

Broken Starfish: Haiku and Ink Paintings, by Ron C. Moss (Australia: Walleah Press, 2019). 131 pages; 5¼" × 8¼". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-877010-53-8. Price: \$22.00. Inquire of the author at ronmoss8@gmail.com

Reviewed by Sandra Simpson

Long-time volunteer firefighter on his home island of Tasmania in Australia, Ron Moss is an award-winning writer of haiku, and an outstanding brush painter and photographer. In this, his third solo collection of haiku, he has brought two of his skills together in a volume that also includes a number of his sumi-e paintings.

It would be easy to categorize Moss as an artist who also writes or a poet who is also an artist. In reality, the truth is a kind of a Schrödinger's cat thought experiment, for he has managed to become both at the same time—his poetic eye/ear and his artist's eye operating in sync.

shading pencil lines
like my father taught me ...
summer clouds

The haiku have been set one to a page, a marvelous way of presenting them if one is able to be disciplined enough during the selection process and/or afford the extra printing costs if one's selection runs long! The layout invites every reader, even impatient ones, to pause, consider, and appreciate each haiku and, it is to be hoped, to understand that every poem is a universe in itself.

An erudite foreword from Robert Epstein examines the Zen Buddhist nature of Moss' work, something on which I am entirely unqualified to comment but that does, however, add another dimension to the collection. The haiku are mainly three-line poems, with one cruciform layout and a sprinkling of one-liners, most of which are straight readings without multiple interpretations.

gunshot all the ravens in spaces of now

Broken Starfish is not divided into sections, which has the charming effect of making the reader feel invited to follow a life. This is what he does, this is what he sees—the continent’s unique animals, life in the countryside, being part of a family. A very few seem to have been written from the intellect and these, to me, are the least successful, seeming more like musings than haiku.

gospel of souls
the purpose of a river
that flows through us

Many of the indigenous language groupings of Australia recognize far more than four seasons and, as the climate changes and our seasons slide this way or that, we may become less hung up about the use of kigo (seasonal words) in English-language haiku. Moss is already one step ahead and presents, with no detriment, a good number of poems without a seasonal word, or uses a broad key word that might be applied to more than one season or even every season.

swollen moon	after the firestorm
a platypus swims	a wallaby’s ribcage
belly to the stars	curved to the sky

Moss pays careful attention to word choice and the sounds the poems make in the mind or when read aloud. His deft use of *ma* (what’s not said) lets readers bring their own experiences to the work, so creating ‘wordless poems,’ the gold-standard for every haiku poet. Moss also pays attention to senses beyond sight, subtly enriching his haiku for the reader.

dead thistles	his old hands
the feel of a key	working the soil —
in a rusty lock	smell of brewed tea

This is a joyous collection that deals with everything from life to death and all that is to be experienced between. There is a sense that the poems collected in *Broken Starfish* have been written by a man who is drawing together the threads of his life in the most superb way to recognize and reflect the beauty and wonder of being alive right here, right now.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Between Two Dates, by Kwaku Feni Adow (Ghana: Mamba Africa Press). 37 pages; ebook (pdf). ISBN 978-9988-53-429-5. Available as free download from Africa Haiku Network @ <https://africahaikunetwork.wordpress.com/downloads/>

Kwaku Feni Adow took up haiku in 2014 and won Africa's first haiku contest in 2016. Now he offers us his first e-chapbook. Thirty-six haiku revolve around funerals, cemeteries, and moments of remembrance with grim humor and poignant insight. Translations into Twi (by Adjei Agyei-Baah) and French (by Keith A. Simmonds) also grace the page. Worth a read in any language. *funeral— / his sleep empty / of snore; after the funeral— / slipping into / father's shoes; funeral wreath / a life / gone full circle*
– mrb

One Branch, by Stuart Bartow (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2019). 120 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-colored card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-47-0. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Stuart Bartow, professor of writing and literature, comes to haiku through “long” poetry—and it shows in the best way. This, his second collection of haiku, takes us on a fascinating journey through the fallow lands separating genres, wherein Bartow gleans hybrid poems of subtle artistry and haiku of graceful resonance and ambiguity. Nature, western literature, and the conundrums of cosmological physics are all grist for his mill,