
REVIEWS

The Searchable World, by Peter Newton (No Place [Winchendon, Mass.]: Maplevue Publishing, 2017). 124 pages; 5" × 7". Four-color matte card covers; perfectbound. Letterpress. ISBN 978-1-640075-28-3. Price: \$15.00 from Maplevue Publishing, 12 High Street, Winchendon, MA 01475

Reviewed by Brad Bennett

Peter Newton, co-editor of the online journal, *tinywords*, and a Director of The Haiku Circle, an annual haiku gathering in Northfield, Massachusetts, has been publishing accomplished, award-winning, and delightful haiku for years. *The Searchable World* is his second full-length book of haiku after *What We Find* (Imaginary Press, 2011). It contains 163 haiku and senryu, usually with one poem on the verso and two on the recto. The poems are sequenced seasonally, starting with the new year.

With this book's intriguing title, Newton invites the reader to accompany him on a quest. What are we looking for? The haiku moments that make up our journeys through life. And what parts of the world are searchable? Well... all of it, naturally.

The opening title haiku starts us off on this journey:

tide pool
the searchable world
we live in

In his introduction, Newton explains, "When I was a kid I spent a lot of time stooped over tide pools flipping over rocks... Low tide was filled with little ecosystems perfect for an 8-year-old's curiosity. I was a student of salt-water puddles. By summer's end I must have crisscrossed acres of tidal flats, moved a million rocks."

We readers are the lucky recipients of what Newton has found during his searches as a child and an adult. His poems are simple yet enduring, personal yet universal, observational yet philosophical. He writes humbly, honestly, and refreshingly. Newton uncovers moments that are familiar, but he examines them in new ways that resonate. He is adept at using less when less will do. We learn about ourselves as Newton measures himself up against what he is observing. Overall, this is a very strong collection with many charming poems that I have enjoyed reading again and again.

Newton asserts that, “The haiku poet learns to look at life very democratically.” One of the most inevitable and democratic forces in our lives is that all of us age and eventually die. Many of the poems in *The Searchable World* consider this process of aging and dying, and I appreciate Newton’s graceful and quiet self-reflections:

the little shift	more and more
in the blue jay’s song	willing to leave this life
accepting my age	...light snow

Newton also believes that haiku “... are the lessons you teach yourself...” *The Searchable World* is full of helpful lessons about change and discovering what is important in life. But the most important lesson that Newton teaches us in *The Searchable World* is that the joy is in the savoring.

what we have	if I learn
and for how long	nothing else
last snow	the oriole’s whistle

This collection includes many of my favorites of Newton’s from the last few years, including this 2016 Touchstone Award winner:

November wind
the hollow places
that form a song

And others that continue to bring me joy each time I read them:

a wing	oolong
in each world	pekoe
the stingray breaks the surface	tasting each sound

In The Searchable World, Newton shows a wry touch with humorous haiku and senryu:

height of summer	mid-puddle
the traffic cop	the toddler discovers
busts a move	his superpower

And he has included some deft political senryu as well:

dark money	refugee
bags	her fluent
under the candidate's eyes	grief

Throughout this collection, we see the effectiveness of Newton's clear, simple language rendering small moments that yield valuable insights and lessons learned.

phases of the moon	one clap —
the only thing	the sky explodes
on my calendar	in starlings

The intriguing cover artwork by Carol Hall contributes to Newton's efforts to record his moments during his life-long search. The original is an abstract land- or seascape in acrylic glazes, integrating text from the poems in the book. For Newton, his words were found in "the searchable world" and it makes sense that the cover art portrays that visually successfully.

afternoon rain
emptying a book
of its words

In this collection, Newton has flipped over many rocks to show us many delightful moments. In doing so, he is also urging us to continue to search through the acres of our own tidal flats to see what we can find.

Even the Mountains: Five Years in a Japanese Village, by Sean O'Connor (United Kingdom: Alba Publishing, 2017). 92 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-910185-60-5. Price: \$12.00 from www.albapublishing.com

Reviewed by Dan Schwerin

We inhabit space that comes to inhabit us. For some a mountain range or a prairie or an ocean is always at the periphery of the mind's eye. The forest can conjure the wonder of a redwood cathedral, the idle summers of our youth, passages of love and adulthood, or Dante's pathless wood of midlife. We live in the spaces and images that form us. In *Even the Mountains: Five Years in a Japanese Village*, Sean O'Connor takes us into the rural village of Yuzuri, Okayama Prefecture, on Japan's main island of Honshu. He gives us the images in prose and haiku to render the essence of this half decade in a traditional farmhouse with his wife, Junko.

Twenty prose selections are accompanied by haiku that relate to topics such as "night," "garden," "longing," and my favorites: "fragility," "shaking," and "mountains." I found the prose to be a lucid record of discovery much like Lafcadio Hearn's *Writings from Japan* after his arrival on Honshu in 1890. The chapter given to "longing," for example, cites O'Connor's yearning for Irish tea as an example of the well-chronicled Irish homesickness he places next to the emotional repertoire of wabi-sabi. Acceptance of transience, imperfection, austerity and simplicity is a quiet companion to the poet's longing that it can't just be Irish tea—it has to be Barry's tea.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard describes "how everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate." In the section entitled,