

plays with form, from concrete poems such as “March winds / his / c o m b o v e r,” with its upswept final line of letters, to the representation of an ever-so-familiar sound in this senryu:

nails _____
 _____ chalkboard _____
 _____ chills

Johnette Downing’s collection of haiku is an excellent representation of her creative spirit and lifelong themes. Each poem is complete in itself with nothing added or missing. She presents a warm relationship with life, even in its most difficult moments. Her ability to communicate a full story in a few, simple words makes this book a rich and worthy addition to any library.

Walking Uneven Ground: Selected Haiku of Bill Pauly, eds. Randy and Shirley Brooks (Taylorville, Ill.: Brooks Books, 2021). 169 pages; 6¼”×9¼”. Glossy four-color hardcover. ISBN 978-1-929820-22-4. Price: \$30.00 from www.brooksbookshaiku.com

Reviewed by Lee Gurga

Walking Uneven Ground is the latest clothbound book of selected haiku in Brooks Books’ “Masters of American Haiku” series. The book contains three prose introductory sections, an ample selection of Bill Pauly’s haiku, and a selection of tan renga. The editors’ introduction relates the Brooks’ personal and poetic relationship with Bill since the late 1970s. If you get the idea from the introduction that Bill was a special man and a special poet, you would be right.

Pauly promoted his reputation mostly through contest entries rather than networking. This may be one of the reasons he is so minimally represented in the major anthologies that have surveyed the haiku landscape over the past five decades. Sadly, Pauly’s work doesn’t appear in any of

the three editions of Cor van den Heuvel's *The Haiku Anthology*, the 3rd edition of which appeared in 1999. And this is a poet who had won the HSA's Henderson Award three times by 1991. This recalls Dana Gioia's essay about Ted Kooser, "The Plight of the Regional Poet." Quality, it seems, is too often a lesser factor in reputation than geography. Kacian et al.'s *Haiku in English* contains only two Pauly haiku, but they are two for the ages. What is probably his most famous haiku,

snowmelt ...
 she enters
 the earth on her knees

as well as what may be my personal all-time favorite Pauly haiku,

back from the war
 all his doors
 swollen shut

I suspect it is the ambition of every haiku poet to write at least one haiku that can't be dislodged from the canon. These two get my vote. The first is saturated with season and emotion. The second makes use of what I find richest in haiku, striking imagery that can be interpreted both literally and figuratively.

This striking originality of image and image association is what shows Pauly at his best. As Randall Jarrell wrote of Walt Whitman, "One need only quote." Only a mind as open and a heart as pure as Bill's could write such things as "cut mums / the odor / of whispers" or "snapdragons closing dusk" or "too cold for moths, / and her eyes are snowing."

The book contains a fine selection of his haiku, not too few and not too many for a selected volume, with a nice mix of individual haiku and sequences. The haiku are presented in chronological order, which allows us to follow his evolution from the 17-syllable haiku with initial caps and terminal periods in 1971 to haiku like

moon
 on
 no
 one

in 1977. His “cuckoo moon laughing herself right out of her clothes” shows he was writing notable monoku as early as 1978. In the haiku section you will find one brilliancy after another:

red wagon
 my son’s ocean
 filled with rain

snagged
 on her
 hook & eye

a moist trail
 everywhere of her
 snail
 anger

In a haiku such as

so much silverware
 so much silence
 for two

Pauly instructs us in life as well as in how much can be said with a few words in a fine haiku.

It was an interesting and worthwhile decision to include some of the tan renga that Bill had done with Julie Schwerin in the last few years of his life. In the prose introduction to this section, we are told that Bill referred to his contributions to these collaborations as his “wannabes,” which indicates that in his own mind this was not among his best work. Perhaps it would have been a better service to the reader to include fewer in the book. For those interested, a fuller selection might have been made available on the Brooks Books website.

I first met Bill in 1988 as a part of the planning for a haiku festival in Dubuque, Iowa commemorating the fifth anniversary of Raymond Roseliep's death. I was struck by his warmth and generosity as well as his mischievous, impish nature. He shared the handout he used for his haiku classes; on it he had a quote from Kurt Vonnegut, "Pity the reader." That three-word admonition became a permanent guidepost on my haiku journey. On his teacher Raymond Roseliep's grave marker there is a quote from one of Roseliep's most famous haiku: "AGAINST THE NIGHT." If there is anything today that is proof against the night, it is Bill Pauly's haiku. Don't miss them.

Lips Licked Clean: Selected Haiku of Sugita Hisajo, trans. Alice Wanderer (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2021). 152 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-85-2. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Julie Schwerin

I was immediately drawn to Sugita Hisajo when I saw her described in Makoto Ueda's *Far Beyond the Field: Haiku by Japanese Women* as one who "worked hard to compose haiku while neglecting domestic chores."

reading a play —
the winter evening's crockery
left to soak

Ueda further described her trailblazing efforts as a female haijin in early twentieth-century Japan. Hisajo became a member of the Hototogisu writing group led by Shiki disciple, Takahama Kyoshi, and was a regular contributor to the magazine's "The Kitchen Miscellanies" column along with other promising female poets of the time. She even started her own magazine for women only—*Hanagoromo*.