

of the means of discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary, of finding a higher level of significance or a heartfelt understanding of forces beyond our immediate observations and perceptions. My hat is off to thank Janice Doppler for asking her five questions and compiling the results of her call for twenty-six contemporary poets to consider zoka as “one thread” running through their haiku.

*Shine Shadow*, by Peter Yovu (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2024). 108 pages; 6” x 9”. Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-958408-51-3. Price: \$20.00 from [www.redmoonpress.com](http://www.redmoonpress.com)

*Reviewed by Scott Mason*

Some five-plus decades ago, as a college freshman, I first encountered the curious and now widely-recognized work of the Dutch graphic artist M. C. Escher (1898–1972). While admiring Escher’s expert technique and sense of design, my visceral and principal reaction to his work was one, in rapid succession, of surprise, disquiet, and exhilaration. Escher offered a strange and, ultimately, exciting new way of seeing. Or, more accurately, here were exciting new *ways* of seeing, whether through the memorable inversions in his figure/ground patchworks (e.g., *Day and Night*, 1938), his captivating eternal loops (e.g., *Drawing Hands*, 1948), arresting depictions of simultaneous natural states (e.g., *Three Worlds*, 1955), the persuasive rendering of spatial impossibilities (e.g., *Belvedere*, 1958), or assorted other sleights of eye. Escher’s “illusions” subvert both visual convention and conventional thinking to suggest the very real possibility of other possible realities—made all the more plausible through his flawless draftsmanship.

This flashback occurred as I pored through *shine shadow*, Peter Yovu’s stunning new collection of haiku, haibun, and other short poetry. Of course, the comparison is imperfect. While Yovu’s poetic accomplishments in terms of imagery and language bear something in common with Escher’s clever visual conceits and masterful technique, and while both

creators deliver sensations of existential (and often entertaining) surprise, I believe that the two bodies of work differ fundamentally in their origins and, relatedly, their ultimate effects. While many of Escher's "truths" are the product of artifice, albeit an ingenious artifice, I experience Yovu's as the result of a deep and comprehensive, if uncommon, authenticity. Let me offer an example from the book:

dead hawk  
the sun  
buried in the sky

Here we have a natural scene conveyed through the heart as well as the eye, yet faithful to both. Beyond its stark first line, much of the poem's startle effect—or irruption, to borrow Richard Gilbert's terminology—comes from "buried" as a referent for the sun. We conventionally think of something buried as something now invisible, whether covered by earth or some other material. Just as credibly, however, something buried could be something unnoticed, possibly in consequence of natural or artificial camouflage (e.g., ET in a closet of stuffed animals); or alternatively, it could be something occupying only a tiny part of one's total field of vision and thereby remote, as in the current example. Complementing this physical logic is the sensation and emotional "logic"—possibly one of psychological transference—of culpability or shame for the hawk's fate, imputed to a heavenly body commonly seen as the symbol of power and enlightenment. We also have the reversal and cruel irony here of an exposed dead creature juxtaposed with a "buried" sun. That's a lot to unpack, and there's doubtless more, but the poem coheres. It offers a deep and complete (physical, emotional) and unflinching look at a snippet of life. And it feels vibrantly real.

It strikes me that this other avian poem, from Yovu's earlier collection *Sunrise* (Red Moon Press, 2010), would serve nicely as a somewhat more lighthearted companion to the one just discussed:

a falcon dives  
how completely  
I surround my bones

Nothing could be further from what we commonly consider a sketch from nature. But Yovu deliberately eschews any pretense at objectivity (a chimera anyway) for more fully realized truths. The epigraph in *shine shadow*, from the end of a letter penned by the visionary poet William Blake to his patron Thomas Butt, tells us as much.

“May God us keep  
From Single vision and Newton’s sleep.”

Yovu’s poetry is revelatory in an unconventional but authentic sense: it faithfully reflects and thereby reveals moments in at least some of their fascinating multiplicity, rather than as prompts for a sanctioned interpretation or, heaven help us, “answer.” This fidelity to the wonderfully-variegated nature of things is both thorough-going and evident from the very start of Yovu’s book, beginning with a title that might do Gerard Manley Hopkins proud. (Hopkins might likewise have smiled on what he labeled “inscapes,” found throughout Yovu’s work.) The book’s cover image, as well, is ambiguous. Could it be the detail of an explosion from outer space some 15,000 light years away as seen by the Hubble Space Telescope? Or might it be a shot of “inner space” recorded by another kind of scope? I’d place a bet on the latter, given the cover art’s title, “Amber in Man” ... another inscape, perhaps.

Yovu revels in the liminal, those interstitial zones which for some folks divide but for this poet serve as a space for rumination or as living connective tissue. This is experienced in the physical arrangement of many of his haiku and it extends to his contemplation of spoken or written language and that which it represents. Two examples:

when did sound  
become my name?

rain falling all night

taken up by a hawk

every letter of  
a snake's alphabet

In the brief course of the following haiku, the object signified in its first line both shifts location (from here to there) and dematerializes (into scent):

lilac

where this breeze  
came from

Such shapeshifting wizardry can be enjoyed in this one-liner as well, though it hits closer to home:

a child staring at the stranger I become

As a poet Yovu is endlessly curious (in more than one sense, of course!) and deeply inquisitive; correspondingly, his poems serve as mini quests and often as mini adventures. So it's little wonder that he has found a kindred spirit in the Japanese outlier haiku poet Hōsai Ozaki, after whom he has named four series (not really sequences) of four one-line haiku that appear at intervals in his book. Here is some of what scholar Kyoko Selden had to say about Hōsai:

Hōsai's haiku discover. They find him discovering himself. He discovers his own shadow, and moves it to see if anything happens...

In the spirit of Hōsai, some of Yovu's one-liners in his "After Hosai Ozaki" series feel a bit like the fragmentary early impressions near the beginning of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

a child eats a donut he was looking through

They also bear a passing similarity to the inspired one-liners, delivered deadpan, by the standup comedian Steven (“Lost a button hole.”) Wright:

I eat swiss cheese from the inside out.

This next altogether different and stand-alone one-liner by Yovu is suffused with beauty and mystery:

waves that begin mid-ocean a horse responding to a young girl’s hand

This is no Newtonian dream but reminiscent instead of the strange and wonderful phenomenon of quantum entanglement from a newer breed of physics.

Such a brief review cannot begin to do adequate justice to *shine shadow*; I haven’t even touched on Yovu’s haibun and the other short poems in this volume, all superb and masterfully interwoven. While all these poems can stand on their own, a perusal of Yovu’s review in this journal of *Big Sky: The Red Moon Anthology 2006* (MH 39.1) would serve as helpful background to his original thinking and distinctive approach to haiku. It’s very much an *ars poetica* and highly recommended reading for any serious student of the genre.

Peter Yovu’s work in haiku is so very fresh that it’s hard to imagine he’s been at it, on and off, for nearly four decades. Although I’ve encountered and enjoyed his unique haiku for the second half of that period, my first reading of *shine shadow* brought me a level of delight only better expressed by Keats in his paean to Chapman’s Homer. This is a volume I shall return to and learn from for years to come.