

BRIEFLY NOTED

Piece of My Fart, by Adjei Agyei-Baah with a foreword by Mike Rehling (Ghana: Mamba Africa Press, 2018.). E-chapbook (32 pages). ISBN 978-9988-2-8132-8. Available for free download at <https://africahaiku-network.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/piece-of-my-fart-by-adjei-agyei-baah.pdf>

For those in need of some robust, Rabelaisian humor, Agyei-Baah offers twenty-six senryu in English and Twi on flatulence: holding it, not holding it, as the case may be. Some of the translations seem a bit strained, in keeping with the theme. Rehling reminds us that we've all been there, done that, so what the hey: *confessional box — / leaving behind / a piece of my fart*

Haiku Days of Remembrance: In Honor of My Father, by Robert Epstein (West Union, W.V.: Middle Island Press, 2018). 238 pages; 6" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7325023-0-7. Price: \$17.00 from online booksellers.

In a recent issue of this journal (49.3), Robert Epstein penned an essay on the loss of his mother and the outpouring of “mourning haiku” that express and relieve his sorrow. As a psychotherapist, he understands the healing value of the exercise—and indeed argues for its organic inclusion within haiku practice and its purposes. Indeed, he has published several books of death poems this year, including *Free to Dance Forever: Mourning Haiku for My Mother*, not reviewed here. *Haiku Days of Remembrance* collects poems written over the last sixteen years since the death of his father. Their value lies in testimony, ku after ku after ku expressing both the mundane and the sacred qualities of grief. At times, the repetition of certain phrases such as “Dad’s death day” produces a hypnotic, ritual effect similar to that of a Gregorian chant: *Dad’s death day / opening my eyes / on the out-breath; Dad’s death day / meditating / the end of time*

The Worksongs of the Worms, by James Roderick Burns (India: Cyberwit.net, 2018). 94 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-88125-02-4. Price \$15.00 from www.cyberwit.net and online sellers.

Burns is no stranger to contemporary practice, yet this collection of eighty or so haiku seems oddly uneven. Juxtaposed images too often pass each other by like proverbial ships in the night. That said, here and there search lights connect. *Late summer — / curtains and shadows / shift in the heat*. And an Issa poem that serves as epigraph—*The old dog listens / intently, as if to / the worksongs of the worms*—finds response in the impossible, yet somehow contextually charming, *As the worms / clear their throats, / the old man dances*

Spilling seeds, by George Dorsty (Windsor, Conn.: bottle rockets press, 2018). 12 pages; 2¾" × 4". Matte cover; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. Price: \$3.50 from www.bottlerocketspress.com.

In this mini-chapbook, # 4 in the bottle rockets press series, Dorsty presents ten haiku/senryu, at least some of which have been previously published or anthologized. The selection begins strongly, exploring spiritual and cognitive matters as only haiku can. Mid-book, however, the energy seems to peter out of the loosely arranged sequence as Dorsty moves on to other, unconnected themes and observations, however wry. Still, some of Dorsty's best. *winter zendo / a fly is first / to awaken*

Beads of Water, by Lee Enslow (No place: privately printed, 2017). 38 pages; 5¼" × 8½". Matte four-color card covers; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. Price: inquire of the author.

This self-published chapbook of haiku seems an honorable foray into contemporary haiku from someone more used to working outside the form. The haiku, haiga, and haiku sequences offered up for our perusal

largely reflect the poet's reading of the old Japanese masters, especially Buson, to whom the selection is dedicated. Contemporary practitioners of English language haiku may find the poet's fine observations of nature somewhat flattened by overly explicit description and closely related imagery. There are compelling exceptions: *reading old haiku / I look across the table — / in a bowl, a plum*

The Art of Motorcycle Haiku, by Mark Fargo, with photography by the author (No place: Lone Wolf Prints, 2018). Paperback and e-chapbook (68 pages) available soon. No ISBN. Price \$10.00/\$4.00 from Amazon books.

Mark Fargo is a helmetless loner out for the long ride, chance glances, and close observation of the open road. In this, his third installment of motorcycle haiku, he is unapologetic about his idiosyncratic take on 5-7-5 verse, most of which resemble notes for haiku yet to be written. Paired with some incredible photographs and sandwiched between extended prose sections on his travel experience, the whole makes for some intriguing proto-haiku/-haibun/-haiga, with one or two more finished exceptions: *Cloudless day alone / Late afternoon shadows cast / Silence in the hills*

Be Inspired, by Erin Moore-Ceesay (Tallahassee, Fla.: BFF Publishing House, 2018). 192 pages; 6" x 8¼". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7328197-0-2. Price: \$19.13 from www.erinceeday.com and Amazon books.

In the author's words, over three hundred "haikus on life as seen through the eyes of a mother, daughter, sister, and friend who has encountered and overcome days that lacked encouragement." Be prepared for inspirational pep-talk rather than imagery-based 5-7-5. *If you are reading / This Haiku I want you to / Know you are Awesome!!*

The Flintknapper's Ghost, by Tim Gardiner (United Kingdom: Alba Publishing, 2018). 60 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-912773-03-9. Price: \$14.00 from www.alba-publishing.com.

In this debut collection of forty haibun, Tim Gardiner nicely combines memoir with history with ecology with fantasy. From an area of England bordering the North Sea, home to endangered species and fragile habitats, he charts the inner and outer weathers of boyhood and manhood, of love lost and love denied. Childhood adventure games in the great outdoors twine with deft descriptions of flora and fauna. Local lore of witchcraft and other ghostly horrors inspire imaginative recreations—with a twist. In "The Ducking Stool," a narrative "we" probes the truth, one climbing onto the stool and submerging in the midnight water, the other diving to the rescue at the last minute. A pair of haiku, some of the best in the book, punctuate the prose: *air bubbles / my heart sinks / with yours; naked moon / do wild hearts / pass the test*. Venturing further afield, Gardiner explores male companionship in high mountains and high seas, in history as well as story: Mallory and Irvine on their fateful 1924 climb of Mount Everest; Philip Aston on Roatán Island; Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid: *freeze frame / I wish we could hold the pose / a little longer*. When all is said and done, the juxtaposition of such varied pieces—and the seepage between what's real and what's imagined—challenge the reader to dig between the lines of Gardiner's terse evasiveness, finally to find reward.

Checkout Time is Soon: More Death Awareness Haiku, by Robert Epstein, with a foreword by Charlotte Digregorio (West Union, W.V.: Middle Island Press, 2018). 104 pages; 5" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7325023-3-8. Price: \$15.00 from online sellers.

Epstein followers will recognize this chapbook as a sequel to *Checkout Time is Noon* from 2012. As the poet explains in the preface, the title

comes from the idea of vacation and its original meaning to vacate, to empty. To go on a vacation is often to stay at a hotel, there to empty ourselves of daily preoccupations. For Epstein, the leap from there to death as the ultimate travel destination speaks to the playfulness and wit with which he takes on this weighty subject. What's more, the hotel vacation metaphor shapes each haiku and senryu. With suggested reading. *smoky car rental / we don't always realize / what we leave behind; travel pill box / nothing / for death*

My Afterlife, by John Martone (No place [Charleston, Il.]: Tufo, 2018). 120 pages; 4¼" × 6¾". Glossy black and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-387-96253-2. Price: \$10.00 from www.lulu.com.

The prolific Martone is back with his trademark restlessness, this time trained on morning glories, basil plants, vegetable growth, old age, illness, and the inevitable transformations of body into soul. Gardening offers us something to do in our declining years; we are grateful for the work; happy to be of service to nature: *peonies done / a human being / sweeps up*. More, gardening teaches us how to see, not just the visible world but the invisible realm of cells dividing, odors dispersing, seeds forming, memories, ecstasies, dreams: *ars poetica / / the leap from / basil to breeze / a space to dwell in*. This reviewer has had opportunity in the past to assess some of Martone's more challenging "acts of minimal language" and many poems in this collection are no exception. Yet many others mark a return of sorts to more widely shared haiku forms. The result is a masterful reminder that the best "rule-breakers" are those who know them inside out—and seek to create, instead, another set of constraints. In Martone's case, thematic obsession pits ku against fragments of free verse, each informing and inspiring the other. To read this book is to feel oneself witness to a man's most passionate meditation on mortality:

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| the soul's | how light | paper |
| ascent | you are | wasp nest |

Embracing Life as It Is: Lessons from Wabi-Sabi, Haiku, and Zen, by Alan Gettis and Carl Genjo Bachmann, with photography by Cyndi Goetscheus Sarfan (Norwood, N.J.: Goodman Beck Publishing, 2018). 135 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936636-01-3. Price: \$14.95 at Amazon books.

Alan Gettis, clinical psychologist and former vice-president of the Haiku Society of America, teams with zen teacher and psychotherapist Carl Genjo Bachmann to produce an easy-going discussion of three inter-related paths to living fully in the present moment. The Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi (rustic or flawed beauty), the craft of haiku, and the practice of Zen Buddhism all promote a heightened awareness of the suchness of things and their impermanence. About a quarter of the book deals with haiku as “a way of experiencing life by intensifying perception,” not in craft practice, however, but in its appreciation. Readers are enjoined to savor the wabi-sabi flavor of traditional Japanese haiku as well as illustrative poems by Gary Hotham (regrettably misspelled in the book), Adele Kenny, Michael McClintock, Alexis Rotella, George Swede, Ruth Yarrow, and the two authors. Lovely color photographs help set the mood. *not listening to / the Zen lecture — / the Japanese maple* (Gettis)

His for Haiku, by Sydell Rosenberg, with illustrations by Sawsan Chalabi (Oklahoma City, Okla.: Penny Candy Books, 2018). 23 pages; 7" × 9". Hardcover. ISBN 978-0998799971. Price: \$16.95 from www.pennycandybooks.com and Amazon books.

Twenty-two years after the death of Sydell Rosenberg, a charter member of the Haiku Society of America and a frequent contributor to the pioneering journal *American Haiku*, Amy Losak has compiled twenty-six of her mother's poems into a book for children. Rosenberg excelled in syllabic haiku that deftly capture special moments of curiosity, wonder, and delight: *Munching on acorns / a squirrel sweeps up sunbeams / with her transparent tail*. These, and the riddle haiku interspersed throughout the book, should keep children intrigued, even Chalabi's illustrations

make concrete the emotional identifications at the heart of the poetry: *So pale—it hardly / sat on the outstretched branch / of the winter night.* Happily, little has changed in the largely urban world that Rosenberg depicts, making her verse as timely now as when it was written. The same is not true for contemporary aesthetics, which have all but abandoned 5-7-5 haiku. This book yet serves as a refreshing reminder that form must always come in second to what Rosenberg herself called “that fledgling moment, when the wingstrokes become sure—when the bird has staying power in the air.” *Yesterday’s rain / left this flat puddle smoothing / the wrinkled leaves*

Greetings From, by Alison Woolpert (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Colorvue Press, 2018). 68 pages; 7" × 5". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-692-14666-8. Price: \$15.00. Availability: inquire of the author.

An admirable first collection, unique in its approach. The poet has two passions—haiku and deltiology, the hobby of collecting postcards. She marries them by interspersing fifty haiku with seven vintage cards depicting scenes from California in the first half or so of the twentieth century. As she notes in an afterward, Woolpert was drawn to these images for their visual and political ironies. Matched with haiku on a facing page, the postcards anchor the chapbook both visually and conceptually. Two examples: an irrigation ditch stretching straight into the distance and hyped as a beautiful California landscape is accompanied by *spring sky / one twirl before the girl / settles in line.* The poet similarly mirrors a shot of colored flares smoking on open ground at Fort Ord with *darkening clouds / the driftwood fort one boy builds / another destroys.* (After closing in the mid-1990’s, the base underwent extensive clean-up of hazardous, toxic and radiological waste). The first pairing in fact opens the chapbook, the second comes near its end. In between, what Woolpert does very well indeed is to explore, in haiku loosely arranged in sections, how the tensions between natural and human landscapes affect personal life and personal commitment to restitution: *the mountain sleeps — / each runner taps the signpost / before turning back*

Deer Heart, by Stephen Toft, with photographs by Phil Openshaw (India: Yavanika Press, 2018). E-book. No ISBN. Available for free download at https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/21d2c2_d365c439370649008a51445119cbcbe1.pdf

This is Stephen Toft's third book of haiku and a moody one, at that. Twenty haiku, interspersed with three black and white photographs by Phil Openshaw, train a fine attention on the inner and outer vagaries of winter: *winter landscape myself in diagram form*. For Toft, the seasonal barrenness of trees (Openshaw's artwork providing diagrams of a different sort), the lonely call of owls, the spiritual obliterations of new snow, all these images and more limn the dark heart of men and deer: *wilderness / i warm a shadow / with my blood*. In lesser hands, the depressive atmosphere might send some readers packing. The poetic originality of Toft's one-, two-, three- and four-line haiku somehow provides a measure of catharsis: *between the ribs a whale a winter star*. Some strong language.

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