

BRIEFLY NOTED

Cloud Hands, by Ron C. Moss (Australia: Walleah Press, 2022). 116 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-645089-34-9. Price: \$25.00. Inquire of the author at moss.cloud-hands@gmail.com

In Tai Chi, Cloud Hands refers to a warm-up exercise designed to unlock the body's energy flow. With the precision of a master, Ron Moss brings his title, *Cloud Hands*, into poetic practice. Just as the warm-up exercise aligns and opens the person to all life's experiences, the same is true from the experience of reading this latest collection. One of the many benefits of reading an accomplished poet such as Ron Moss is the feeling for the reader of familiarity. It's not just that we have seen his published work for many years but it is also the resounding truth of his words. *Cloud Hands* presents some twenty years of writing by the Zen-inspired artist. *rain sparkles / in the hospice light ... / the old man passes*. In the fleetingness of life is the awakening to life's brilliance. The rain, for example, even though it has fallen continues to affect those who bear witness to its many forms. One light dims, another sparkles. An equilibrium seems to be suggested. Certainly, an optimism. Moss writes with a vibrancy one can feel through multiple senses. *red crimson vibrates with the painter's hum*. As an accomplished painter, Moss suspends the moment of creation with the painter's brush poised to strike the white of the canvas with vivid expression. There is a lushness to Moss' writing that one acquires not simply through the act of living but by maintaining an awareness of life. *midwinter / her nose ring glints / in the street light*. And not just human life but all life. *time for bed / in the dog's eyes / tomorrow's walk*. And then there is the image of the tai chi practitioner that so perfectly captures the slow-motion movement of one leg and then the other stepping into the day with the utmost care. A reverence for not simply what is to come but for what is. *morning tai chi once more stepping into clouds* —pn

Scaring Crow, by Adeji Agyei-Baah (Calif.: Buttonhook Press, 2022). 42 pages; ebook. No ISBN. Price: free download from ojalart.com

In this collection of 102 scarecrow haiku only one leaves out mentioning the scarecrow by name. *his coat was black / and his spine was bent— / the overseer of the field*. There is something to be said for ruminating on a single subject. John Martone for example, has done this to great effect in multiple chapbooks of his own. As has Chris Gordon in the crow. But the less common subjects can often be the most interesting. Martone's box turtle for example. Here, Agyei-Baah has turned his poetic eye to an everpresent member in haiku circles—the scarecrow. It's a risky endeavor perhaps more suited to the chapbook form as certainly not all poems are going to hit their mark. But in *Scaring Crow*, more do than don't. Frequently, Agyei-Bah seems to assign a more mystical identity to the scarecrow, "the overseer of the field," which is exactly the kind of individual spin a book of this prolonged focus benefits from. As Jianqing Zheng puts it, *Scaring Crow* "is a tour as if in a scarecrow museum with the display of vivid images." And who wouldn't want to go to a scarecrow museum. —pn

Haiku 2022, eds. Lee Gurga & Scott Metz (Lincoln, Il.: Modern Haiku Press, 2022). 114 pages; 5¼" × 4¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9600855-4-5. Price: \$10.00 from www.modernhaiku.org

For the traditionalist, some of these haiku may be on the outer limits of acceptability. For the wordsmithing risk-taker this annual anthology of cutting edge contemporary haiku is an illuminating playground. The 2022 installment is comprised of work by both new and known poets and does not disappoint. Many of the poems are multi-layered re-envisionings of familiar scenes. For example, Helen Buckingham's *deckle-edged / with daffodils / spring dawn*. Here the poet seems to offer an exterior view of the landscape as well as a more intimate view of someone perhaps still waking up with all the romantic dreaminess of the moment. Tyler

McIntosh's *darkness / inside the guitar / summer thunder* perfectly captures the hollow bass of adolescent down-time. A familiar stillness coexists with a loneliness we might all recognize. There's the personal and the hard line political as in Gil Jackofsky's reference to the many killings of black men by law enforcement: *oh say / can you see/ I can't breathe*. From one-liners to six lines these poems encompass everything from dream fragments to deadpan senryu, flagrant wordplay to philosophical snippets. Of course, none can be so easily contained by a single definition. These poems offer the reader an opportunity to take off one's haiku blinders and explore the periphery of poetic expression. As in Shloka Shankar's *tomorrow in a gathering of elsewhere*. Cherie Hunter Day expresses it perfectly in her thoughtful Afterword to this year's anthology: "Meaning lies beyond the reach of words." Well worth embarking on these thoughtful explorations. —pn

The Slingshot Vignettes, by Tony Burfield (No place: Alien Buddha Press, 2021). 60 pages; 6" × 9¼". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-467653-13-6. Price: \$10.44 from online booksellers.

With a clear view of his surroundings and a keen eye for detail, Tony Burfield recounts his rural upbringing. He flexes and taunts with a tough-kid bravado. At times, he writes in a minimalist, staccato style. Fragments abound. All embellishments stripped away to the bare necessities. This pared-down style helps transport the reader to each scene he recreates. One three-line haiku follows his mostly single-paragraph prose. Titles are straight-forward and to the point. The subject matters he addresses coalesce around a boyhood of chores in the hardscrabble rural life of petty theft and macho role models. He's wary of these role models, moreso than the Pennsylvania wilderness about which he writes. If somewhat predictable in his delivery, Burfield conveys an authentic American experience of someone with sense of compassion despite less friendly surroundings. "Rusty burn-barrel. Milk carton. Potato peel. Newspaper. My one match rule" begins his haibun "Burn Barrel Evening" followed by the haiku: *spider from the flame / I set her down / onto a snow death*.

The best writing is remarkably straightforward. “in the black-eyed susan meadow the dog and I nap / untethered, she snores softly / I cloud watch and count butterflies / both of us being ourselves” There’s an authenticity to these vignettes that welcomes the reader. Includes them. Making the experience of reading fifty-one haibun by Tony Burfield a memorable one. —pn

Desert Rain: Vol. 1, ed. Jacob D. Salzer (No place: Haiku Nook, 2022). 198 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-387-97171-8. Price: \$15.99 from online booksellers.

Haiku Nook is an online haiku community. *Desert Rain, Vol. 1*, concerns itself with haiku, while later volumes will address tanka and haibun. Sales will support several non-profit organizations. The anthology is divided into sections—four-line haiku, three-line haiku, two-line haiku, one-line haiku, 5-7-5 haiku, etc.—and includes a healthy amount of poetry. As would be expected, the quality varies by poet, but overall an enjoyable outing. Some favorites: *I watch someone / watch someone else / the promise of rain* (Nicholas Klacsanzky); *paddling pool I sink back into my child* (Martha Magenta); *winter rain— / I don’t fight back* (Eva Limbach). —pm

One Dozen Donuts, by Ed Rayher (Northfield, Mass.: Swamp Press, 2022). 14 loose paper “donuts” in a 5” metal film-like canister. No ISBN. Price: \$19.00. Inquire of the author at ed@swamppress.com

The donuts in this case are round discs upon which haiku are printed so that no one of its three lines has priority, thus a single donut can produce three possible poems. For example, the disc: *Scarecrow’s hat drips / thirsty crow carcass / after before, before*, can also be read as *thirsty crow carcass / after before, before / Scarecrow’s hat drips*, or *after before, before / Scarecrow’s hat drips / thirsty crow carcass*. In this way, the poems don’t so much have the two-part structure one usually associates with haiku. An interesting, if not entirely satisfying experiment. —pm

The New Green, by GRIX (No place: Cuttlefish Books, 2021). 57 pages; 4" × 6". Glossy black and white (with green lettering) card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7350257-3-5. Price: \$10.00. Inquire of the author at robinsmithhaiku@gmail.com

As described in the Spotlight on page sixty-three, GRIX (aka Robin Smith) does a wonderful job conflating the universal with the personal. Trying on a variety of identities, their work often takes surprising turns, as in: *orange blossom / not as soft / as I appear*. This conflation is not always convenient, and much of their world seems unfinished, or unresolved, yet they have the courage to face it through their poetry. Despite all the pseudonyms the reader gets a real sense of who GRIX/Smith is, and that beneath it all they have hope. A bold voice and an enjoyable collection. *deciduous dreams my tree; plucking songs / from a pinecone / pygmy nuthatch*; and a favorite: *everybody bleeds the Leonids*. —pm

Sucking Mangoes Naked, eds. Gary Blankenship and Tad Wojnicki (Calif.: Writers & Lovers Studio, 2022). 100 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8448096914. Price: \$7.99 from online booksellers.

This anthology of erotic haiku, tanka, and haiga, contains a large selection of poems. The term “erotic” is occasionally used loosely, since the volume contains poems that seem unconnected to sex or love, but the majority of the work fits the theme nicely. Being an anthology, the quality varies, with some understandably overt metaphors to be found: *his vine / always grows well / in my soil* (Bryerton-Schiff). There will, of course, be comparisons to erotic anthologies past (with Wilmot’s *Erotic Haiku* as the gold standard), whose levels *Sucking Mangoes Naked* doesn’t quite reach. That said, there are enough enjoyable poems to satisfy the most jaded reader: *in all her curves and their shadows am I autumn rain* (Dominiczak); *ripe mango / sucking the moon / white* (Wojnicki); *summer idyll— / a wild strawberry bobs / on her belly* (Teki). —pm

Coastal Visions, by Ian Storr, Ric Van Noort, Kirsteen Aubrey, and Victoria Smith (United Kingdom: British Haiku Society, 2022). 30 pages; 11¼" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-906333-18-8. Price: £7.99 from www.britishhaikusociety.org.uk

The collection labels itself as a “collaboration ... that explores the British coastline through science, language and art.” The editors have assembled glass, in a variety of forms and colors, made from sand from twenty locations in England and Scotland. One haiku each, from a number of poets, is paired with these still lives. For example: a clear disk of glass, resting upon a tentacled spread of the Yarmouth sand from which it was made, is paired with *a sudden gust / the end of season beach balls / jostle in their nets*, by David Steele. Likewise, a small black glass slab, posed upon a pile of speckled Bexhill sand, attaches to the haiku *turnstones / among the rain-washed pebbles / channel light*, by Matthew Paul. An interesting experiment. —pm

Playground Grass: Haiku Options, by Gary Hotham (Scaggsville, Md.: Yiqralo Press, 2022). 44 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-802133-95-8. Price: \$6.00 from online booksellers.

A small collection of twenty-three haiku from a longtime haikuist. Hotham’s work has always done a great job at noticing quiet connections, the haiku being a perfect format for such observations. Large things—mountains, clouds, stars, etc...—often occupy the same poem as small things—dented pillows, a bruised fruit, children, etc... and suggest a similar value. Hotham is content to leave these connections unresolved, uncommented upon. The poems are bracketed by William Stafford’s “In Our State No One Ever” and Psalm 147: 7-11; both, perhaps, suggesting the mystery and magic of our existence, as well as its precarious nature. Some favorites: *more snow in the forecast / what the mirror had / leaves the room; day fades / water keeping water / on top; leaving the ICU / everyone’s breath / on their own*. —pm

Fireflies in the Rubble, by Arvinder Kaur (India: Red River, 2022). 112 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy four-color card covers: perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-92494-13-0. Price: \$9.99 from online booksellers.

Kaur set out to write a collection of poems about her mother which inevitably turned into a collection of poems on every woman. Her poems are very much of India, and use everyday terms and celebrations which may seem exotic to readers outside the country, but whose inclusion nicely grounds the poems. And despite these terms, the poems themselves are universal in theme. Kaur is a fine writer, and her poems exude motion and musicality; things are rarely static, especially people. We are left with the feeling of a full life. Some favorites: *homecoming / mother's phulkari / a little threadbare; its ajar / since she left ... / dollhouse window; a dry leaf / where she left last / mother's prayer book*. A beautifully designed book. Also includes a few tanka and cherita. —pm

Scattered Sunflowers, by Alexis Rotella (Greensboro, N.C.: Jade Mountain Press, 2022). 93 pages; 8½" × 11". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-440463-35-6. Price: \$29.99 from online booksellers.

As a second-generation Russian-Ukrainian, Rotella was appalled by Russia's invasion. Her latest collection of haiku and haiga seeks to offer solidarity through art with the besieged people. Rotella has always been a bold artist, and the haiga—in this case, always of women—are full of emotion. A painting of a woman holding a dog with pigeons overhead bears the haiku *My home gone / and with it / the wing beats of pigeons* pairs nicely with the haiku *Littering the roadside / liquor bottles / and bodies* on the facing page. In fact, most of the women in the paintings are holding some precious item which seems to make them all the more vulnerable. Since we are unable to share images, we'll conclude with some favorite haiku: *Dog too scared / to bark / shelling in our village; On Putin's desk no flowers; Facedown in the dirt / someone's mother— / her vermilion fingernails*. —pm

Wintermoon, by Robert MacLean (Japan: Isobar Press, 2022). 83 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-4-907359-39-3. Price: \$15.00 from online booksellers.

A haiku collection from a Zen practitioner who lived in Japan for twenty-five years, now relocated back to his native Canada. Visiting the poems it is tempting to focus on the ways they sometimes aren't quite haiku, or at least how they don't quite conform to contemporary practice. One might be discouraged by the personification in a poem such as *the wind sleepwalks / out of the hills / October*, yet there is no denying its resulting emotional power. A few are half-haiku, and sometimes, like other Zen poets, statements take the place of poetry, as in: *cloud floes floating north / why not follow / just throw self away*. Yet others are magical: *pore over / leaf litter / the colour of lost syllables*. In fact, it is hard to fix a particular style onto MacLean. Yet, the variety belies a singular poetic voice, whose poems are casual, their language precise, and filled with sincerity. An enjoyable volume. *where the hermit lived 300 years ago / in the bamboo grove / still a space; blow out the candle / dark / gazes back*. —pm

My Hands Full of Light, by Gideon Young (Durham, N.C.: Backbone Press, 2021). 28 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7363467-1-6. Price: \$10.00 from www.backbonepress.org

Debut collection from Young. He has organized the poems into a narrative in which the poems act as important markers of time. It is a powerful journey, and not dissimilar to the shifting emotional associations in a traditional seasonal progression. The first poems are of fatherhood, and the dreams all fathers have for their children; landscapes expand and choices are made; we watch what it means to be a black man in the South and the implications of this choice for his family; hints of violence; and the narrative ends with a second child. It is a slow and satisfying burn. *fatherhood— / weathered brown hands / shield a candle; tortoise shell— / the North Star / in my skin; father of two / my hands full / of light*. —pm

Pathside Weeds in Rain, by Paul Russell Miller (United Kingdom: Granddad Publishing, 2022). 146 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-9995931-6-2. Price: \$15.00. Inquire of the author at pr.miller@live.co.uk

Hot off the release of his study on James Hackett's haiku comes Miller's own collection. Not surprisingly, his work is similar to Hackett's. Miller writes defiantly in a 5-7-5 format, but if anyone needs convincing that haiku can be written successfully in a fixed form, Miller is the latest in a long line of poets to prove that assertion. The poems are nature poems of Miller's neighboring Cotswold landscape. His language is precise and his lines rarely feel padded. Many haiku are sketches that don't go beyond close observation, while others see deeply into things in the Zen-infused way favored by Hackett and Blyth. Nearly all are rewarding. The haiku community is a large camp with tents for all kinds of poets; we are glad of Miller's entry. *At the furrow's edge, / laden too with ploughed up stones / a fresh-made molehill; A total eclipse ... / as the oak-traversing moon / meets the pheasant cock; Light drains from the wood ... / its canopy's leafless gaps / resealed by jackdaws.* —pm

Ebbing Shore, by Crystal Simone Smith (Durham, N.C.: Horse & Buggy Press, 2022). 44 pages; 5¾" × 7½". Matte four-colored card covers; saddle-stapled. ISBN 978-1-63901-213-8. Price: \$15.00 from www.crystalsimonesmith.com

Ebbing Shore contains haiku composed at historic slave plantations and through Smith's own research on slave and slavery artifacts. The poems point out the clear demarcations between master and slave, and do so with a light authorial touch which makes them all the more effective. Most of the poems maintain a not-quite comfortable tourist viewpoint: *overhang balcony / our tourist view / of Master's view; bordered by / oyster shells / lynching site.* A few times, Smith goes deeper to inhabit the horrific history itself, as in: *old cane field / a midday sun / burns my back; public sale / of rice-field slaves / refreshments served.* The second poem,

possibly written from a historical advertisement, nonetheless puts us at the scene. There is an immediacy to the heat, dust, and noise, which makes the refreshments served to potential buyers all the more jarring. These are the more powerful poems. The book, humbly produced, also includes photographs of some sites and objects visited. A powerful project. —pm

The Field of Why, by Shloka Shankar (India: Yavanika Press, 2022). 68 pages; 5½" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8427871860. Price: \$14.00 from online booksellers.

Debut collection from *Sonic Boom* editor Shankar. Tucked among abstract digital haiga are forty-two poems broken into four sections. Themes of identity and relationships weave in and out of these sections, and there is a sense of progress as the book moves along—some kind of missing footnoted acceptance and eventual empowerment—yet many of the poems seem too personal to fully embrace. Because of their abstractions, the reader may fill in the blanks with their own baggage at the expense of getting to know Shankar. For example, the poems: *in my bones the dimness of someone else's voice*; or *examining the nails of vowels so quiet, so old*. They are arresting images, but we aren't sure where to go with them—unless that uncertainty is the point. Shankar is a hard poet to nail down, but the journey is an enjoyable one. Two more from the collection: *fitting my body into a yawn*; *balancing darkness a poem with birds in it*. —pm

Unexpected Gift, by Sonam Chhoki and Geethanjali Rajan (Canada: Editions des petits nuages, 2021). 45 pages; ebook. ISBN 978-1-926519-63-0. Price: \$2.49 from amazon.com

Poets Chhoki (Bhutan) and Rajan (India) became acquainted in 2015, and since then have been corresponding with each other via email. The poems in *Unexpected Gift* are a variety of linked forms (composed of

haiku and tanka) that arose from this online conversation. The movement from one poet to the other is enjoyable. The shifts between each poem are organic, never too-jarring, as each poet learns more about their counterpart; we can easily imagine these poems being built over years of a deepening friendship. While the haiku sequences are mostly nature and domestic scenes, it is in the tanka sequences that the poet's personalities and concerns begin to emerge. The first four links from the rengay "Another Rhythm": *ancestral home / the familiar long creak / of the teak door* (Chhoki); *sunlight streams / through bamboo blinds* (Rajan); *opening the window / mother's guava trees brim / with birdsong* (Chhoki); *tea time / the milk splashes / into a pail* (Rajan). —pm

In the Mountain's Shadow: the Issa Triads, by Joy McCall and Don Wentworth (No place: Stark Mountain Press, 2022). 70 pages; 5" × 8". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-838103-20-8. Price: \$5.00 from online booksellers.

Each spread of two pages contains an Issa poem on the left hand (translated by David Lanoue) accompanied on the right hand by McCall's and Wentworth's own response poems—creating a triad of poems. *In the Mountain's Shadow* presents twenty-five such triads. The response poems don't necessarily inhabit the same locale as the Issa poems, and it is enjoyable to discern what the authors have plucked from Issa to use as the starting point for their own poems. For example, Triad 11: *driftwood floating / this way, that way ... / ends the year* (Issa); *newspaper / in the chain link fence / fleeing refugees* (McCall); *loose birchbark / flapping in the wind / my white hair unkempt* (Wentworth). In this example, both poets focus on the untethered nature of the driftwood, and create similar scenes: McCall connecting litter to a refugee, while Wentworth connects loose bark to his own white hair. Yet, in Triad 23, the poets take different directions: *baby sparrows, too / arrive for the Buddha's / morning showing* (Issa); *covered / in pigeon shit / St. Francis' statue* (McCall); *little robin sitting / on the nose of the stone cat— / blissfully unaware* (Wentworth). All in all, the poems in the collection stand nicely on their own, but combine to add interesting parallels. An enjoyable experiment. —pm

Love in the Time of Covid, by Anna Cates (Eugene, Ore.: Resource Publications, 2021). 122 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-6667-0366-5. Price: \$13.00 from online booksellers.

A collection of haiku, senryu, sequences of both, haibun, and tanka prose. Some of the haiku in sequence only work in the context of the sequence, and some, such as this one from a sequence on the Elephant Man, seem only to help a larger narrative along: *he was man / of clever disguise— / a burlap bag*. Likewise, a series of haibun titled, "Love in the Time of Covid," details a lockdown romance, that while enjoyable, is also too narrative; the gap between the prose and haiku too close. It is not surprising, then, that the strongest poems in the volume are the tanka, in which Cates gets to relate a narrative, and from which she can provide the volume's subtitle: "poems of spiritual introspection." Back to haiku, when Cates relies less on the haiku to push a sequential narrative, the poems expand nicely. Some favorites: *earth / still settling over the tomb / migrating birds*; *October dusk / black oceans of doubt / in the 8 ball*; *white butterfly my good intentions* —pm

Blue Balloon, by Grant Caldwell (Australia: Collective Effort Press, 2020). 99 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9593755-2-7. Price: Inquire of the author at cal@unimelb.edu.au

Thirty years worth of haiku and senryu from Caldwell. The book is divided into three sections: haiku and senryu, the same written during travels, and some from a previous collection. The poems are Caldwell's observed moments of significance—and are often humorous. He has a good eye for irony, and more than a few poems suggest how much is missed in everyday living: *trees now / bursting with leaves— / i show you with my phone*. Yet he has a serious side as well, and these poems can be deeply affecting: *a man putting leaflets / in letter boxes— / talking to himself; between buildings / while everyone sleeps— / half moon*. The first poem

subtlety hints at a lonely life; the second philosophically asks questions about the nature of a thing absent people. The collection could have used some culling of weaker poems (*at 3 a.m. / waiting for haiku— / it never comes*) but overall it is an enjoyable outing. —pm

Miles Deep in a Drum Solo, by Cherie Hunter Day (Durham, N.C.: Backbone Press, 2022). 36 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7363467-5-4. Price: \$10.00 from www.backbonepress.org

The first poem in the new collection from veteran haikuist Day (*the box to check / that I am not a robot— / winter rain*) illustrates the collision between nature and contemporary humankind often found in her work—and how each affects the other. Even though the poems can contain abstract language and ideas, they also often contain traditional seasonal aspects which ground the poems both logically and emotionally. For example: in the haiku *privacy settings / November as it slips / into redaction*, the self-isolation of the settings nicely juxtaposes with the coming seasonal isolation of winter; we are left to ponder the real choices we make. She is especially apt at the one-line haiku, and the collection contains a good sampling. A few favorites: *single quotes washing all the shiny things; crows without a chaperone twilight*. Some, like the wonderful *autumn martyr in the first draft*, feel at the edge of contemporary haiku, more metaphor than objective scene, yet it is hard not to find the inevitability of falling leaves and other things (including us) without such sentiments being overtly said. There is a strong sense of the pandemic in many of the poems, with references to masks, the new normal, her backyard redwoods, and a twice-occurring mole that it is not hard to identify with Day. An original and thought-provoking writer. Recommended.

