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## REVIEWS

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*Fencing with the Moon*, by Julie Schwerin (Georgetown, Ky.: Finishing Line Press, 2025). 90 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-89990-289-5. Price: \$22.99 from online booksellers.

*Reviewed by Mary Stevens*

Dedicated to the women in her life, Julie Schwerin's collection, *Fencing with the Moon*, is an open, honest depiction of the challenges women face throughout their lives. The first poem—for which the collection is named—consists of twelve lines of free verse that foregrounds the narrative arc of the rest of the volume: the cycles and stages over the course of a woman's life.

The meaning in this poem is supported by the cover art, which is a work of Schwerin's as well. The composition consists of a translucent moonlike image on a red background with black winglike shapes, and the title is in black font with the exception of the word "moon," which is red. An image both bold and delicate, it reflects the tone and content of the volume.

There are eleven other images in the book, in black and white, that grace the first page of each section. The author's artist's statement explains her use of *suminagashi*, a Japanese marbling technique of painting on water that invites an interplay between the laws of physics and the artist's intuition.

Each section contains seven poems, for a total of seventy-seven poems in the volume. About thirty-nine percent of the poems are senryu, three percent are haiku, and fifty-eight percent are hybrid. Seventy-eight percent of the poems have people in them, mostly featuring a female protagonist. There are men in some poems too—in relation to the women. The

poems technically not featuring people in them often carry a palpable human presence by virtue of their position in the section they're in. This calibration of senryu to haiku, human to natural world, and women to men is the perfect balance in a collection about women's experience. This book belongs alongside other human-rights-rich publications such as those by Roberta Beary, Rowan Beckett Minor, Terri L. French, marlene mountain, and Lorraine Padden.

Above each painting is the section's title, which consists of a word or phrase from one of the poems from the section. The arrangement of the sections and the poems within each section is masterful in its flow and how it follows women's life stages. The sections "the sunflower turns" and "dandelion wishes" deal mainly with relationship violence, followed by a tone of loneliness and isolation in the section "the inside of a tulip":

narrowing river  
we learn to identify  
his triggers

The section "a hole in the light" is abundant with moon imagery and features poems about fertility and pregnancy:

a chance to conceive the moon I'm tethered to

In the section "no more words," we sense a transition, a disjointedness, a not-fitting, a fragility in the tone of the poems:

no more words  
only clouds of frozen breath  
between us

The sections "migrating monarchs" and "counting blossoms" address poverty and addiction, respectively:

counting blossoms  
into her daughter's hands  
one day at a time

There is a respite period in section “a caress of moon,” where an unhatching seems to be happening with images of shells and containers, and a freedom from roles. This emergence continues in the section “whispered resistance,” with poems suggesting the work involving coming into alignment with one’s gender identity:

stepping off  
the eggshell past  
second spring

Finally, the section “winter forsythia” focuses on menopause and midlife in general, while “cataract clouds” brings to mind old age, with images of broken, frozen objects, and topics of decay and memory loss:

breaching whale  
the time between  
too soon and too late

Despite their beautiful imagery, these are not poems of the joyful moments in life: falling in love, weddings, the little rewards of motherhood, the antics of grandchildren, or tender memories of parents. With the exception of the first couple of poems suggesting youth and innocence, Schwerin shows with compassion and tenderness the many situations in which women suffer and the work involved in lifting oneself up after hardship. The collection ends with

all of us  
witnesses  
blood moon

This final poem connects strongly to a poem from the “the inside of a tulip” section:

day moon  
the only witness  
remains silent

The moon and witnesses appear in both poems; however, the final poem demands accountability—a satisfying shift from the earlier poem, in which the speaker has no support and is all alone.

The last poem also circles back to the initial long poem, yet drops us off in a different place. After reading the poems in this volume, we cannot help but reflect on these challenges that occur so frequently in women's experience. This last poem is an invitation, a call, a challenge: now that we are all witnesses, what are we going to do?

*Sōseki Natsume's Collected Haiku: 1,000 verses from Japan's Most Popular Writer*, trans. and introduced by Erik R. Lofgren (Tokyo & Vermont: Tuttle, 2024). 312 pages; 8¼" × 5½". Matte four-color book jacket; hardcover. ISBN 978-4-8053-1845-4. Price: \$19-99 from online booksellers.

*Sōseki Natsume: A Collection of Haiku in Irish, English, and Greek*, by Gabriel Rosenstock (Ireland: Ababúna, 2026). 66 pages; 8¼" × 5¾". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-918058-16-1. Available from online booksellers.

*Reviewed by David Burleigh*

One of the notable things about Makoto Ueda's pioneering anthology *Modern Japanese Haiku* (1976), beyond its meticulous scholarship and presentation, is the inclusion of two novelists among the twenty poets represented: Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927), the latter to some extent a disciple of the former. Neither has appeared in any of the much more compendious anthologies issued since, such as those from the Modern Haiku Society in Japan (2001; 2008), though Sōseki does appear in a smaller one by Lucien Stryk, *Cage of Fireflies* (1995). Clearly this is something that Erik R. Lofgren seeks to remedy with this book, at least for the older author.

Besides being Japan's most popular novelist, familiarly referred to by his given name, and one of its greatest writers, Sōseki was also closely