

likely also catch some of her vibrant enthusiasm for haiku, which alone makes the book worthwhile. The epigraph for this book is a quote from Allen Ginsberg, who said, “Follow your inner moonlight. Don’t hide the madness.” Indeed, in *Three Simple Lines*, Natalie Goldberg shows her madness, her wild mind. It’s that spirit this book promotes, of letting yourself go with haiku, which may be the best lesson of all. Despite the book’s occasional missed opportunities (obviously more my preference than Goldberg’s), this is a book I enjoyed reading.

Well-Versed: Exploring Modern Japanese Haiku by Ozawa Minoru, translated by Janine Beichman, with photographs by Maeda Shinzō & Akira (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture / JPIC, 2021). 376 pages; 8½" × 6". Hardcover, ISBN 978-4-86658-179-8. Price: ¥3,700 from <https://japanlibrary.jp/c.or.jp/>; \$23.49 as ebook from www.amazon.com

Reviewed by David Burleigh

A couple of years ago, when I was introducing a course that I had been asked to do for international students on the history of haiku (‘From hokku to haiku in English’), I began with some translations by Janine Beichman. These were from a poetry column by the late Ōoka Makoto that ran daily for twenty years on the front page of a national newspaper in Japan, under the title *Oriori no uta*, or *Poems for all Seasons* in Beichman’s selection, each consisting of a short poem (or a part of a longer one) with comments. I took a handful from the earliest of Japanese anthologies, like the eighth-century *Man’yōshū*, just to give the flavour of the work, remarking what a singular venture the column had been, an indication of the prominence given to short-form poetry over the centuries.

In Japan many newspapers carry columns of poetry, particularly haiku, and often they include commentary by the selector, usually a well-known poet, and many of these commentaries and selections are gathered into books, comprising a vast reserve of discussion and exegesis that is almost

unknown to readers of haiku elsewhere. Janine Beichman's translation of this new volume by Ozawa Minoru (whose name, like all those in the book, is in Japanese order) is therefore uniquely valuable in the insights that it offers into how the Japanese themselves consider and evaluate the haiku. The translator is herself known to us for her book on Masaoka Shiki, as well as her writing on the modern tanka poet Yosano Akiko.

Ozawa Minoru (b. 1956) is a prize-winning contemporary poet, as well as an editor and critic, and an enlightening guide to the broad range of the some 300 haiku that the book contains. The book appeared first in 2018, with a title that conveyed the idea of careful reading, playfully rendered in the main English title, *Well-Versed*, one which particularly appeals to me as I find the word 'verse' useful in discussing haiku, since in its original meaning it is not confined to verse-form (like the quatrain), but actually means a line, as the haiku of course is written. The translator, however, explains in her own remarks on the presentation that this 'line' divides into three 'segments' of 5-7-5—in Japanese, though not necessarily in English. She has placed the poem in translation across the head of each page, from one side to the other to give it prominence, but broken according to the content and meaning, which allows greater flexibility than a standard lineation would:

The tin-can phone
connected me to the autumn
of the ancients

Settsu Yukihiko (1947–1996)

Each poem has a single page, and they are grouped seasonally, starting with New Year, in the usual manner. Each is by a different poet, so there are many of them, ranging from the 19th century to the present, and including Shiki, while the range of styles embraces free verse and other experimental forms, though the majority are traditional in shape. Below the verse on each page comes the commentary, which varies in length, and then the original in roman letters, with a note about the poet in small print at the bottom, last of all. I slightly missed having the Japanese script

but it is easy enough to find elsewhere, if you are interested. The notes of course explain the seasonal reference, and what the poet probably intends in each case, and how the poem works, all highly instructive.

So what do we learn from all this? On the one hand there is the note about the season-word as it is generally understood: the subtle difference between ‘spring wind (*harukaze*)’ and ‘the wind of spring (*haru no kaze*)’ for instance, or what the simple mention of a shuttlecock on a battledore conveys of girls in beautiful long-sleeved kimono celebrating New Year. The precise word selection is examined, or the use and significance of numbers, or an irregular division into segments, and how these all affect the resonance of the poems, or amplify their meaning. Often other verses are quoted too: either by the same poet, or else by one to whom they have responded. Contextual detail sometimes shows us how a single line can capture an entire life.

There are photographs of the natural world in Japan between the four sections, with a few non-seasonal verses added at the end, besides a brief selection of haiku by Ozawa. Everything is elegantly rendered, and the notes are meticulous and helpful. A verse by Takahama Kyoshi, “Autumn wind — / everything I see / is haiku,” is but the first of a dozen on this rich seasonal topic, all quite different, the last of them alluding to a Song dynasty poem in Chinese. But the younger poets too bring something fresh, that comes across in English, like this verse by Yamaguchi Yūmu (b. 1985): “Of light, the beating heart / knows nothing — / snow melting in the river.” This is a valuable book, highly recommended.

A Drift of Birdsong, by Carol Purington ([Colrain, Mass.]: Privately printed, 2021). 171 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy blue and black card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: \$16.00 from Nancy Purington, PO Box 2233, Palm City, FL 34991.

Farm Song, by Carol Purington (Colrain Mass.: A Winfred Press Book, 2020). 191 pages, with photographs; 8½" × 11¼". Hardcover. No ISBN. Price: \$28.00 from Nancy Purington, PO Box 2233, Palm City, FL 34991.