
REVIEWS

For Want, by Cherie Hunter Day (Princeton, N.J.: Ornithopter Press, 2017). 32 pages; 4½" x 7". Matte four-color wrappers; saddle-stapled. ISBN 978-1-942723-01-4. Price: \$11.00 from www.ornithopterpress.com

Reviewed by Eve Luckring

Cherie Hunter Day's *For Want* is the most recent in a series of hand-made, limited edition chapbooks published by Ornithopter Press. Beautifully crafted and designed by Mark Harris, with an evocative block-print cover, *For Want* contains sixty-three poems (including six tanka) in which Day's typically wry perceptual acuity turns more overtly contemplative and mournful.

I've always admired Day's haiku for its precise word use and attention to sound. The carefulness of her craftsmanship parallels the carefulness with which she attends to the nuances and overlooked details of the world around her. For many years now, Day has created delicate sketches and remarkable imagistic relationships that summon all the reader's senses. *For Want* follows the path of *sting medicine*, her 2016 e-chapbook, and moves into some rawly felt and intriguing linguistic directions, as demonstrated by the opening poem:

bird's-eye view
torn wet and applied
to the appetite

Day is an expert of detached observation and often uses a deadpan sense of humor in the face of serious subject matter:

drought year in portrait or landscape

However, Day's ironic amusement all but disappears in this collection. Words like 'failed', 'broken', 'want', 'illness', 'sorrow', 'crying', 'fugitive', 'struggle', 'skeleton', 'death', 'flooded', and 'leaky' haunt the pages.

Although her last book of similar length, *Apology Moon* (2013), included humorous poems about the body's vulnerabilities, as well as depictions of the comforting rituals memorializing death, *For Want* is weighted with a palpable sense of loss:

unable to carry grief a saw blade in the mirror
the movable walls
of a drug trial

nightfall —
moths the color
of the dying pine

As is evident from these examples, Day's perspicacity gleams through the elegiac quality of the book; and, in my favorites, she retains a light touch and a mastery of sound that rouses a visceral response:

winter's hinge ringing vacancy

how clean this lobby of echoes

deep indigo confidential

Compared to *Apology Moon*, this collection includes fewer poems that rely on spare descriptions of flora, fauna, and human daily life. Instead it offers more poems that highlight language as a mediator of experience. If anything, it is this feature that delineates this book from the earlier one. There are many poems that employ metaphor directly and twice as many poems that concern the stuff of language itself:

the window of if

The following seem particularly relevant to haiku:

loan words the soft taste of echoes

moonlight the stitch in a metaphor

As is suggested by these, the splendor of kigo in classical haiku is its ability to link a rich literary history to the rhythms of everyday life. Many powerful haiku continue to use traditional kigo, while much has been debated about using season-less keywords or creating saijiki that provide kigo for specific locales. For me, some nagging questions linger: With or without kigo, since English-language haiku does not share the same type of cultural legacy that the Japanese is rooted in, what exactly are we referencing when we use the name ‘haiku’? And where does “the natural world” start and stop in the age of the Anthropocene? Those activities that once affirmed humans’ interdependence with non-human life forms and the earth are, for many, no longer part of daily life; and yet, we are changing our environment at a dizzying speed. The well-documented increase in global warming, habitat destruction, and the corporatization of agriculture are systemic issues that seem to elude the specifics of most haiku. I am heartened to see Day take some of these issues head-on:

climate change the season turns diagrammatic

Paris eyeholes for the planet

Day does not shy away from somber and difficult subjects in *For Want*. This collection shows us how we might create beauty out of our laments, how we might courageously face those things that sadden, frighten, and threaten us. And, as is also evident in *Qualia*, Day’s other 2017 e-chap-book, *For Want* demonstrates how poets committed to haiku might continue to expand their relationship to the tools of their craft, and how this might affect the very things we talk about.