

BRIEFLY NOTED

Healing into Haiku: On Illness and Pain, by Robert Epstein, with foreword by David H. Rosen (West Union, W.V.: Middle Island Press, 2018). 133 pages; 5"×8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7325023-5-2. Price: \$15.00 from www.amazon.com.

Poet and anthologist Robert Epstein continues to offer us compelling evidence that the practice of haiku can ameliorate many of the vicissitudes of life. Having compiled haiku by himself and others on death awareness, loss, grief, and the afterlife, he now turns to chronic illness—his own. For many years, Epstein has led a “circumscribed life,” hemmed in by back pain, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, insomnia, and kidney disease. Haiku have been his “saving grace.” Most of the haiku in this collection understandably read like daily witness to the difficulties of coping rather than art-making. This is less a criticism than a confirmation of the book: haiku do indeed craft a voice that others hear. Both the speaking and the listening, Epstein tells us, help allay emotional suffering and nurture spiritual healing. *today's forecast: / cloudy with a chance / of sciatica; shut-in / more in common with the fly / than I care to admit; after the fire / new redwood growth / I ask for help*

On Haiku, by Hiroaki Sato (New York: New Directions, 2018). 294 pages; 5"×8". Matte four-color covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-8112-2741-4. Price: \$19.95 from online booksellers.

Since the late 1960s, the celebrated translator and author Hiroaki Sato has been carefully considering Japanese haiku while living and working in the U.S. In *On Haiku* he compiles in one volume nineteen talks and essays, dating from the 1990s through 2016, on a variety of topics that haiku poets will find of great interest. (Many, but not all, of the essays appeared in *Modern Haiku*, *Frogpond*, and *Roadrunner Haiku*.) In a discursive style that is yet lucid and compelling, Sato discusses Bashō's haikai, arguing that his hokku (opening link) and accompanying wakiku

(second link) are best read as host-guest compliments. He translates and comments on famous *kasen*, link by link. He writes about women *haijin*, with a fascinating, sad piece about Suzuki Shizuko, who composed haiku while working as a prostitute in post-WWII Japan. He takes a look, too, at haiku and zen, Shiki's mediocrity, *gendai* rejection of traditional form, war haiku by Saitō Sanki and others, and difficulties inherent in translation itself. Indeed, Sato's preference for the one-line presentation offers a corrective of sorts for English language understanding of Japanese haiku. *An old pond: a frog jumps in the water the sound* (Bashō); *Sleeting: the sum of dough I get from a man* (Shizuko); *Machine gun: between his eyebrows a red flower blooms* (Sanki). Recommended.

Empty Title Space, by Daniel Gahnertz, translation by Stefania Renzetti (Italy: La Ruota, 2018). 60 pages; 6" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card cover; perfectbound. ISBN 978-88-99660-29-1. Price: €8.00 from www.laruotaedizioni.it/empty-title-space/

The journalist-photographer-poet Daniel Gahnertz presents fifty-three haiku in Italian and English. Most read like extemporaneous snapshots of a life lived with cats, little kids, Italian traffic, bar scenes, and the like—though some *ku* paint more enduring pictures. The form is free-style, with the first word capped and the last word followed by a period. The English translations occasionally jar, occasionally intrigue. *Autumn leaves— / yellow fresh smell / through the window.*; *Snoring sound / beside my baby— / my cat.*; *Roman bar chat— / I feel so north / of all language.*

Goodwill Galaxy Hunting, by LeRoy Gorman (Canada: Urban Farmhouse Press, 2019). 70 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-988214-25-2. Price: \$17.00 from www.amazon.com and other online booksellers.

Author of a couple dozen poetry books and chapbooks, Gorman is a master of minimalist and concrete wordplay and, it turns out, the haiku,

senryu, and tanka of sci-fi worlds. Here he uses all his jets to explore life on Mars, time travel, time crime, and other forms of the extra-terrestrially strange. Given that this is science fiction and not fantasy, some readers may need to brush up on their knowledge of Mars and such, but Gorman's sharp wit and inimical insights make the effort worthwhile. Beam me up, Scotty! *pictures from Mars / I revisit / the zen garden; dust pinks / the Martian mind / cherry blossom brain; physiotherapy / a robot with measured limp / points the way*

Haiku as Life: A Kaneko Tohta Omnibus, by Richard Gilbert, Itō Yūki, David Ostman, Masahiro Hori, Koun Franz, Tracy Franz, and Kanamitsu Takeyoashi (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2019). 515 pages; 6"×9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-40-1. Price: \$35.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

This omnibus collection of four previously-published books by the Kon Nichi Translation Group contains additional interview material with Kaneko Tohta and more of his haiku through 2018—all rendered in English. The sheer size and heft of the volume makes palpable the outsize reputation of the poet in his own land—and if Richard Gilbert and colleagues have anything to do with it, in the English-speaking world as well. How soon the West absorbs, adapts, or even expands on the pioneering approach of Japanese gendai haiku remains to be seen. Kaneko's baptism in the radical poetics of pre-WWII Japan and his commitment to retain that progressive spirit in the war's aftermath make for a fascinating read. Indeed, an appreciation of his philosophical stance as a "wild ordinary human" engaged in a socially conscious poetics of all "living things" is critical to understanding his work. Make that, trying to understand. The translations largely read like runes difficult to decipher, due not only to the poet's idiosyncratic brilliance, but to the translators' efforts to avoid the declarative phrasing of English-language haiku in preference to the raw, imagistic energies characteristic of the original Japanese. As a result, many of Kaneko's haiku remain inaccessible without the translator's commentary at the bottom of each page and, often, not even then. And yet,

any poet eager to explore expanding possibilities for haiku or the “creative disorder” of its innovation will want to make the attempt. In a life dedicated to the intellectual wildness of a seamless bodymind, Kaneko points the way to a new form of “poetic composition.” From his oeuvre: “*ume* bloom / blue sharks appear / everywhere in the garden”. From the commentary: “White *ume* [plum] blooms and beams of the rising spring sun form pale shadows. In such an atmosphere, energetic and violent blue sharks swim—such scenery cannot be real; however, this haiku possesses a vivid and clear reality”—i.e., that of a “spring dream.”

Mixed Bag, A Travelogue in Four Forms, by William Scott Galasso, with photographs by William Scott Galasso and Vicki Galasso (Laguna Woods, Calif.: Galwin Press, 2018). 189 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card cover; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7327527-0-2. Price: \$8.38 from www.amazon.com.

This “legacy series” of poems, culled from previous books and publications is, indeed, a mixed bag. Galasso combines free verse, haiku, haiku sequences, haibun, and tanka with a *mélange* of travel destinations geographical and emotional. Plenty of haibun and haiku stick in the mind like postcards worthy of a prominent place on cork board or refrigerator door. In the haibun “Night” someone sits by the open window, watching the sky, listening to the sea, his feelings capped by *so much depends upon / the smell of salt and / a star to steer by*. Littoral imagery returns in yet another locale to cap a haiku sequence: *tasting sea salt / on your tongue / ... gulls sweep the sky*. Yet, though we travel the world, some places in the heart remain mutely mysterious. *nothing to say / only my hands and arms / can speak*

Call It Haiku, by Vincent Tripi (Windsor, Conn.: Bottle Rockets Press, 2018). 37 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7327746-0-5. No price; contact The Haiku Circle at www.haikucircle.com.

This slim volume compiles casual, intuitional reflections on the “haiku journey” by one of our masters. To walk the walk, Tripi asserts, is to engage “a space-making consciousness.” Indeed, haiku (re)create a moment in place rather than the moment in time to which most haiku primers refer. Time is an ethereal abstraction that we can only grasp through the physical world around us, through material things and processes in situ. What insight this consciousness may have for reading and writing haiku shapes Tripi’s mostly one-page essays on “direction,” “getting lost,” “the where,” “reaching water,” and “the haiku place.” He hones his metaphor literally; he also asserts its figurative dimension. “Place, too, refers to what’s inside”: *rain river stream creek brook rivulet empty canteen*. “To write is to be at the very center of a place. To know that place completely is to know oneself”: *wind chi me*. A handful of reflections on making meaning in haiku stand out, among them, Tripi’s musings on repetition as more than a “play-of-words,” but instead an immersion in a “core word” that invites the “live feeling” of presence: *the sandpiper / getting me, getting me, getting me / to get my feet wet*

Wishbones, by Ben Moeller-Gaa, calligraphy by J.S. Graustein (Meredith, N.H.: Folded Word, 2018). 130 pages; 5"×7". Glossy four-color covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-61019-116-6. Price: \$12.00 from www.amazon.com.

In Moeller-Gaa’s fourth chapbook of haiku and senryu, J.S. Graustein’s calligraphy lends an antique air, as if signaling to the reader that within these pages lies a tried and true reality. As indeed it does. Moeller-Gaa writes with enviable command of the poetic possibilities inherent in haiku, playing with unexpected juxtapositions, reversals of causality, perceptual surprise, and more. And he takes for subject matter some of the more familiar byways of American life in the Midwest: backyard nature, pets, domestic tiffs, domestic joys, and happy hour at the local bar. *our silence / along the two lane highway / snow covered barns; nightfall / kids out walking / their flashlights; the vet feeling / the old cat’s tummy / a lump in my throat*

Windmill Sails, by Zdravko Karakehayov (Bulgaria: privately printed, 2019). 62 pages; 5½" × 8". Matte tan card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-619-91176-0-6. Price: inquire of the author at zgk@nbu.bg.

In his second book of poetry, Karakehayov offers up sixty-seven haiku in Bulgarian and English, translations apparently his own. About a quarter of the poems have been previously published, some in the pages of this and other English-language journals. Here and there a translation treads closer to awkwardness than expressive novelty—*smell of bread / is coming / the night train*—but by and large the poems read very well. Karakehayov knows his way around haiku and is not averse to playing a bit with form. In a short series of three haiku, two phrases are separated by a circle sketched in dotted line: *the drawbridge lowered / [circle] / a wedding ring*. Exploring a multitude of relationships between movement and stasis, he takes the reader on a windmill's journey in and through place. His poetic vision is a reticent one, yet especially sensitive to sensory experiences often overlooked: *the elevator is moving up / kids with balloons inside*

On the Planet, by Deb Koen, edited by Michael Ketchek (No place: Free Food Press, 2018). 48 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy black and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-578-41529-1. Price: \$ 7.00 from www.freefoodpress.org.

In this fine first collection of haiku and senryu, Koen is as steeped in the human world as she is in “the nooks and crannies of Rochester and the magical Finger Lakes Region of New York State ...” Three and four poems at a time, page by page, the poet navigates the miscible experience of both. Although some ku refer only to nature, and many more refer only to social or political concerns, most exist in a place between, a place the poet deftly exploits. Weighing in on any number of cultural issues and concerns, Koen skewers our pretenses, delights in the ironies of our rationalizations, lightly traces the lineaments of our distress. To this uneasiness, a feeling of belongingness to and communion with nature serves as ballast. Some superb linking and shifting between poems add to the

aesthetic achievement. From a single spread: *trapped / the terminal bird / in my brain; uprooted tree / its base water collects / migrating birds; border crossing / rummaging for proof / of my existence*. Recommended.

Oars Up, by Joe McKeon (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2019). 64 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-35-7. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

This first chapbook nimbly captures moment after moment of the past, particularly those deep memories of childhood and adolescence. Take it as high praise, indeed, that if *Oars Up* doesn't make you want to have a go at some of your earliest recollections, nothing will. Poems addressing the lines cast across a lifetime by friendship, illness, love, loss, marriage, and children are to savor, admire, and emulate. Most of the haiku and senryu have been previously published singly; many presented here in titled sequences or after-the-fact haibun are newly enhanced. *oars up / dad asks what I know / about girls; awaiting word... / coffee in a paper cup / too hot to sip; snow crocus / my grandson asks / if I have dreams*. Recommended.

A Piece of the Berlin Wall, by Marcus Larsson (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2018). 64 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-29-6. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

In this, his second collection of haiku/senryu, Larsson mines the intimate moments of family and community life for artful, heartfelt poetry. The themes of care, wonder, and bittersweet irony that mark his "examined life" are ably bookended: *easy climb / the way my son / looks after me* begins the chapbook; *old diary / searching for something / then as well* penultimately ends it. Meanwhile, the poet shifts from verse to verse the way conscious attention shifts between thoughts of present, past and future, one season and another, morning and evening, self and other. How his son "looks after" him resonates with the tourists at Auschwitz who

stay “*close / to the tour guide*,” which resonates in turn with the childhood teacher who “*still remembers us*.” Larsson is especially skilled with understatement, metaphorically charged juxtapositions, and universal readings of the particular. In a collection replete with “I,” “we,” and “you,” the highpoint is reached with an indeterminate pronoun that stresses human communion at its halcyon best: *someone’s chin / on someone’s shoulder / summer stars*. Recommended.

Number Eight Wire: The Fourth New Zealand Haiku Anthology, edited by Sandra Simpson and Margaret Beverland (New Zealand: Piwakawaka Press, 2019). 150 pages; 5¾” × 8¼”. Matte green, black, and tan card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-473-46477-6. Price: \$25.00 plus \$18.00 postage to the U.S. Inquire of haithologynz@gmail.com.

Compiled by two of New Zealand’s best and most active haiku poets, *Number Eight Wire* surveys New Zealand haiku a decade after the last anthology to do so. The result is impressive: 330 haiku published between 2008 and 2018 by seventy poets. Short biographies of contributors are at the back. A handy glossary is also provided, because so many poems reference native flora and fauna, as well as cultural tropes: *beaded with songbirds number eight wire* (Karen Peterson Butterworth). Used for fencing for over a century, number eight wire has come to represent Kiwi ingenuity and inventiveness. Without doubt, the poets featured here have resourcefully adapted haiku to their own circumstances—those unique and those universal. *sowing mustard seed... / the brush of a bumblebee / against my arm* (Margaret Beverland); *by the gate / a wild rose holds me / for a second* (Mac Miller); *plovers landing / each shadow widens / to receive its bird* (Katherine Raine).

Walking, Just a Little Water, by Rebecca Lilly (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2018). 100 pages; 4¼” × 6½”. Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-33-3. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

9,000 feet: *deepest darkness / my palms flat / to the wall*. With admirable restraint and sensitivity, the reader is invited to share in the delights of travel: *coffee ceremony / no one drinks / alone*

Contractions, by kj munro (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2019). 102 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-36-4. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

Somewhere in the middle of kj munro's first full collection of haiku and senryu, the reader comes upon an artist framing the summer sky with her hands. This is surely a self-portrait. Munro is adept at sizing up poetic moments, finding just the right perspective, placing her words at the vanishing point where vision and insight intersect: *inside / the paintbox / birdseed*. She is especially good at monoku, wresting double duty from her words to create interesting disjunctions: *my words blending homemade paper*. Munro's place may be the Yukon in northwest Canada; her subjects the wild landscape, the northern lights, the snow; yet she also excels when addressing domestic life, writerly obsessions, and small moments of awareness: *lurching bus / the petals from her bouquet / brush my face*. Recommended.

Wild Rhubarb, by Stuart Quine (United Kingdom: Alba publishing, 2019). 92 pages; 8" × 5¾". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-912773-19-0. Price: £12.00 from www.albapublishing.com.

Quine writes one-line haiku as a matter of course, rather than as a means of emphasizing the double meanings of words or multiple line breaks. Nevertheless, the simple form suits this second book: most of his haiku run less than ten or twelve words, some parsing as fragment and phrase, some as one-clause dictions. The latter occasionally feel a bit too declarative, yet what appeals again and again is the finely-observed imagery with which Quine evokes a largely rural landscape: saltmarsh flowers, the

muddy dugs of a sow, the hoof-print of an ox, an antique knife, a sash window, a headland kirk. The eighty or so ku in the collection add up to a portrait of the artist as much in touch with nature as with those daily rituals that invest a moody, introspective life with a sense of the sacred. *grey morning another pinch of pepper for the ramen broth; stepping out of the gate to taste the midnight rain; with every sweeping a little dust defies the dustpan*

The Cunnilinguist, by Joseph B. Raimond (Germany: Mirran Thought, 2017). 126 pages; 4¾" × 7½". Glossy four-color covers; perfectbound. ISBN 9-783744-809702. Price: \$4.33 from www.amazon.com.

Raimond is one of the original members of Doc Wör Mirran, a German multimedia group of artist-musician-poets striving "for complete fulfillment of the Dada movement's premiss [sic] ... total artistic freedom." Channeling Kerouac, he considers haiku "a sort of punk rock version of poetry: fast, to the point, aggressive and without a lot of fluff and clutter." He adopts a three-line format, counts his syllables (more or less), and plucks random thoughts out of the air. *It makes no difference / What I write, paint or sing for you / You will never find me or love me*

Nameless, by dw skrivseth (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2018). 64 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-28-9. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

In an endnote to this, his second collection of haiku and senryu, Skrivseth confesses that "[i]t took a while before my haiku started to become half-decent." No matter. Most of the poems he serves up here sound all the right notes and more than a few speak volumes. Having found his voice, Skrivseth writes with humor, compassion, and heightened attention to a common life: *shards of light / pierce the dense woods / wild ginger; life support removed / no one notices / the heavy rain; the inner glow / of my grandson's laugh / purple iris*

Alone on the Shortcut, by Vasile Spinei (Republic of Moldova: Bons Offices, 2018). 256 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-9975-87-426-7. Price: inquire of the author

This hefty anthology compiles haiku and senryu from eight previous collections written by one of the best and best-known of Moldavian haiku poets. Spinei's haiku are praised in Europe for exploring the beauty of the natural world, particularly deepened by nostalgia for childhood and home. His embrace of "haiku theory" largely explains his restrained palette—flowers, insects, trees, birds, animals—though the senryu take him to indoor domestic scenes or out into the streets as he co-mingles nature with human concerns. It appears that in their original Moldovan the haiku revolve around fixed syllabic form. The English translations, by Mihaela and Ion Codrescu, are free-form and read very well. Over thirty sumi-e by Codrescu also grace the text. *on the cart's wheel / so many / white poppy petals; frozen padlock / at my home—I warm it / with my breath; the war is over— / in the pit made by the shell / a pond with fish*

Barking Mad, ed. by Corine Timmer (Portugal: Bicaideias Publishing, 2018). 36 pages; 5¼" × 8". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-989-99760-1-6. Price: €5.00 from www.bicaideias.com/shop.

Timmer conceived this anthology of hound haiku by twenty poets as a means of raising funds for the care of street dogs in Portugal, where she makes her home. If poetry can trigger change, which we must believe it can, surely it does so by awakening compassion, by "highlighting man's connection to our canine companions." The twenty-six ku assembled here, seven by Timmer herself, make an admirable job of it: *homecoming— / my dog wags her tail / in circles* (Corine Timmer); *bitter cold / the high quick steps / of the dog* (Michael Rehling); *rescue dog / just in time / for both of us* (Diane Tomczak).

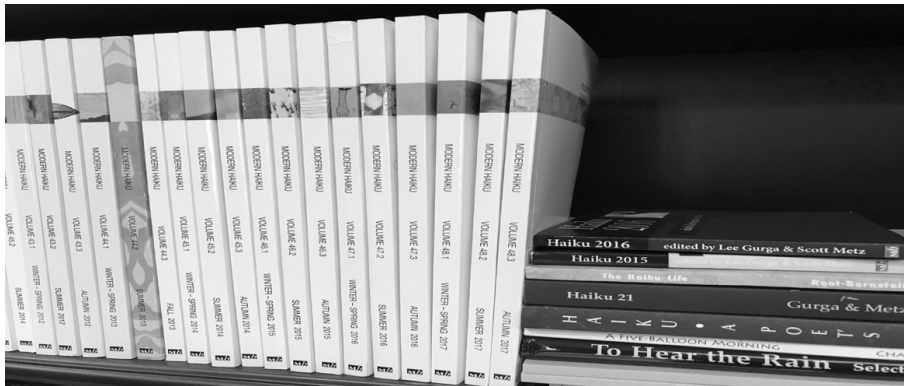
The Way of Haiku, by Naomi Beth Wakan (Brunswick, Maine: Shanti Arts Publishing, 2019). 110 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947067-67-7. Price: \$15.95 from www.shantiarts.com; ebook available from online booksellers.

As a companion of sorts to her 2018 *Poetry That Heals* (briefly reviewed in *MH* 49.2), Wakan's *The Way of Haiku* covers much the same ground for somewhat different purposes. Where the 2018 book offers a personal affidavit for immersing oneself in the haikai arts, the 2019 book presents an all-about-haiku primer for beginners, with easy to follow discussions of basic techniques, aesthetic principles, historical developments, writing tips, and exercises. Some of the advice Wakan offers may be good for the novice, but arguably less so for more advanced poets—she frowns on revision, for instance, or technical practice. "I like to keep my illusion," she writes, "that spontaneity is the essence of haiku." That said, there is much freshness and wisdom, too, in her enthusiasms for haiku, haibun, haiga, renku, and tanka (to which Wakan devotes an entire third volume, not reviewed here). Despite some repetition of examples and material that will be familiar to loyal readers, *The Way of Haiku* makes for a worthwhile read. Featuring Japanese haijin, past and present; contemporary English-language haiku poets too numerous to list; and at least one poem by Wakan herself: *no paper / I write a haiku / on a shell*

Head-On: Haibun Stories, by Rich Youmans (St. Paul, Minn.: Red Bird Chapbooks, 2018). 32 pages; 5½" × 8½". Matte four-color card covers; single signature with hand sewn binding. No ISBN. Price: \$12.00 from www.redbirdchapbooks.com.

In this, his third chapbook of haikai poetry and prose, Youmans collects a constellation of thirteen haibun "stories" that touch the life of the narrator. Implicitly, this is the poet himself, yet the reader is left to draw connections between one sketch and another; to ask what is the poet's story and what not; what may be fiction, perhaps, and what fact. Altogether, the haibun add up to a concentrated meditation on hardship, loss, death

and, finally, rebirth. The skillful prose, with not a word out of place, advances the narrative through revealing gesture, act, and dialogue that leave the reader to plumb the emotional depths: *bone deep / the words my father can't say*. “You cannot turn” is particularly admirable for its evocation of traumatic flashback and for its original use of one-line haiku in groups of three to carry the story forward: *windshield / through a jagged hole, night rushes in // on your tongue / the taste of iron and her name // after the funeral / all the ceiling cracks lead nowhere*. There is, perhaps, an overuse of star imagery in the haiku, but this is a minor quibble since each haibun is singly stellar. Come to think of it, perseverance is surely part of the lived experience of distress. Happily, so is its alleviation, as expressed in the last two haibun and accompanying haiku: *new love / not seeing the star / seeing the star*. Recommended.



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