

Lithica Ann's *Against the Current* is certain to become part of the canon of haiku anthologies—alongside such comparable classics as Cor van den Heuvel's *The Haiku Anthology*, Bruce Ross's *Haiku Moment*, Scott Mason's *Gratitude in the Time of COVID-19*, and Robert Epstein's special-topic anthologies—not as a variation on a gender “norm,” but as a collection of important haiku and senryu by poets outstanding in the genre.

A few favorites:

child bride —
she insists on wearing
the daisy tiara
Hifsa Ashraf

after sex
he tells me
I'm a whore
Martha Magenta

lily of the Nile ...
dad's older brother
calls my mom “ethnic”
Kath Abela Wilson

childless
I hug a teddy bear
into the void
Rachel Sutcliffe

an atlas moth
emerges from the cocoon
shedding my gender
Robin Smith

just me without a prefix
Julie Schwerin

morning cartoons
I shake out
the last pill
Tia Haynes

a bud
too fresh to be named
post-traumatic growth
Kelly Sawage

Everything With an Asterisk, by Bruce H. Feingold (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2022). 82 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-99-9. Price: \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Peggy Bilbro

Bruce Feingold's *everything with an asterisk* is a small volume, easy to read over a cup of tea, carry to a bench in the park, or savor anytime one is alone in need of company. His fifth collection of haiku opens with a single poem as prologue, then is divided into five parts. The majority of the poems are traditional three lines, with a few monostich throughout the book. Each page holds no more than two haiku leaving ample white space to contemplate the beauty, sorrow, or humor of the individual poems. In a few cases the monostich extends across the middle fold, an interesting format that carries the eye across two pages.

It wouldn't be difficult to come close to understanding the title of this collection from Feingold's opening dedication to all his family and friends who have suffered or been lost during the pandemic. This collection is one that helps us understand the pandemic year that marks the before and the after of our lives. However, it isn't till we reach the end of part three that he tells us exactly what the source of the title is in the following simple monostich

2020 everything with an *

His commentary at the end of the book offers his reasoning for this fifth collection of poetry after believing he would not produce another book.

[T]he multiple impact of COVID, wildfires, the climate crisis, political disruption and personal losses juxtaposed with many personal and family blessings, gave impetus to the volume.

That mix of blessings among the many crises of 2020 is vital to a reading of this book. It is poetry that balances loss with the small blessings visible from the very first poem of anticipation in the prologue:

winter drought
our grandson safe in
his amniotic sac

As we move from fear and sheltering in the drought, we come to this jewel of hope for the future near the end, a beautiful segue from those early months of fear and isolation to the end of the year of an asterisk.

a toddler takes
his first step into the future
air purifier

The poems mixing fear with humor, loss with hope, nature with human vulnerability are poetry that makes us say, “Yes, that’s how it was.” Section 1, titled ‘upside down,’

yoga
i look at the world
upside down

brings a chuckle as we all remember how the pandemic turned our lives upside down. But with the humor comes the pain of suffering and impending loss as in the following poem

hospital bed
wheeled to the living room
desert starts

Feingold’s poetry even in his fifth collection remains fresh and new, never trite, never tired. He addresses the day-to-day happenings—John Lewis’ death, the results of the U.S. election (in giant letters with exclamation point!), the proliferation of zoom meetings—in poems that the reader easily recognizes as a part of that year with an asterisk.

The themes of family and friends so present in Feingold’s previous collections continue to appear here. Mentions of his grandson clapping on Inauguration Day, his children with their lovers, grandmother and grandson reading dinosaur books, camping trips with old friends give comfort between poems of loss such as the following one on the death of his friend.

my friend's passing
the goldfinches shake seeds
from the buckwheat

Even as he presents that loss, he finds a place for death in the cycle of nature. This juxtaposition of our human existence within nature in the midst of a cataclysmic year, is characteristic of many of the poems as in this poem commenting on the months-long lock-down.

shelter in place
a jay inches closer
on the patio

Yet another thread running through the collection is Feingold's Jewish religion. The following simple six-word poem brings it all together.

zoom yoga zoom seder zoom kaddish

Yoga leading to a settling of mind and body; Seder the celebration of Passover asking for exemption from the plague; Kaddish the series of prayers recited upon the death of family or friends, all done in lockdown isolation connected only by the miracle of zoom and all representing the swing of emotions in the year of pandemic.

The simplicity and cleanliness of Feingold's poetry is somewhat deceptive. My response to a first reading of *everything with an asterisk* was enjoyable, but with each additional reading I found myself going deeper into each poem to find layer upon layer of meaning. It did make me say, "Yes, that's how it was" but it also made me look at that year in a new way through the prism of poetry. After all, isn't that what poetry should do? I urge you to read Robert Feingold's book to find your own new understanding of the year of the asterisk.