

Discovering Fire, by David Grayson (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2016). 155 pages; 5¼" x 7¾". Glossy orange and black card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-59-1. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Paul Miller

For years Grayson has been publishing short essays in a number of print and online journals. *Discovering Fire* collects twenty-three of these essays, broken into five sections: “Haiku Practice,” “Haiku Poets,” “Haiku and Art,” “Haiku and Religion,” and “The Short Poem.” In addition, it collects forty of Grayson’s own haiku, ten of which act as bridges—following the seasons—between each section. The book is reminiscent of Paul O’ Williams’ similarly organized volume *The Nick of Time: Essays on Haiku Aesthetics* (Press Here, 2001).

The essays in *Discovering Fire* don’t concern themselves with beginner’s questions on haiku history or form. This is not a “how to” book. Instead the essays are designed for someone who is ready to look at the genre from other angles.

The essays in the “Haiku Practice” section cover topics such as subject matter, word choice, and form—but specific to cliché, word roots, and the two-liner. Grayson’s prose has an ease to it, and while the subjects will benefit beginners eager to learn more about haiku beyond the basics, seasoned poets will find ideas of interest as well.

The section “Haiku Poets” includes pieces on a few well-known haikuists, two “Introductions” to HPNC’s Two Autumns Anthologies which lightly touch on four poets each, and a piece on J.D. Salinger’s use of haiku.

“Haiku and Art” is a fascinating read of haiku and its relationship to other arts, notably Warhol’s “Screen Tests,” Rauschenberg’s “Black Paintings,” Calder’s mobiles, and *New Yorker* cover art. Like the other essays, these aren’t long extended explorations, but Grayson finds the right entrances to make them thought-provoking. The reader will leave feeling an oft-missed connection to other arts.

The pieces in “Haiku and Religion” are culled from his online posts at The Haiku Foundation.

The haiku between the sections do more than provide a thematic break. They successfully illustrate what he has been talking about in his essays. In his daily life Grayson moves between the suburban and urban; he is a husband, parent, and member of a community. These interactions drive much of Grayson’s haiku—and his thinking of haiku. So it is not surprising to find a discussion of homelessness as a suitable topic for haiku in the essay “The Sword of Cliché,” and to later find his own on the topic:

the coldness
of my pocket change —
cardboard shelter

This openness, crossed with careful thought, is something I have always admired of Grayson’s work. In the same vein, a two-liner (“The Two-Line Form”) and one with a religious reference (“Haiku and Religion” section):

I blink and the fox disappears —
scent of wildflower

summer afternoon the sun filling with Shabbat

Discovering Fire is a well thought out collection of connected ideas and practice. An ideal book to have in one’s library. Two final poems that nicely illustrate Grayson’s place in the community—both actual and haiku.

first warm day	street corner memorial —
the ringing bells	my four-year-old
of the paletas cart	asks for a balloon

It should be added that this reviewer is included in a list of poets and editors which the author acknowledges—however this reviewer had nothing to do with the volume’s production.