
REVIEWS

Where the River Goes: The Nature Tradition in English-language Haiku, edited by Allan Burns (United Kingdom: Snapshot Press, 2013). 479 pages; 5"x7". Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-903543-36-8. Price: £26.00 from www.snapshotpress.co.uk

Reviewed by Ian Marshall

Any anthologist begins with the dilemma of deciding what gets in and what gets left out. Early in his introduction to *Where the River Goes*, Allan Burns clarifies that his selection criteria are based on George Swede's classification system of the "three content categories" of haiku: first, nature haiku with an erasure of the human; then, haiku that explicitly combine the human and the natural; and finally, haiku that focus on the human world to the exclusion of the natural world. While admitting that there is inevitably some slippage between categories, and that the human perspective is "always present in haiku" even when it is not directly invoked, Burns's concern is with "type one" nature-oriented haiku. While that focus does lead to the exclusion of some great haiku that say a great deal about human relations with the natural world—Ruth Yarrow's "after the garden party the garden" comes to mind—it does provide a clear and appropriate thematic focus for Burns's excellent volume. Burns makes a case for the exigency of such a focus, pointing out that in the last twenty years the prevalence of "type one" haiku in journals has dropped from twenty percent to thirteen (and lower in some prestigious venues). Burns attributes the decline of "type one" haiku to an "anthropocentric creep that mirrors an accelerating alienation of humans from the natural world."

As the volume's subtitle makes apparent, the focus is very much on the tradition of nature-oriented haiku in English. In general, the haiku

represented here do not engage in much wild experimentation. Yes, there are one-liners and some use of blank space and some vertical haiku, some straying from the unwritten rules regarding cuts, and occasional examples of what Richard Gilbert has called “irruptive collocation” of surprising elements. But it is apparent that the primary emphasis in the nature-oriented tradition has been on the natural world itself, not on postmodern self-reflexiveness. Burns refers to the “stylistic synthesis” of the 1990s, featuring spare diction and punctuation, focus on the image, and a reliance on cuts, seasonality, objectivity, and decorum; that synthesis seems to have persisted even beyond the nineties. If there is a conservative bent to the tradition examined here, that is possibly a product of the subject matter; writers engaging with the natural world tend to foreground perceptions of the world rather than the language in which those perceptions are recorded. Possibly too the emphasis reflects an editorial decision. To the degree that experimentation is evident in recent nature haiku, Burns heralds a “healthier diversity” but cautions that “the neglect of haiku traditions” in favor of a “cognitive language-based approach” risks blurring the lines “between haiku and other modes of extremely terse poetry” (63-64). In identifying the key ingredients in the evolving tradition of nature-oriented haiku, Burns notes a kind of self-effacement and an abiding concern for “naturalistic competence,” with the resulting haiku often marked stylistically by close attention to sound.

One clear emphasis in the collection is for depth rather than breadth. Rather than include many different writers with a haiku or two by each, Burns gives us a solid sampling of at least fifteen poems for each included writer. Early masters like James W. Hackett, Nick Virgilio, Robert Spiess, and John Wills are well-represented. Readers will also note the strong presence of Zen influences in many of the haiku; certainly many of the included poets speak of the role Zen has had in their interest in haiku. While the extent of Zen’s pervasiveness in Japanese haiku has become a point of contention in recent years, its presence in the English-language tradition, especially in the early days, is not to be denied and is aptly represented as an important theme and influence. Regarding the selections for more recent writers, some readers are bound to wonder about the exclusion of a particular favorite poet, but it’s hard to quibble with

the inclusion of the poets represented here. Burns implicitly argues for the internationalization of English-language haiku with a solid representation of haiku from Great Britain and Australia. And among the contemporary poets included, readers are apt to make some new discoveries—like Tasmanian Ron Moss, for example—that may not have been on all our radar screens. All in all, the selections are admirable and nicely represent the tradition. If readers note the absence of some “big names” among contemporary haiku poets, it is likely that upon reflection they’ll realize that “type one” nature-oriented haiku may not be the typical focus of particular favorite poets.

The extensive introduction and the headnotes for each writer are strong attractions of the volume. The introduction covers ground from Basho, Buddhism, and Blyth to Wang Wei; from Lucretius to Emerson to Carl Sagan. Burns covers not just the history of haiku but also the history of our ideas about nature. It’s a wide-ranging and interesting account that includes concern about contemporary environmental issues—as well as concern about the “decline” in haiku that seem to respond to those changes. The headnotes excel in succinctly covering biographical information that often focuses on how the writer got introduced to haiku, and in astutely highlighting the stylistic tendencies and attractions of each poet’s haiku corpus.

If there is one thing this reader would have liked to see further developed, it is attention to recent directions in ecocriticism (ecologically-oriented literary studies). Recent emphases on urban nature and issues of environmental justice have led ecocriticism away from concerns about wilderness and toward what Scott Hess has called “everyday nature.” In the process, ecocritics have interestingly complicated our conceptions of what we mean by nature. It would have been worthwhile to consider how these trends might reflect haiku’s apparent turn away from “type one” nature-oriented haiku and toward “type two” and its focus on human-nature interactions. The reality is that as yet few ecocritics have paid much attention to haiku, and few in the haiku community have explored what the field of ecocriticism has to offer. But this is just to say that there is room for further discussion of these issues and for future dialogue. For now, it is a delight to encounter a volume that features so many fine haiku

that remind many of us why we turned to haiku in the first place, finding in it a form that discovers endless fascination in the more-than-human world and shows us how to reconnect with that world.

One Rock Out of Place, by Jay Friedenberg (United Kingdom: Alba Publishing, 2013). 40 pages; 8¼"×5¾". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9575265-5-6. Price: \$12.00 from www.albapublishing.com

Reviewed by Hilary Tann

Jay Friedenberg has been composing haiku for the last several years and during that time he's grounded himself well in the haiku community, publishing in many of the best journals and becoming active in the Haiku Society of America and in the New York Metro HSA group.

His *One Rock out of Place* is divided into two sections of about equal length: "Town and County" and "City and Street." There are 64 haiku and senryu total, with two poems on all but two pages, and those contain one. All the poems are three-liners except for a single one-liner. The publisher adheres to high production standards, including the crisp, elegant printing I've come to expect from books produced in the UK. The book is wider than it is tall, with a photo of a rock garden on the cover.

The title of the collection, taken from a poem (Zen garden/one rock/out of place), led me to anticipate a Buddhist theme in the whole that I didn't find, except in the artist's relationship to nature—extremely appreciative and I would say inquisitive. Indeed, it is the author's frequent references to nature, offering surprises even in the heart of a major city, which most unify the collection and most make me admire it. Perhaps Friedenberg is asserting his Buddhism in a quiet, unassertive manner, as would be appropriate.

Quite a few of the poems seem to be primarily descriptive, but a number of these contain arresting images:

wind-blown grass
 the soft curl
 of flapping sheets

The best poems offer more, a sense of mystery, often provided by the universal mother:

morning downpour
 at my doorstep
 a small frog

natural history museum
 the dead fly
 also on exhibit

woodland trail
 the rabbit's footprints
 suddenly stop

In the section on city and streets, Friedenbergs's social concerns become evident, particularly in his empathy for the powerless and abandoned ones whose home is the street. Several poems center on them and their frustrating and frightening separation from the herd:

wrinkled newspaper —
 in the beggar's face
 stories not told

her rant an express train speeds through

One Rock provides humorous moments, and sad ones, and ones in which the universe winks:

cool breeze
 the sound of a calypso band
 from the subway grating

Friedenberg captures well the mood of the country and that of the city too. Overall the collection is a fun and easy read, with instances of poetic

transcendence that make me hope for books to follow, as the author's voice, still relatively new to the world of English language haiku, matures and deepens.

Clouds and More Clouds, by David H. Rosen (Northfield, Mass.: Lily Pool Press, 2013). 64 pages; 5½"×5½". Glossy four-color card covers; hand-sewn. ISBN 978-1-628890-7. Price: \$19.95. Inquire of the author at P.O. Box 5661, Eugene, OR 97405

Reviewed by Michel Ketchek

David Rosen's book, *Clouds and More Clouds*, is an elegant little book. Everything from the illustrations by Alec Formatin Shirley to the printing by Swamp Press is in perfect harmony with Rosen's sparse haiku. The haiku, mostly one to a page, don't have any extra words. The images are lean, clean and often powerful. The title poem,

Clouds
and more clouds
lone black bird

is a fine example of an image that is both vast, the sky, and intimate, the bird. This combination of expanse and detail gives an emotional resonance that is deep and yet as mysterious as nature itself.

The interconnectedness of all things and the fleeting nature and mystery of life are reoccurring themes in Rosen's poetry. One haiku, more than all the others in this collection eloquently gives voice to these themes and does so in a mere nine words;

Mother dying...
full moon over
Kansas City, the world

Nature is present in most of these haiku, but the lack of any excessive wordage, more than anything is the unifying feature of Rosen's work. None of the haiku have more than fifteen syllables and the average is only eleven.

One haibun is also included as is one sequence entitled "On Mother Earth." In that sequence each haiku begins with the line "On mother earth=" (note: as a stylistic choice throughout the book, equal signs are used in place of em dashes). The first haiku of ten,

On mother earth=
Every Breath
Simple and easy

is a fitting description of Rosen's attitude to life and haiku. Keep it simple, take it easy and the true depth and meaning of life and each haiku will emerge naturally without pretense and without being forced. This book of fine haiku, attractively presented, is something that the author, artist and printer can take pride in. I am sure that any reader of poetry will enjoy having this book.

Apology Moon, by Cherie Hunter Day (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2013). 76 pages; 4¼"x6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-28-7. Price: \$12.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Melissa Allen

There's a misconception that the talents and interests of scientists and poets are fundamentally different and incompatible. Cherie Hunter Day's *Apology Moon* should put this misconception to rest. A biologist by training, Day has the relentless stare, the hunger for truth, and the imaginative capacity that stand both the scientist and the poet in good stead. The result is a collection of wide range, masterly control, and stunning insight.

Some of Day's juxtapositions are really startling and remind us that flashes of insight and imagination are an underrated scientific tool. Day's imagination isn't fanciful, it's precise; it doesn't invent so much as it discovers; it doesn't wander so much as it connects:

calla lily	a Coleman lantern
the sound of a ladder	lighting the compromise
lengthening	quarter moon

Accustomed to close observation of the natural world, Day notices things that most of us do not, on both a micro and a macro level. When she looks at insects, for example, she narrows in on their crawling or flying forms, and then quickly zooms out to the wider world, where human beings stomp around pontificating about economic policy and nuclear proliferation:

termites	Titan missiles
with temporary wings	the number of striped beetles
the debt ceiling	loose in this world

These jarring, caustic juxtapositions are just right for the subject matter; insects with their complex social structures and way of seeming to overrun the world invite comparison with some of the worst aspects of human beings. When Day looks at birds, on the other hand, her gaze narrows a bit, from social issues to interpersonal ones; mating and nesting birds speak to her of domesticity and relationships.

the trim needs paint	reconciliation
in all the usual places	crows gather
nesting finches	their blue luster

Most of the preceding examples, however fresh and original, are more or less familiar in their structure. Day has been writing haiku for decades and is intimately familiar with its history and traditions. But she is also highly interested in challenging those traditions. When Day tests the limits of the haiku genre, however, her experiments are carefully calibrated

against her deep knowledge of its traditions. She isn't trying to transform it beyond recognition; she's trying to determine the delineators of, as it were, the haiku species.

dawn crows the scuffle of nomenclature

The abstractness and scientific vocabulary of this poem push the boundaries of haiku, but reading it closely, the "scuffle of nomenclature" is an effective juxtaposition, evoking an all-too-human quarrel over what to call things, maybe a quarrel as seemingly meaningless as the shrieking of crows. There might be a sly joke here at the expense of those who like to argue about the definition of haiku.

azaleas as afterthought as afterword

This poem's wordplay and alliteration might make it seem too intellectual for some to take it seriously as haiku, but there's a level at which it can be read very literally: a human being thinks about, then speaks of, the flowers she's seen one spring. The poem is about the effect of the flowers on their viewer.

The epigraph to apology moon is from Rilke: "Everything is blooming most recklessly; if it were voices instead of colors, there would be an unbelievable shrieking into the heart of the night." This quotation, I believe, tells us how Day sees the world: There's life everywhere; it's full of startling sights; and it's both beautiful and terrifying. Day is not afraid to probe dark places in this poetry; she evokes discomfort, fear, pain, and ugliness at least as often as beauty and grace. After all, no one who observes nature closely could fail to notice that danger and death are inevitable accompaniments to life.

new litter of kittens —
the missing rung
on the hayloft ladder

cesium wind from the lily's mouth a ravine

But as Issa might say: And yet... and yet... The point of life, to Day, seems to be to see as much of it as possible with as much clarity and insight as possible, and to describe it so that others can see what you saw. The extraordinary haiku of this scientist challenge us to think about the world both more analytically and more creatively.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Fear of Dancing: The Red Moon Anthology of English-language Haiku 2013, edited by Jim Kacian and the Red Moon Staff (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2014). 194 pages; 5½" x 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-946848-24-9. Price: \$17.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

The eighteenth annual "best of" anthology from Red Moon Press. Seventy pages of haiku, thirty pages of haibun and linked forms, and seventy pages of essays. While the structure hasn't changed over the years there is always something new to be found. An important annual that gauges the health (very healthy if this year is any indication) of haiku in English.

We Are Not to Sing in the Car: Haibun 2005 – 2013, by Carol Pearce-Worthington (No place: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014). 107 pages; 5½" x 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-492873-83-9. Price: \$11.99 from online booksellers

An accomplished haibun writer, Pearce-Worthington's work has always consisted of interesting intersections. Yet behind the quiet Americana lie hard truths. A satisfying read.