed than the others, yet even so did not seem to exhaust the meaning of the poems. One haiku that I asked him to inscribe alluded to a poem by the Irish poet W.B. Yeats. Ten leftover verses were sufficient for another article, published in this journal (35:3), which has also since reviewed *100 Selected Haiku of Katō Ikuya* (42:3), translated and explained by Itō Isao, the same scholar who has assembled this new book, based upon the poet's last collection and appearing posthumously. In an interview about translation many years ago, Hiroaki Sato said that he would not be including Katō Ikuya in the compendious anthology that he was then compiling with Burton Watson, *From the Country of Eight Islands* (1981). The reason he gave was that the work was far too ambivalent in meaning, deliberately so in its varied play on words. It was enough, Sato observed, to know that there were poets like that in Japan, but that their work was impossible to render. That can also be said of writers like James Joyce, yet even *Finnegans Wake* has been translated into Japanese, quite how I do not know (A suggestive parallel might be drawn with the Irish poet Paul Muldoon (b. 1951), in whose work meaning is often playfully suspended, as it is in his experiments with haiku, to the dismay of certain English haiku lovers, though each poet is ludic in a different way, and with a different intention). It should be noted, however, that Ikuya has not been included in books introducing modern haiku representatively by Makoto Ueda or Donald Keene, for example.

While Ikuya's editor and translator takes great trouble to give the background to the poems and translations here, the arguments that he rehearses first, about morality in English literature and the influence of the new aesthetic of Walter Pater, in whom he specializes, apply mainly to the late nineteenth century, and perhaps the early twentieth, but not much

later. The poet, on the other hand, was well up in the writings of James Joyce and others, as well as in the playful *haikai* writers of Edo, as Tokyo was once known. It is in the interplay between these, and from the fusion of them, that his work emerges. Besides the macaronic titles of books by him in the spare notes to anthologies from the *Gendai Haiku Kyokai* or Modern Haiku Association in Japan, in 2001 and 2008, we find the Edo *Haikai Saijiki*, a reference work of *haikai* in the past.

The term *haikai* is itself redolent of the past, yet represents a spirit and a long tradition of vitality and play, and within that of dissent, as well as of beauty and decay, in the face of modern changes. All of this plays out in the work of Katō Ikuya, is always suggested yet is seldom adequately conveyed in the book under review. There is first of all the difficulty of rendering a poem like this one:

したたりて敵々たるがいのちかな
shitatarite / tekitekitaru ga / inochi kana

falling
 drop by drop
 such is life

The crisp rhythm of the original, the pattern of repeated sounds, and the precise lexical choices (the first two parts use the same words essentially in different readings), and the sudden break with this to the softer final phrase, is entirely lost in the English version. Furthermore, Ion Codrescu has chosen to illustrate this with a delicately sketched picture of the seeds of a dandelion being scattered on the wind. Yet somehow it works, and catches in its own way a sense of evanescence, even though the seeds fly up and away, instead of dripping down like water.

The poet's awareness of life flowing away from him and about to end pervades the book. The haiku are all drawn from his last collection, the title of which had been confided to his (second) wife. The last poem of the twenty in this selection is evidently the last one that he composed, a sort of *jisei-ku* or parting verse:

神を拝し愁眉をひらく花明かり
kami wo haishi / shūbi wo hiraku / hana akari

praying to the god —
 the shadow fades in my mind,
 the glow of flowers

The note by the editor and translator is illuminating here, when it explains the significance of a late visit by the poet to the Izumo Shrine. A note by the artist says that his illustration of a “wind-bell with a clear sound that fades in the air” is meant to capture the essence of the prayerful moment, though a wind-bell more obviously evokes the summer heat. There is much to ponder in this volume, which is replete with notes and explanations, presented in both English and Japanese throughout. It is possible to discern the poet’s intentions, and the richness of his work, if somewhat obscurely, filtered as it is through the Japanese scholar’s quaint old-fashioned English (“nigh” and “nay”). That both he and the artist are sincere in their admiration for the poet, and in their response to his haiku, is not to be doubted, and there are interesting touches to the illustrations, such as the specially designed seals inked in red onto each of the haiga, that create an original impression. So there is much to enjoy at different levels, though the haiku have been conveyed, as it were, through a glass darkly.

An Inch of Sky: Haiku & Haibun, by Paresh Tiwari (No place [India]: 20 Notebooks Press, 2014). 118 pages; 20.5cm; 5" x 8". Semigloss black and blue card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-5196-392-9. Price: Rs. 300 from online booksellers

Dandelion Seeds: Haiku, Senryu & Tanka, by Arvinder Kaur (Ludhiana, India: Aesthetic Publications, 2015). 129 pages; 17.5 cm; 4¾" x 6¾". Semigloss four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-83092-42-0. Price: Rs. 275 from online booksellers