

BRIEFLY NOTED

A New Resonance 12, eds. Jim Kacian and Julie Warther (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 175 pages; 5¼" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-79-1. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

In this most recent installment of a landmark series, the editors welcome another seventeen emerging voices in English-language haiku. And what a vibrant, wide-ranging music they represent, with four under forty, three over seventy; a balance of genders; and a striking range of styles and concerns. As always, the editors' introductions to each poet ring the changes. Among many memorable haiku: *up late the moon in our merlot* (Mary Jo Balistreri); *winterberries / in love again / with the color red* (Kristin Lindquist); *yesterdaylilies* (Matthew Moffett); *bird / song / i / live / on* (Stephen Toft). —mrb

Birth, by Elizabeth McFarland (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 72 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-75-3. Price: \$25.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

In this book of thirty or so very personal haiga, Elizabeth McFarland pairs sensitive, searching haiku with pen and ink drawings in monochrome that are sometimes difficult and heavy, yet almost always provide a third element for contemplation. Add the free-spirit feel of the calligraphy and the result is an engaging, yet enigmatic resonance of, as she puts in her introduction, "different voices ... communicating." Standouts for this reader include *mother & daughter— / the sea washes and washes / its fragment of glass* written on bits of newsprint collaged around an ink-washed shell. And *the first animal / you tied to a tree— / eyes darken with understanding* hovering above an image in black wash that might be an emotional funk as easily as a tethered dog. —mrb

Contemporary Haibun 16, editor-in-chief Rich Youmans (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 156 pages; 5¼" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-72-2. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Another terrific compilation of some of the best haibun, tanka prose, and haiga from 2020. Rich Youmans writes that the editorial board set out to provide a “state of the art’ glimpse into how writers are trying to advance” these mixed forms. They looked for novel directions, topics, styles, and more in the prose-poem mix—and found it in meditations and memoirs, of course, but also historical portraits, flash fictions, and even an essay. Interspersed throughout are some thirty-six haiga, in color, many of which also push the boundaries of picture and poem. Altogether a compulsive read. By way of example among many standouts: *Full Moon*, by Peggy Bilbro. “Mangos. Melons. Tomatoes. Peaches. Two handfuls. Not enough, or more than enough. After losing my own mangos, small as they were, I am suddenly aware of the variety and beauty of breasts ... *the weight / of what we don’t see / till it’s not there.*” —mrb

Favorite Haiku and Other Collected Essays, by H.F. Noyes, ed. Jim Kacian (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 283 pages; 6" × 9". Matte yellow and black card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-81-4. Price: \$30.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

With this republication of H. F. Noyes’ *Favorite Haiku* (first published by Red Moon Press in five volumes from 1998 through 2002), another generation of English-language haiku poets gains renewed access to fundamentals of the form. Noyes (1918–2010) was active in the 1980s, 90s, and early 2000s as a widely-published and anthologized haijin perhaps best known for his “favorite haiku” pieces. In clear, brief, unaffected prose, he interpreted haiku—most often one, sometimes a pair, very occasionally a trio—with deep feeling for the aesthetic principles and spiritual sensibilities of the East. Noyes closely equated the “haiku way” with Zen Buddhism, yet he recruited other Eastern traditions, as well as the

poetics of a Wordsworth or the spirituality of a Thoreau to his meditations. With regard to *Sunset ... / washing up on the beach / an empty can of paint* by Elizabeth St Jacques, Noyes wrote: “What a warming thought that the paint can’s contents had something to do with the glory of the sunset. How refreshing a haiku in which rationality has no place at all! Robert Spiess quotes Hazrat Inayat Kahn: ‘Reason is the illusion of reality.’” Thus the masterclass in crafting unselfconscious expressions of the intuitive “heartmind.” A little editorial context from Red Moon Press for the volume as a whole might have been nice, as well as another round of proof-reading, but these are minor quibbles. The index of poets and first lines is a godsend. Recommended. —mrb

Finding the Other Door, by Adjei Agyei-Baah (West Africa: Mamba Africa Press, 2021). 34 pages. Ebook. ISBN 978-9988-2-8131-1. Price: free download from www.africahaikunetwork.wordpress.com

Twenty senryu in Twi and English bemoaning rejected submissions by Agyei-Baah, co-founder of the Africa Haiku Network and its e-journal The Mamba. As Bryan Rickert puts it in the Foreword, rejection can also be “a time of contemplation.” Who among us hasn’t felt the sting—and hasn’t benefitted from it? Agyei-Baah certainly has. Among some clunkers (befitting the theme), some marvels: *morning garden / reading my rejected haiku / to a little sparrow*. —mrb

Haiku 2021, eds. Lee Gurga and Scott Metz (Lincoln, Ill.: Modern Haiku Press, 2021). 114 pages; 4" × 5¼". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9600855-4-5. Price: \$10.00 from www.modernhaiku.org

This fifth installment of supplements to the groundbreaking anthology *Haiku 21* continues the job of balancing the contemporary with the experimental in English-language haiku. It is a necessary task, for the form only lives that responds to sensibilities and concerns of the living. What

can haiku be, in a world of upheaval, now and in the near future? The one hundred ku by one hundred poets gathered here explore some of the answers in, as Philip Rowland remarks in his cogent introduction, “a remarkable range of minimalist poetic possibilities.” *Day of the Dead year* (Marilyn Ashbaugh); *briefly / in the headlights / Schrödinger’s squirrel* (Nate Haken); *end of summer / i go fishing / in an old wound* (Keith Polette). —mrb

Joyride, by Jennifer Hambrick (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 98 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-74-6. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Joyride is a joy to read. The concept of the book, announced in its title, remains tight throughout, lending energy to the whole. Expect cars, road trips, journeys of discovery, and an appealing amount of humor. Hambrick organizes thirty-nine haibun—each piece revolving around a mode of transportation, whether literal or metaphorical—into three sections. The first takes us from the present into the past of childhood, adolescence, summer travel, summer food, summer love: *walking around / in a new place / first kiss*. The second, a linked series of fourteen rip-snorting haibun, explores a threesome of car, woman, and man and the beach trip that brings the relationships to climax: *thunderhead / the gas tank / more than full*. The third section, a more sober, yet still optimistic affair, touches on the middle chapter of life, with its intimations of sorrow, illness, and the road ahead. *westbound situation / all the time in the world / to watch the sunset*. Recommended. —mrb

Keep Walking, by Bill Kenney (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 94 pages; 4¼" × 6". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-76-0. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Kenney’s third collection of haiku keeps up the good work he is known for: words well-chosen, images well-placed and, above all, inner honesty

and authenticity. The four sections of the book (averaging eighteen or so haiku each) read like four meditations on the imperatives of old-old age, which is to say, dealing with illness, living for the present, savoring the work left to do. The seasons cycle endlessly throughout, as if recounting all that has brought the poet to this point: *summer hours ... / older than my father / ever was*. Leaning on a light touch, a way with compression, and emotional presence, Kenney keeps walking. Recommended. *the doctor wants / to take a closer look / my unexamined life; after the mail comes the rest of the day; tiny sips / to make it last / autumn twilight*. —mrb

Sirens and Rain, by Barry George (Lexington, KY: Accents Publishing, 2020). 79 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936628-62-9. Price: \$16.00 from online booksellers.

This small review begins with a disclaimer: I grew up just outside of Philadelphia, I went to school in the city, and I can attest to how brilliantly *Sirens and Rain* brings that urban landscape to life. Philly has one of the country's largest urban park systems, so it seems a natural place (!) to explore where the man-made and the wild butt up against each other. Which George does with as much irony and sensitivity as one might wish. Beginning in the heat of summer, George has us cycling through the seasons, past typical and particular scenes of life in a thriving metropolis, right through the turnstiles of fall and winter, to the dandelions of spring. His eye for the remarkable is remarkable—and it does not flinch. The “silent lap / of river oars,” yes, but also jackhammers. A heron that “spreads / the wind,” as well as the train that fills the subway tunnel with a “cloud of light.” Limo drivers wiping down “one-way glass” and also the *vagrant / reasoning with someone / who isn't there*. Featuring hairdressers, police officers, priests, lawyers, the poet's own cats and more, hardly a haiku or senryu in the collection doesn't work the dichotomies of city and nature and their congruence in the modern soulscape. Recommended. *up elevator— / her exit prompts / realignment; back streets— / the diva's warm-up rises / above sirens and rain; city lights— / I'm overtaken by my / second and third shadows*. —mrb

Season's End, by B.A. France (American Fork, Utah: Kelsay Books, 2021). 33 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-954353-11-4. Price: \$15.04 from online booksellers.

In this debut chapbook of six haibun (along with six tanka, not reviewed here), B. A. France demonstrates a good grasp of the first task of the haijin, which is close attention to the world. He proves less handy with the prose-poem resonances one expects in haibun, though nice observations, like the black swallowtail “freckled with the vibrance of blue and yellow spots,” settle for a moment in his garden and breathe. *taking to the air / ignoring the audience / a dance in the sun.* —mrb

Songs of Cardinal, by Maryam Qureshi (No place: Alien Buddha Press, 2021) 88 pages; 7" × 10". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8730719-28-6. Price: \$10.00 from online booksellers.

The section headings in *Songs of Cardinal* promise Haiku Poems!, Senryu!, Tanka Poems!, Solo Tan Renga!, Haiga Poetry! Yet despite the enthusiasm, the poems disappoint. Syllabic formalities in three lines do not make for compelling haikai expression in the absence of juxtapositions, understatements, ambiguities, and more. *The beautiful rose / Appeared magnificently / Among stinking weeds.* —mrb

Carrying Sunrays, by Bakhtiyar Amini (Sacramento, Calif.: Velvet Dusk Publishing, 2020). 55 pages; 8¼" × 6". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-579804-8-22. Price: \$8.99 from online booksellers.

The poems in *Carrying Sunrays* form a narrative track, a personal history of the poet. In them we find familial relationships, childbirth, divorce, dating—as well as other societal observations. It is not surprising that Amini focuses on relationships, being somewhat untethered himself: a resident of Germany, but a native of Tajikistan. And a few poems explore

this explicitly: *chilly night / my native town's taking me / for a stranger*. Yet among these markers on a timeline, each poem stands strongly in its own moment. Notably, he finds good humor in most events, which lends a lightness to the presentation, so when some poems hit harder (as in the first example below) we feel it all the more. A strong outing. *unfamiliar flower / let me call you / by my daughter's name; insomnia / counting again / dogs in the village*. —pm

Window Seats: A Contemporary Anthology of Cat Haiku & Senryu, ed. Stanford M. Forrester (Windsor, Conn.: Bottle Rockets Press, 2021). 108 pages; 5½" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7366037-1-0. Price: \$21.00 from www.bottlerocketspress.com

An anthology of all things cat. While we might expect such a themed-anthology to be overly cute or precious, or heaven forbid what editor Forrester calls “5-7-5 humor books,” *Window Seats* instead gives a good, well-rounded sampling of literary English-language cat-haiku. These are poems that cover all aspects of our long-standing relationship with feline company. One-hundred and three poets, 151 poems, roughly half previously published in a wide-variety of venues. An enjoyable volume. A few selections: *on the front porch / someone else's cat / sleeping in the sun* (James Babbs); *cat carrier / so much heavier / empty* (Maxianne Berger); *all the shapes / a cat can sleep in / summer sky* (Carolyn Hall); *spelling out / the cat's name / so she won't know* (Mary Stevens). —pm

A Way of Looking, by Jianqing Zheng (Eugene, Ore.: Silverfish Review Press, 2021). 77 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-878851-7-27. Price: \$18.00 from online booksellers.

Zheng's collection of haibun and tanka prose is the winner of the 2019 Gerald Cable Book Award. The fifty-one prose-poetry pieces are broken into four sections: “On the Road,” “Farewell,” “Momentary Stay,” and

“Toward Forever.” These sections suggest a linear journey, presumably autobiographical, of the poet from his native China to his residence in America’s South. What ultimately reveals, however, is more of a muddle of what is home vs. what is homeland, as Zheng moves between the two in memory and actuality. The poems that accompany the prose work nicely, sometimes expanding the scene, other times shifting in unexpected, but satisfying ways. Worth checking out. —pm

Travel by Haiku: Volume 6-10, ed. Marshall Deerfield (No place [Philadelphia, Pa.]: A Freedom Book, 2021). 154 pages; 4¾" × 6". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9984-2583-2. Price: inquire of the press at www.afreedombooks.com

Poetry written by Deerfield and some friends on their travels across the U.S. From our reading the only thing that makes these short poems “haiku” is their three-line structure. There is a strong psychedelic element to the poetry and accompanying prose notes, plus lots of emphasized type to ensure the reader gets the earnestness of the poetry. *The poet chops wood / to keep **the inner fire** / burning with zen joy; Simple moon landing / a **bum clown** lost in the dunes / gravity s t u m b l e s.* —pm

The Earth Afloat: Anthology of Contemporary Japanese Haiku, ed. Kōko Katō, trans. Kōko Katō and David Burleigh (Japan: Kadokawa Shoten, 2021). 230 pages; 5¼" × 7½". Matte four-colored paper wrapper; perfectbound. ISBN 978-4-04-884390-4. Price: \$20.00 plus postage from Brooks Books, 6 Madera Court, Taylorville, IL 62568.

An expanded version of the “Japan” section of editor Bruce Ross’ *A Vast Sky* (2015), an international “Anthology of Contemporary World Haiku.” Added to those English translations are the original Japanese, plus biographical and cultural notes, as well as poetic affiliations. *The Earth Afloat* is beautifully produced, containing one or two haiku each from 153 “contemporary” Japanese haiku poets. The word “contemporary”

is a bit misleading, since the birth dates of many of the poets go back to the early twentieth century. However, a reader will quickly note the oft-included phrase “is the leader of” some local haiku group. So what the anthology may lack in wider “contemporary” practice is more than offset by a breadth of individual groups—and presumably their leaders or best poets. Too often the cultural fringes, or squeaky wheels, are given the most press. *The Earth Afloat* does a good job of rectifying that. —pm

Dream Tree, by David Watts (India: Cyberwit, 2021). 48 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-81-8253-714-9. Price: \$15.00 from online booksellers.

An uneven first collection; seventy-six haiku and senryu from a fairly new writer. Though capable, too many poems trade in personification, observe without any greater depth (*rainfall / bits of river / in the sky*), or sketch without moving beyond mere picture (*windy beach / sunset in the fold / of a wave*). Watts has the ability to write a good poem, but he is still finding his way. Two enjoyable ones: *bone moon / no coins / at the bottom of his cup*; *sudden rain / her yard puddle / hooks up with mine*. —pm

Clay Moon, by Thomas Powell (United Kingdom: Snapshot Press, 2020). 96 pages; 5" × 7¾". Matte card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-903543-48-1. Price: £11.99 from www.snapshotpress.co.uk

We enjoyed Powell’s 2017 ebook, *A Dawn of Ghosts*, so we were excited to learn of the arrival of his first full-length collection, *Clay Moon*; it does not disappoint. Powell’s world is deeply tangible, worn, with rough edges—as befits that of someone who uses their hands for a living (he is a professional potter). He is a master of quiet juxtaposition, often letting the objects of his poems shine with the Japanese aesthetic *sabi*; in fact, many aesthetic terms such as *yugen* and *karumi*, also come to mind when reading his haiku. His poems inhabit a world that finds use and beauty in worn and used things, as in the poem: *year’s end frost / the field with a*

cattle trough / empty of cattle. How deftly Powell describes a bleak, fenced-in scene, which then surprisingly expands beyond its boundaries with the last line's reveal. We are left with a landscape that, despite the absence of cattle, feels strongly alive. In the main his poems are nature haiku—but in the best way—with mankind intruding at the edges, sometimes only implied, yet nature bouncing resiliently back. Recommended. *grasshopper bending light from the blade; buttercups / the haltered pony / on its back.*
—pm

Crumb Tray, by Jay Howard (No place [Springfield, Mo.]: Privately printed, 2020). 83 pages; 5" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-00-693846-7. Price: \$10.00 from the author at jayhoward@gmail.com

Crumb Tray includes nearly four hundred haiku and senryu from an author who published his first haiku in 2018. As might be suspected of such a large number from a new haikuist, the collection would have benefited from a good editing. Too many poems feel flat, such as: *a cozy place to read / the barista asks / if the lamp is broken.* Others are interpretive: *girl in a boat smiles / as her boyfriend takes pictures / like her heart won't break.* That said, there are some enjoyable poetic moments, usually senryu, in which Howard notes the ironies of modern life: *office coffee pot— / in this line of work / one needs filters.* —pm

Pixels, by Simone Pansolin (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 90 pages; 4¼" × 6". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-80-7. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Pansolin is an Italian poet and musician, and the poems in *Pixels* are presented in both Italian and English—translations presumably by the author. Several of the haiku are overtly metaphorical, such as: *counting the days / since she left: / fire without flame.* And others have a false profundity: *finger on the trigger / peace, / the other choice* or *two plus two*

/ equals five— / holy war. We find such poetry too clever by a half. European haikuists have always been more comfortable than their American counterparts with such subjectivity. Their poems, as in Pansolin's case, often tell more than show; leaving less room for the reader to engage. A few stand out having greater depth, but overall the volume is hard to recommend. *first day of school / in every sigh / the sounds of the sea.* —pm

Personal Myths: Numbers 2,3, and 4, by Thomas H. Chockley (Raleigh, N.C.: Privately printed, 2021). 87 pages; 4¼" × 7". Glossy gray and red card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-716-32199-3. Price: \$15.00 softcover from online booksellers; \$2.58 ebook from www.lulu.com

Chockley continues the journey he started with his 2018 collection, *Born in Mystery*, writing haiku based on Joseph Campbell's four functions of myth. His first volume focused on the "mystical"; the current volume looks to the others: "cosmological," "sociological," and "pedagogical." Each section contains fifty-two haiku. Chockley works at the edge of abstraction, which considering the poems are presumably written in response to Campbell's ideas, makes sense. Some of the connections in his haiku vibrate strongly, such as: *mound builders... / positron bones buried / at Los Alamos*; or *the dessert forks next to old-wives' tales*. In both cases the distance between the images (or ideas) is sufficient to generate thoughtful reader reaction. But other poems fall flat, especially when the relationships are too close, for example when one half of the poem explains the other half: *small-town noir / scrap scavengers glean / Christmas remnants*; or when poems are essentially statements. A bit of a mixed bag. —pm

Filling in the Sky, ed. Sharon Pretti (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Two Autumns Press, 2021). 32 pages; 5½" × 8½". Matte black and white card-covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: \$10.00 (checks payable to "HPNC") from Jim Chessing, 2886 Calais Drive, San Ramon CA 94583 or inquire of jchessing@hotmail.com

The latest anthology produced to accompany the Haiku Poets of Northern California's thirty-first Two Autumns reading, the longest-running reading series outside of Japan. This year's reading took place on August 28th, 2021, and like the previous one, took place online due to Covid. The reading showcases four readers and over the years it has featured some of the best in the community. Editor Sharon Pretti, in the anthology's introduction, gives a nice overview of each of the current year's poets: David LeCount, Patricia Machmiller, Crystal Simone Smith, and John Stevenson. This is followed by twelve poems each from the poets. Some of the poems will be recognized by readers; but all are enjoyable. Another fine outing. *on the back of my neck / as I dig ... / the scarecrow's cold breath* (LeCount); *lost pinwheel — / the wind finds it / plays with it* (Machmiller); *star-shaped snowflake / a smile amidst / teenage angst* (Smith); *fireflies / beyond / the sarcasm* (Stevenson). —pm

Last Train Home, ed. Jacqueline Pearce (Canada: Pondhawk Press, 2021). 270 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four color card-covers; hardcover and perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-9991808-0-5. Price: \$24.00 (hardcover), \$19.95 (perfectbound) from online booksellers.

An anthology of haiku, tanka, and renga on the subject of trains and train travel. The volume collects nearly 600 poems by 193 poets. It would be reasonable for readers to be concerned with what editor Pearce, in the introduction, calls the "unavoidable repetition of words such as 'train' and 'tracks'..." and how that repetition might weigh heavily on the collection. Have no fear on that score; the included poets find an astonishing number of ways our lives connect to rail-travel. Some are overt, such as travel itself; others find tangential relationships where trains serve as backdrops or settings to another story. The volume is beautifully produced. A few samples below. Recommended. *deep winter / I hold a one-way ticket / home* (Louisa Howerow); *rust on the tracks / the lonely landscape / of a harmonica* (Chad Lee Robinson); *night train / an open boxcar / filled with stars* (Ron C. Moss); *a penny left / along the tracks / oxeve daisies* (Theresa A. Cancro). —pm

Basho's Haiku Journeys, by Freeman Ng, illustrations by Cassandra Rockwood Ghanem (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 2021). 40 pages; 8" × 10". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-61172-069-3. Price: \$16.95 from online booksellers.

A children's book that seeks to tell the story of Bashō's life and his five journeys, as well as introduce readers to haiku. It is more successful in the first goal, telling of his life in Edo, the fire that burned down his hut, and a brief overview of the journeys, in thirty haiku-like poems. The poems themselves are 5-7-5 narratives, such as: *His students built him / a hut outside the city. / Then, one night, a fire!*; *"I have travelled West," / thought Basho, "but did not see / everything I could."*; *Basho wayfarer / travels on in the spirit, / like silk on the wind.* The book ends with a few guidelines on haiku: that it be 5-7-5 and that "They can be about the simplest things. A single sight or simple thought." —pm