

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](http://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,

“Alive,” the lifefulness of cicadas and crickets and caterpillars convey the accumulation of vital contradictions that remind us how season words evoke a particular time. As O’Connor sums it, “summertime is insect time.” Two haiku under this theme include:

this relentless heat  
will it surrender  
to this cricket?

busy platform  
between passing trains  
the sound of crickets

This theme, “Alive,” and the haiku aesthetics of particularity bring to mind the counsel of Bob Spiess from September 27th in his *A Year’s Speculations on Haiku*: “Juxtaposition of entities in haiku cannot be simply the throwing together of just anything, the poet must have the intuition that certain things, albeit of ‘opposite’ characteristics, nonetheless have a resonance with each other that will evoke a revelation when they are juxtaposed in accordance with the time-tested canons and aesthetics of haiku.” Haiku layered enough to invite re-reading are difficult to achieve. Most haiku poets have a drawer full of half poems that have the resonance of unmatched socks.

O’Connor’s haiku work more like a miscellany than a link, shift, fragrance, or development of the prose. O’Connor’s preface asserts his own aesthetic aim that the prose would animate the haiku. I found myself reading the prose with delight but also a hope for more. The section called, “fragility,” begins with the earthquake warning, the quake, the tsunami, and the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster. The next sections take us to the inner life of aftershocks and practical considerations—what should be packed if a rapid departure is needed? Will a mudslide that claimed a home just a few miles away be possible here? These sections, it seems to me, called for more poems that mine a particular geography of upset not easily appreciated by those in more distant realms. The gold in the book was more in the poetics of space yielded in prose, and echoes of Hearn. It is easy for such prose to outpace haiku.

Some of my favorite haiku evoke O’Connor’s lack of pretense and eye for irony:

my guitar at home  
 at the musician's shrine  
 I cast a coin

behind a monk  
 the swish of his robe  
 turning petals

waiting for guests  
 how silently they sit  
 three tea bowls

*Even the Mountains* also considers the Japanese attention to detail in gift-giving, festivals, and customs related to everything from real estate transactions to family visits and honoring ancestors. The detail of the prose descriptions reminded me how perhaps only this land could give birth to aesthetics from flower-arranging to the tea ceremony to haiku. The eyes of this Irish sojourner have recorded a pilgrimage and a narrative of understanding.

a box of Barry's Tea  
 nothing left  
 but dust

*A Dawn of Ghosts*, by Thomas Powell; 27 pages. *Goodbye*, by Roger Jones; 22 pages. *Stone Circles*, by Cynthia Rowe; 19 pages. *All the Windows Lit*, by Richard Youmans; 21 pages. *Thronging Cranes*, by Allan Burns; 28 pages. *A Fence Without Wire*, by Simon Chard; 30 pages. Ebooks.: (United Kingdom: Snapshots Press, 2017). Price: Free for reading and download from [www.snapshotpress.co.uk](http://www.snapshotpress.co.uk)

*Reviewed by Paul Miller*

Six new ebooks from Snapshots Press. The world of Powell's *A Dawn of Ghosts* is a gray one, made up of mist, haze, and well-trod ruts—most likely his North Irish landscape, yet his craftsman's eye finds unexpected relevance. He is a potter by trade, so his haiku often note how things are used or discarded. Much to be found and enjoyed. *abandoned shed... / a*