

ПОСА ВЪРХУ БУРЕНИТЕ / *Dewdrops on the Weeds*, by Ludmila Balabanova (Bulgaria: Small Stations Press, 2016). 64 pages; 5½" x 8¼". Green and white matte card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-9-543840-47-2. Price: \$5.00 from www.smallstations.com

Reviewed by J. Zimmerman

Dewdrops on the Weeds is Ludmila Balabanova's third book of haiku and eighth book of poetry. Her haiku have been widely published and anthologized: twenty-four of the thirty-nine haiku of this collection appeared in English-language journals 2008–2015. David Lanoue provides four introductory paragraphs. Balabanova, whose English is excellent, nonetheless acknowledges Lanoue as co-translator. The collection is intriguingly illustrated by Irina Karakehayova.

The collection has an over-arching but dispersed organization (a spin-drift rainbow) by season:

we are as different
as we think —
sunflower field

swift kiss
at the bus stop —
day moon

The looseness of the seasonal organization is clear from the start, where only three of the first six poems reference spring; they alternate with haiku from other seasons (late autumn, summer, winter). Among the haiku with *kigo*, Balabanova intersperses a similar number of non-seasonal haiku, adding to the jazz-like energy of the structure and further protecting the book from a linear march through the seasons:

after parting...
a bird's flight
over bitter water

night flight
I entrust you for a while
to the stars

Many of her haiku juxtapose inner and outer worlds, and often blend left-brain logic with right-brain leaps:

forgiveness:	first yellow leaves
the tree by the window	pretending to like
again in blossom	the party

In addition to the seasonal organization, another possible perception of the book's structure is as a passage through life. The book begins as Western humanity began, with its reference to the re-experiencing of the transient innocence of the Garden of Eden in its opening one-line poem:

an apple ... millennia after Adam and Eve

Later in the book we have loss of love:

morning chill
on the deserted beach a heart
made of stones

and later still an all-too-human legacy:

peaceful afternoon
my grandson kills and revives
ten clay soldiers

The book's final poem seems to bring us to a moment of worried maturity, a resonance with Issa's "dewdrop world," and a consideration of our own weed patch, part tears, part insight:

sleepless night dewdrops on the weeds

It says a lot for the richness of the book and its poems that more than one arc to the book is perceivable, just as more than one reading of a Balabanova haiku can often be made.

The slim book is bilingual in Bulgarian and English. Each of the thirty-nine haiku is presented on its own page, the Bulgarian above the English. The cover's in-folded end-flaps strengthen the cover and can also serve as

bookmarks. This textured green cover is comfortable in the hand.

The book is beautifully printed and illustrated. The delicate drawings by Irina Karakehayova are juxtaposed opposite and nicely counterbalance nine of the haiku. Most of Karakehayova's art contains two images, one above the other, mirroring the arrangement of the Bulgarian haiku above the English. In each image pair, the parts are clearly of the same subject (such as an elderly woman beside a young women). However, each image in a pair is slightly different (a face being bigger in one than the other, a collar more open here, the hair a little longer there). The effect of looking at the drawings—tables set for four; a Venetian square at high tide and low tide, etc.—is similar to that experience with reading a good haiku: the need to look again and enter the work one level deeper.

Ludmila Balabanova is also a thoughtful essayist. *Modern Haiku* 39.3 (2008) printed her article “Metaphor and Haiku” (a fuller version of the original published in *Chrysanthemum*). In 2014 she published her five-hundred-page book (in Bulgarian only at present) *Haiku: A Dragonfly under the Hat: (The Power of the Unsaid)*, whose intriguing subtitle indicates Balabanova's concerns with and insights into the subtleties and layerings that the haiku can offer, to express more than what is explicitly stated. I hope that some of that material will eventually be available in English.

I close with one of my favorites of her haiku. It illustrates many of her work's best attributes: the jump from the interior to the exterior; the poetic trope of implicitly defining something hard to communicate by giving us something visceral that our bodies can feel; and the balletic leap that makes me read and re-read her haiku:

desire till the high C of spring rain

Balabanova's book is published in part with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria, marking the national regard that she clearly deserves.

I highly recommend this beautiful book.